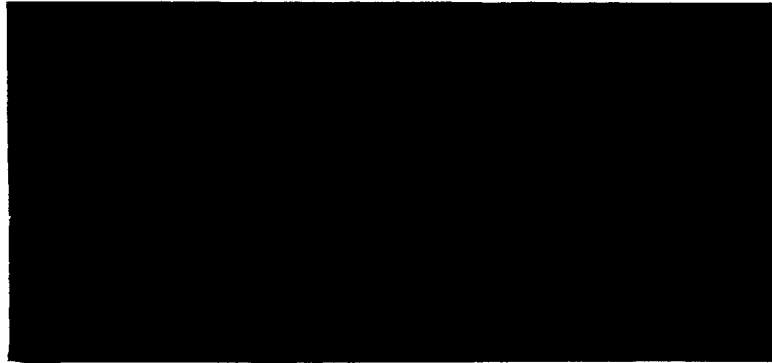# TRANSFORMATIONS
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"From the Eclipse of Reason to Communicative Rationality"

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From the Eclipse of Reason to Communicative Rationality

By referring to Horkheimer's 1947 study <u>Eclipse of Reason</u> and Jürgen Habermas's more recent <u>The Theory of Communicative Action</u> the title of my lecture suggests a significant transformation within the Frankfurt School between the late 1940s and the 1980s, a change that touches in particular on the core concepts of reason and/or rationality. Moreover, it reflects a specific understanding of the way in which this transformation occurred, namely a replacement of the first generation's critique of instrumental reason by a more positive and clearly more differentiated approach to the concept of reason in the work of the second generation, notably in the writings of Jürgen Habermas. In this account, which is shared by most of the members of the second generation, the history of the Frankfurt School has to be read as a process of overcoming and also of theoretical improvement. The most common narrative has been to describe it as a transition from the pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno to the more pragmatic and realistic attitude of Habermas and his disciples. Another way of looking at the development would be (in Habermasian terms) to define it as a passage from metaphysical to post-metaphysical thought. What these narratives have in common is their linear and teleological direction. They assume that Critical Theory has moved through a number of phases until it finally arrived at a theory of communicative rationality which not only redraws the boundaries of reason but also offers a very different outlook at contemporary social and political problems.

It is not my intention to reject this narrative out of hand. It is a convenient and, at least up

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to a point, persuasive account of the theoretical development within the Frankfurt School after Word War II. Moreover, it represents the perspective of important insiders, among them Habermas and Axel Honneth, who have repeatedly emphasized a significant paradigm shift between the older and the younger generation that occurred during the 1970s. According to this model, the early work of Habermas, for example The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1962) and Knowledge and Human Interest (1968) would still belong to the older paradigm, while Legitimation Crisis (1973) and The Theory of Communicative Action (1981) would be part of the post-metaphysical paradigm that then becomes the standard for the third generation of critical theorists.

Yet also external observers such as Fredric Jameson, who is much closer to Adorno and Benjamin and clearly not much in sympathy with Habermas's later work, have acknowledged and commented on the paradigm shift, if only to reject it as a loss of the original impetus of Critical Theory. In his reading of Adorno's work in Late Marxism (1989) he pleaded for Critical Theory's original project as it was defined by Horkheimer and Adorno in the 1940s and later worked out in the mature writings of Adorno. Similarly, the recent work of Peter Bürger, who had more or less adopted a Habermasian perspective in Theory of the Avant-Garde (1974), has reassimilated themes and forms of Adorno's thought, in combination with a stronger acknowledgement of French poststucturalist theory. These voices suggest the possibility of a different understanding of the theoretical development of the Frankfurt School, a more complex configuration in which the older theoretical model is not simply replaced but reintegrated, possibly even used as a challenge to the conception of communicative rationality. In such a configuration the work of Albrecht Wellmer certainly comes to mind, who never absolutely abandoned the theoretical foundations of

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the first generation and has continued to emphasize the importance of Adorno's aesthetic theory in the context of the postmodernism debate.

There are two additional elements that do not easily fit into the picture of a linear development from a critique of reason to communicative rationality. First, there is the case of Herbert Marcuse. The work of Marcuse, which spanned three decades, did not foreground an eclipse of reason or a loss of belief in the possibility of revolutionary change. During the 1960s he became one of the most outspoken revolutionary social critics in this country who argued that the structures of advanced capitalist societies were not immutable. And it is undeniable that Marcuse also influenced the German Left, including young Habermas. In fact, it was partly through Marcuse's writings that the early Habermas could reformulate the project of Critical Theory in Germany, especially in opposition to the stance that Max Horkheimer considered as appropriate for West Germany. Second, there is the case of Walter Benjamin, or more precisely the case of his impact in the 1970s and 1980s. Benjamin's reception in Germany (or in the United States for that matter) does not easily fit the evolutionary narrative I have outlined before. During the 1960s and 1970s he became the hero for the radical Left when they became disappointed with the political position of the Frankfurt School (including that of Habermas). And later he was sometimes seen as an altogether isolated figure whose writings anticipated the philosophical and cultural criticism of French poststructuralism. Habermas's response to the radical Marxist appropriation of Benjamin was telling. He argued that it was Adorno rather than Benjamin who had carried on the Marxist tradition. As a result, Habermas marginalized Benjamin's importance for Critical Theory. The point I want to make is that Benjamin's multi-faceted reception is at odds with the official narrative of the school.

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How, then, do we conceptualize the development of Critical Theory after World War II? First of all, I want to suggest that if we want to apply an evolutionary model, we have to distinguish at least three phases, namely the early years of the Institute for Social Research, the restructuring of the project after 1944, and finally the paradigmatic shift that occurred after the death of Adorno during the 1970s under the leadership of Jürgen Habermas. Moreover, we will have to keep in mind that this model tends to eliminate or marginalize counter-tendencies or moments of repetition and recurrence.

