

# BJCT

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**Desensitized genius:  
The actuality of Dialectic of Enlightenment**

*Vjeran Katunarić*

**Social Practices and the Constitution of Knowledge: Critical  
Social Theory as a Philosophy of Praxis**

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**Notes on Jean Baudrillard and Critical Theory**

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pretation of the Confucian Tradition in Chinese Marxism**

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## Desensitized genius: The actuality of Dialectic of Enlightenment

Vjieran Katunarić<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Some important passages in modern political and cultural theory are given over to monsters – Hobbes to the Leviathan and the Behemoth, Neumann to the Behemoth, and Horkheimer and Adorno to Homer’s Sirens. However, in their Dialectic of Enlightenment the last two authors interpret the Sirens in a different, and ultimately diffident, way. This essay re-examines their interpretation in light of the hermeneutic double dead-end of the Sirens’ songs pitted against Odysseus’s instrumentality and in light of the contemporary revival of a totalitarian, anti-poetic worldview – a new Behemoth – in terms of a global capitalism fueled by a permanent state of war.

I seek to revise the Weberian core of Horkheimer and Adorno’s concept of Enlightenment (disenchantment without empathy), but I still concur with their identification of Nazism as the peak of the long shadow of the Enlightenment. The following arguments are offered in support of this reinterpretation of the actuality of the Dialectic of Enlightenment. The first argument establishes the relationship between gynophobia and an aversion to peace. The second designates the development of the military Enlightenment as a premise for Nazism. The third argument outlines neo-totalitarian capitalism as the product of the collaboration between Big Science and the advanced industrialism of a “genially stu-

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pid” system, which may be compared to the absurdity of the idea of “intelligent design”. This system consists of the inventive design (of a given product) and a massive idiotizing of (re)productive work. Several examples are given to illustrate this inherent contradiction.

Finally, I reject Adorno’s pessimistic view regarding the possibility of the co-existence of a poetic world after Auschwitz, and propound a possible rehabilitation of the fundamental value of human (re)productive work as the basis of a new poesis. In combination with the work of the arts, a re-evaluation of work (in terms of Marx’s postulate of “constant capital being man himself”) may provide the material basis for a renewed aesthetic Enlightenment anticipated by voices ranging from the mythical Sirens to Schiller’s Letters, as a universe in which the poetic form provides substance with true meaning.

### **Introduction: Monsters, science, and art**

Some classic passages in modern political and cultural theory are given over to monsters. Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan represents characteristics of the modern bureaucratic state, while the Behemoth designates the will to wage permanent war. Franz Neumann took the Behemoth as a metaphor for Nazism. Horkheimer and Adorno, in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, dealt with a marvelous group of monsters, namely the Sirens. However, the authors doubt whether the Sirens are monsters at all and, accordingly, offer another interpretation which is, however, not devoid of ambiguities. On the one hand, they take the Sirens as representatives of the forces of nature, including sex drive, which Odysseus, who represents calculating rationality, deceives in a manner typical of the whole project of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, the authors recognize the aesthetic dimension of the Sirens’ song, due to which the relations between instrumental reason, nature, and the aesthetic reason remain partly inconsistent. This is the main subject of this paper, a point which deserves further discussion. In essence, I agree with the authors’ remark that cold rationality, as incorporated into modern science, constitutes the colonial mind of the Enlightenment. Yet, I disagree with the authors’ view that deceptive reason permeates human mentality and activities right from the beginning. Likewise, it remains unclear what is the proper role of the arts in the formation of human society and culture.

My interpretation essentially maps onto Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation: from a hermeneutical understanding of the myth of Odysseus and the Sirens in an aesthetic key to their view of Nazism as a contemporary avatar of the archaic instrumental reason. In developing my argument, I will emphasize the role of the military Enlightenment and its merging with Big Science on the way to the present-day military-industrial complex. This line of argumentation concludes with an outline of the figure of the desensitized genius, as an enormous financial and military power with neo-Nazi predilections.

To this extent, I agree with the implication of the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that democracy, as a political project of the Enlightenment, cannot develop on the basis of a half-hearted rationality. This is primarily so because the latter instigates fears of the liberating voices of peace coming from a feminine culture represented by the Sirens.

In essence, I agree with the authors' view of the Enlightenment as a project of developing a desensitized reason, although they refer to the concept of purposive rationality in terms of Weber's ideal-type in a reductionistic way.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise, instrumental rationality exists, indeed, in a reductive form mostly at the core of modern power, and is pitted against nature and humanity and even threatens total annihilation, for the first time in the evolution of life. In view of this outlook, one must revise the historical canon which claims that Nazism was defeated in the Second

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2 I do not understand Weber's *Zweckrationalität* as instrumental in a Machiavellian sense, but as an integrated form of rational action, which includes his notion of the *value rationality* (*Wertrationalität*), as well. This can be understood normatively in terms of (neo-)Kantian ethics, because actors by definition consider the consequences of their action: "determined by ... expectations as to the behavior of objects in the environment and of other human beings" (M. Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich [Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1964], 17). On the other hand, Habermas understands Weber's notion of purposive action similarly to Adorno and Horkheimer, as a non-communicative act which operates automatically in a person's self-interest, in terms of the *homo economicus* caricaturized by Adam Smith's naturalized model of individual selfishness (cf. J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol. 1 [Boston: Beacon Press, 1984], 281).

World War (yes, perhaps only militarily and, besides, only temporarily). One part of the explanation of this bias is cybernetic, in terms of automatic regulation. This aspect is outlined in Homer's depiction of Odysseus's evasion of the Sirens, which automatically turned his ship onto the correct course.<sup>3</sup> The other part of the explanation concerns the egalitarian power of the artistic performance. The Sirens sing their song as a female vocal band (like the Dalmatian *klapa*), which originally partakes in reproducing a social lifeworld that is, in modern terms, underdeveloped, like ancient Greece, where the arts, the knowledge of nature, and the activities of work are all integrated.<sup>4</sup>

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Before moving on with this interpretation to the next step, I will briefly examine Hobbes's understanding of the myths threatening human sur-

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- 3 The encounter between Odysseus and the Sirens can also be interpreted in terms of Jaynes's concept of the bicameral mind (J. Jaynes, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* [Boston and New York: A Mariner Book / Houghton Mifflin Company, 1976]). The right hemisphere of the brain is the seed in which, in terms of the myth, the "voices of gods" are bent, dictating obedience and awe. In this case, Odysseus obediently followed the instructions of Circe. The left hemisphere is the seed of rational thinking, in this case executed by the quick and straight-line sailing of Odysseus's ship. Presumably, he organized this action thanks to his own capabilities, but he actually executed the suggestion given by Circe to avoid any possibility of a close encounter with the Sirens. Ultimately, his decision to fasten himself is technically original, but the purpose of the action is determined by Circe. Thus, seemingly instrumental action is guided by the irrational impulse.
  - 4 The holistic nature of artwork was outlined by Marx in *Grundrisse* (1857) and, in an analogous manner, by Durkheim in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). Both understood the authenticity of artwork as the creative product of an integrated society and its holistic worldview. The syncretic knowledge of art, religion, and practical action can, thus, be maintained among people in a relatively underdeveloped society (according to the criteria of modern development). Science and technology, on the other hand, are developed as specialized activities, in the silence of a laboratory and in isolation from social and natural surroundings. This is typical of the process of modernization, which unfolds at the expense of the disintegration of society, often into antagonized units. This is analogous to the state of mind of the Greek gods, a group of whom opted for one or the other party in the Trojan war. This was also the reason why the Sirens who, as I will show later, condemned the gods for what they did both to the Greeks and to the Trojans.



vival. Actually, he first designated political power through the symbolism of the two monsters, mutually exclusive by virtue of their political roles. For Hobbes, the Leviathan is presumably a domesticated monster installed to serve the people (following the end of the Civil War in England). The new establishment is a bureaucratic government with the absolute monarch at the top, which guarantees peace within the state and presumably in its international relations. In contrast to this, the Behemoth remains a genuine monster who waged a war which seemed never-ending and, as such, a proxy for the "state of nature".

In Neumann's work, written during the Second World War, the Behemoth represented the Nazi anti-state.<sup>5</sup> Its *raison d'être* is a permanent state of war with a strong tendency towards world-wide expansion, crushing all barriers, including that of the domesticated Leviathan in terms of the social contract, and that of God as the ultimate guarantor, at least for believers, of eternal peace in the universe.

### **Excursus: The questionable role of God**

Both monsters are described in the Old Testament as antagonists towards the God who eventually defeated them and transformed them into his instruments for punishing people. Who is then in charge of these large-scale destructions? The classical interpreters of the myth, who themselves belong to the Enlightenment and were, consequently or just hypocritically, atheists, spared God the responsibility of waging wars.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, any answer to this question is still ambiguous. The ruler's body, as the body politic in Hobbes's *Leviathan*, may also be understood as a reference to Aristotle's idea of God as Unmoved Mover, yet with an invective against "lazy" God. Accordingly, like every ruler, even in the newly born democratic sense, he can only be moved by people who understand that

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5 F. Neumann, *The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee; published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009 [1942]).

6 Nevertheless, many passages in the Old Testament describe the rage of God and even His orders to exterminate some communities, which again, however, can be understood as the (self)projection of the local patriarchs.

the ruler is to serve the people and also that every power must be contained. Next to Aristotle's God, the following fragment from Hobbes's *Leviathan* looks like an anticipation of Newton's mechanics, as well:

[W]hen a thing lies still, unless somewhat else stir it, it will lie still for ever, is a truth that no man doubts of. But that when a thing is in motion, it will eternally be in motion, unless somewhat else stay it, though the reason be the same, namely that nothing can change itself, is not so easily assented to.<sup>7</sup>

To put both references in political terms, at least two politically organized groups are necessary to limit the tendency towards the omnipotence of any one group. This equilibrium, however, may or may not depend on the resulting will of the people expressed through free elections. Eventually, Hitler won the elections with some forty percent of the popular vote, but could not establish permanent power without introducing a state of permanent war. The same conclusion applies in the case of the establishment of an apparently "multiparty" rule on the basis of the overriding authority of monopolistic capitalism as an oligarchic rule based on the monarchic principle.<sup>8</sup> Thus, monarchy and present-day democracy converge on the same endpoint.

Franz Neumann indirectly addressed this issue in his study of Nazism. He did his best to distinguish between the Behemoth's mission of extermination and the mission of the Christian or conservative West, for the latter had adopted the institutions of liberal democracy and, at the same time, domesticated the Leviathan through the creation of the bureaucratic state, which took care of people without instigating war. Accordingly, Neumann repudiated both the Christian and the democratic legitimacy of Nazism. However, he must have changed his position regarding the non-complicity of the West in the rise of totalitarian pow-

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7 T. Hobbes, *Leviathan or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill* (1651), 10.

8 As Varoufakis, the former Greek Minister of Finance, was told by the European Commission: you may elect whomever you want, but you must follow the same policy (of austerity).

er. He was disappointed with the reasons for the urgent closing of the Nuremberg trials, which were followed by the political crusade against the Soviet Union and Communism, respectively. This momentum interrupted the process of democratization in the West, which Neumann had envisaged beforehand.<sup>9</sup>

### **The archaic challenge of the aesthetic Enlightenment: The Sirens' song**

The contemporary political scene in the USA might aid our understanding of Odysseus's rage against the Sirens' challenging song. In 2015 a Republican candidate, who soon became the new President, remarkably rejected politically correct rhetoric. His speeches were replete with fervent language: affective outbursts and poorly articulated sentences in which the speaker openly expressed his resentment against a variety of other groups. Obviously, the uncontrolled rush of emotions, which is typical of big bosses unaccustomed to dialogue and respect for counterarguments, broke through the membrane of linguistic syntax, one of the genuinely cultural barriers (which may be designated as "cultural discontents" in Freud's sense, due to their frustrating effects on the many people who reject the mitigation of their conflicts).<sup>10</sup>

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9 Neumann's *Behemoth* served as the basis for the compilation of evidence for the indictment against Nazi leaders in the Nuremberg trials: "In 1943–1945, while Neumann was serving in Washington, D.C., in the Office of Strategic Services, the forerunner of the Central Intelligence Agency, his work strongly influenced the formulation of America's goals for post-war Germany as the 'four Ds,' each directed at one of the colluding groups he had highlighted: denazification, democratization (including the recruitment and training of civil servants), demilitarization, and decartelization ... As the Cold War froze on a line through Germany, the United States steadily backed away from the 'four Ds,' turning denazification over to the Germans, abandoning attempts at civil service reform, urging the creation of a new West German army, and accepting the reconsolidation of the country's largest banks and industrial enterprises" (P. Hayes, Introduction to F. Neumann, *The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933–1944* [Chicago: Ivan R. Dee; published in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2009 [1942]], 5–6).

10 S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929).

Sometimes, there is neither talk nor syntax, but only silence, for rage keeps mouths shut, albeit such a person hardly waits for an opportunity to lessen the tension. This stance resembles the posture of a warrior on the verge of battle, when dull anger mixed with fear can be felt in the air. Such an atmosphere on the boat was created by Odysseus's decision to fasten himself to the ship mast to restrain himself from the irresistible call of the Sirens. Although they were just singing, he responded with a mix of fascination, anxiety, and rage, as he was told that Sirens were life-threatening (while all the time being under the spell of Circe). Functionally, rage, as the antidote to joy, served as a proper shield for the king of Ithaca, a country in an early stage of military democracy, where the leader was supposed to be the most skillful warrior, immune to the cries of his enemies and not a sensitive man whose talents are appropriate for accruing soft power rather than refining his fighting technique.

In contrast to that, the aesthetic Enlightenment, the archaic representation of which is captured by the music of the Sirens, invokes an era of peace. Its outlook, however, is the main target of the avatars of the Behemoth. In the nineteenth century both the cognitivist (cold reasoning) and military (directly destructive) Enlightenment targeted Romanticism and its holistic vision of the world.<sup>11</sup>

### **Opposing the Romantic worldview: The military Enlightenment**

The relationship between the Enlightenment and war confronts one with the problem of definition. What exactly was the Enlightenment?<sup>12</sup>

The Enlightenment is a very broad concept, encompassing all human abilities to understand properly both itself and its environments. Proper knowledge becomes reliable and, more importantly, more efficient, i.e. quicker and increasingly more exact and precise, thanks to the invention

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11 Cf. F. D. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

12 A. Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700–1789* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 2003), 14.

of instruments aimed at the processing and analysis of data. All instruments have machine(s) as a summary term. In fact, the machine distills instrumental rationality, which is originally human, but is “unclean” like iron ore as compared to steel. From its inception in Adam Smith’s work, *homo economicus* offers a template for making machines, rather than describing human behavior. Actually, people cannot operate without a non-instrumental “surplus”, from strikes to chatting with colleagues during worktime. Evidently, such gestures are irritating to profiteering owners. In the long run, provided that the instrumental knowledge of the Enlightenment would be of further use in the service of capital interested exclusively in making a profit, it would not be strange if the human work force were to be replaced by more and more sophisticated machines, and ultimately left to its own destiny.

Still, it cannot be said that the propensity toward machines and war, least of all a lifeless world, was inscribed in the philosophy of the Enlightenment. From Descartes to Kant there are no traces of a desire for destruction that may be compared to the desire of the biblical God, for example, who allegedly created the universe out of Nothing and can, according to His own caprice, reverse the whole process. On the other hand, some Enlightenment philosophers expressed ambiguous feelings toward war, particularly when the interests of their own countries were involved. Voltaire and Helvetius provide such examples, in particular when the interests of their own countries or “civilizations” were supposedly endangered. Yet the ambivalence renders itself inevitable. For example, Voltaire expressed his admiration both for Leopold Lorraine and Gustav Vasa, who were peaceful and welfare-oriented rulers, and for Frederic the Great and Catherine the Great, who achieved great glory as winners in major wars.<sup>13</sup>

In a similar vein, the beginning of “the military Enlightenment” is marked by the attempt at synthesizing science and obscurantism. Both forms of cognition produced an equally strong desire for domination over nature. In this respect, the seventeenth-century author Montecuc-

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13 Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700–1789*, 4.

coli is paradigmatic, for he seems to anticipate the coming of the military-industrial complex with its Big Science component. In analyzing the war against the Turks in Hungary in 1344, he referred to Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, showing the key role of concepts for storing empirical facts in the memory. From combined recollections complex experience emerges with a general understanding, "which is the beginning of all sciences and arts."<sup>14</sup> This beginning, however, is continued in Big Science, not the arts. It is intrinsic to an economy based on the merciless struggle for survival. In it, the integration of useful knowledge and Big Science becomes synonymous with multidisciplinary military science.<sup>15</sup>

### The sensuous against the irrespective Enlightenment

Judith A. Peraino gives a plausible interpretation of the Sirens' song as an invitation to the imagining of a different world based on the wisdom of the senses.<sup>16</sup> But, the *Odyssey* is a mythical rather than a dialogical text. Accordingly, I do not want to discuss the background of the narrative plot about the Sirens, as the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* did not enter into such a discussion either, although the motives of the sorceress Circe for persuading Odysseus that the Sirens are lethal and sing so seductively only to do harm to others are illogical and dramaturgically questionable. To the best of my knowledge, it does not fit the plot of any artistic narrative. I should not accept typical patriarchal prejudice as an explanation, either, which would claim that a woman (e.g. Circe) is the worst enemy to another woman, etc.

Most important for the tenor of the poem is the fact that Odysseus was efficient in performing his actions by strictly following Circe's suggestion to avoid an encounter with the *femmes fatales*. Hence, he has chosen

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14 Cited in A. Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought: From the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 20–21.

15 M. Hitzlik, *Big Science: Ernest Lawrence and the Invention that Launched the Military-Industrial Complex* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2015).

16 J. A. Peraino, *Listening to the Sirens: Musical Technologies of Queer Identity from Homer to Hedwig* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2006), 3.

the most reliable pathway: to accelerate the rowing in a rectilinear direction. This motion is equivalent to the path of a ballistic rocket, which intertwines narrow instrumental reason with military efficiency.

Homer's description of Odysseus's navigation basically resembles Hobbes's account of interchangeable relations between the motion and rest of a body (cited above). In the case of Odysseus, the ship zig-zags sometimes, but mainly moves in a rectilinear direction along the coasts inhabited by monsters. Also, the ship comes to rest by harboring on fabulous islands such as Circe's gastronomic Aeaea. Other islands are inhabited by local monsters, such as Scylla and Charybdis, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and Calypso (this last, though, was very interesting to Odysseus for two paradisiac motifs: her insatiable sexuality and her promise of immortality). Often, as in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, monsters are allegories for tyrannies. In the case of the Sirens, however, the song might be "tyrannical" only to musically untrained ears.

By all accounts, the source of the mass attraction to different forms of Fascism and its myth of a domineering race is subterranean, shadowy, rather than Reason. The latter executes the desires of the former. In the sphere of the unconscious, time is glacial and can be thawed to become a torrent in any era under the appropriate conditions. These appear as a counterreaction to the rule of cold reason, especially in the time of crisis for its capitalistic makeup, as in Germany between the two World Wars, when the glacial underground was momentarily thawed and popped up above-ground in response to the call of the latter. Indeed, the official authorities invited the underground in the same way that Hannah Arendt described the initial moment in the formation of Nazism as the "temporary alliance between the mob and the elite."<sup>17</sup> Since the conscious with its fluid time and the unconscious with its glacial time never exist entirely separated, the politics of the emotions is constitutive of the politics dealing with rational causes, and really, narrow political interest. The former is indispensable for any political enterprise for two reasons. First,

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17 H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland and New York: Meridian Books – The World Publishing Company, 1962), 236.

it makes believable what is rationally unsustainable or unreachable, such as was the Nazi plan of controlling the world through incessant war. The second reason concerns the internal policy of national cohesion. A powerful elite is always a small group, and it cannot implement its project without broader support, a part of which is made up of street mobs as the striker. Besides, most members of powerful groups are anonymous, as they do not want to be exposed to the public gaze. Large groups played a role of signal importance in solving the issue of atomic science and of all of the powers interested in making the atomic bomb, respectively, which is how a small and hardly visible core can explode with such magnitude and thus become big and powerful. The political correlate to nuclear technology lies in the fact that large groups usually have sacrosanct names, whether national or religious. Furthermore, it is the specific task of political demagoguery to switch masks. When addressing the public, the representatives of power assume an angelic expression. This serves to address a particular interest by recasting it as a general interest, as something from which allegedly the largest group will gain an advantage. This way, a small group manipulatively controls a whole society. In such a travesty of government the most merciless force grows up, a destructive force which is enormously enlarged due to scientific and/or technological research. Yet, the magnitude of the force is realized only when the majority of the people passionately support such an "intelligent design".

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The aesthetic dimension of the early Enlightenment, which Friedrich Schiller expounded in his *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man*, as a Romantic counterweight to cold reason, was a self-contained project improper for the cognitive Enlightenment, particularly those branches of it which facilitated the expansion of military power. For Schiller, the general laws of the universe have a more encompassing purpose, which is both rational and sensuous:

[There are] two fundamental laws of sensuous-rational nature. The first has for its object absolute reality; it must make



a world of what is only form, manifest all that in it is only a force. The second law has for its object absolute formality; it must destroy in him all that is only world and carry out harmony in all changes. In other terms, he must manifest all that is internal, and give form to all that is external.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the aesthetic dimension gives form to the growing substance and only then, by following the innermost idea of the creative mind, can the universe accrue an appropriate and sustainable form. If, by chance, let us imagine, Schiller had been in a position to assume the role of an alter-ego of Odysseus, he would probably turn the ship closer to the Sirens to enjoy their concert.<sup>19</sup>

For Adorno, however, just because the biggest tragedy of humankind was Nazism, high culture remained a rudimentary organ of the Enlightenment. Similar to the song of the Sirens, if I may add, high culture is not receptive to most consumers of mass culture. At the same time, many scientists lend themselves to the “non-musical” business corporations and military industries that have outgrown the monster of Dr. Frankenstein. It is a creature who possesses tremendous physical power, yet without any feelings. In a similar vein, in Adolf Eichmann’s trial in Jerusalem, the Nazi monster uttered words spoken by Dr. Frankenstein’s monster: “Master, give me a brain!” – or, in Eichmann’s notorious words: “Ich habe nur Befehle ausgeführt” [I only executed commands].<sup>20</sup>

18 F. Schiller, *Letters upon the Aesthetic Education of Man* (2005 [1794]), 15.

19 This convergence, however, is not without any parallel in practice. One can recognize it in contemporary projects running in post-conflict areas in some multi-ethnic societies, where music performances are adopted by formerly conflicting parties as the most efficient means of pacifying the primal fears and revengeful memories of the parties. This way, expressions of antagonistic attitudes may be replaced, in particular among younger people, with expressions of positive emotions by means of the public arts celebrating life and peace as their common values. Cf. C. Zelizer, “The Role of Artistic Processes in Peace-Building in Bosnia-Herzegovina,” *Peace and Conflict Studies* 10.2 (2003); V. Katunarić, “Sirens” and “Muses”: *Culture and Conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2001); id., “The Elements of Culture of Peace in Some Multiethnic Communities in Croatia,” *Journal of Conflictology* 1.2 (2010): 34–45.

20 <https://www.zukunft-braucht-erinnerung.de/der-eichmann-prozess-in-jerusalem-1961/>.

### **Hermeneutics of self-restraint; or, What the Sirens actually said to Odysseus**

Before analyzing the Sirens' verses directly, I will cite a fragment from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which Odysseus, in this particular episode, is depicted as a landlord with a collective of agricultural workers strictly following the work scheme:

He knows only two possibilities of escape. One he prescribes to his comrades. He plugs their ears with wax and orders them to row with all their might. Anyone who wishes to survive must not listen to the temptation of the irrecoverable and is unable to listen only if he is unable to hear. Society has always made sure that this was the case. Workers must look ahead with alert concentration and ignore anything which lies to one side. The urge toward distraction must be grimly sublimated in redoubled exertions. Thus, the workers are made practical. The other possibility Odysseus chooses for himself, the landowner, who has others to work for him. He listens, but does so while bound helplessly to the mast, and the stronger the allurements grow the more tightly he has himself bound ...

His comrades, who themselves cannot hear, know only of the danger of the song, not of its beauty, and leave him tied to the mast to save both him and them. They reproduce the life of the oppressor as a part of their own, while he cannot step outside his social role.<sup>21</sup>

The thought-provoking analogy between the boat and an industrial company notwithstanding, two points in this fragment seem most important. One is Odysseus's code. He is both the king and a hero of the Trojan war, but also the captain to his crew, who is supposed to exem-

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21 M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002 [1944]), 26–27.

plify sacrifice himself (which is not typical of a captain of industry, however). Another point is Odysseus's controversial reaction, although sublimated by his self-restraint. Nevertheless, this is an ambiguous reaction to the challenge issued by the alternative world, inasmuch as his anxiety originates from patriarchal gynophobia, i.e. fear of women, rather than misogyny, i.e. hatred of women. His encounters with women indicate that he is rather polyamorous. He enjoyed women, but he also loved his wife. Still, as a patriarchal man, he is not prone to approach women who have capabilities other than sexual and reproductive. In this respect, Circe seemed to know him very well, when she spoke ill of the Sirens as demi-goddesses who are not "functional" in the palette of patriarchal affinities and who, moreover, if only putatively, hate men. In turn, he is committed to the Olympic deities and their surrogates, such as Circe, and believes that women in that circle confirm the patriarchal order and his whims, respectively. Even in the event that Circe's suggestion regarding the Sirens had turned out to be an ill-conceived intrigue and nothing else, he would probably have taken the side of his hostess (for, as the popular saying goes, one should not bite the hand that feeds).

Odysseus's confusion as regards the intentions of the female choir may interpretatively diverge in two ways. One path of interpretation emphasizes male heterosexuality, in which woman, in light of the feminist critique of patriarchalism, is reduced to an object of male sexual desire.<sup>22</sup> The other path refers to the Sirens' music as a performance in a vestibule to the world of the Muses of the arts, to which Horkheimer and Adorno are close, yet for a short while and not explicitly enough.<sup>23</sup> For me, these two interpretations must not be irreconcilable in the end, provided that sexuality and art are taken as complementary parts of a world of permanent peace. In such a world, love and aesthetic desire assume many different forms hardly imaginable in the patriarchal world, replete

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22 Cf. G. Finney, *Women in Modern Drama: Freud, Feminism, and European Theater at the Turn of the Century* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

23 Cf. A. Wellmer, "The Death of the Sirens and the Origin of the Work of Art," *New German Critique* 81 (Fall 2000): 5–19.

with its incessant wars and preparations for wars, respectively. People in such a milieu do not understand peace and its purpose, because they basically do not know what to do in such a “boring” condition and are also not sure whether they may preserve the positions of power that they occupied beforehand – as kings, warriors, traders, and their female partners, respectively. For them, peace seems more threatening than war. In such a context, the Sirens can be taken as Muses of the arts and symbols of the mimetic power of attraction which leads to joy and creation in peace, where unidirectional movement, which is purely instrumental and self-contained, is essentially senseless.

Let us, finally, see what Circe said to Odysseus about the Sirens:

First you will raise the island of the Sirens, those creatures who spellbind any man alive, whoever comes their way. Whoever draws too close, off guard, and catches the Sirens’ voices in the air—no sailing home for him, no wife rising to meet him, no happy children beaming up at their father’s face. The high, thrilling song of the Sirens will transfix him, lolling there in their meadow, round them heaps of corpses, rotting away, rags of skin shriveling on their bones ... Race straight past that coast!<sup>24</sup>

This description, of course, is a product of mythical fantasy, as is any counterargument discussing different versions or possible backgrounds of the myth. Basically, one cannot argue with myth.<sup>25</sup> Yet, Circe’s dreadful version of the purpose of the Sirens deserves a search for an aesthetic reason for such a poetic performance. Homer’s bizarre version, which Horkheimer and Adorno hardly mention, goes against common sense in the ancient Mediterranean, which says that he who sings – including

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24 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. R. Fagles, 197–198.

25 Cf. R. Martin, “Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Analytic View,” *History and Theory* 32.1 (1993): 25–50; A. Cohen, “Myth and Myth Criticism Following the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,” *The European Legacy* 15.5 (2010): 583–598.

bards<sup>26</sup> – means no harm. According to Circe, however, these fascinating singers are a bunch of bizarre psychopaths. Such a projection of the Sirens might be sociopathic in its own right. Nevertheless, it must not necessarily be Circe's or Homer's, least of all a fabrication of the Sirens themselves. Rather, it resembles the contents of propaganda against enemies in times of war, which abounds with similarly awful details, whether wholly imagined or simply exaggerated.<sup>27</sup>

Even in the midst of war, a lyric song is least to be understood as an inimical threat. For instance, the well-known *Lili Marleen*, played in the German Army and elsewhere, does not offer any horrific message resembling Circe's defamation of her alleged contenders for Odysseus's favor:

*Outside the barracks, by the corner light / I'll always stand and wait  
for you at night / We will create a world for two / I'll wait for you the  
whole night through.*

And this is, lastly, what Homer quoted as the Sirens' verses:

"Come closer, famous Odysseus—Achaea's pride and glory—moor your ship on our coast so you can hear our song! Never has any sailor passed our shores in his black craft until he has heard the honeyed voices pouring from our lips, and once he hears to his heart's content sails on, a wiser man. We know all the pains that Achaeans and Trojans once endured on the spreading plain of Troy when the gods willed it so—all that comes to pass on the fertile earth, we know it all!"<sup>28</sup>

26 In the words of Telemachus, "Why, mother... why deny our devoted bard the chance to entertain us any way the spirit stirs him on? Bards are not to blame— Zeus is to blame. He deals to each and every laborer on this earth whatever doom he pleases" (Homer, *The Odyssey*, translated by R. Fagles, pp. 13-14.)

27 For example, psychiatrist Vamik Volkan, as a child growing up in a Turkish family on Cyprus, heard rumors that each knot in the local Greek priest's cincture stood for a Turkish child the priest had strangled (V. D. Volkan, *Cyprus—War and Adaptation: A Psychoanalytic History of Two Ethnic Groups in Conflict* [Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1979]).

28 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. R. Fagles, 202.

What he heard from the Sirens evidently does not correspond to Circe's words. In brief, the Sirens' self-introduction is gnostic ("we know it all"), but it is also empathic ("we know all the pains"). Eventually, they are critical of and disrespectful towards the irrational authority of the gods, as they deeply disagree with their taking sides in the war, thus practically pushing both the Greeks and the Trojans into war.

Furthermore, the Sirens' promise to the sailor that, after listening to them, his heart would be content, and he would be "a wiser man" recalls the platform of Schiller's *Letter* dedicated to the aesthetic (re)education of humanity.

Hence the ultimate consequence of the demonization of the Sirens is even worse than simply an anti-aesthetic bias: it is anti-human, i.e. misanthropic. Apart from the Sirens, Homer's epic offers a set of "different women", all of them dangerous in their own ways.<sup>29</sup> This is a tentative detail, for it recalls a notorious manual of misogyny called the *Malleus Maleficarum*.<sup>30</sup> This misogyny represents another great entryway into the modern epoch. The manual provides an enormous collection of superstitions and instructions alike, offering guidance in the business of witch-hunting for the centuries which follow.<sup>31</sup> This pogrom was carried out in concurrence with the pogroms of the Jews in Europe.

### The peak of the antipoetic world: Nazism

Adorno posited his most remarkable question, which marks the highest peak of European cultural pessimism, several years after the Second

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29 R. Comay, "Adorno's Siren Song," *New German Critique* 81 (Fall 2000): 21–48.

30 H. Kramer and J. Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (2002 [1486]).

31 "All wickedness is but little to the wickedness of a woman. Wherefore S. John Chrysostom says on the text, It is not good to marry (S. Matthew xix): What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours!" (Kramer and Sprenger, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, 101). Homer's misogyny is a mere trifle when compared to this anti-female Bible.

World War, when he rhetorically questioned the very purpose of writing poetry after Auschwitz.

Adorno's disappointment was directed mostly against a high culture that could not prevent the sloughing of totalitarianism. Nevertheless, Adorno faced insurmountable logical difficulties with his invective by confronting two disparate experiences. One is the Nazi concentration camps and the other is the world of the Muses and artists, the former something that annihilates people, and the latter something that enables human creativity and empathy. This is not to say that creation comes out or after Nothing, which is an illusion coming from two sources. One is literary and allusive. It reads that only war makes peace and vice versa (Orwell). The other comes from the Abrahamic religions, which are not allusive, but literal. It points out that God has created the world from Nothing, an implication which comes to the fore in Apocalyptic imagery, so that the total annihilation of this world may allegedly pave the way for another world. Obviously, neither modern science nor the Nazis believed in the basics of this theology, for the latter burnt millions of Jews in the conviction that they could not return after passing through the Nazis' black hole, i.e. the crematories.

Did Adorno share this conviction about the shocking termination of the human existence – some atheistic Jews remarked that God must have been sleeping when the Holocaust happened – such that no poetry is capable of recovering the lives lost? In such a case, ultimately, the Muses and the Sirens have remained nothing more than mythical beings, save the messengers from another world that created life in an abundance of peace. This is the most serious challenge to Horkheimer and Adorno's interpretation and a valid reason for their ambiguity with regard to the meaning of Odysseus's encounter with the Sirens and his eventual escape.

Indeed, this understanding of the non-transcendence (irreligiosity) of poetry might be the real reason why Adorno understood that the door of poetry, as the entrance to a world of permanent peace, if it ever existed, was definitely shut in the post-Holocaust world:

Cultural criticism finds itself faced with the final stage of the dialectic of culture and barbarism. To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric. And this corrodes even the knowledge of why it has become impossible to write poetry today. Absolute reification, which presupposed intellectual progress as one of its elements, is now preparing to absorb the mind entirely.<sup>32</sup>

Is it really “impossible to write poetry today”? The possibility itself is another ambiguous notion. Technically, yes, it is possible to write, even with additional moral arguments. Thus, in South America and Sub-Saharan Africa, where perhaps no bullet was shot during the Second World War. Next, among Jewish survivors and their descendants, for at least they cannot have been tormented with an evil conscience with regard to the cardinal crime of the Nazis. The other possibility is contentious. It opens up a never-ending debate about whether we humans – or at least some of us, those who reflect on the possibility of a permanent peace among anthropomorphic beings at some other time and place – are really alone in our attempts to solve the worst problem in our history: the termination of life not only on an individual, but also a collective, level of humankind? Is the latter just an analogy for the former? Can or should humanity as a collective live on after the death of a single being? Should we be ashamed of this possibility just as sensitive people, like Adorno, are shocked by what happened at Auschwitz?

Of course, I cannot compete with the arguments of Adorno or anybody else, since I do not deal with unbeatable arguments and may easily be proclaimed incompetent, when establishing a presumption or even a premonition that automatically disqualifies me from the list of participants in the project of the Enlightenment. My presumption is that no being has ever disappeared “magically”, in terms of crossing over into Nothing. In other words, and paraphrasing Schiller, we cannot by any means ascribe to Nothingness any part in the generation of both substance and form – except negatively, i.e. their destruction. Rather, I incline toward the an-

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32 T. W. Adorno, *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 34.



cient Greek mythological worldview, which is many artists' view as well. It reads that there was no beginning of the world whatsoever. The sum of the matter or energy has always been and will always be the same. Let us for the moment lean on the first law of thermodynamics without taking into account its negative dimension captured by the second law, namely that entropy, a useless matter, constantly increases (instead, we count on the technological possibility of the nuclear fusion of dissipated matter for the sake of producing an immensity of free energy). Now, let us abandon the premise of the first law, which also has a contradictory implication. Accordingly, the universe is finite, but without frontiers, which means that it expands a bit and implodes a bit, as well, hence transforming itself along the way. This is because a visible loss of anything is replaced by a gain in another, yet hardly visible, part of the spectrum of existence. Nevertheless, the latter is accessible to sensible artists, scientists, and many other people in sympathy with the world. It is the part of their secret knowledge about the cosmic network of worlds in which friends of such people live far away and on Earth simultaneously. When/if we die, we change form as part of the eternal procession of mortal bodies. They are shaped artfully by the immense tape of timeless creativity. It is immersed in the fertile water of the lifeworld in parallel with our unconscious life, our dreams and wants. The world as an art form protects the living being from its unconscious breakthrough into imagined Nothingness. Therefore, we never exchange substance or form for Nothing. Such an exchange is impossible, for it contradicts to the very core the creative process of the universe, a core which, as most cores, exists at a less visible part of the cosmic spectrum. For the same fundamental reason, Nazism cannot overwhelm the poetic form of living substance, in which the former is locked down as the self-destroying part of the latter, its Thanatos, Behemoth, or whatever its name might be in the vocabulary of a given mythology or religion. Basically, evil, as the common denominator of all destructive forces, gives the impression that it can rule over the world, although it is not capable of making life in it sustainable.

Adorno's condemnation of the hypocrisy of the unpoetic world is acceptable inasmuch as the primacy of the poetic world is not plausible enough and is even despised by the part of humanity that sympathizes with the Behemoth. Likewise, writing poetry must never have been shameful, although many times poetic reason has found an appropriate place in inappropriate conditions. The same goes for the decades after the First World War, which Krleža named the "European Gigantomachy."<sup>33</sup> Have the Sirens and the Muses consequently fled away then, so that nobody may continue their missionary work? Certainly, they could not settle in the European Peninsula in the midst of the war. Eventually, their sisters the Sirens could not persuade Odysseus to change the course of his ship, as much as some poetic souls in Europe could not stop Hitler's burgeoning Army by the end of the 1930s. In general, why blame them, the Sirens or the Muses and their favorites among the people, for what the latter did not do, while their senses were paralyzed with contempt for what they saw before their eyes?

### **Conclusion: The genial stupidity and the quest for an aesthetic Enlightenment**

The mega-system generated through the cooperation between the analytical sciences employed in military laboratories and the organized destruction of what was built up by many preceding generations may be designated as "the genially stupid system". Its destructive activity is radial. It demolishes both objects and subjects, from the outside and from the inside. This chilling combination, in which the pathological becomes normalized and vice versa, can be represented as a bell curve. Statistically, it consists of a broad middle and tiny extremes. The system represents a variety of social pyramid in which the top consists of political and corporate elites surrounded by security services, i.e. military and police. It is followed by an upper-middle stratum consisting of the designers of the whole system, mainly big science specialists spanning from physicists to

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33 M. Krleža, *Hrvatski bog Mars* [Croatian God Mars] (Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Matice Hrvatske, 1946 [1922]), 199.

financial experts. The rest of the middle stratum consists of administrators dealing with implementing different laws for different operations. The lower strata consist of workers dealing with simpler, manual or routine, jobs (their intelligence and emotions being the first victims when this system design is downloaded and installed for industry).

The expression “genially stupid system” is derived from a remark by French industrial sociologist Pierre Naville. He pointed out that mass production is serial, while product design is made by genius.<sup>34</sup> Yet, serial production is the necessary condition for products to be sold on the market and for work to be proclaimed productive. To perform the whole project of capitalistic production, workers’ capabilities must be reduced. This vision echoes a remarkable passage from Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* in which he notices a tragic divergence between the work of the employer and that of the worker: “The one resembles more and more the administrator of a vast empire, the other a brute.”<sup>35</sup>

Examples of the genially insensitive system appeared as early as the beginning of the Enlightenment. During the times of the witch-hunting craze in Europe, which coincided with the expansion of the doctrines of Grotius, Bacon, and Descartes among the elites, these and other sceptics alike were reticent about the numerous trials against women. Some historians explain this paradox by claiming that these Enlightenment philosophers were waiting for some other time in the future when the belief in witches would dissipate and a rationalistic worldview would accordingly prevail.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, any premature opposition to the witch-hunt-

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34 Naville’s sentence is paraphrased from memory (unfortunately, I cannot track down the original reference, from a collection of essays published at the beginning of the 1980s). His earlier articles written on similar topics are closer to the Schumpeterian, i.e. neo-classical, viewpoint, than to the (critical) theory of alienated labor which emerged in the sociology of work in 1970s; cf. “Le travail et la guerre: Esquisse de certaines relations entre production et destruction,” *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* 27 (1959): 27–53; “Vers l’automatisme social,” *Revue française de sociologie* 1.3 (1960): 275–285.

35 A. de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010 [1856]), 526.

36 Martin, “Objectivity and Meaning in Historical Studies: Toward a Post-Ana-

ing craze would have been futile. Still, the validity of such a claim is dubious. One reason is ethical: the numerous victims of the false accusations deserved some demonstration of solidarity, at least among the personalities who claimed to speak for the Enlightenment. The second reason follows from the first. It is the lack of empathy among scientists preoccupied primarily with their versions of the truth. More than this, the atomic bomb and similar complex inventions in service to the power of annihilation are the products of scientists devoid of empathy towards the numerous victims of such weapons. Accordingly, the lobotomized, "left-brain", inventors are the *conditio sine qua non* of military and other instrumentalist rationalities.

A certain racialization of the system is demonstrated by the bestselling book *The Bell Curve*.<sup>37</sup> The presentation of a genial stupidity in this book does not relate to the statistics showing the unequal distribution of intelligence among different categories of people. It is not wrong in principle that the results of measuring abstract intelligence favor white men in general, although they have the broadest span between the extremes with very intelligent, on the one hand, and very stupid, on the other hand. The central paradox concerns the applicability of the results, for they are valid for a relatively small percentage of the population. In other words, the results represent only the chosen respondents. Statistically, the latter represent a small portion of the total variance within the general population, between four and sixteen percent. The latter, however, served as the basis for a patently false generalization about the levels of intelligence among the general population. Thus, the book contains, as some commentators have noted, "flawed methodology and racist conclusions."<sup>38</sup> Besides, such a design is not generated only through such a research project, for the evaluation of the existence of a tight connection

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lytic View."

37 R. J. Herrnstein and C. Murray, *The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

38 J. Johnson, "Visions of Disability in a Technocratic Society," *DataCrítica: International Journal of Critical Statistics* 3.1 (2019): 43–45.

between higher intelligence and higher race (and gender, i.e. males) has cost hundreds of millions of lives, from early colonialism to the epoch of Nazism to whatever comes as its next avatar ...

