The Frankfurt School Revisited: A Critique of Martin Jay's The Dialectical Imagination

by Douglas Kellner

In the 1960s a generation of students and intellectuals were confronted with oppressive social problems and contradictions that could not be solved within the system itself. This generation sought an alternative to advanced capitalist society and a theory that would guide and justify radical social change. In both Europe and America many of the new revolutionaries turned to the critical theory of society developed by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research. They discovered that the works of Herbert Marcuse, Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School articulated their own rejection of capitalist society and pointed toward revolutionary socialism as the alternative. The Frankfurt School introduced them to Marxist theory and at the same time indicated the need to develop a neo-Marxism which would adequately describe the current situation of imperialist capitalism, pointing to a social practice that would abolish it. As the world-wide anti-imperialist movement grew during the “heroic period” of the 1960s, and as revolts against the system broke out in the advanced capitalist countries, the ideas of the Frankfurt School became a material force in the revolutionary struggles haunting the bourgeois world. After the fragmentation and repression of the movement in the early 1970s, those committed to the ideas of the 1960s began a serious study of the neo-Marxist thinkers. They discovered the wealth of works which the Frankfurt Institute had produced since the 1950s and they also found many deficiencies and inadequacies in the work of the Frankfurt School, particularly in its post 1945 phase.

The history of the Frankfurt Institute from 1923 to 1950 is told for the first time by Martin Jay in The Dialectical Imagination. Jay’s study provides an introduction to the work of the Institute for an American audience, which, although perhaps familiar with Herbert Marcuse’s version of critical theory, was probably not aware of critical theory’s origins and development in Germany and in the period of emigration to the United States. Jay’s book provides a gold mine of information and gives some sense of the richness, comprehensiveness and complexity of the Frankfurt School’s many projects. Yet on the whole the book is deceptive and disappointing. It is deceptive because it fails to explicate the radical Marxist program implicit in the Institute’s work in the 1950s and as a result, provides a misleading interpretation of critical theory. It is disappointing because it fails to define adequately what distinguishes critical theory from traditional theory, and fails to discuss the later
transformation of critical theory in which many of its earlier positions were sacrificed.

Part of the problem lies in the focus and scope of Jay's work. He is a historian and is more concerned with amassing factual details than in developing an interpretation and critique of critical theory that would relate it to current theoretical and political problems. The crucial deficiency of Jay's book, however, is that he relies for his information on those members of the Frankfurt Institute who turned away from the early Marxist radicalism of the Institute (especially Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock and Leo Lowenthal). Jay therefore reads the standpoint of the late Frankfurt School which, however, is never really defined, into the earlier, more radical phase of the Institute's history. The ambivalence toward Marxism of those members who had in fact more or less abandoned Marxism leads Jay to distort the story of the origin and development of critical theory by failing to explicate adequately its earlier commitment to Marxism and the revitalization of Marxist theory. To correct the deficiencies of Jay's interpretation of the Frankfurt School, let us first reexamine the story of the sources and development of the Frankfurt Institute, and then indicate the transformation in the post 1945 history of critical theory.

1.

Marxist theory was the decisive and formative influence on the Frankfurt Institute from its beginning. The Institute for Social Research was founded as the first Marxist institute in Germany to have as its goal the development of Marxism through a study of the workers' movement and capitalist and socialist economies as well as the institutions and the social-cultural life of bourgeois society. The Institute's first director, Carl Grünberg, was in Jay's words "the first avowed Marxist to hold a chair at a German University." (p. 10). In his 1924 inaugural address, Grünberg disclosed his commitment to Marxism and argued that Marxism is at once a self-contained philosophical system, a Weltanschauung, and a method of research. Marxism, according to Grünberg, is a science and a philosophy of history and has no connection with bourgeois philosophy or philosophical materialism. Here Grünberg differed from the then current Marxist orthodoxy of the Social Democrats and Soviet Marxists who subscribed to a positivistic scientific socialism and a mechanical philosophical materialism. Jay is incorrect, therefore, in characterizing Grünberg as someone who viewed theoretical issues with "relative indifference" (p. 10). Rather, Grünberg argued that historical materialism is a method of scientific research whose object is the concrete historical world in its change and development, or more precisely, social life in its transformations.

1. Carl Grünberg, "Festrede gehalten zur Einweihung des Instituts für Sozialforschung an der Universität Frankfurt am Main am 22.6.1924," Frankfurter Universitätsreden (Frankfurt am Main, 1924), pp. 5-6. Reprinted in Anfänge der kritischen Theorie (Frankfurt am Main, 1972).
2. Ibid., p. 10.
are not eternal, universal, unchanging truths, but rather concepts describing a changing, developing society. The aim of Marxist research is to discover the causes and laws of social change. Since Grünberg believed that social life in all its manifestations is a reflex of the existing economic system, the key to social theory is to discover the laws of development of the economic system. Grünberg's methodology was more inductive than dialectical, and his belief in an ameliorative evolutionism "from the less perfect to the more perfect," would be rather confused with fascism and the Second World War. Hence overemphasizing his influence on his more philosophically sophisticated successors who were to develop critical theory would be a mistake. Nonetheless, the Institute was to follow his Marxist program by placing the critique of political economy at the center of an interdisciplinary program of research that was in part shaped by Grünberg's interest in empirical investigation and concrete historical studies.

What Jay fails to reveal is both the depth of the commitment to Marxism of the early members of the Institute and the social and cultural climate in Germany that produced this Marxist intelligentsia. Although Jay begins his narrative with a rather perfunctory reference to the Russian Revolution, he fails to evoke the excitement that the Revolution created for a generation of European intellectuals.

Indeed, from the beginning, the members of the Institute were pro-communist and supported the Russian Revolution. Many of them were affiliated with the major German working-class parties and some maintained close ties with Ryazanov and the Soviet Marx-Engels Institute, even visiting the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that the Institute members were perceived and perceived themselves as Marxists to a far greater extent than Jay's narrative implies.