Before I focus on the best-known works of the older generation such as Eclipse of Reason and Dialectic of Enlightenment I want to begin therefore with the project of the Institute for Social Research as it emerged during the 1930s.. For this purpose I will offer a symptomatic reading of one of Herbert Marcuse's early essays which attempts to define the method and the goal of Critical Theory. In character and intent it remains close to Horkheimer's more famous essay "Traditional and Critical Theory." In "Philosophy and Critical Theory" (1937) Marcuse argues for a special and distinct status of critical theory vis-a-vis philosophy. Yet the emphasis is placed on those aspects of the German idealist tradition that Critical Theory has appropriated. It is important to note that for Marcuse modern European philosophy contains a critical element. "Reason was established as a critical tribunal." (Negations, 136). Thus Marcuse quotes Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy to underline the link between philosophy and freedom. "To speculative philosophy belongs the knowledge that freedom is that alone that is true of mind." (136f). For Marcuse the philosophical concept of reason (Vernunft) therefore remains a limited but clearly positive asset of the project of freedom with which he identifies. The limitations have to do with two aspects, namely, first, philosophy's blindness for the material aspects of life, which

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only an economic theory can conceptualize, and, second, the way in which reason by way of

philosophical reflection constitutes the world. Marcuse criticizes philosophy's inability to offer a

truly critical approach to the actual development of the world and argues: "For at its conclusion

[philosophy] arrives at nothing that did not already exist 'in itself' at the beginning. The absence of

concrete development appeared to this philosophy as the greatest benefit." (139) The critical

moment that philosophy cannot produce by itself emerges in connection with the struggle of

oppressed groups for better living conditions. This means that "the realization of reason no longer

needs to be restricted to pure thought and will" (141); instead, only through the intertwinement of

the pressure of material conditions, on the one hand, and the conception of reason as a "critical

tribunal", on the other, does a truly critical theory materialize that is bent on social transformation.

Thus critical theory, unlike philosophy, derives its progressive tendencies from its involvement

with the present social process.

The proximity of this definition of critical theory to Marxian theory is hard to overlook.

Yet it is important to note that Marcuse does not want critical theory to be confused with

economics, i.e., with certain orthodox forms of Marxism for which German idealism is nothing

but bourgeois ideology. While Marcuse agrees with Marxism's characterization of the goal, that is

freedom of the masses, he holds on to the contribution of philosophy in this struggle and therefore

he also holds on to the concept of reason as it was defined and sustained by the philosophical

tradition. The universality of rational concepts, although they are abstract, remains for Marcuse a

necessary correlate to the process of material changes and revolutionary transformations. To put

it differently, Marcuse perceives of reason's utopian moment as an aid and not as a hindrance for

the process of emancipation. Hence he notes: "Critical theory's interest in the liberation of

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mankind binds it to certain ancient truths. It is at one with philosophy in maintaining that man can be more than a manipulable subject in the production process of class society." (153)

This argument implies not only that Critical Theory has to take cognizance of Kant and Hegel but also that it should recuperate a concept of reason brought forth by these philosophers. Nowhere does the essay suggest that the concept of reason is in itself problematic or is unsuitable for the process of emancipation. While Marcuse in his later work, for instance in One-Dimensional Man (1964), differentiates more clearly between reason as 'Vernunft' and instrumental reason, he continued to link reason and liberation and thereby also to rely on the revolutionary potential of reason. This is, I believe, the strand of Critical Theory that Jürgen Habermas picked up in the 1960s in his initial opposition to the late work of his teachers in Frankfurt.

Habermas's first major project, i.e., The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere has a pivotal position in the development of the Frankfurt School after the war. It is a perplexing and ambivalent book since its epistemology is certainly indebted to Horkheimer and Adorno, while its politics are only partly compatible with the teaching of the older generation. It was not accidental therefore that they rejected the study and forced Habermas to seek his Habilitation at the University of Marburg. The moment one scrutinizes the study more carefully it becomes apparent that Habermas had actually written an implied critique of Dialectic of Enlightenment. Not only did he offer a much more positive evaluation of the European Enlightenment and its philosophical accomplishments than Adorno and Horkheimer, he also developed a political perspective that his teachers were unwilling to share. While they might have agreed on the need for democracy in Germany, their assessment of the necessary strategies differed, although more implicitly than explicitly. In psychological and political terms, then, Structural Transformation

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was too radical and Marxist for Horkheimer's taste, and <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u> too pessimistic for the early Habermas. In particular they clashed over the question of modernity. While Horkheimer and Adorno, following Nietzsche, wrote a harsh and almost unrestricted indictment of modernity, Habermas offered a first version of what he later came to call "the incomplete project of modernity." Although his critique of the decline of the public sphere in the late 19th century is clearly indebted to <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>, especially to the famous chapter on the culture industry, he ultimately wanted to explore the ground for a rehabilitation of the public sphere or, to put it differently, he meant to investigate the political and social institutions on which a radical democracy could be built. In this context, as I will try to demonstrate, the concept of reason as well as the classical German philosophical tradition from Kant to Marx take on a different meaning than in <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u>.

Habermas's implicit disagreement with his teachers had to do with their relentless critique of the very concept of reason that had sustained the essay of Herbert Marcuse and, more broadly speaking, the Institute's project of the 1930s. Both in historical and systematic terms the concept of reason came under attack as the cardinal failure of Western civilization, which had "progressed" from its early stages couched in mythology to the nominalism of modern positivism, on the one hand, and from the human sacrifice of early civilizations to the mass murder of contemporary fascism, on the other. The failure of reason is the central argument of the book. The introduction speaks of the "self-destruction of the enlightenment" (xi) and argues "We are wholly convinced--and therein lies our *petitio principii*--that social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought. Nevertheless, we believe that we have just as clearly recognized that the notion of this very way of thinking , no less than the actual historic forms--the social institutions--

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with which it is interwoven, already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today" (xiii).

