

SOCIAL THEORY TODAY

Edited by Anthony Giddens and
Jonathan H. Turner

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subordinate population, come to have an accurate view of social reality and of the conflicts which are at the centre of that reality. Class analysis, better than any other mode of analysis, makes such an understanding possible.

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Critical Theory¹

AXEL HONNETH

It is now half a century since critical theory emerged under the direction of a single man and as the work of a circle of intellectuals; but it was not until the student movement turned back to the writings of the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) that critical theory was recognized as a unified theoretical project. Since then it has occupied the intellectual imagination: historical research has retraced the history of that intellectual circle around Horkheimer from its beginnings in Frankfurt to its spread, via France, to the United States;² spurred on by the disillusioning accounts of its early members, philological analyses have brought to light the internal inconsistencies, indeed the whole disparity of the circle;³ above all, younger authors, motivated by changes in the *Zeitgeist*, have continued to discover new themes which have thus far remained unnoticed in the old writings;⁴ finally, however, the critical discussion that the Frankfurt School has stimulated for over twenty years has also revealed materially relevant deficiencies and theoretical aporias in the original project.⁵ This process has in some cases led to the admission of a fundamental weakness in critical theory (see, e.g., Brandt: 1986).

Thus, for all the continual, indeed increasing, interest that critical theory

¹ Translated by John Farrell. I wish to thank Rolf Wiggerhaus for helpful comments.

² See, among others, Dubiel: 1984; Jay: 1973; Wiggerhaus: 1986. In addition, the following provide comprehensive surveys: Bottomore: 1984; Brandt: 1981; Gründer: 1985; Held: 1980; Jeyer: 1982; Kilminster: 1979; Slater: 1977; Tar: 1977.

³ Institute members' accounts of their experiences at the institute exist primarily in interview form: see Habermas (1978) and Löwenthal (1980); an extract from Löwenthal is translated in Dubiel (1981). The first systematic investigations of the internal differences within the institute's circle are presented in Brandt (1981), Breuer (1985), Habermas (1986b) and Jay (1982).

⁴ See, for example, Höriseb: 1980; see also Dews: 1984.

⁵ Above all I am thinking of Benhabib (1981), Habermas (1984, ch. 4, section 2), Held (1980, part 3), Honneth (1985, part 1) and Wellmer (1971).

has attracted internationally,⁶ a sober awareness of its theoretical achievements is what prevails today. Every new wave of interest has, with its research endeavours, removed from the old project a part of its initial fascination and gradually shaped it into a realistic theoretical approach that is open to verification. Every current attempt at a systematic reconstruction of critical theory has to proceed from the critical findings that this process has unearthed. Only with the awareness of all its deficiencies can one today productively continue the theoretical tradition originated by Horkheimer. In what follows I want to attempt such a systematic reconstruction of critical theory by supplementing the existing results with a further thesis, which is that the social-theoretical means whereby Horkheimer's goals might have been successfully realized were present solely in the works of those authors who held a more peripheral position in the Institute for Social Research. While Horkheimer, and later Adorno and Marcuse, grounded the idea of a philosophically oriented and at the same time empirically-founded theory of society firmly in the context of the contemporary sciences, they were not able to realize this claim, exemplary though it was, because they lacked an appropriate concept for the analysis of societal processes. On the other hand, Benjamin's, Neumann's, Kirchheimer's and, later, Fromm's material inquiries contained sociological insights and suggestions, which, taken together, could have provided pointers for such a societal concept. If the works of these authors had been taken more seriously with respect to their social-theoretical substance, then the philosophically-formulated objectives of critical theory could have been sociologically realized in a more fruitful manner.

In this essay I shall, following a brief sketch of the programmatic objectives in which critical theory was grounded by Max Horkheimer, identify the theoretically-based assumptions that prevented the 'inner circle' of the Institute for Social Research from successfully realizing the original concept. I shall then examine the social-theoretical alternative offered in the works of the 'outer circle' and, finally, after a brief glance at the post-war development of the institute, I shall consider implications of my thesis for Habermas's revision of critical theory.

I Max Horkheimer and the Origins of Critical Theory

Among the many attempts undertaken in the period between the two world wars to develop Marxism in a productive manner, critical theory assumes an outstanding position. It was not so much its theoretical principles but, above all, its methodological objectives which distinguished this theory from comparable approaches; these objectives arose out of an unreserved and

⁶ See the contributions in the following collections: Bonss and Honneth: 1982; Honneth and Wellmer: forthcoming.

programmatic acknowledgment of the specialist sciences. The systematic utilization of all social-scientific research disciplines in the development of a materialist theory of society was critical theory's principal goal; it hoped thereby to overcome the long-standing theoretical purism of historical materialism and make room for the possibility of a fruitful merger of academic social science and Marxist theory. This conception of the methodological objective found its most capable representative in Max Horkheimer, who was 'positivistic' enough to be able to acknowledge the value of the specialist sciences; in him the plan of an interdisciplinarily expanded Marxism grew to maturity.⁷

To realize this wide-ranging objective, an intellectual climate and geographical location were required which would attract scientists of different disciplines but of similar orientation; in addition, institutional facilities were needed in order to permit these scientists to work together under one roof. In the Frankfurt of the twenties such an intellectual climate existed; supported by a wealthy and open-minded bourgeoisie, forums of cultural life had emerged here: the newly-founded university, a liberal newspaper, a radio station happy to experiment and, finally, *Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus* (Free Jewish House of Instruction) – in all a cultural life that led to an exceptional concentration of intellectual energy.⁸ In the Institute of Social Research the same city had gained a research centre which had the financial and organizational means to back social scientific projects. At this institute, founded at the instigation of Felix Weil in 1924 and affiliated to the university, research on the history of socialism was carried out in the first years.⁹ Thus, in 1930, when Max Horkheimer was appointed to succeed Grünberg as director of this institute, it was receptive to the proposal that it should provide the means and facilities for the organizational realization of the programme for an interdisciplinary theory of society. Horkheimer used his inaugural address as the occasion to present for the first time in public the programme of a critical theory of society (Horkheimer: 1972d). In the journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (or 'Studies in Philosophy and Social Science', as it was called in America), which was founded in 1932 and henceforth formed the intellectual centre of the institute's work,¹⁰ Horkheimer, together with Herbert Marcuse, attempted to elaborate this approach in the following years.

The contemporary position of the human sciences formed the background of the somewhat programmatic articles in which the project of critical theory gradually assumed its methodological shape.¹¹ On the level of the history

⁷ On Horkheimer's theoretical development, see Korthals: 1985; Küsters: 1980. On Horkheimer in general, see Schmidt: 1976.

⁸ On this, see Schivelbusch: 1982.

⁹ On the early history of the Institute for Social Research see, among others, Kluge (1972, esp. Book 4, ch. 2) and Migdal (1981).

¹⁰ The collected edition of *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (1970) is now available as a paperback (1980). On the history of this journal, see Schmidt's immensely informative Foreword to the new edition (Schmidt: 1980); see also Habermas: 1980.

of ideas, Horkheimer saw the the situation into which the effort to develop a theory of society is placed as characterized by a divergence of empirical research and philosophical thinking. For him, the Hegelian philosophy of history represented the last mould of a theoretical tradition in which both branches of knowledge were merged into a single mode of thought in such a way that the empirical analysis of reality coincided with the philosophico-historical conception of reason. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, the idealist premisses on which this philosophy of history was based, as well as the unifying bond which had thus far held empirical research and philosophical reflection together, was dissolved. As a result, the two branches of the philosophy of history stood, unmediated, opposite each other, embodied in the new positivism and contemporary metaphysics. In positivism, empirical knowledge of reality is reduced to a mere search for facts, since such knowledge is separated from any philosophical self-confirmation; in the contemporary metaphysics of Max Scheler's and Nicolai Hartmann's philosophical projects, the reflection of reason atrophies to mere speculation on essence, since such reflection is independent of any theoretical reference to historico-empirical reality.¹²

For Horkheimer, the real problem of this historico-intellectual situation was its displacement of the very possibility of thinking in terms of a philosophy of history, for, in the abstract division between scientism and metaphysics – to which the post-Hegelian development of thinking had led – there is no place for the idea of a historically embodied reason on which the classical philosophy of history has always been based. Along with a philosophy of history, however, the possibility of a transcending critique is also removed from every theory of society: no longer are any cognitive means available to this theory to measure the given relations of a society against a transcending idea of reason. Therefore the foundation of a critical theory of society first presupposed the overcoming of that historico-intellectual fissure between empirical research and philosophy. Epistemologically, Horkheimer's and Marcuse's articles were directed at a systematic critique of positivism; methodologically, they were aimed at a concept of interdisciplinary research.

The materialist epistemology of the early Marx was the key to the institute's critique of positivism. Horkheimer adopted this approach, which initially was only sketched out in Marx's writings, from Lukács (see Jay: 1984, ch. 6); Marcuse, on the other hand, appropriated it from Heidegger.¹³ But both of them proceeded from the presupposition that the empirical sciences – right through to their methodology – are determined by the

¹¹ Above all, I am thinking of the articles by Horkheimer (1972c; 1972d) and Marcuse (1968).