Unjustifiably, Jay seems to place more weight on the Jewish origins of the members of the School than on their commitment to Marxism as the "common thread running through individual biographies" (p. 51). In fact the most important "common thread running through individual biographies" is a marked anti-capitalist and pro-socialist tendency. In the cases of Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm and Friedrich Pollock it was their political stance, and not ethnic descent, I believe, that led them to Marxism. In Horkheimer's case this point is illustrated by Dämmerung, his early book of short essays and aphorisms written from 1926 to 1931 and published in 1934 in Switzerland. Jay's use of this remarkable book is highly selective, and he fails to cite some of the most explosive passages where Horkheimer clearly expresses his anti-capitalist and pro-socialist position. The title of the book Dämmerung signifies both dawn and twilight, and the aphorisms suggest the twilight of a disappearing historical epoch (capitalism) and the dawn of a new (socialist) era. The tone of the book is one of restrained revolutionary optimism. The style reads like that of a Marxist Nietzsche: "The Dämmerung of capitalism does not need to lead to the night of inhumanity that today appears to threaten." The book contains a thoroughgoing

critique of capitalism and bourgeois ideology: "It [theory] always relates critically to the concepts of metaphysics, character, morals, personality, and the value of humanity as they possessed validity in the period of capitalism."^4 Horkheimer's attack on bourgeois society, capitalism and imperialism is relentless, and his commitment to socialism is unequivocal: "The capitalist system in the current phase is a world-wide system of organized exploitation. Its maintenance is the condition of immeasurable suffering. This society possesses in reality the human and technical means to abolish poverty in its crudest material forms. We know of no epoch in which this possibility would have existed to the extent that it does today. Only the property system stands in the way of its realizations, that is, the condition that the gigantic apparatus of human production must function in the service of a small group of exploiters" (Dämmerung, p. 46). "Most men are born into a prison. Precisely for this reason the present form of society, so-called individualism, is in truth a society of sameness and mass culture. So-called collectivism, socialism, is in contrast the unfolding of individual talents and differences" (Dämmerung, p. 89). "Socialism is a more appropriate (zweckmäßiger), better form of society, whose elements are in a certain way present in capitalism. There exist 'tendencies' in capitalism that lead to an upheaval of the system" (Dämmerung, p. 62).

"If mankind would consciously take its social processes of life in hand, and in place of the struggles of capitalist corporations would establish a classless and planned society, then the effects of the production processes on mankind and their relations could be overseen and regulated...it is a question of helping this free conscious subject that shapes social life come into existence: this self is none other than the self-regulating, rationally organized socialist society" (Dämmerung, pp. 98,100). "Whoever has eyes for the senseless injustice of the imperialist world, will consider the events in Russia as the continuing, painful attempt to overcome this terrible social injustice, or will at least ask with a beating heart whether this attempt is still going on" (Dämmerung, pp. 152-153).

Jay quotes from a letter by Adorno indicating his complete agreement with Horkheimer's book and analysis of "the agonizing development of the capitalist total situation" (p. 66). An examination of Marcuse's early essays, written from 1928 to 1932 before he joined the Institute, also reveal anti-capitalist and pro-Marxist tendencies. Thus the members of the Institute for Social Research formed part of the radicalized intelligentsia in Weimar Germany whose aversion to capitalism and turning to socialism best defines the shared social and political stance of the Institute.

Jay's failure to see the radicalism of the Institute in its early years leads him to underestimate the influence of Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch on the Frankfurt School. Both were present at the Marxist seminar sponsored by Felix Weil in 1922, a

4. Ibid., p. 7.
5. See my discussion of Marcuse's early essays in Douglas Kellner, "Introduction to 'On the Philosophical Foundation of the Concept of Labor'," Telos, 16 (Summer, 1978), 2-8.
year before the Institute was opened. Adorno, Marcuse, Benjamin and Lowenthal have noted the impact of Lukács on their work, and there is reason to believe that the influence and role of Korsch in the Institute was much greater than Jay indicates. Korsch’s works Marxismus und Philosophie (Marxism and Philosophy) and Die materialistische Geschichtsauffassung: Anti-Kautsky (The Materialist Concept of History) were first published in Grünberg’s Archiv. Moreover, Korsch participated in several Institute seminars and wrote reviews for the Institute’s journal. Many of Korsch’s students were active in the School. Although Korsch devoted most of his time to practical politics, surely both his philosophical positions and socialist ideas (workers’ councils, socialization, syndicalism, anti-bureaucracy, etc.) had an impact on the Institute. Korsch, in fact, might have had a very instrumental role in the very project of founding the Institute. Felix Weil, who financed the Institute, met Korsch in 1918 and was strongly influenced by him. In many ways Weil remained closer to Korsch’s position than to Horkheimer’s and the “inner circle’s” theory. Jay notes that Weil’s dissertation on the practical problems of implementing socialism was published in a series of monographs edited by Korsch, who had been one of the first to interest him in Marxism” (p. 5). Indeed, at this time Korsch had been discussing the idea of founding a Marxist discussion and research institute modeled on the Fabian Society. Moreover, the seminar sponsored by Weil which preceded the founding of the Institute was, as Jay notes, “devoted to a discussion of Korsch’s yet unpublished manuscript ‘Marxism and Philosophy’” (p. 5). Finally, Korsch remained in contact with the Institute throughout the 1930s, offering a series of lectures at the Institute as late as 1939. Jay’s failure to trace more clearly the influence of Korsch and Lukács on the School makes it difficult to discern the Marxism characteristic of critical social theory.

In 1929 Grünberg retired from the Institute due to illness and Max Horkheimer was chosen director. He remained its guiding spirit during the troubled period in which fascism forced the emigration of its members to other European countries and later to the United States. It was under Horkheimer that the Institute developed the critical theory of society for which it is famous. During Horkheimer’s reign, new members such as Adorno, Fromm, Lowenthal and Marcuse became part of the “inner circle” of the Institute and made outstanding contributions to its program.

Horkheimer defined the conception of social philosophy that was to provide the framework for the Institute’s program in his inaugural address “The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research”—an important essay to which Jay characteristically devotes a bare paragraph and a half (pp. 25-26). In this essay Horkheimer defines social philosophy as an attempt to philosophically elucidate the “late of human beings, insofar as they are parts of a community, and not mere individuals. It concerns itself above all with the social life of people: state, law, economy, religion, in short, with the entire material and

---

6. See the articles on Karl Korsch by Michael Buckmiller in Über Karl Korsch (Frankfurt am Main, 1975).
spiritual culture of humanity." Horkheimer rejects these concepts of social philosophy, such as the Kantian, in which all cultural and social products are grounded in the inner essence of an autonomous individual, so that philosophy becomes self-reflection. "Hegel," Horkheimer claims, "freed this self-reflection from the fetters of introspection and referred the question of the autonomous culture-creating subject to the labor of history, in which it takes on objective form." Thus, "Hegel's idealism is in its essential aspects social philosophy—the philosophical understanding of the collective whole in which we live." Hegel's philosophy, however, contained an impossible mystification that posited a march of reason behind the seeming "swarm of arbitrariness" in history and glorified the State as the embodiment of reason.