An indication of the span of the genial stupidity of contemporary society can be found in the pages of the otherwise pioneering work of sociologist Manuel Castells concerning information society. Towards the end of the work he wrote as follows: "The dream of the Enlightenment, that reason and science would solve the problems of humankind, is within reach. Yet there is an extraordinary gap between our technological overdevelopment and our social underdevelopment."<sup>39</sup> Gaps indeed exist, but mostly socioeconomic ones, whereas the gap between technological overdevelopment and social underdevelopment is illusory, due to a conceptual bias, for the latter is partly the product of the former. The apparent paradox constitutes the essence of the design of the genially stupid system. The informational networks, financial superpower, and military build-up are growing at the expense of the downsizing of face-to-face human interaction, especially among younger generations. This is one of the externalities of the applied Enlightenment, mostly its military variety, which is unthinkable without the long-term destruction of the broader social ties of solidarity and social empathy that reach beyond the borders of a society as the military build-up continues.<sup>40</sup> On the other hand, the technologies of a society with broader ties of solidarity and a sense of empathy toward other people(s) and their sufferings might be entirely different from and more developed than these technologies, constituting, as Castells calls it, the early stage of the Information Age.

The most absurd and, at the same time, one of the most attractive products of the applied sciences is – the bomb. Recall the brilliant parody on

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39 M. Castells, *End of Millennium* (Malden, MA; Oxford; and Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), 395.

40 Notably, the Arpanet, the forerunner of the Internet, was a military project used until 1990 specifically aimed at re-establishing connections among troops in the event of nuclear war. This vision basically corresponds to the condition of a disintegrated social life that is provisionally restored through virtual networks.

this penchant of the leading power, namely Stanley Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). The main character (the paranoid Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper) lusts for the newest generation of the weapon. His delight with the bomb has recently been matched by that of US President Donald Trump, when he described the country's newest ballistic missile with the following words: "Get ready Russia, because *they* will be coming, nice *and* new *and* 'smart!'"<sup>41</sup> This message demonstrates how monstrous the "nice" looks when viewed from the peak of the power serviced by the newest generation of weapons.

Otherwise, the genial stupidity is condensed in the very complex structure of the atomic bomb. It consists of fissile elements (isotopes of uranium and plutonium) in the bomb core, with neutrons striking the nucleus of isotopes, which is crowned by a chain reaction causing an atomic explosion.<sup>42</sup>

The mind capable of constructing such a device is analytically brilliant, but emotionally devoid. It is one of the generations of monsters created in the laboratory of Dr. Frankenstein. The creature is autistic and rightly perceives inputs, including the orders given by its creator, but has no sense that these clash with disastrous outputs. From a military perspective, however, this is the most efficient system for destroying life along with the inorganic environment. Since such a destruction is constitutive of the design of the system, in its operation some nodes in the left hemisphere are hyperactive, while nodes of positive emotions, located in the right hemisphere, are defused.

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The mythical distinction between mind and body, continued by lobotomist intervention into human beings in Cartesian terms as well as in terms of the social division into manual and intellectual work, has enabled the growth of the biggest monster. In the nineteenth century many intellectuals considered technology a great hope for humanity and even

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41 <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-5603577/Get-ready-Russia--Trump-warns-missiles-coming-Syria-attack.html>.

42 <https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/science-behind-atom-bomb>.

a force of liberation for workers, albeit Marx in his *Outline of the Critics of Political Economy* started to doubt this truism (after he and Engels, in their *Communist Manifesto*, celebrated industrial technology as a step forward for civilization). He remarked that technology is incorporated exclusively into the constant capital and that work itself becomes more and more alienated. In a lucid moment he wrote down the observation, “fixed capital being man himself.”<sup>43</sup>

How is this so? Is it possible to make that worker a producer of surplus value as that becomes the major value capable of creating everything that technology has served for? Is it true, for instance, that the Egyptian pyramids could have been built without slave labor? This is, of course, impossible, because free workers would never take part in such an enterprise, unless they were compensated with some material reward (food, water, clothing and shelter, according to the sources). The same is true for Gothic cathedrals and other monumental architecture. Were precapitalistic systems then “genially stupid”, as well – or have we missed something very important and fundamentally different in the study of the precapitalistic history of work? Eventually, are slaves as well as industrial workers just predecessors of machines, whose role ends up in the hands of robots, or is the value of human work so deeply embedded in the psychophysical and social context of work, which is still poorly understood, even by capitalists?

On the other hand, it is mainly women who do repetitive work. Since they have entered the work force, the total amount of their worktime has expanded and typically surpassed that of men. Nevertheless, one essential difference has remained the same. Women’s domestic work is not productive in terms of the classical political economy. In addition to exhausting mass labor – without which the designs of Imhotep’s pyramid, Brunelleschi’s Palace or Sinan’s Blue Mosque might have remained only mental maps put on paper – anonymous women’s work, although registered just as a daily and ergonomic, essentially reproductive process, has provided the economic basis for building civilizations and raising

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43 Marx, *Grundrisse*, 643.

children accordingly. Ultimately, the synonym for human (re)productive work is – *poesis*. The (re)productive work of workers and/or women in combination with the work of the arts may open up the new era of the aesthetic Enlightenment, long anticipated by voices ranging from the mythical Sirens to Schiller’s *Letters*.

Valère, the protagonist of Molière’s drama *The Miser*, reveals the deepest motive behind the imperial disregard of human (re)productive work and poetic reason, respectively. Although unsuccessful in his businesses, he dislikes people as much as other businessmen do. For him, people are a necessary evil along the way for the few successful climbers, i.e. the emerging monopolists. Eventually, these terminate the illusory competition among “equals”. The monopolists, after robbing competitors and many other people, move away to places that are inaccessible to their fellow citizens or, more properly, their subjects.

Hence, misanthropy emerges as the common denominator of the whole system of power. Valère displays misanthropy as the proper face of the businessman, whereas any public expression of sympathy is just the mask of one who deeply hates the people:

Honesty suffers, I acknowledge; but when we have need of men, we may be allowed without blame to adapt ourselves to their mode of thought; and if we have no other hope of success but through such stratagem, it is not after all the fault of those who flatter, but the fault of those who wish to be flattered.<sup>44</sup>

Yet, the mode when misers “ha[d] need of men” is behind us. Meanwhile, misers in cooperation with experts have created a genially stupid system of huge proportions. Its long-term goal is to destroy people and the living environment step by step – not by detonating the bomb instantly. Concurrently, their mask loudly defends “democracy” against others, whether terrorists or immigrants or both as the new “barbaric” intruders. Yet, the ultimate goal of the two-faced speaker remains unchanged: to pit all parts of the human race against one other. Although

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44 Molière, *The Miser* (1668), Act I, Scene I.



this may seem like the game in favor of the One or the religious projection of the One, this is basically a suicidal system. Nonetheless, when the powerful misers realize what they are doing or have done already, i.e. that they have drilled out (say, with a hadron collider, as well) a black hole, it will be too late to repair the damage. Because of that, we must think, write, speak, and act publicly a step ahead of them. After all, the process of the Enlightenment (in a broader sense than simply cognitivist) is not completed yet. To prevent the worst outcome, the new wave of aesthetic Enlightenment must reach beyond the paths of knowledge based on crude instrumentalist reasoning and consequently modify the way of understanding and feeling about the dialectics of the matter.

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## Social Practices and the Constitution of Knowledge: Critical Social Theory as a Philosophy of Praxis

Craig Browne<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Habermas' program of knowledge constitutive interests remains a profound synthesis and the tensions intrinsic to it would be decisive for later critical social theory. The extent to which this program sought to extend the perspective of the philosophy of praxis will be explored and the justification of its key thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory analysed. Habermas presumed that the critique of ideology is a central task of critical social theory and knowledge constitutive interests is shown to have been shaped by critical theory's dispute with positivism and the critique of organised capitalism's technocratic ideology. My analysis highlights how Habermas attempted to ground the formation of knowledge in social practices and how the nexus between the subject and history ensuing from this approach was critical to his theory, including its reflexivity and intended initiating of emancipatory practices. It will be argued that this epistemological synthesis involved an early articulation of Habermas' core intuition of the communicative mediation of the universal and the particular in a rational identity. It is this conception that conditions Habermas' controversial claim that Marx reduced praxis to the technically orientated activity of labour. This core intuition likewise framed his original program's image of society and its interpretation of the democratic dimensions of social and natural scientific inquiry. Despite the major difficulties that led to Habermas' distancing of his social theory from the philosophy of praxis, a systematic re-assessment of this program is warranted by contemporary changes in capitalist society and the limitations of those later social theory programs that knowledge constitutive interests prefigured. My analysis discloses the substantial potentials

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of this program that have never been pursued and proposes some conceptual means for better achieving its integration of the intentions of the philosophy of praxis and critical social theory.

## Introduction

“If Marx had not thrown together interaction and work under the label of social practice (Praxis), and had he instead related the materialist concept of synthesis likewise to the accomplishments of instrumental action and the nexuses of communicative action, then the idea of a science of man would not have been obscured by identification with natural science. Rather, this idea would have taken up Hegel’s critique of the subjectivism of Kant’s epistemology and surpassed it materialistically. It would have made clear that ultimately a radical critique of knowledge can be carried out only in the form of a reconstruction of the history of the species, and that conversely social theory, from the viewpoint of the self-constitution of the species in the medium of social labour and class struggle, is possible only as the self-reflection of the knowing subject.”<sup>2</sup>

Habermas’ early program of critical theory was shaped by the praxis philosophy problem of the intersection of the subject and history.<sup>3</sup> The innovative conception of *the social* that emerged in response to this problem was principally articulated in the epistemological model of ‘knowledge constitutive interests’.<sup>4</sup> These are the anthropological interests that shape the practical acquisition of knowledge in terms of technical control, mutual understanding, and emancipation. Habermas later abandoned this centrepiece of his nineteen-sixties writings. It was the subject of extensive critical assessment and subsequent changes in

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2 Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 62-63.

3 Craig Browne, *Habermas and Giddens on Praxis and Modernity: A Constructive Comparison* (London: Anthem Press, 2017).

4 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

capitalist society, as well as shifts in theoretical discussions, meant that this epistemological model's background assumptions were overtaken by developments. Nevertheless, 'knowledge constitutive interests' remains a distinctive theoretical synthesis. It is still, in my opinion, Habermas' most fecund work and its possibilities are not exhausted. Despite this epistemological model's serious critical limitations, those seeking to reinvigorate critical theory will continue to revisit it. There are few equivalent endeavours to link together social practices and the constitution of knowledge through a reconstruction of major strands of modern philosophy.

My analysis shows how knowledge constitutive interests is one of the major attempts to connect The Frankfurt School program of critical social theory and the neo-Marxian approach of the philosophy of praxis. Habermas' later critical assessment of these two schools of thoughts' different theoretical orientations veils the synthetic intentions of his original program.<sup>5</sup> In fact, this critical assessment might be viewed as a symptom of knowledge constitutive interests' conceptual deficiencies. Whilst it contains the nucleus of the theoretical innovations of the intersubjective paradigm of communication, it will become evident that the limitations of its syntheses decisively influenced the format of Habermas' later critical theory. The program of knowledge constitutive interests incorporated the philosophy of praxis problem of the transformation of subjects from being the objects of historical processes that they nevertheless generate under the conditions of social domination into the genuine subjectivity that consciously and autonomously makes history through its practices. In short, the broad normative aspirations of this *problematique* were retained but the terms in which it was framed by the philosophy of praxis would be disavowed.

The complexity of the program of knowledge constitutive interests demands an initial overview of its general framework and intentions. In this context, the discussion clarifies significant dimensions of this synthetic

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5 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987).

epistemology and social theory that were subsequently relinquished. The second section explores the centrality of the critique of positivism to this program and this critique is shown to be a counterpoint to Habermas' emerging image of the social. Positivism did not just represent a deficient epistemology, rather it was a major ideological justification of technocratic capitalism and positivism's limited outlook even afflicted Marx's social theory. The third section outlines the diagnosis of the times that informed knowledge constitutive interests and the context of organised capitalism. Marx's social theory is presented as pivotal in a historical narrative of the abandoning of epistemological reflection. Marx initiated a decisive shift towards a social theory based on social practices, yet his anthropology of labour overlooked the significance of communicative practices and led to epistemological misconceptions. This critical interpretation of Marx's social theory has been contested and its neglect of Marx's paradigm of production's conceptual differentiations will be remarked upon.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth section, then, sketches how the respective logics of inquiry of the natural sciences and the human science each depend on practices that involve contrasting mediations of the universal and the particular. This contrast evidences the differing rationality of mutual understanding and technical control; it likewise reflects Habermas' openness to a range of theoretical perspectives and the general significance to his theory of the constitution of identity through symbolic communication. The fifth section returns to the idea of a cognitive interest in emancipation and autonomy. Psychoanalysis and the critique of ideology constitute epistemological exemplars of an emancipatory cognitive interest that facilitates subjects overcoming domination and repression. However, the emancipatory interest is manifested broadly in the long-term historical processes that orient the rationalisation of technical control and mutual understanding towards progress.

Finally, the last section is comprised of two parts. In the first part, it considers the implications of the failures and substantial criticisms of

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6 György Márkus, *Language and Production: a Critique of the Paradigms* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1986).



Habermas' early program. The decomposition of knowledge constitutive interests is shown to involve Habermas' distancing of critical theory from various dimensions of the neo-Marxian perspective of praxis philosophy, irrespective of whether praxis philosophy refers to distinct schools of neo-Marxism or a specific strand of Marxian thought more generally.<sup>7</sup> Although these systematic revisions rectify a number of weaknesses, it is not necessarily the case that the outcome is a superior social theory. Rather, the synthetic revisions prefigure problems in Habermas' later theory and effectively foreclosed the possibility of developing the original model's outstanding potentials and novel intuitions. This closure may explain Habermas' rather unequivocal later criticisms of the social theory initiatives that have a background in the philosophy of praxis.<sup>8</sup>

The second part of the final section outlines some traces and resonances of the program of knowledge constitutive interests in social theory. It concludes with a discussion of the main changes that would be needed to properly take-into-account subsequent historical developments and suggests how the inclusion of the notion of the dialectic of control would strengthen its perspectives.<sup>9</sup> These recommendations are distinct from Habermas' revisions and reflect contemporary concerns. The traces and resonances that are discussed are more a matter of loose affinities and

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7 Craig Browne, 'From the Philosophy of Praxis to the Sociology of Practice', in *Praxeological Political Analysis*, ed. Michael Jonas and Beate Littig (London: Routledge, 2017), 35-55; Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

8 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

9 Craig Browne, *Critical Social Theory*, (London: Sage, 2017). Anthony Giddens once defined the dialectic of control in the follow terms: "For it is my argument that the dialectic of control is built into the very nature of agency, or more correctly put, the relations of autonomy and dependence which agents reproduce in the context of the enactment of definite practices. An agent who does not participate in the dialectic of control, in a minimal fashion, ceases to be an agent. As I have emphasised before, all power relations, or relations of autonomy and dependence, are reciprocal; however wide the asymmetrical distribution of resources involved, all power relations manifest autonomy and dependence 'in both directions'." Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 149.

anticipations of tendencies, rather than statements of direct connection. This original model's best-known lineages are those of later critical theory and the theory and practice of deliberative democracy. Significantly, even in the case of later critical theory, the linkages are disconnected from knowledge constitutive interests' central organising conception of the nexus between the subject and history. This epistemological program's influence upon contemporary social theory is not always fully recognised. Nevertheless, its framing of problems is generally more substantial than later parallel initiatives and the social theory 'turns' to dimensions of knowledge constitutive interests, like those to language and practice.<sup>10</sup>

There are broader reasons for undertaking a systematic reconstruction and assessment of Habermas' original program. The questions of ideology and rationality are central to this program and were taken for a time as evidence of its belonging to an earlier period. These questions have been reinvigorated by social and political developments, especially by the challenges posed by the growth of material inequalities, authoritarian neo-populism, and the infiltration of technology into social life.<sup>11</sup> Neo-populism's irrational critiques of expertise and moral universalism contrasts with the intentions of Habermas' critiques of technocratic ideology.<sup>12</sup> It aimed to surpass this ideology with a more comprehensive conception of rationality and through initiating emancipatory reflection on historical development. The program's key thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory is equally revealing in its contrast with

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10 Browne, 'From the Philosophy of Praxis to the Sociology of Practice'; Andreas Reckwitz, 'Towards a Theory of Social Practice: A Development in Culturalist Studies', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5, 2002, 243-263; Theodor Schatzki, 'Introduction: Practice Theory' in *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, ed Theodor Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Erike von Savigny (London: Routledge, 2001), 1-14.

11 Browne, *Critical Social Theory*.

12 Jürgen Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protest, Science and Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 91-92; Jürgen Habermas, *The Lure of Technocracy* (Cambridge: Polity 2015); Patrick O'Mahony, *The Contemporary Theory of the Public Sphere* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013).

the current state of social science discussions. The disengagement from epistemology has been described as ‘sociology’s unspoken weakness’.<sup>13</sup> From the contemporary perspective, the weight placed upon epistemology by Habermas might appear unusual and incongruent with the range of wider problems that the program sought to address. However, it was in no sense unusual for that period and this is evidenced by the otherwise quite different structuralist epistemological proposals of Althusser and Foucault.<sup>14</sup>

The program of knowledge constitutive interests may have been substantially flawed in its construction, but its basic intention was broadly the right one in terms of countering the opposed double exigencies of the neo-populist irrational dismissals of scientific knowledge and the ‘scientistic misunderstandings’ of science by positivism and its later refinements, as well as of scientism’s highly practical instrumentalising application and ideological legitimation of domination. Knowledge constitutive interests sought to disclose the prescientific practical orientations towards deep-seated problems of social reproduction and the liberation from obsolete modes of repression that shape the development of different types of scientific inquiry and the appropriate application of scientific research. For this reason, it seeks to show that there are common and overlapping interests between the rationality of science and the prescientific practices of social reproduction. The separation that emerged between these two domains of the expression of the interests guiding knowledge had to be understood historically and the same criteria could be applied to disclose the distortion of the appropriate development and application of the different modes of science. Positivism’s reduction of epistemology to methodology meant that it could not comprehend these

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13 Rob Stones, “Sociology’s Unspoken Weakness: Bringing Epistemology Back In” *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 53 4, 2017, 730-752.

14 Louis Althusser, *For Marx* (London: Allen Lane, 1969); Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971); Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1970); Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books 1972).

wider considerations and how they needed to be addressed from the standpoint of social theory. Similarly, the synthesis of psychoanalysis and Marxism in knowledge constitutive interests is open to criticism, yet the conception of ideology as systematically distorted communication that resulted from it and its resulting 'methodology' of critique are most relevant to contemporary capitalist society's forms of irrational regression and displaced expressions of social pathologies.

Despite the substantial flaws that precipitate its revision, knowledge constitutive interests is likewise a corrective to the recent influential sociological analyses of science that rightly highlight its practical constitution but often appear indifferent to the questions of rationality and universalistic justification. These analyses undialectical bracketing of these considerations enabled important disclosures of science's arbitrary and constructed character. This construction is veiled by science's standard self-representation and modernist rationalist philosophy. However, the apparent indifference to the questions of rationality and universalistic justification conditioned the affinities and analogies that emerged between the theses of sociological investigations and subsequent neo-populist arguments concerning science and rationality, such as in relation to global warming and crime rates. These parallels have been described as a product of misunderstandings and counter to the intentions of these studies.<sup>15</sup> Yet even if this defence is accepted, it still reveals the failure to explicitly address those difficult questions that Habermas attempted to resolve in the construction of knowledge constitutive interests. It is, nevertheless, possible to sustain the program of knowledge constitutive interests' general intentions, while elucidating the internal contradictions of science to a greater degree. In a sense, this aspiration formed part of Cornelius Castoriadis' revision of the philosophy of praxis and elaboration of the notion of the social imaginary.<sup>16</sup>

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15 Bruno Latour, 'Has Critique Run Out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2004. 225-248.

16 Cornelius Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1984); Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Craig Browne, "Two Critiques of Identity: Adorno and

It will become clear that Habermas' program of knowledge constitutive interests contains significant potentials for a social theory perspective that have never been fully redeemed. These potentials have to be separated from the program's limitations. My analysis will show that the notion of the dialectic of control is partly anticipated in Habermas' explication of Hegel's notion of the struggle for recognition and the alternative intersubjective perspective that is present in Marx's substantive analyses of class struggle and political conflicts. The notion of the dialectic of control overcomes the bifurcated character of Habermas' conception of the moral-practical and technical cognitive interests, being consistent with the integration of these two interests in the third 'species' interest in autonomy and emancipation. Similarly, it is possible to learn from the limitations of Habermas' original program and its background image of a just social order. Despite its critique of the positivist mentality of the period, the conception of the social that this program justifies very much reflects the practices and outlook of the post-second world war decades of the 'social democratic era' and 'organized modernity'.<sup>17</sup> Habermas wanted to show that in the development of science and its contribution to human learning there is a misunderstood capacity for progress. What was required was a more democratic form of collective learning and rational organisation of society.

### **1. Reconnecting the Subject and History: An Introductory Overview**

Habermas' original commitment to the praxis philosophy *problematique* is evident in the formulation of a reflexive theory of knowledge and the

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Castoriadis on the Capitalist Imaginary' in *Reading Adorno: The Endless Road*, ed. Amir Khandizaji (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 2019, 1-35.

17 Craig Browne, 'The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction of Historical Materialism: Towards A Dialectical Renewal Critical Social Theory's Historical Perspective', *Inter-Legere*, Volume 2, Number 24: 2019, 17-49; Axel Honneth and Martin Hartmann, 'Paradoxes of Capitalist Modernization' in Axel Honneth *The I in We* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013); Peter Wagner, 1994 *A Sociology of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

critique of positivism. Knowledge constitutive interests' key thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory is just as provocative today as it was at the time of its formulation. Of course, the image of social theory that Habermas had in mind bears the imprint of that time and the critical theory commitment to the sociological translation of philosophical problems. At that time, Habermas considered critical theory's primary task is the critique of ideology. Yet, he already perceived that critique's need for epistemological justification threatens this task. There was a need to theorise the consequences of the transition to late-capitalism, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the problem that "Marx never explicitly posed for himself the epistemological question concerning the conditions of the possibility of a philosophy of history with political intent".<sup>18</sup>

During this period Habermas sought, I argue, to reconnect the subject and history on the grounds of the process of institutionalising the social. However, I conclude that he was unsuccessful due to the conflicts intrinsic to the epistemology of knowledge constitutive interests and because his early critique of late-capitalist ideology equivocates over the relation between the two organising categories of the philosophy of praxis. The praxis philosophy categories of history and the subject are critical to the epistemology of knowledge constitutive interests. It seeks to provide a retrospective and prospective justification for critical theory, through clarifying the 'conditions of its possibility' and sketching the preliminary outline of a substantive social theory. Habermas claims that his later theory of communicative action foregoes the 'primacy of epistemology', and he replaces the social theory derived from the model of knowledge constitutive interests.<sup>19</sup> However, there are no exact equivalents in his later theory for some of his original program's most important organising considerations, including some deriving from the philosophy of praxis. In fact, these dimensions of knowledge constitutive interests are central

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18 Jürgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice* (London: Heinemann, 1974), 242.

19 Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1988), xiv.

to its attempt to rethink the social. This is a major reason why Habermas theory's later omission of a synthesising subject is an especially consequential revision.

Before this omission, Habermas proposed that the subject's activities underpin the constitution of knowledge and that the subject performs the function of integrating the separate constitutive interests. In this way, the subject served as an analogy for the institutional framework of society. The subject's coordinating of interests has certain parallels with the institutional organising of the activities necessary for social reproduction. Moreover, the subject's synthesis of knowledge has affinities with how institutions' ideological legitimation regulates the distribution of material goods. For this reason, the notion of identity is fundamental to the subject's synthetic operations and the claim that social identity has considerable importance in defining the moral conditions of legitimation. This conception of social identity has direct continuities to Habermas' later theory's intersubjective presuppositions. In his opinion, however, the notion of a synthesising subject is now unnecessary. It is inconsistent with the innovations proper to the intersubjective paradigm of communicative action.<sup>20</sup>

The abandonment of a synthesising subject is, to be sure, consistent with a shift in paradigm, but the discordance between these stages is more complex than simply a logical advance. Besides the fact that positions later systematically developed receive their first expression in knowledge constitutive interests, there is the issue that many of the arguments precipitating this paradigm change already influence this model. Habermas aimed to reveal the connections different types of scientific inquiry have to forms of action.<sup>21</sup> In this way, through explicating the epistemological significance of labour and language, he overcomes the limitations of the philosophy of consciousness. In other words, the transition from the par-

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20 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and System* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*

21 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

adigm of the philosophy of consciousness was specified in terms of social practices, rather than attributed solely to intersubjective communication. The complex notion of 'interest', or cognitive orientation, was meant to signify this practical-materialist change to the grounding of knowledge in the conditions of social reproduction.<sup>22</sup>

Habermas departs, however, from the Marxist tradition's tendency to consider labour the model of practice. He controversially broke the category of praxis down into two distinct action orientations: labour is instrumentally organised, whereas interaction is communicatively orientated. Habermas rejected the enlargement of the 'sensuous human activity' of labour into a general notion of creative self-expression. He considered that the action orientations aligned to labour and interaction refer to more universal paradigmatic modes of activity.<sup>23</sup> Labour and interaction are undoubtedly equally necessary, but my analysis will show that they do not have an equivalent status in either Habermas' early conception of institutionalising processes or his critique of late-capitalist ideology based on the anthropology of knowledge constitutive interests.

Habermas reduced labour to instrumental action in aligning labour with the technical cognitive interest: it is oriented by the technically efficient means of realising an intended state of affairs and applies technical rules governed by 'empirical-analytic' knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Labour serves the need of the human species to reproduce the material conditions of life through a continuous attempt to control nature. By contrast, 'historical-hermeneutic' sciences incorporate a practical interest in preserving and extending mutual understanding.<sup>25</sup> This practical interest underpins interaction and the consensual regulating of behaviour through the symbolic communication of meaning. Norms that subjects reciprocally

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22 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

23 Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics", 225.

24 Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 91-92.

25 Jürgen Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: a General Perspective", in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (London: Heinemann: 1978), 308-310.



recognise structure interaction and such communicative action is constitutive of cultural meanings. In Habermas' opinion, the communicative socialization of subjects' 'inner nature' is just as much a prerequisite of social reproduction as control over 'external nature'. These two interests represent then different and irreducible spheres of rationality; his depiction of their rationalisation retains, however, the historical perspective of the philosophy of praxis.<sup>26</sup> He sought to specify the progressive developments they make possible and delineated prospects for emancipation by locating interests in the historical process. For this reason, the later omission of a synthesising subject can equally be considered a consequence of substantial alterations in his conception of history.<sup>27</sup>

The model of knowledge constitutive interests was to serve as a characterisation of the subject. It therefore contains an intrinsically circular logic, since the subject's capacity to know determines this construction. In other words, it is the task of reflective analysis to illuminate those constituting activities which epistemological knowledge presupposes. Habermas claimed that *the disclosure of the interests orienting the constitution of knowledge is made possible by the subject's experience of rational insight in the act of reflection* is crucial to his original program's justification. As a consequence, the category of reflection is fundamental to this model and its critique of positivist philosophy. Habermas accepted the historical dimension of Hegel's phenomenological critique of Kant's epistemology and the attendant need to account for the genetic development of consciousness.<sup>28</sup> He asserted that positivism is the disavowal of the historical standpoint of reflection. Positivism suppresses the subject's role in the constitution of knowledge, primarily by limiting reason to the explicating and following of methodological procedures.<sup>29</sup>

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26 Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*; Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

27 Browne, 'The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction'.

28 Georg W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

29 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, vii.

In Habermas' opinion, reason always has a normative meaning and uncovering this quality counters the positivist reduction of reason to science alone. Instead, *it is the subject's experience of liberation in enlightening reflection that is constitutive of reason.* Moreover, contrary to positivism's supposedly disinterested perspective, this interest in autonomy should determine the application of reason.<sup>30</sup> This proposal is potentially controversial, since in linking reason to emancipation, it implies that *epistemology is not exempt from the critique of ideology*, rather it is conditional on it. Habermas' critique of positivism employed a method similar to Hegel's 'determinate negation', that is, just as Hegel shows how consciousness develops by recognising the deficiencies of its existing stage and progresses beyond it through negation, so knowledge constitutive interests reveals positivism is a chimerical reflection of science and, as such, a contemporary ideology to be historically surpassed through critique.<sup>31</sup>

Habermas claimed that subjecting epistemology to ideology critique only recovers the association reason had to emancipatory reflection prior to the predominance of positivist notions of rationality. The critique of ideology, in exposing false and limited conceptions, gives contemporary expression to the historically accepted 'interest' of reason in the emancipation from dogma. According to Kant and Fichte, the norm of autonomy informed any decision to act on the basis of reason alone. However, the subsequent rationalisation of society demonstrates that science is not unequivocally opposed to heteronomy.<sup>32</sup> Rather, the contemporary ideology "keeping actual power relations inaccessible to analysis and to public consciousness" derives its justification from the scientific critique

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30 Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: a General Perspective", 308.

31 Richard Bernstein, "Comment on The Relationship of Habermas's Views to Hegel", in *Hegel's Social and Political Thought*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1980), 233-239; Craig Browne, 'The Problem of Hierarchy and the Modern Political Imaginary', *Social Epistemology*, Volume 33, Issue 5: 2019, 398-409; Albrecht Wellmer, *Critical Theory of Society* (New York: Continuum: 1971).

32 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 256-263.

of dogma.<sup>33</sup> It is precisely because the critique of ideology originates from the same process of rationalisation that resulted in science replacing traditional legitimations that the legitimating technocratic consciousness “is less vulnerable to reflection, because it is no longer *only* ideology”.<sup>34</sup>

Positivism’s severing of reason from normative considerations paradoxically highlights the problem of the epistemological grounding of the critique of ideology. Indeed, this paradox and the technocratic distortion of reason are so compelling that the problem of *grounding a critique that discloses the very social conditions of its justification* shapes Habermas’ conception of knowledge constitutive interests. In order to satisfy these demands and codify the experience of emancipatory reflection, he conceived of a third cognitive interest in autonomy - alongside those referring to labour and interaction. Despite this emancipatory interest not positing a distinct domain of reality, Habermas’ early epistemological model owes its overarching meaning to overcoming domination.<sup>35</sup> In quite different ways, overcoming constraint and repression is part of each interest, but it is through being related to the interest in autonomy that the rationalisations of the technical and practical interests acquire their complete connection to the progressive overcoming of domination in the history of the species.

This conceptualisation of progress further demonstrates why the notion of a synthesising subject is critical to Habermas’ early understanding of the social. He suggested that an interest in autonomy directly informs the Marxist critique of ideology and the therapeutic practice of psychoanalysis. It has, then, a special relevance to the earlier Frankfurt School’s interdisciplinary research. But he went beyond his critical theory predecessors in claiming that an interest in autonomy is at the “root of traditional theories” and that *the social theory of the critique of ideology is the proper mode of epistemological reflection*.<sup>36</sup>

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33 Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 99.

34 Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*, 111.

35 Habermas, “Postscript”, 371.

36 Habermas, “Knowledge and Human Interests: a General Perspective”, 308;

Knowledge constitutive interests is clearly intended to give greater substance to the intuitions of praxis philosophy. In particular, the inclusion of the category of interests represents an original attempt to develop the epistemological implications of some of the praxis perspective's central ideas. In this model, the problem of the constitution of knowledge is posed in terms of subjects' practices and it aims then to demonstrate the continuity scientific inquiry has to prescientific experience and how patterns of action structure cognition. Like Marx, Habermas rejected the conception of theory as contemplation, which has its origins in Ancient Greek philosophy, he instead grounded epistemology in categories of action and these action categories in a philosophical anthropology. Under the influence of phenomenology, a diffuse notion of a practical orientation to the world appeared even earlier in his writings, but Habermas' distinctive modifications to the praxis perspective originated from his attempt to render this notion of a practical orientation more precise.<sup>37</sup> Knowledge constitutive interests systematises different types of action and defines the appropriate domains of practices. Interests specify this nexus "between the constitutive context in which knowledge is rooted and the structure of possible application which this knowledge can have".<sup>38</sup>

Although the distinction between labour and interaction is basic to its difference from Marx's production paradigm, the epistemology of cognitive interests incorporates aspects of approaches that share similar intentions to those of the philosophy of praxis. For instance, a basic contention of North American pragmatist philosophy is fundamental to Habermas' conception of science: that is, that scientific cognition emerges out of the acting process and that knowledge develops from subjects encounter-

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Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991); David Ingram, *Critical Theory and Philosophy* (New York: Paragon House, 1990).

37 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 209-211, and Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: its History, Theories, and Political Significance*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 545-546, each discuss Habermas' earlier notion of practice.

38 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 9.

ing situations which problematise action.<sup>39</sup> Equally, if not even more, important is pragmatism's conception of the democratic organisation of scientific discourse.<sup>40</sup> Pragmatism's social ideal of an unconstrained communication community will be retained when other dimensions of knowledge constitutive interests are discarded. This social ideal addresses a critical dilemma in Habermas' explication of scientific inquiry: that is, he implied that the objectivity derived from experience can only be guaranteed in the form of statements and not from the immediacy of experience, but that it is with reference to constitutive interests that true statements can be made. By their connections to action, these interests supply the basic underpinning of social institutions.

The concept of interests contains many of the tensions of Habermas' early approach to the praxis philosophy problem of the mediation of the subject and history. By no means are all of these tensions deleterious, but the ambiguities they create were often the focus of criticism.<sup>41</sup> Habermas acknowledged many of these problems in revising his position; yet, given the radical historicism typical of praxis philosophy, his constructing a social theory containing transcendental elements is unusual. His key thesis, that 'epistemology is possible only as social theory', directly addresses the central praxis problem of mediation. However, I want to argue that there is a conflict between the transformative demands of the critique of ideology and cognitive interests' definition of the universal significance of scientific rationalisation. The latter was also the basis of Habermas' conception of historical progress. According to Habermas, the critique of positivism converged with the requirement of formulating a new notion of the transcendental.<sup>42</sup> And hence, cognitive interests specify a priori

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39 Hans Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

40 Craig Browne, 'Pragmatism and Radical Democracy', *Critical Horizons*, (Vol. 10, No. 1, 2009), 54-75.

41 Fred Dallmayr, "Critical Theory Criticised: Habermas's Knowledge and Human Interests and its Aftermath" *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* (2, 1972), 211-229.

42 Jürgen Habermas, "A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests" in Jür-

“conditions of the objectivity of experience” and they refer to “anthropologically deep seated” orientations.<sup>43</sup> These orientations are *universal*, since they represent culturally invariant patterns of acquiring knowledge and they are *necessary* because the types of action which they direct are “determined by conditions governing the reproduction of the species, ie. by the socio-cultural form of life as such”.<sup>44</sup> In this way, subjects’ prescientific constitution of the world shapes the ‘object domains’ of scientific inquiry. However, if the socio-cultural form of life determines constitutive interests then they are empirical rather than transcendental. Habermas recognised this ambiguity in asserting:

“As long as these interests of knowledge are identified and analysed by way of reflection on the logic of inquiry that structures the natural and humane sciences, they can claim a ‘transcendental’ status; however, as soon as they are understood in terms of an anthropology of knowledge, as results of natural history they have an ‘empirical’ status.”<sup>45</sup>

Despite this qualification to the transcendental meaning of cognitive interests, Habermas claimed that reflection on the historical development of humanity reveals their universal significance. In fact, this historical reflection distinguishes cognitive interests from the limitations of both the ‘naturalism’ associated with the biological arguments of philosophical anthropology and the relativism typical of historicism.<sup>46</sup>

In Habermas’ model, the subject is expressly social, it is neither prior to history, nor outside the historical process.<sup>47</sup> Even though the subject is not of the order of a transcendental consciousness, reflection upon the subject’s constitutive activities is supposed to supply the guiding framework for a reworked understanding of the historical process. Habermas’

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gen Habermas *Knowledge and Human Interests*, (London: Heinemann, 1978), 351-386.

43 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 8.

44 Habermas, “Postscript”, 372.

45 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 21; Habermas, ‘Postscript’, 376.

46 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 7-24.

47 Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (London: Hutchinson, 1978), 53-54.

model extended Marx's critique of the idealist founding of the problem of the knowing subject in a consciousness separate from the praxis of social being, with features like incorporating the critique of ideology and linking the rationalisation of knowledge to categories of action. But, as Wellmer suggests, its reflexive clarification of the epistemological status of critical theory equally enabled him to unfold the idealist problem of knowledge as "a dimension of historical materialism itself."<sup>48</sup> These intersecting considerations explain why some commentators suggest Habermas' early program aspired to constitute a materialist phenomenology of mind.<sup>49</sup> *The interest in emancipation is expressed in historical reconstructions that provide insights into the distortions of the self-formative process* of either an individual or a collective development. Furthermore, through the connection that critical theory has to practice, this standpoint enables the subject's reflective and liberating continuation of its developmental process. Habermas illustrated this interest in suggesting that, like the critique of ideology, psychoanalysis deploys such a notion of a 'systematically generalised history' and that its methodology is directed to problems of systematically distorted communication and subjects' experience of alienation. Habermas' reading of Freud revealed motifs of a philosophy of praxis in psychoanalysis.<sup>50</sup>

## 2. The Critique of Positivism and an Emerging Image of the Social

Knowledge constitutive interests took definitive shape against the background of the 'positivist dispute in German sociology' over methodolo-

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48 Albrecht Wellmer, "Communication and Emancipation: Reflections on the Linguistic Turn in Critical Theory" *On Critical Theory* ed. John O'Neil (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 259, 231-263.

49 Wellmer, "Communication and Emancipation". Gabriel Kortian, *Metacritique: the Philosophical Argument of Jürgen Habermas*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Henning Ottmann, "Cognitive Interests and Self-Reflection", in *Habermas: Critical Debate*, ed. John B. Thompson and David Held (London: Macmillan, 1982), 79-97.

50 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*; Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*; Jay M. Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life: Jürgen Habermas and the Future of Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 1995).

gy, although the aptness of this debate's title has been disputed.<sup>51</sup> Habermas reiterated many of The Frankfurt School's well-known arguments critical of positivism.<sup>52</sup> It will become evident how these arguments were incorporated into the construction of his early epistemological model. The critique of positivism pointed towards the need for a broader social and historical conception of reason and the limitations of any epistemology that is not formulated from the standpoint of social theory and its central problems, like the historical development of capitalism and the consequences of rationalisation. Critical theory associated the positivist mentality with the phase of organised capitalism and the dissolution of subjectivity in a highly administered society.<sup>53</sup> Despite its positivist misrepresentation, Habermas' epistemology assumes that the rationalisation of scientific inquiry is a major dimension of social progress and development. The alternative image of scientific inquiry's practices and organisation that he derived primarily from pragmatism, along with his prior book on the structural transformation of the public sphere, prefigure Habermas' substantial and innovative theory of democracy.<sup>54</sup>

The Frankfurt School critiqued the positivist notion that science formulates hypotheses relating to a self-subsisting reality independent of the subject, or, as Habermas termed it, 'objectivism'.<sup>55</sup> Positivists invoke the objectivist view that knowledge pertains to facts that are given inde-

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51 David Frisby, "Introduction to the English Translation", in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. David Frisby (London: Heinemann 1976), ix-xliv; Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*, (London: Routledge, 1991).

52 Jürgen Habermas, "The Analytical Theory of Science and Dialectics", in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. David Frisby (London: Heinemann: 1976), 131-162.

53 Theodor Adorno, "Introduction" in *D. The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology*, ed. David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), 1-67.

54 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989); Browne, 'Pragmatism and Radical Democracy'

55 Jürgen Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism" in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* ed. David Frisby (London: Heinemann, 1976), 201-202, 198-225.



pendently of the operations of the knowing subject in spite of modern philosophy's extensive criticisms from Kant onwards of pre-critical epistemology. Even though other approaches share this critique, critical theory is especially opposed to objectivism. It considers that objectivism has conservative ideological implications. Horkheimer contended that 'traditional theory' obscures the social-historical production of reality and the positivist view of knowledge similarly promotes subjects' passive acceptance of the 'reality' of existing capitalist society.<sup>56</sup> Habermas argued that passivity is reinforced by objectivism's close connection to a copy theory of knowledge. Copy theory assumes that mental concepts and cognition are a reflection of objects. Mach, for example, argued that scientific consciousness replicates the material facts that it perceives through sensation.<sup>57</sup> In short, the implications positivist objectivism and modern copy theory are that rationality is restricted to science and the subject's activity in the constitution of knowledge is denied.

Habermas likewise reiterated The Frankfurt School's argument that the notions of scientific disinterest and value freedom are themselves value choices and postulates. Positivism's disregard for the potential and actual irrational consequences of science and technology is a theme extensively developed in Horkheimer's and Adorno's critiques of instrumental reason.<sup>58</sup> Habermas' nineteen-sixties writings addressed one of the seminal paradoxes of the philosophy of positivism: the contrast between, on the one hand, an avowal of science's supposed neutrality and value freedom, and, on the other hand, the evident impact of science in the form of technical rationalisation. Positivism's identifying progress with the latter exposes a basic inconsistency in its avowal of the former.<sup>59</sup>

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56 Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 224.

57 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 81-91.

58 Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*. Max Horkheimer, "The End of Reason", in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 26-48; Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

59 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*; Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism".

As we will see, the praxis philosophical solution that Habermas proposed to the division incipient in this paradox is integral to knowledge constitutive interests. Yet, these interests were formulated in a restrictive manner that is inconsistent with other aspects of praxis philosophy, especially its radical historicism and emphasis on social creativity.

The features of Habermas' arguments opposing positivism that differ from The Frankfurt School's critique have regularly been seen as signalling later developments in his theory.<sup>60</sup> Habermas exhibited a greater familiarity with twentieth century analytical philosophy and a deeper engagement with the problems that shape this approach. He argued that internal developments within the analytical tradition have thrown a number of the tenets of positivist philosophy into question, like the notion of a unified methodology and the postulate of value-freedom. Despite his debate adversary participating in these shifts in analytical perspectives, Habermas claimed that the Popper school of 'critical rationalism' does not fully appreciate the implications of criticism and that it cannot be justified in terms of its own critical standards.<sup>61</sup> Critical rationalism depends on the prior existence of a 'critical tradition' in order to justify its version of the scientific method, but this justification is inadmissible in the terms of its own epistemology. Popper's philosophy of science is ambiguous: it points to what lies beyond the methodology of science, yet in resisting this move critical rationalism can only turn in the limited circle of methodology. This inconsistency reveals a lack of reflection and it again inadvertently intimates at the broader range of considerations in relation to which science must be situated. In other words, it is necessary to develop a more comprehensive idea of rationality than the one permitted by positivism.<sup>62</sup>

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60 William Outhwaite, "Generations of Critical Theory?", *Berlin Journal of Critical Theory* (Vol. 1, No. 1: 2017), 5-28; Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*; McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*.