¹² On these two fronts against metaphysics and scientism see, above all, Horkheimer (1972d), but also Horkheimer (1972a).

¹³ On the existential-ontological aspect of Marcuse's interpretation of Marxism, see Breuer (1977, ch. 2, sect. 2) and Schmidt (1968).

demands of societal labour; here, the securement of theoretical statements subserves the same interest of a mastery of physical nature by which the activity of labour is already guided on a pre-scientific level. As soon as this practical constitutional context of the sciences has been rendered transparent epistemologically, the misunderstanding emerges, however, to which positivism must inevitably lead: by justifying the sciences only on a methodological level, positivism cuts them off both from the consciousness of their own societal roots and from the knowledge of their practical objectives. In the denial of the practical framework of scientific theories Horkheimer and Marcuse saw, of course, not only the error of contemporary positivism but also the deficiency of the modern understanding of theory in general; Horkheimer retraces to as far back as Descartes the roots of that positivist consciousness which permits the sciences to appear as a pure undertaking completely detached from practical interests. 'Traditional theory' is the name he gives to this tradition of scientism which stretches across the entire period of modernity; this both he and Marcuse contrasted with 'critical theory' understood as a theory that is constantly aware of its social context of emergence as well as of its practical context of application.

Critical theory can fulfil the task thereby expected of it only if, at the same time, it has at its disposal a theory of history which is able to enlighten it about its own position and role in the historical process. Therefore, if only for epistemological reasons, the grounding of a critical theory of society demanded a reflection on the philosophico-historical level in a form for which no legitimate place was provided in the contemporary division between philosophy and the sciences. The rudiments of such a theory of history were already implicitly set out in the materialist epistemology which Horkheimer and Marcuse relied on in their critique of positivism; they elaborated these rudiments into a general framework of interpretation by extending them around the basic assumptions of historical materialism. In the thirties, Horkheimer and Marcuse still unwaveringly advocated the classical version of the Marxist theory of history. According to this, a process of development of the forces of production is taken to be the central mechanism of societal progress; along with every expanded stage in the technical system of the mastery of nature, this process also forces a new stage in the social relations of production (see, e.g., Horkheimer: 1932). Critical theory should be included in this historical event not simply – like the empirical sciences – as a cognitive authority in the labour process, but rather as a critical authority in societal self-knowledge; following Horkheimer, Marcuse stated that in critical theory 'the possibilities, to which the societal situation itself has matured', attain consciousness (Marcuse: 1968). The societal position and the practical function of critical theory were evaluated in terms of the extent to which the potential for reason present in the productive forces had already been set free in the new forms of societal organization; just as, once, Hegel's philosophy of history was assigned to research critically, with idealist presuppositions, the empirical course of

history with reference to the possibilities of reason embodied in it, so critical theory now assumed this same task on the basis of materialist premisses.

If it is the case that these preliminary epistemological considerations moved along similar lines to a productivist philosophy of history advocated by Lukács and Korsch at that time,¹⁴ then it was only in the next methodological step of critical theory that Horkheimer and Marcuse broke new ground; with this step they found what is today retrospectively called 'interdisciplinary materialism' (see, e.g., Bonss and Schindler: 1982). Both proceeded on the assumption that to the diagnosis on the philosophico-historical level, with which critical theory begins, there must be added empirical social research as a second current of reflection – hence the necessity for the cooperation of different disciplines. Neither for Horkheimer nor for Marcuse was it the case that it is exclusively the task of political economy empirically to examine society's condition in terms of a philosophy of history: a critical theory of society must make use of the entire spectrum of social scientific disciplines in order to be able to research appropriately the present conflict between the productive forces and relations of production. Horkheimer outlined the general model for the methodological relation between the philosophy of history and interdisciplinary research. It specifies a 'dialectical' dovetailing of both which was constituted such that 'philosophy, as a theoretical intention focused on the universal, the "essential", is in a position to give inspiring impulses to the specialist disciplines and, at the same time, is open enough to the world in order to allow itself to be impressed and changed by the advance of concrete studies' (Horkheimer: 1972d, p. 41).

outline of a critical theory of society and thereby determined the research programme of the institute for the thirties. The empirical problem, which he regarded as the focus of cooperation among the specialized disciplines, ensued for him from an application of the materialist philosophy of history to the contemporary situation: if the historical process in general progresses in such a way that the potential for reason embodied in the productive forces is released time and again in social conflicts, then, under the special conditions of the present, the question arises as to precisely which mechanisms prevent the outbreak of such conflicts. Just like many other Marxists of his generation, the young Horkheimer perceived the process of the increasing integration of the working class into the advanced capitalist societal system as the most striking developmental tendency of his time.¹⁵ Horkheimer's perspective was so one-sidedly concentrated on this integrative achievement of advanced capitalism that he made it the point of reference for the entire research work of the institute; during the thirties, its interdisciplinary investigations were wholly concerned with the question, 'how [do] the mental mechanisms come about, by which it is possible that tensions between

¹⁴ The best overview of the 'philosophy of history' assumptions of critical Marxism is still provided by Cerutti (1970).

¹⁵ On the historical background of this thesis, see Mahnkopf: 1985, esp. ch. 6.

social classes, which feel impelled toward conflict because of the economic situation, can remain latent?' (Horkheimer: 1932, p. 136).

The formulation of that question demonstrates how Horkheimer had already conceived, in detail, the construction of interdisciplinary social analysis: the central discipline from then on was to be political economy; it alone is in a position to mediate materially between the philosophy of history and the specialist sciences because it investigates, from an empirical standpoint, the same process of capitalist production which appears, from a philosophico-historical perspective, as a stage in the realization of reason. If it is thus the case that political economy represents the theoretical backbone of a materialist social science, then, under the changed conditions, a second discipline must step alongside it. Since the potential for reason accumulated in the capitalist productive forces is no longer reflected in the class action of the proletariat as still assumed in the Marxist theory of revolution, an additional investigation of the 'irrational' binding forces that prevent that class from perceiving its actual interests is required. For Horkheimer, it was beyond question that this task could be accomplished only by means of a psychology informed by Freud. Finally, yet a third discipline must step between political economy and psychology because the social demands to conform do not strike the individual psyche unmediated, but rather only in a culturally refracted manner. As a concluding element of the research project he had sketched, Horkheimer envisaged a theory of culture that has to investigate the cultural conditions under which individual socialization in advanced capitalism takes place. From the imbrication of these three disciplines there ensues the tasks that Horkheimer assigned to critical theory in its first phase; they comprise the economic analysis of the post-liberal phase of capitalism, the social-psychological investigation of the societal integration of individuals, and the cultural-theoretical analysis of the mode of operation of mass culture. However, Horkheimer and his collaborators could only achieve a theoretical unity in his programme by using Marxist functionalism to establish a direct dependence between the individual elements of the investigation.

1 *The economic analysis of post-liberal capitalism.*

Horkheimer saw political economy as undertaking the central task of investigating the far-reaching process of change which had taken hold of capitalism since the end of its liberal phase. It was above all the emergence of National Socialism which raised the question of whether a changed organizational principle of capitalism was perhaps starting to emerge in the planned-economy features of the new economic system. Friedrich Pollock, a 'left-wing bourgeois' economist who grew up with Horkheimer, was entrusted with researching this area at the institute;¹⁶ during the thirties he studied the newly emerging planned economy, and his findings were followed in

¹⁶ On Pollock, see Dubiel: 1975.

their entirety by the 'inner circle' of the institute's members. Pollock's views are quintessentially expressed in the concept of 'state capitalism' (Pollock: 1941; 1975). He believed that, with National Socialism as well as with Soviet Communism, a planned-economy form of capitalism had taken shape in which the steering medium of the market had been supplanted by bureaucratic planning authorities. The management of the capitalist conglomerates had so seamlessly coalesced with the political power elites that full societal integration could henceforth take place in the form of centralized administrative domination. Originally undertaken as a specialized study, this analysis soon became the starting-point of a global theory of post-liberal capitalism (see, e.g., Horkheimer: 1972c); it provided the general framework within which the psychological and cultural-theoretical investigations could find their place.

2 *The social-psychological investigation of societal integration.*

Though the new organizational form of capitalist production could be explained by the theory of state capitalism, the question that could not be answered was why individuals, apparently without resistance, submit to a centrally-administered system of domination. Horkheimer delegated this task of social-psychological investigation to his friend Erich Fromm. With Fromm's arrival, the institute gained a crucial advocate of that intellectual movement of the Weimar Republic which strived for an integration of historical materialism and psychoanalysis.¹⁷ Fromm, who had been practising as an analyst since 1926 and who was closely associated with *Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus*, was completely indebted to the 'Freudian Left' in his early studies.¹⁸ Like Siegfried Bernfeld or Wilhelm Reich, he proceeded on the assumption that the integration of individuals into the capitalist system of domination comes about by way of the social formation of their psychosexual character. This general explanatory model, in which insights of psychoanalysis are linked with those of a Marxist sociology, was applied by Fromm in his investigations at the institute.¹⁹ Its point of departure is the observation that the development of the state capitalist order entails a structural change in the bourgeois nuclear family; together with the economic basis of his authority, which was still accorded to him under liberal capitalist conditions, the male loses the unquestioned patriarchal authority which he previously possessed. The authoritative point of reference from

¹⁷ On the 'Freudian Left', see Dahmer: 1973; on the Frankfurt School's reception of Freud, see Bonss: 1982.