The dominant schools of social philosophy, Horkheimer suggests, have either followed Kant in taking the individual as the basic unit of investigation (Lebensphilosophie, existentialism, positivism, etc.), or they have postulated a superpersonal entity such as state, community, nation, class or race as the authentic domain of social theory. Horkheimer and his colleagues concluded that these undialectical conceptions must be overcome and that a theory of interaction between individual and society must be developed which neither posits an abstract, isolated individual, nor a reified social totality, as the subject matter of social theory. Instead, social philosophy attempts to grasp dialectically "the relations between the individual and society, the meaning of culture, the basis of socialization and the total structure of social life." Such an ambitious enterprise requires a new kind of synthesis of philosophy and the individual sciences. The positivistic conception that philosophy "is perhaps beautiful, but scientifically fruitless because it is not subject to controls," verification, experiments and the like must be rejected, as must the philosopher's prejudice that he is dealing with the essential while the scientist is dealing with bare, trivial facts. These conflicting claims to the primacy of science and philosophy must be overcome in favor of a "dialectical penetration and development of philosophical theory and the praxis of the individual disciplines." Hence the philosophical drive toward the universal and essential should be the animating spirit for social research, but philosophy must be at the same time "sufficiently open to the world to allow itself to be impressed with, and transformed by, progress in concrete studies." To

9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 40.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 41.
sociology, publishing their results in the Institute's journal, the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung. The Institute hoped that the cumulative work of its members would help clarify the phenomenon of fascism and contribute to the struggle against fascism.

In view of the Institute's programmatic intentions laid out by Horkheimer and Marcuse, as well as the actual program of research carried out, Jay is wrong in claiming that: "Critical theory, as its name implies, was expressed through a series of critiques of other thinkers and philosophical traditions. Its development was thus through dialogue, its genesis as dialectical as the method it purported to apply to social phenomena. Only by confronting it in its own terms, as a gadfly of other systems, can it be fully understood" (p. 41). Although critical theory took the task of the critique of ideology and the criticism of bourgeois philosophy very seriously and carried out detailed criticisms of the leading philosophers of the day, it is misleading to claim, as Jay does (p. 41), that critical theory was developed primarily in a debate (Auseinandersetzung) with other philosophical systems. Rather, critical theory developed out of metatheoretical inquiries into the nature of radical social theory and through the study of social reality directed toward actual social problems. During the 1930s, it was concerned primarily with the collapse of bourgeois society into a totalitarian nightmare. Moreover, it is misleading to claim that Lebensphilosophie (Nietzsche, Dilthey and Bergson) was "crucial" in determining Horkheimer's aversion to metaphysics (p. 48) and in determining the Institute's concept of praxis (p. 64). Clearly, Hegel and Marx were the crucial philosophical influences on critical theory, while Horkheimer and his associates were basically critical of Lebensphilosophie. It is perhaps symptomatic of Jay's process of selection that he spent an undue amount of space explicating Horkheimer's discussion of the now relatively moribund Lebensphilosophie, rather than discussing in any detail Horkheimer's and his associates' critique of the still influential philosophical currents of positivism, phenomenology and existentialism. Jay, in fact, never really defines critical theory. When he attempts a general characterization, calling critical theory a "gadfly of other systems" (p. 41), for instance, his statements are usually misleading or false.

What, then, is critical theory? This question can be answered by a careful examination of Horkheimer's essay "Traditional and Critical Theory."19 We have seen that the Frankfurt Institute's theory is founded on an interdisciplinary enterprise which combines philosophy and science, theory and fact, concern with the universal and the particular. Critical theory itself is a dialectical social theory rooted in the Marxist dialectic. The Institute constantly concerned itself with the problem of explicating and utilizing the dialectical method. As noted, the Institute was concerned to work out the mediations that linked the individual with society and to disclose the contradictions of social totality, which a revolutionary practice would...

negate and abolish (aufheben). The role of negation in the dialectic was to become an increasingly central concern of the Institute. Indeed no individual or group of individuals since Marx was so concerned with developing the dialectical categories and utilizing and defending the dialectical method. Although Jay calls attention to the Frankfurt School's use of dialectic (pp. 54-55), he fails to show how the Frankfurt School's dialectic is rooted in the Marxist critique of political economy and how it is a historical dialectic aiming at revolutionary change. "The critical theory of society," Horkheimer argues, "begins with abstract determinations; insofar as it deals with the present epoch, with a characterization of an economy based on exchange." 20 Marx's concepts of commodity, money, value and exchange characterize not only economics but also social relations when human relations and all forms of life are governed by commodity and exchange relations and values. Critical theory's "content consists of changing the concepts that thoroughly dominate the economy into their opposites: fair exchange into a deepening of social injustice; a free economy into monopolistic domination; productive labor into the strengthening of relations which inhibit production; the maintenance of society's life into the impoverishment of the people's." 21 The goal of critical theory is to transform these material conditions, for the economy is more immediately and forcefully determining all realms of life. Critical theory is therefore concerned with working out the new forms of the economy and the new role the economy plays in social life. It therefore intends to grasp "the historical movement of an epoch that is to come to an end." 22 At the same time the stability and solidity (Festigkeit) of the theory consists of both "the fundamental economic structure that underlies all social change;" and "the class relations in their simplest form and the idea of their abolition." 23

Further, critical theory is eminently dialectical in that its method combines empirical investigation with theoretical construction, and its object is the interaction between the individual and society, which it conceives as a dialectic of subject and object, man and world. On the one hand, society is a product of human labor performed by individuals in a given society: "it is our world." But on the other hand, the world has its own dynamics and mechanisms, so that it appears as a blind, anarchistic process impervious to human control: it is "the world of capital." 24 Although human praxis creates the social world, "the people are not only in their clothes and behavior, in their forms and ways of feeling, a product (Resultat) of history, but the way they see and hear is also not to be abstracted from the process of social life as it has developed over the millennia." 25 The key to understanding the object of critical theory is this interaction between the individual and the social world which can only be grasped dialectically. In this conception, no phenomenon,

20. Ibid., p. 179.
22. Ibid., p. 195.
24. Ibid., pp. 156-57.
25. Ibid., p. 146.
nothing, escapes determination by social processes. Individuals, scientific theory, works of art, the state are all to be understood as part of a social process, moments of a social totality. Hence, critical theory is necessarily a critical theory of society.

Horkheimer claims that all phenomena present to the senses, all facts in social theory are socially performed in a double sense: "through the historical character of the object perceived and the historical character of the perceiving organ." Indeed, insight into the social conditioning of theory is one of the distinguishing features of critical theory, which recognizes that all research and ideas are influenced by societal interests, the mode and level of production, the values of a given society, the particular conditions of life. Thus pure theory, value-free objectivity and neutrality are unattainable. Rather than suppress values, interests and presuppositions, the critical theorist must explicate and defend research in terms of the goals intended, the operative interests and the solutions envisaged. Above all, one should be clearer about how all activity from the most abstract theorizing to the purchase of food is conditioned by the material conditions of existence.