What is wrong with reason as it functions in modern discourse? Where do Horkheimer and Adorno perceive the shortcomings and problems? Actually, they give a number of different reasons, some of them have to do with its context and functions in modernity, others are linked more intimately to its genealogy. Reason, they note, has lost its transcending quality and its relation to truth; its application to scientific and social problems is exclusively determined by pragmatic concerns that are rooted in strategies for survival. This line of the argument is closely connected with the problem of commodification, that is, the problem that "thought becomes a commodity, and language the means of promoting that commodity" (xii), obviously an echo from Lukacs's analysis of reification in <u>History and Class Consciousness</u>. But where Lukacs grounded his analysis in the modern phenomenon of commodity fetishism, Horkheimer and Adorno develop a much broader critique going back as far as the original split between subject and object in the era of mythology. Turning against the historical European Enlightenment, for instance Kant, they argue that the formation of the subject is not the result of autonomy but the consequence of adaptation to survive through the domination of nature. In this perspective the self-interpretation of the historical Enlightenment, its stress on humanism, comes across as an ideology that served darker purposes under the aegis of modern capitalism and imperialism.

Horkheimer and Adorno were quite aware of the inner contradiction of their study. Despite their all-out attack on the enlightenment they insisted on the legitimacy of substantive reason as well, a performative contradiction that Adorno later tried to work out in <u>Negative Dialectics</u> (1966) where the epistemological consequences of the earlier critique are finally

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brought into the foreground. But at that point the project of the second generation was already

emerging, although the Frankfurt School still presented a common front to the larger public. In

their critique of the radical students, for instance, Habermas and Adorno worked out a shared

position. But the appearance of a common front was deceptive, for when one looks more closely

at the arguments that Adorno and Habermas developed in dealing with student unrest, it becomes

obvious that Adorno's resistance to revolutionary action was a principal one while Habermas's

criticism was determined by strategic considerations. Adorno was convinced that the time for

revolutionary mass movements had passed, that they would be counter-productive in the age of

late capitalism. Habermas, on the other hand, believed that the time for revolution had not yet

come, that the students were mistaken when they expected a major revolutionary transformation

in the immediate future.

This brings us back to the early work of Habermas. Both Structural Transformation and

his early essays collected in the volume Theory and Practice (1963) are grounded in a concept of

history that is largely indebted to Marx seen through the lenses of Western Marxism and the older

Critical Theory. To some extent, I believe, the early Habermas recuperated the project of the

1930s, however, with a much more critical eye for those moments of Marx's work that had to be

revised. Along these lines Habermas reconstructed the history of the public sphere by

demonstrating its determination through material conditions. In sum, the bourgeois public sphere

rose and fell with the class that had promoted it. At the same time Habermas in his reconstruction

of the public sphere emphasized the need for a normative grounding of the public sphere. By

defining the ideal bourgeois public sphere (Öffentlichkeit) as a discursive field based on reason he

set up a tension between historical reality and the ideal. Using the public sphere of the

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Enlightenment and in particular its definition in the work of Kant as the trope for this ideal, Habermas moved away from the historico-philosophical (geschichtsphilosophisch) model of the older Critical Theory, at least in some respects, although clearly not consistently and systematically. When Habermas some thirty years later wrote a new introduction for the 1990 edition of Structural Transformation he clarified precisely this point when he argued that in the 1970s he became dissatisfied with the theoretical underpinnings of his first book and therefore in The Theory of Communicative Action attempted a very different kind of theoretical grounding. Historical hermeneutics was replaced by linguistic theory and normative considerations received clearly preference over historical ones.

Before I sketch Habermas's path to communicative rationality, however, I want to mention in passing at least that Habermas's solution to the implicit tension between historical and normative aspects in Structural Transformation was not the only one within the Frankfurt School. In their Public Sphere and Experience of 1972 Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge proposed a very different solution. In their critique of Habermas they radicalized the historical approach by charging that he had failed to understand the deeply ideological nature of the bourgeois public sphere. Their reconstruction not only broadened the scope of the investigation by including the proletarian public sphere, it also reinforced the Marxist tenets and therefore argued that the liberal public sphere could not be recuperated at all. By insisting on the radical historicity of the public sphere (or the configuration of competing public spheres), Negt and Kluge meant to block, in epistemological as well as political terms, the normative bent of Habermas's theory.

Schematically speaking, by the end of the 1960s Habermas was left with two fundamental problems: on the one hand, he had to develop a theoretical perspective that would enable him to

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describe and address social and political problems; on the other hand, he had to formulate a theory that would allow him to articulate normative moral and ethical issues. For a short span of time, Habermas was convinced that the common denominator for these projects would be a combination of an advanced form of philosophical hermeneutics (a critical extension of the work that Hans-Georg Gadamer had done) and critical reflection in the tradition of ideology critique. In this version theory and material interests are linked through the concept of "erkenntnisleitende Interessen" which are inevitably at the bottom of human communication and social action. It is noteworthy that in this version the concept of reason is differentiated along the lines of basic forms of human orientation. Building on the methodological differences between the natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities, Habermas argued that the traditional understanding of theory that dominated philosophy from Plato to Husserl treated theory and interests falsely as a strict opposition since it failed to analyze the hidden premises of knowledge. Instead of eradicating human interests as constitutive for knowledge, Habermas proposed a tripart structure as the basis for the development of knowledge. "The specific viewpoints from which, with transcendental necessity, we apprehend reality ground three categories of possible knowledge: information that expands our power of technical control, interpretations that make possible the orientation of action within in common traditions, and analyses that free consciousness from its dependence on hypostatized powers. These viewpoints originate in the interest structures of a species that is linked in its roots to definitive means of social organization: work, language, and power." (Knowledge, 313)