¹⁸ A complete overview of Fromm's theoretical development is given by Funk (1980).

¹⁹ See, above all, Fromm: 1932; 1978. Fromm wrote the social-psychology part of the large-scale investigation, 'Authority and Family' (see Fromm: 1936); the pilot studies for this project, which Fromm undertook within the framework of an empirical investigation, 'German Works 1929', have recently been edited (Fromm: 1980). For a general background, see Bonss's Introduction to the latter work (Bonss: 1980).

which the child could develop and strengthen his ego is therefore lost, and the structural change of the family thus proceeds hand in hand with a weakening of the adolescent ego, as a consequence of which an authority-bound, easily manipulable personality-type emerges. Once again it was Horkheimer who gave a general form to the disparate and frequently speculative reflections of Fromm; the theory of the 'authoritarian personality', which combined the social-psychological investigations of the institute (Horkheimer: 1972b), was soon to be adopted by all the members of the 'inner circle'.

3 *The cultural-theoretical analysis of mass culture.*

The economic and the social-psychological approaches of the institute were related to one another by means of functionalist premisses such that, taken together, the image they produce is of a self-contained integration of society. The economic structural analysis disclosed the developmental tendencies which allow capitalism to set a course for a planned-economy system of domination; from the alterations that this process of change entails in 'familial' socialization, social-psychological analysis then worked out the mechanisms by which individuals are smoothly adjusted to the new behavioural demands. The theory of culture, the third component of the research project envisaged by Horkheimer, would have been the place to force open the closed functionalism of such an analysis of society. Here, it could have been demonstrated that socialized subjects are not simply passively subjected to an anonymous steering process but, rather, actively participate with their own interpretative performances in the complex process of social integration. In fact, Horkheimer had, at the beginning, assigned a task to the analysis of culture that theoretically catered for this insight: like subcultural research today, it was to have empirically investigated those 'moral customs' and 'life-styles' in which the communicative everyday practice of social groups finds expression.²⁰ If Horkheimer had subsequently followed this line of research, then – as could be exemplarily demonstrated with the phenomenon of culture – that logically independent dimension of social action-orientations and value patterns, which cannot be viewed as a merely functional element in the reproduction of domination, would have become visible to him. Instead of this, however, and even before he was himself aware of the action-theoretic logic of his initial conceptual determinations, he had led the analysis of culture back into the functionalist reference system into which he had already previously integrated political economy and social psychology.²¹ In this altered context, Horkheimer understood as 'culture'

²⁰ Thus, above all, in Horkheimer (1972d, esp. p. 43); the concept of culture that Horkheimer uses here is strongly reminiscent of E. P. Thompson's in his history of the English working-class.

²¹ Programmatically, for instance, in Horkheimer (1972b); I have followed the re-ordering of Horkheimer's concept of culture from action-theoretic to institution-theoretic, in Honneth (1985, ch. 1).

(wherever works of art are not at issue) only that totality of cultural facilities and 'apparatuses' which further mediate the societal behavioural demands from the outside with the individual's psyche, which has become manipulable. Above all, the investigations that Theodor W. Adorno submitted on the emergence and effects of the culture industry move within the horizons of such a concept of culture, which is limited in terms of a theory of institutions.²² In the institute, a type of cultural research was thus adopted in whose framework culture – as in the Marxist superstructural-basis doctrine – appears solely as a functional component of domination securement. Once again, Horkheimer's recourse to a functionalist system of reference can be traced back to the basic assumptions of his philosophy of history which formed the basis of his entire interdisciplinary research project; among these can be seen the theoretical premisses that were necessarily the undoing of critical theory in its first phase.

II The Theoretical Weaknesses of Critical Theory

If the different investigations that the members of the inner circle of the institute made in the course of the thirties are joined together into a theoretical whole, then what appears is the image of a totally integrated society; social life therein exhausts itself – as in the visions of theories of totalitarianism – in a closed circuit of the centralized exercise of domination, of cultural control and of individual conformity. If this image, given the societal circumstances with which the institute's members were confronted in the face of Fascism and Stalinism, may find a certain measure of historical justification, then, in contrast, from a systemic point of view it proves itself to be the result of a theoretically faulty construction. In the social-theoretical system of reference on which Horkheimer based his programme, that dimension of social action in which moral convictions and normative orientations form themselves independently is systematically excluded: this programme was so designed that only those social processes which can assume functions in the reproduction and expansion of social labour can find a place within it. This functionalist reductionism had its origins in the philosophico-historical premisses on which Horkheimer's, but also Marcuse's and Adorno's, deliberations were generally based.

At the time, one thing was common to the philosophical works of all these authors: even though their thinking as a whole aimed radically to renew social philosophy, the basic convictions of their philosophy of history which they brought to bear in this attempt were nevertheless deeply rooted in the tradition of Marxism. Even where they attempt to rid themselves of this dogmatic residuum, it is still done from the constantly retained perspective

²² See, for example, Adorno: 1978; as far as I can see, the works of Leo Löwenthal, who was responsible for the theory of literature and culture at the institute, also belong in this framework: see, above all, Löwenthal: 1932.

of the Marxist philosophy of history. Neither the pioneering achievements of Durkheim and his school, nor the theoretical innovations of pragmatism, could ever have fallen on fertile ground here; the close circle of the institute remained constantly closed in the face of all attempts to consider the historical process other than from the point of view of the development of societal labour. There are two theoretical premisses which determine the conceptual framework of the philosophy of history within which the works of Horkheimer, Marcuse and Adorno, notwithstanding differences in detail, jointly move. First, all three assume that human reason or rationality must admit of being able to be understood as the intellectual faculty for the instrumental disposal over natural objects; to this extent, all three remain bound to the conceptual tradition of the philosophy of consciousness which constructs human rationality according to the model of the cognitive relation of a subject to an object.²³ Second, all agree on the conclusion that can be drawn from the philosophico-historical premisses for a theory of history: namely, that historical development takes place above all as a process of unfolding precisely that potential for rationality which is set out in the instrumental disposal of man over natural objects. To this extent, they remain bound to the tendency already predominant in Marx, to instrumentalistically foreshorten human history to a developmental unfolding of the societal processing of nature (see Honneth: 1985, part 1, pp. 9ff.).

However shaped – in the details – by the influence of Lukács and Korsch,²⁴ Dilthey and Heidegger²⁵ or, finally, Benjamin,²⁶ it is this reductionist philosophy of history which served the research work of the institute as a general system of reference in its first decade. Not only are the theoretical deficits which have been identified in the normative foundations of early critical theory²⁷ grounded therein, but also the problems which we have followed in connection with Horkheimer's construction of an interdisciplinary theory of society. The functionalist style of Horkheimer's programme is the methodological consequence of the reductionism with which his philosophico-historical referential model is imbued.²⁸ Because no other type of social action is conceded alongside of societal labour, Horkheimer can only take the instrumental forms of societal practice systematically into account on the level of his theory of society, and thus loses sight of that dimension of everyday practice in which socialized subjects generate and creatively develop common action-orientations in a communicative manner.

²³ On critical theory's premisses based on the philosophy of consciousness, see Habermas: 1984, pp. 366ff.

²⁴ On their influence on Horkheimer see, above all, Jay: 1984, ch. 6.

²⁵ On their influence on Marcuse, see Schmidt: 1968.

²⁶ On Walter Benjamin's influence on the early Adorno, see Buck-Morss: 1977.

²⁷ See, above all, Habermas (1984, chap. 4, sect. 2) and Benhabib (1986, pp. 147ff.); an 'interesting' rescue of Horkheimer's moral philosophy is undertaken by Schnädelbach (1986).

²⁸ I have developed this thesis at length in Honneth (1985, part 1, pp. 9ff.).

Only by considering this communicative sphere of social everyday practice could Horkheimer have discovered that societal reproduction never takes place in the form of a blind fulfilling of functional imperatives, but only by way of the integration of group-specific action norms. In his thinking the idea must break through that societies reproduce themselves in principle independent of the communicatively gained self-understanding of their members, in that they anchor the economic demands directly in the nature of the individual's needs with the help of systemic steering processes. As a consequence of such a conceptual model, the closed functionalism can finally emerge, and it is in this form that Horkheimer's programme of an 'interdisciplinary materialism' was ultimately presented.