Critical theory is grounded in the Marxist critique of political economy. Horkheimer and his associates firmly adhere to the Marxist standpoint that the economy is the crucial determining factor for all social life and individual activity. Moreover, critical theory accepts the Marxist critique of capitalism which sees all social problems as ultimately rooted in the irrationality and contradictions of the capitalist mode of production. "The categories which have arisen under its influence criticize the present. The Marxist categories of class, exploitation, surplus value, profit, impoverishment and collapse are moments of a conceptual whole whose meaning is to be sought, not in the reproduction of the present society, but in its transformation to a correct society." Critical theory is motivated by an emancipatory interest: the emancipation from capitalism. "If rationally determined action belongs to humanity, then the given social praxis which shapes existence down to its smallest detail is inhuman, and this inhumanity affects everything that takes place in society." Hence critical theory is above all a philosophy of praxis engaged in "the struggle for the future." Critical theory must remain loyal to the "idea of a future society as the community of free human beings, insofar as such a society is possible, given the present technical means." This goal is distinguished from abstract utopia "through the demonstration of its actual possibility, given the current status of human productive powers." Hence, Horkheimer regards critical theory as

27. In his article "Philosophy and Critical Theory," Herbert Marcuse historically locates the origins of critical theory in Marx's insight into the fundamental role of economic factors in the constitution of society. In the postscript to the article we are discussing, Horkheimer also explicitly takes Marxism as the paradigm of critical theory. See Herbert Marcuse, "Philosophy and Critical Theory," Negations: Essays in Critical Theory (Boston, 1968), pp. 184-189.
29. Ibid., p. 159.
30. Ibid., p. 166.
31. Ibid., p. 166.
an analysis of a determinate social and historical system. The goal of critical theory is to overcome this system in order to provide the transition to a better, freer, happier and more rational social order.

Thus, critical theory is also a revolutionary theory geared toward the abolition of capitalism and the construction of socialism. It is motivated by the dual interest in a rational society and the liberation of the individual from bondage to a system of exploitation and domination. Moreover, critical theory continually insists on the contradicious in the capitalist mode of production, its anarchy and blind uncontrolled domination, its hostility or indifference to the individual's freedom and happiness. Since "the economy is the first cause of poverty, theoretical and practical criticism has to direct itself primarily at it." Horstheimer and his associates were convinced that the capitalist economy was driving bourgeois society to catastrophe through its underlying cycle of wars, depressions, unemployment and production anarchy. Moreover, its increasing drive toward domination was destroying the features of individuality which the system extolled as its prime creation: "Under the conditions of monopoly capitalism, however, the relative autonomy of the individual has come to an end. The individual no longer has his own thoughts. The content of mass belief, in which no one really believes, is a direct product of the ruling economic and state bureaucracies. In patriarchs secretly follow only their atomized and therefore false interests: they act as mere functions of the economic mechanisms." 33

To overcome the crisis of bourgeois civilization, which was at the time producing concentration camps and gigantic war machines that would plunge Europe into a long night of barbarism, critical theory was driven by an interest in a "rational organization of human activity" and saw itself as an "indispensable moment in the historical effort to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers of human beings." 34 It does not aim primarily at an increase in knowledge but at the emancipation of human beings from enslaving relations. 35 Thus to the extent that the free development of the individual is dependent on the rational construction of society, critical theory is grounded in the critique of capitalism and committed to socialist revolution.

Here it is important to perceive the interconnection that the dual interest in the emancipation of the individual and the construction of a rational society entails. Horstheimer continually stresses the impotence of the individual alienated from control over social relations, exploited in labor activity, subject to unemployment, senseless poverty and war in an inhuman capitalist world. In Horstheimer's view, bourgeois society's proudly extolled virtues of individuality, freedom, rationality and justice were being destroyed by an increasingly repressive social order that denies or limits free human activity and self-fulfilling praxis. Critical theory thus defended the

35. Ibid., p. 194.
interests of individual freedom, happiness, creative action and spontaneity against an increasingly destructive social order. To liberate the highest human potentialities, new relations of production and social relations must be created to enable individuals to fulfill their basic human needs and develop their human potentialities. As Marcuse puts it, "Without freedom and happiness in the social relations of men, even the greatest increase of production and the abolition of private property in the means of production remain infected with the old injustice." 36

Thus, as Jay does not show, critical theory is firmly grounded in the Marxist critique of political economy and is committed to socialist revolution. It should be noted, however, that Horkheimer and his associates did not subscribe to the ruling Marxist orthodoxies of the Social Democratic or Communist Parties, whose scientism, economism, mechanistic determinism, dogmatic materialism, and distortion of Marxism for the purposes of political opportunism were anathema to them. The Marxism of the Frankfurt School is best interpreted as part of the critical neo-Marxism that originated with Lukács and Korsch (and Gramsci in Italy). It is sometimes referred to as Western Marxism, or Hegelian Marxism, because of its concern with the Hegelian roots of Marxism and its stress on dialectics as the proper method against the positivistic scientism of Kautsky, Bernstein, Plekhanov and those Soviet Marxists who did not read or ignored Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks. 37

During the 1930s the Frankfurt School was the most important force preserving an independent non-dogmatic, creative Marxism, a Marxism that was relevant to the current crisis of bourgeois civilization. In the early 1920s Korsch and Lukács had placed in question the ossifying interpretations of the Social Democratic and Communist Parties. The theoretical achievements of Korsch and Lukács had awakened a concern for the revitalization of Marxism by both returning to the works of Marx and rethinking Marxism in relation to the demands of current social and historical problems. But Lukács's political orthodoxy and his move to the Soviet Union forced him to disclaim his radically innovative History and Class Consciousness. Korsch's political difficulties with the Communist Party and his move toward a more positivistic version of Marxism put a damper on his creative efforts to rethink and critically develop Marxist theory. This task of providing a Marxist account of the changing social reality and reworking Marxist theory to make it relevant to the practical exigencies of the current historical situation was assumed by the Frankfurt School. Hence, the historical role carried out by the Institute for Social Research was to preserve Marxist theory from degenerating into a stale orthodoxy, and to develop the theory by applying it to many different social and historical problems. The Frankfurt Institute of the 1930s shows how a living Marxism functions

37. I have omitted a detailed discussion of the impact of Hegel on Horkheimer and his associates because of the complexities and difficulties raised by this issue. The Institute continually reflected on Hegel's dialectical method and idealist metaphysics, as well as on his social and political philosophy. Jay's cursory discussion of the impact of Hegel on the Frankfurt Institute is hardly satisfactory, but a full discussion of this issue would require another article.
and develops. The major contribution of the Frankfurt School, then, was to creatively develop and preserve the dialectical method while at the same time extending it to a wide variety of areas of social and cultural life. This contribution includes many novel applications which it is the main virtue of Jay’s book to exhibit.