61 Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism"

62 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*. Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism"; McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 40-52.

Habermas' position diverged from The Frankfurt School's critique of positivism in its incorporation of arguments from alternative philosophical traditions. Pragmatism and hermeneutics decisively inform knowledge constitutive interests and its formulation of a comprehensive idea of rationality. In particular, they supply directions for answering the questions that 'critical rationalism' left open, especially why value considerations cannot be evaded with respect to the genesis and instituting of scientific activity. Pragmatism and hermeneutics show that value considerations do not only apply to the potential consequences ensuing from the application of the results of inquiry. Habermas sought to illuminate how social practices' originating choices and action orientations are incorporated into the structure of scientific activity. This praxis philosophical line of analysis led in both directions: to his tracing out the scientific methods' forms of dependency on a prescientific background, on the one hand, and to determining the appropriate modes of application by the conditions guiding the generation of knowledge, on the other. However, Habermas' contention that the different constituting interests are not commensurate is central to his early conception of the social: the technical interest in control is unable to clarify the ethical dimension of theory. This thesis was influenced less by Neo-Marxian conceptions of praxis and more by the classical conception of praxis and its revivals by philosophers like Arendt and Gadamer.<sup>63</sup> In Habermas' opinion, positivism's concealment of value considerations is typical of technocratic ideology. Praxis, in the sense of the normative deliberation of citizens over justice and the good life, was being displaced by the rationality of technical efficiency and administrative control.<sup>64</sup>

In opposing the positivist idea of a unified method, Habermas attempted to disclose how norms are not external to scientific practice. Despite its analytical equation of the natural and social-cultural sciences,

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63 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*; Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958); Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1979).

64 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 255; György Márkus, "Praxis and Poiesis: Beyond the Dichotomy", *Thesis Eleven* 15, 1986, 30-47.

the positivist idea of a unified method implies that the natural sciences possess a superior rationality. For positivists, explanations in the natural sciences represent a form of rigour to which the social-cultural sciences should aspire. Habermas believed that the positivist equation ignores the definite distinctions between the social-cultural and the natural sciences. In line with the arguments of philosophical pragmatism, he claimed that an examination of the actual activity of any research community leads to a different conclusion. Positivism veils the fact that any science that is reliant upon language includes a hermeneutic component and that the norms of social cooperation are prerequisites of science. The significance of language to processes of scientific inquiry were now widely acknowledged by upholders of the scientific method, including critical rationalism. A research community's common recognition of statements and propositions is a condition of scientific truth and scientific progress.<sup>65</sup>

This concern with the practices of inquiry made explicit Habermas' debt to philosophical traditions external to those of The Frankfurt School and enabled the critique of perspectives that were more distant from the scientific method. Notably, Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy had forcefully reinforced the integrity of understanding to the cultural sciences (*Geisteswissenschaft*) and constituted a significant influence on Habermas' overall theoretical perspective. In his major work, Gadamer juxtaposed the truth disclosed in hermeneutic understanding to that formulated by means of the scientific method.<sup>66</sup> Habermas differed, then, from Gadamer, in developing his arguments through explicating scientific research practices. In pursuing this approach, he was building largely upon Peirce's pragmatism and its argument that modern philosophy had often misrepresented the actual methods of science.<sup>67</sup> Pragmatism appealed to Habermas because it enabled "communication and

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65 Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism".

66 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

67 Charles Sanders Peirce, *The Essential Peirce, 2 Volumes*, ed. Nathan Houser, Christian Kloesel, and the Peirce Edition Project (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992-1998).

community to be brought together.”<sup>68</sup> In fact, a fundamental dimension of knowledge constitutive interests derived from his reading of Peirce. Habermas drew attention during the positivist dispute to how discourse and agreement are virtually transcendental conditions of science.<sup>69</sup> He subsequently suggested that Peirce partly recognised cognitive interests’ quasi-transcendental status when he situated inquiry “between formal and transcendental logic”:

“Like transcendental logic, the logic of inquiry extends to the structure of the constitution of knowledge. But, as a process of inquiry, this logical structure materialises under empirical conditions . . . In the process of inquiry, the logical connections of symbols and the empirical connections of action are integrated into a mode of life [...] The logical analysis of inquiry, therefore, is concerned not with the activities of a transcendental consciousness as such but with those of a subject that sustains the process of inquiry as a whole, that is with the community of investigators, who endeavour to perform their common task communicatively.”<sup>70</sup>

These reflections on scientific inquiry’s reliance on language forms part of Habermas’ uncovering what lies behind the positivist understanding of science. Language is necessary for conducting cooperative research activity, even before it makes possible theoretical propositions and elementary statements. Linguistic communication’s function in coordinating the institutionalised practices of scientific inquiry is a specific instance of a general feature of social life: communication is a universal and necessary condition of social organisation.<sup>71</sup> Yet, Habermas considered that the operations applied in research into an objective environ-

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68 Heller, “The Positivist Dispute as a Turning Point”, 55.

69 Habermas, “A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism”.

70 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 94-95.

71 Habermas, “A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism”; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*

ment and the technically oriented activities of transforming nature are structurally different in their internal organisation from those of the *communication* amongst the community of scientists. He contended that lying behind these operations on an objective environment are forms of experience deriving their internal organisation from the activity of *labour*. His insight into the equivalent universality and necessity of communication was developed in a different manner. Symbolic interaction is necessary, above all, for *the formation of identity*. Positivism's reduction of reason to science veils this communicative constitution of the subject. In my opinion, this critical assertion gives voice to Habermas' entire theory's central intuition:

"Under the conditions of reproduction of an industrial society, individuals who only possessed technically utilizable knowledge, and who were no longer in a position to expect a rational enlightenment of themselves nor of the aims behind their action, would lose their identity. . . Socialized individuals are only sustained through group identity, which contrasts with animal societies which must be constantly built up, destroyed and formed anew. They can only secure their existence through processes of adaptation to their natural environment, and through re-adaptation to the system of social labour in so far as they mediate their metabolism with nature by means of an extremely precarious equilibrium of individuals amongst themselves . . . organic equilibrium is bound up with the distorted balance between separation and unification. Only in this balance, through communication with others, is the identity of each ego established."<sup>72</sup>

For Habermas, both the social and natural scientific communities are dependent upon the mutual understanding achieved through processes of linguistic communication, but there is, nevertheless, a fundamental difference between them. Empirical-analytical research into nature generates knowledge of a domain that is separate from the identity that the research community acquires through communication. Whilst research processes into the natural environment are directed by a technical ori-

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72 Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism", 222.

entation towards control, the organising of scientific inquiry by way of activities such as the choice of theories, distinctions drawn, evaluative standards applied, and the transmission of hypotheses making learning possible, are all bound to the communicative context of argumentation.<sup>73</sup> In other words, Habermas considered that *the research community functions as a synthesising subject*. However, unlike Kant's transcendental consciousness, the subject is socialised by communication. It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of this idea of synthesis. In a rudimentary manner, Habermas' initial image of the social can be discerned in this conception of the research community. It is, notably, evident in the idea that a community's communicatively constituted identity determines the general organisation and distribution of the tasks of scientific inquiry.

In Habermas' opinion, the formation and enacting of identity go beyond the instrumental considerations of the activities performed by the scientific community. Even so, the science community is not as such a model of society; rather, it exemplifies certain generic and formal features of the social. First, Habermas suggested that the intersubjective recognition of statements pertaining to a common domain of inquiry presupposes and produces a community. In this way, the processes of inquiry replicate the general social processes of identification and identity formation. Second, the search for truth within the scientific system is a specific institutionalisation of the general requirement of meaning, justification and legitimation. Third, in a research community there is some agreement over the conditions for the practical procedures of inquiry, or, at least, a consensus concerning the way of sorting out disagreements. A problematising of this third feature would reflect back on the conflicts over legitimation contained in the second feature. Positivism veils this social background to science and science's manifestation of it. The image of the underlying rationality and reflexivity that informs the parallels Habermas drew between a scientific research community's communicative practices and the formal conditions of society is well-captured in

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73 Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism", 211.

Honneth's observation that:

"Just as the research community must reach an understanding about the meaning and goal of scientific undertaking, a society as a whole must produce a kind of elementary consensus about the meaning and the goal of social life."<sup>74</sup>

Habermas' proposal that the institutional framework of society is constituted primarily through interaction, rather than labour, was significantly influenced by his account of the logic of methodology and, in particular, by its implicit normative ideal of the formation of a scientific consensus based on domination free communication. In my opinion, this conception is an early expression of Habermas' theory's core intuition of the rational mediation of the universal and the particular in the communicative formation of identity. The practical interest in understanding has a different type of universality to that of the technical interest in control. The reason for his anchoring the social in the symbolic mediation of practices expresses this difference: *a comprehensive notion of rationality must include a moral dimension and this normative content cannot be derived from the interest in technical control*. Habermas' critique of the technocratic ideology legitimating organised capitalism aimed to expose the limitations of a rationalisation of science and technology that is disconnected from a community's normatively constituted social identity. This critical intention can be viewed as the critical negative inspiration of his theory's core intuition concerning a rational social identity.

Before proceeding it is necessary to clarify the status of the peculiar notion that has been introduced of the quasi-transcendental character of knowledge constitutive interests. The problems and complications of this notion that will lead basically to its abandonment are examined later. Habermas claimed that considered from the standpoint of the logic of inquiry the interests orienting the acquisition of knowledge are transcendental and the anthropological depiction of cognitive interests does indeed have a rather static quality. However, the model of the transcendental that informs knowledge constitutive interests was never really

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74 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 221.



that of a foundational epistemology concerning the a priori conditions of knowing. This conceptualisation is more accurately defined as akin to the reflective and meta-critical clarification of epistemology that Hegel presented in the *Phenomenology of Mind*.<sup>75</sup> This is the case, even though Hegel's *Jena* sketches of labour and interaction as the mediating practices constituting Spirit approximates more to knowledge constitutive interests' conception of social institutions.<sup>76</sup> What Hegel's *Phenomenology* supplies is a model of the process of liberation in emancipatory reflection and the stages in the development of freedom.<sup>77</sup>

### 3. Marx's Conceptions of Synthesis and the Ideology of Late-Capitalism

Habermas' derivation of knowledge constitutive interests' social theory 'prolegomenon' from the 'self-reflection of science' is certainly unusual. It is, nonetheless, indicative of the complications that he considers the rationalisation of society poses for critical theory.<sup>78</sup> In another sense, it continues the Frankfurt School's concern with the consequences of rationalisation beyond the phase of liberal capitalism. The Frankfurt School claimed that this process culminated in monopoly capitalism's more pernicious organized forms of domination and the culture industry's commodification of culture.<sup>79</sup> Habermas' account of the 'technocratic' ideology which appears in 'the mantle of science' is a variation on the theme of 'the dialectic of the enlightenment'. He departed from Horkheimer and Adorno in criticising the 'hidden orthodoxy' implicit in their cultur-

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75 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*

76 Georg W. F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4)* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979); Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Jena System, 1804-5: Logic and Metaphysics* ed. G. D. Giovanni, H. S. Harris, and J. W. Burbidge (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press: 1986).

77 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

78 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, vii.

79 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

al critique's application of the categories of the labour theory of value.<sup>80</sup> Similarly, while he viewed Marcuse's critique of technological rationalisation as an appropriate response to developments necessitating a re-assessment of Marx's political economy, he criticised Marcuse's alleged inability to satisfactorily distinguish between science and technology's legitimate rationalisation and the stage in which their development is destructive. In Habermas' opinion, science and technology's rationalisation is destructive when it undermines forms of life's reproduction through the symbolic meanings generated in interaction and the institutional framework founded on normative structures.<sup>81</sup>

Habermas contends that technology and science have become the 'leading productive force' and that the rationalisation of production has rendered the premises of Marx's labour theory of value redundant. Likewise, there has occurred a 'repoliticisation' of production owing to the increased state regulation of the capitalist economy. In effect, the social foundations of Marx's critique of political economy no longer obtain and these developments 'mediate' the class conflict intrinsic to capitalism. The consequences of class conflict now manifest themselves more in an indirect fashion and less in direct struggles between classes as social actors.<sup>82</sup> The distinction between the technical and practical cognitive interests is relevant to the exigencies resulting from this analysis, however, the context of this diagnosis brings to the fore an unresolved tension between the historical orientation of the critique of ideology and an anthropological justification of these cognitive interests' universality. Habermas sought to refute Marcuse's vision of a new science and technology with the claim that the interest in technical control is an anthropological constant. The form that the rationalisation of technical interest in control takes under capitalism is not unique to it, rather the developmental logic of the rationalisation of technical control is universal. Unlike the critical theory of

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80 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 203.

81 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 90-94.

82 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 100-104; Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 222-235.

The Frankfurt School, Habermas cannot conceive the instrumentalisation of nature is part of a process of the alienation of the subject.<sup>83</sup>

Marcuse, by contrast, subscribes to a much more open-ended notion of socio-cultural variation and envisages the historical creation of a science and technology which is not bound to a logic of domination.<sup>84</sup> For Marcuse, the capitalist rationalisation of science and technology belongs to a project that extends the domination of nature and the subordination of humanity to an unparalleled degree of control. Habermas agreed that the contemporary rationalisation of science and technology is unprecedented, and that science and technology have taken over the function of social legitimation. However, he considered that the progressive developments associated with the rationalisation of technical control should not be renounced and Marcuse's suggestion of an alternative relation to nature is simply untenable. The interest underlying labour precludes a fraternal interaction with nature as a complementary partner and the objectification of reality in empirical-analytical inquiry excludes nature from being a subject.<sup>85</sup> Basically, Habermas was sceptical about praxis philosophical redefinitions of action orientations. This is a major source of Habermas' social theory's limitations. It means that the core praxis philosophy motifs, like that of the creativity of human praxis, are restricted to dimensions of processes of rationalisation.<sup>86</sup> Habermas' arguments are, in fact, only as convincing as the distinction between the different cognitive interests and there is a fundamental flaw to his extrapolating entire institutional domains of social organisation from them. This flaw has been regularly recognised by commentators: Lepenies, for instance, faults its transforming "anthropological factors into socio-structural correlations" and Honneth criticises Habermas' equating social institutions with a single action type.<sup>87</sup>

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83 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interest*, 33.

84 Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*.

85 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 86-90.

86 Browne, 'The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction of Historical Materialism'; Johann Pall Arnason, "Praxis and Action - Mainstream Theories and Marxian Correctives" *Thesis Eleven* (29, 1991), 63-81.

87 Wolfgang Lepenies, "Anthropology and Social Criticism: A View on the

Despite its evident shortcomings, the distinction between the practical and the technical cognitive interests enabled Habermas to illuminate aspects of technocratic ideology and its somewhat impervious method of legitimation. He proposed that a social organization's mode of legitimation is appropriate to its structure and level of development, hence the shift from liberal to organised capitalism results in the ideology of commodity exchange being replaced. Technocratic ideology is far more indifferent to normative considerations than the liberal ideology of fair exchange, which was framed by natural law conceptions of reciprocity and justice. The critical recognition of the class inequalities that are intrinsic to capitalist production decisively undermined the liberal ideology of the fair exchange of commodities. It was then 'replaced by a substitute program' that "is oriented not to the social results of the market but to those of government action designed to compensate for the dysfunctions of free exchange".<sup>88</sup>

Technocratic legitimation is precisely a product and manifestation of an ensuing double dilemma. On the one hand, the state has to sustain the capitalist system of production in order to be able to compensate for the injustices of the market. On the other hand, there are intrinsic limitations to a technocratic orientation. The state administration is obliged to operate in accordance with the rules of a purposive-rational institutional system. It applies technical solutions to social problems. Under the conditions of organised capitalism, the systems-rationality of technical control translates into a political strategy of risk avoidance.<sup>89</sup> Technocratic ideology, Habermas claimed, makes no appeal to the 'practical goals' of politics and the normative justification of public policy. Instead, it legitimates primarily through 'depoliticising' the public sphere and reducing politics to a plebiscite over administrative personnel.

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Controversy Between Arnold Gehlen and Jürgen Habermas", *The Human Context* (3, 1971), 223, 205-225; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*.

88 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 102.

89 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 90-14; Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, (London: Heinemann 1976).

The 'mediatizing' of class conflict in organized capitalism changes the presuppositions of critique's justification. According to Habermas, the conception of social reciprocity that formed the normative background to Marx's critique of political economy has been undermined. Because the systemic process of capital accumulation depends less on the exploitation of immediate producers' labour, "Hegel's concept of the ethical totality of a living relationship which is sundered because one subject does not reciprocally SATISFY the needs of the other class is no longer an appropriate model" for organized capitalism's critique.<sup>90</sup> As we saw, Habermas opposed Marcuse's vision of the socio-cultural creation of a new science on the grounds that science and technology constitute a project "of the human species *as a whole*".<sup>91</sup> The critique of ideology has to be grounded in equally universalistic conditions of emancipation. This is evident in the prerequisites that Habermas detailed of the critique of the technocratic ideology that came to the fore with the *mediatizing* of class conflict:

"The new ideology consequently violates an interest grounded in one of the two fundamental conditions of our cultural existence: in language, or more precisely, in the form of socialization and individuation determined by communication in ordinary language. This interest extends to the maintenance of intersubjectivity of mutual understanding as well as to the creation of communication without domination. Technocratic consciousness makes this practical interest disappear behind the interest in the expansion of our power of technical control. Thus the reflection that the new ideology calls for must penetrate beyond the level of particular historical class interests to disclose the fundamental interests of mankind as such, engaged in the process of self-constitution."<sup>92</sup>

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90 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 110.

91 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 87.

92 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 113. Habermas acknowledges the persistence and importance of more traditional belief-systems and the ideologi-

The historical cast of knowledge constitutive interests' metacritique is intended to rectify the ideological confusion of progress with the expansion of the power of technical control. Parallel with the systematic explication of cognitive interests, Habermas provided a historical narrative detailing the dissolution of epistemology. It aims to force the self-reflection of science by retracing those 'abandoned stages of reflection' that consolidated the positivist conception.<sup>93</sup> Of course, a narrative of this sort has to presume the existence of a subject capable of recognising its identity in this process of development. The erosion of the distinction between the technical and practical interests places this subject in question. 'Scientific consciousness' conceals the subject's active constitution of knowledge and divorces scientific inquiry from the institutionalization of research. In this way, positivism expresses the alienated self-understanding of science, because its reduction of epistemology to methodology follows from the "separation in principle of questions of validity from those of genesis".<sup>94</sup>

Although positivism originated in Comte's work as a post-enlightenment philosophy of historical progress, Habermas considered that a historically oriented critique of knowledge is inconsistent with contemporary positivism. Like the critique of ideology, positivism's original tie to an emancipatory understanding of progress derived from the rational critique of the dogmatism of tradition. However, already in Comte's philosophy an objectivism veils the normative standpoint implicit in his philosophy of history. Positivism eventually restricts progress to the effects of scientific and technological development.<sup>95</sup> In opposition to positivism, Habermas sought to determine the broader meaning of historical progress: knowledge constitutive interests specify different dimensions of the rationalisation of modernity.

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cal legitimations associated with structures of consciousness which are typically considered congruent with liberal-capitalism, as well as late-capitalism, like possessive individualism, civic and familial privatism, and consumerism.

93 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, vi, 3-5.

94 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 300.

95 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 73-80.

The prevalence of positivism has another source, besides the efficacy of science and technology. Habermas advanced the thesis that science has not been comprehended by philosophy since Kant; both the practical accumulation of scientific knowledge and the interests determining its practical application have been misrepresented.<sup>96</sup> In this narrative, Marx is presented as the 'only' theorist that could have effectively contested the positivist definition of rationality, but Marx "misunderstood his own conception and hence completed the disintegration of the theory of knowledge".<sup>97</sup> Marx's justifications of his method of analysis reflect this confusion. 'Positivist overtones' are apparent in the analogies Marx drew between his theory and the natural sciences.<sup>98</sup> Marx obscured the distinctive epistemological status of 'critique'; his mistaken analogies were not by chance, however, nor were they just rhetorical devices without consequence, given that they provided the rationale for orthodox Marxism's scientific epistemology and mechanistic materialism. Rather, Marx's theory is continuous with positivism to the extent that it conceives of rationalisation in terms of the accumulation of the forces of production. Marx's critical theory does not sufficiently, in effect, differentiate itself from technocratic consciousness and its ideological definition of progress.

Despite Habermas' metacritique's disclosure of decisive conceptual considerations, its depiction of Marx's conception of rationalisation suppresses the dialectical dimensions of Marx's theory and its concern with social contradictions. This reading of Marx exhibits the rigidity of the juxtaposition of labour and interaction that was crucial to Habermas' critique of the contemporary ideological erosion of the distinction between the technical and the practical. Like his critique of Marcuse's vision of a non-instrumental relation to nature, Habermas' argument that the activity of labour is singularly directed towards extending technical control is significantly influenced by Gehlen's philosophical anthropology and

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96 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 4.

97 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 5, 24.

98 David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (London Hutchinson, 1980), 269.

the thesis that technical development replaces the embodied practices of human labour.<sup>99</sup> This anthropological determination of progress in the forces of production and the invariant relation of labour to nature are critical to Habermas' contention that Marx's writings suggest a 'materialist' conception of cognitive synthesis. Marx's category of labour does not simply describe an empirical activity, rather it signifies the subject's epistemological synthesis and the grounding of synthesis in practice. Marx's writings imply that epistemology is possible only as social theory. This implication is notwithstanding the fact that Marx's theoretical and methodological self-understanding allegedly limited him from realising his theoretical perspective's implications and the paradigmatic restrictions that this misunderstanding imposed on Marxist theory and practice.

For Habermas, Marx was in a position to contest the 'victory' of positivism, because his critique of Hegel is based on the category of labour. The practical activity of labour is inconsistent, he argued, with the presuppositions of Hegel's philosophy of identity; it precludes an absolute unity of subject and object, mind and nature. Marx's materialist notion of synthesis is based on an almost Kantian notion of the "independence and externality" of nature.<sup>100</sup> Habermas admitted that this reconstruction of Marx's epistemology is an "extrapolation". Be that as it may, his account of labour as a 'fixed framework' of action upon external nature results in an *under-socialized* interpretation of production. In this respect, it diminishes Marx's conception of production as a complex totality.<sup>101</sup> Habermas actually defined the anthropological interest orienting labour independently of social context.

Marx's somewhat limited reflection on the epistemological basis of critical theory, according to Habermas, had as its sequels a misunderstanding of the sociological content of the category of synthesis. Marx's

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99 Habermas, *Toward A Rational Society*, 87, 106; Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 33, 48.

100 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 33.

101 Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), 83-111.



restricted action theoretical framework resulted in his failure to adequately distinguish critical self-reflection from the instrumental activity of transforming nature in production. Rather, Marx's conception of praxis in the *Theses on Feuerbach* combines the appropriation of nature through labour and the critical self-reflection of the subject in dissolving ideological distortions to consciousness.<sup>102</sup> By failing to pursue this insight and develop a materialist epistemology of knowledge, Marx left the way open for the critical reflection guiding social struggle to be assimilated to the technical activity of the labouring subject. There were, as a consequence, no immanent epistemological grounds for the critique of the strategic and instrumental modes of organization that determined orthodox Marxism's undemocratic political practice. In short, Marx failed to give sufficient consideration to the implications of the fact that the "institutional framework that resists a new stage of reflection (which, it is true, is prompted by the progress of science established as a productive force) *is not immediately the result of the labour process*".<sup>103</sup> Marx initiated a social theory in the form of critique but did not fully appreciate how the practical foundations of the historical project of emancipation from social relations of domination differ from those determining production's organisation:

"While instrumental action corresponds to the constraint of external nature and the level of the forces of production determines the extent of technical control over natural forces, communicative action stands in correspondence to the suppression of man's own nature. The institutional framework determines the extent of repression by the unreflected, 'natural' force of social dependence and political power, which is rooted in prior history and tradition. A society owes emancipation from the external forces of nature to labour processes, that is to the production of technically exploitable knowledge

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102 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.

103 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 52, my italics, CB.

(including the transformation of the natural sciences into machinery). Emancipation from the compulsion of internal nature succeeds to the degree that institutions based on force are replaced by an organization of social relations that is bound only to communication free from domination. This does not occur directly through productive activity, but rather through the revolutionary activity of struggling classes (including the critical activity of reflective sciences). Taken together, both categories of social practice make possible what Marx, interpreting Hegel, calls the self-generative act of the species."<sup>104</sup>

Of course, Habermas' interpretation of Marx can be readily contested. Marx's paradigm of production sought to comprehend society dialectically as a differentiated unity and this meant that he was concerned with mediation and translation between class struggle and the rationalisation of productive forces. Habermas' theory has difficulty capturing this latter dynamic of the dialectic of control, even though the conflicting orientation of the technical and practical anthropological interests was critical to it.<sup>105</sup> In fact, the reasons for this difficulty are deeper than a specific conceptual problem. Habermas' juxtaposition of cognitive interests and critical interpretation of Marx derived from his central intuition concerning intersubjective communication's constitution of an identity that mediates the universal and the particular. Habermas' innovative approach to *the social* stems from the reframing of the notion of identity that this intuition makes possible.<sup>106</sup> For Habermas, Marx's materialist conception of synthesis may have been limited to the category of labour, but it marks a transition from the concept of identity in formal logic to an understanding of identity that is founded on a social theory of 'material practices.' In Marx, Habermas, claims, synthesis is "the both empirical and transcendental accomplishment of a species-subject that produces itself in history".<sup>107</sup>

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104 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 53.

105 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

106 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

107 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 31.

Marx's dual conception of nature is the key to his vision of history: the transformation of external nature is at the same time a process of the production of the human species 'subjective nature'. Habermas argued that Marx's understanding of history assimilates Fichte's notion of 'subjective synthesis': that is, just as Fichte proposed that knowledge depends on self-consciousness and that the subject knows it posits its own identity, so Marx proposed that labour encounters the products of previous production and that the species-subject's productive activity constitutes history.<sup>108</sup> Moreover, just as Fichte's generative view suggests that self-consciousness entails the ego knowing that it posits the non-ego and recognising in reflection that its identity is the unity of the ego and non-ego other, so Marx contends that only "in its process of production does the species first *posit* itself as a social subject".<sup>109</sup> Marx considered labour to be the objectifying activity of the subject and hence that the objectified nature of production is the 'other' equivalent to the non-ego of the species-subject. For this reason, external nature is presupposed as the 'substratum' of labour, being integral to the constitution of the subject.

At this time, Habermas accentuates the parallels that Marx's conception of labour as a cycle of the subject's 'externalisation' and the 'appropriation' of objectification has to Fichte's epistemological application of idealist and romantic motifs of constitution and creativity. In this respect, Habermas is consistent with the philosophy of praxis in highlighting how Marx's social theory incorporates these motifs and differs from Kant's and Fichte's idealist approaches to the subject. For Kant and Fichte, the problem of identity pertains to the subject's relation to the representations of consciousness and the extension of the principles of formal logic to the activity of consciousness.<sup>110</sup> In other respects, Habermas' 'instrumentalist' interpretation of Marx's notion of the creativity of

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108 Johann G. Fichte, *Science of Knowledge; with the First and Second Introductions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1982).

109 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 39.

110 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (London: Macmillan, 1956); Fichte, *Science of Knowledge*.

labour diverges from the philosophy of praxis.<sup>111</sup> In particular, he does not allow for the possibility that this Fichte-inspired vision of history alters Marx's supposedly quasi-Kantian conception of external nature. At most, Habermas conceded that Marx considered that the subject brings about a unity between itself and nature in labour, but that this is not an "absolute unity". Unlike the absolute unity of Hegel's philosophy of identity, where nature is regarded as an externalisation of Spirit, the objectifying dimension of labour instances the resistance of external nature and the nature intrinsic to human subjectivity. For Marx, the "subject is originally a natural being instead of nature being originally an aspect of the subject, as in idealism".<sup>112</sup>

Despite Marx's materialist idea of synthesis being potentially superior to Hegel's phenomenological reflection on the constitution of knowledge, Marx's dual conception of nature falls behind a facet of Hegel's philosophy of identity. This regression is due to Fichte's inspiration of Marx's dialectic of subjective and objective nature. Because Fichte conceived the genesis of self-consciousness in the ego recognising its own positing of the ego and the non-ego, Fichte's dialectic of self-reflection was always far less 'mediated' than Hegel's notion of spirit.<sup>113</sup> In Fichte's dialectic, the relation of consciousness to the 'other' of consciousness is not to that of another subject. The non-ego other is really only another of it(self). By contrast:

"Hegel's model of mind that recognises itself in nature as in its other combines two relations of reflection: the self-reflective relation of the isolated subject to itself and the intersubjective relation of a subject that knows and recognises a subject in the other just as the latter does with regard to the former".<sup>114</sup>

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111 Hans Joas, *The Creativity of Action* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

112 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 32.

113 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 142-169.

114 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 32.

Marx's social theory retained the intersubjective perspective of Hegel's early notion of spirit, but Marx did not make this intersubjectivity explicit at the categorical level of his philosophical self-understanding.<sup>115</sup> Now, whether this claim is actually correct depends on whether one accepts Habermas' conception of labour as basically a monological practice and his equation of the institutional sphere of production with the single action orientation of technical control. There are considerable grounds for disputing each of these contentions and for accepting the intersubjective framing of Marx's paradigm of production.<sup>116</sup> It is true, nevertheless, that Marx did not pay as much attention to the interest of the species in sustaining understanding and that he consequently underestimated the significance of the socialization of 'inner nature'.

This critical analysis is conditioned by Habermas' central intuition concerning identity, even though it had yet to be extensively developed. This is evident from Habermas' acknowledgment that the distinction between labour and interaction, or communicative action, was implicit in Marx's differentiation of the forces of productive from the social relations of production. Marx saw these as interdependent in the process of historical development and his distinction between them was constrained by the alleged failure to satisfactorily represent how different types of action remain irreducible to one another. Basically, Habermas believed that Marx's distinction does not mean the same thing as one that truly recognises the implications of intersubjective communication; instead, it is constructed from the standpoint of labour as the source of epistemological synthesis and the social.

The conclusions Habermas drew from his thesis that Marx restricted the generative activity of the species to labour would be decisive for his conception of the nexus between the subject and history. He claimed that Marx grounds the universality of the interest in technical control with reference to the historical progress 'objectified' in the unfolding of the forces of production. The equivalent universality of the interest orienting

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115 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

116 Márkus, *Language and Production*.

the ‘synchronous’ interaction between subjects is presupposed, but not satisfactorily clarified by Marx. At the level of its theoretical grounding, Marx’s dialectic of the forces and relations of production implies that classes encounter one another in a similar manner to how the subject encounters nature in the activity of production. The dialectic of objective and subjective nature does not comprehend the *moral* dimension of the institutional framework of society.

In my opinion, it is Habermas’ under-socialized interpretation of labour which neglects intersubjective relations and not at all Marx’s inclusive notion of production. Indeed, Habermas even acknowledged that the idea that history is constituted by the activity of a singular species-subject is “not typical of Marx’s actual social theory” and that Marx’s historical materialist investigations take into account the social interaction and the interpretative framework of the symbolic structures with which subjects codify and transform their identities.<sup>117</sup> Marx’s empirical analyses deal with questions concerning not only the material economic basis of society, but the sources of social institutions in cultural traditions and power.<sup>118</sup> Marx’s concrete analyses, Habermas accepted, exceed the strictures of his categorical framework. Yet, even demonstrating that this owed to the intersubjectivity of the social relations of production would not alter the fundamental issue underlying Habermas’ critique. That is, that Marx did not ground critique in the intersubjective practice constitutive of morality and normative structures.

Marx could, Habermas argued, have grounded critique in the theory of social interaction contained in his interpretation of class struggle. The moral quotient of class struggle implies a different notion of synthesis to that of the instrumental activity of labour. History is constituted in class struggle as a process of “repression and self-emancipation”. The synthesis through class struggle would constitute “a dialectic of the consciousness of classes in its manifestations” and it would give expression to the cognitive interest in reflection that orients the critique of ideology.

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117 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 51.

118 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 53.

Further, it would do so from the intersubjective standpoint of justice and morality.<sup>119</sup>

This concession of a possible alternative conception of synthesis in Marx's images of class struggle and 'critical reflexive practice' does not lead Habermas to a more complex conception of the social based on the interconnection of labour and interaction, technical and practical cognitive interests. In my opinion, the notion of the dialectic of control involves the combination of each of these dimensions and it makes it possible to conceive of how intersubjective struggles can both precipitate and restrict developments in technical control.<sup>120</sup> It can, properly conceived, contribute to understanding how the structuration of production and domains of social interaction, including those internal as well as external to processes of material production, are conditioned by their mediation and combination. In his reflections on Hegel's early Jena writings' notion of Spirit, Habermas had some intuition of such a conception and disclosed a significant source of the notions of the dialectic of control and the struggle for recognition.<sup>121</sup> In the epistemological model of cognitive interests, however, he locates the social in symbolically mediated interaction external to production, because moral-practical considerations are absent, in his opinion, from the mediation of the subject and object in labour. In this conception, the connection between class conflict and production is mediated by normative structures and identity-defining belief-systems.

This conceptualisation of the social is an advance beyond Marx from the standpoint of understanding the rationalisation of culture. Yet, unlike the perspective of the dialectic of control, it risks neglecting Marx's intention of disclosing the reciprocal constitution of production and class conflict. Habermas, rather, seemed to displace this intention in proposing that Marx's idea of synthesis through labour presumes a species-sub-

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119 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 54, 60.

120 Browne, *Critical Social Theory*; Giddens, *Central Problems*; Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism: Power, Property and the State*, (London: Macmillan, 1981).

121 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

ject in the singular. In his opinion, this presumption is acceptable to the extent that it refers to control over nature and the productive power of society, because in “principle members of society all live at the same level of mastery of nature, which in each case is given with the available technical knowledge”.<sup>122</sup> The division of the species-subject is due to the institutional framework not subjecting “all members of society to the same repressions”.<sup>123</sup> This claim appears to divorce class from the actual processes of production and locates the origins of class in the realm of social domination:

“If production attains the level of producing goods over and above elementary needs, the problem arises of distributing the surplus product created by labour. This problem is solved by the formation of social classes, which participate to varying degrees in the burdens of production and in social rewards. With the cleavage of the social system into classes that are made permanent by the institutional framework, the social subject loses its unity.”<sup>124</sup>

Habermas’ central contention is again discernible in his argument that synthesis through class struggle involves a different form of mediation and projected identity to that of labour. The mediation between the two types of synthesis makes use of the knowledge derived from labour but synthesis should only occur through processes of communication that are distinct from the technical process of production itself. In Habermas’ opinion, the emancipatory practice of critical reflection is directed towards the institution of the principle of domination free communication. The refusal of dialogue is then a litmus of heteronomy.<sup>125</sup> Similar to the practical organisation of scientific research, communication free from domination should determine the institutional framework’s normative

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122 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 54.

123 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 54.

124 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 54.

125 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 55, 59.



legitimacy and coordinate the distribution of productive activity and material rewards. This would amount to a social synthesis in the form of democratic control.

While this democratic ideal is a consistent theme of Habermas' writings, knowledge constitutive interests' social theory develops his core intuition in relation to considerations that are less apparent later. In particular, it presented a far more agonistic model of intersubjective mediation and moral development. After Marx, the latter is conceived to transpire through the process of class struggle. This emphasis upon the dynamics of change is closer to the process approach of philosophy of praxis than Habermas' later reconstructions of the logic of historical development.<sup>126</sup> It has already been noted how Habermas suggested that Hegel's early theory of the 'struggle for recognition' and 'fragment on morality' provided the prototype for Marx's implicit notion of synthesis through class struggle.<sup>127</sup> These early Hegel accounts of intersubjective mediation detail processes of change in uneven balances of power and they outline a conflict-ridden sequence of moral development.<sup>128</sup> In this respect, they are unlike Habermas' later more consensual and symmetrical model of intersubjective mediation.

For the early Hegel, "it is not unconstrained intersubjectivity itself that we call dialectic but the history of its repression and re-establishment."<sup>129</sup> Despite his critique of Marx being anchored in the juxtaposition of the technical and practical, Habermas' early interpretation of social struggle does not radically oppose morality and power to one another in the manner of his later critical theory and its critiques of other perspectives.<sup>130</sup> Instead, knowledge constitutive interests' notion that norms constrain and institutionally sanction power reflects a quasi-Freudian conception of social domination. This is evident in Habermas' interpretation of Hegel's

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126 Browne, 'The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction'.

127 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

128 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

129 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 59.

130 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

idea of the moral legitimacy of social struggle and the categories drawn upon reveal the substantial influence upon knowledge constitutive interests of Marcuse's historical and revisionist psychoanalytic text: *Eros and Civilization*.<sup>131</sup> Habermas proposed that the institutional framework:

“Through the repression of needs and wishes, it translates this constraint into a compulsion of internal nature, in other words into the constraint of social norms. That is why the relative destruction of the moral relation can be measured only by the difference between the actual degree of institutionally demanded repression and the degree of repression that is necessary at a given level of the forces of production. This difference is a measure of objectively superfluous domination.”<sup>132</sup>

The history of class consciousness can, in part, be traced in terms of the distortions to communication that ensue from the difference between necessary and ‘institutionally demanded’ repressions. This history of the forms of class consciousness under conditions of domination and repression would constitute the unfulfilled dimension of a materialist transformation of phenomenology. It should be clear from the preceding that this history would, for Habermas, have to be founded on a broader basis than Marx's materialism, especially in order to encompass the socio-cultural rationalisation that extends beyond science and technology. Knowledge constitutive interests was undoubtedly meant to be the groundwork for a materialist phenomenology of mind. Habermas incorporated into it a conception of history as the gradual emancipation of the subject through the power of reflection. The task of Critical Theory was the furtherance of this historical process and the emancipatory practice that critique inspired would provide its fullest justification. This conception of history suggests directly and by way of analogies that psychoanalysis exemplifies the interest in overcoming domination and involves practices that

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131 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: a Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*, (Boston Beacon Press, 1966).

132 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 57-58.

have an equivalent status to the methodologies deployed by the other two cognitive interests. Like the critique of ideology, psychoanalysis is based on the idea that the subject is implicated in a history that it constitutes without yet being the free and conscious creator of this historical process. Psychoanalysis intends to elicit in the subject a capacity for reflection that will eventually transform this distorted historical process and alleviate the suffering resulting from it.

The epistemological model of knowledge constitutive interests similarly represents a rigorous justification of Habermas' original conception of critical theory as distinctively a 'philosophy of history with a practical intent'.<sup>133</sup> The emphasis that he placed on the structuring of historical inquiry by the *anticipatory projections of practice* is one of the principal ways in which he seeks to satisfy this consideration, as well as reflecting the strong influence of pragmatist philosophy and its concern with the consequences of knowledge. Further, the notion of anticipatory historical projections is an important component of Habermas' critique of Gadamer's philosophy. He argues that owing to a failure to grasp the historical basis of practice, Gadamer actually neglects the immanent logic of the hermeneutic circle.<sup>134</sup> These criticisms of Gadamer's hermeneutics are grounded in a notion of the historical significance of rationality, even though Gadamer's critique of the limits of scientific methodology was drawn upon to demarcate the cultural from the natural sciences. The critique of the ideology of organised capitalism nevertheless required a more demanding conception of historical rationalisation. The program of knowledge constitutive interests sought to satisfy these desiderata through revising Marx's conception of the nexus between history and the subject. This revision had to take into account the processes of rationalisation since Marx and to initiate reflection on the logics of the natural and cultural sciences which had proven to be so integral to it.

In a manner typical of critical theory, Habermas conceives rationality to be responding to the problem of the mediation of the universal and

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133 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

134 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

the particular.<sup>135</sup> Habermas depicted the rationalisations of the technical and the practical interests as developments that are directed by this process of mediation. However, these two forms of mediation are logically separate processes. The cognitive synthesis that each interest generates is originally motivated by quite different and even obverse problems of interrelating the universal and the particular. In this context, Habermas underlined the interrelating of the universal and the particular required by Peirce's notion of scientific 'progress' and that apparent in Dilthey's concept of the 'common'. The latter articulated the identity made possible by the intersubjective structure of language. This condition of socialization is, in turn, the anchor for the constitution and differentiation of individual and social identity. Habermas argued that, on the one hand, the idea of synthesis through labour meant that Marx had an appreciation of the historical self-constitution of the human species which is superior to either that of Peirce or Dilthey. On the other hand, the methodical practices of scientific inquiry that Peirce and Dilthey sought to clarify were not just part of a cultural stage of the development of the human species. Rather, Habermas contended, that this rationalisation had 'at a specific' - though unspecified - 'stage' of historical evolution made social reproduction through 'work' and 'interaction' dependent on the knowledge acquired in the 'form of methodical inquiry'.<sup>136</sup>

This argument has a deeper significance than simply highlighting what Habermas implies is another oversight on Marx's part concerning the course of historical development and his appreciation of Weber's conception of the professionalization of science in the course of modernity's rationalization. Peirce and Dilthey's alternative approaches to the mediation of the universal and the particular share a common recognition of the importance of the symbolic. In my opinion, it is ultimately the demands of the mediation of the universal and particular that determines

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135 Albrecht Wellmer, "Reason, Utopia and the Dialectic of Enlightenment" in *Habermas and Modernity* ed. Richard. J. Bernstein (ed.) (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), 35-66.

136 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 196.

Habermas' view of the essential limitations of the image of the social deriving from Marx's framework. It likewise determines his assessment of the superiority of the alternative coordinating function of communicative action and the cultural rationalisation associated with the struggle against ideology. Significantly, this idea of the constitution of the social supplies Habermas' early program with the reflective structure that is appropriate to its aspiration of developing a materialist phenomenology of mind.

#### **4. Contrasting Methods of Mediating the Universal and the Particular**

The question of the relationship of theory and practice has been a defining feature of the philosophy of praxis. In Habermas' case, this questioning is conditioned by his belief that the logic of rationalisation means that in modernised societies social reproduction depends on knowledge acquired through scientific inquiry. Habermas did not entirely reverse the hierarchy of theory over practice in the concept of interests, as his aim was as much to redefine theory.<sup>137</sup> However, he demonstrated the mediated relation and dependence of theory on practice. In knowledge constitutive interests, this reflection on methodical practices took the form of a metacritique of Peirce and Dilthey's respective philosophical approaches. Habermas believed that Marx's 'transcendental-pragmatist' idea of labour anticipated Peirce's conception, but that Peirce was better placed to comprehend the socio-cultural institution of empirical-analytical science.<sup>138</sup>

Peirce clarified how the operations of natural science, like inference and experimentation, are pursued in a purposive-rational manner. According to Habermas, reflection on methodical practices reveals that the interest in technical control that organises the activity of labour is constitutive of empirical-analytic sciences and the relation that they have to the domain to which they apply. The interest in technical control transcen-

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137 Browne, 'The Problem of Hierarchy'.