Now in the institute itself, the idea of interdisciplinary social research enjoyed a lively and productive reception only up until the beginning of the forties. A general change of orientation was already perceptible in the articles that Horkheimer contributed to the last volume of the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*²⁹ (which ceased publication in 1941), a change that not only implicated the philosophico-historical premisses of critical theory but also the position of the specialist sciences within that theory. In these articles Horkheimer increasingly yielded to a pessimistic philosophy of history whose roots reach so far back into the early phase of his own intellectual biography that his writings of the thirties look, in retrospect, like a more theoretical interlude (see Korthals: 1985). Just as at the time of his first reading of Schopenhauer, the dominating theme for Horkheimer now again became the destructive potential of human reason. True, the concept of work still formed the categorical foundation of this new conception of the philosophy of history, but instead of looking at the emancipatory possibilities stored in the process of the societal mastery of nature, Horkheimer now directed his glance at the devastating effects which the cognitive accomplishments presupposed in human labour-practice entail. It was the change from a positive to a negative concept of societal labour that introduced a new phase in the history of critical theory; the position thus far occupied by the productivist conception of progress was taken here by a critique of reason sceptical of progress and so radical that it must also doubt the cognitive value of the specialist disciplines.

Admittedly, it was not Max Horkheimer, but Theodor W. Adorno who was the outstanding representative of this new conception of critical theory. His thinking, like scarcely any others' of his time, was stamped with the historical experience of Fascism as a calamity for civilization;³⁰ this permitted him, from the very beginning, to view with scepticism what, by way of historical-materialistic ideas of progress, had gone into the original programme of the institute. In addition, his intellectual development had been so heavily influenced by artistic interests that he not unnaturally queried the narrow rationalism of the Marxist tradition of theory. Under the influence of

²⁹ I am thinking particularly of Horkheimer (1941; 1978).

³⁰ On this, see esp. Klein and Kippenburg: 1975.

Walter Benjamin, this reservation allowed him soon to undertake the first attempts to make aesthetic methods of interpretation fruitful for the materialist philosophy of history (see Buck-Morss: 1977, esp. ch. 6). Of course in Adorno's philosophy too, both conceptual themes – scepticism about progress, and the methodological place of honour for the aesthetic contents of experience – take effect only within the framework of those premisses of the philosophy of consciousness that had already been determining for Horkheimer's theoretical model. In the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), which they wrote together at the beginning of the forties and which subsequently gave the name to the new conception of critical theory, these different themes and tendencies came together in a single book.

In its philosophico-historical approach, this book had already risen above the horizons of the institute's early programme: the totalitarian condition into which the world had fallen with the rise of Fascism is no longer to be explained by the conflict of productive forces and relations of production, but by the internal dynamic of the formation of human consciousness. Horkheimer and Adorno left the framework of theories of capitalism, within which the institute's social research had thus far moved, and instead presupposed the civilization process in its entirety as the system of reference for their theory, in which Fascism appears as the historical end-stage of a 'logic of disintegration' that is present even in the original form of existence of the species. The explanation of the mechanisms that have, right from the outset, forced the civilization process into this logic of disintegration constitutes the actual task of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; literary and philosophical works of the European history of ideas make up its primary material, and its style of argument is more that of the aphoristically-pointed essay than of an empirically designed investigation. The concept of the societal mastery of nature represents the only link with the original approach of critical theory, since it is as central for the new approach as it was for the philosophico-historical-based reference system of the empirical research programme. However, the same concept now receives a changed meaning:³¹ in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 'societal labour' no longer designates a form of emancipatory practice but, rather, the germ-cell of objectivizing thinking. For this form of a reified thinking that emerges concomitantly with the human processing of nature, Horkheimer and Adorno use the concept of 'instrumental rationality'; the central function assigned to this concept is to explain the origin and dynamics of the phylogenetic process of disintegration.

The new concept, which from then on characterized a key theme of critical theory, was indebted to a turning of Lukács's concept of reification in the direction of the anthropological. Horkheimer and Adorno understood the reifying thought forms, which Lukács derived from the abstraction imperatives of capitalist commodity exchange (Lukács: 1971), as an immanent component of humanity's instrumental disposal over nature. The ideas prompted by Alfred Sohn-Reithel's analysis of the abstraction of exchange

³¹ I have followed this transformation of the concept of labour in Honneth (1982).

find their limits in the central premiss of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, i.e. that with the first act of the mastery of nature, the compulsion toward instrumental forms of thinking is already inevitably established.³² If, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the emergence of instrumental rationality is thereby explained by the elementary structures of human labour, then they derive the historical dynamic of this rationality from the self-determined tendency with which its effects are shifted into the psychical and social life of the human species: the prehistoric efforts of instrumental thinking, by which humanity learns to assert itself over nature, are propagated step by step in the disciplining of the instincts, in the impoverishment of the sensual capabilities, and in the formation of social relations of domination. In this thesis, which essentially rests on a series of anthropological and ethnological arguments that only more recent textual interpretations have cast light on (see esp. Cochetti: 1985; Früchtl: 1986), the different parts of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* reach an agreement about a common result: it amounts to nothing less than the claim that the entire civilization process of humanity is determined by a logic of gradual reification which is set in motion by the first act of the mastery of nature and is brought to its consequential completion in Fascism.

This philosophico-historical thesis can only be fully understood when, as its normative point of reference, an aesthetic personality-model is also considered in which humanity's freedom is defined as the ability to submit properly to nature. Because Horkheimer and Adorno view human emancipation as linked to the presupposition of a reconciliation with nature, they have to see in every act of the mastery of nature a step toward the self-alienation of the species. The arguments with which they substantiate the further influence of that initial reification in mental and social life issue from the same philosophical tradition of thought within which the aesthetic personality-model is also resident; this tradition is circumscribed by early German Romanticism on the one hand and by the philosophy of life on the other. This line of tradition forms, with respect to the history of theory, a background which the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* explicitly reveals only at few points;³³ the first to have critically referred to this background was Galvana della Volpe (1973) who viewed the book as nothing more than a product of 'late Romanticism'. However it is not, as della Volpe seems to assume, the romantic and life-philosophical themes that constitute the theoretical weakness of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, but rather the philosophico-historical framework within which these themes first gain significance.

As with the interdisciplinary research programme of the thirties, Horkheimer's and Adorno's theoretical work in the forties was also determined by a philosophy of history which reduces the historical process to a dimension of the mastery of nature. Though the 'philosophy of consciousness' premisses, which underlie such a theoretical reductionism, now appeared in a negativ-

istic form, this normative re-evaluation nevertheless leaves the categorial thought-compulsions essentially untouched. Therefore, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno are forced to conceive of all social action according to the same pattern of the instrumental disposal of a subject over an object; this alone, and not the romantic tradition from which they draw, provides them with the basis for claiming the effectiveness of the same 'logic of reification' for the three dimensions of societal labour, the socialization of individuals and, finally, social domination. Because Horkheimer and Adorno, as can be shown in detail (see Honneth: 1985, ch. 2), conceptualized from the beginning both the process of the formation of individual needs and the process of the social exercise of domination according to the model of instrumental acts of disposal, they could, in retrospect, effortlessly see the civilization process as a whole dominated by the same instrumental rationality that underlies the act of the mastery of nature.

Not surprisingly, all creative accomplishments of interacting subjects and groups fall victim to this philosophico-historical reductionism; the entire sphere of communicative everyday practice is so decisively excluded from the investigation of the civilization process that social advances, such as occurred in this period, do not enter into the picture. One consequence, as can be seen in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, was the denial of another dimension of the civilizational progress which finds expression not in an increase of the forces of production, but in an expansion of judicial liberties and of the individual's scope for action (see Habermas: 1987, ch. 5); a second consequence was of a methodological kind and of no less significance for the further development of critical theory. Horkheimer and Adorno applied the philosophico-historical critique so generally that they had to comprehend every form of scientific knowledge, including social scientific research, as an element in the process of civilizational reification. They were thus forced to remove yet again the critical theory of society from the embrace of the empirical social sciences and return it to the exclusive domain of philosophy. With the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, critical theory returned to the sphere of a philosophically self-contained theory from which, in the first place, it wished to free itself with the methodological thrust into interdisciplinary social research. From then on and into the post-war period, there was again a systematically unbridgeable gap between the philosophical and social scientific work of the institute. This gap was, once again, further widened by the philosophical investigations through which Adorno and Horkheimer continued their joint venture, although in separate ways, in the *Negative Dialectics* and the *Eclipse of Reason*.³⁴

³² On this theme in general, see Müller: 1977; Schmucker: 1977.

³³ On this, see Habermas: 1987, pp. 130ff.; Honneth: 1984.

³⁴ On this movement toward a 're-philosophizing', see Adorno: 1973b; Dubiel: 1984, A sect. 4.3.3; Horkheimer: 1974.