In a remarkable series of studies carried out in the 1930s, the Frankfurt Institute sketched out a theory of the new industrial state: the new managerial class, the integration of the proletariat, the role of giant corporations in monopoly capitalism, a theory of state capitalism, fascism and the totalitarian state, as well as a theory of the increased importance of technology in modern society. In short, the Institute confronted those themes that were to occupy the center of social theory for the next four decades. Rarely, if ever, has such a brilliant group of interdisciplinary workers come together under the auspices of one institute, a group of creative thinkers who shared common interests, philosophical presuppositions and methodology, and yet maintained their own independence while pursuing the group project of developing a critical theory of society and engaging in shared social research. Their individual and group studies were published in collective volumes put out by the Institute and in the remarkable journal Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, which even today is stimulating and relevant to current theoretical and substantive problems of social theory and criticism. To the extent that Jay’s book introduces this important body of work to American audiences it serves a useful purpose. To the extent, however, that he distorts its revolutionary conception and commitment to radical social change, he blunts the sharp edge of critical theory and dulls its challenge to the contemporary American intellectual establishment.

For those who desire an overview and introduction to the Institute’s work, Jay provides a detailed account of its then novel merger of Marx and Freud in the project of developing a social psychology, its study of authority and the family, its analysis of Nazism, its aesthetic theory and critique of mass culture and its empirical studies of the authoritarian personality in the 1940s. But, as an intellectual historian in the tradition of his dissertation director H. Stuart Hughes who, for example, in Consciousness and Society devotes a few pages to one thinker, then skips quickly to another, Jay expends much energy expositing the ideas and texts of the Institute and in uncovering gossip in their letters and personal reminiscences. Jay writes intellectual history in an idea for ideas’ sake manner with little real discussion of those ideas’ relevance, truth, or relation to current problems. It is odd that one would write a book on critical theory and so lack its spirit of criticism and relevance. The main problem is that there is little real interpretation or development of the ideas discussed. When Jay actually risks taking a position, he often founders. One might also criticize the mandarin concern with the letters, personal relations, gossip

36. The Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung (1932-1941) was recently republished in nine volumes with an introduction by Alfred Schmidt, which is helpful in tracing the development of the school and in making clear both the common program and individual contributions of Horkheimer, Marcuse, Adorno, Fromm, Benjamin, et al. Schmidt’s essay was just reprinted in a volume entitled Zur Idee der Kritischen Theorie (Munich, 1994).
and trivia of the Frankfurt School that dominates Jay's overly anecdotal history. A key to this attitude is perhaps to be found in his book's title, *The Dialectical Imagination*. Now, to be sure, the Frankfurt School put a strong emphasis on dialectics and on the importance of imagination and its products for radical theory, but to take imagination as the center of critical theory is misleading. Indeed, Jay never really explains his title, but I suspect it discloses his own predilection for the play of ideas and his proclivity to seek refuge in his own dialectical imagination rather than in undertaking the arduous task of doing social theory and critique.

To correct Jay's account of the origin and genesis of the Frankfurt Institute, I have tried to show the extent to which the Institute from its inception through the early 1940s was committed to a radical program of social inquiry and change. A careful examination of the works of Horkheimer and Marcuse, the Institute's leading theoreticians during the 1930s, confirms this view. My examination of Horkheimer's programmatic essays indicates the extent to which the "classical" formulation of critical theory was committed to Marxist theory and revolutionary praxis (an examination of Marcuse's 1930s essays would show the same). Although conditions of exile made it unwise for the Institute to advertise its Marxism, it is nonetheless present in the major studies published in the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, reaching its peak in the illusionless radicalism of Horkheimer's "The Authoritarian State." The acropolitan language that the Institute in exile, housed in Columbia University, was forced to adopt, as well as the lack of an explicit interpretation of Marx, makes it a difficult interpretive task to uncover and unfold the Marxist roots of critical theory and its critique of orthodox Marxism. Unfortunately, Jay does not contribute much to this task. Hence, we still face the task of re-reading the Frankfurt Institute's works and rethinking their program and ideas in terms of our own predicament. In addition, this task involves both the criticism and the development of the projects initiated by the Frankfurt School.

II.

Only by clearly conceiving the original revolutionary conception of critical theory can the thoroughgoing changes in the later Frankfurt School positions be perceived and interpreted. Jay's choice not to discuss the School's works after 1950 makes it impossible to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of critical theory. Hence Jay strands his reader halfway along the route with no sense of where the Frankfurt School is going. In this context it is necessary to discuss briefly the surprising direction that Horkheimer and Adorno were to take in the 1940s and to indicate their radical departure from the earlier critical theory.

The story of the post-1945 development of the Frankfurt School (some would say decline and fall) must be put in its social-historical context to explain the break with its former philosophical intentions, program and commitment to Marxism. Without

doubt, Nazism, emigration and war were key factors in its members’ pessimism, resignation and distance from praxis. This is particularly true of Horkheimer and Adorno, who along with Marcuse emerge as the most influential representatives of critical theory at the peak of its influence in the 1960s. Dispersed in exile in New York and California, haunted by the revelations of the concentration camps, obsessed with unraveling the mysteries of the triumph of fascism and understanding anti-Semitism, alienated from consumer society and mass culture in the brave New World of America, utterly cut off from any base to which their theory could appeal for revolutionary change, the individual members immersed themselves in their own research tasks, philosophical speculations and everyday cares. The conditions of exile thus produced a pessimistic turn in their thought, and critical theory became increasingly negative.

Their commitment to Marxism was shaken by the failure of the agency of the Marxist theory of revolution, the industrial proletariat, to serve as a revolutionary or even progressive force. Marcuse ends his 1954 essay “The Struggle Against Liberalism in the Totalitarian View of the State” with the observation that “Today the fate of the labor movement, in which the heritage of this philosophy was preserved, is clouded with uncertainty.”41 Already in Dämmerung, Horkheimer was concerned with the split of the labor movement into the Social Democratic and Communist camps, and he was no doubt shaken by the failure of the Marxist parties to stop the rise of fascism as well as by the fact that Nazism was embraced by many workers. Indeed, the 1930s were a depressing decade for Marxist radicals: the triumph of Nazism, the defeat of the progressive forces and dissolution of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, the revelations of the trials and camps in Stalinist Russia, the Hitler-Stalin pact, World War II and the concentration camps—a barbarism in which socialism appeared as but a flickering beacon of hope. In America—the new features of state capitalism, a government which took over and managed those affairs of the bourgeoisie which the competing monopolies could not handle themselves, showed that state intervention could, for the moment at least, manage the contradictions of capitalism. Although the Institute wrote little on the New Deal, they were no doubt aware that government programs were at least in part responsible for alleviating the economic crisis of the great depression. Furthermore, the American working class was being increasingly integrated into the system, mesmerized by the mass culture and commodity paradise and managed by new technological forms of social control. The Institute’s empirical studies of the American worker, conducted for the Studies in Prejudice project, showed not only widespread racism and anti-Semitism, but also deep-rooted anti-communism: the American propaganda machine had worked and would continue to inoculate the working class against radical ideas in the Cold War period. In the United States, Marcuse, and to some extent Adorno and Horkheimer, discerned the beginnings of

a new world-historical Behemoth that threatened humanity with new forms of domination and oppression in its relentless drive for world hegemony.