138 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 36; Habermas, 'Postscript', 359.

dentally defines the meaning and validity of statements in empirical-analytical sciences. Due to their methodological structure, empirical-analytical sciences objectify reality in a manner obeying much the same rules and format as those applied in the pre-scientific pattern of instrumental action. Although the rules of scientific inquiry are much more reflexively elaborated, their aim of generating reliable statements that apply to empirical regularities is consistent with the prescientific practices of instrumental action. Just as the success of everyday instrumental action relies on accurate predictions and known regularities, the same configuration of the interest in technical control sets the conditions of the validity of empirical-analytical statements.<sup>139</sup>

Pragmatist conceptions clarify the character of scientific inquiry in relation to the process of problematising. In a similar fashion, Habermas explicated the structural features of instrumental action through examining wherein lies its potential for failure and the cognitive responses to such failure. For philosophical pragmatism, creative learning is made possible by a failure to realise an intended result and to successfully pursue a form of action. It leads to learning through the feedback a failed intervention into objective reality produces and controlling feedback becomes itself a principle of empirical-analytical sciences. The reverse holds too. Science is a reflected form of the originally prescientific experience of dealing with feedback and this interest is institutionalised in the scientific test situation. As noted already, the forms of analytical reasoning employed in the natural sciences, like inference and prediction, are modelled after the prescientific learning through feedback. In other words, forms of selection occur that are like those that take place in the labour process. Technical control is an orientation constitutive of what aspects or realms of experience appear as subject to inquiry of an empirical-analytical type.<sup>140</sup> Significantly, it is precisely because this manner of constituting the world precedes scientific inquiry that the rationalisation of production shapes the historical institutionalisation of empirical-analytical science.

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139 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 121.

140 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 130.

Habermas' proposal is based on scientific knowledge's similarity with the original learning in the activity of controlling nature in labour, but his claim that Peirce disclosed the a priori action orientation underlying science truncates Peirce's approach to an instrumentalist epistemology.<sup>141</sup> In fact, Habermas' account of the principle of synthesis underpinning scientific progress in empirical-analytical knowledge evidences Peirce's much more complex approach. That is, science formulates hypothesis whose expectations can be disappointed and such disappointment facilitates the processes of systematic revision associated with 'cumulative learning'. Now, learning not only enables enhanced technical control, it leads to the differentiation of the framework of science. Whereas the knowledge gained through labour is habitualised in the acting processes, Peirce showed that the reflected form of scientific learning entails synthetic inferences that turn into universals what were originally particular hypotheses. This synthetic transformation is crucial to Habermas' conception of the democratic community of science. Despite deriving this notion of democracy principally from Peirce's reflections on discourse, Habermas claimed that Peirce's approach is deficient in its appreciation of the social nexus institutionalising the synthetic principle of progress.

The comparison in knowledge constitutive interests between Peirce's exposition of the empirical-analytic method and Dilthey's conception of the historical-hermeneutic method illustrates in miniature the thesis that Habermas' core axiom was consolidated in relation to the problem of the mediation of the universal and the particular.<sup>142</sup> For Peirce, the scientific method entails a constant process of regulation. This makes it possible to grasp the general significance of every particular in the testing of universal laws and rules. According to Peirce, this methodological 'self-regulation' of 'true statements' and predictions is enabled by the set of analytical rules contained in three modes of scientific inference: deduction, induction and abduction.<sup>143</sup> In this context, Habermas accentuated two

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141 Habermas, "Postscript", 368-374.

142 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

143 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 113-131.

aspects of Peirce's reflections on method. First, how Peirce suggested that the logic of inquiry anticipates the general validity of singular experimental results and the universal significance of the explanation of specific cases.<sup>144</sup> Second, that Peirce considered that universally valid hypotheses and scientific theories were possible only under the conditions of an intersubjective consensus. A consensus that is grounded in the knowledge of the possible repetition of methodological procedures, but, more fundamentally, an intersubjective agreement depends on the signifying function of language.

Habermas emphasized how Peirce's natural scientific model of the 'necessary relation between' the universal and the particular is intrinsically connected to his notion of progress. These two conceptions reciprocally inform one another, as cumulative learning in the natural sciences amounts to subsuming the singular and finite under universal categories. Habermas contended that even though Peirce's model presumes and takes-for-granted scientific progress, Peirce did not fully grasp the connection that the technical interest has to the *historical development* of the human species.<sup>145</sup> Specifically, Peirce's conception of the subject is inadequate and a series of misunderstandings reflect major critical inconsistencies. These criticisms are signalled by a chapter on Peirce's subtitle: "*the dilemma of a scholastic realism restored by the logic of language*".<sup>146</sup> Habermas claimed that Peirce's ontological notion of universally valid linguistic propositions undermined his methodological reflections on the practices of the empirical-analytic science. As a result, an ontological conception of a reality independent of the subject displaces the explicating of the transcendental logic of inquiry. In this way, Peirce supposed that the synthetic inferences connecting the universal and the particular, and which are the condition for, as well as an outcome of, scientific progress, could be objectively known to be more than a conditional possibility

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144 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 110.

145 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 191-198.

146 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 91-112.



dependent on the activity of an inquiring subject. In spite of his revealing that an interest in technical control is founded in the 'life context' of action and experience, Peirce's ontological notion contains an 'objectivism' which "leaves out the system of reference in which events are first constituted for us as instrumental action".<sup>147</sup> Peirce places the community of scientific investigators in the same frame as objective phenomenon. A placement, or rather misplacement, made possible by his ontological equation: beliefs have the same 'real' status as empirical events.<sup>148</sup>

Peirce was misled, Habermas argued, by his failure to distinguish between different dimensions of the intersection of language and action. He did not consider the specificity of the 'monological' form of purposive-rational action oriented to controlling 'objectified natural processes' and how this orientation conditions the use of symbols in instrumental types of activity:

"Deduction, induction, and abduction establish relations between statements that are in principle monologic. It is possible to think in syllogisms, but not to conduct a dialogue in them. I can use syllogistic reasoning to yield arguments for a discussion, but I cannot argue syllogistically with an other."<sup>149</sup>

This failure of Peirce is typical of theories of language bound to the paradigm of subject-object relations, like objective semantics.<sup>150</sup> Habermas, rather unfairly, attributed Peirce's inconsistencies and these difficulties to a "hidden but unyielding positivism".<sup>151</sup> Whether these criticisms actually apply to Peirce is certainly open to dispute and they probably reveal more about the deficiencies of knowledge constitutive

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147 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 132.

148 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 107-112, 133-134.

149 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 137.

150 Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply" in A. *Communicative Action*, ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 214-264; Jürgen Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking: Philosophical Essays* (Cambridge, Mass. MIT Press, 1992).

151 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 135.

interests' restrictive model of practices.<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, the implications of the manner in which Habermas marked out these limitations is highly instructive. They disclose *the reasoning behind Habermas' position that the subject and history could be reconnected only on an intersubjective basis and the centrality to this process of social identity*. In his opinion, forms of mediating the universal and the particular oriented by the empirical-analytical sciences' interest in technical control are internally limited and conditional. These forms of mediation are less than a comprehensive rationality. Ultimately, the supposedly positivist framework of Peirce's methodological reflections prohibited him from satisfactorily developing his insight into the practical processes of inquiry, particularly into the dialogic employment of language and how discourse is not just for purposes of technical control. Discursive communication incorporates elements from the identity-forming dimension of language that is actualised in symbolically mediated interaction:

“Had Peirce taken seriously the communication of investigators as a transcendental subject forming itself under empirical conditions, then pragmatism would have been compelled to a self-reflection that overstepped its own boundaries. In continuing his analysis, Peirce would have come upon the fact that the *ground of intersubjectivity* in which investigators are always already situated when they attempt to bring about consensus about metatheoretical problems is not the ground of purposive-rational action, which is in principle solitary.”<sup>153</sup>

The scientific research community's dependence on the intersubjectivity established through linguistic communication refers to the problems of understanding that orient the practical cognitive interest. Both the constituting identity and the cooperative organising of inquiry are founded on mutual understanding. However, the practical problems of

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152 Victorino Tejera, “Has Habermas Understood Peirce?”, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society* (Vol. XXXII, No. 1: 1996), 107-125.

153 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 137.

the historical-hermeneutic disciplines are not constituted by the technical objectification of the world but generated through the symbolic mediation of social interaction and the need to understand the meaning of communication in its own right. Despite this critical difference, Habermas argued that 'scientism' conceals historical-hermeneutic disciplines' tie to practice and the participatory self-application of knowledge that is constitutive of these discipline's ethical standpoint. Where the philosophy of science had not obscured entirely these interconnections, epistemological confusion bedevilled attempts to articulate their meaning and consequences. For example, Habermas pointed to an alleged inconsistency between Husserl and Dilthey's analyses of the lifeworld background and their epistemologies' implicit 'scientism'.

Like his depiction of the domain of the interest in technical control, Habermas incorporated considerations derived from the philosophy of praxis into the practical cognitive interest. He sought to disclose a basic continuity of the historical-hermeneutic methodology with a prescientific pattern of action. A continuity even more pronounced in this case, as the transcendental character of the interest in understanding intersects at the level of the logic of inquiry with that of the empirically given cultural knowledge of subjects. The structural features of ordinary language communication constitute the conditions of the possible acquisition of knowledge in the cultural sciences. Hermeneutics takes the model of translation to be exemplary precisely because of this methodological presupposition. Translation displays the practical interest in overcoming disturbances in mutual understanding and the underlying normative reciprocity of intersubjectivity. Historical-hermeneutic sciences clarify subjects' 'action orienting self-understanding' and through their interpretation of meaning contribute to the continuation of cultural traditions and the formation of collective, as well as individual, identities. Habermas traced this interest to the anthropological dependence of the species on socialisation processes grounded in linguistic communication.

"When these communication flows break off and the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding is either rigidified or falls

apart, a condition of survival is disturbed, one that is as elementary as the complementary condition of the success of instrumental action: namely the possibility of unconstrained agreement and non-violent recognition. Because this is the presupposition of practice, we call the *knowledge constitutive interest of the cultural sciences* ‘practical’. It is distinguished from the technical cognitive interest in that it aims not at the comprehension of an objectified reality but at the maintenance of the intersubjectivity of mutual understanding, within whose horizon reality can first appear as something.<sup>154</sup>

The contrasting methodological stance of the interests relating sciences to their domains of inquiry manifest their differing modes of emergence from the lifeworld. Both types of inquiry share this common background, but the methodological “attitude” of empirical-analytic sciences mean that they cannot comprehend this intersubjectively formed “cultural life context”.<sup>155</sup> This reflection on the cultural constitution of science provides a telling insight into Habermas’ conception of the social. The fact that Habermas contended that metatheoretical decisions are reached through intersubjective understandings indicates that *the question of identity is crucial to the sociological theory incipient in the epistemology of interests*. Identity is the privileged axis for measuring social inequality and injustice. The difference between the cognitive interests illuminates why this measuring is not just a matter of technical administration. Cultural sciences do not involve the type of abstraction that structures the processes of empirical-analytical inquiry. The practical interest in understanding supposedly precludes the methodological neutralising of the experiences of the subject that is so integral to the technically oriented objectification of the world.

Historical-hermeneutic inquiry seeks to discern particular meanings and the ‘ineffably individual’. The cognitive interests’ contrasting modes

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154 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 175-176, my underlines, CB.

155 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 140.

of validation and rationalisation reflect obverse modes of dialectical mediation. If the fundamental question scientific progress posed for the natural sciences is: "how a universal relation can be known, given a finite number of established singular facts" then the equivalent question that the extension of understanding poses for the cultural sciences is: "How can the meaning of an individuated life structure be grasped and represented in inevitably general categories?"<sup>156</sup>

Dilthey's methodology plays a similar role to Peirce's in constitutive interests: a partial recognition of practical interests' quasi-transcendental status was implicit in Dilthey's critique of historical reason and attempts to locate the epistemological preconditions of cultural sciences. Even so, Dilthey is another representative of the 'abandoned stages of epistemological reflection' that permitted the dominance of positivism. He developed his intuition of a practical interest in an inconsistent manner, due to his lacking both the appropriate theoretical means and limitations intrinsic to his framework of understanding. Biography provided Dilthey's model of the interpretation of meaning in the cultural sciences and this image reflected his 'expressivist' conception of language as an objectivation of the subject. Dilthey's choice of this model was primarily influenced by the cultural sciences' interest in the unique and distinct, as we have seen the cultural sciences' perspective on the universal and the particular is the reverse of the natural sciences. Biography represents a peculiar relationship of whole and part, but it provides the pattern for hermeneutic interpretation. For the whole history of life experiences congeal into a unique ego identity, yet this ego identity has to continuously integrate these experiences, so that it is organised into an individual biography.

Under the influence of the later philosophies of Wittgenstein and Gadamer, Habermas highlighted Dilthey's intuitions that prefigure the innovations associated with the 'linguistic turn'. However, he suggested that several deficiencies in Dilthey's perspective result from his failure to appreciate the implications of a shift from consciousness to language.

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156 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 160.

Dilthey understood hermeneutics to be “both a form of experience and grammatical analysis at the same time”.<sup>157</sup> Interpretation and concept formation use the reflexivity operative in the linguistic mediation of social interaction. Language is the medium of its own interpretation. A circularity then exists between the logic of inquiry and the prescientific domain of practical interaction. Dilthey recognised that meaning is expressed in the form of collective symbols, prefiguring the later argument of Wittgenstein that there can be no private system of meaning. Dilthey conceived this aspect of meaning under the notion of the *common*; referring to “the intersubjectively valid and binding quality of the same symbol for a group of subjects”.<sup>158</sup> In Habermas’ opinion, Dilthey’s substantial insight into the problem of the universal and the particular in the cultural sciences is due to his conceptualising the practice of interpretation from the intersecting standpoint of the history of individual life experience and the grammatical structure of meaning contained in language. This insight led to an appreciation of how the socializing conditions of language-use facilitates the individuation of the subject. However, Dilthey was unable to satisfactorily represent the mediating processes involved:

“The community that is based on the intersubjective validity of linguistic symbols makes both possible: reciprocal *identification* and *preservation of the non-identity* of one with another. In the dialogue relation a dialectical relation of the general and the individual, without which ego identity cannot be conceived, is realized.”<sup>159</sup>

Habermas’ choice of categories in depicting the relationship of the general and individual in symbolically mediated interaction confirms that his intention was one of reworking Adorno’s dialectic.<sup>160</sup> Not only is the ‘common’ virtually the transcendental condition of any institution

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157 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 162.

158 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 155.

159 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 157.

160 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York, Seabury Press, 1979).

of the social, it constitutes a form of social identity that makes possible the non-identity of subjects with respect to one another through the mediation of interaction. According to Dilthey, the 'expression' of meaning 'owes its semantic content' to its being the external symbolising of the biographical experience of the individual and part of the shared linguistic system. With this connection, Dilthey implied that identity is constituted through a vertical dimension of history and a horizontal dimension of language.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, each of these identity-forming dimensions apply as much to a community as to the individual. Dilthey then appealed to the analogy of biography on the grounds of *identity*. Due to the reciprocal inherence of the whole and part that characterises the hermeneutic circle, the interpretative standpoint of the cultural sciences is part of a larger whole of linguistic meaning, whilst an anticipatory structure is implied by the temporal dimension of the constitution of meaning. Every part of a text or symbol is interpreted "through what is at first a diffusely preunderstood 'whole' and the correction of this preliminary concept by means of the parts it subsumes".<sup>162</sup> This process constantly involves projections that anticipate the later interpretations produced by this movement and this circular process is not solely of the order of a logical-methodological stipulation. Habermas strenuously emphasises that it is a practice inherent in the use of language. Beside subjects' 'vertical' projections in anticipating future understandings, there are 'horizontal' projections in the form of the expectations that subjects have concerning the response of interaction partners to the meaning they communicate.

Habermas' criticisms of Dilthey's hermeneutic conception of the logic of inquiry were largely determined by his estimate of how subsequent methodological discussions have gone beyond Dilthey's position in analysing the practical conditions of understanding. Dilthey supposedly 'ignored the logic of his own investigation' into the continuity of science and intersubjective practice. As a consequence, he failed to satisfactorily develop the epistemological implications of his insight into the linguis-

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161 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 158.

162 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 171.

tic mediation of social interaction. Instead, Dilthey considered that the objectivity of scientific inquiry conflicted with the life context of everyday practice and his mode of differentiating these disguised the interest constitutive of knowledge. Habermas traced this perception of a conflict between scientific inquiry's objectivity and everyday life practice back to Dilthey's acceptance of the contemplative version of truth. Habermas contends that 'objectivism' is a logical counterpart of the philosophical idea of contemplation.<sup>163</sup>

Dilthey's empathy model of understanding reduced the "experiential realm of communication to the pattern of uninvolved observer".<sup>164</sup> Likewise, owing to the weight of 'objectivism', Dilthey too sought to equate the interpretation of symbolic meanings with the empirical description of the world of objects. In his case, the justification for this equation lies in the supposed parallels that exist between the situation of controlled observation and 'reexperiencing' in the empathy model of understanding. According to Habermas, this reduction of the communicative dimension of interpretation reveals just how much Dilthey's thought was bound to the format of the philosophy of consciousness. The expressivist versions of meaning, which underpin the empathy method, start from the perspective of a solitary subject, rather than a genuinely intersubjective standpoint. It could be argued, however, that the 'empathy model' of expressivist conceptions of language and communication is another way of approaching the problem of intersubjectivity and that it presumes that intersubjectivity is a genuine problem, rather than a given.<sup>165</sup> Habermas ruled this consideration out entirely, because of expressivism's 'objectifying' notion of language. Rather, it led in Dilthey's case to a serious regression. Dilthey "saw the communicative a priori of experience in interaction mediated by language", but his subject-centred perspective

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163 Habermas, "Postscript".

164 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 181.

165 Charles Taylor, "Language and Society", in *Communicative Action* ed. Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), pp. 23-35; Craig Browne and Andrew P. Lynch, *Taylor and Politics: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).



ultimately 'dissolved' the key problem of mediating the general and the individual in a 'vitalist' version of pre-rational agreement and unity.<sup>166</sup>

Dilthey's methodological reflections floundered on the problem of 'objectivity'. Yet, given that Habermas' argument is that epistemology is possible only in the form of social theory, a translation of the epistemology of this schema into a theory of society would need to reconcile the normative core of the practical interest in understanding with a recognition that social reality is comprised of objective structures and systems. The debate that he conducted with Gadamer over the scope of hermeneutic reflection clarified the extent to which critical reflection on institutionalised social understandings entailed nomological explanations, typically associated with empirical-analytic inquiry, as well as interpretation. Notwithstanding the fact that Dilthey's choice of individual development as a model for hermeneutic inquiry reflects the standpoint of the philosophy of consciousness, Habermas did not so much contest this analogy as extend and deepen it. He differentiated the practical interest in understanding from historicism's relativist affirmation of culture and conservative exclusions of tradition from rational evaluation by locating the hermeneutic circle inside the historical development of the subject.

"[...] hermeneutic understanding can arrive at objectivity to the extent that the understanding subject learns, through the communicative appropriation of alien objectifications, to comprehend itself in its own self-formative process. An interpretation can only grasp its object and penetrate it in a relation in which the interpreter reflects on the object and himself *at the same time* as moments of an objective structure that likewise encompasses both and makes them possible. In this sense the objectivity of understanding rests on the principle that Dilthey set forth for autobiography and that only seems to be objec-

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166 Habermas, 'Postscript', 359; Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 183-184.

tivistic: 'A person's (group's, epoch's) reflection upon himself remains as both orientation and foundation'."<sup>167</sup>

Habermas suggested that the analysis of language use and the conditions of interpretation clarifies the internal structure of social practice. Owing to the reciprocal agreement concerning meaning which interpretation presupposes, and that is practically constituted through the symbolic mediation of differences, interaction between dialogue partners is precisely that type of action that he conceives of as *social*.<sup>168</sup> In particular, the mutual understanding of subjects makes possible the social agreement necessary for the coordination of task orientated purposive action. Similarly, the pattern of reciprocal understanding is constitutive of the social identity that defines the normative conditions for the legitimation of institutions. Habermas proposed that the practice of symbolically mediated action take shape in the horizon of a potential unconstrained consensus based on undistorted communication. However, this is a presupposition of action which is far from ever actually realised, because of the structures of domination and their ideological legitimation. The tension between the factual and the normative apparent in his depiction of social practice was formulated in accordance with the presumption that history is a central ordering category of critical theory. This historical dimension of knowledge constitutive interests informed Habermas' correcting Dilthey's epistemology. Likewise, his criticisms of Gadamer's philosophy are founded on the view that hermeneutics could understand the purpose of interpretation in such a way that disguises the social sources of the tension between the normative and factual, without explicitly denying them.<sup>169</sup>

Gadamer accentuated the historicity of the practice of socio-cultural interpretation.<sup>170</sup> According to Gadamer, hermeneutic interpretation is

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167 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 181.

168 Axel Honneth, and Hans Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

169 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*.

170 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*; Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Historicity* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1972).

always 'productive', in the sense that understanding is never limited to the recovery of the original constitution of meaning. Understanding is the outcome of a 'fusion of horizons' relating the past to the present. Habermas agreed that interpretation involves a narration of the past, however, he argues that it always also entails a future projection that is normative. Gadamer considered that the tradition to which an interpreter belongs shapes the capacity for understanding; indeed, understanding depends upon the interpreter being placed inside tradition. Now, 'methodological' considerations only partly determined this view of tradition, it was as much grounded in the later Heidegger's ontological notion of language. For Gadamer, the 'effective history' of understanding is something that happens to the subject 'over and above' its 'wanting and doing'.<sup>171</sup> In Habermas' opinion, Gadamer's account of understanding rightly outlines the participatory condition of socialization but it grants excessive authority to tradition in emphasising the reliance of the cycle of interpretation upon a 'structure of prejudice'.<sup>172</sup> For these reasons, the capacity of the subject for rational reflection is undermined in Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy and the need to examine the validity of tradition is underestimated. The liberating experience of reflection means rejecting tradition where necessary as dogma on the basis of reason.

Gadamer replied that the belief in a total separation from tradition was an exaggeration of the Enlightenment. For this belief ignored the very historicity of reflection itself. This response demonstrated the qualitative differences between Gadamer and Habermas' respective conceptions of history. According to Habermas, despite its background in classical practical philosophy, Gadamer's hermeneutics was misleading with respect to the actual conditions of practice, because of the deficiencies in its historical conception. In order to clarify the potential for *critical historical reflection* in the hermeneutic circle, Habermas alternately stressed the anticipatory dimension of the practice of interpretation.<sup>173</sup> He contended

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171 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*.

172 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*.

173 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, 161.

that actualising this potential depends on critical reflection into the limits of language, especially given the language immanent deception that is conditioned by social relations of oppression and the systematically distorted communication that underpins the institutionalisation of oppressive social relations.

“Hermeneutics comes up against the limits of the context of tradition from the inside. Once these limits have been experienced and recognised, it can no longer consider cultural traditions absolute. . . . But clearly this metainstitution of language as tradition is dependent in turn on social processes that cannot be reduced to normative relationships. Language is *also* a medium of domination and social power. It serves to legitimate relationships of organised force. Insofar as the legitimations do not articulate the power relationship whose institutionalization they make possible, insofar as the relationship is merely manifested in the legitimations, language is *also* ideological. In that case it is not so much a matter of deceptions in language as of deception with language as such. Hermeneutic experience, encountering this dependence of symbolic context on actual relationships, becomes a critique of ideology.”<sup>174</sup>

Gadamer and Habermas agreed that the juxtaposition of language and practice is false. Habermas argued, however, that hermeneutics is idealistic to the extent that it neglects the external circumstances that condition language. Structures of domination have had a constitutive significance in the development of traditions; and hence, the historical change in linguistic worldviews is explicable only when these objective circumstances are taken into consideration. These circumstances include the constraints of ‘external nature’ that supply the guiding orientation to the anthropological interest in technical control, but even more so “the constraint of inner nature, which is reflected in the repressions of social relationships of power. These two categories of constraint are not only the object of

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174 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 172.

interpretations; behind the back of language, so to speak, they affect the very grammatical rules in accordance with which we interpret the world. *The objective context in terms of which alone social actions can be understood is constituted jointly by language, labour, and domination*".<sup>175</sup>

In this way, social theory needs to incorporate the dynamic dimensions of oppression, conflict and social struggle into its conception of social action. Moreover, the critique of distorted understanding changes the task of hermeneutic reflection and the methodology of the interpretation of symbolic meanings. Habermas described the aim of those forms of inquiry orientated by an interest in the furtherance of the development toward autonomy and responsibility as that of elucidating the historical suppression of attempted dialogue and the reconstructing of what is suppressed.<sup>176</sup> Since these critical inquiries disclose torsions in the historical development of the subject, he proposed that psychoanalysis provides a model for the critical interpretation of ideological structures of meaning.

It is important to emphasise that Habermas' critique of these accounts of the logic of inquiry sought to satisfy the Hegelian-Marxist conception of critical theory. That is, that critical theory reflexively locates its own standpoint in the historical process and that this reflexivity contributes to the rational development of emancipation. Habermas' account of the research practices of scientific communities anticipates a completely democratic organisation of society. He believed that recognising scientific practices' linguistic foundations is a movement beyond positivism's unreflexive standpoint. It is how social organisation and coordination could catch up with the rationalisation of technology and science, thereby subjecting them to democratic control. The basic contrast between the forms of mediation precluded the collapsing of the technical and practical cognitive interests, as well as constituting a quite different dialectical position to that of Adorno's critical theory.

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<sup>175</sup> Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, 174, my underline CB.

<sup>176</sup> Habermas, "Knowledge and Human Interests: a General Perspective", 315.

## 5. The Critique of Ideology and the Transformation of Emancipatory Reflection

There are, to be sure, direct continuities between Habermas' later conceptualisation of mediation in the paradigm of mutual understanding and this account of the mediating of the universal and particular in the form of socio-cultural understandings arising from the practical context of symbolically mediated interaction. However, alongside this account developed from epistemological reflection on the structure of communication, there is the grounding in knowledge constitutive interests of the relationship of the universal and the particular in the ideas of progress and development. Even if the intention of justifying and facilitating progress and development is broadly the same later, Habermas' subsequent elaborations of the paradigm of understanding retract some of the key suppositions of this earlier approach to history and contend that the full implications of intersubjectivity are incommensurate with them.<sup>177</sup> Despite the contrasting meanings reflecting the different methodologies that have been outlined, Peirce's pragmatist notion of scientific progress and Dilthey's concept of a vertical, as well as a horizontal, dimension of identity formation stress how the universal is an outcome of historical development. Habermas conceived progress or development to be itself of universal significance - in this history a particular is a part or moment of the subject's formative process. The most developmentally advanced stage is of universal importance; the accumulated knowledge that it contains is not just a particular stage in the history of the species, because it stands in a process of universal significance.

It is not by chance that Habermas retained the idea of progress, as this is a central nostrum of Marxism and pragmatism. Progress is, as Heller remarked, a 'leading idea' that he 'shares with the positivists'.<sup>178</sup> In his

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177 Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 1: Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

178 Agnes Heller, "The Positivist Dispute as a Turning Point in German Post-War Theory", *New German Critique* (15, 1978), 54, 49-56.

opinion, whilst progress is intrinsically related to the model of the universal in modern science, scientific progress makes an essential contribution to a larger process of rationalisation without providing an exclusive justification of it. Heller suggests that “progress is not conceived of” in Habermas’ theory “as a scientific-technical process common to all of society, rather science and technology are included within a conception of progress”.<sup>179</sup> In knowledge constitutive interests, this larger conception appears in the form of the historical evolution or developmental history of the species. It is in relation to this broader conception that the ‘historical’ notions of Peirce and Dilthey are seen to critically reflect back upon these theorists’ epistemologies. Habermas believed that these notions disclose the immanent limitations of their standpoints and that situating epistemology in the developmental history of the species reveals a third cognitive interest in emancipation and autonomy.

Peirce and Dilthey were unable to properly perceive the linkage of reason and autonomy due to their alleged respective confining of historical reflection to a specific interest. This limitation significantly conditioned their misunderstandings of cognitive interests:

“Peirce and Dilthey discovered the roots in interest of scientific knowledge . . . but they would have been able to identify the basic orientations of the empirical-analytic and the hermeneutic sciences only in a framework that was foreign to them: that is, within the conception of a *history of the species* comprehended as a *self-formative progress*.”<sup>180</sup>

It is worth noting, even though it cannot be expanded upon in this context, that this critique of Peirce and Dilthey is inconsistent with Habermas’ later perspective of the nexus of the history and the subject.<sup>181</sup> In any event, the most suitable - and possibly the only - ‘methodological’ exemplar of a third cognitive interest was still in the process of being formulated during the period of their writings. Habermas argued that

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179 Heller, “The Positivist Dispute as a Turning Point”, 54.

180 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 197.

181 Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press: 2005)

*psychoanalysis* gives concrete methodological form to the connection between reflection and autonomy. Significantly, the idealist philosophies of Kant and Fichte presented this connection as a general presupposition of all knowledge. However, psychoanalysis is the only 'tangible example' of the methodological self-reflection of a science oriented by emancipation. Psychoanalysis is unique in its combining hermeneutic interpretation with a notion of explanation that is like that of the natural sciences. Habermas interpreted Freud's theory from a perspective sensitive to the orientation of the philosophy of praxis. Despite its methodological slant, Habermas' explication is continuous with the Frankfurt School's utilising of psychoanalysis to the extent that it aimed to elaborate a constructive approach to the critique of ideology.<sup>182</sup> In fact, it exceeded, so to speak, The Frankfurt School's appropriation of psychoanalysis in seeking to derive from psychoanalysis a 'quasi-transcendental' justification for critique in an emancipatory interest. The price of this epistemological grounding is that Habermas gave less emphasis to the sensual aspects of Freud's theory.

Psychoanalysis and the Marxist critique of ideology have a common background in the Enlightenment, but Habermas' synthesis evoked a potentially confusing analogy between therapy and political practice. He suggested that psychoanalytic practice confronts on an individual level the basic problem of the philosophy of praxis: that of the subject being the producer of a history without being the real subject of this process. In this instance, the self is not the product of an autonomous subject but an individual conditioned by its pathology. There are strong parallels then to the praxis philosophy notion of the inversion of reality, in the sense that the subject experiences symptoms as a second nature and this self-alienation expresses the subject's being like an object in relation to his or her psychopathology and suffering. Habermas contended that Freud

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182 Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: a History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (London: Heinemann Educational, 1973); Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*; David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory*.



appreciated the power of enlightening reflection but misrepresented the logic of psychoanalytic inquiry in a scientific manner. In short, Habermas argued that if psychoanalysis were a practical application of the interest in technical control then it would affirm the subject precisely in the heteronomous state of being 'an object for itself', rather than anticipating the transformation of this condition through the subject's emancipatory self-reflection:

"As long as the theory derives its meaning in relation to the reconstruction of a lost fragment of life history and, therefore, to self-reflection, its application is necessarily *practical*. It effects the reorganisation of the action-orienting self-understanding of socialized individuals, which is structured in ordinary language. In this role, however, psychoanalysis can never be replaced by technologies derived from other theories of the empirical sciences in a rigorous sense."<sup>183</sup>

Habermas had no place for an expressivist concept of alienation in the case of technically oriented instrumental action, though he did consider that the subject undertaking psychoanalysis is characterised by a division between the self and symbolic meaning. Psychoanalysis is directed to the problem of rendering comprehensible alienated forms of symbolic expression. Its claim to knowledge differs, nevertheless, from that of the historical-hermeneutic sciences: it is not solely one of understanding. Psychoanalysis seeks to provide an *explanation* of the origins of symptoms. Habermas' account of psychoanalysis was less interested in the psychodynamic features of Freud's theory, like the categories of cathexis and drives. In his opinion, these features often approximate to the 'energy distribution model' of quasi-casual connections between instinctual processes which operate below the threshold of consciousness. The energy distribution model misrepresents the psyche in a scientific manner.<sup>184</sup> Habermas was far more interested in the rationality of psychoanalytic

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183 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 247.

184 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 246-245.

inquiry and his account is unusual in the degree to which he considered that psychoanalysis is a method of linguistic analysis. Indeed, he suggested that Freud developed his 'structural model' of the ego, id and superego from examining the communicative exchange of the analytical situation. Similarly, he claimed that the dream provided Freud with the initial archetype of the unconscious and its 'private' system of meaning, because psychoanalysis is founded on a theory of communication.

According to Habermas, Freud traced disturbances in communication to the exclusion of repressed wishes and needs from linguistic interpretation. Freud's 'structural' model of the psyche implies that censorship leads to the (often infantile) wishes being displaced into other 'privatized' symbolic meanings and that these private meanings then seek alternate modes of expression. From this perspective, neuroses result from a tension between the repression of wishes and the resistance of their unconscious displacements. Neurotic symptoms are symbolically expressed in the distorted language of the subject's private system of meaning and are manifested in such actions as compulsive behaviour and various parapraxes. Due to this 'systematically distorted communication', psychoanalysis attempts to decipher the 'meaning' or rationale of an illness through the process of a 'depth hermeneutic' between the therapist and patient.<sup>185</sup> A standard 'cultural' hermeneutic is insufficient, rather a depth hermeneutic is necessary because the patient may be able to sustain intersubjective understandings while misunderstanding its symbolic productions. The misunderstanding is due to 'interior' communication disturbances and 'internal' disruptions of meaning. Psychoanalysis likewise encounters the 'secondary elaborations' of neuroses and the altering of these requires more than comprehension, since they reflect the fact that in neuroses "the ego necessarily deceives itself about its identity in the symbolic structures that it consciously produces".<sup>186</sup> Socially acceptable 'functional substitutes' are necessary for the transformation of such neurotic symptoms.

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185 Habermas, 'On Systematically Distorted Communication', 205-210; Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 226.

186 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 227.

Habermas' reconstruction of Freud's discovery that there is meaning to this 'self-alienation' of the subject is rather idiosyncratic. His defining of the unconscious as the source of the alienation of the self, because it constitutes a private system of meaning discrepant from the public meaning of language, arguably confuses the methodological problem of elucidating the unconscious with the phenomena of the unconscious itself.<sup>187</sup> In my opinion, this interpretation of psychoanalysis not only privileges the social over the natural, but its model of distorted communication is more applicable to the ideological process of veiling social domination than to individual repression. The analysis of the process of socially distorted communication has to inform the interpretation of individual repression. This is a logical consequence of Habermas' equating the unconscious with a system of private meanings requiring translation. Habermas actually admitted the precedence of the social in criticising the scientific misunderstanding of Freud's instinct theory:

"The concept of instinct, when transferred back from animals to men, is still rooted in meaning structures of the life-world, no matter how elementary they may be. They are twisted and diverted intentions that have turned from conscious motives into causes and subjected communicative action to the causality of 'natural' conditions. This is the causality of fate, and not of nature, because it prevails through the symbolic means of the mind. Only for this reason can it be compelled by the power of reflection."<sup>188</sup>

Since Habermas drew on psychoanalysis to illuminate the critique of ideology, there is a certain irony in this privileging. In this way, his outline of the interest in autonomy anticipates his later theorising the rationality of communicative action, rather than the outcomes of the more indeterminate practices of ideology critique and psychoanalytic inquiry into ambivalent meanings. However, the theory of rationality and the

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187 Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: a Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995).

188 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 256.

critique of ideology were not distinct frameworks at this stage in his program. Habermas proposed that psychoanalytic practice presumes a model of undistorted communication and communicative competence. The latter is based on a model of normal language usage and the 'general' public, that is, socially shared, capacities or competences.<sup>189</sup> Still, psychoanalysis' aim of translating the private meanings of distorted communication and disturbed symbolic action into a set of comprehensible public meanings is only part of the process of constituting knowledge and it is a necessary, though insufficient, requirement of analytic practice. Psychoanalysis aims at change, as well as understanding, and this aim of transformation is guided by a metapsychology.

Freud's metapsychology has the theoretical structure of a scientific reconstruction, according to Habermas, and, as such, it went beyond the format of narrative history. It constituted a distinctive fusion of theory and practice. Psychoanalysis' methodology is founded on the notion of a 'systematically generalized history' of the subject's 'self-formation'.<sup>190</sup> This theoretical background supplies a normative model of development in relation to which individual pathology can be compared. A notion of the self-formative process of the subject is, then, integral to the practice of psychoanalysis, underpinning its aim of transformation through the subject's reflection into the disturbance of the life-historical process.

The intersubjective dialogue of analysis, Habermas implied, may be something of a model for the organization of emancipatory praxis. Psychoanalysis aims to initiate a process of reflection on the part of the analysand into those disturbances of socialization and processes of development that have a 'causal' significance for his or her illness. In this process, the analyst does not exercise 'control' in the sense of a technical activity, she rather presents the patient with hypothetical interpretations and the analysand evaluates, in turn, their veracity. These interpretations

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<sup>189</sup> Jürgen Habermas, "Toward a Theory of Communicative Competence", in *Recent Sociology* ed. Hans P. Dreitzal (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 114-148.

<sup>190</sup> Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*.

build upon the patient's partial recollections and are meant to initiate processes of deeper reflection. The subject suffers under circumstances that are partly self-created, since the symptoms of disturbances are part of the life history of the individual. Even though it is not actualised in the present and cannot be empirically corroborated, the possibility of the subject's autonomy is a presumption without which psychoanalytic practice would be ineffective.

Psychoanalysis requires a historical projection, in the form a hypothetical anticipation, of the autonomy of the subject. Habermas suggested that this projection has parallels with that of the problem of historical-hermeneutic interpretation: both require direction and orientation to their anticipation. In this projection, an interest in freedom and autonomy coincides with that of the subject's self-reflection upon the process of its development and the transformation of its present state. This projection is analogous to that of the aspirations of the critique of ideology. Critical social science employs a similar combination of interpretation and explanation.<sup>191</sup> By interpreting psychoanalysis as a theory of distorted communication, Habermas was able to address the problems that he saw as resulting from Marx's limited epistemological reflection and their social theory extension. He initially highlighted the 'surprising' 'convergence' between Freud and Marx's respective social theory.

Like Marx, Freud recognised that social development is fundamentally shaped by the necessity of material production. Freud differed, however, in his assigning greater significance to communication in social reproduction. In Freud's image of society, socialisation appears central to the exercise of power and a decisive feature of the organisation of domination. For Freud, there is a fundamental tension between the libidinal instincts and the social necessity of labour; however, acceptance of the principle of social reality is a prerequisite for the individual's own survival and for that of the social collectivity as well. It is the socializatory role of institutions to bring about this acceptance; hence, a certain amount of repression is involved in individuals' acceptance of institu-

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191 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*.

tional authority. In particular, work requires the displacement and sublimation of libidinal and aggressive instincts.

“Marx conceives the institutional framework as an ordering of interests that are immediate functions of the system of social labour according to the relation of social rewards and imposed obligations. Institutions derive their force from perpetuating a distribution of rewards and obligations that is rooted in force and distorted according to class structure. Freud, on the contrary, conceives the instinctual framework in connection with the repression of instinctual impulses.”<sup>192</sup>

According to Freud’s model of consciousness, the superego represents society in enforcing this denial of instinctual demands. That is, the superego is the moral authority behind the renunciation of the pleasure principle.<sup>193</sup> Habermas, as we have remarked, rather unusually contended that Freud derived this structural model of the psyche from the *communicative logic* of the analytic encounter, yet this perspective enabled Habermas to redefine social domination based on insights framed by the study of speech and behavioural pathologies. The communicative dimension of this reconstruction of Freud’s social theory differentiates it from Marcuse’s historical materialist rendering of the psychoanalytic interpretation of societal development. Habermas’ conception of the relation between the degree of psychic repression and the level of the development of the forces of production is otherwise indebted to Marcuse’s interpretation.<sup>194</sup>

It is not so much the necessity of labour but the *compulsion to labour*, according to Habermas, that Freud saw as requiring institutional regulation. Habermas interpreted this notion of compulsion in the light of his conception of the social as deriving from a symbolically mediated agreement concerning the distribution of the functions of material pro-

192 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 277.

193 Sigmund Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”, *Freud On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis* ed. A. Richards (London: Penguin, 1984), 271-338.

194 Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*.

duction and material rewards. In short, the 'institutional framework' of society involves "embedding purposive-rational action in an interaction structure".<sup>195</sup> Social institutions have a normative background legitimating their authority to sanction and restrain. At the centre of Habermas' reading of psychoanalytic social theory is the following thesis concerning Freud's response to the question of the legitimation of institutions' authority: that *the degree and intensity of repression corresponds to the level of the species technical control over nature*. In this way, a more rational relation of the ego to the instincts became possible on the basis of the technical development of production. For this reason, there is a notion in Freud's theory of social organisation and development that is equivalent to Marx's notion of the dialectic of the forces and relations of production. In this respect, Habermas' application of a psychoanalytic framework to the critique of ideology is historical materialist and it locates ideology in the cultural superstructure. He suggested that material constraints condition the degree of institutionalized social repression and that the 'objective possibility' of emancipated social relations which ideology projects is defined in relation to the stage of development of the forces of production.<sup>196</sup>

Habermas' intention of developing a materialist phenomenology of mind determined his interpretation of psychoanalysis. By conceiving of Freud's therapeutic methodology as one founded on a notion of undistorted communication, he believed that the history of ideology could be traced from the standpoint of emancipation. This historically oriented critique of 'class consciousness in its manifestations' gives substance to Habermas' proposals of the synthesis through the struggle of social actors and the reconstruction of suppressed dialogue in emancipatory reflection. This procedure of supplementing Marx's philosophical anthropology supposedly overcomes and rectifies the limitations of his paradigm of labour: "Marx was not able to see that power and ideology are distorted communication, because he made the assumption that

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195 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 279.

196 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*.

men distinguished themselves from animals when they began to produce their means of subsistence".<sup>197</sup> Freud, by contrast, considered that the distinction of humanity from animals resided in the transformation of "instinct-governed behaviour into communicative action". All social organization seeks to resolve the conflict between surplus impulse and the constraint of reality.