III The Social-Theoretical Alternative

The theoretical works of those who were briefly or indirectly or, in any case, more loosely associated with the institute³⁵ recede behind the pre-eminent importance which Horkheimer's, Adorno's, and Marcuse's writings acquired in the public image of critical theory. Given that this latter group of permanent institute members can be characterized only with difficulty as a homogeneous research circle, then this holds all the more for that group of three, or rather four, authors who, though they introduced all the important investigations in the research context of the institute, never merged their scientific identity with its programme and tradition. Thus, from the beginning, it was only their common marginal position which allows, in retrospect, Franz Neumann, Otto Kirchheimer, Walter Benjamin and, perhaps, Erich Fromm to be regarded as a single group. At first sight there is no interpretative foundation for contrasting them as an 'outer circle' with an 'inner circle' formed by Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, Löwenthal and Pollock. Nor at first sight is there any common ground among the four authors in a sociological, or even social-philosophical, respect: Neumann and Kirchheimer – both were trained in jurisprudence and both reached political maturity in German social democracy – contributed investigations on theories of law and the state to the institute's work during the period of exile in New York;³⁶ Benjamin, an independent thinker, one of few found in our century, was, until his suicide in 1940, irregularly commissioned by the institute to research issues relating to theories of literature and culture;³⁷ Fromm, certainly at first a close associate of Horkheimer and fully committed to the institute, took, when in exile in New York, a new course in the interpretation of psychoanalysis which caused relations with the institute to be broken off in 1939.³⁸

Thus these different authors cannot be compared either in their theoretical orientations nor in their thematic alignments; what fundamentally unites them is the overall direction of their thinking which allowed them as a body to go beyond the functionalist reference system of the original programme of the institute. The spirit of contradiction of all four authors is ignited by Marxist functionalism, against which they oppose considerations that converge in an upward revaluation of individuals' and groups' own communicative performances. True, this underlying impulse, which thrusts

³⁵ In the following I proceed from a distinction which Habermas introduced in his debate on critical theory (see Habermas: 1981, p. 558), and I shall attempt to clarify this essentially loose differentiation between a 'closed' and an 'outer' circle at the institute.

³⁶ An introductory survey is offered by Söllner (1979, pp. 86ff.). On Neumann, see Söllner (1978); on Kirchheimer, see the summary in Luthardt (1976).

³⁷ An introduction to Benjamin is offered by Witte (1985) and Wolin (1982).

³⁸ See, for a general introduction to Fromm, Bonss: 1982.

towards an overcoming of the philosophico-historical reductionism laid out in the categorial premisses of Marxism, is not expressly voiced in any of the works, but it is visible at every point where theoretical differences between representatives of the two groups within the institute begin to surface. It was not accidental divergence in object conception, but rather systemic differences in the model of a theory of society that separated the inner from the outer circle in every case.

Neumann's and Kirchheimer's knowledge of jurisprudence and political science was very fruitful in various investigations concerning the political form of integration of advanced capitalist societies. Their legal and scientific background meant that both were fully conversant with the view that law is a central steering mechanism of bourgeois society; they regarded constitutional law as the socially-generalized outcome of a political compromise which the classes, with varying degrees of power, had agreed upon under the conditions of private capitalism. This social-theoretical premiss constituted the background for the analyses in which Neumann, like Kirchheimer, investigated the formal constitutional alterations which accompany the economic structural change of capitalism.³⁹ The issue over which, as a group, they finally come into conflict with the institute's directorship concerned the organizational principles that underlay the new dominating order of National Socialism. Neumann and Kirchheimer advanced empirically-grounded objections to the 'state capitalism' thesis put forward by Horkheimer and Pollock. The social scientific investigations which they had conducted – from their American exile – on the situation in Germany (Kirchheimer: 1976h; 1976c; Neumann: 1978b) and their practical political experience of the end of the Weimar Republic, convinced them of the unbroken primacy of private capitalist interests over state management of the economy. Neumann and Kirchheimer could not therefore accept Pollock's thesis that, in National Socialism, state management of the market had merely devolved upon a centralized administrative bureaucracy; rather, they continued to argue that Fascism had not annulled the functional laws of the capitalist market as such but had simply placed them under the additional control of compulsory totalitarian measures. This thesis, with its doctrine of political compromise, was summarized in a single formula in the concept of the 'totalitarian monopolistic economy', which Neumann, in his investigation *Behemoth*, programmatically opposed to the concept of state capitalism (Neumann: 1966, pp. 221ff.).⁴⁰ This thesis claimed that National Socialist domination came about in the form of a socially restricted compromise which was freed from constitutional obligations and in which party, economic and administrative elites agreed upon

³⁹ See, above all, the following collections of essays: Neumann: 1978a; Kirchheimer: 1976a.

⁴⁰ On the debate within the institute on the analysis of Fascism see, among others, Rainer: 1984; Wilson: 1982.

political measures that, ultimately, had as their goal the improvement of monopolistic profit-opportunities.

It was not of course simply the empirical knowledge alone which allowed Neumann and Kirchheimer to follow the path of this analysis of Fascism, an analysis which has since been largely confirmed;⁴¹ what equally contributes to the superiority of their interpretation as against the state-capitalism thesis are the social-theoretical conceptions implicit in their work. From the outset, Neumann and Kirchheimer perceived the societal order from a different perspective than the one that prevailed in the closer circle around Horkheimer; for the former, social integration represents a process which comes about not simply by means of the permanently unconscious fulfilling of societal functional imperatives, but also by way of political communication between social groups. Because of their concern about the position of the constitutional state, Neumann and Kirchheimer were for the first time confronted with the phenomenon of political legitimacy; as a result, they realized that the constitutional order of a society is always the expression of a generalizable compromise or consensus between political forces. The active participation in class conflicts that characterized the Weimar Republic led to a realistic assessment of the 'relative strength of social interests' (Kirchheimer: 1978): for Neumann and Kirchheimer, the power potential arising out of capitalist control of the means of production is not to be under-estimated. Finally, their experiences of Austro-Marxism⁴² revealed to both of them the compromise character of a societal order as a whole: the institutions of a society are no more than momentary expressions of the social agreements which the different interest groups accept in accordance with their respective power potential.

In Neumann's and Kirchheimer's thinking all this comes together to form a concept of society whose centre is occupied by the comprehensive process of communication between social groups. This concept not only prevents the uncritical adoption of ideas that view all societal groups as completely integrated in the social order,⁴³ but above all sets up barriers against that Marxist functionalism toward which Horkheimer and his associates inclined. Neumann's and Kirchheimer's analyses always start from the interests and orientations that social groups themselves bring into societal reproduction on the basis of their class position. From the communicative process in which the different groups negotiate these interests among themselves through the utilization of their respective power potential, there emerges the fragile

⁴¹ On the superiority of Neumann's and Kirchheimer's analysis of Fascism over the analysis offered by the theory of state capitalism, see Schäfer: 1977; Wilson: 1982.

⁴² See the reference in Söllner (1979, pp. 101ff.); the influence of Austro-Marxism on the socialist theory of the state and of law in the Weimar Republic has not been extensively researched. A first approach, although it does not consider Neumann and Kirchheimer, is the investigation by Strom and Walter (1984).

⁴³ See, above all, Neumann: 1977.

compromise which finds expression in the institutional constitution of a society.

Because both Neumann and Kirchheimer thought in this way they could not assume that societal integration comes about by way of a steering process which simply extends into the symbolically mediated interests and orientation of social groups. For both of them it is the group-specific action perspectives and not the systemically produced motives of instinct that shape the social element out of which the integrative process of a society is formed. Thus Neumann's and Kirchheimer's concern is neither Marxist functionalism nor the assumption that totalitarianism is merely a delusional system (*Verblendungszusammenhang*) that has become total. Finally, if only for social-theoretical reasons, Neumann and Kirchheimer resist tendencies toward a centralism at the level of a theory of power – tendencies which can be found in Horkheimer and his associates because they consider the totalitarian state a homogeneous power centre, whereas for Neumann and Kirchheimer it is a self-evident assumption that state domination always grows out of an intertwining of the power potentials of different interest groups.⁴⁴ The superiority of the social-theoretical approach, which is more implicitly than explicitly found in Neumann and Kirchheimer, is evident in the empirical richness and material diversity of their analyses of Fascism; precisely because they explain totalitarian domination in terms of an interplay of rival interest groups, their theories are still of value today.

Benjamin's intellectual path crossed the social-theoretical avenue of Neumann and Kirchheimer only at a single point: for him too, the conflict of social classes is both a continually effervescent experience and, at the same time, a theoretical premiss of every analysis of culture and society. Admittedly, Benjamin's interest lay not so much in a sociological investigation of society as in a diagnosis of the times in terms of a philosophy of history. The driving force behind this philosophy of history is the idea of a redemption of humanity from the guilt of social repression and domination; it draws its central insights from the tradition of Jewish Messianism and its social-theoretical view is formed by the ideas of historical materialism.⁴⁵ As a thinker who brought together very different theoretical traditions in his works, Benjamin had as close or as distant a connection to critical theory as to Gershom Scholem's Jewish hermeneutic and to Bertolt Brecht's materialist theory of literature. Of course, the interest in art as a theoretical source of knowledge linked him to Adorno from the very beginning (see Buck-Morss: 1977), and the preference for a micrological analysis of every-

⁴⁴ On this see, above all, Marramao: 1982; on the further development of Neumann's 'theory of intertwining' in the post-war period, see Buchstein and Schlöer: 1983.