The question was irresistible: where and how had Marxism gone wrong? Many emigrant Marxists, to be sure, kept the faith. Bloch, Brecht, Grossmann, Eisler and others returned to East Germany to see what they could contribute to building a socialist society. Others, for example Marcuse, Ernst Fischer and Lucien Goldmann, never completely abandoned their commitment to Marxism, but questioned some tenets of Marxist theory which history seemed to have refuted or at least rendered problematic, and sought a revitalized and up to date Marxism which would be relevant to the current situation. Many intellectuals came to Marxism after the war having concluded that Marxist theory provided the best global explanation for the catastrophes of the first half of the twentieth century and for the problems of the Cold War, and that socialism was the best solution to the problems of late industrial society. Others, we know, saw Marxism as “the God that failed” and became bitter anti-communists. During this period, Adorno and Horkheimer began a collaboration that would question the roots and foundation of Marxism and would radically modify the earlier positions of critical theory. Their new position is most clearly visible in their joint work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in Horkheimer’s *The Eclipse of Reason* and in Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*.

There are several features of these works that indicate a rupture with the earlier critical theory. Although the Frankfurt Institute never wrote easily digestible tracts for the masses, there is little doubt that in exile Horkheimer and Adorno developed an increasingly ascetic, elitist style. Their audience was clearly a small group of intellectuals that had the culture to follow *Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s difficult re-reading of history through Heiner, the Enlightenment, de Sade, Kant, Nietzsche, etc. Their investigations take place on the highest level of the cultural superstructure and have little relation to either the economic base or real history (unless one takes ideas as real history a la Hegel or Heidegger). Surely, there is little excuse for Marxist intellectuals to write in such an involuted, in-group manner if they intend to make any serious social and cultural impact. Hence, the forced conditions of exile and their isolation induced a change of style that was to shape the mandarin nature of much of the later critical theory.

Secondly, Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s works abandoned any revolutionary intentions. The original critical theory, as we have seen, made the theory-praxis relation its foundation stone. Horkheimer ended his postscript to *Traditional and Critical Theory* with a jab at quiescent, contemplative philosophies: “A philosophy that thinks to find peace within itself, in any kind of truth whatsoever, has nothing to do with critical theory.” 42 At least the 1930s work of critical theory was shaped by an emancipatory interest in the liberation and happiness of the individual and the construction of a socialist society. This revolutionary intention can be found in all its work on philosophy, art, Nazism and the family. In the 1940s, however, members of

the Frankfurt School surrendered this belief in the desirability of a more rational socialist society and even attacked rationality and rationalization of society itself. They concluded that an instrumental rationality served as a new, more technologically sophisticated means of domination and that the increased rationalization of society would lead to increased domination, administration and slavery. No doubt despair and pessimism about the very possibility of constructing a free society contributed to the abandonment of their Marxist radicalism. Hence their theory became further and further removed from any praxis and seemed to contain and imply passivity and resignation rather than revolutionary hope and radical praxis. Schopenhauer replaced Marx as Horkheimer's philosophical saint and Adorno's negative dialectic became ever more negative and removed from the goal of changing the world. Marx's eleventh Feuerbach. Thesis was forgotten and pessimism concerning the very possibility of praxis prevailed.

Thirdly, their theoretical works in the 1940s contained an attack on some of the most central Marxist conceptions that they had earlier accepted. The main theme was now the struggle between man and nature rather than class struggle. They put forward a critique of the project of the domination of nature which they saw as the root of civilization's sickness and discontents rather than capitalism. The motor of history became, in their analysis, the project of the domination of nature and technology, and technological rationality became the criticized vehicle of this project (see the reflections on Homer in the Dialectic of Enlightenment). Capitalism was now put in the context of the domination of nature, one among many forms of domination. Moreover, Marxism was also included in the Enlightenment tradition they were attacking. As Jay notes: "...not only did the Frankfurt School leave the vestiges of an orthodox Marxist theory of ideology behind, it also explicitly put Marx in the Enlightenment tradition. Marx's overemphasis on the centrality of labor as man's mode of self-realization, which Horkheimer had questioned as early as Dämmernung, was the primary reason for this argument. Implicit in the reduction of man to an animal laborans, he charged, was the reification of nature as a field for human exploitation. If Marx had his way, the entire world would be turned into a 'giant workshop.' In fact, the repressive technological nightmares perpetrated by his self-proclaimed followers in the twentieth century could not be entirely dissociated from the inherent logic of Marx's own work" (p. 259).

Horkheimer and Adorno had indeed traveled a long way from their earlier allegiance to Marxism. These positions and a general mood of pessimism and resignation were to remain with them until the end. The conception of history in the Dialectic of Enlightenment was to provide the basis for Marcuse's disastrous philosophy of history in One-Dimensional Man— an interpretation, however, that he soon in part abandoned. Finally, their alternative to the domination of nature, their

43. Clearly this issue as well as many of the other positions that Adorno and Horkheimer took in this phase of critical theory is very complex. Here I only wish to mention how they surrendered the intention of creating a more rational, socialist society which they had advocated earlier.
solution to mankind's alienation, was reconciliation with nature: an ideal that carries very quietistic and even mystical implications. It is highly unclear what they meant by reconciliation with nature in view of their dislike for irrationalism, naïve Rousseauan or barbaric fascist nature worship and their critique of Engels' dialectic of nature (Jay attempts to clarify this notion on pp. 287 ff.). In any case, such an ideal is far removed from revolutionary praxis and the project of constructing a socialist society.

Another aspect of the Frankfurt School's modification of the original critical theory in the 1940s becomes evident in its empirical work on The Studies in Prejudice project which was to produce, among other works, The Authoritarian Personality. Jay makes much of the compromises in their conception of theory that had to be made in order to collaborate with the various groups and individuals involved in these empirical studies. But this heightened emphasis on the empirical dimension of social research and the simultaneous decline of theory, as well as the muting of their revolutionary language for the language of liberal democracy (in developing a character type opposed to the authoritarian personality) was not, in my view, as crucial a change as the modifications in their major theoretical works of this period. Upon their return to Germany, as Jay points out, they engaged in a critique of positivistic empiricism in the great methodological controversy (Methodenstreit) with the "critical rationalists" (i.e., neo-positivists). Moreover, they defended the dialectical conception of theory right up until their deaths. They had attempted to achieve a mediated balance between theory and fact and sociology and psychology, which may indeed have been tilted toward the empirical and psychological aspects in their 1940s research projects. Hence the empiricist deviation of critical theory in the 1940s is best seen as a temporary concession to the special conditions that surrounded their studies of prejudice, anti-Semitism and the authoritarian personality. It did not indicate any real change in their concept of theory.