This supposition of human reproduction determined the significance that Freud attached to socialization and to the family as its primary agency, particularly owing to the extended childhood dependency in humans. Habermas argued that when a psychoanalytic perspective is applied to the social, it becomes a critique of the illusory character of the ideological content of belief systems. That is, *the critique of ideology deciphers the surplus repression intrinsic to the self-interpretation of a society by disclosing how the power of social institutions derives from the 'unconscious mechanisms' of distorted communication*.<sup>198</sup> Systematically distorted communication results in pathological social development, rather than enabling the conscious determination of social organization by subjects. Habermas explicated this process by way of drawing a parallel between the individual and society: where the power of social reality prevails by way of oppression, the collective ideological 'defense' mechanisms resemble those of individual pathology. The social consequences of distorted communication are similar to the neuroses that reflect an individual's lack of autonomy due to repression, like the neurotic symptoms of repetitive action and delusory interpretations of self-identity. The role of critique is then to reveal the historical obsolescence of a form of repression.

A psychoanalytic social theory should therefore conceptualize ideology as a defense mechanism sublimating the utopian content of the 'wish-fantasies' that a culture projects. In other words, collective fantasies are 'objective illusions' that have a compensatory function. Since collective 'illusions' have a utopian component signifying an objective historical possibility for emancipatory change immanent in the present,

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197 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 282.

198 Jürgen Habermas, "On Systematically Distorted Communication", 205-218.



ideologies are not straight-forwardly false. Rather, they rationalize, in the Freudian sense, inequality and unnecessary domination.<sup>199</sup>

In Habermas' opinion, Marx's anthropology of labour entails a dual conception of nature and a view of history as shaped by the species' activity of externalisation and appropriation in production. Freud alternatively stresses the internalizing activity of communication and how social constraints shape the reification of speech and behaviour. Freud's innovation pertains to the socializing of 'inner nature' and his insights into repression still needed to be developed into a theory of systematically distorted communication.<sup>200</sup> However, as remarked upon already, Habermas' interpretation has been criticised for its methodological focus and for its failure to pay sufficient attention to the psychodynamic elements in Freud's theory of the psyche.<sup>201</sup> At the very least, these criticisms are warranted on philological grounds and it is fairly transparent that the overall aspirations of Habermas' social theoretical project determined his interpretation of psychoanalysis. Knowledge constitutive interests aspires to reconnect the subject and history on the grounds of the movement of the social institution. In light of this attempted synthesis, there is some plausibility to Habermas' criticising Freud's 'scientistic' misrepresentation of the practice of analysis, whilst at the same time endorsing Freud's extending the 'logic of trial and error' to history. The latter would ground evolution in a theory of socio-cultural learning broadly compatible with knowledge constitutive interests. Habermas then corrected Freud's positivism by reference to the pragmatist inspiration of his theory's design; he traced learning to the principles organizing a scientific research community's activities. Because these principles anticipate a rational organization of society, the critique of ideology can take its historical bearings from this utopian projection of the direction of rationalization.

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199 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 276.

200 Habermas, "On Systematically Distorted Communication".

201 Fred C. Alford, *Science and The Revenge of Nature: Marcuse And Habermas*, (Tampa, Florida: University of Florida Press, 1985); Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia*.

“Freud clearly set out the direction of the history of the species, determined simultaneously by a process of self-production under categories of work and a self-formative process under conditions of distorted communication. At every stage, development of the forces of production produces the objective possibility of mitigating the force of the institutional framework and ‘(replacing) the affective basis of (man’s) obedience to civilization by a rational one.’ Every step on the road to realizing an idea beset by the contradiction of violently distorted communication is marked by a transformation of the institutional framework and the destruction of an ideology. The goal is ‘providing a rational basis for the precepts of civilization’: in other words, an organization of social relations according to the principle that the validity of every norm of political consequence be made dependent on a consensus arrived at in communication free from domination.”<sup>202</sup>

Habermas’ theorizing of this dimension of ideology is interesting and complex. However, his analysis of the projection of autonomy in psychoanalysis points towards Castoriadis’ perspective and its arguably more innovative elucidating of the creative capacities of the social imaginary and the radical imaginary of the individual psyche.<sup>203</sup> In the case of Castoriadis, this elucidating of the creativity of the radical imaginary of the psyche and the instituting imaginary of society leads to a number of significant theoretical proposals and a social theory that is equally substantial as the one derived from the epistemology of knowledge constitutive interests. Notably, the psychoanalytic inspiration of aspects of Castoriadis’ theory results in a critique of the epistemological principle of determination and political insights into the indeterminacy of freedom.<sup>204</sup> Castoriadis considers that the principle of determination un-

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202 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 283-284.

203 Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*.

204 Kanakis Leledakis, *Society and Psyche*, (Oxford: Berg, 1995).

derpins the logic-ontology of identity-thinking and it has gone together with the predominance of the heteronomous instituted society over the radical imaginary of instituting society.<sup>205</sup> The indeterminacy of freedom is partly a result of the questioning of the hierarchical relation of theory and practice. In respect of this questioning, there are overlaps with the intentions of Habermas' original program of knowledge constitutive interests. In other respects, there are pronounced difference with respect to question of rationality and the nexus of history and the subject. The contrast with the indeterminate creativity of the social imaginary reinforces how Habermas' conception of the conversion of utopian projections into reality follows the Hegelian-Marxist logic of historical reflection. Knowledge constitutive interests presumes that emancipatory transformations are the outcome of the subject recognising itself in its historical self-formative process.

Given the radical historicism typical of praxis philosophy, Habermas' aspiration of constructing a social theory containing transcendental elements is rather unusual. As we have seen, Habermas believed that a transcendental conception of interests is the best means of countering the standpoint of positivism, yet precisely this transcendental component of his early social theory proved to be an untenable compromise.<sup>206</sup> The notion of knowledge constitutive interests virtually disappears entirely from Habermas' later writings. The intention that it shared with the philosophy of praxis of reconnecting the subject and history is abandoned. Habermas does propose a new means of conceiving the intersection constitutive of the social in his later theory and the 'quasi-transcendental' status of language remains and assumes greater importance. These systematic revisions lead to the conception of the social as that of the nexus between the more abstract components of the logic of historical development and individual competences, that is, competences like the

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205 Craig Browne, "Two Critiques of Identity"; Craig Browne and Paula Diehl 'Conceptualizing the Political Imaginary: An Introduction to the Special Issue', *Social Epistemology*, (Volume 33, Issue 5, 2019), 393-397; Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*; Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

206 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 14.

cognitive, linguistic and moral. These competences are possessed by an individual and they may be sedimented in the structure of a culture and lifeworld's level of reasoning.<sup>207</sup> In order to understand the exigencies that conditioned these revisions in Habermas' program, it is necessary to indicate some of the tensions between the epistemology of knowledge constitutive interests and his early theory of organised capitalism. The preceding analysis principally detailed the integrity between the epistemological proposal and the interpretation of organised capitalism, especially with respect to the significance to each of scientific and technological rationalisation.

In response to extensive criticisms, Habermas subsequently described the distinction between labour and interaction - associated with the different cognitive orientations and their respective logics of inquiry - as an analytical one.<sup>208</sup> Whilst this clarification of his theory's action-theoretical content may reflect Habermas' real understanding of social practices, this statement is inconsistent with significant features of his earlier employment of the distinction between interests and the argumentative strategy of his critique of ideology. A typical instance of this strategy, which is indicative of the more general sociological use of the distinction, is the procedure of demarcating aspects of one interest against the other. This was apparent in Habermas' criticisms of Peirce's supposed misconceptions, based on the contrast between intersubjective dialogue and the monological property of symbol use in purposive-rational action and the objectifying of reality in accordance with an interest in technical control. Besides a need for logical consistency, the demarcating of one interest against another related to the critical diagnostic potential of the contrast between interests. The notion that technocratic consciousness erodes the distinction between the practical and the technical interests actually depends on the initial juxtaposition of labour and interaction.

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207 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*. Browne, 'The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction'; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 1*.

208 Habermas, "Postscript"; Anthony Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques in Social Theory* (London: Macmillan: 1982), 98. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*.

I have argued that Habermas' distinction between interests results in an under-socialized conception of production. In fact, the categories of labour and interaction gave rise to unnecessary ambiguities concerning the cooperative dimension of work activity. Habermas inverts, as Postone has convincingly argued, Marx's critique of the capitalist reduction of the praxis of labour to instrumental action.<sup>209</sup> Habermas admitted that Marx's critique of capitalism "distinguishes the *self-conscious control* of the social life process by the combined producers from an *automatic regulation* of the process of production that has become independent of these individuals".<sup>210</sup> Despite his innovative stress on communication in determining the social ends of production, Habermas did not identify emancipation with the reorganisation of the activity of labour. His defining the 'self-conscious control' of associated producers as the institutionalizing of the principle of communication free from domination goes together with an unequivocal acceptance of the logic of technical rationalisation for the processes internal to the organisation and activities of production. Habermas' social theory starts from the supposition that rationalisation has exposed the limitations of any definition of emancipation from the standpoint of production and this gives rise to a need to delineate an alternative idea of emancipation in the moral-practical dimension of interaction and communication. Habermas never subsequently wavered from the claim that was stated in the conclusion to his original explication of labour and interaction as practices depicted in Hegel's early Jena writings as constitutive of Spirit:

*"Liberation from hunger and misery does not necessarily converge with liberation from servitude and degradation, for there is no automatic developmental relation between labour and interaction."*<sup>211</sup>

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209 Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: a Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

210 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*.51.

211 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 169.

One of the major reasons for Habermas' relative indifference to the emancipatory possibilities of production is his argument that the mediation of class conflict in organised capitalism required the formulation of a more differentiated model of crisis tendencies.<sup>212</sup> This model, he believed, should be founded on a new account of the reproduction of social systems, reflecting the changes in the relationship between the state and economy that marks the transition from liberal to late organised capitalism. The theorising of the transition to organised capitalism is connected to a serious ambiguity in Habermas' approach to the critique of ideology and some potentially irreconcilable features of his early program. On the one hand, he argues that ideological legitimations are more fragile in relation to the oppressed class, due to the unequal class experience of forms of repression.<sup>213</sup> In this context, he is reiterating Lukacs' thesis of the subjective limits of reification and applying the interaction structure of Hegel's dialectic of master and slave to class relations.<sup>214</sup> On the other hand, Habermas' social theory is mainly concerned with the non-class specific character of contemporary ideology. In his opinion, technocratic ideology undermines the normative dimension of interaction altogether.<sup>215</sup> While the notion of social struggle does not have to be identified with class conflict, Habermas' early position insinuates at difficulties in delineating the agency of change. The critique of technocratic ideology, he believed, requires the disclosure of the interest governing the genesis of normative structures and moral consciousness. Yet, the attempt to ground this interest transcendently involves 'extra-historical' arguments and an appeal, above all, to the category of rationality.<sup>216</sup>

There is, then, the question of Habermas' potentially exaggerating the consequences of rationalisation. Giddens, for instance, remarked

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212 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*.

213 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 57.

214 Georg Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* (London: Merlin, 1971); Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

215 Habermas, *Toward a Rational Society*

216 Lepenies, "Anthropology and Social Criticism."

that he “is not convinced that technocratic consciousness has submerged pre-existing economic divisions and conflicts as pervasively as Habermas seems to believe”.<sup>217</sup> Nevertheless, the arguments of this stage of Habermas’ program were still framed by the dilemmas of the critique of ideology. Although there are considerable overlaps, his later theory of communicative action’s predominant interest in the problem of rationality implies a rather less direct connection between critique and political practice.<sup>218</sup> In my opinion, this change results in a more defensible but, in many respects, less provocative theory than the one insinuated by knowledge constitutive interests. The notion of ‘synthesis through class struggle’ and the use of psychoanalytic categories to explicate the multi-valent character of language imply an appreciation of the contingency of reason that differs considerably from the later notion of communicative rationality’s exclusive emphasis on formal procedures.<sup>219</sup>

Before explaining the grounds of the final disassembling of the program of knowledge constitutive interests, I shall briefly review the main arguments that have been presented. The most important of these was how the epistemological model of knowledge constitutive interests addressed the question of the intersection of the subject and history. Indeed, the key thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory was derived initially from an interpretation of Marx and is clearly a restatement of the philosophy of praxis position: that the social is constituted through this intersection. The model of cognitive interests is ultimately intended to be a reflective clarification of the conditions necessary for the satisfaction of this thesis. Positivism was criticised precisely because it is an epistemology that occludes and disregards this constitution of knowledge and society. In light of his perspective’s later developments, the major innovative component of Habermas’ standpoint was his argument that the social forms of the interrelating of the subject and history develop

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217 Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques*, 98.

218 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Volume 2.

219 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

by way of changes in both structures of interaction that are practically grounded in processes of intersubjective communication and in the technically oriented processes of the appropriation of nature through labour. These dimensions of pre-scientific action supply the guidelines for scientific forms of inquiry and are each considered necessary and universal requirements for the reproduction of society.

Habermas' making these claims by way of arguments of a philosophical anthropology was broadly consistent with the Marxian philosophy of praxis. There were, however, specific differences in content resulting from his limiting labour to the type of action pursuing only an instrumental interest in control and the complementary expanding upon the species' interest in mutual understanding. Whether these distinctions between labour and interaction signify separate institutional domains or are, instead, of the order of analytical types largely determines the degree to which the anthropology of constitutive interests departs from the tenets of the Marxian conception of social constitution.

Unlike his later works, Habermas' early program did not aspire to a change in paradigm. Rather, they aimed to correct deficiencies in Marx's critique of Hegel's philosophy. Habermas' theoretical innovations supplement Marx's category of labour and sought to clarify the variegated dimensions of human praxis. Like Marx's materialism, his early program is essentially practical in its construction, as well as in its criticisms of Hegel. Action frames the transition from consciousness to language, but communication appears as a form of action equivalent to labour in its importance for social reproduction. Culture and socialisation are primarily processes of communication and symbolically mediated behaviour. In Habermas' view, the moral composition of society derives from interaction rather than labour. He proposed a conception of the social as primarily deriving from the cultural interpretation of identity that underpins the institutional framework of society.

This symbolically generated identity is formative for the ideological legitimation of the social relations of domination. On this view, it is the nexus between domination and identity that has historically determined



the distribution of rewards and repression, rather than the dynamics internal to the processes of production. This conception likewise makes social struggles and subordinate classes' contestation attempts to actualise the normative substance of interpretations justifying institutions. These legitimations are normative to the extent that they claim that the existing arrangement of society is fairly ordered. However, these same interpretations of the identity of a society typically justify the repression, as well as the suffering, that the relations of domination entail. The psychoanalytic dimension of knowledge constitutive interests suggested a way of broaching the complications posed by this duality of identity, yet it was difficult to reconcile with the more linear conceptions of rationality that structure Habermas' program.

The idea of rationalisation informing knowledge constitutive interests' view of historical development meant that Habermas initially clarified the most general conditions of social organisation through examining a scientific research community's cooperative activity. In particular, he did this by elucidating the establishment of a common agreement among participants. The processes of communication that structure inquiry lend the scientific research community a social dimension distinct from, and irreducible to, the 'technical' procedures of inquiry into objective reality. What the research community holds to be true has an intersubjective form and depends upon mutual understanding. Scientific research constituted a type of analogy for how the institutional framework of society coordinates through symbolically mediated action the technical processes of the appropriation of nature and normatively justifies the distribution of the accumulated surplus. For Habermas, this parallel is a critical one. It breaks down, however, precisely because in class divided societies there has never historically been a genuine consensus over the institutional framework of society. Now, while an authentic consensus requires domination free communication, the legitimation of extant social institutions operates through a systematic distortion of meaning.

Despite the limitations of a scientific self-understanding, Freud's theory represented a methodological model for overcoming ideology

and it supplied several clues as to how to recognise a socially institutionalised deceptive consensus. In this way, psychoanalytic social theory complemented Marx's insights into the mechanisms of exploitation and class struggle. Habermas' reading of Freud is exceptionally social: psychoanalysis is portrayed as a theory of communication. This reading relies on there being a connection between individual pathology and the exclusion of needs from public communication. Drawing an analogy or a parallel between individual experience and the historical development of society, Habermas claimed that the social repression of autonomy takes a somewhat similar ideological form. Even though he turned later to different approaches in psychological theory, this parallel between ontogenesis and phylogenesis remains critical to his subsequent *reconstruction of historical materialism* and discourse ethic.<sup>220</sup> These later works however forego the central contention of knowledge constitutive interests concerning its determination by the historical reflection of the subject in the process of its self-formation.

### **6. Habermas' Distancing from the Philosophy of Praxis: A Revised Program**

The basic design of Habermas' theory exhibits a general continuity from the early seventies onwards.<sup>221</sup> The new themes that emerge and the changes that are made do not significantly alter the theory's foundation. For this reason, these later changes differ from the substantial modifications that ensue from Habermas' excision of key dimensions of his early program. These revisions diminish precisely those dimensions of knowledge constitutive interests that connected it to the philosophy of praxis conception of the constitution of the social. Despite various retractions, Habermas subsequently still sought to formulate a conceptual

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220 Jürgen Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1979; Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge, Mass MIT Press, 1990).

221 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*; Simon Susen, *The Foundations of the Social: Between Critical Theory and Reflexive Sociology*, (Oxford: The Bardwell Press, 2007).

intersection equivalent to that between the subject and history.<sup>222</sup> A linkage between individual competences and social development is meant to supersede the earlier praxis philosophical understanding of the social nexus. Underlying this alternate linkage is a substantial change in the categories of the subject and history. It evidences a significant problematising of their previously unchallenged position as the fundamental organising categories of critical theory. Indeed, the two primary frameworks combined in Habermas' new mode of addressing the nexus, seen within the praxis perspective as constitutive of the social, each involve a decentring of the subject and history: the formal pragmatic theory of linguistic communication and sociological systems theory. Habermas originally sought to retain Hegel's dynamic phenomenological sense of the historical process, whereas the later conception of the social nexus involves a rather rigid and inflexible vision of historical development.<sup>223</sup>

Habermas' early program did contain a forerunner of his later approach to the social. A correspondence between stages in the historical development of the species and language deformations giving cultural expression to the pathologies of domination was sketched in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Some of this proposal's intuitions were developed later in an account of the 'structural violence' of 'historical forms of understanding'.<sup>224</sup> However, well before this, he recognised that the critique of systematically distorted communication presupposes a model of undistorted communication. Psychoanalysis undoubtedly requires a similar supposition concerning the autonomy of the subject, but critics had pointed to the potentially authoritarian and undemocratic implications of extrapolating a general model of emancipation from the analytic con-

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222 Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*

223 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*; Johann Pall Arnason, "Review of J. Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion Des Historischen Materialismus*", *Telos* 39, 1979, 201-218; Johann Pall Arnason, "Universal Pragmatics and Historical Materialism", *Acta Sociologica* 25, 1982, 219-233.

224 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*, 185-197; Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 283-289.

text.<sup>225</sup> These critics argued that communication between political participants should be symmetrical, unlike the asymmetrical relationship between therapist and patient. Habermas did not really resist the changes that these criticisms suggested were necessary.<sup>226</sup> One of his original motives in introducing the category of communicative action was rectifying the undemocratic features of Marxism's highly consequential conjoining of theory and practice. Nevertheless, the displacement of psychoanalysis is an important part of a broad array of changes that undo the connections between the subject and history which had determined the complexion of knowledge constitutive interests. Despite these changes, Habermas' theory remained organised around the core problem of the mediating of the universal and the particular.<sup>227</sup>

The modification of the psychoanalytic dimension led to Habermas' merging the interest in emancipation with the moral-practical dimension of mutual understanding.<sup>228</sup> These revisions meant that the connections that mutual understanding had to overcoming domination needed to be established on a different basis. Namely, the emancipatory interest in autonomy originally anticipated the furtherance of the subject's self-formative process. The orientation towards mutual understanding was internally connected to the interest in autonomy by way of the argument that historical-hermeneutic inquiry utilises an *anticipatory projection* in understanding the part in terms of the whole. This projection was necessary in order to avoid historical relativism and it was linked to a systematic history of the subject's self-formation. Further, the interest in emancipation opposed pathological determination of the subject by repressive modes of socialisation and the ideological distortions to communication that are conditioned by relations of domination. In this way, struggles for

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225 Hans Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Anthony Giddens, *Studies in Social and Political Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1977), 135-164.

226 Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: the Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 481.

227 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

228 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 238.

social change are accorded a significant position in knowledge constitutive interests, as *a transformative process appeared the precondition of genuine understanding*. Habermas theory's relinquishing the separate category of emancipation then marks a significant departure. Social conflict and struggles opposing domination have a more ancillary status in his later conceptions of communicative rationalisation and social evolution.<sup>229</sup>

The implications of the decisions Habermas made in overhauling his theory are, of course, easier to gauge in retrospect. These changes consolidated those dimensions of his early works that pointed to grounding a substantive social theory in communicative action and mutual understanding.<sup>230</sup> Indeed, systematically elaborating a formal pragmatic theory of communicative competence immediately took precedence and the critique of ideology was relegated to the background of Habermas' approach.<sup>231</sup> In one sense, this task was closer to the demands of 'traditional theory': that is, of establishing a general truth that is not conditional on a future transformative practice.<sup>232</sup> It was motivated by the contention that the normative foundations of critique needed to be revised. Habermas was explicitly moving away from the Hegelian-Marxist model of 'immanent critique' and its residual ties to the suppositions of a philosophy of history.<sup>233</sup> Habermas considered critical theory to be in need of independent normative foundations and this consideration explains the significance that he attached to explicating the rational structure of communicative action. This explication represented a formalising of his core intuition of the communicative mediation of the universal and particular in the formation and enacting of a rational identity.<sup>234</sup>

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229 Arnason, "Modernity as Project and as Field of Tensions"; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*; Honneth, and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*.

230 Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences*, xiii-xiv

231 Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*.

232 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 481, 494-497.

233 Craig Browne 'The End of Immanent Critique?' *European Journal of Social Theory* (Volume 11, issue 1 2008), 5-24.

234 Jürgen Habermas, "On Social Identity", *Telos* 19, 1974, 91-103.

The problem of establishing normative foundations can be viewed as either replacing or complementing the former central problem of the lack of a suitable epistemology, however, inadequate normative grounding was now seen as the fundamental deficiency of the Marxist tradition. The precedence given to rectifying the normative foundations of critique was not without potential drawbacks from the standpoint of social theory, as other theoretical revisions had to be consistent with the normative principles derived from the communicative processes of reaching mutual understanding.<sup>235</sup> For example, concepts of social action had to be tailored to the normative model of consensual agreement. The limitations of Habermas' later account of domination can be partly traced to how this tailoring excluded a more nuanced conception of power.<sup>236</sup> Similarly, the effects of this tailoring can be seen in how his later definition of social action excludes a range of practices and experiences that were integral to the philosophy of praxis, like those of the creative and expressive forms of action.<sup>237</sup> Habermas, naturally, does not see it this way; he considers that such tailoring is a metatheoretical decision. He justifies it in an almost transcendental manner. The orientation of communicative action towards agreement is not a choice, he argues, at the disposition of subjects. Rather, it is built into the structure of language.<sup>238</sup>

From the beginning, there were tensions between the different segments of Habermas' theory. It is certainly the case that the subsequent choices between alternatives present in his early program influenced the

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235 John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics: a Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John Thompson, "Universal Pragmatics", in *Habermas: Critical Debates* ed. J. B. Thompson and D. Held (eds) (London: Macmillan, 1982), 116-133.

236 Anthony Giddens, "Labour and Interaction", in John B. Thompson and David Held *Habermas: Critical Debates* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 149-161; Honneth, *The Critique of Power*.

237 Habermas, "A Reply"; Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*.

238 Jürgen Habermas, "A Reply to My Critics", in) *Habermas: Critical Debates*, ed. John B. Thompson and David Held (London: Macmillan, 1982), 227, 219-283; Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, 177; Susen, *The Foundations of the Social*.

complexion of his later theory of socio-cultural evolution.<sup>239</sup> The discrepancy between Habermas' usages of the category of totality in the 'positivist dispute' has often been highlighted.<sup>240</sup> In his first contribution, totality is the most prominent category he employs, being presented as central to the distinctive dialectical logic of Adorno's critique of positivist philosophy.<sup>241</sup> But in his second contribution the category of totality occupies only a subordinate position, referring there to the general hermeneutic background of inquiry.<sup>242</sup> This downgrading of totality is seen as a precursor of subsequent changes and signals Habermas' general drift away from Hegel's socio-historical approach to one that owes more to Kant's formal-transcendental perspective.<sup>243</sup> In any event, Habermas' conception of the significance of intersubjective communication moderated his version of Hegelian-Marxist social theory from the outset. Whilst it is true that Kant's critiques appear the primary inspiration of the epistemological division of knowledge constitutive interests, he considered, as we have emphasised, that an intersubjective notion of the historical subject could be derived from Hegel's *Jena* interpretation of the struggle for recognition.<sup>244</sup> These *Jena* sketches of labour and interaction intimate at a possible 'materialist phenomenology of mind', as Spirit was first conceived there as constituted through the practical media serving to interrelate subjects.

At the same time, Habermas criticised Hegel for superimposing the conceptual figures of alienation and appropriation, drawn from the externalisation and objectification model of the subject, upon the genuinely intersubjective categories of the *Jena* system of separation and reconcil-

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239 Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; Jürgen Habermas, "History and Evolution", *Telos* 39, 1979, 5-44; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*.

240 Outhwaite, "Generations of Critical Theory?"; Heller, "The Positivist Dispute as a Turning Point"; Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*.

241 Habermas, "The Analytical Theory of Science and Dialectics" ..

242 Habermas, "A Positivistically Bisected Rationalism".

243 David M. Rasmussen, *Reading Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1990); Jay, *Marxism and Totality*.

244 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*.

iation.<sup>245</sup> Now, the tension between his underscoring the intersubjective structure of language and the 'idealistic' motif of the reflection of a unitary collective subject is then particularly significant for the later revisions. Habermas had, to be sure, delimited the Hegelian conception of a unitary collective subject in rejecting any reconciliation with nature, but it still substantially informed his vision of the historical process. Honneth and Joas observe that up to this point Habermas "understood history as a universal process in which the human species constitutes itself as the subject of world history in instrumental and interactive education processes".<sup>246</sup>

Habermas' break with the idea of a unitary collective subject is perhaps the most decisive change from his early program. At least, this shift would appear decisive in light of the applicability of his later criticisms of the philosophy of praxis to this dimension of his early theory.<sup>247</sup> The idea of a higher level supra-individual subject, which was expressed in such figures of thought as those of the history of the species and the completion of the subject's self-formative process, specified conditions of historical progress extending beyond those of the positivist understanding of rationalisation. Theunissen outlined just how integral the notion of an enlarged subject was to Habermas' entire construction of cognitive interests and why it cannot be portrayed as a consideration peripheral to its central contention that 'epistemology was possible only as social theory':

"Objective knowledge is made possible according to Habermas by knowledge-constitutive interests because they sublimate the spurious subjectivity of the individual in the intersubjectivity of the human species. While they may be transcendental achievements, these interests are nevertheless also empirical in origin because of the contingency of the human species. This is where the left-Hegelian revision of Kant comes out most clearly."<sup>248</sup>

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245 Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, 161-166.

246 Honneth, and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, 158.

247 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*.

248 Michael Theunissen, in Habermas, "Postscript", 380; Michael Theunissen



The notion of a collective subject reconciled the various details of Habermas' original program. Above all, the concept of emancipatory reflection was tied to the motif of the torsion of the subject. This motif signified the conflictual dimension of the self-constitution of the species. Since these notions of the subject's self-formation supplied direction as well as continuity to the historical process, changes in Habermas' conception of the subject altered the place of history in his theory. There are two further factors that considerably influenced the direction of these shifts and their effects are discernible in the replacement of the idea of a constituting species-subject. On the one hand, the idea of a collective subject in the singular is replaced by a conception of the social that is founded on the intersubjectivity of communication and this intersubjectivity of communication is now claimed to resist totalisation. On the other hand, Habermas would from now on consistently employ sociological systems theory categories to explicate supra-individual social developments. Habermas explained this revision in the following reflection:

“Since the collective subject of a meaning-constituted life-world, which is borrowed from transcendental philosophy, proves to be misleading at least in sociology, the concept of system recommends itself to us. Social systems are units that can solve objectively problems by means of suprasubjective learning processes.”<sup>249</sup>

The first of these modifications can be attributed to the conclusions that Habermas drew in the course of his debate with the systems theorist Niklas Luhmann.<sup>250</sup> After the positivist dispute, Habermas came to consider systems theory the most advanced ideological articulation of technocratic consciousness. Luhmann's reformulating the structural-functionalist idea of differentiation accentuates how the development

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“Society and History: A Critique of Critical Theory”, in *Habermas: a Critical Reader* ed. Peter Dews (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 259, 241-270.

249 Habermas in Honneth, and Joas, *Social Action and Human Nature*, 159.

250 Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*; Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*; McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*.

of social systems is a self-regulating process. This conception, in effect, challenged the most fundamental suppositions of Habermas' original epistemological program.<sup>251</sup> Luhmann argues that social differentiation is not reducible to the originating activity of a constituting subject, rather the differentiation of social systems is conditioned by the interchange they have with their environment. Systems may even be constitutive of subjects in some spheres, though they are not at the disposition of subjects. Since systems reduce the interchange problem of complexity by regulating their internal composition through processes of differentiating between inside and outside, the problem of complexity overarches the subject and there is no unifying centre to society that a collective subject could occupy. Habermas accepted the force of the systems theory critique of the subject, but contests Luhmann's version of this critique. One of the paradoxes, however, of his critical appropriation of systems theory is that Habermas overlooks some constructive alternatives contained in his early program and the major statement of his theory neglects many of the arguments of his original critique of systems theory.<sup>252</sup>

Honneth suggested that Habermas' early phase contains two competing versions of critique.<sup>253</sup> One founded on the idea of the struggle of subordinate groups against social relations of domination driving moral development. Hegel's concept of the struggle for recognition inspired this version of critique. The parallel with Hegel is evident in Habermas' supplementing labour with the intersubjective dimension of moral interaction. The second version, Honneth argues, deriving from the critique of technocracy later prevails. Habermas' subsequent readiness to incorporate systems theory categories reflects an acceptance of the social-his-

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251 Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Niklas Luhmann, *Social Systems* (California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

252 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*; Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*; Thomas McCarthy, "Complexity and Democracy, or The Seductions of Systems Theory", *New German Critique* (45, 1985), 27-53.

253 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*.

torical diagnosis of the technocracy thesis. He differs from its systems theoretical proponents in connecting this thesis to an emergent technocratic form of domination. It will be suggested later that developing the notion of the dialectic of control enables these two competing versions of critique to be reconciled and for each variant of critique to be enhanced. Nevertheless, the notion that was first formulated under the influence of the technocracy thesis that there is an increasing self-determination of systems of purposive-rational action shapes, in Honneth's opinion, Habermas' entire conceptualisation of social conflicts and pathologies:

“Thus the same process that the technocracy thesis describes affirmatively is presented as a process of the draining off of communicatively achieved relations of life through purposive-rationally determined action accomplishments, through a ‘dominance of technology’. Habermas’ theory is so deeply shaped by this experience that it appears in the background of all other crisis phenomena and current problems”.<sup>254</sup>

The linguistic theory modifications to the notion of a collective subject are critical to Habermas' ascertaining the limits of systems theory. He has remarked upon how these changes were influenced by his increasing appreciation of the thoroughly intersubjective structure of language. This appreciation preceded his encounter with Luhmann and was mediated through his reflections on the work of Wittgenstein.<sup>255</sup> It led initially to a theory of communicative competence and the complementary, though often misunderstood, concept of the ‘ideal speech situation’.<sup>256</sup> The ide-

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254 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, 266.

255 Jay, *Marxism and Totality*, 471 note 38.

256 William Outhwaite comments: “It is clear enough that Habermas never intended the ideal speech situation to be understood as a concrete utopia which would turn the world into a gigantic seminar. He has sometimes compared it to what Kant called a transcendental illusion, involving the extension of the categories of the understanding beyond the limits of experience, but with the difference that this illusion is also ‘a constitutive condition of the possibility of speech’. But the terminology of preconditions is notoriously slippery, and Habermas has repeatedly slid between different formulations. There is,

al speech situation signified the normative dimension of the concept of 'reaching understanding'; but it was initially connected to Habermas' separating the question of the genesis of knowledge from that of the validity of knowledge in response to criticisms of cognitive interests.<sup>257</sup> This seemingly minor revision is representative of a much more fundamental change in perspective. Those tensions intrinsic to the category of *interest*, reflecting its responding to considerations of the philosophy of praxis, disappear in this separation of experience and discourse.

From that point on, Habermas distinguishes the normative model of the subject's reflective insight from reconstructive inquiry into subjects' competences.<sup>258</sup> He earlier elided this difference between reflection and reconstruction. This was arguably because it entwined the synthetic design of knowledge constitutive interests and importantly underpinned the continuity it drew between theory and practice. A lack of a 'precise distinction' between these two senses of reflection was, in his opinion, not unique to *Knowledge and Human Interests*:

"It occurred to me only after completing the book that the traditional use of the term 'reflexion', which goes back to German Idealism, covers (and confuses) two things: on the one hand, it denotes the reflexion upon the conditions of potential abilities of a knowing, speaking and acting subjects as such; on the other hand, it denotes the reflexion upon unconsciously produced constraints to which a determinate subject (or a determinate

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however, a fairly clear movement in his thinking towards stressing the virtual and ideal aspects; whatever 'our first sentence' commits us to cannot, it seems be spelled out very precisely, and the constraint is less a strictly logical one than that identified in the notion of 'performative contradiction'. The emphasis therefore shifts, rightly in my view, from a fruitless search for precise entailments and commitments to a broader account of communicative action in general, and moral reasoning in particular." William Outhwaite, *Habermas: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 45.

257 Habermas, "Postscript", 360-376.

258 Habermas, "Postscript", in *Habermas and Modernity* ed. Richard Bernstein (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985) pp. 35-66.

group of subjects, or a determinate species subject) succumbs in its process of self-formation."<sup>259</sup>

From this point on the intersection between historical development and the competences of subjects displaces praxis philosophy's conception of the social nexus. Before this Habermas critically drew attention to Dilthey's reference to 'systemic cultural sciences' and to how their approaches extend beyond Dilthey's historical-hermeneutic methodology. Habermas suggested that they "develop general theories about sectors of social life that are distinguished by constant structural relations and have the character of systems".<sup>260</sup> He made a variation of this line of argument a central element in his criticism of Gadamer's hermeneutics. Yet it was not a simple continuation of his earlier claim that the critique of ideology in the social sciences incorporates nomological explanations. Rather, Habermas now drew a contrast between the systematic inquiry into linguistic competences and the hermeneutic concern with communicative experience.<sup>261</sup> This contrast basically overlaps the distinction between reconstruction and reflection. Despite the criticisms of his early interpretation of psychoanalysis' formal quality, the methodology of reconstruction has a certain parallel with analytic procedures. Namely, a reconstruction of linguistic competences is not limited to the hermeneutic explication of meaning; it is a type of inquiry concerned with the underlying rules of linguistic communication. Since these rules are universal in being followed by all linguistically competent subjects, their rational reconstruction is somewhat similar to a transcendental analysis. A rational reconstruction explicates the necessary and general, rather than the contingent and circumstantial, conditions of communication.

Rational reconstructions of competences differ though from transcendental analyses in being largely empirical inquiries into subject's implicit

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259 Habermas, "Postscript", 377.

260 Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, 184.

261 Jürgen Habermas, "On Hermeneutics' Claim to Universality", in *The Hermeneutics Reader*, ed. Kurt Muller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1988).

knowledge and intuitively held abilities. Habermas argues that communicative competence entails not just mastery of grammatical and semantic rules, but also the pragmatics of 'action oriented to reaching understanding'.<sup>262</sup> Communicative action involves abilities which could only be acquired through socialisation and these abilities are learned within a specific socio-cultural context. A potential tension therefore exists between, on the one hand, his understanding of the conditions of subjects' acquisition and application of competences, and, on the other hand, his argument, originally intended to disclose the limitations of hermeneutics, that the underlying rules of linguistic communication condition historically specific forms of understanding. This tension is never completely eliminated. But it is somewhat obviated through a theory of evolutionary development and socio-cultural rationalisation.<sup>263</sup> By these means Habermas attempted to demonstrate the mutually reinforcing processes of historical development and the formation of individual competences. Nevertheless, this conception of their interconnections is constitutive of a social nexus that can only be rationalised.<sup>264</sup> Habermas envisages historical development eventuating in the communicative constitution of social relations becoming increasingly transparent and subject to the universalistic principles of discourse. This is really the only sense in which his later theory can conceive of the social nexus becoming open to the possibility of being creatively redefined.

None of these revisions inevitably entails a distancing from the intentions and perspective of the philosophy of praxis, excepting the specifically rejected version of a philosophy of history. Their cumulative effect, however, is a considerable distancing. Habermas believes that his later theory preserves the intentions of the Marxian philosophy of

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262 Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*.

263 Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*; Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*.

264 Arnason, "Review of J. Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion Des Historischen Materialismus*"; Arnason, "Universal Pragmatics and Historical Materialism"; Browne, "The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction".

praxis, yet such revisions lead to positions which militate against their retrieval. They result in a rather different type of theory. One whose orientation and justification is less dependent on the intersection of theory and practice. In various ways, informed and sympathetic commentators responded to the problems ensuing from this separation from practice. McCarthy and Bernstein, for instance, each drew attention to the significance of Habermas' shift from a more practical-contextual approach to the abstract theoretical design of the program of 'reconstructive science'. The latter appeared particularly distant from the motivations of agents' practices and it may even be resistant to translation into the context of social struggles.<sup>265</sup> Bernstein suggested that Habermas' later theory needs to be 'detranscendentalised' in order to regain the practical orientation of critical theory. He argued that a translation between theory and practice could be accomplished through a more 'interpretative dialectic'.<sup>266</sup>

In a similar vein, McCarthy proposed that the connection to practice could be restored through a situated and specific contextual hermeneutic.<sup>267</sup> McCarthy believed that the emphatic theoretical turn of Habermas' reconstructive works gives the appearance of leading to a type of objectivism. There appears to be a lack of mediation between Habermas' theory's normative standards and the meaning of struggling actors' own standards of critique.<sup>268</sup> It therefore obscures and condemns to silence an essential component of political practice. Of course, this is contrary to the explicit aims of Habermas' entire project. The allegation often made of the 'abstract rationalism' of his theory of communicative action is indicative of a certain distance between critique and political practice.

The review of the decomposition of the social theory program of

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265 Alex Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), xiv.

266 Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 184-194.

267 McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, 353-357.

268 Axel Honneth, *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007); Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social*.

knowledge constitutive interest has shown that Habermas' revisions encompassed the key categories of the philosophy of praxis that were integral to the original programmatic model: practice, critique, history, the subject, and the social. These categories were recast in a manner that involves a distancing from the philosophy of praxis, even though Habermas claimed to have reformulated this approach in his later conception of the relationship between communicative action and the lifeworld.<sup>269</sup> Similarly, a range of ancillary categories were modified and recede into the background, including those of social struggle and, in some respects, historical reflection. The subsequent deployments of rational reconstruction explicitly disavow the praxis philosophy nexus of the intersection of the subject and history.<sup>270</sup> Moreover, the depth of these revisions explains how Habermas reached a point at which he could play off the difference between the Frankfurt School tradition of critical theory and the Neo-Marxian tradition of philosophy of praxis.<sup>271</sup>

A further downside of these changes is that the genuine complications that the original program sought to take into account, like the ambivalence highlighted by psychoanalysis and the problem of the interest in autonomy having to presuppose itself, are displaced by conceptions that are less open to the criticisms that ensue from engaging with difficult considerations. The later reliance on communicative rationality is not equivalent to the social theory of cognitive interests - no matter how valid and substantial communicative rationality's contribution to critical theory's normative justification and discourse theory of justice and democracy. The deficiencies of Habermas' formulation of the technical interest guiding labour meant that it could not be expanded upon in a similar manner to that of communicative action. In other words, the divergence from the Marxian paradigm of production was anticipated in

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269 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*; Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

270 Jürgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).

271 Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 75-76.



knowledge constitutive interests' juxtaposition of the normative and the technical. The intersubjective complex of Marx's paradigm of production, according to György Markus, meant that it incorporated both the technical-instrumental facets of production and the normative rules that are formative of production's structure and unfolding processes.<sup>272</sup> The limitations of Habermas' conception of labour resulted in his subsequent reconstruction of historical materialism's discarding without any sustained argument "a whole complex of analytical distinctions, the main outlines of which were traced by Marx" concerning production.<sup>273</sup> At the same time, the delimited conception meant that the most innovative feature of Habermas' *reconstruction* is its conceptualising the social relations of production as relations of communication.<sup>274</sup>

It has been suggested that the notion of the dialectic of control, which is only intimated at by Habermas, could rectify this deficiency through combining the technical and the practical interests without analytically collapsing them together. The ideological dynamic in late capitalism of the technical interest eroding the moral practical interest can be better understood by way of the insights that the dialectic of control provides into the power of objectifying social interaction and the resistance to the ensuing alienating experience of the subject of interaction being treated as an object.<sup>275</sup> The normative interest in autonomy is built into the notion of the dialectic of control, because it is intrinsic to the struggles of subordinate groups against the dominant. The perspective of the dialectic of control is then an alternative to the division that Honneth presented between Habermas' predominant critique of the technocracy thesis and the

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272 Márkus, *Language and Production*; John Grumley, "Marx and the Philosophy of the Subject: Markus contra Habermas", *Thesis Eleven* 28, 1991: 52-69; John Grumley, "Two Views of the Paradigm of Production", *Praxis International* 12: 1992, 181-204.

273 Arnason, "Review of J. Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion Des Historischen Materialismus*", 207.

274 Browne, "The Antinomies of Habermas' Reconstruction"; Habermas, *Communication and the Evolution of Society*.

275 Browne, *Critical Social Theory*; Giddens, *Profiles and Critiques*.

subordinated critique deriving from the struggle for recognition.<sup>276</sup> The notion of the dialectic of control could retain each of these two versions of critique and likewise better integrate them. It enables an internal, as well as external critique, of capitalist social relations of production and bureaucratic domination, as well as of the quasi-functionalist reasoning of sociological systems theory.<sup>277</sup>

The perspective of the dialectic of control challenges the more linear and straightforward conception of the rationalisation of technical control, because it treats conflict as integral to the process of rationalisation, especially influencing the direction of rationalisation and the effects of opposition to the modalities of domination. It is integral in some instances precisely because rationalisation is an outcome of dominant groups and established institutions' attempts to become independent of the dialectic of control, that is, to become independent of the limited, to be sure, power and agency of subordinate groups to affect the dominant in interdependent social relations and social systems. The dialectic of control overlaps that of the struggle for recognition but rectifies the latter's extant social theory conceptualisation.<sup>278</sup> Habermas' core intuition concerning the intersubjective constitution of identity significantly influenced Honneth's subsequent reformulation of critical theory in terms of the struggle for recognition and social freedom.<sup>279</sup> If Fraser's assessment that Honneth's conception is principally concerned with identity is correct, then, the dialectic of control represents a complementary notion that can correct the limitations of the struggle for recognition framework with respect to power, material production and distribution.<sup>280</sup>

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276 Honneth, *The Critique of Power*; Browne, 'The Antinomies of the Modern Imaginary and the Double Dialectic of Control'.