What Habermas gained from this approach was a rather different take on the problem of reason. The tri-part structure redirected the critique of reason that we found in the work of

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Horkheimer and Adorno. On the one hand, it acknowledged instrumental reason as a legitimate concern of the human species to gain control over its environment, on the other hand, it criticized the unreflected application of scientific standards and methods to the humanities and the social sciences where we are concerned with different forms of truths. In this configuration the concept of reason, respectively theory, loses its overpowering central position since it is conceived and applied in more specific contexts and is shown to be grounded in the lifeworld. Thus Habermas concluded: "The insight that the truth of statements is linked in the last analysis to the intention of the good and true life can be preserved today only on the ruins of ontology." (317) Although Habermas's later work did not continue this line of argument because its author had increasing doubts about the mode of transcendental grounding applied in Knowledge and Human Interest, it gives a clear indication of the general direction of Habermas's theory. It distinguished a variety of forms of rationality and therefore also emphasized the need for a variety of critical approaches. Ideology critique was only one of several methods of analysis.

In the ongoing discussion of the paradigm shift in Habermas's work the emphasis is mainly placed upon the so-called linguistic turn that was already suggested in Knowledge and Human Interest. Of equal interest, however, is the problem of historical reconstruction because it touches on the approach to social criticism. In his early work, Habermas, as we have seen, followed a Marxian trajectory in the treatment of the public sphere. During the 1970s, however, he critically revised his approach. Especially in Zur Rekonstruktion des Historischen Materialismus (1976) he attempted to explore the enduring feasibility of a Marxian concept of history while at the same time another strand of his theory moved in the direction of a general theory of communication in which the traditional concept of reason had to be substantially redefined. Still, the question

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remains: how do they hang together? How, more specifically, does Habermas make compatible a theory of social evolution that remains indebted to the Marxian tradition and a general theory of communicative rationality that is based on linguistic theory? We may best understand this relationship as a three-tiered research project. To use a succinct formulation of Thomas McCarthy: "The ground level consists of a general theory of communication [...], at the next level this theory serves as the foundation for a general theory of socialization in the form of a theory of the acquisition of communicative competence, finally, at the highest level, which builds on those below it, Habermas sketches a theory of social evolution which he views as a reconstruction of historical materialism." (Introduction to Communication, xvii)

I want to begin with what McCarthy calls the highest level, i.e., Habermas's theory of social evolution. While it claims to stand in the Marxist tradition, it does not retain many of the typical building blocks of Marxist theory. In this respect Habermas turns out to be a radical revisionist who reassembles and modifies traditional Marxism in order to recuperate its most important feature, namely its critical and practical intent. Part of this strategy is the inclusion of other theoretical traditions, among them phenomenology (Schütz), pragmatism and functionalism (Parsons, Luhmann) in varying degrees and forms. Thus Habermas argues: "I do not see, why these intentions (his critical intentions) would oblige me to take over more or less dogmatically the assumptions of a theory which is rooted in the 19th century." (Zur Rekonstruktion, 130) In his own approach problems of meaning (Sinn), aspects of action (communicative versus strategic), and hierarchies of communications (symbolically mediated interaction, propositionally differentiated actions, discursive speech) play an important role. Specifically, Habermas underlines the relevance of learning for the social system and its evolution. This emphasis is directed against

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traditional Marxism, on the one hand, and Luhmann's theory, on the other. By emphasizing the crucial importance of learning processes and steering mechanisms Habermas distances himself from the Marxist assumption that the dialectic between the forces of production and the relations of production can sufficiently explain social evolution. In addition, this accent implies a critique of systems theory's belief that evolution can be sufficiently explained in terms of differentiation.

In his important essay "Towards a Reconstruction of Historical Materialism" (1976) Habermas tries to demonstrate how a materialist theory can both make use of Marx and must at the same time go beyond him. I can only briefly indicate in what ways Habermas deviates from the tenets of Marxian theory. (1) He holds that there is no need for a collective subject (Gattungssubjekt) that is treated as the substratum of the evolutionary process.. (2) The logic of the evolutionary process does not demand the assumption of linearity or necessity and continuity. Instead, he wants to access evolution by way of a consistent distinction between events and structures. These structures are the basis for evolutionary changes, but the actual process of evolution remains contingent and depends on specific circumstances. This is why the reconstruction of learning processes is of great importance for Habermas. (3) The observation and analysis of (increased) complexity does not suffice for a complete description of social evolution. More specifically Habermas argues that the primary importance of the economic system for social evolution , as Marx defined it, was not meant as a universal law but as a specific model of explanation for the transition from a feudal to a capitalist society. For a more plausible understanding of social evolution Habermas insists on a categorical distinction between communicative action, on the one hand, and instrumental and strategic action, on the other. By separating out communicative action he arrives at a different understanding of the dialectic

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between the forces of production and the relations of production. Moreover, he distances himself from the Marxian assumption that the forces of production ultimately take the lead in social evolution and argues that neither the emergence of the original civilization nor the origins of Western capitalism can be explained in terms of the impact of new forces of production (161).

How, then, do we explain the major shifts in the social structure? Habermas's answer reads: "the species learns not only in the dimension of technically useful knowledge decisive for the development of productive forces but also in the dimension of moral-practical consciousness decisive for structure of interaction. The rules of communicative action do develop in reaction to the changes in the domain of instrumental and strategic action; but in doing so they follow *their own logic*." (148) This means that the concept of the mode of production that underlies Marxian theory is, according to Habermas, not abstract enough, to explain the more general character of social evolution (167). Consequently, Habermas wants to move in the direction of increased conceptual abstraction to analyze organizational principles. This would include, for instance, a clear separation of the mode of production, on the one hand, and the social formation that is linked to the dominant mode of production, on he other. (169) And more specifically he means to foreground the role of symbolic interactions, which Marxist theory has traditionally treated as secondary for the process of social evolution. This, then, is the place where a theory of communicative action begins to help in the conceptualization of social evolution.