⁴⁵ There are few studies of Benjamin that are successful in demonstrating the unity behind his diverse thinking; of major significance is Habermas's interpretation (Habermas: 1983). See also Tiedemann: 1973.

day culture connected him to Siegfried Kracauer.⁴⁶

It was on the question of the effects of the new media of modern mass culture on society and art generally that Benjamin came into conflict with the leading associates of the institute. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Benjamin at first perceived the emergence of the culture industry as a process of destruction of the autonomous work of art: in so far as the products of artistic labour are technically reproducible, they lose that cultic aura which previously lifted them, like a sacred relic, out of the profane everyday world of the beholder (Benjamin: 1973b). The technical media of film, radio and photography destroy the aura surrounding the art product and expose it to a remote viewing by the public; the contemplative form of the solitary enjoyment of art is suppressed by the public methods of the collective experiencing of art. However, the differences of opinion in the institute were ignited not by the identification of these cultural developmental tendencies, but by the assessment of the receptive behaviour they engendered. In the destruction of aesthetic aura Adorno saw a process that forces the beholder to become a passive, reflectionless consumer and thereby renders aesthetic experiences impossible; mass art, which resulted from new reproduction technicized, represented for him nothing more than a 'de-aestheticization of art' (Entkünstung der Kunst).⁴⁷ Benjamin, on the other hand, saw in technicized mass art above all the possibility for new forms of collective perception; he pinned all his hopes on the fact that, in the public's remote experiencing of art, those illuminations and experiences, which had hitherto only occurred in the esoteric process of the solitary enjoyment of art, could from then on come about in more prosaic circumstances.

As in the debate about the state-capitalism thesis, it is not so much the individual empirical claims that still merit interest today, since subsequent developments and the state of international research have rendered these claims largely obsolete.⁴⁸ The social-theoretical considerations concealed behind the respective, competing positions are however instructive; thus, it becomes apparent that Benjamin and Adorno only arrived at differing assessments of technicized mass culture because they proceeded implicitly from different concepts of social integration. Not only an unwavering insistence on the knowledge value of only the esoteric work of art, but also the presupposition of a closed functionalism allowed Adorno to arrive at a strict rejection of the new art forms. He is so preoccupied with the idea of a systemic steering process of society which reaches into all cultural life-contexts that he cannot, under any circumstances, credit social groups with the creative performances which would be necessary in order to learn spontaneously new forms of world disclosure from the mass arts.⁴⁹ As we

⁴⁶ See the reference in Zohlen (1980).

⁴⁷ See, for example, the perspective in Adorno (1978); the 'de-aestheticization of art' is the heading under which he later considers the culture industry in Adorno (1973a, pp. 52ff.).

⁴⁸ On the current state of research, see the overview provided by Kellner (1982).

⁴⁹ See my critique in Honneth (1985, ch. 3).

have been able to observe, Adorno's theory of contemporary society begins with the claim of a system integration which has become total; thus he can regard the entire media of the culture industry only as a means of domination and must rate popular forms of art as phenomena of psychological regression.

Benjamin, however, cannot agree with the premisses of this interpretation since he allows himself to be led, if not by an alternative model of social integration, then at least by other ideas about the composition of social experiences. Accordingly, social groups and classes are ascribed the ability to develop a collective imagination that finds expression in common experiences of perception and in common experiential contents; these collective worlds of perception are always sprinkled with far-fetched images which contain shocklike insights into the context of guilt and redemption of human history. Benjamin arrives at the notion of a pictorial imagination of social groups by way of an idiosyncratic absorption of, on the one hand, Ludwig Klages' anthropological theory and, on the other, Georges Sorel's conception of myth;⁵⁰ of course, he additionally fused both theoretical elements with insights which emphasize the significance of social interactional forms for the constitution of collective experiences. As a theorist of culture, Benjamin was thus primarily interested in the changes that the process of capitalist modernization occasion in the structures of social interaction, in the narrative forms of experience exchange and in the spatial conditions of communication, because these changes determine the social conditions under which the historical past enters the pictorial imagination of the masses and acquires immediate significance there. From such a perspective, which was the determining factor not only for individual articles by Benjamin but also for a whole series of his book reviews,⁵¹ fragments of another image of social integration necessarily emerge: here, the experiential worlds of different groups and collectives represent not so much the mere material of domination but rather the logically independent forces themselves from which the movement of social life emerges.

If these observations are correct, Benjamin did not think functionalistically. True, he is not a theorist of society in the conventional sense of the term, for he showed little interest in an explanation of the mechanisms of the constitution of society. However, there are still enough social-theoretical elements in his analyses of culture to indicate the extent to which his conceptions went beyond the institute's functionalist level of thinking. For Benjamin, the socio-economic conditions of a society, the forms of com-

⁵⁰ Benjamin continually referred to Ludwig Klages's anthropological theory and, above all, to the conception of the pictorial imagination and dream consciousness; see here Benjamin (1985a). On the entire complex see, as an introductory but incomplete analysis, Fuld (1981).

⁵¹ On his approaches to a history of forms of communication see, for example, Benjamin (1973a). Benjamin's interest in class-specific forms of experience and perception are evident in his book reviews: see, for example, Benjamin (1972; 1985b).

modity exchange and of production, can only represent the material by which the pictorial imaginations of social groups are ignited. Societal experiences are not merely the representations, charged with instinctual dynamic, of the functional imperatives of society, but rather the independent expression of an ability to develop a collective imagination. Therefore, social integration too is not simply to be conceived as a process that comes about by way of an administrative steering of individual attitudes and orientations. Rather, individual horizons of orientation always also represent extracts from those group-specific worlds that are independently formed in processes of communicative intercourse and that subsist on the forces of a pictorial imagination. These collective worlds stand together in a conflicting relationship whose respective historical form co-determines the course of societal reproduction; to be sure, Benjamin makes quite plain that it is the cultural struggle of social classes itself that determines the integrative ability of society. This, finally, also provides the motive that allowed Benjamin to reach a different assessment of modern mass art than Adorno: because he, unlike the latter, still credited oppressed groups with an ability to perceive creatively, he could pin all his hopes on the fact that mass-art forms unleash unthought-of potentials of the collective imagination and thereby lead to a politicization of the aesthetic.⁵²

Like Neumann and Kirchheimer from the perspective of a theory of politics, Benjamin developed, from the perspective of a theory of culture, conceptions and considerations that went beyond the functionalist frame of reference of critical theory; the way this took place led in both cases not only to a more differentiated assessment of the integrative forms of capitalism, but also to preliminary insights into the communicative infrastructure of societies. All three were quick to realize that societal life-contexts are integrated by way of processes of social interaction; communications-theoretic insights of this kind are anticipated in the theory of the political compromise worked out by Neumann and Kirchheimer, as well as in the concept of social experience developed by Benjamin in his sociology of culture. Yet, not one of them used these insights as the foundation for an independent theory of society. The anti-functionalist elements found in their empirical investigations did not mature to that level of generality where they could have been transformed into an explicit critique of Marxist functionalism. Thus, the most sociologically productive research to be conducted under the auspices of the Institute for Social Research remained in the shadow of that philosophically ambitious but sociologically barren theoretical model which the members of the 'inner circle' had developed.

In Erich Fromm's thinking, communications-theoretic insights developed in the microsociological rather than macrosociological domain; the overcoming of the functionalist horizon of thinking, under which he himself had originally moved at the institute, was attained by way of a reinterpretation of psychoanalysis. The impetus for such a reinterpretation came during his

⁵² See the contemporizing reference in Wellmer (1985, esp. pp. 41ff.).

exile in the United States which was forced upon him by Fascism in 1934. There, at first still attached to the institute which had resettled in New York, he became acquainted with the writings of those authors concerned with an interactionistic revision of the basic assumptions of psychoanalysis. Fromm willingly and rapidly took up the suggestions of this intellectual group, centred around Karen Horney and Harry Stack Sullivan,⁵³ on how to revise his theory of social psychology. The results of these revisions were published in 1941 in his book *Escape from Freedom*, in which the formation of the bourgeois personality is investigated within the framework of a now fundamentally altered conception of psychoanalysis. A revision of the psychoanalytical theory of instincts is at the core of the new conception. Fromm puts the assumption of humanity's pliable nature in that position which the hypothesis of a fixed, libidinally centred instinct-structure had assumed in Freudian theory; along with the instinctual impulses that constitute human needs he adds, besides 'self-preservation', 'social instincts' as well (Fromm: 1941, ch. 1). These two basic instincts form a drive-potential that, as a natural substratum, enters into every process of socialization; the shaping of the inner nature into historically-unique personality features takes place here in the medium of social interaction (Fromm: 1941, ch. 2).

With this fundamental change of direction Fromm severed his connections with the closed functionalism that had shaped his initial approach within social psychology; he now granted societal interaction not only a logically independent position of importance in the socialization process but moreover assigned it, albeit in the unfortunate form of a theory of instincts, the role of a constitutive driving force in social development. True, Fromm retained the 'milieu contextual-theoretic' orientation of his earlier investigations: that is, he continued to view personality development as primarily a 'dynamic conforming' of individual drive-potential to the behavioural imperatives that are admitted into the sociocultural milieu of different classes (see Bonss: 1982). However, because he now conceived the socialization operation as a whole as a process of communicative individualization, he was no longer able to assume that these social influences and expectations are deposited in a completely uninterrupted manner in the individual personality structure; rather, the behavioural demands of society take effect only by means of and through a medium that, in accordance with its entire structure, is aimed at the autonomy of the subject.⁵⁴ In principle, ego development thus takes place in the dovetailing of increasing individualization and growing socialization.