277 Browne, *Critical Social Theory*.

278 Browne, *Critical Social Theory*.

279 Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*; Axel Honneth, *Freedom's Right – The Social Foundations of Democratic Life*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

280 Nancy Fraser, 'Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation', in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, (London: Verso, 2003,

The notion of the dialectic of control has to be conceptualised from the perspective of social practices, since the dynamics of social struggles and resistance cannot be simply inferred from structural injustices and domination. It is concerned with the dynamics of enacting competences and not simply their possession. Knowledge constitutive interests differed in its differentiation and separation of types of practices from the typical conceptions of praxis philosophy. The synthetic approach of praxis philosophy seeks to overcome divisions, including those of action-orientations, and this leads to an integrated image of praxis. Similarly, Habermas came to consider that the intersubjective theory of language and the organisation of social systems undermined notions of collective subjectivity. While the notion of the history of the species was always only a projection of a collective subjectivity, the dynamics of the dialectic of control show that some conception of collective subjectivity is required to grasp social mobilisations and contestations that transcend the individual, as well as the counter-resistance to these emancipatory struggles.<sup>281</sup> In fact, it is important to grasp *the double dialectic of control* involving the power of progressive political parties, trade union associations, and different social movements' hierarchies, in relation to the larger emancipatory movements contesting domination.<sup>282</sup>

The program of knowledge constitutive interests is a significant 'switching point', to borrow a metaphor from Weber, in social theory. Its connections to the preceding Frankfurt School critical social theory are apparent in various ways: the synthesis of Marxism and psychoanal-

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7-109; Nancy Fraser, "Distorted Beyond Recognition" in Fraser and Honneth *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, 198-236; Browne, *Critical Social Theory*.

281 Jose Maurício Domingues, *Sociological Theory and Collective Subjectivity*, (London: Macmillan, 1995); Jose Maurício Domingues, *Social Creativity, Collective Subjectivity and Contemporary Modernity*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press 2000); Jose Maurício Domingues, *Modernity Reconstructed*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2006).

282 Craig Browne, 'The Antinomies of the Modern Imaginary and the Double Dialectic of Control', *Thesis Eleven*, 2020 forthcoming; Browne, "The Problem of Hierarchy".

ysis, the critique of positivism, and the reformulation of the problem of identity. It is equally a precipitator and precursor of major programmatic turns in social theory. For Habermas' subsequent theory, the most consequential initiative is, of course, the 'linguistic turn'. Habermas' revisions extend this dimension of his original program to the point of a supposed change in philosophical paradigm. In his opinion, it is a shift from the philosophy of consciousness and subject-centred reason to that of the intersubjective paradigm of communication and mutual understanding.<sup>283</sup>

Although the change to the paradigm of understanding overshadows it, the anchoring of cognitive interests in practical orientations to the world forms part of the transition in social theory from the philosophy of praxis to the sociology of practice.<sup>284</sup> Like Habermas, the key initial contributors to the 'practical turn' in social theory were originally concerned by the critique of ideology and similarly sought to develop alternatives to the conception of theory inherited from the traditional philosophy of contemplation.<sup>285</sup> The original program of knowledge constitutive interests remains important in this context, because the more recent elaborations of the 'practical turn' have diluted some of the original normative and critical intentions that it inherited from the philosophy of praxis.<sup>286</sup>

The linguistic turn and the practice turn share a common inspiration in North American pragmatist philosophy. The significance of Peirce's pragmatist conception of the logic of inquiry to knowledge constitutive interests was highlighted. Likewise, the influence of pragmatism more

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283 Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action Volume 1*.

284 Browne, 'From the Philosophy of Praxis to the Sociology of Practice'; Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*.

285 Browne, 'From the Philosophy of Praxis to the Sociology of Practice'; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000); Susen, *The Foundations of the Social*; Simon Susen, "Bourdieuian Reflections on Language: Unavoidable Conditions of the Real Speech Situation" *Social Epistemology*, 27 (3-4): 2013, 199-246.

286 Browne, 'From the Philosophy of Praxis to the Sociology of Practice'; Arnsperg, "Praxis and Action".

broadly upon Habermas' theory of democracy was recognised to be of enduring importance. In short, knowledge constitutive interests contributed immensely to the contemporary revival of pragmatism. At the same time, it does look in retrospect like it failed to fully do justice to philosophical pragmatism. The already noted equating of Peirce's epistemology with the technical cognitive interest is indicative of this limitation. Even though the pragmatism of George Herbert Mead provided the most substantial prior articulation of Habermas' core intuition of the communicative mediation of the universal and the particular in a rational identity, Habermas' theory marginalises themes that were central to pragmatism, like the problem of contingency, the creativity of action, the significance of the temporal and spatial, the role of imagination, the importance of the body and experience.<sup>287</sup> This is not to deny the significance of Habermas' theoretical development of pragmatist notions of democracy and learning. Rather, it suggests that initiatives that seek to expand upon these pragmatist suppositions should take as their starting point the intentions of knowledge constitutive interests, rather than Habermas' later reworkings of pragmatism. The original program contained a greater sense of the subsequently marginalised themes and it is possible to construct different syntheses out of its perspective, partly because of the tensions that we saw undermined it.

Critical theory contends that knowledge and truth are bound up with the historical process.<sup>288</sup> It is worth mentioning some of the ways in which this bears upon the core thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory in light of subsequent developments. Without either reiterating the general arguments that I have developed elsewhere<sup>289</sup> or referring to Habermas' incredible range of relevant contributions, the most obvious considerations that result from the internal construction of

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287 Browne, *Habermas and Giddens*.

288 Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory: Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1995.

289 Browne, *Critical Social Theory*; Alejandro Bialakowsky, "Browne's immanent critique of the perspectives of Habermas and Giddens: philosophy of praxis, contemporary modernity and social classifications", *Global Intellectual History*, (2018), 1-17.

knowledge constitutive interests are: first, that of the notion of the 'institutional framework of society'. It by no means refers to a 'national' society *per se*, but there is no sense in knowledge constitutive interests of the divisions in a transnational order, even though this is something readily recognised by Habermas. The 'interest of the species' is a philosophical anthropological projection that nevertheless needs to be finessed. Even satisfying the knowledge constitutive interests needs to take-into-account the different cultural 'orientations to the world' to a greater extent than is suggested by the program's arguments and perspective.

In a similar vein, second, the formulation of the technical interest guiding natural scientific inquiry and associated with the practice of labour needs to be rethought in light of the ecological crisis. Habermas' position was that the developments ensuing from the technical interest should be externally constrained and regulated by the norms and values that derive their institutionalisation from the other two interests: moral-practical and critical-emancipatory. This balancing of social developments ensuing from the different interests remains, no doubt, necessary, but it hardly seems sufficient. A transforming of practices internal to the technical interest would seem to be required and the depiction of the technical interest probably impedes this more than facilitates it. In any event, the already emphasized weaknesses of Habermas' under-socialised conception of labour warrants its revision.

It could be argued, third, that to sustain the notion that the critique of ideology is basic to epistemology is more difficult and complicated today. Now, this is not simply because the notion of ideology is simply less prominent in social science discussions and that Habermas was right in some respects to recognise that this category's justifications had become suspect. Yet, the real problem is that ideology has become more invisible and effective. The technocratic and positivist ideology still exists today. In fact, they have insinuated themselves into the texture of forms of life in ways that are less recognised. Similarly, Habermas only had some intimation of how the new spirit of capitalism would reflexively draw, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, upon strands of the critique

of technocratic ideology and bureaucratic organized capitalism.<sup>290</sup> These remarks are sufficient to indicate why Habermas' early framing of the critique of ideology needs to be rethought, whilst some of the categories of this ideology-critique deriving from psychoanalysis that were subsequently marginalised are relevant to this rethinking.

There are, fourth, those facets of the original program that remain superior in their intentions to those that have guided the parallel subsequent social theory initiatives. Even so, this is not a matter of simple re-statement, because the relative diminutions of more recent initiatives are connected to the broader processes of social regression. If we follow the perspective of the dialectic of control, then, these regressions are partly the outcome of the contestation and counter-resistance to the preceding social progress, such as in relation to citizenship rights and the subordination of women. The regression is not only a result of reactionary political mobilisations; it has deeper sources in the persistent contradictions of capitalist society. For example, the critique of the reduction of the logic of science and reflection upon science to methodology is as relevant today as it was at the time of Habermas' original critical formulation. The difference is that after a period of contestation it is less recognised, partly because the reduction was associated with the positivist mentality that has been supposedly superseded.<sup>291</sup>

The interest in considering these kinds of questions from the perspective of social theory is by and large now thought of as somehow for specialists and something that would generate unnecessary complications. Of course, there are exceptions to this attitude, but the concealment of the need for social theory has partly come about by the 'moral-practical' development of the ethical regulation of scientific inquiry. The latter is in many respects positive and ethical regulation should, to be sure, point to the importance of a social theory perspective. The reason it may not

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290 Luc Boltanski, and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, (London: Verso, 2005); Craig Browne, 'Postmodernism, Ideology and Rationality', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* (Vol. Issue 1, 2010), 79-99.

291 Browne, 'Postmodernism, Ideology and Rationality'; Peter Wagner, *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

is, fifth, partly because the image of the social has changed and the application of ethical regulation is one instance of a more general tendency. There is regularly a mismatch between the structural dimensions of problems of contemporary capitalist society and the means, so to speak, that are proposed to address them. In fact, strands of contemporary social theory have contributed to this development. One can find parallels in the discrepancy between legitimate human rights demands and the kinds of structural dimensions of injustice that they are meant to address.<sup>292</sup>

The fact that Habermas' later theory has endorsed procedural conceptions of rationality and democracy may be another instance of this kind of mismatch. One related to a distancing from social theory in favour of normative political philosophy. There is no denying the importance of procedures, but a recognition of their insufficiency was evident in Habermas' critique of positivism's reduction of epistemology to methodology and therefore the following of procedures. The changed historical perspective on the social is stark. Knowledge constitutive interests belonged to a period when it was thought that the questions of philosophy could only be effectively addressed by social theory and that social theory was the most significant informant of reflexive practices intending the self-liberation of subjects from domination.<sup>293</sup>

### Conclusion

The program of knowledge constitutive interests remains one of the major attempts to justify the project of a critical theory of society. It simultaneously contains the nucleus of Habermas' later social theory and core presumptions that are subsequently disavowed. The nexus between the history and the subject is critical to its central thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory. Yet, the social theory that ensued from it

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292 Peter Wagner, *Modernity – Understanding the Present*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012); Peter Wagner. *Progress – a reconstruction*, (Cambridge Polity: Press, 2016).

293 Craig Browne, 'La théorie sociale comme projet et comme institution', *Sociologie* No. 1, Vol. 9: 2018, 73-90.



suffered from the limitations of its epistemological separation of interests. The diagnosis of technocratic ideology that informed the juxtaposition of the moral-practical and technical interests reflected the institution of organised capitalism, but which was coming under significant strain. The dominant trajectory of the ensuing social dynamic was contrary to knowledge constitutive interests' image of rational progress based on historical reflection informed by critique. Habermas subsequently tempered the critical theory conceptions of its participating in the historical process and that the veracity of critical social theory depended on a radical transformation of society. The problem of the normative justification of critical theory came to replace the critique of ideology as a major focus of his theory and the task of formulating a comprehensive theory of rationality was reframed. In a sense, knowledge constitutive interests' sketches of the mediation of the universal and the particular in intersubjective communication prefigure Habermas theory's replacement of the constituting subject by communicative rationality.

My analysis has shown how the original program of knowledge constitutive interests was shaped by the praxis philosophy *problematique* of the nexus between history and the subject. The various revisions that severed the links to praxis philosophy resulted in a social theory that was no longer open to many of the criticisms that derive from the dialectical logic associated with the praxis perspective and which manifested itself in subsequently retracted conceptions, like the integrity of the genesis and validity of knowledge, the epistemological synthesis of the other two interests in the interest in autonomy, and the interpretation modelled on immanent critique of anticipation driving the hermeneutic circle. Of course, the integrity of these dimensions of cognitive interests with dialectical logic was already under strain and, indeed, the only connection that unequivocally remained to it was the dialogical one of the intersubjective mediation of the universal and the particular in a rational identity. In fact, this conception of identity was already taken as the basis of the institutional framework of society in this social theory construction. It served as the measure for evaluating the format of class relations, the

condition of democratic control, the appropriate application of knowledge, and as the goal of overcoming intrapsychic conflicts due to repression and systematically distorted communication.

Habermas acknowledged that there are elements of this intersubjective conception of identity in Hegel's theory of the struggle for recognition. While it was possible to integrate this theory's sense of dynamic conflict into Habermas' original program's social theory, it would become more difficult later, especially owing to the critical appropriation of systems theory and the emphasis on the formal rationality of communication, the logic of development over developmental dynamics, and the seeming priority of moral and epistemological discursive consensus. My analysis pointed to how Castoriadis' theory of the social imaginary offered a way in which some broadly similar praxis philosophical considerations, with the exception of the Hegelian conception of historical progress, had been substantially reformulated. These considerations, particularly the contingency of practice, the ambivalence psychoanalysis disclosed, the full implications of the social constitution of knowledge, and the circularity of the institutional creation of autonomy, posed major difficulties for knowledge constitutive interests and were largely excised from Habermas' later theory. Castoriadis' elucidating of the imaginary shows that these considerations can be integral components of a theory of society. Similarly, I suggested that the notion of the dialectical of control constitutes a conceptual means for overcoming the deficiencies of Habermas' social theory and for retrieving some of the valid intentions of his original program. The dialectic of control enables the conceptions of rationalisation and social conflict to be combined, the alienation of the subordination of the practical interest to the technical interest to be better comprehended, and for the dynamic of contesting heteronomous interdependencies and projections of autonomy to be perceived as integral to the reproduction and transformation of society.<sup>294</sup>

Despite its problems, the program of knowledge constitutive interests stands at the intersection of modern social thought. The initiatives

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<sup>294</sup> Browne, *Critical Social Theory*.

that it prefigured and precipitated in social theory have not surpassed it. Rather, many of the most important questions knowledge constitutive interests sought to address remain outstanding. It is only by renewing knowledge constitutive interests' intentions that a clear view of these questions can be obtained. The enlarged horizon of understanding that the thesis that epistemology is possible only as social theory implies and the emancipatory reflection that it presupposes in relation to the institutional framework of existing society depend on processes of historical development. The course of historical development since the formulation of knowledge constitutive interests has justified elements of this program but contradicted its confidence in the redeeming power of reason and the future that it anticipated.

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## Notes on Jean Baudrillard and Critical Theory

*Chris Horrocks*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** These notes present some ways of connecting critical theory to each phase of Jean Baudrillard's developing problematic of the relation of subject and object formations. These figure in his transition from critical to fatal theory – from his critique of the subject of history to his extrapolation of the objective strategies that challenge “integral technological reality.” I identify them according to Baudrillard's writing primarily with the categories presented in critical thought as the proletariat, the masses and the mass media. These connect with themes of manipulation, emancipation, revolution, resistance, and with historical formations of subject-object relations based on a rejection of models of reification, alienation and commodity fetishism. I have focused mainly on Baudrillard's writings themselves to draw out the subject-object relations as they alter from power over the subject to the fatal strategies of the object. This parallels Baudrillard's increasing interest in the “destiny” of the object in his later writing. I then offer some less-known variants on the role of objective strategies he addresses in the final phase of his writing in relation to ‘radical alterity’.

Jean Baudrillard's thought is a challenge to critical theory because he sees its interaction with its object of criticism as problematic. If critical theory's traditional role is to identify existing social problems and foster social transformations, then his response is to articulate and question the character of this association in which a theory addresses and assumes representation of the object of its thought. Baudrillard's claim is that theory has become a mirror to the forces it symptomatizes and diagnoses. It is the investment in the *representation* of its object (class, labour, commodity fetishism, alienation) where this complicity lies. This is in keeping Baudrillard's project, which is in general an interrogation of signs of the real that generate, or exchange themselves for, (social) reality. It is the

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theoretical context for the exchange between critical theory and emerging articulations of state and economy in the social and cultural formations of state capitalism, and the integration of society in this order. If the problem of critical theory is one of representation, the transformations in the scale, structure and composition of its object amplify the challenges that face critical theory in accommodating this abstraction and differentiation under global hegemony.

With the rise of international multi-corporate capitalism, and the emerging dominance of the internet and global media networks, the role of critical theory becomes still more difficult to identify as the object of its critique becomes more abstract. This is not to say that many critics do not maintain the need for critical theory to recalibrate itself to this changing condition in advanced capitalism.<sup>2</sup>

Baudrillard's engagement with critical theory is oblique, and its adherents are not afforded detailed examination. It appears rather as a character in his general thesis on the role of theory and representation in relation to economics, society and culture. He subsumes critical theory under other labels ("critical thought", "theory") and his later aphoristic form of writing and interview "fragments" further disperses his earlier, more direct engagement with the problematic of theory, which had culminated in *The Mirror of Production*.

While not often explicitly identified in *The Mirror of Production*, Baudrillard addresses the assumptions of critical theory in relation to the historical and structural transformations of the commodity in the context of the Marxist analysis of political economy, and semiological analysis of economic exchange in commodity circulation and consumption. This challenge to Marx (and by extension critical theory) led back to his work on symbolic exchange and to his emphasis in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* on simulation and the precession of simulacra.

With the arrival of simulation as Baudrillard's dominant model, critical theory may be seen primarily in its emphasis on social theory in rela-

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2 Douglas Kellner, "Critical Theory Today: Revisiting the Classics." (accessed in <https://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell10.htm>)

tion to the problematic distinction he draws between “class” and “masses”. As Baudrillard’s employment of “fatal theory” and “theory-fiction” becomes the guiding principle of his engagement with theory, the role of metaphor and narrative in developing a type of representation and strategy for theory defines the final phase of Baudrillard’s project. I will address these two phases below, but first I will connect Baudrillard’s early writing on critical thought in relation to Frankfurt School theory, before addressing his critique of critique in relation to Marx.

### Baudrillard and the Theorist

Baudrillard’s critique of critical theory bears comparison with Horkheimer’s essay on the position of the theorist as well as the role of critical theory in relation to its subject-of-history, the proletariat. Horkheimer describes its experience and conditions as one shared with the figure of the critical theorist. He attempts to form a coherent and shared subject position for them, but is aware of the contradictions that beset this unification. In his version of the relation between the critical theoretician and society, the former passed judgment on eliminating the irrationality of society. But theoretician and theory are not mirrors to its object, “with thought then, as it were, recognizing its own reflection in the product of these forces.”<sup>3</sup> Rather, the subject who wants a new state of affairs and “better” reality also brings it forth; there is a relative objective detachment of the theorist. This critical separation requires the resolution of some contradictions: “It is the task of the critical theoretician to reduce the tension between his own insight and oppressed humanity in whose service he thinks.”<sup>4</sup> Critical theory, no longer the mirror that comprises traditional theory, and its subject, are yoked together in tension and subject to the same forces.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” *Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1982), 217.

4 Ibid.

5 Contrast this with Horkheimer’s conception of traditional theory, in which theories, “on the contrary, which are confirmed or disproved in the building of

Horkheimer's equation attempts to resolve the differences between their positions by identifying their mutuality, but recognises that critical theory contains in itself the specific means to alter the prevailing conditions: "If, however, the theoretician and his specific object are seen as forming a dynamic unity with the oppressed class, so that his presentation of societal contradictions is not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change, then his real function emerges."<sup>6</sup>

The role of theory is to resolve contradictions between its subject-position (the theorists, their experience, intellectual classes) and oppressed humanity in the face the increasing contradictions of the commodity economy. Leaving aside Horkheimer's analysis of the role of theory in relation to praxis, to move from diagnosis to intervention, we can observe critical theory's affiliation with the subject against the object, which here is the capitalist economy in general and the commodity in particular. It is here that Baudrillard's stance on critical theory and its objective and subjective status emerges. Recognition of his allegiance to its project appears in several readings, but one that most emphasises his connection to both critical theory and the role of the object arises in a psychoanalytic register. This is Charles Levin's account of Baudrillard's thought as nothing other than "an attempt to elaborate a theory of reification à la Lukacs, Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse - with a strong dose of Benjamin. The theory of reification is of course a story about a struggle between subjects and objects in which objects appear, if only temporarily, to have gained the upper hand."<sup>7</sup> Such misunderstood objects return to haunt the subject and spoil their experience. The role of the critical theorist in this perspective is to restore to the subject their

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machines, military organizations, even successful motion pictures, look to a clearly distinguishable consumer group, even when like theoretical physics they are pursued independently of any application or consist only in a joyous and virtuous playing with mathematical symbols; society proves its humanness by rewarding such activity." Horkheimer, 217.

6 Ibid. 215.

7 Charles Levin, "Jean Baudrillard, Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 15:1-3 (1991), 172.



freedom, by identifying the damaging and deceptive qualities of the object.

The phases of Baudrillard's thought determine different types of interaction or transaction between subjects and objects. The subject and object differ according to the theme he addresses and the scale at which he sets the involvement or operation between them. They are related to each other in keeping with Baudrillard's interest in terms of sign exchange and symbolic exchange. We can consider the exchange between subject and object as conducted in a field constitutive of relations that Baudrillard had critiqued as outmoded, chiefly the field of power and desire.

From his critique of political economy through his separation from Marxist thought in the mid-1970s there is a shifting conception of critical theory in Baudrillard's thought, characterized as a changing articulation between subject and object in terms of their dynamic relation.<sup>8</sup> They figure as constant poles in a developing analysis of their effects on each other in forms of exchange which he identifies and rejects as meaningful forces: power, desire, resistance and control. Baudrillard asserts that the action lies elsewhere, in seduction, fascination, indifference and fatality. He offers in his critique alternative types of exchange that are arranged under the themes of seduction, fatality, symbolic exchange and reversibility. In the books *Fatal Strategies*, and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* Baudrillard performs a transformation of the traditional subject of critical theory (for example, the proletariat) into an object (termed "the masses"), which as an object of political theory or media representation occupies a different relationship to the capacities of the subject to control, represent or account for it.

These changes take place according to his shifting emphasis from the role of the subject in critique, and the position of critical theory as the subject to its object (the social, the cultural and production), and to the

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8 It is tempting to locate Baudrillard's theory of the object with Adorno's "primacy of the object" over thought, and his non-identity thinking that shows the dependence of concepts on objects, and the irreducibility of objects to concepts. This would lose the non-dialectical force of Baudrillard's thought, from the perspective of symbolic exchange and death.

increasing centrality of the object. Where critical theory sided with the subject of history (for example the positive actions of the class subject) Baudrillard takes it as a relationship that founders once the subject it becomes problematic. This is compounded by his increasing interest, by the late 1970s, in what Gane termed “rather obscurely and inconsistently defined object-mass strategies of resistance [sic] (thus of resentment, though he rarely uses the term).”<sup>9</sup> These following four sections suggest how the critique in Baudrillard bears the traces of his major concerns of symbolic and sign-exchange as they appear in his writing over four decades.

### The Critical Mirror

Mark Poster argues that Baudrillard’s links to critical theory are forged then broken as capitalism shifts from market and entrepreneurial to monopoly and stage capitalism with the consumer society, scientific and technical organization of society. For him, Baudrillard’s developing analysis of consumption was initially “fully historical because it subordinated semiology to critical theory.”<sup>10</sup> Baudrillard’s semiological analysis revealed signification in a new phase of commodity production, and this offered “a new critical theory that captured the interdependence of technology and culture, production and symbolic exchange.”<sup>11</sup>

Baudrillard’s first major engagement with critical theory and its semiological turn appears in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, published in French in 1972. He attempts to tie the logic of commodity exchange to its circulation as a sign. Just as the commodity circulates with its use value or utility as its alibi, its sign-exchange value exploits its status as signifying form: “The object-become sign no longer gathers its meaning in the concrete relation between two people. It assumes its

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9 Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 139.

10 Mark Poster, “Technology and Culture in Habermas and Baudrillard”, *Contemporary Literature*, 22:4 (1981), 468.

11 Ibid.

meaning in the differential relation to other signs.”<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard’s critique of the commodity as sign-exchange form is built on the foundations he had established in *The System of Objects* (1968), which for Levin took from Lukacs the recognition that “the structure of commodity relations can be made to yield a model of all the objective forms of bourgeois society together with all the subjective forms corresponding to them.”<sup>13</sup>

In this context Baudrillard focused on the technical object and commodity of mass production and consumption, and he mirrors critical theory’s focus on the commodity as it constitutes, deforms and replaces social relations. If he can be said to be involved in the project of critical theory this is because he too is invested in an analysis of commodity form. Yet his reference frame differs in terms of the literature on which he draws, and certainly he refuses to adopt critical theory’s attempts to find alternative means to bring about positive social change.

Baudrillard’s critical theory has a trans-Atlantic bias; his references are mainly American popular academic writings on technology, marketing, advertising and product design: Lewis Mumford, Vance Packard, Ernst Dichter and David Riesman. Roland Barthes appears as the primary European theorist. His mirror here is one that intends to reflect onto subjective forms (in their integration in the system of objects) the regressive and limiting processes of technological organization and process: “Our technological civilization is no exception to the rule: techniques and objects therein suffer the same servitudes as human beings - and the process of material organization, hence of objective technical progress, is subject to exactly the same blocks, deviations and regressions as the concrete process of the socialization of human relationships, hence of objective social progress.”<sup>14</sup>

His emphasis on the penetration of the technical structure of the commodity form in abstract and concrete terms establishes him within the

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12 Jean Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (St. Louis, MO: Telos Press), 66.

13 György Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass., MIT Press, 1971), 83.

14 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 124.

field of critical theory but marks his differing methodological approach. This reference frame marks out his phenomenological, psychological and sociological interrogation of the technological environment and its object as a form of critical theory which occupies its territory but performs its work on the commodity as practical objects. These are “related to one or more structural elements, but at the same time they are all in perpetual flight from technical structure towards their secondary meanings, from the technological system towards a cultural system.”<sup>15</sup>

What begins to demarcate him clearly from critical theory is his publication *The Mirror of Production*, in which critical theory itself becomes an object of critique. He recognised that the circulation of signs is central to commodity exchange, with nothing left to be salvaged by the subject: the sign-object has its meaning already encoded, so that objects are detached from human involvement in their systematized self-referencing and the subject is excluded completely. His credentials as a critical theorist become strained when his critique of the political economy of the sign penetrates not only the commodity form, but also its prevailing Marxist critique.

Shifting the emphasis from labour and its divisions to the system of consumption, he extended his analysis beyond the interrogation of the object as commodity and unit of economic exchange to a signifier in a structure of sign exchange. In Baudrillard’s view the consumer object, indissoluble as a sign that exploited its use value as an alibi in order to ensure its circulation, also applied to Marx’s critique of capital. Baudrillard’s critique of the political economy of the sign placed Marx’s emphasis on labour in the same position as the function of utility: Marx’s critique relied on the signified of *homo economicus* and the ethos of labour as the reference point to elaborate his theories, in the same way that commodities circulated according to the alibi of their utility. Baudrillard seizes on Marx’s dialectical conception of labour, where Marx writes, “Labor is, in the first place, a process in which both man and nature participate,

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15 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), 8.

and in which man of his own accord start, regulates, and controls the material re-actions between himself and nature."<sup>16</sup> Baudrillard quotes Marcuse's contention that labour is grounded in "an essential excess of human existence beyond every possible situation in which it finds itself and the world."<sup>17</sup> And Marcuse's separation of play as a separate activity is for him an indication of an absolute idealism of labour in which "continuation, the sphere of play is merely the aesthetic sublimation of labour's constraints."<sup>18</sup> Play as non-work is a projection of the ideological ground of labour, and for Baudrillard there is an absurdity in asking subjects to pretend that under labour they are 'other' and that their deepest desire is to become themselves again. His opening remark, that the "critical theory of the mode of production does not touch the principle of production"<sup>19</sup> immediately consigns critical theory to a misrecognition of the object of critique.

It should be noted that the basis for Baudrillard's reading of Marx's political theory as a mirror of production is for some scholars based on misrecognition of Marx's methodology. Mackenzie criticises Baudrillard for among other things reading into Marx metaphysical assumptions and taking "dialectics for an antagonistic and jagged but essentially linear chain of causality."<sup>20</sup> For him, Baudrillard's critique is launched from received interpretations of Marx from mainly the 1960s and 1970s: "Baudrillard thus reads Marx through the lens of the disappointments of the Paris Spring of 1968."<sup>21</sup>

But while Baudrillard may view Marx through the events of May 1968, critical theory is now caught in a mirror game with labour, the commod-

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16 Karl Marx, *Capital* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House), Vol. 1, 42-43.

17 Herbert Marcuse, "On the Concept of Labor", *Telos* 16 (Summer 1973), 22.

18 Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 40.

19 Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 17.

20 Graham Mackenzie, 'Through a Glass, Darkly: Jean Baudrillard and the Mirror of Critical Theory' (accessed at [https://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fast-capitalism/12\\_1/Mackenzie-Through-Glass-Darkly.htm](https://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fast-capitalism/12_1/Mackenzie-Through-Glass-Darkly.htm))

21 Ibid.

ity form, and by extension, the field of consumption and the “culture industry”. The threat to critical theory is that it will not be able to accommodate itself to a critical horizon beyond what Baudrillard has identified as objects operating under the sign of production. These include commodity fetishism, alienation and reification, and the class formations under capitalism. They are signs not simply detached from history and reality, but generated from models and codes, and constitutive of new forms of subjective and objective interaction under what Baudrillard calls the third order of simulacra: simulation. Critics such as Douglas Kellner had asked for theories that “articulate both fragmentation and new forms of social structuration, that stress disorganization and reorganization”,<sup>22</sup> and Baudrillard delivers an analysis that not only articulates the object of theory in these terms, but eventually fragments theory itself as a strategy in the face of this dissolution. Before this, however, he has to bring his work on symbolic exchange and death, and on simulation, into alignment.

### Critical Sacrifice

Baudrillard stated that *The Mirror of Production* “was the break with Marx, with the emergence of symbolic exchange in prospect”<sup>23</sup> *Symbolic Exchange and Death* brought to the fore Baudrillard’s riposte to sign-exchange and the system of objects in mass consumption. If Baudrillard’s critique of Marx had aligned thought with the world in a complicit relationship that attached itself to the subject’s freedom to and from work (and emancipation), then this next step would detach from this critique of the subject-position and side with the challenge and reversibility of the object. Baudrillard drew on psychoanalysis, sociology and anthropology to do this, in “the intercalation here of themes from Freud, Durkheim and Mauss, at a key moment, precisely at the point in the argument when the analyses of the fetishism of, or need for, objects comes to the fore-

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22 Douglas Kellner, “Critical Theory Today: Revisiting the Classics.” (accessed in <https://www.uta.edu/huma/illuminations/kell10.htm>)

23 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 20.

ground.”<sup>24</sup> Baudrillard must salvage fetishism from his dismantling of Marx, but refashioned according to the theory of symbolic exchange.

Returning to Horkheimer’s portrait of the critical theory from the perspective of psychoanalysis and object-relations theory, Levin points to a separation from the theorist and critical theory in Baudrillard’s methodology. He calls this Baudrillard’s moment of “self-doubt in the act of critique.”<sup>25</sup> He notes Baudrillard’s self-denunciation as a critical theorist and doubt about critical theory. This observation signals the separation of Baudrillard from identification with critical theory, because he cannot maintain the fiction of the alienated subject in the face of the mystifying object. For Levin, in *The Mirror of Production* “this moment of doubt redeems the recalcitrant object, and that there is no salvation without the object.”<sup>26</sup> Levin suggests that critical theory expects so much from the subject that it can only explain away the damage by attributing fantastic, demonic power to the object. There is no possible resolution the death of the subject or the nihilating absorption of the object. “When critical theory is at its worst, what it wants, what it strives for, is a world without objects . . . Baudrillard’s critique of the sign tries to cut through all this metaphysics. Reification ceases to be a mystical veil, a trick of consciousness, an alienation of the subject’s power, the robbery of an essence, or a primitive projection based on ignorance. Instead it is a positive presence in its own right.”<sup>27</sup>

In psychoanalytical mode, Levin attributes to critical theory a depressive position, which would be reparative if it could “shift its attention away from all the bad things it wants to get rid of in the world, and onto the new things it wants to put into it.”<sup>28</sup> He concludes with the observation that Baudrillard has potentially opened up a transitional or

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24 Mike Gane, *Baudrillard: Critical and Fatal Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 81.

25 Charles Levin, “Jean Baudrillard, Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 15.1-3 (1991): 175.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid. 176.

28 Ibid. 181.

lived space, where the subject can engage with the object in a mode of reparation, of world-building. This for Levin is the ground of symbolic exchange.

However, what this reparative reading of ambivalent relations between subject and object in a shared space omits is the role of destruction in symbolic exchange. Baudrillard has not retrieved an object structure from behind the mystifying veil that critical theory has erected in order then to tear down. Nor is it a “positive presence”, autonomous in the face of the subject who deals with it in the social world. The Baudrillard-object is not located on a balance sheet of positive and negative affects. The object, in symbolic exchange, is one predicated on challenge, reversibility and death, with no resolution between it and the subject. In symbolic exchange the subject is not in a position to desire mastery over the object, but is open to being analysed by the object in a relation of reversibility.

There is a broader theoretical and historical context for this change of emphasis, which disrupts the basis for political economy and consequently arrests the activity of critical theory. This is through his reading of Mauss via Bataille, the latter proposing that useless expenditure challenges capital’s “restricted economy” and exchangeability.<sup>29</sup> Lotringer notes Baudrillard’s debt to Freud’s Death Instinct, and links it to historical circumstance. For Lotringer post-Fordist modes of labour (in the Italian Operaist movement, and in writings by Guattari, Negri and Baudrillard himself) are now integrated with consumption, and immaterialized labour has penetrated the field of consumption: “Labor and non-labor time (exchange value and use value) became harder to differentiate.”<sup>30</sup> Against this interpenetration of labour into all aspects of life itself, Baudrillard’s response was through Bataille’s sacrificial economy.<sup>31</sup> So he writes, “we must maintain that the only alternative to labor is not free

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29 See Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The form and reason for exchange in archaic societies* (London and New York: Routledge 2002).

30 Sylvère Lotringer, “Introduction”, in Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power*, 16

31 See Bataille, Georges. “The Accursed Share, vol. 1, trans. Robert Hurley,” *New York: Zone Books* 14 (1988), 135-36.



time, or non-labor, it is sacrifice."<sup>32</sup> The reversibility is, for Baudrillard, symbolic exchange, which "has been the radical basis of things. Our market is one of challenge, of one-upmanship, of potlatch, and hence of negation, the sacrifice of value."<sup>33</sup> It is on this basis of death that Baudrillard rebuilds his critique of Marx: production does not extract from man their surplus value (from which alienation and false consciousness and the mystified subject should be freed), but instead subjects them to a sacrifice. By converting his death into a wage, the worker can only freed himself by putting his death up as a challenge: "As labor was slow death, only an instant and violent challenge could possibly free one from it."<sup>34</sup>

### Critical Simulation

In his posthumous publication *The Agony of Power*, Baudrillard returns to his work on simulation in the context of a distinction he draws between hegemony and domination. Domination was characterised by the master/slave relation, "a relationship of forces and conflicts."<sup>35</sup> In the hegemonic system the emancipated slave internalises the master, so that there are no dominators or dominated. These are now annexed as hostages to a consensus. Indeed, "the alienated, the oppressed, and the colonized are siding with the system that holds them hostage."<sup>36</sup>

Where does critique reside in this? Baudrillard argues that critical thought continues along its trajectory "where there is nothing left to analyse in the hope of subverting it".<sup>37</sup> However, the critique of alienation and spectacle remains as a consolation, becoming melancholy as the desire for transgression and subversion loses popularity. Baudrillard offers examples of the ways power ransacks critique and uses it for itself, such as the banker denouncing capital and its financial mechanisms

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32 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 3.

33 Jean Baudrillard, *Passwords*, 18.

34 Ibid. 21.

35 Ibid. 33

36 Jean Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e) 2010), 37.

37 Ibid. 41.

("truth coming out from the mouth of Evil").<sup>38</sup> This follows from his claim that we are no longer in a "critical situation" (such as the domination of capital), but in a closed-circuit that has captured the negative value: "If the corrupt have no respect for this protocol, and show their hand without sparing us their hypocrisy, then the ritual mechanism of denunciation goes haywire."<sup>39</sup>

In this assumption of critique by its object, which performs a critique of itself, we see how subject and object change polarities and absorbs criticality. This absorption is most marked in the opposite direction, in Baudrillard's description of the transition of a subject of history into an object of hegemony. This appears in his text *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*. Here, the strategies of the object succeed those that Baudrillard described in symbolic exchange. The object is now a third-order simulacrum, its representation and reality now effects of the code and its operations. This object, once termed the proletariat (which is also the subject of history), is now "the mass" or "the masses". As an object of critique, or subject of history, it no longer performs according to its place within a model of critique formerly accorded it in traditional critical theory. The silent majority replaces the working class, and "No one can be said to represent the silent majority, and that is its revenge."<sup>40</sup> The mass is not an authority or reference as was formerly class. Now silent, they are no longer "(a) subject (especially not to – or of – history) . . . they can no longer be alienated."<sup>41</sup> As the object, its mode of defence and retaliation is to be inaccessible to "schemas of liberation, revolution and historicity . . ." The object is encouraged to speak, to be asked for information, but its counter-strategy is an absence of response. It is here that the Baudrillardian formulation of the object of simulation appears. This is rephrased from his original essay *Requiem for the Media*, in which mass media institute a mass communication model without response from the social. But

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38 Ibid. 37.

39 Ibid. 38.

40 Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 22.

41 Ibid.

this is one value attributed to the masses. By the time of *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, simulation, the generation of the real from models (such as opinion polls, phone-ins, a census), places the subject-object relation into a “double-bind”. The masses adopt the values of the subject and object as an alternating or reversible strategy. The silent majority is constituted by the media, by the political class as *both a subject and object*. This is a non-dialectical turn in which two strategies exist according to a demand from power. To the demand to be a submissive object it adopts disobedience and emancipation – the resistance-as-subject is promoted as positive. To the demand to be subject (to be a liberated, speaking, revolutionary subject) it opposes its being as object: as passive, hyper-conformist and idiotic. For Baudrillard this has “superior impact” which the demand of the media and the political class attributes to alienation and passivity. In this polarity of the (non-)response of the masses, Baudrillard sides with its indifference, but does so in order to claim that what he calls the “liberating practices” grasp only the condition of the masses as an object (one to be rescued from its alienation or false-consciousness). He maintains that it ignores the other feature of the demand for meaning: the incessant call or the mass to constitute itself as a subject (of media): to hear its opinion, vote, decide and “play the game.”<sup>42</sup> Baudrillard’s strategy here is to close the circuit between subject and object in order to show how a complicit relationship emerges: “All the movements which only bet on emancipation . . . of speech as a raising of consciousness, do not see that they are acting in accordance with the system, whose imperative today is the overproduction and regeneration of meaning and speech.”<sup>43</sup>

In critique, under simulation, Baudrillard offers a model where forces and references exchange between two bodies (here, the media and the masses), and where each body switches its polarity. His deployment of the media or the political field in his argument invites close analysis, first because it is operating as transformational subject-object itself. In other words, just as the masses exist in two states, subjective and objective, so

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42 Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 108.

43 Ibid.109.

too the media field alternates. Thus, Baudrillard can assign to this other body that exists in addition to the masses its own two contradictory modalities, but only in relation to its social other, the masses. Baudrillard is then in a position to pose the same question to the media that he has asked of the masses: "Are the mass media on the side of power in the manipulation of the masses, or are they on the side of the masses in the liquidation of meaning, in the violence done to meaning, and the fascination that results?"<sup>44</sup> Like the object, this technological subject of history also reverses.

We return to the metaphor of the mirror, but this is no longer the mirror of representation, where one reality reflects another as illusion, or in which a medium mediates between two realities. The reflective surface Baudrillard proposes is one to, and in, which the masses send back to the system its own message, as if in a feedback loop.

Returning to Horkheimer's concern with the figure of the critical theorist, we can see that Baudrillard would present him as a fragment of the mirror to the social. In *Fatal Strategies* he writes, "But this idea of alienation was never more than an ideal perspective of philosophy for the use of the hypothetical masses. It never expressed anything but the alienation of the philosopher himself, that is, the one who thinks he is other."<sup>45</sup> As "other" the philosopher projects alienation onto the masses, but according to Baudrillard the masses have renounced power and responsibility not through alienation or enslavement but through "un-will", "the wish to hand one's desire over to another."<sup>46</sup> These others are the media, the political class, and the "philosophers", who suppose the desires of the masses. The latter off-load their desires onto these professionals.

We are a long way from reification, and of a world in which potential subjects misrecognise themselves in reified objects, in order to restore both within a potential space that critical theory attempts to identify in reference to the contradictions it seeks to resolve. Now these poles either

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44 Ibid. 105.

45 Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 125.

46 Ibid. 126.

amplify their opposite terms or switch them, power/media and masses/meaning being Baudrillard's main examples. If this recognition leads him to observe that "negation or critique is no longer an effective optic for analysing fashion, advertising or television"<sup>47</sup> this is because for him critical theory is "indexed on the immediately prior state of the system."