Although the difficult conditions of exile contributed to the radical alterations in Adorno and Horkheimer's version of critical theory in the 1940s, the fact that they abandoned an explicitly Marxist perspective and that they withdrew from revolutionary practice can be explained in part by an intensification of features of critical theory that were present from the beginning. Even in the 1930s there was a somewhat tenuous relationship to orthodox Marxism, traces of positivism and cultural elitism, and an ambivalent relation to political practice. Horkheimer and the inner circle never really developed a detailed interpretation of Marxist theory. Horkheimer's view of Marx is found in a series of asides scattered throughout his essays and his appropriation of Marxism is highly selective. Adorno spent far more time expositing (and criticizing) the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger than in appropriating Marxist theory. Although Marcuse's work is a never ending meditation on Marxism, his emphases and views of Marxism shifted constantly. None of the inner circle of theoreticians wrote much on Marxist economics, and from the beginning they carried out little scientific work, preferring the generalizations of philosophy to the more detailed labors of empirical research. Although in the 1930s they rarely took anti-scientific positions, and although in their
programmatic essays they continually talked of a synthesis of philosophy and the sciences, theory and empirical data, in theoretical-practice the inner circle engaged almost exclusively in philosophical critique and theorizing. And although they took many Marxist positions, they also took Kantian, Hegelian, and even Nietzschean positions.

Oddly, Horkheimer and Adorno were never much taken by the early philosophical works of Marx that Marcuse so much admired and so brilliantly analyzed. Their deemphasis of labor and its alienation, as well as a marked lack of emphasis on the project of the abolition of alienated labor, had both theoretical and political consequences that were to emerge in post-1945 critical theory. The rejection of the centrality of labor opened the way for a subjectivistic anthropology that was to emerge explicitly in the later works of Adorno and implicitly in Horkheimer. Habermas' "deviation" can also be traced to his refusal to accept the Marxist doctrine of the centrality of labor in the constitution of the human being and the social world. Politically, the denial of the central importance of labor involved a move away from the liberation of labor, and hence away from the working class, labor struggles and the political emancipation of the proletariat.

From the beginning, in fact, critical theory maintained an ambiguous relationship to the proletariat and to political practice. To be sure, there are some programmatic pronouncements that define critical theory as the theoretical arm of political struggle. "The critical theorist's vocation," Horkheimer writes, "is the struggle to which his thought belongs. Thought is not something independent, to be separated from this struggle." Moreover, critical theory often linked its theoretical efforts to the political struggles of the proletariat—a point which Horkheimer embarrassingly confessed from his later, reactionary, standpoint. In "Philosophy and Critical Theory," Horkheimer links critical theory to the struggle of the proletariat for socialism and even praises the working class' organization: "something of the freedom and spontaneity of the future appears in the organization and community of those in struggle, despite all the discipline grounded in the need for success." But, at the same time, Horkheimer and his colleagues had their doubts about the proletariat as a revolutionary force: "Still less does a social class exist whose ascent (to critical theory) one could count on," and notes that the consciousness of the working class can be "corrupted and ideologically cramped under the present relationships." And to some extent it was; otherwise fascism would not have so readily triumphed. Hence the actual situation of the German working class, defeated by fascism, in part accounts for critical theory's increasing distance from the organization and practice of the working class. Although this distance existed from the beginning, it was to broaden as the stranglehold of fascism intensified and as the integration of the working class in advanced capitalist society accelerated.

45. See Max Horkheimer, "Foreword," to Jay, pp. xi, xii.
47. Ibid., p. 190.
Now, certainly one could blame the Institute’s political isolation under the conditions of emigration for their pessimism concerning class struggle, but their failure to contribute to political practice was also grounded in their basic refusal to posit the “negation of the negation.” That is, they envisaged no concrete negation of capitalism by refusing to posit any definite alternative. The alternative would only emerge out of the struggle itself, they endlessly argued. This sacrifice of the political and utopian dimension of Marxism, and this refusal to champion any specific revolutionary practice or alternative, led critical theory to become more and more negative and less and less related to practice (praxisbezogen). Critical theory always manifested a Schopenhauerian moment of pessimism and sense of uncertainty when it came down to actual political action, culminating in Horkheimer’s later position that any political action whatsoever would merely be absorbed or coopted into the system, and would thus serve to strengthen the system that was supposed to be abolished.

Further, critical theory was from the beginning, if not totally, much more oriented toward pure theory than toward the attempt to develop a theory that could serve as a concrete weapon of political upheaval. Their first director, Carl Grünberg, ended his inaugural address with the curiously apolitical declaration that the Institute was happy to be integrated into the framework of the University of Frankfurt and would concern itself “to expand science and thus to increase the fame of this university and the fame of Frankfurt.” Hardly a call to revolutionary struggle! To be fair to the Institute, their contributions to Marxist theory are impressive and often of first-rate importance but they were never directly connected to any given political practice.

An account of the Institute’s post-1950 work after Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt could further explain the increasing conservatism and resignation, particularly of Horkheimer, in terms of the integration of the Institute into the postwar German intellectual establishment. J. J. notes the clamorous lionization of Horkheimer by a German public and students eager to salvage some heroes out of the fascist debacle. Their new stake in the system could help explain Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s horror at the use to which radical students were putting their early theories in the tumultuous 1960s. Integrated, coopted, part of the establishment, the Frankfurt Institute was a new adornment for German culture, and its representatives were the proud possessors of prestigious chains and public acclaim. Nonetheless, it is difficult to explain the depth of Horkheimer’s abandonment of his earlier radicalism and his turn to religion, conservatism, pessimism and other bourgeois conceptions. For example, in a 1970 essay entitled “Kritische Theorie gestern und heute” (“Critical Theory Yesterday and Today”), he defended defense spending, told the students not to demonstrate against the Shah of Iran and attacked student radicalism and Marxism on almost every page.49

48. Grünberg, “Freude,” p. 15. The Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung also contains a number of wholly unpolitical programmatic pronouncements.

49. See Max Horkheimer, “Kritische Theorie gestern und heute,” in Gesellschaft im Untergang (Frankfurt am Main, 1972). This collection might have been entitled “Horkheimer im Untergang.”
Now, certainly one could blame the Institute's political isolation under the conditions of emigration for their pessimism concerning class struggle, but their failure to contribute to political practice was also grounded in their basic refusal to posit the "negation of the negation." That is, they envisaged no concrete negation of capitalism by refusing to posit any definite alternative. The alternative would only emerge out of the struggle itself, they endlessly argued. This sacrifice of the political and utopian dimension of Marxism, and this refusal to champion any specific revolutionary practice or alternative, led critical theory to become more and more negative and less and less related to practice (praxisbezogen). Critical theory always manifested a Schopenhauerian moment of pessimism and sense of uncertainty when it came down to actual political action, culminating in Horkheimer's later position that any political action whatsoever would merely be absorbed or coopted into the system, and would thus serve to strengthen the system that was supposed to be abolished.