At the institute it was above all Adorno and Marcuse who reacted to Fromm's new theoretical approach; of course, because of more personal reasons, they did not develop their critique until he had already left the institute (see Bonss: 1982, pp. 394ff; Jay: 1973, pp. 101ff.). It was not so

⁵³ See, for example, Fromm (1971, pp. 193ff).

⁵⁴ See, above all, Fromm (1941, ch. 2).

much the interactionistic elements in Fromm's new theory as its revisions of the theory of instincts that encountered opposition in the closer circle of the institute's members. Adorno and Marcuse perceived the abandonment of the Freudian theory of the libido as the common characteristic and traitorous core of neo-analytical revisionism; they saw here a theoretical accommodation of psychoanalysis to the purposes of a conformist therapy.⁵⁵ Against this tendency they argued for the orthodox content of the Freudian theory of instincts; although Adorno nevertheless referred primarily to the Freudian dualism of the sexual and death instincts, Marcuse linked up with the aesthetic-revolutionary potential of the libido theory in his interpretation of psychoanalysis.⁵⁶ Thus, the conflict concerning the importance and content of the Freudian libido theory became centrally significant for the relationship of psychoanalysis and critical theory; from the beginning, Fromm's new social-theoretical approach, the really fruitful core of his revision of psychoanalysis, receded behind this conflict. Interactionism – the interactionism which as a common orientation underlies neo-analytical revisionism – was never taken seriously as a theoretical challenge by either Adorno or Marcuse. The social-theoretical premisses of their own interpretations of psychoanalysis therefore remained concealed for a long time, and it is not until today that they have, through their problematic features, come to light.⁵⁷

IV Jürgen Habermas and Critical Theory

The research work of the 'outer circle', all of which could have contributed to an overcoming of Marxist functionalism, remained without influence on the further development of critical theory; the institute's research links with the three survivors of that circle, Neumann, Kirchheimer and Fromm, broke definitively after the Second World War. Of course Adorno and Horkheimer had long severed connections not only with what were once some of their most productive associates, but also to a certain extent with their own past history. When the Institute for Social Research opened again in Frankfurt in 1950 it recommenced its research activity without any direct reference to the social-philosophical self-understanding of the thirties and forties. The unifying bond of a comprehensive theory that could have mediated between empirical research and philosophical reflection was broken in the post-war period. For that reason there was no longer an internal connection between

⁵⁵ See Adorno (1972b) and Marcuse (1966), especially the Epilogue, 'The Social Implications of Freudian "Revisionism"', in the latter work. See also Jacoby (1978), which is written from Adorno's and Marcuse's perspective.

⁵⁶ On these differences, see Bonss: 1982, pp. 397ff.

⁵⁷ For a critique of the social-theoretical premisses of Adorno's interpretation of psychoanalysis see, above all, Jessica Benjamin (1977); I have attempted to continue this critique in Honneth (1985, pp. 99ff.).

the empirical studies conducted at the institute and the philosophical, cultural-critical research in which Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse (who remained in the United States) continued to pursue their original concerns. As a uniform, philosophically integrated school, critical theory was in ruins.

While a common denominator can scarcely be found for the empirical research projects of the institute,⁵⁸ the idea of a 'totally administered world' represents such a uniform point of reference, at least initially, for the social-philosophical works. As a theme, this idea runs through the cultural-critical studies of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse,⁵⁹ where the central premisses of the state-capitalism thesis became the general frame of reference for an analysis of post-war capitalism. The totalitarian perspective, which had already shaped the conception of society in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, now also determined the sociological investigations: because administrative social control and individual willingness to conform interlock seamlessly, societal life came to be seen as integrated in a stable and unassailable system of constraint. Of course, from their largely concurring diagnosis of the times, the three authors drew very different inferences for the project of a critical theory of society: in Horkheimer's thinking, a pessimism deriving from Schopenhauer – which had accompanied him from the very beginning – intensified to the point where it turned into a negative theology;⁶⁰ Adorno pressed ahead with a self-critique of conceptual thinking whose normative fixed point remained the idea of a mimetic rationality that is representatively preserved in the work of art;⁶¹ only Marcuse reacted to the pessimistic diagnosis of the times with an attempt to rescue the lost idea of revolution by pushing reason under the threshold of the social and shifting it into the libidinal nature of human needs (see Habermas: 1985).

Notwithstanding the differences in objectives, the background of a philosophy of history remained common to the three approaches – a philosophy of history in which historical development is interpreted as a process of technical rationalization that comes to completion in the closed system of domination of contemporary society. It is a theory that at the beginning hardly disclosed itself as a new approach within critical theory which is the first to depart from the philosophical premisses of this diagnosis of the times. Although Jürgen Habermas was early on associated with the

⁵⁸ See Institut für Sozialforschung (1955); in the fifties a concentration on industrial sociology was already emerging (see Institut für Sozialforschung: 1956; Pollock: 1957). In the seventies this concentration on projects within industrial sociology – in connection with Alfred Sohn-Rethel's theory – became almost total; see Brandt (1981) and, in general, Institut für Sozialforschung (1981).

⁵⁹ For Horkheimer, see the essays in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (1985, vols 7 and 8); for Adorno, see above all the studies and essays in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (1972a, vol. 8); for Marcuse see, among other of his works, Marcuse (1972).

⁶⁰ Immensely informative on Horkheimer's late work is Schmid Noerr (1985); see also Habermas: 1986b, esp. pp. 172ff.).

⁶¹ On this, see Baumeister and Kulenkampff: 1973; on Adorno's later sociological work, see Honneth: 1985, ch. 3.

Institute for Social Research, he had at first, in his theoretical origins and orientation, little in common with the philosophical tradition of critical theory. In his scientific development, it was theoretical currents such as philosophical anthropology, hermeneutics, pragmatism and language analysis that had gained recognition, theoretical currents which were always foreign to the older generation around Adorno and Horkheimer – indeed the latter were hostile to these traditions of theory. Nevertheless, a theory has gradually emerged from Habermas's works which is so clearly motivated by the original objectives of critical theory that it may be accepted as the only serious new approach within this tradition today; the anti-functionalist impulses detected in the thinking of the marginal members of the institute have reached theoretical self-awareness in this theory and hence have become the frame of reference for a different conception of society.

The insight into the linguistic intersubjectivity of social action forms the foundation of this conception. Habermas reaches the fundamental premiss of his theory by way of a study of hermeneutic philosophy and of Wittgenstein's language analysis; from these he learns that human subjects are *ab initio*, i.e. always already, united with one another by means of reaching understanding in language (*sprachliche Verständigung*). The life-form of human beings distinguishes itself by an intersubjectivity anchored in the structures of language; therefore, for the reproduction of social life, the reaching of understanding in language between subjects represents a fundamental, indeed the most basic, presupposition.

In his thinking, Habermas lends weight to this thesis since he makes it the point of departure of a debate with the social-philosophical and sociological tradition: thus, in contemporary social philosophy, he criticizes the tendency toward a gradual reduction of all political-practical matters to questions of technically appropriate decisions (see Habermas: 1968). Contrary to social scientific functionalism, he argues that the reproductive tasks of a society are always determined by the normative self-understanding of communicatively-socialized subjects and that vital functions as such are by no means always encountered in human life-contexts (Habermas: 1982a). In this way he is ultimately led to a critique of Marxism that results in an 'action-theoretically extended' conception of history: if the human life-form distinguishes itself by the medium of achieving understanding in language then societal reproduction cannot be reduced to the single dimension of labour as propounded by Marx in his theoretical writings. Rather, in addition to the activity of processing nature, the practice of linguistically-mediated interaction must be viewed as an equally fundamental dimension of historical development (Habermas: 1972, parts 1–3, pp. 25ff.).

With this consideration Habermas has already implicitly broken with the basic assumptions of the philosophy of history that were thus far determining for the tradition of critical theory.⁶² He no longer sees, as Adorno, Hork-

⁶² On critical theory's communications-theoretic development – a term which encompasses Habermas's new approach – see Brunkhorst (1983), Honneth (1979) and Wellmer (1977); on Habermas's theory in its entirety, see McCarthy (1984).

heimer and Marcuse continued to do, the characteristic feature of human socialization in the operation of a continually expanding processing of nature, but rather in the fact that the collective securing of material existence is dependent, from the very beginning, on the simultaneous maintenance of a communicative agreement. Because human beings, in accordance with their nature, are only able to form a personal identity as long as they can grow into the intersubjectively bequeathed world of a social group and move therein, the interruption of the communicative process of reaching understanding would violate a presupposition of human survival which is just as fundamental as that of the collective appropriation of nature. Linguistic communication is the medium in which individuals can secure that mutuality in their action-orientations and conceptions of value which is necessary in order that the tasks of material reproduction can be societally mastered. However, the philosophy of history that had served critical theory as a theoretical system of reference abstracts from this dimension of social interaction; it was because of this abstraction that critical theory fell into the illusion of a Marxist functionalism in which all societal phenomena are considered in terms of the function they fulfil in the human processing of nature.