Here, then, critical theory might be then a nostalgia for resurrection of signs of the real, of liberation of the unconscious and of meaning: "Even critical theory, along with the revolution, turns into a second-order simulacrum, as do all determinate processes. The deployment of third-order simulacra sweeps all this away, and to attempt to reinstate dialectics, 'objective' contradictions, and so on, against them would be a futile political regression."<sup>48</sup>

### Critical Alterities

If critical theory is lagging behind the order, Baudrillard asks, is there a theory or practice that is subversive because it is more aleatory than the system itself, "an indeterminate subversion which would be to the order of the code what the revolution was to the order of political economy?"<sup>49</sup> At this stage, Baudrillard attempts to extrapolate the way critical thought is bound to its object at one level, and yet unable to capture it. This contradiction is brought to the fore in his aphoristic writing, most notably *Fragments*, where he asks, "What becomes of a thinking when it's confronted with a world that is no longer exactly the critical world, the world of crisis and critical thought? Thought must be both homologous with its object and must at the same time be able to mark itself off from it one way of another."<sup>50</sup>

He poses this question in the mid-1970s, and I suggest there are two main types of response, two categories of indeterminate challenge.

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47 Baudrillard, Jean, *Revenge of the Crystal* (London and Stirling, VA: Pluto Press, 1999), 32.

48 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, 3.

49 Ibid. 4.

50 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 74

The first figures in Baudrillard's interest in alternative economies, based on sacrifice and destruction, and his reading of Mauss and Bataille. Even at the height of Baudrillard's engagement with simulation, its principles were grafted onto the system in place of now-outmoded strategies of the order of production. These were founded on the act of defiance. Defiance is predicated on Baudrillard's counter-gift that refuses the exchange of value. This is not dialectical or oppositional; it is destructive of the structural relation of each term (of the relation of the subject to the object), of the one who hurls the challenge. It abandons a contractual position or anything approaching a "relation." This challenge has nothing to do with relations of force, or meaning, or identity. For Baudrillard this is a suicidal position, but a triumphant one, in a defiance of meaning or existing as such.<sup>51</sup>

The second response considers the symbolic order a fatal strategy which sides with the extremes of the object. As Lotringer puts it they are "not about securing the sovereignty or prosperity of the subject but are deployed by forces enigmatic to us: evil genies, sly objects, ironic events, and spanners in the works which escape the centripetal will and best laid plans of the individual."<sup>52</sup> Against the desiring subject are the seducing object<sup>53</sup> and the possibility of substituting for critical theory an "ironic theory."<sup>54</sup> Baudrillard's writing becomes fragmented and aphoristic in which "thought must move faster than things, faster than the world. [...] The 'conservative' type of thought, which assumes thought to be a reflection of the world, will always lag behind."<sup>55</sup>

The object and the world are no longer registered according to the political economy that critical theory mirrored. How can we speak of capital, Baudrillard asks, when it is its destiny to go to the limits of exchange

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51 Jean Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, 69.

52 Sylvère Lotringer, "A Belated Introduction to the Orgy," in Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 15.

53 Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2008), 141.

54 Ibid. 120.

55 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 78.

and self-destruct the case with the economy when it is based on financial flows and international speculation? Having lost its essence it becomes integral and virtual. In contrast “capital in its historical form appears to be a lesser evil.”<sup>56</sup>

I want to distinguish here between the fatal strategy of the object that challenges the subject, and the extreme phenomena of systems (codes, models, simulations) that for Baudrillard constitute ‘integral reality’. There are two modes of relationship: one which poses the object that eclipses the subject, and the other as an extreme phenomenon that disengages from classical capitalist political economy. The former often appear in Baudrillard’s writing as singularities, unique events that cannot be accommodated or absorbed by integrated reality or the hegemonic order. A singularity “doesn’t resist, but constitutes itself as another universe, with another set of rules, which may conceivably get exterminated, but which, at a particular moment, represents an insuperable obstacle for the system itself.”<sup>57</sup> These can include terroristic acts for example. The latter are scenarios in which the system overextends itself and thus threatens its own integrity, by sending it to extremes. Computer viruses and spiralling financial speculation are typical instances.

In the midst of his thesis on fatal strategies Baudrillard returns to the object and its “destiny”. This is no longer the alienated object, but the one which challenges the subject. In *Impossible Exchange* Baudrillard sees that critical thought thinks it holds up a mirror to the object and the world, but in line with symbolic exchange, this impossible demand is not reciprocated: the object has no mirror stage and cannot be represented according to this thought. Baudrillard proposes this constitutes a duel, in which the object makes the subject lose sovereignty. He writes, “When the subject discovers the object – whether that object is viruses or primitive societies – the converse, and never innocent, discovery is also made: the discovery of the subject by the object . . . the object, too, does more

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56 Jean Baudrillard, *The Agony of Power* (South Pasadena: Semiotext(e) 2010), 44.

57 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 71.

than just 'discover' us; it invents us purely and simply – it thinks us."<sup>58</sup> This is the late stage in the ontology of Baudrillard's object, which is now construing the subject through its own laws.

### **Wolves, Rats, Cockroaches, Viruses**

In *Revenge of the Crystal* Baudrillard proposes that narrative can be valuable as form of theory.<sup>59</sup> As he transferred his analysis from the alienated social subject of modern industrial society, Baudrillard spoke about his resistance to resistance, proposing instead the precedence of the viral and of singularity as models that replaced what he considered the pious, illusory and out-dated world of critical, rebellious and subversive thought.<sup>60</sup> These offered models that could not be absorbed by reality. Singularity represents, however temporarily, another set of rules and another world. It may be destroyed but it presents an insurmountable obstacle to the order. "Virality" presents itself as an invasion that penetrates the reality and exploits it to its advantage.

Baudrillard's final engagement with forces of attack and resistance suggests a genealogy less known than his famous orders of simulacra. This is one of wolves, rats, cockroaches and viruses.

First are the wolves: enemies, including humans, attack us head-on, and we construct walls, barricades and ditches as defences. We defend directly, against a visible enemy. Baudrillard remarks, "You might say, up to Marx's class struggle, that was still the pattern."<sup>61</sup> Then the rats come, dispersed, and underground. We resist these using prophylaxis, hygiene and poison, to stamp them out. Next are the roaches: they do not attack in three-dimensional space, but through the cracks in these dimensions. They get everywhere and one has to defend against everything. Finally comes the virus, which attacks inside the body, and resistance is no longer possible, at a certain level. We move from classical mode to the

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58 Jean Baudrillard, *Impossible Exchange* (London and New York: Verso, 2001), 23.

59 Jean Baudrillard, *Revenge of the Crystal*, 24.

60 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 71.

61 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 72.



secret systems of rats (intrigue, agents), parasitism (roaches as attaching to other systems) to viral unknowns.

Baudrillard proposes that an armed defence against a visible enemy is out-dated. Against reaction and resistance, he poses abreaction: the expulsion of the attack without a fight. This amounts to a “dissatisfaction” which is not able to channel through a “critical consciousness, and is no longer able to arm itself against a visible enemy.”<sup>62</sup>

As these attacks are more elusive, he suggests that we should become invisible and elusive ourselves. The thought must itself become viral, and fighting the enemy with its own weapons is a possibility: “a thinking, that in order to pose a challenge, is a match for a system that is paradoxical, elusive and random.”<sup>63</sup> In a world which Baudrillard argues is no longer a critical one, where virtual and digital orders prevail, thought must exist in a structural contradiction, “capable of creating different chains and unchainings of thought from those of objective or even dialectical criticism.” Immersed in the world’s virtuality but standing opposed to it, Baudrillard’s final model for critical theory arguably poses a contradiction between thought and its object.

How can we make sense of these successive strategies of attack, reaction and abreaction in relation to critical theory? Kellner argues against what he sees as Baudrillard’s leap into the “delirious postmodern implosion of all boundaries, abstractions, and distinctions in the vertiginous flux of the hyperreal.”<sup>64</sup> Despite this he also recognises that critical thought must move beyond previous social theories into the “brave new world of simulations, media, information, DNA, satellites, terrorism, postmodern art and so on ...”<sup>65</sup> Theory must accommodate and penetrate the technological dimensions that now abstract in new ways the classical

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62 Jean Baudrillard, *Fragments*, 73.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Douglas Kellner, “Boundaries and Borderlines: Reflections on Jean Baudrillard and Critical Theory”, (accessed at <https://pages.gseis.ucla.edu/faculty/kellner/Illumina%20Folder/kell2.htm>)

commodity form. Kellner notes that critical theory analyzed a range of processes of social abstraction that demanded necessarily abstract categories “to capture the mode of abstraction actually being produced by capitalist development.”<sup>66</sup> Yet he argues that versions of “New French Theory” see these abstractions as mystifications. Baudrillard’s writing on reality, representation and meaning is one example. However, I suggest Baudrillard’s theory has not become absorbed with its object, the technologically integrated reality or code; neither is it compromised owing to what Kellner claims is its will to mystification of all formerly reliable abstractions (such as labour power). It offers innovative readings which suggest how new commodity forms create different modes of challenge and refusal. These may be generated the system itself, against itself; or adopted by subjects who use strategies replicated from the system, in viral modes that Baudrillard describes.

In identifying the extremes of global capitalism’s development Baudrillard offers models that, instead of replacing those identifying the commodity form and its social and psychological effects, offer additional descriptions of a new form of commodity as exchange and circulation through information and data, in global flows. Baudrillard’s implicit critique of critical theory extends the limiting terminology critical theory brings to the increasingly complex actions between subjects and objects in what he defines as the technological world order. His singular contribution is to describe and foreground the object’s ability to perform those acts of abreaction (perhaps even of resistance) that critical theory accorded to the subject.

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## Seeking a *Xiaokang* Society: Deng Xiaoping and the Reinterpretation of the Confucian Tradition in Chinese Marxism

*Roland Boer*<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** China is on the verge of achieving a long-anticipated *xiaokang* society, which means a moderately well-off, healthy, and peaceful society. But what is the origin of this term and how did it come to be reinterpreted in the Chinese Marxist tradition? To answer this question, this article delves back into the Confucian classics and follows the path of two terms. The first is *datong*, the Great Harmony. It begins in the *Book of Rites*, is reinterpreted in the commentaries and then in the influential work of Kang Youwei, coming to mean not an undreamed-of utopia but an anticipated and verifiable topos, for which one plans in great detail. It would be the last of three ages, preceded by one of chaos and one of rising peace, or *xiaokang*. While Mao Zedong was fond of using *datong* to refer to communism, he does not refer to *xiaokang* – the second term to be analysed. Instead, it was Deng Xiaoping who picked up the term in 1979. But to understand its background, we return to the Confucian classics to find that it is a more modest achievement, between chaos and the Great Harmony. *Xiaokang* means a society that has finally – after much toil and misfortune – risen from chaos and disorder, to achieve relative prosperity, rest, peace and well-being. Deng’s frequent use of *xiaokang* eventually led to a ‘*xiaokang* society in an all-round way’ becoming core government policy, from Jiang Zemin to Xi Jinping. Its achievement is subject to eradicating absolute poverty, providing medical care for all, ensuring ecological civilisation, and overcoming obstacles. The date: the anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. The method: recordable and verifiable plans and their completion.

In 1979, Deng Xiaoping observed: ‘We are striving to achieve ... a “moderately well-off family” [*xiaokang zhi jia*]’, by which he meant a ‘moderately well-off country [*xiaokang de guojia*]’.<sup>2</sup> The moment was

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2 Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zhongguo ben shiji de mubiao shi shixian xiaokang (1979.12.06)’, in Deng Xiaoping wenxuan (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2,

auspicious for two reasons: first, it came soon after the audacious and potentially risky launch the year before of the reform and opening up (*gaige kaifeng*); second, it drew on a term – *xiaokang* – with an ancient pedigree.<sup>3</sup> The word comes from the Confucian classics and designates a moderate or acceptable time of health, well-being, prosperity and peace. Deng sought to reinterpret the term, also used in everyday parlance, within a Marxist framework. In other words, it was yet another example of the sinification of Marxism (*makesizhuyi zhongguohua*), or Marxism made concrete and transformed in a Chinese context.

The following analysis seeks to explain the background to Deng Xiaoping's reinterpretation of *xiaokang*, which will be left in transliterated form since it is almost impossible to translate. This task entails what may initially seem like a detour: an examination of the Confucian tradition's notion of *datong*, or 'great harmony'. As the highest stage of social development, it would come to be reinterpreted – through Mao Zedong – in light of communism. Before the stage of *datong* comes *xiaokang*, a more moderate and achievable middle ground, somewhat above chaos and disorder, but not at the same level as the great harmony. Deng Xiaoping claimed *xiaokang* and reinterpreted it in light of socialism, the stage – according to orthodox Marxism since Lenin – before communism. What follows has a number of twists and turns, all of them necessary to unearth what Deng Xiaoping meant in 1979. The following points will emerge as the analysis proceeds: both *datong* and *xiaokang* became associated with what is verifiable and recordable, a topos rather than an imagined and transcendent 'no place' (utopia); contradictions and differences are not to be overcome in a perfect world, but managed so as to be non-antagonistic; the Chinese

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1979 [2008]), 237-38. Since the emphasis is so often on specific Chinese terms, the modern Chinese texts, from Mao Zedong onwards, are cited only in their Chinese versions. The English translations may be found in the standard selected and collected works. Citations follow the convention of Chinese names, with the family name first, followed by the personal name, without a comma between them.

3 The immediate context was a reply to a question from the Japanese prime minister concerning the 'Four Modernisations', first elaborated by Zhou Enlai.

Marxist intersection with and reinterpretation of a very long tradition is an inescapable dimension of recent developments.

### ***Datong: From the Confucian Tradition to Mao Zedong***

The first step to discerning Deng Xiaoping's reclaiming of the Confucian tradition concerns *datong*, which at its core means the great unity, togetherness or harmony. The tradition itself is notable not for its lengthy discourses, but for the briefness and sparseness of its key moments. It is as though the weight of the moments has increased precisely because of this brevity.

#### *The Book of Rites (Liji)*

The first articulation of *datong* – and thereby its *locus classicus* – appears in the 'Cycle of Rites [*Liyun*]' chapter of the *The Book of Rites (Liji)*,<sup>4</sup> compiled in the third to second centuries BCE:

When the Great Way [*dadao*] was practiced, all-under-heaven was as common [*tianxia wei gong*]. They chose men of worth and ability [for public office]; they practiced good faith and cultivated good will [*xiumu*]. Therefore, people did not single out only their parents to love, nor did they single out only their children for care. They saw to it that the aged were provided for until the end, that the able-bodied had employment, and that the young were brought up well. Compassion was shown to widows, orphans, the childless, and those disabled by disease, so that all had sufficient support. Men had their portion [of land], and women, their homes after marriage. Wealth they hated to leave unused, yet they did not necessarily store it away for their own use. Strength they hated not to exert, yet they did not necessarily exert it only for their own benefit. Thus selfish scheming was thwarted before it could

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4 For a useful introduction to *Liji*, one of the three books of rites (the other two being *Yili* and *Zhouli*), see Michael Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 185-88.

develop. Bandits and thieves, rebels and traitors did not show themselves. So the outer gates [*waihu*] were left open. This was known as the period of the Great Unity [*datong*].<sup>5</sup>

A few observations are in order. To begin with, the Chinese text is very concise, with one character often functioning as a whole word. Translators are tempted to fill in the meaning for readers. For example, *dadao* is literally the big road, but metaphorically the Great Way. One may seek to expand the meaning by calling it the Great Way of virtue, but this already adds even more layers of interpretation. The text explains *dadao* as one in which ‘all under heaven was’ – literally – ‘as common [*weigong*]’. How one interprets the phrase, which comes down to us through millennia of interpretations, says as much about the translator as the text. It may be expanded to mean that something serves or acts as common, or the common good. Some translations go further, offering ‘public good’, ‘a public and common spirit’, ‘public-spirited’ or ‘one community’. All may offer angles on the initial phrase, but it is important to keep in mind that the focus of the text is primarily on the common, so I have translated the two characters as ‘was as common’.

Further, this social reality is simultaneously envisaged as an expanded family and one that undermines the family by focusing on the common good.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the primary concern is not one’s immediate parents and children, but all in society – including the widowed, childless, orphans

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5 Translation by Nylan, *The Five ‘Confucian’ Classics*, 196. I have chosen the translation by Nylan for the sake of consistency, with one modification in the first sentence. Each translation has of course its benefits and drawbacks. One may also compare James Legge’s classic translation (also at <https://ctext.org/liji/li-yun>): James Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism. Part III: The Li Ki, I-IX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1885), 364-66; and also that of Watson in William Theodore De Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume 1* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), 176.

6 A point missed by P.C. Lo, ‘Between the Family and the State: The Common Good and the Confucian Habits of the Heart’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 176-77.



and sick. All should have opportunities in life and appropriate care, although distinct roles were still appropriate for men and women. The text reinforces this common good with a powerful image: the 'outer gates' of the family compound were left open. The character for gate or door – *hu* – also bears the meaning of family or household. If the outer gate is open, it means not merely that households are connected with another, but that the very sense of household expands well beyond the gates so that the family itself is not primary.<sup>7</sup> While the vision may be an ideal, the overall framework is from a ruling perspective. This appears initially with the phrase *tianxia*, a traditional imperial term for all under the ruler's sway. In this context, it meant China, however large or small it may have been, although it also came to be seen as encompassing the known earth. Further, the setting for this brief description of *datong* has Confucius saying the words to a certain Yen Yen as they stood on a balcony after a ritual. Confucius sighs over the current State of Lu, offering his vision of what might be. The discourse is primarily for rulers' ears, who should be worthy (*xian*) and have ability (*neng*), exerting power not for their own advantage but for others, able to bring about the common good, or – as the final word has it – *datong*.

*He Xiu's Revision: Datong as Topos*

Crucially, in *Liji* the *datong* is viewed as a past era, as the opening phrase of the following stanza indicates: the way has 'fallen into disuse and obscurity [*jiyin*]'. *Datong* lay in the past, so one had to do the best in the current circumstances. The next moment in the tradition reworks this assumption, appearing in a commentary on a commentary. More precisely, it is the commentary of a certain He Xiu (129-82 CE) on one of three commentaries (*Gongyang*) on the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*). While the annals themselves are sparse indeed,<sup>8</sup> the commentaries explore every possible implication, based on the assumption articulated by Men-

7 Further, the phrase for cultivate harmony or good will (*xiumu*) means to cultivate friendship with neighbours, which entails peace and harmony.

8 The annals record events of the Zhou Dynasty of the state of Lu (concerning which Confucius uttered his reflections on *datong*), from 722 BCE to 481 BCE.

cius that Confucius was the author or editor and had compiled the annals according to specific criteria, embedded through ‘subtle phrasing’ [*weiyán*], which had to be unearthed through careful exegesis.<sup>9</sup> Of the three commentaries – by Guliang, Gongyang and Zuo – the one by Gongyang is the most intriguing.<sup>10</sup> It is this tradition, which came to be called ‘New Text’ (see more below), to which He Xiu added his layer of commentary.

Briefly put, He Xiu distinguished three ages, with one superseding the other: the ‘decayed and disordered [*shuailuan*]’ world; one of ‘rising peace [*shengping*]’; and one of the ‘greatest peace [*taiping*]’.<sup>11</sup> While these ages are not an immediate engagement with the *datong* text from *Liji* (see above),<sup>12</sup> the connection should be obvious: *taiping*, the great peace, and *datong* speak of the same desired reality – especially in hindsight. At the same time, there is a risk that the three-age sequence takes on an evolutionary sense, rising from chaos and disorder to the great peace. Scholars have been keen to stress other criteria, such as legitimacy, virtue rather than inheritance as the criterion for office, or the possibility of moving in either direction, especially if one juxtaposes Confucius’s sense of loss in *Liji* to the progressive schema in He Xiu’s interpretation.<sup>13</sup>

The most important contribution of He Xiu’s commentary lies elsewhere: the world of great peace is not of the imagination, of rumour and innuendo, but one that can be seen and is thus verifiable. To explain: He

9 Needless to say, efforts continue to discern the criteria of compilation and deviations from them: Joachim Gentz, ‘Language Of Heaven, Exegetical Skepticism And The Re-Insertion Of Religious Concepts In The *Gongyang* Tradition’, in *Early Chinese Religion, Part One: Shang through Han (1250 BC-220 AD)*, ed. John Lagerwey and Marc Kalinowski (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

10 For a useful introduction to the three commentaries and thus of the central role of *Chunqiu* in Chinese tradition, see Nylan, *The Five ‘Confucian’ Classics*, 257-306.

11 He Xiu, *Chunqiu gongyangzhuan zhuxu*, 28 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1980), 2200.

12 The reason is that the commentary focuses on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*.

13 Li Jing, “‘Chunqiu gongyangzhuan’ zhi sanshi’, *Chang’an daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* 15.4 (2013):58-63; Chen Hui, ‘Gongyang “sanshi shuo” de yanjin guocheng ji qi sixiang yiyi’, *Zhongguo shehui kexue wang fabiao yu wenhua* 2016.12 (2016):1-10.

Xiu follows an earlier interpreter, Dong Zhongshu, who distinguished between two types of meaning: inner and outer. In He Xiu's hands, this becomes a threefold schema of words and worlds that are 'rumoured [*suochuanwen*]', heard of or 'recorded [*suowen*]' and 'seen [*suojian*]'.<sup>14</sup> Now for the breakthrough: For He Xiu, these become three eras.<sup>15</sup> Thus, what is 'rumoured' becomes the 'decayed and disordered [*shuailuan*]' world, one of chaos in which the heart is 'course and unrefined [*cucu*]', the country is broken up into small states and the records virtually non-existent. Rumours abound of skulduggery, assassination, intrigue and inappropriate behaviour in light of established rituals. By contrast, the 'recorded' or reported world has records and it unites all of the Chinese people so that outside are the foreign tribes (*Yidi*). This is known as the time of 'rising peace [*shengping*]': although not ideal, for it still has leaders and people engaging in less than appropriate behaviour, it is a distinct improvement. The 'seen' world, directly experienced, becomes the greatest peace and tranquillity (*taiping*). Here the world is one, whether distant or nearby, large or small, while the heart (*xin*) or inner being is now deep and thoroughly known (*xiang*).

This insight provides a significant contrast between Chinese and 'Western' philosophical assumptions concerning 'utopia'. Let me put it this way: He Xiu's interpretation valorises the 'seen' as the most ideal world (*taiping*), in contrast to what is 'rumoured' and for which no records exist. The ideal world is precisely the one that is fully recorded and can be empirically verified; in short, it is a world in which one lives.

14 Li, "'Chunqiu gongyangzhuan" zhi sanshi', 58-59; Gao Jiyi and Chen Xubo, 'Lundong, He de "sanshi yici" shuo', *Anhui daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 2014. 1 (2014):36-45.

15 Many editions of this work exist, in 28 volumes. It may also be found at <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&res=642006&remap=gb>. I am unable here to go into a detailed analysis of the development of this position in He Xiu's texts, but other scholars have done so: Jiang Qing, *Gongyangxue yinlun* (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995); Wang Gaoxin, 'He Xiu de gongyang "sanshi" shuo de lilun goujian', *Shaanxi shifan daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue ban)* 36.1 (2007):21-26; Gao and Chen, 'Lundong, He de "sanshi yici" shuo'; Chen, 'Gongyang "sanshi shuo" de yanjin guocheng ji qi sixiang yiyi'.

The unrecorded and unseen world, of which only rumours and hearsay exist, is the world of chaos and disorder. This approach provides a stark contrast with Western European philosophical assumptions concerning ontological transcendence, for here it is precisely what is unseen and unknown that is the ideal world, of which the known world is only a poor copy. This (external) ontological transcendence runs through Western European assumptions at many levels (from religion, through politics, to culture), but how does it influence perceptions of utopia? To put it sharply, for a 'Western' tradition the ideal world is a transcendent one, a *utopia* beyond human experience and knowability; by contrast, for the Chinese tradition examined thus far, *datong* and *taiping* constitute a *topos*, a known and verifiable place.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to the Western 'no' place and 'best' place (*outopia*), which is ultimately unreachable, the Chinese tradition should really be called a 'topian' one, focused on a verifiable *topos*.

*Kang Youwei and the Flourishing of Topian Literature*

This profound identification of *taiping* (and thus *datong*) with what is empirically verifiable and recorded would be raised to yet another level many centuries later with Kang Youwei (1858-1927). But in order to understand the path to his core text, *The Book of Datong* (*Datongshu*), let us return for a moment to the two main traditions that arose out of the commentaries on the *Spring and Autumn Annals*. As mentioned earlier, the *Gongyang* commentary became the spring of the 'New Text' tradition, which came into favour during the early Han Dynasty, only to fall into disfavour due to a perceived esoterism. From the late Han (25-220 CE) the more rationalist 'Old Text' school, based on the commentary by Guliang, was at the forefront, forcing the 'New Text' tradition into the background for a while. The rival traditions were nearly always at loggerheads, with one or the other dominating for a time, with rulers keen

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16 Noteworthy here is that while the Chinese tradition obviously has perceptions of a better world (as I have been examining), the Western concept of 'utopia/outopia' required a loan-word adaption, as *wutuobang*, which bears both the meaning and sound structure of the original. Intriguingly, 'dyptopia' becomes *fanwutuobang*, 'anti-utopia' – a distinctly different opposition.

to see that neither was completely dominant for long.<sup>17</sup> However, with the imminent collapse of the whole dynastic system and profound turmoil, the 'New Text' tradition gained a whole new lease of life in the work of Kang Youwei.<sup>18</sup>

This was precisely the tradition to which He Xiu had made his daring contribution many centuries earlier. The following quotation from Kang Youwei will indicate how much he is indebted to this tradition:

The divine sage-king, Confucius, early on gave thought to and worried over this. Therefore, he established the law of three governments [*santong*]<sup>19</sup> and three ages [*sanshi*]: after a world according to disorder [*luan*] it will change into ascending peace [*shengping*], into the greatest peace [*taiping*]; after *xiaokang* it will advance to *datong*.<sup>20</sup>

Once again, the text is brief indeed, although Kang Youwei offers later a comprehensive table of the main features of each age.<sup>21</sup> Yet, this sentence effectively connects *Liji* and the commentary by He Xiu. The latter's terms appear first, with the three ages of disorder, ascending peace and greatest peace; immediately following are the two terms that appear in

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17 Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics*, 262.

18 Wong Young-tsu, 'Philosophical Hermeneutics and Political Reform: A Study of Kang Youwei's Use of Gongyang Confucianism', in *Classics and Interpretations: The Hermeneutic Traditions in Chinese Culture*, ed. Tu Ching-i (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2000), 383-407. Some are rather drawn to Kang Youwei's proposals, claiming that *The Book of Datong* is 'the most imaginative utopian construct in Chinese intellectual history': Hsiao, Kung-chuan, *A Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975), 500.

19 *Tong* (统) has the sense of uniting, interconnecting and governing.

20 My translation of Kang Youwei, *Datongshu* (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1935 [2010]), 6. Thompson's 1958 translation is patchy at best, expanding some parts significantly while skipping large sections elsewhere, with only summaries in their place. Kang Youwei, *Ta T'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei*, trans. Lawrence G. Thompson (London: Routledge, 1935 [1958]), 72.

21 Kang, *Datongshu*, 43-52, 60-62; Kang, *Ta T'ung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of K'ang Yu-wei*, 105-27.

the *Liyun* chapter of the *Liji*: *xiaokang* and *datong*.<sup>22</sup> Kang uses these to elaborate on He Xiu: ascending peace (*shengping*) is thus connected with *xiaokang*, while the greatest peace (*taiping*) refers to and indeed expands upon *datong*.<sup>23</sup>

Three issues are relevant for this analysis,<sup>24</sup> the first of which concerns the threefold rumoured-recorded-seen that He Xiu connected with the three worlds. While Kang does not use the terminology explicitly in relation to the three worlds, he does deploy the phrases *yiwusuojian* and *yiwusuowen* to indicate ‘I have seen’ and ‘I have heard’ and, more importantly, he has a liking for the phrase *jianwen* to designate what is – literally – seen and heard and thus what may be regarded as well-informed knowledge.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, this term may well describe the nature of *The Book of Datong*, for Kang goes into immense detail to describe *datong* from every conceivable angle. In other words, he seeks to present a world that is not rumoured and found in a distant ‘no-place’, but rather a world that

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22 Kang adheres closely to the texts in question, for only two terms appear in *Liji* and there is no equivalent for the age of disorder.

23 As the argument of *The Book of Datong* proceeds, the threefold schema is reiterated on a number of occasions: disorder (*luan*), rising peace (*shengping*) and great harmony (*datong*) or greatest peace (*taiping*). Kang, *Datongshu*, 17, 54, 65, 78-79, 92, 97-99, 124, 33-34, 36-37, 39.

24 I leave aside the question of *ren* (仁), best translated as ‘two-person mindedness’, which Kang Youwei deploys extensively. For example, while *ren* begins to appear in the age of ascending peace and love is characteristic of *taiping*, *ren* comes to full expression in the third age of *datong*: Kang, *Datongshu*, 136. See further, Albert Chen, ‘The Concept of “Datong” in Chinese Philosophy as an Expression of the Idea of the Common Good’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 89-90; Tay Wei Leong, ‘Kang Youwei, The Martin Luther of Confucianism and his Vision of Confucian Modernity and Nation’, in *Secularization, Religion and the State*, ed. Haneda Masahi (Tokyo: University of Tokyo Center for Philosophy, 2010), 101-3; Jonathan Chan, ‘Common Good and the Ethics of Global Poverty: A Confucian Perspective’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 159-61; Wang Jue, ‘The Common Good and Filial Piety: A Confucian Perspective’, in *The Common Good: Chinese and American Perspectives*, ed. David Solomon and P.C. Lo (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 136-39.

25 Kang, *Datongshu*, 27, 66, 68, 93, 118.

is potentially verifiable and recorded. Rather than an uncrossable gulf or barrier that prevents access to this world, he offers specific suggestions as to how it might be achieved.

Second, the major problem to be overcome concerns the current world's many boundaries. The bulk of the work is devoted to the method of overcoming the boundaries of nation, class, race, sex, family, occupation and private ownership, unequal laws, and suffering itself. The question is whether the resulting age of *datong* is one of homogenous commonality, without any differences. His answer is no, but he comes at the problem through competition (*jingzheng*), which is both necessary for improvement and potentially destructive. Without competition laziness ensues, but competition also leads to strife and a return to disorder. Further, if everyone receives equal pay and is equal on all counts, little incentive would be found for further innovation. Kang concludes:

Now, the way of heaven [*tiandao*] is not peaceful; not being peaceful it is disorderly [*luan*]. The human way [*rendao*] is afflicted by the misfortunes of disorder [*luan huò*]; therefore, they decide to assist one another and make every effort to achieve peace. But having arrived at the time of peace, then misfortunes also arise!<sup>26</sup>

The problem is less the threats to *datong* and *taiping*, but the need for differences. Kang seeks a way to continue the fostering of competition and innovation, offering as a solution three criteria: striving for excellence; encouraging knowledge; and encouraging *ren*.<sup>27</sup> But the very need to foster competition indicates the continued need for differences even in the era of *datong*. How such differences might relate to one another is a problem he did not solve. For that we need to await Mao Zedong and the category of non-antagonistic contradictions.

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26 My translation of Kang, *Datongshu*, 127.

27 Such competition would in the Soviet Union of the 1930s become socialist competition, a continual striving for improvement in labour, innovation in technology, and the well-being of all. That it did not always succeed does not negate the theoretical point .



Third, Kang Youwei repeatedly deploys the four-character phrase *ti-anxia wei gong*, all under heaven is as common. As the short-hand definition of *datong*, the phrase is from the initial articulation of *datong* in *Liji*. Kang was by no means the only one to use the phrase at the time, for his political opponent, Sun Zhongshan (Yat-sen), also invoked it frequently to designate the vision of China that would overcome the ‘three mountains’ of semi-colonialism, feudal relics and bureaucratic capitalism.<sup>28</sup> So common became the phrase that it is known by nearly every Chinese person today. Indeed, it was precisely at this time, as the last imperial dynasty stumbled into oblivion and China felt the sting of colonial humiliation, that ‘utopian’ – or, rather, *topian* – ideas and literature flourished. Kang was only the most significant writer among many others. For example, another influential piece of literature was Cai Yuanpei’s revolutionary short story, ‘New Year’s Dream’.<sup>29</sup> The story, with its revolutionary tone and invocation of the Confucian three eras – as mediated by He Xiu – became widely popular, even if it was the only fictional text published by its author.

### *Mao Zedong: Datong and Communism*

It would fall to Mao Zedong to reinterpret *datong* in light of communism. Before tracing this development, let us consider another widely popular short story. In 1926, Guo Moruo published ‘Marx Enters a Confucian Temple’, which tells of a conversation between Marx and Confucius. Asked to elaborate his idea of a communist society, Marx does so, after which Confucius is unable to contain himself, clapping his hands and crying out: ‘Your ideal society and my world of *datong* coincide with each other’. Thereupon, he quotes the text from *Liji* (see above). In reply, Marx

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28 Chen, ‘The Concept of “Datong” in Chinese Philosophy as an Expression of the Idea of the Common Good’, 88.

29 Cai Yuanpei, *Cai Yuanpei quanji* (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), vol. 1, 422-26; Li Guangyi, ‘“New Year’s Dream”: A Chinese Anarcho-cosmopolitan Utopia’, *Utopian Studies* 24.1 (2013): 89-104. It was first published in 1904 as ‘Xinnian meng’ in the magazine, *Eshi jingwen* [Alarming news about Russia], in the February issue, pages 1-20 and 24-25.



calls Confucius an old comrade (*lao tongzhi*) and observes, 'Your opinion is completely consistent with mine'.<sup>30</sup>

Given this wider context, it should be no surprise that Mao Zedong also favoured the use of *datong* in his writings, although he took somewhat longer to connect it explicitly with communism. In his pre-communist phase, he writes 'the great harmony [*datong*] is our goal'. Confucius, Mao acknowledges, explored this idea, setting up 'the great peace [*taiping*] as his goal', although he 'did not do away with the two realms of chaos [*luan*] and ascending peace [*shengping*]'.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, the language is not that of Confucius but of He Xiu and Kang Youwei, although the latter similarly attributed the three ages to Confucius.<sup>32</sup> After Mao's turn to communism, *datong* continues to appear, although now he begins to elaborate further: acknowledging that it was a central aspect of the revolutionary program of Sun Zhongshan,<sup>33</sup> he observes that it must be built on the national self-determination of all Asian countries afflicted by colonialism.<sup>34</sup> Further, the relation between a 'movement for world *datong*

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30 Guo Moruo, 'Makesi jin wenmiao', in *Guo Moruo quanji* (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue chubanshe, vol. 10, 1926 [1985]), 164, 66.

31 Mao Zedong, 'Zhi Li Jinxi xin (1917.08.23)', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1917 [1990]), 89.

32 In 1917, Mao could not have read Kang Youwei's *The Book of Datong*, since it was published posthumously in 1935. However, Kang had already elaborated such ideas in *Zhongyong zhu, Mengzi wei* and *Liyun zhu*: Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei xueshu zhuzuo xuan: Mengziwei; Liyunzhu; Zhongyongzhu* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1987). Further, the ideas were relatively widespread at the time and Mao may have encountered them elsewhere, such as the work of Cai Yuanpei, author of 'A New Year's Dream'. Cai became president of Beijing University, revised its educational philosophy and structure, appointed Chen Duxiu and set up the work-study program in France. Mao's notes the influence of Cai on the 'Strengthen Learning Society': Mao Zedong, 'Jianxuehui zhi chengli ji jinxing (1919.07.21)', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1919 [1990]), 362-72.

33 Mao Zedong, 'Guomindang youpai fenli de yuanyin ji qi duiyu geming qiantu de yingxiang (1926.01.10)', in *Mao Zedong ji, Bujuan*, ed. Takeuchi Minoru (Tokyo: Sōsōsha, vol. 2, 1926 [1983-1986]), 144.

34 Mao Zedong, 'Zhi Zhang Guoji xin (1920.11.25)', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1920 [1990]), 560.

[*shijie datong yundong*] and the national anti-colonial struggle in China is not a contradiction, but a dialectic in which the only way for China to participate in the international movement is through being independent and liberated.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, on the eve of liberation, Mao makes the clearest connection with communism. Explicitly acknowledging Kang Youwei's *Book of Datong*, Mao points out that Kang was unable to find a way to *datong*. By contrast, the communists have found a way. But how does he define *datong*? It entails working towards the 'conditions in which classes, state power and political parties will die out very naturally [*ziran de guiyu xiaomie*]', so that humanity can enter *datong*.<sup>36</sup> The allusion is less to Kang Youwei than to Engels's coining of the phrase in the third edition (1894) of the deeply influential *Anti-Dühring*: 'The state is not "abolished". It dies out [er stirbt ab]'.<sup>37</sup> But Mao also follows what was by now Marxist orthodoxy, which distinguished between the stages of socialism and communism. The latter may eventually entail such a natural dying out, but socialism is a time of struggle and development, needing to deal with internal and external foes. This entailed a dialectic of strengthening the

35 Mao Zedong, 'Zhongri wenti yu Xi'an shibian - he Shimotelai tanhua', in *Mao Zedong wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1, 1937 [2009]), 484. Occasionally, Mao would use the term in a low-key way to designate cooperation, whether in terms of the anti-colonial struggle or labour unions: Mao Zedong, 'Xin minzhuzhuyi lun', in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1940 [2009]), 676; Mao Zedong, 'Suo xiwang yu laogonghui de (1921.11.21)', in *Mao Zedong wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1, 1921 [2009]), 6.

36 Mao Zedong, 'Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng (1949.06.30)', in *Mao Zedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 4, 1949 [2009]), 1469. Later, he would make similar observations: Mao Zedong, *Guanyu shehuizhuyi geming de bufen lunshu* (Wuhan: Zhonggong Hubei sheng wei xuanchuan buyin, 1976), 9, 15.

37 Friedrich Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft. 3. Auflage', in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, vol. I:27, 1894 [1988]), 535. A comparison between the first and third editions of *Anti-Dühring* reveals the introduction of the influential phrase only in the third edition: Friedrich Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft (Anti-Dühring)', in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, vol. I:27, 1878 [1988]), 445; Engels, 'Herrn Eugen Dührings Umwälzung der Wissenschaft. 3. Auflage', in *Marx Engels Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Dietz, vol. I:27, 1878 [1988]), 535.

state, for only when all opposition had been overcome on a global scale could one begin to move to communism, or *datong*.<sup>38</sup>

The reflections in this 1949 text open up the role of contradiction analysis, and thus dialectics, in Mao's thought.<sup>39</sup> As we already found with Kang Youwei, differences are not abolished even in *datong*, for to do so would lead to lack of incentive and laziness. Already in his 1937 lectures on dialectical materialism in Yan'an, Mao had developed a sophisticated 'contradiction analysis', which would become the theoretical basis for the success of the revolution in 1949. The revised text, 'On Contradiction', was the mature formulation,<sup>40</sup> but he also began to elaborate on an insight first developed in the Soviet Union but now taken to a whole new level through engagement with Chinese philosophy. This was the theory of non-antagonistic contradictions (*feidui kangxing maodun*), which dealt with the reality that contradictions and tensions continue under socialism, if not under communism.<sup>41</sup> As he observes in 1967, any society is driven by 'opposing struggles and contradictions'.<sup>42</sup> Not to acknowledge this is to abandon dialectical materialism. Crucially, they must be managed to as to be non-antagonistic. How is this relevant for *datong*? This

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38 Mao, 'Lun renmin minzhu zhuanzheng (1949.06.30)', 1475-76.

39 An intriguing foreshadowing of this development may be found in Mao's pre-communist marginal notes on Friedrich Paulsen, which had been translated by none other than Cai Yanpei. Here Mao invokes *datong* and *pingan*, peace. But he observes that under *datong* competition (*jingzheng*) and resistance (*dikang*) would arise, so much so that an era of greatest peace would be unbearable. Cycles of order and disorder (*luan*), war and peace, are more creative and the norm: Mao Zedong, "'Lunlixue yuanli" pizhu', in *Mao Zedong zaoqi wengao, 1912.6-1920.11* (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 1917-1918 [1990]), 184-86. The notes on Paulsen constitute a crucial transformative period for Mao, for he would soon join the fledgling communist movement in China.

40 Mao Zedong, 'Maodunlun', in *Maozedong xuanji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 1, 1937 [1952]), 299-340.

41 Mao Zedong, 'Guanyu zhengque chuli renmin neibu maodun de wenti', in *Maozedong wenji* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 7, 1957 [1999]).

42 Mao Zedong, 'Dui "(Xiuyang) de yao hai shi beipan wuchan jieji zhuanzhang" yiwen jia xie de er duan hua', in *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui* (Beijing: Hongweibing, 1967), 308.

era entails not the abolition of all difference, tension and contradiction, but a situation in which they are non-antagonistic, or – as the term itself suggests – harmonious.

### *Xiaokang: From the Book of Songs to Xi Jinping*

Thus far, we have examined the tradition of *datong*, which emerges not as a ‘utopia’ but as a verifiable *topos*. While the *Liji* presented *datong* as an earlier and lost age, with the reinterpretations of He Xiu and Kang Youwei it became a future to be enacted. The connection of *datong* with communism may have already been suggested by writers such as Guo Moruo, but Mao Zedong made the connection explicit on the eve of Liberation. Crucially, it was not to be an age of the removal of contradictions but for their non-antagonistic interaction.

#### *The Book of Rites and the Book of Songs (Shijing)*

However, in Mao’s many works there is one crucial absence: he never refers to the other Confucian age of *xiaokang*.<sup>43</sup> Instead, it would fall to Deng Xiaoping to pick up and reinterpret the term in light of Marxism. So let us retrace our steps to the *Liji*, specifically to the paragraph following the one concerning *datong*. Confucius is reported to have said:

Now the Great Way [*dadao*] has fallen into obscurity, and all under heaven is as family [*tianxia wei jia*]. Each loves only his own parents and cares only for his own children. Wealth and strength they consider to exist only for their own advantage. Hereditary succession among the great men [the lords of the land], they take to be a sufficient rite. Inner and outer walls, ditches, and moats, they take to be adequate defenses. As for the rites and duties, they think them the main structures by

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43 As noted above, on one occasion in 1917, Mao referred to ‘ascending peace [*shengping*]’, found in He Xiu and Kang Youwei, but he does not mention *xiaokang*. The term also does not appear in He Xiu’s commentary, and while Kang Youwei may have mentioned it briefly as an equivalent for ‘ascending peace’, his resolute focus was on *datong*.

which to rectify relations between ruler and subject, to consolidate relations between father and son, to induce concord between elder and younger sibling, to induce loving harmony between husband and wife. By them, they set up institutions and measures; by them, they lay out fields and hamlets; by them, they judge men of courage and understanding to be worthy; by them, they consider merit to accrue to men's personal advantage. Thus selfish schemes are invented. Warfare derives also from this ... This was known as the period of *xiaokang*.<sup>44</sup>

According to this text, the difference between *datong* and *xiaokang* may be captured by the contrast between two four-character sayings: in contrast to 'all under heaven is as common [*tianxia wei gong*]', we now find 'all under heaven is as family [*tianxia wei jia*]'. For those who would charge Confucian thought with an overwhelming emphasis on (wider) family,<sup>45</sup> the contrast is instructive. Under *datong*, the family is subordinate to the common good of society, even if the latter is conceived in extending family terms to the social whole. By contrast, under *xiaokang*, one focuses primarily on one's family – a lesser good, for it leads to personal gain, inheritance, moats and ditches. Ordering society according to appropriate relations between ruler and subject, elder and younger, husband and wife, leads not to peace, but to personal advantage (*wei ji*), scheming and war.