Let me give just one example to show how this approach would unfold in the description of social evolution. To pinpoint the transition from one stage to the next Habermas gives a pattern of attitudes and responses that define a specific phase of social organization. In the case of social evolution some of them are changed but not necessarily all of them. Thus Neolithic societies and

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early civilizations share a conventionally structured system of action (157), as well as mythic world views, but in the case of the developed civilization this mythic world view is already separated from the system of action and can therefore have a legitimating function for the ruler.

There is no need in the context of my lecture to go into more details. What I do want to underline, however, is the general perspective of Habermas's understanding of social evolution. Where Horkheimer and Adorno in Dialectic of Enlightenment treated the history of the modern world basically as the failure of rationality, Habermas views social evolution, which of course includes increased rationality, as a more neutral process. Not that he tries to derive general laws of progress from it as 19th-century evolutionists did, but he sees in human history a potential for more adequate social, political and moral solutions based on learning processes. Yet there is, as he repeatedly argues, no transcendent guarantee (Lessing) or metaphysical logic (Hegel). Habermas's understanding of social evolution is strictly post-metaphysical. In other words, Habermas's materialism has distanced itself from the belief in preordained laws of evolution. History can be theorized, but only through the intertwinement of empirical methods and a systematic theoretical framework . Strictly speaking, there is no place for the philosophy of history anymore which still guided Habermas's early work.

Of course, the difference between Habermas's early work and his mature writings is characterized by fundamental changes in the theoretical grounding, changes that occurred at the level of the general theory of communication which Habermas began to explore in the 1970s and then articulated in the Theory of Communicative Action. The first major step was taken in the ground-breaking essay "What is a Universal Pragmatics?" that tried to reconstruct the universal conditions of possible understanding (Verständigung) and tried to identify them as basic to other

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forms of action such as conflicts, competition, strategic action. Following Karl Otto Apel, Habermas focuses on speech actions and distinguishes four aspects of linguistic communication, i.e., the moment of utterance, the aspect of the content, the moment of articulation (the speaker), and, finally the aspect of reception by another person. Habermas claims; "The goal of coming to an understanding is to bring about an agreement (Einverständnis) that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding, shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another." (Communication, 3) To be sure, this structure does not represent the average case of communication. Far from it. In most cases communication remains partial and incomplete, possibly hindered, mutilated, and subverted. In most cases, therefore, interpretation is necessary for speaker and recipient to achieve adequate if not ideal communication. For Habermas the crucial question, however, is not the factuality of disrupted and partial communication but a reconstruction of the general conditions of communication. To put it succinctly: what do we already presuppose when we speak of failure in communication? There are always validity claims, for instance, that can be affirmed or negated. In addition, there are grammatical structures. Hence Habermas distinguishes (1) the grammatical level, (2) the the level of intersubjective recognition (claims of truthfulness), (3) the aspect of justification of validity claims (for instance through arguments, appeals to intuition etc.). Like Apel, Habermas thus underlines the importance of the pragmatic properties of language and distances himself from positivism, structuralism or any type of linguistic theory that treats the pragmatic aspect of language as a mere empirical problem.

The goal Habermas pursues with his analysis relies on a notion of a transcendental deduction. Yet the term "transcendental" does no longer carry the strong connotations it had in Kant's First Critique. Following the discussion of modern logic, Habermas is inclined towards a

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weaker conception of the transcendental which allows for adaptations and modifications in the analysis.

It would be too time-consuming to develop the specific steps of the argument that is strongly indebted to Searl and Austin. Instead, I want to focus our attention on the result and specifically on the problem of the transition from linguistic to social theory. Why does a social theorist feel the need to integrate linguistic theory? The concise, although abbreviated answer would be: Habermas is concerned with what he calls "Geltungsansprüche" that are, he argues, basic for social interaction. To underline this point I want to quote from the essay's final paragraph where Habermas summarizes his findings: "In speech, speech sets itself off from the regions of external nature, society, and internal nature, as a reality sui generis, as soon as the sign-substrate, meaning, and denotation of a linguistic utterance can be distinguished." (Communication, 68) With this statement Habermas foregrounds the linkage between language and the world in which humans live and act. However, in this scheme the function of speech is differentiated. Representation of facts correlate with the world of external nature, the social world needs speech for the establishment of legitimate interpersonal relations; and the world of internal nature (the subject) uses speech to disclose the speaker's subjectivity. In terms of validity claims we therefore have to distinguish truth, rightness, and truthfulness (68).

Now I am facing an impossible task, namely to sketch how Habermas's linguistic turn has effected his social theory in The Theory of Communicative Action. This massive two-volume study (the English translation has almost 900 pages) proceeds simultaneously historically and systematically. It develops its argument by returning to older theories, for instance those of Weber, Durkheim, Mead, Lukacs, and Adorno, in order to frame the theory of communicative

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action through a redemptive critique of the classics. Very much in the tradition of Critical Theory, yet even more consciously than the first generation, Habermas relies on a double strategy of critique and integration, which then leads to the articulation of the new theoretical position. To give you an idea of this position, I want to quote from the first volume: "If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination is established through communication--and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement--then the reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action." (1, 397) Rationality is clearly separated from the concept of instrumental reason, as we found it in Horkheimer and Adorno, or even a concept reason developed out of subjective consciousness. Instead, Habermas shifts the attention more to social action through communicative interaction. The social, in other words, cannot be achieved without language and speech. Social action depends on interpretive accomplishments. But, of course, the act of reaching an understanding does not exhaust communicative action. Rather, it prepares the coordination of social actions in which the particular aims of the agents come to the fore. (1,101) As McCarthy points out: "Communicative competence is not just a matter of being able to produce grammatical sentences. In speaking we relate to the world about us, to other subjects, to our own intentions, feelings and desires." (Theory, i, x) To generalize this point, we can say that for Habermas the world is largely but not exclusively constructed through language. And it is through language that humans are able to foster a process of social organization that is at any moment incomplete and therefore in principle open to new levels of social development. In this process (which we have already examined) rationality plays an important role. "The rationality proper to the communicative

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practice of everyday life points to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal that makes it possible to continue communicative action with other means when disagreement can no longer be repaired with every-day routines and yet are not to be settled by the direct or strategic use of force." (1, 17-18) Apart from its conventional or functional use, for Habermas language and communication contain a critical dimension that is crucial for social interaction and especially for cultural and moral evolution. What we have observed as a moment of idealization in the initial concept of the public sphere in 1962 now returns as the claim for a universal communicative rationality in 1981. In short, the concept of reason must not be rejected but redirected, differentiated and delimited in its function.