To be sure, the decisive step that Habermas has taken in the direction of an independent theory of society and thereby toward a new formulation of critical theory arises only by way of a loading of the two action concepts, 'labour' and 'interaction', with different categories of rationality. This step, rich in potential, results from Habermas's interest in incorporating the new distinction between two types of action into a theory of societal rationalization. A discussion of Marcuse's critique of technology provides the immediate occasion for this; Max Weber's concept of rationality, however, provides the theoretical framework (Habermas: 1971). Habermas conceives the two kinds of action distinguished in his critique of Marx not only as the pattern of specific forms of activity but also as the framework for special cognitive performances; to this extent, both fundamental dimensions of societal reproduction, 'labour' and 'interaction', have also to be able to be respectively distinguished by an independent form of knowledge production and an independent form of 'rationality'. However, Weber's concept of rationalization then proves itself to be too narrow; because, just as specific forms of rationality can be claimed for instrumental activities and technical knowledge, possibilities of rationalization must also be able to be shown for communicative practice and the knowledge embedded in it. Habermas summarizes the general thesis resulting from this critique of Weber in a conceptual framework borrowed from systems theory: although the species develops further – by way of the accumulation of technical and strategical knowledge – in the subsystems of purposive-rational action in which the tasks of societal labour and political administration are organized, it also continues to develop – by way of liberation from forces which impede communication – within the institutional framework in which the socially integrating norms are reproduced (Habermas: 1971, esp. pp. 92ff.).

All Habermas's extensions of his theory in the course of the seventies have followed the lines of this concept of society in which purposive-rationally organized action-systems are distinguished from a sphere of communicative everyday practice, with separate forms of rationalization being claimed for both social realms. Here, universal pragmatics serves further to clarify the linguistic infrastructure of communicative action (Habermas: 1979b); a theory of social evolution helps clarify the logic of development of societal knowledge and thereby the process of rationalization in both its forms;⁶³ and, finally, with the further reception of systems-theoretic conceptions, Habermas seeks to determine the mechanisms by which social action-realms become independent purposive-rationally organized systems (Habermas: 1982b).

Although these theoretical endeavours penetrate into the most diverging areas of science, nevertheless they are all aimed at the same objective, i.e. the communications-theoretic foundation of a critical theory of society. With their help Habermas seeks to prove that the rationality of communicative action is such a fundamental presupposition of societal development that the tendencies toward an instrumental reification diagnosed by Adorno and Horkheimer can be criticized as forms of societal rationalization that are one-sided, i.e. organized solely in a purposive-rational manner. In *The Theory of Communicative Action*,⁶⁴ which Habermas published in two volumes in 1981 (Habermas: 1981; 1984), this programme assumes a systematic form for the first time. The results of the different research work are brought together here to form a single theory in which the rationality of communicative action is reconstructed within the framework of a theory of speech acts; it is also further developed – in the passage on the history of sociological theory from Weber to Parsons – in order to lay the foundations of a theory of society; and, finally, it is made the point of reference for a critical diagnosis of the contemporary world.

In Habermas's theory, the concept of communicative rationality assumes the same key position which the concept of instrumental rationality held in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Just as Adorno and Horkheimer developed the unfolding dynamics of a historical process – in which the present is comprehended as being in a state of crisis – from the rationality form of the mastery of nature, Habermas does so from the rationality potential of communicative action. The basic outline of his construction is that, in the communicative speech acts through which individual actions are coordinated, culturally invariant validity claims are stored and these are historically differentiated gradually in the course of a cognitive rationalization

⁶³ See the other essays in Habermas (1979a), and also Habermas (1979c).

⁶⁴ A brilliant presentation of the development which leads to the basic assumptions of this book is given by Bernstein (1985); see also my own presentation (Honneth: 1985, ch. 9).

process. Through decentring of the life-world knowledge that encompasses all communicative action, a cognitive attitude (as one aspect) is identified with which subjects relate to their environment solely from the point of view of success. Habermas sees, within such a historically-derived ability to act strategically, the social presupposition for the emergence of systemically-organized spheres of action.

As subjects learn to act in a manner oriented purely toward success, there emerges the possibility of coordinating social actions by non-linguistic media such as money or power⁶⁵ (instead of by processes of reaching understanding). The two spheres of action, which are detached from the communicative life-world because of the institutionalization of these steering media, are the domains of economic production and political administration. The economic system and the action sphere of the state are integrated from now on without recourse to the process of communicatively reaching an understanding. In modern societies they stand, as systems regulated in a manner free of norms, opposite those spheres of action which continue to be communicatively organized and in which the symbolic reproduction of social life proceeds.

On the basis of the historical decoupling of 'system' and 'life-world' Habermas justifies the introduction of the two-level concept of society, to which his construction leads. Here the process of communicatively reaching understanding is viewed also as the fundamental reproductive mechanism of modern societies but at the same time, the existence of such norm-free action spheres – accessible only by way of a systems-theoretic analysis – is presupposed as a historical product. Thus the interweaving of a theory of communication and a concept of system proves to be the essential component for a sociological theory of modernity: every analysis of those processes of reaching understanding by means of which societies today reproduce themselves in their life-worldly foundations requires the aid of systems analysis to investigate the systemic forms of material reproduction. Finally, from this dualistic construction Habermas derives the framework within which he attempts to develop his diagnosis of modernity; its central motive springs from the intention to interpret the process of the 'dialectic of enlightenment' in such a manner that the inevitable outcomes to which Adorno and Horkheimer were forced, can be avoided. The developed theory of society provides the discursive means for this, for, in light of this theory, the systemically-independent organizational complexes – in which Adorno and Horkheimer could only see the final stage of a logic of the mastery of nature – now prove to be the social products of a rationalization of the social life-world. It is not now the existence of purposive-rational organizational forms as such in social life that appears as a crisis-ridden tendency of the present, but just their incursion into that inner domain of society that is constitutively dependent on processes of communicatively reaching understanding. To this phenomenon of a 'colonization of the social lifeworld' Habermas thus

⁶⁵ On the introduction of the concept of system, see Habermas: 1981, pp. 229ff.

attaches his own diagnosis of a pathology of modernity: 'the rationalization of the lifeworld makes possible an increase in systems complexity which enlarges to such an extent that the released systemic imperatives outstrip the comprehension ability of the lifeworld which is instrumentalized by them' (Habermas: 1981, pp. 232ff.).

It is not difficult to see that the reasoning of this diagnosis of modernity is fully dependent on the two-level model of society – the point to which Habermas has further developed his communications-theoretic approach. Only because he sees modern societies divided into system and lifeworld, into purposive-rationally-organized functional contexts and communicatively-constituted spheres of action, can he understand the incursion of systemic forms of steering into the hitherto intact domains of a communicative everyday practice as the determining pathology of our times.

However, it is precisely the distinction between system and life-world which has recently met with opposition; with this distinction Habermas is in danger of yielding to the 'seductions of systems theory' and of again surrendering the actual potential of his communications-theoretic approach.⁶⁶ The outcome of the discussion which has been sparked off by this problem will determine the future of critical theory. This discussion will have to tackle the question of how the communications-theoretic turn – by means of which Habermas has overcome the instrumentalistic bottlenecks of the critical theory tradition – is to be developed further in a suitable theory of society. It may be that in the course of the discussion Neumann's, Kirshheimer's and Benjamin's sociological insights, which were not widely read at the time, can at last prove their theoretical potential for critical theory. It may well be that the theory of political compromise as well as Benjamin's concept of collective experiencing acquire – the moment they become components of a communicative theory of society – a systematic significance opposed to the dualism of system and lifeworld. The turn towards communication in critical theory thus might allow a recovery of a neglected aspect of its past.

⁶⁶ See McCarthy (1985); see also the contributions by Joas, Berger and Arnason in the collection of essays edited by Honneth and Joas (1986), as well as Honneth (1985, ch. 9). Habermas has in the mean time already replied to these critiques (Habermas: 1986a, esp. pp. 377ff.).

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Sociology and the Mathematical Method¹

THOMAS P. WILSON

Language does not serve science very well as an analytic device. ... J. B. S. Haldane said that if someone could not use something in an equation then he did not really know what it meant, and Haldane's principle accounts for the universal use of mathematical notation in the sciences. The most important accomplishment of [*Culture and the Evolutionary Process*] is the explicit algebraic representation of a rich meaningful set of unambiguous processes with which to study cultural transmission.

Harpending: 1985

On the other hand, many, including myself, would like to argue that these notions about the sciences of man are sterile, that we cannot come to understand important dimensions of human life within the bounds set by this epistemological orientation.

Taylor: 1971

The social sciences are concerned with such things as politics and government, law, crime and punishment, education, religion, the production and distribution of goods and services, class structure, organization and bureaucracy, war and revolution, race and ethnic relations, the family, similarities and differences between and within societies both contemporaneously and historically, and the like. The subject of this essay is the place of mathematics in the description and explanation of such phenomena. The issues, however, run very much deeper than can be addressed by a recital of the virtues of mathematics or a review of the literature in mathematical sociology. We are involved here with fundamental, enduring controversy over the nature of society and the social sciences. I want to take this occasion, then, to

¹ Parts of this essay are adapted from Wilson (1984) by permission.