Not a particularly positive image, even if this seems to be the time of Confucian ethics. Is this what Deng Xiaoping had in mind when he invoked *xiaokang* in 1979? Perhaps not, for an even earlier text from the tenth century BCE – the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing*) – presents a somewhat dif-

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44 Translation by Nylan, *The Five 'Confucian' Classics*, 196. As with the previous quotation from *Liji*, I have followed Nylan's translation (apart from the last sentence, which I have added). One may usefully compare those of Watson and Legge: De Bary, Chan, and Watson, *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Volume 1*, 176; Legge, *The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism. Part III: The Li Ki, I-IX*, 366-67.

45 Lo, 'Between the Family and the State'.

ferent picture. In the section called 'The People are Hard Pressed [*Min-lao*]', from Part III, Book 9, it presents five stanzas stressing the alleviation of intolerable burdens on the people. I quote the first eight characters of each stanza:

The people indeed are heavily burdened,  
 But perhaps a little ease [*xiaokang*] may be got for them.  
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,  
 But perhaps a little rest [*xiaoxiu*] may be got for them.  
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,  
 But perhaps a little relief [*xiaoxi*] may be got for them.  
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,  
 But perhaps a little repose [*xiaokai*] may be got for them.  
 The people indeed are heavily burdened,  
 But perhaps a little tranquillity [*xiao'an*] may be got for them.<sup>46</sup>

The purpose of quoting these lines is to indicate the meanings attached to *xiaokang*. The repetition of the lines enhances the variation, which is only with the final character. That is, each of the following stanzas begins with the exactly the same characters, with only the last character changing: *kang*, *xiu*, *xi*, *kai*, *an*, or ease, rest, relief, repose and tranquillity. Even so, to give single translations of the terms loses their richness. For example, *kang* can mean health, well-being, prosperity and peace, while *an* has the senses of peace, calm, stillness, contentment, safety and security. The remainder of the stanzas speak of robbers and oppressors, the wily and obsequious, the unconscientious, noisy braggarts, the multitudes of evil and the parasites – from whom the people seek at least some relief. In short, for the *Book of Songs*, *xiaokang* is clearly a distinct improvement on tough lives.

Clearly, the *Book of Songs* provides a more positive image, of people relieved from the burdens of struggle and from those seeking to deceive

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46 Translation by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: Vol. 4, Part 2: The She King, or The Book of Poetry* (Hong Kong: London Missionary Society, 1871), 495-98. Legge's translation may also be found at <https://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/min-lu>.

and rob them (rulers included). Yet, the differences between the two explanations of *xiaokang* may in part be explained by their foci: *Liji* sees this time as a decline from *datong*, while the earlier *Book of Songs* sees *xiaokang* as a noticeable improvement. Clearly, Deng Xiaoping's invocation draws more from the sense of the most ancient picture of *xiaokang*.

*Deng Xiaoping and Xiaokang Shehui*

As noted earlier, the moment when Deng Xiaoping called up the term was in late 1979, soon after the launch of the Reform and Opening Up:

The objective of achieving the four modernizations was set by Chairman Mao and Premier Zhou Enlai. By achieving the four modernizations, we mean shaking off China's poverty and backwardness [*pinqiong luohou*], gradually improving the people's living standards, restoring a position for China in international affairs commensurate with its current status, and enabling China to contribute more to mankind. Backwardness will leave us vulnerable to bullying.

The four modernizations we are striving to achieve are modernizations with Chinese characteristics [*Zhongguoshi de si ge xiandaihua*]. Our concept of the four modernizations is different from yours. By achieving the four modernizations, we mean achieving a 'moderately well-off family [*xiaokang zhi jia*]'. Even if we realize the four modernizations by the end of this century, our per capita GNP will still be very low. If we want to reach the level of a relatively wealthy country of the Third World with a per capita GNP US \$1,000 for example, we have to make an immense effort. Even if we reach that level, we will still be a backward nation compared to Western countries. However, at that point China will be a country with a moderately well-off condition [*xiaokang de zhuangtai*] and our people will enjoy a much higher standard of living than they do now...

Some people are worried that if China becomes richer, it will be too competitive in world markets. Since China will be a

moderately well-off country [*xiaokang de guojia*] by that time, this will not be the case.<sup>47</sup>

Three features of this important text should be noted. To begin with, Deng sees the idea of *xiaokang* as a distinct improvement from woeful conditions. He speaks of poverty, backwardness and bullying, with a clear allusion to China's long humiliation at the hands of foreign powers. Such humiliation had continued after 1949, with international sanctions, destruction of new industrial facilities and refusal to acknowledge the People's Republic. Only a few years earlier had the situation begun to change, and *xiaokang* indicates the relative improvement underway.

Further, Deng uses *xiaokang* in three formulations: a moderately well-off family (*xiaokang zhi jia*), condition (*xiaokang de zhuangtai*) and country (*xiaokang de guojia*).<sup>48</sup> The initial use of 'family [*jia*]' alludes to the Confucian focus in *Liji* on the primacy of family relations during the era of *xiaokang*, when 'all under heaven was as family [*tianxia wei jia*]'. But then Deng modulates this emphasis with the following iterations. He means not merely the 'family', but also China's condition or situation, and above all the country as a whole (*guojia*). The reinterpretation is significant, for the focus on the social whole is actually a feature drawn from the Confucian notion of *datong*.

Finally, Deng's concern is at this point resolutely economic. He speaks of the four modernisations (agriculture, industry, national defence, and science and technology), quadrupling output and raising per capita GNP to US \$1000 (later modified to \$800) by the end of the century, of making life relatively comfortable even if China would remain a relatively backward country.<sup>49</sup> While we may initially think that this focus is a relatively

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47 Deng, 'Zhongguo ben shiji de mubiao shi shixian xiaokang (1979.12.06)', 237-38.

48 See also a speech from 1987, where Deng speaks of a *xiaokang de zhongguo*: Deng Xiaoping, 'Xiqu lishi jingyan, fangzhi cuowu qingxiang (1987.04.30)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1987 [2008]), 226.

49 Deng Xiaoping, 'Shehuizhuyi shouxian yao fazhan shengchanli (1980.04-05)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1980



narrow one compared with the tradition from which Deng draws, it is important to keep in mind the following: a) Deng was very clear that socialism entailed not only equality in the relations of production, but more importantly unleashing the forces of production so that the socio-economic situation of all would be improved;<sup>50</sup> b) the Chinese Marxist approach to human rights sees the right to economic wellbeing as the core,<sup>51</sup> a right that remains a key driver of the Reform and Opening Up.

*Xi Jinping and the Centenary Goals*

Deng Xiaoping's preferred usage was 'moderately well-off level [*xiaokang shuiping*]',<sup>52</sup> but it was not this phrase that would enter into the lexicon of

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[2008]), 311-14. For a brief outline, see Elizabeth Perry, 'Chinese Conceptions of "Rights": From Mencius to Mao - and Now', *Perspectives on Politics* 6, no. 1 (2008): 41-43.

- 50 He would repeat the point on many occasions, observing that socialism entails not equality in poverty but unleashing the forces of production to improve people's lives: Deng Xiaoping, 'Shehuizhuyi ye keyi gao shichangjingji (1979.11.26)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1979 [2008]), 231-36; Deng Xiaoping, 'Yixin yiyi gao jianshe (1982.09.18)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1982 [2008]), 10-11; Deng Xiaoping, 'Gaige keji tizhi shi weile jiefang shengchanli (1985.03.07)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1985 [2008]), 107-9; Deng Xiaoping, 'Gaige shi zhongguo fazhan shengchanli de biyouzhilu (1985.08.28)', in *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1985 [2008]), 136-40.
- 51 Sun Pinghua, *Human Rights Protection System in China* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2014).
- 52 So frequent is the usage that I can give only a sample of references: Deng Xiaoping, 'Muqian de xingshi he renwu (1980.01.16)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1982 [2008]), 259; Deng Xiaoping, 'Guanche tiaozheng fangzhen, baozheng anding tuanjie (1980.12.25)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1982 [2008]), 356; Deng Xiaoping, 'Zhongguo de duiwai zhengce (1982.08.21)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 2, 1982 [2008]), 417; Deng Xiaoping, 'Jianshe you zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi (1984.06.30)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 64; Deng Xiaoping, 'Women de hongwei mubiao he genben zhengce (1984.10.06)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 77; Deng Xiaoping, 'Zai zhongyang guwen weiyuanhui disanci quanti huiyi shang de jianghua (1984.10.22)', in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin

the CPC. Instead, it was a relatively minor usage by Deng, ‘moderately well-off society [*xiaokang shehui*]’ that would become the norm.<sup>53</sup> Even so, it was not until Jiang Zemin’s speech at the sixteenth congress of the CPC in 2002 that it became part official policy positions.<sup>54</sup> Jiang Zemin broke ground by using the phrase *xiaokang shehui* in the title of his speech, now adding ‘in an all-round way [*quanmian*]’. So central did the full term – well-off society in an all-round way – become that we also find it in Hu Jintao’s final speech as president in 2012 and in Xi Jinping’s major speech at the nineteenth congress of the CPC in 2017.<sup>55</sup>

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- chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 89-90; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Jundui yao fucong zhengge guojia jianshe daju (1984.11.01)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 98; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Gaige keji tizhi shi weile jiefang shengchanli (1985.03.07)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 109; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zai zhongguo gongchandang quanguo daibiao huiyi shang de jianghua (1985.09.23)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 143; Deng Xiaoping, ‘You lingdao you zhixu de jinxing shehuizhuyi jianshe (1987.03.08)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 210; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Huijian xianggang tebie xingzhengqu jibenfa qicao weiyuanhui weiyuan shi de jianghua (1987.04.16)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 218; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Woguo fangzhen zhengce de liang ge jiben dian (1987.07.04)’, 250; Deng, ‘Women gan de shiye shi quanxin de shiye (1987.10.13)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 256.
- 53 Deng Xiaoping, ‘Fazhan zhongri guanxi yao kan de yuan xie (1984.03.25)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1984 [2008]), 54; Deng, ‘Jianshe you zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi (1984.06.30)’, 64; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zhengqu zhengge zhonghua minzu de da tuanjie (1986.09.23)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1986 [2008]), 161; Deng, ‘Huijian xianggang tebie xingzhengqu jibenfa qicao weiyuanhui weiyuan shi de jianghua (1987.04.16)’, 216; Deng, ‘Xiqu lishi jingyan, fangzhi cuowu qingxiang (1987.04.30)’, 226; Deng Xiaoping, ‘Zhongyang yao you quanwei (1988.09.12)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1988 [2008]), 278. On one occasion, Deng uses the full combination, ‘the level of a moderately well-off society [*xiaokang shehui de shuiping*]’: Deng Xiaoping, ‘Gaige kaifang shi zhongguo zhenzheng huoyue qilai (1987.05.12)’, in *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, vol. 3, 1988 [2008]), 233.
- 54 For material on the sixteenth congress, see <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/44506.htm>.
- 55 Hu Jintao, *Jianding bu yi yanzhe zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi daolu, qianjin wei quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui er fendou* (2012.11.08) (Beijing: Renmin

A detailed comparison of the speeches<sup>56</sup> is beyond the remit of this study, but one item is relevant: the gradual fixing of dates. From Deng Xiaoping's hints<sup>57</sup> to Xi Jinping's detailed clarity,<sup>58</sup> we find the following:

2000: The achievement of basic *xiaokang*, fixed on economic conditions.

2020: Attainment of a *xiaokang shehui* in an all-round way by the centenary of the founding of the CPC.

2049: A strong 'socialistically modernised country [*shehuizhuyi xiandaihua guojia*]' on the centenary of the People's Republic.

The Confucian three ages have clearly been reinterpreted in light of Marxism. Thus, rising from chaos and disorder to *xiaokang* (and ascending peace, *shengping*) becomes the long period of constructing socialism. But most interesting is the clear fixing of dates. Is this not unwise for politicians, who routinely have the habit of failing to achieve stated goals? This clarity may be quite difficult to understand for those steeped in the Euro-American liberal and bourgeois tradition. In this tradition, politicians are wary of any targets, not merely because they know opponents will undo them at the first opportunity, but also because political spin entails that one promises nothing while pretending to promise everything. More to the point, this tradition is wary indeed of any project that

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chubanshe, 2012); Xi Jinping, *Juesheng quanmian jiancheng xiaokang shehui, duoqu xinshidai zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi weida shengli* (2017.10.18) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2017).

- 56 It would include the genre of communist leaders' speeches, a comparative analysis of continuities and variations, and the elaboration of new dimensions, as we find particularly with Xi Jinping.
- 57 While most of Deng's focus was on achievements by the turn of the century, he occasionally spoke of 30 and 50 years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when China would have reached the level of a moderately developed country and the superiority of socialism would become apparent.
- 58 Apart from the speech at the nineteenth congress, see also the two volumes, *The Governance of China*: Xi Jinping, *Tan zhiguolizheng*, vol. 1 (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2014); Xi Jinping, *Tan zhiguolizheng*, vol. 2 (Beijing: Waiwen chubanshe, 2017); see also Roland Boer, 'Xi Jinping's China: Keeping the Imagination Alive Under Socialism in Power', in *Socialist Imaginations: Utopias, Myths, and the Masses*, ed. Stefan Arvidsson, Jakub Beneš, and Anja Kirsch (London: Routledge, 2019), 244-64.

seems too 'utopian', too transcendent and thereby unknown and vague.

In order to understand the very different approach of the Chinese government, we need to remember not so much the great emphasis on continuity and stability of long-term plans, but the point first made by He Xiu: both the Greatest Peace (*taiping*) and Ascending Peace (*shengping*) are eras that can be seen and recorded. They are empirically verifiable, rather than falling into the realm of vague promises and rumour. The 'two centenary goals [*liangge yibainian*]' may be seen in this light: as the date of 2020 draws nearer, we find ever greater detail concerning what a *xiaokang shehui* in an all-round way means and what needs to be done to ensure it is achieved. Thus, Jiang Zemin interprets 'all-round way' to mean socialist democracy, the legal system, ideological and ethical standards, and sustainable development. By the time of Xi Jinping's speech, we find advanced science and education, thriving culture, greater social harmony,<sup>59</sup> a better quality of life, poverty alleviation, medical cover for all, improved education, and environmental health. In speech after speech, Xi Jinping continues to elaborate on what these items entail, with the ensuing resources, detailed planning, implementation and assessment.

In all this verifiable planning, what has happened to *datong*, which since Mao Zedong has been reinterpreted in light of communism? Has it been replaced by a strong socialistically modernised society, thereby relegating *datong* to an imaginary 'utopian' future? The answer lies elsewhere: the stage of socialism – according the Marxist framework first developed by Lenin – precedes communism, which may take a long time indeed to achieve. Thus, the Chinese Marxist logic is that socialism is the period for achieving *xiaokang*, indeed that until *xiaokang* is attained, China remains at the preliminary stage of socialism. Let me put it this way: Xi Jinping has identified three core issues as markers of attaining *xiaokang*: managing profound risks, poverty alleviation and environmental

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59 It is beyond my remit to analyse here the complex terms of security (*anquan*), harmony (*hexie*) and stability (*wending*), which run through all material since Deng Xiaoping.

health. Without these, one cannot speak of a moderately well-off, healthy and peaceful society. With them, one may speak of a 'new era [*xin shidai*]' of socialism, a socialistically modernised society.<sup>60</sup> But not yet a verifiable and carefully recorded *datong*.

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60 Indeed, the speech at the nineteenth congress would become the basis for Xi Jinping Thought for Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era, or, in brief, Xi Jinping Thought.

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# Depression and Political Will

Brian Price<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** By way of a reflection on Chantal Akerman's 2011 film, *Almayer's Folly*, this paper is an attempt to describe the ways that political depression complicates the way that we understand the will—in particular, Peter Hallward's conception of dialectical voluntarism. To what extent, I ask, can we be expected to know our minds before acting in a politically efficacious way? And to what extent, in turn, can the complications of aesthetic experience as an affective registration of the personal, moral and social complications of the world as we experience it lead us to a different conception of the will than dialectical voluntarism affords. This essay, then, gestures in the direction of an aesthetic conception of the will, but only insofar as aesthetic experience is shorn of the clarifying imperatives of judgment.

Take as a point of departure, and also as a point of agreement, Peter Hallward's assertion that "it is difficult to think of a canonical notion more roundly condemned in recent 'Western' philosophy, than the notion of will, to say nothing of that general will so widely condemned as a precursor of tyranny and totalitarian terror."<sup>2</sup> Hallward has been defending the will against its detractors on the left who have privileged, in its place, either a melancholic diagnosis of the inevitability of failure, or else laudatory appraisals of failure as the necessary undoing of social bonds and the institutions that fortify those bonds. In "The Will of the People: Dialectical Voluntarism and the Subject of Politics," for instance, Hallward claims that "Even those thinkers who, against the grain of the times, have insisted on the primacy of self-determination and self-emancipation have tended to do so in ways that devalue political will *per se*."<sup>3</sup> Among the philosophers included in Hallward's account is Rancière, whom he characterizes as "one the few philosophers to emphasize the category of 'the people',

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2 Peter Hallward, "The Will of the People: Dialectical Voluntarism and the Subject of Politics," in *Theory After Theory*, eds. Jane Elliott and Derek Attridge (Routledge: London and New York, 2011), 93.

3 Hallward, "The Will of the People," 94.

but does so in terms that privilege disruption and dis-location, terms geared towards the aesthetic criteria...that have come to dominate his recent work."<sup>4</sup> What Hallward notices, I think, is an aesthetic conception of politics that undercuts, in its constant appeal to perceptual fissures, any claim for the people, which by definition, could never survive the continual acts of undoing that are celebrated in the aesthetic experience of modernism. And in Foucault's philosophy, to cite just one more of Hallward's many examples, he indicates a similar contradiction at work that is left unresolved:

Foucault never compromised on his affirmation of 'voluntary insubordination' in the face of newly stifling forms of government and power, and in crucial lectures from the early 1970s he demonstrated how the development of modern psychiatric and carceral power, in the immediate wake of the French Revolution, was designed first and foremost to 'over-power' and the break the will of the people who had the folly literally to 'take themselves for a king'; nevertheless, in his published work Foucault tends to see the will as complicit in forms of self-supervision, self-regulation and self-subjection.<sup>5</sup>

If I am emphasizing here what Hallward never directly describes as the problem of contradiction in both Ranciere's and Foucault's thought, it is largely because the overcoming of contradiction itself strikes me as the unacknowledged first step of Hallward's own theory of dialectical voluntarism. If we assume, as Hallward does, that "the practical exercise of the will only proceeds, as a matter of course, in the face of resistance," then any expression of political will necessarily supposes the presence of a clear enemy and a clear, if also inflamed, conscience. That is, if we are ourselves divided—if we show some sympathy for what we are meant to oppose whole, no matter how unreasonable it otherwise seems in view of our ongoing political commitments—then any use of the will, presumably, will

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4 Hallward, "The Will of the People," 94.

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undercut our own interests, just as much as it does the stated interests of what or whom we resist. I agree with Hallward that we discount the efficacy of the will at our own peril. I will even go farther and say that emancipation cannot be, strictly speaking, the desired end of every political practice, if emancipation has simply come to describe the protection of our idiosyncrasies against the necessary compromises of social and institutional forms of existence. What I am less sure of is the status of the clear conscience—if only clear because inflamed—as the prerequisite to resistance, even while I see the obstacle that such an absence might present to the desired movement from an act of individual will to the will of the people: what Hallward calls dialectical voluntarism. Or, to put it more plainly, what I am less sure of is how well we have to know our own minds in order to act well and in ways that may inspire others to do the same. What I mean, here, by knowing one's own mind is something like Robert Pippin's description of a reflective model of agency in which it is possible to say, as Pippin does in critical tones, that "I know what I am about and why I am about it."<sup>6</sup> Is it not at least tacitly the case that what Hallward says about Rancière and Foucault, in the passages just quoted, is that both thinkers know *what* they are about but not *why* they are about it; or else, they do not know *what* they are about just *why* they are about it. A reflective model of agency is, in this respect, an assertion that the work of sustained self-reflection is ultimately understood as the purification of thought privately performed before an image of purposiveness and against the perceived presence in the self of contradictory impulses.

For this reason, it is tempting to say that Hallward's dialectical voluntarism does share something with the threat of totalitarianism, a meeting point that has blocked the will from having any real currency in contemporary political theory. And yet, in an essay on Fanon, Hallward is careful to situate the work of reflection and clarification within a freely deliberating collective—the space, presumably, where private opinion gives way to a communally agreed upon demand. There, he writes:

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6 Robert Pippin, *Fatalism in American Film Noir: Some Cinematic Philosophy* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), 14.

A consistent voluntarism requires, first, that political will indeed be considered as a matter of volition or *will*, rather than compulsion, coercion or ‘instinct’. Voluntary action is a matter of free deliberation and prescription. Political will is thought through: it subsumes a ‘spontaneous’ enthusiasm or rebellion in an organized mobilization or a disciplined campaign. It affirms the primacy of a conscious decision and commitment, independent of any ‘deeper’ (i.e. unconscious) determination, be it instinctual, historical, or technological.<sup>7</sup>

Described this way, the work of popular will dovetails in interesting ways with Ernesto Laclau’s conception of hegemony as an equivalential relation, in which we emphasize our differences for the sake of what we agree must change in the order of the social. Our differences remain in view, in an equivalential relation, but remain de-emphasized for the duration of the demand made and sustained as a new order of the social.<sup>8</sup> Such a view, Hallward’s or Laclau’s, allows for the space of debate and exchange in the formulation of a demand that comes to name the resistance and also what is being resisted; Hallward’s most emphatic criterion of political will. In this sense, we have to assume, as well, in terms of Hallward’s argument, specifically, that the process of free deliberation has always the effect of resolving contradictory views in the self for the sake of a collective demand. If we cannot do so all by ourselves, in other words, conversation with others will produce the clarification needed to sustain resistance. Thus, the work of free and direct deliberation will either entirely eradicate the wayward impulse on the strength of reason alone, which finds its justification in the clarity of ongoing resistance; or else, the will to prescription, the naming of the demand, will come to shame the self that cannot be reconciled whole with what has been

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7 Peter Hallward, “Fanon and Political Will,” *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2011): 107.

8 See, for instance, Ernesto Laclau, “Why Do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?” in *Emancipation(s)* (London and New York: Verso, 1996): 36-46, and Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York, 2005).

prescribed. If shame is required, and this seems to me the likelier scenario of dialectical voluntarism, then the act of shaming might bring the one shamed to agreement rather quickly. However, imagined from the perspective of the one shamed, I contend that the quick work of apology and renunciation that follows exposure—when exposure gives way to shame—occurs in order to prevent others from carrying on noticing the source of shame that one feels in the unpredictable duration that necessarily extends beyond the moment of exposure. We can feel shame, but having renounced the wayward impulse, nothing prevents us from carrying on entertaining that very same impulse, knowing as we now do simply not to show it. Consequently, resistance may arrogate more to itself than it will be able, in the end, to sustain, especially if wayward feeling is converted into resentment by virtue of the ongoing resistance to resistance that dialectical voluntarism requires.

I want to emphasize the affective dimension, here, not simply to note one way that dialectical voluntarism might fail, but to ask instead what a theory of the will might consist in that *does not* require us to presume a reflective model of agency that comes into focus only after the sorting of conflicting impulses has been completed. Must I place the will in parenthesis until I get my mind right? What if others cannot help me to know what I am about and why I am about it, so that we can all know what *we* are about and why *we* are about it? It seems to me that the real challenge in constructing a theory of the will lies less in the eradication of contradiction than it does in taking instead, and as a point of departure, the undecidable character of difficult emotions, or so-called errant thoughts, which is more often the condition we find ourselves in when resistance is most warranted.

This question has come into focus, for me, by way of Chantal Akerman's 2011 film, *Almayer's Folly* and has done so as a question about the relationship between depression and the will, which is figured in the film—in aesthetic terms—as a problem of camera movement; namely, of how we tell camera movement apart from whatever else moves within and outside of the frame. Depression, here, is figured as political depression, or at

least as a depression that affects our ability to know what to think or do within a space that requires both decision and an action. And as is quite well known about depression, a cause is very difficult to locate. One can identify a trigger, but rarely do such acts of identification have the effect of resolving the depression one feels, which, in turn, casts doubt on the cause identified. Just as often, and as many have remarked on—in both clinical and simply anecdotal contexts—depression can feel as if it has come from nowhere and regularly stays for a duration that cannot be predicted. For this reason, it may not be so important to distinguish instances of political depression from non-political experiences of depression, since one can only ever identify a cause that remains shrouded in doubt. What strikes me in Akerman’s work, in particular, is an aesthetic understanding of depression that resembles William Styron’s famous description of it as a “disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way that it becomes known to the self—to the mediating intellect—as to verge close to being beyond description.”<sup>9</sup> I would add to Styron’s description of depression the one offered by Christine Ross in *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Depression*. There, Ross writes:

Depression is an illness not of incompleteness of the self in relation to the other but of the insufficiency of the self in relation to itself—the counterpart of the neoliberal idea of performative autonomy—which has banalized the neurotic’s experience of prohibited desire for the other and related feelings of lack, fault, and repression. In a society defending values of initiative, flexibility, self-realization, and the right (even the requirement) to choose one’s own life, the chief moral symptom of depression is not culpability but frustration, not repression but incitement, not loss of plenitude but a sheer sense of incompetence.<sup>10</sup>

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9 William Styron, *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 7.

10 Christine Ross, *The Aesthetics of Disengagement: Contemporary Art and Design* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 3.



If, in a state of depression, one feels not—as Ross indicates—a sense of incompleteness in relation to another, but an “insufficiency of the self in relation to itself,” and not a loss of plenitude but a sense of incompetence, then we have a very good basis for understanding depression in Styron’s terms as a state in which we verge close to being beyond description. If we verge close to being beyond something we still have some capacity for it. There are things we can identify, lines around the self that we can begin to draw, but as a function of the insufficiency of the self in relation to the self, we cannot complete a description of ourselves, one that would indicate most plainly what separates me from some other, which is what dialectical voluntarism requires. That is, under the concept of dialectical voluntarism, I am intended to know what I am about and why I am about it, to return to Pippin’s conception of reflective agency. In a state of depression, however, understood as the feeling of incompetence, I may know who I am, but may no longer know *how* or *why* to be about it. This is not the most promising starting point for a theory of the will, but I’m not sure how we can avoid dealing with it, either.

The problem I am describing here is, perhaps, most familiar in colonial and post-colonial contexts. And it is not by accident that Fanon’s description of the will is central to Hallward’s own justification of dialectical voluntarism. In his consideration of Fanon’s writing, Hallward points to Fanon’s rhetorical reworking of the colonist’s description of the native as an extension of nature, as essentially impassive; lacking in volition. To that, Fanon responded in *The Wretched of the Earth*: “We must tame nature, not convince it.”<sup>11</sup> For Fanon, as Hallward points out, this implies both the self-identification of the nature of the pathology that has been instilled in the colonized subject and the subsequent allowance of that realization to become what animates the ongoing resistance as the continual declaration of its opposite. This includes for Fanon a belief that “since the racial drama is played out in the open, the black man has no time to ‘make it unconsciousness.’”<sup>12</sup> Once one knows what to reject, what the

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11 Fanon quoted in Hallward, “Fanon and Political Will,” 109.

12 Peter Hallward, “Fanon and Political Will,” 110.

enemy looks like, one uses that very image to sustain a resistance that cannot pause or give way to further reflection. In his essay “The Case of Blackness,” Fred Moten rejects this aspect of Fanon’s conception in a rather compelling way when he asks: “But how can the struggle for liberation of the pathological be aligned with the eradication of the pathological?”<sup>13</sup> I take Moten’s question to be a critique of a reflective model of agency, and add that the only way to sustain a claim that we know what we are about and why we are about it is through the maintenance of a pathology that retains all of its vehemence but none of its signs.

*Almayer’s Folly* raises the stakes of this question in considerable and, for me, deeply uncomfortable ways. Adapted from Joseph Conrad’s first novel, *Almayer’s Folly* is a film in which the distinction between colonial and post-colonial is rather difficult to make. This confusion is owed, in no small part, to the ways in which the film is, we might say, on the verge of being indescribable. We know that it is set somewhere in Southeast Asia, but not where exactly; nor is it ever made particularly clear the period in which the film is set. The primary location is a small island in Southeast Asia inhabited by Almayer, a white European who was sent to the island some years before by Lingard, a fellow European trader who promised Almayer to deliver him a map to a gold mine and thus to a fortune that would allow Almayer to move to Europe and to live a proper bourgeois life. What else we know is that Lingard had arranged for a marriage between Almayer and a native woman, Zahira, who quickly comes to detest him, and also that they have a child, Nina. Almayer describes Nina—while still a young child—as the only one in the world who loves him and her as the only one in the world he loves. As a part of the agreement for gold, however, Lingard demands that Nina be placed in a boarding school in Europe once she is old enough to begin school, where she will receive a so-called proper education and learn to live as a white person. The film begins as Lingard shows up to take Nina to Europe.

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13 Fred Moten, “The Case of Blackness,” *Criticism*, Vol. 50, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 209.

In an early scene in the film, Akerman visualizes, in what might be best described as anti-visual terms, the problem of depression and its relation to the will, and the will as something that cannot be easily known in relation to a stable or sympathetic position. The scene I have in mind concerns the last moment in which Almayer is left to deliberate with Lingard, to consider whether or not he can make good on his promise to send Nina to Europe. We have already heard Almayer say, at this point, that he gave up on his idea of love simply to move here—wherever here is—and thus marry Zahira, who hates him. Another way to say this is that Almayer gave up on his idea of European Love for the sake of the gold that would allow him, in time, the European life he also desired. And yet, now here, wherever here is, Almayer does not want to be without Nina, either; his biracial child who could otherwise carry on living in Southeast Asia with her family, with Almayer—greatly reducing, one presumes, the threat of resentment. Yet, as we know, part of Almayer's folly consists in his unabated desire that Nina live as white, that she be fully assimilated, which also means that he has to give up the child he loves for the notional white European he also wants her to be. One reason I say that this film complicates matters considerably is that it will ask us to take Almayer's complications seriously. This is not to say that we are meant to admire Almayer but that we acknowledge the complications of the choice he has to make. For, if he decides to give up on his dream of Europe, he can retain his daughter and likely her love—but staying, presumably, also means doing so without money and with a wife who abhors him, and could herself only ever be subject of Almayer's racism. So, I think we can say that Almayer is thoroughly unlikable; but even so, he is presented with a choice that he simply cannot *not* make and despite the fact that he seems aware of the problems that every option before him has to offer.

What I want to note in this scene, in particular, is that way that Akerman's camera movement figures depression in aesthetic terms. What the camera movement traces in this scene is the imperfectly traceable, because nearly indescribable, self of Almayer—that is, not simply what he looks like, but a nearly objective correlative of his mental state at the

moment in which he is pressed to decide on the fate of his daughter. Since this is not, perhaps, an ordinary effect of camera movement, I want just briefly to say what I think camera movement typically consists in.

Camera movement is the concatenation of place as line, which is registered by the four enclosing sides of the frame. These four sides etch out, hegemonically, that which remains continuous in what moves. The invariability of the frame as it moves in one direction or another, one direction *then* another, is what remains consistent in continuous movement, even as what moves within the frame itself—people, vehicles, animals—carry on in directions that take them away from what remains in the frame. In this sense, we can say, in terms more familiar to painting, that camera movement—as an expression of the priority of the frame—is before all else, line. It is line in precisely the way we understand the term in painting, as that which performs the work of figuration. One completes a camera movement as one completes a line: as an expression of the figure distinguished from ground, even if the function of camera movement is only in its rarest instances a way of defining the limits of the body so as to show a body whole, as if at once. Camera movement is better understood as the concatenation of place as line, which includes views of bodies and other objects, but is not what gives those things the definition they assume prior to their capture by the camera; rather, camera movement is what establishes a particular affective relation between the things it shows.

This scene between Lingard and Almayer begins in a long shot with Almayer seated to the right of the screen, and Lingard to the rear left of the frame. Throughout the scene, the camera moves slowly forward, almost imperceptibly so. The camera moves for the entire duration of the shot, but in what ways, one cannot, I think, always be so sure. The primary reason for this is owed to the darkness of the frame itself, to the way that shadows cut across the body and darken the walls of the room itself. notice how dark the frame is and how that darkness makes the movement of the camera difficult to describe accurately. This difficulty is owed, I propose, to what this substantial and unevenly distributed field

of blackness takes away from the clarity of objects in the frame; Almayer included.

In this shot, we know that the camera is moving, but not always what moves, or how it moves. Perhaps the best way of noticing movement in the shot is by way of the illuminated objects on the left side of the screen—a window, a plant on a table, a red blanket—as they are slowly eclipsed by the left edge of the frame. This particular instance of camera movement deviates in important ways from what I've offered as a normative description of camera movement as the concatenation of place as line. There are moments where the camera seems to be moving more assuredly in the direction of Almayer, and one senses an arc in that movement, a decisive turn to the right. And yet, if we continue to look at the full frame, including at the center, which is largely blackened, it is not easy to decide if the camera has also stopped moving forward, if in fact it has begun to swing right more assuredly, as it also seems to do. In this sense, Akerman's camera movement breaks with the hegemonic character of camera movement as line that yields a particular affect for a particular reason. For instance, if we think of camera movement as an equivalential relation—then we would say that in a world where everything moves, what camera movement gives us is a way of understanding the de-emphasization of this or that object in a potentially limitless field for the sake of the relation it needs now to emphasize.

A very good and contrasting example of camera movement as equivalential relation can be seen in famous scene from Renoir's *La Grande Illusion* (1937) where in the middle of a drag performance in the prison camp it is announced that Douamont has been retaken by the French. One of the performers pulls off his wig and begins leading his compatriots and fellow prisoners in a singing of "La Marseillaise." As soon as the song begins, Renoir's camera pans right in a circular movement that will unite in one shot the fellow French prisoners standing in unison, as a front, and then returns to the man who began the song. And during the initial movement of the camera Renoir pauses—but does not cut—to show us two Germans conferring and then quickly exiting the

frame so that the camera can continue its hegemonic movement, as if to de-emphasize themselves for the sake of this collective display of French unity as unbroken line. They will remain, one assumes, in the room but cannot be figured as a part of this unifying camera movement, which both identifies the resistance and what it resists. In one sense, this kind of camera movement meets one of the conditions of Édouard Glissant's understanding of relation, when he claims that "Relation is the knowledge in motion of beings, which risks the being of the world."<sup>14</sup> Relation is knowledge in precisely the way that camera movement is line: it concatenates place as line for the sake of a particular affect, and it does so as contingent, since we know that more moves than just what the camera outlines. But without that line, these beings—and whatever demand they may need to make—may instead fold into the undifferentiated, absolute being of the world.

Where Renoir's line runs clean and completes itself in a full circle as an expression of solidarity, in *Almayer's Folly*, the lines traced by the four edges of the frame in motion fail to show themselves as continuously distinct. We know that the camera is moving but not always in what way things move. The work of concatenation is disrupted by the darkness in the frame that takes the edge off of objects such that we feel the camera move but cannot always identify how. And I would add here that In *Black Sun*, Kristeva tells us that often the first thing to go for the depressed person is the ability for concatenated speech, resulting in the "uttering [of] sentences that are interrupted."<sup>15</sup> If the darkness in the frame interrupts the concatenating effect of camera movement, it does so precisely to describe Almayer's psychic state and the seemingly impossible nature of the decision he has to make. His will, in other words, is required, but what he lacks is an unbroken line around the self, or selves as self, such as we see in Renoir. Renoir's line assures his audience that these charac-

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14 Édouard Glissant, "That Those Beings Be Not Being," *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betsy Wing (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 187.

15 Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 33.

ters—and presumably his spectators, as well—know what they are about and why they are about it. Almayr, by contrast, is seen sinking into the being of the world, which he knows to be moving, but not how, which is one way that we can also define depression. In a state of depression, how do we know where to draw a line around the self when we have a heightened awareness that everything moves but not what, in particular, is moving in what moves?

So, what, then, does this broken line tell us about the will, if we agree that what it does describe is depression, or the moment in which one loses the ability to concatenate and finds oneself, in Styron's terms, on the verge on an inability to describe? One answer that I would give asks that we make a distinction between objects and things as way of reconsidering our ability to act in the way that dialectical voluntarism asks that we do. I have in mind, obviously, Heidegger's famous reflections on the thing, which he opposes to objects on the basis of the four-fold. For Heidegger, a thing is distinguished from an object by virtue of the four-folds that can be identified in it: earth, sky, mortals, divinity. His example, as we know, is the jug—and he draws on it to consider the problem of making a distinction between distance and nearness once we give up on what he calls the "over-againstness" of the object. By contrast, if the jug is a thing, then it is so despite the form that is given to matter *as* jug. We cannot say that the jug no longer contains something of earth and sky within in it. It is given form, but does that mean, then, that matter—or what is gathered—has been distinguished from sky, the dirt and water that hardens in contact with the air and the sun but does not go away? If we admit that the jug in no sense marks the overcoming of the distinction between dirt, water, and air, but is only its redistribution in and as form, then how would we begin to describe the distance between things, since dirt, water, and air remain, in that way, present in the jug? How can we say that we are nearing something or becoming distant from it, if dirt and air remain constant everywhere? Heidegger's way of putting this is to ask whether the jug can ever really be empty, even if its use is to contain and distribute liquid as gift. Since, when it has no liquid in it, the jug still

contains air, which is also what clay needs to become jug—not to mention that even when it has liquid, it still contains air. If an object is defined by its over-againstness, it is so as a result of regarding a thing strictly in relation to its dominant aspect. And we do this, according to Heidegger, when we expect the object to become an object of representation. “Thing in itself, thought in a rigorously Kantian way,” Heidegger says, “means an object that is no object for us, because it is supposed to stand, to stay put, without a possible before: for the human representational act that encounters it.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, when we regard a thing as an object, the object as *over-against*, then we cede the aspectual to the noumenal, which is where representation brokers a dangerous convergence of epistemology and ontology.

In its failure to concatenate, Akerman’s camera movement refuses the over-againstness of objecthood. In one sense, what we can say of this movement is that it is much like the moment in which we regard the jug as a four-fold thing. When the ground shifts beneath our feet as philosophical insight we can no longer easily distinguish near from far. And this insight is predicated in its own way on the failure of concatenation as a representational act that also describes the experience of depression, just as much as it describes philosophical wonder.

In “The Case of Blackness,” Fred Moten calls on Heidegger’s conception of thingness in order to complicate Fanon’s pathologically-perceived voluntarism and the mere reversal of terms it involves and draws on Heidegger’s reminder that, in Old High German, *thing* also refers to “a gathering to deliberate on a matter under discussion, a contested matter.”<sup>17</sup> Moten calls on Heidegger’s distinction between object and thing as a way of describing the entanglement of color as race, such that the priority of color over line, familiar to modernist aesthetics, also becomes a way of disrupting blackness as a racialized ontological category that is willfully confused as epistemology, which typically marks the end of

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16 Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Perennial, 1971), 177.

17 Heidegger, “The Thing,” 174.



contestation. And I would point as well to Alessandra Raengo's essay, "Black Matters," which pursues a similar aesthetic-political course in conversation with Moten's work.<sup>18</sup> Moten writes:

It is...precisely through a consideration of the unstable zone between lived experience of the black [as color] and the fact of blackness, between the color black and what it absorbs and reflects, what it takes in and pours out, that we can begin to see how it is possible to mistake impossibility or impoverishment for absence or eradication. That zone, made available to us by the broken bridge of mistranslation, is where one lives a kind of oscillation between virtual solitude and fantastic multitude.<sup>19</sup>

For Moten, this is meant to complicate the kind of clarity and unreflective rigor of resistance in Fanon, which, like Hallward's celebration of it as dialectical voluntarism, demands that one always know what one is about and why one is about it. As aesthetic experience—whether as broken bridge of mistranslation or un-concatenated camera movement—the priority of color over line describes the uneven, unpredictable and yet ubiquitous character of blackness in aesthetic terms that significantly complicates blackness as a racial term. And in so doing it casts a shadow of doubt over objects for the sake of what thingness might make possible for social existence. As Moten claims, this thingness is a zone in which one lives between loneliness and sociability, much in the way that works of art can make us feel alone, by virtue of what we think we uniquely see, or else bring us together in the sharing of aesthetic experience that also produces or simply reflects back a solidarity that needs no categories to sustain itself as resistance. Or, to put it differently, as modes of thingness, philosophical insight and depression are constituted in similar ways, as a way of being always close to, but never at, the end of description. That

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18 Alessandra Raengo, "Black Matters," *Discourse*, Vol. 38, issue 2 (2016): 246-264.

19 Moten, "The Case of Blackness," 204.

same sense of aspectual volatility may also be what binds powerful instances of the social, if depression is converted into wonder, or social forms of happiness, which will always require reimagining and re-justification in the place of unreflective resistance, or even the supposition of a right mind. It also asks that we begin to pursue a notion of the will that does not take dialectical opposition as its point of departure. In this sense, what Akerman's camera movement suggests, if not also Moten's conception of blackness, instead is something more like an aesthetic conception of the will, one that depends less on the clarified and clarifying resistance of another than it does on our own capacity to see and make different sense of what already surrounds us.

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## The lively voice of Critical Theory

Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. The goal is to focus on the critical theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and to extend their theories to our age. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the concerns and theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are neglected in its second and third generations.

We believe that the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are still capable of explaining many social, cultural, and political problems of our time. However, in some cases, we need to revise those theories. For example, the culture industry in our time can also work with a different mechanism from that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In our age, the majorities can access the media and even respond to the messages which they receive – this is something which was not possible in Adorno and Horkheimer's time. But this doesn't mean that the culture industry's domination is over. Thus, we may need to revise the theory of the culture industry to explain the new forms of cultural domination in our age.

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