In the last section of my paper I want to turn to the emergence of a post-Habermasian version of Critical Theory. This trajectory should be developed in two directions. On the one hand, we would have to deal with the work of the third generation of critical theorists, among them Axel Honneth in Germany and Thomas McCarthy and Sheila Benhabib in the United States; on the other hand, we would have to address internal tendencies of returning to older theoretical positions or seeking an alliance with different theoretical traditions--trajectories that we would find in the writings of Peter Bürger, and Albrecht Wellmer. In some instances this return to Adorno or Benjamin is also characterized by a strong anti-Habermas sentiment. Habermas appears as the rationalist spoiler of Critical Theory. While the members of the third generation have by and large accepted the foundations of Habermasian thought and hence developed their critiques on the basis of this theory, the "outsiders" who are not directly connected to the Frankfurt School as an institution, have been stronger in their resistance to the force of the theory of communicative action and all it stands for. This is, I feel, particularly true in the field of

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aesthetic theory, a field that has received only marginal attention in Habermas's writings. And again in the official transition from Habermas to Axel Honneth, who was recently appointed as Habermas's successor at the University of Frankfurt, the aesthetic question, which was so prominent in the work of Adorno and Benjamin, has been removed to the background.

Before I address the situation of the third generation, I want to focus briefly on Peter Bürger and Albrecht Wellmer, who are only a few years younger than Habermas himself. Typical for both of them is a somewhat uneasy arrangement with Habermas's conception of communicative rationality which cannot easily be applied to the tradition of aesthetic analysis from the early Lukacs to the late Adorno. Bürger is quite conscious of this tension when he explains in the first chapter of his 1988 study Prosa der Moderne that his concept of reason or rationalism is more indebted to the older tradition of Western Marxism than to Habermas. He talks about a "eingeschränkter Begriff von Zweckrationalität" (Prosa, 18) in distinction from Habermas's differentiated concept of rationality. Hence Bürger's central thesis returns self-consciously to the conceptual framework of the first generation of Critical Theory, for instance in the following definition: "Autonome Kunst entsteht als Antwort auf die Entfremdungs-erfahrungen, die der Mensch in einer Welt macht, die sein Produkt ist und ihm doch überall als eine ihm fremde entgegentritt." (Prosa, 17). In this view the process of social differentiation, which in Habermas's work is seen as neutral, takes on a definitely negative character: alienation becomes the very experience that modern art has to oppose or subvert. Modern art, Bürger suggests, resists the process of differentiation as such, "weil der sie konstituierende Formbegriff quersteht zum Begriff der Rationalität." (18) It is quite consistent therefore that Bürger begins with a reconstruction of the category of the modern and modernism in the work of Hegel, Lukacs,

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and Adorno. Still, this reiteration of Habermas's strategy has a different aim since Bürger holds on to a concept of substantive aesthetic truth as it can be found in Adorno's aesthetic theory and would certainly no longer be defended by Habermas and his immediate disciples. While in The Theory of the Avant-Garde of 1974 Bürger treated Adorno's theory as no longer satisfactory for the post-war situation, in Prosa der Moderne (1988) he reverts in his analysis of modernism to the aporetic dialectic of Adorno's aesthetic theory which maintains that art cannot give up its autonomous status as well as its truth claims, but has to come to grips with the fact that the modern social system, i.e., advanced capitalism, has marginalized art and subverted its truth claims. Bürger defines the basic experience of modern art as aporetic insofar as it is at the same time necessary and impossible. (Prosa, 447). This definition, I believe, stays closer to Adorno and Benjamin than to Habermas.

This repositioning becomes even more apparent in Bürger's most recent work. In Das Denken des Herrn (1992) Bürger begins to distance himself from the notion of a systematic theory (that has guided Habermas's work from the very beginning) and seeks refuge in the essay form that the early Lukacs and the mature Adorno had cultivated as the most appropriate venue for critical thought. This formal decision should not be taken lightly as a mere change of genre. Now the non-systematic, even anti-systematic format of the essay is consciously brought back to articulate those moments of critical and self-reflexive thought which the rigor of systematic theory represses or misses. Where Habermas prefers closure (even in his essays) Bürger now propagates the refusal of closure. He suggests: "Der Essay weist keine Auswege, es sei denn, um sie sogleich als Holzwege erkennbar zu machen. Er ist die Form des unendlichen Aufschubs. Seine innere Zeitform ist das Futur, auch wo er von Vergangenem spricht.. Wenn es ein Verfahren des

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Essayisten gibt, dann ist es das Vertrauen auf das Abliegende. Von ihm erhofft er sich den Anstoß

zur Verkehrung seines Wissens. Insofern teilt der Essayist mit Benjamin die surrealistische

Haltung des Erwartens..." (Denken, 13) "Verkehrung des Wissens" signals a situation where the

construction of knowledge, theoretical as well as empirical, has become a disappointing

experience---Endzeitstimmung. One cannot fail to notice the growing pessimism in Bürger's late

work--possibly one reason why all of a sudden Adorno seems to be a more attractive guide than

Habermas.

Once we turn to Albrecht Wellmer, we encounter both a different strategy and a distinct

position. Unlike Bürger, he actually engages Habermas's theory and makes a serious attempt to

join the Adornian problematics with the framework of the theory of communicative action. In

fact, the essay "Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation" (1985) takes Habermas's critique of Adorno as

its point of departure. Looking back at Adorno's work from the perspective of communicative

rationality, Wellmer suggests that Adorno's epistemology, especially it subject-object split makes

it virtually infeasible to grasp the "communicative moment of the spirit" (Persistence, 13); it forces

Adorno to develop a theory of mimesis that has to fill the gap left by a too constricted concept of

rationality. Wellmer follows Habermas in assuming that communicative rationality can overcome

the conflict between subjectivation and alienation which in the writings of Adorno and

Horkheimer had to remain an unresolved dialectical tension. Similarly, in the essay "Modernism

and Postmodernism" Wellmer makes use of the concept of communicative rationality to engage

Lyotard's conception of postmodernism by arguing that the pluralism of language games and

institutions which are expected to overcome the tyranny of the enlightenment depends itself on a

different form of rationality "But such a pluralism of institutions embodying the democratic self-

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organization of societies and groups would not be possible unless the fundamental mechanism by which action is co-ordinated were to take the form of communicative action in the sense that Habermas has defined it." (Persistence, 92) Particularity cannot be purchased without a moment of universality and vice versa. In this line of argument the problem of modern democracy is not simply a matter of supporting pluralism against authoritarian rationalism. What is at stake "is a shared basis of second-order social habits: the habits of rational self-determination, democratic decision-making and the non-violent resolution of conflicts." (92) It is interesting to note, however, that Wellmer defends this position not through ultimate principles and deductive reasoning. Instead, he suggests that "we cannot expect either ultimate justifications or final solutions to our problems". (93) Nonetheless, he underlines the need for a universalist perspective that guides the permeability of the various modes of discourse. In other words, Wellmer wants the unitary notion of reason to be replaced by "plurality of interacting rationalities" (94).

What I have shown so far is the strong Habermasian strand in Wellmer's thought. Yet ultimately more interesting is the question where and to what extent he departs from the Habermasian position. While Wellmer stays convinced of the severe limitations of the epistemology developed in <u>Dialectic of Enlightenment</u> and views the weaknesses of Adorno's art criticism, at least in part, as its logical result, he takes the aesthetic theory of the first generation of critical theorists seriously and engages them both historically and systematically. In his search for an aesthetics of democracy, he carefully distinguishes between moments of aesthetic traditionalism in the work of Adorno and the unfolding of the internal logic of <u>Aesthetic Theory</u> which he sees as determined by the dialectic of subjectivation and alienation, and specifically by the notion of an encroachment of rationality into the work of art.

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At this juncture Wellmer opts for the impulses that have come from Benjamin's art criticism, in particular from his reading of modern mass culture, to distance himself from the Adornian cage of aesthetic autonomy. Following Benjamin, Wellmer argues: "I think that there is just as much positive potential for democratization and the unleashing of aesthetic imagination as there is potential for cultural regression in rock music and the attitudes, skills and modes of perception which have developed around it." (Persistence, 33) Please note the structure of this argument, i.e., the rhetoric of both/and which hovers where Benjamin radically pushed the loss of aura as the necessary secularization of the aesthetic. But, of course, this process of democratic secularization, is already completely taken for granted by Wellmer and does no longer deserve the defense that Adorno still put up. One senses even a certain impatience with Adorno when he holds on the concept of the autonomous art work in its classical or modernist version.

However, this criticism of Adorno does not stand at the center of Wellmer's essay. As he points out in his summary, his main interest lies in the possibility of a recuperative reading of Adorno in which the concept of aesthetic truth is brought to the fore. What Wellmer wants to redeem is the moment of communication in art, a form of non-violent communication that is inherent in the concept of truth. This reading contains an interesting interpretative shift since for Adorno himself the communicative aspect of the art work was of secondary importance. He was certainly not inclined to define the truth content of the art work in terms of communication. In fact, his rabid criticism of reception studies makes this very clear. It seems to me that Wellmer wants to create a bridge between the late theory of Adorno and the mature work of Habermas by focusing on the notion of the utopian. "The intention that has guided me in these reflections," Wellmer states, "was to release the truth-content of Adorno's aesthetics and develop it through

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critique and interpretation." (35) The idea of the utopian, one of the most essential and powerful categories of Critical Theory, enables Wellmer to reintegrate Adorno's work into the mainstream of second-generation critical theory.

In many respects the third generation of critical theorists, most of them students of Jürgen Habermas, follow a similar path. Among them Axel Honneth stands out as the perhaps most representative. His intellectual formation occurred during the 1970s and early 1980s in close proximity to Habermas, who taught for about a decade at the Max Planck Institute in Starnberg und returned to the University of Frankfurt in 1988. For Honneth the paradigm shift within the Frankfurt School had already happened when he joined Habermas's seminar and later became his assistant. Consequently, in his own work the theory of communicative action rather than Negative Dialectics or the late writings of Benjamin became the point of departure. In this sense he represents the self-understanding of the School. Yet there is another side to his writings that is either absent or less developed in the thought of the second generation, namely a strong interest in and lasting familiarity with French structuralism and poststructuralism. Unlike his teacher Habermas, who remained a suspicious reader of his French colleagues,---the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity provides good examples of this response---Honneth tried to develop his own position through the appropriation of French theory, especially through the appropriation of Foucault. This comparative strategy defines the approach of his first major study, Kritik der Macht (1985), but is also quite prominent in his essay collection Die Zerrissenheit des Sozialen (1990) that brought French social theory (Levi-Strauss, Merlau-Ponty, Castoriadis and Bourdieu) to the attention of a broader German public. While Kritik der Macht still holds on to the perspective of the Frankfurt School and ultimately favors the theory of communicative action over

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Foucault's analysis of power relations, the later essays demonstrate a greater appreciation of

French thought as well as a broader and more generous framework of interpretation. What seems

to attract Honneth to the French thinkers is the same moment that makes the older generation of

critical theorists relevant again after Habermas's work had superseded them---the preservation of

motives and themes that find no completely adequate expression in Habermasian theory, for

instance the destructive character of the process of civilization. Thus Honneth characterizes

Foucault in the following manner: "Nur die gesteigerte Sensibilität für jene Formen des Leidens,

die aus der kulturell erzwungenen Abspaltung überschießenden Trieb- und Phantasieimpulse

stammen, macht die schwer konstruierbare Synthese verständlich, die die wissenschafts-

historischen Werke Foucaults darbieten: die ungewöhnliche Verschränkung des Wissens des

Gelehrten, der Kunst des Erzählers, der Befangenheit des Monomanen und der Empfindlichkeit

des Verletzten -- eine Synthese, die in der Physiognomie Foucaults ja als Mischung von

analytischer Kälte und mitleidender Empfindsamkeit sich spiegelte." (Welt, 77)

. Nonetheless, when Honneth turns to the substance of Foucault's work he notes the

shortcomings as well, shortcomings seen from the perspective of a general theory of

communication. In the essay "Foucault und Adorno" (1986) he underlines the failure of Foucault's

early work in which Foucault unfolds the emergence and the passing of scientific discourses.

Honneth interprets the shift to a theory of power in Foucault's later work as an indication that the

structualist approach to language and discourses had failed. It becomes quite clear that Honneth

welcomes this shift as a significant step towards a social theory that is compatible with Adorno's

late work. To make this point Honneth foregrounds the aspect of human suffering, especially the

experience of bodily suffering as the common dimension of Adorno and Foucault. "Die

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Konstruktion des Rationalitätsbegriffs ist bei Adorno wie bei Foucault von der mitleidenden Aufmerksamkeit auf die Leiden des menschlichen Körpers geleitet; darin liegt die innere Verwandtschaft ihrer Kritik der Moderne." (Welt, 82) Common elements that Honneth emphasizes are the concept of rationalism, a notion of "leibhaftiger Subjektivität" (84), the conception of modernity in which the process of enlightenment turns out to be a process of disciplinary and rationalist control in society (totalizing critique of reason).

Ultimately, however, Honneth stresses the difference between Foucault and Adorno. While Foucault means to demonstrate that human subjectivity is nothing but a field of manipulation, Adorno, following a Marxist analysis of advanced capitalism, intends to stress the deformation of the individual. In the final analysis, Honneth favors Adorno's critique of the subject over Foucault's deconstruction of the concept of subjectivity, since the latter approach strikes him as a reductive interpretation of the social along the lines of Luhmann's systems theory. The proximity of this critique to that of Habermas is fairly apparent. In <u>Kritik der Macht</u> Honneth offers a more systematic analysis of this line of interpretation.. The study develops two lines of argument to unfold the main thesis; on the one hand, Honneth traces the internal development of the Frankfurt School, in particular the phase from Adorno to Habermas; on the other hand, he uses Foucault's theory of power relations to provide a contrasting reading of the social problems that Critical Theory addressed at various stages and through various methods. In this regard Foucault might have a function that is similar to that of Nietzsche for Adorno and Horkheimer---a force of resistance to the idea of the self-reflexive and autonomous subject, respectively to a subject-agent engaged in communicative interaction.

Again, an even cursory look at the latest constellation of Critical Theory makes it apparent

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that the history of the Frankfurt School cannot be adequately conceptualized as a linear evolution. Honneth himself seems to be somewhat aware of this more complex configuration when he suggests in his essay on the genealogy of Critical Theory that one has to distinguish between an inner and an outer circle of critical theorists and then credits the "outsiders" such as Benjamin, Kirchheimer, Neumann, and Fromm with the preservation of a greater variety of theoretical models, which the inner circle failed to maintain because it was locked into certain thought patterns. The ideas of the outsiders would be picked up by the next generation, in particular by Jürgen Habermas (and by extension, Honneth himself). Thus in a surprising move Honneth claims that Habermas had actually little in common with his teachers whom he defines as functionalist Marxists (58). Instead, by developing the insights of the outsiders, Habermas arrived at a non-functionalist social theory that "als der einzig ernstzunehmende Neuansatz dieser Tradition gelten darf." (Welt, 58) While I find the latter part of this argument unconvincing, I find the distinction useful and worth applying to the post-Adornian Gestalt of the Frankfurt School. We would have to turn to the work of Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt or to the writings of Peter Bürger and Christoph Menke, perhaps even to the essays of Karl Heinz Bohrer to find the unorthodox impulses that the School might need to break the gridlock of its present articulation.

Still, the distinction between insiders and outsiders, as suggestive as it is, fails to capture the entire history of Critical theory. The phenomenon of returns to older seemingly outdated forms of theoretical articulation and the moment of reiterations at a different level have been at least as important for the development of Critical Theory. For example, the early work of Habermas "returned" to the project developed by the Institute during the 1930s. During the 1970s Negt and Kluge resisted the paradigm shift prepared by Habermas and "returned" to the Marxism

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of the first generation. During the 1980s and 1990s Wellmer and Bürger again "returned" to

Adorno's aesthetic theory to make up for deficits of advanced critical theory in the realm of

aesthetics. Of course, this moment of a return is not to be taken literally as the expression of a

dogmatic belief. Rather, this move signals an awareness of the constraints of the dominant version

of Critical Theory, i.e., the theory of communicative action, and the need for a new and fresh

appropriation of previous theoretical patterns. In other words, it is a learning process for the

future in consultation with the past.