Further, critical theory was from the beginning, if not totally, much more oriented toward pure theory than toward the attempt to develop a theory that could serve as a concrete weapon of political upheaval. Their first director, Carl Grünberg, ended his inaugural address with the curiously apolitical declaration that the Institute was happy to be integrated into the framework of the University of Frankfurt and would concern itself "to expand science and thus to increase the fame of this university and the fame of Frankfurt."*56 Hardly a call to revolutionary struggle! To be fair to the Institute, their contributions to Marxist theory are impressive and often of first-rate importance, but they were never directly connected to any given political practice.

An account of the Institute's post-1950 work after Horkheimer and Adorno returned to Frankfurt could further explain the increasing conservatism and resignation, particularly of Horkheimer, in terms of the integration of the Institute into the postwar German intellectual establishment. Jay notes the clamorous lionization of Horkheimer by a German public and students eager to salvage some heroes out of the fascist debacle. Their new stake in the system could help explain Horkheimer's and Adorno's horror at the use to which radical students were putting their early theories in the tumultuous 1960s. Integrated, coopted, part of the establishment, the Frankfurt Institute was a new adornment for German culture, and its representatives were the proud possessors of prestigious chairs and public acclaims. Nonetheless, it is difficult to explain the depth of Horkheimer's abandonment of his earlier radicalism and his turn to religion, conservatism, pessimism and other bourgeois conceptions. For example, in a 1970 essay entitled "Kritische Theorie gestern und heute" ("Critical Theory Yesterday and Today"), he defended defense spending, told the students not to demonstrate against the Shah of Iran and attacked student radicalism and Marxism on almost every page.49

46. Grünberg, "Freistreb.," p. 15. The Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung also contains a number of wholly unpolitical programmatic pronouncements.
49. See Max Horkheimer, "Kritische Theorie gestern und heute," in Gesellschaft im Unebenweg (Frankfurt am Main, 1972). This collection might have been entitled "Horkheimer im Uneregang."
Unfortunately, this essay is typical of the late Horkheimer, who increasingly sought refuge in religion and assumed incredibly reactionary political positions, defending the U.S. role in Viet Nam, warning of the Red Chinese "yellow peril" and taking an anti-communist stance in the Cold War. Surely Horkheimer's conversion to anti-communism and reaction is one of the stranger phenomena of recent intellectual history.

The account of the post 1960 Frankfurt School that Jay did not write would, strictly speaking, not be an account of the Frankfurt School at all, but the story of its splintering and dispersion. For after the 1940s there is no "School" in any programmatic theoretical or philosophical sense, but rather a dispersed group of individuals, all going their own ways, often in radically divergent philosophical and political directions. There were differences and tensions in the school throughout, many of which Jay has noted: differences toward Marxism, toward the role of labor in a philosophical anthropology, toward the importance of Marx's "1844 Manuscripts," toward the analysis of state capitalism and of Nazism, to give a few examples. Nonetheless, there still existed a certain theoretical and programmatic unity as well as shared political perspectives and constant group interaction and discussion. Every manuscript was read by the group, discussed, reworked and then published, so that in Leo Lowenthal's words, the *Zeitschrift* was "less a forum for different viewpoints than a platform for the Institute's convictions" (p. 26). Moreover, as Jay notes, the Institute members were united not only by their common purpose and program, but by a sense of a shared fate and a shared exile (p. 31). But already during their exile, the Institute members were dispersed, and after the war, Adorno, Horkheimer and Pollock chose to return to Germany, whereas Lowenthal, Marcuse, Neumann and others chose to remain in America. The days of unity and community were over. Those who did return with the Institute to Frankfurt were precisely those members who had (Adorno is in some ways an exception) spurned their earlier radicalism.

Given the dispersion and theoretical divergences in the post 1950 period, a history of the Frankfurt Institute would have to be a history of the development of its most prominent members and students. This history would trace the remarkable development of Herbert Marcuse, who in my view has remained most faithful to the original revolutionary intentions of the Institute. It would trace the decline and transfiguration of critical theory in Horkheimer, whose flirtations with Schopenhauer, religion and anti-communism are surely the low point of the Institute's history. And it would have the onerous task of tracing the explosion of works by Adorno, who furiously produced volume after volume on the most diverse topics, volumes which are, in my view, of very uneven quality. At times he appears the most radical of the group, and at times he joins Horkheimer in resignation and indulges in his particular brand of obscurity. Much of his work, however, is excellent and deserves careful study. 50 Then there is the difficult case of Jürgen Habermas' 

---

50. See the "Introduction to Adorno" published in *Telos*, 19 (Spring, 1974), which stresses Adorno's positive contribution to radical social theory. See also my review of Adorno's *Jargon of Authenticity* in the same issue.
slow break away from the Institute to become the head of the Max Planck Institute. A confrontation with Habermas would have to decipher Knowledge and Human Interests, and would have to follow Habermas through his development of critical theory as communications theory, his meditations on technology, late capitalism, language, identity, socialization and the other projects that flow forth regularly from his hard-working head. Finally, this unwritten history would deal with the attempts at developing critical theory by Alfred Schmidt, Albrecht Wellmer, Oskar Negt and the younger generation of students of the Frankfurt School.

The crucial theoretical and political question to be raised concerns the reception of the School's theory by a generation of radical students in the late 1960s. These students used earlier critical theory and Marcuse's later version of it as a legitimization of their own radical politics, which so shocked Adorno, Horkheimer and Habermas that they devoted much time and energy to criticizing it. Marcuse on the other hand defended and declared his solidarity with the student movement, both in Europe and the United States. What role, then, did critical theory play in the student movement? Can the movement's decline be partially attributed to positions held by critical theory? Or does critical theory provide a viable alternative to Leninism and orthodox Marxism? What in the final analysis are the strengths and weaknesses of the Frankfurt School's positions? How do these questions relate to our situation in America? These questions have hardly been posed, much less answered. But they are crucial questions, questions which Martin Jay does not raise, but which must be raised in further work on the Frankfurt School.

I have suggested that the social and historical conditions of exile in the 1940s, and the integration into the German establishment after 1950, as well as theoretical positions at the roots of critical theory, contributed to its decline. Since the seeds of Horkheimer's and Adorno's later positions can be found in their earlier works, a certain continuity can be traced in their development. But the discontinuities should not be overlooked! And Jay, who blunts the radicalism of their earlier work, also blunts the contrast between the "heroic period" of critical theory and its "failure of nerve" in the postwar period. Thus in Jay's account one can neither perceive the living contribution to radical social theory in the Frankfurt School's work, nor can we discover the deficiencies in their positions that force us both to return to the earlier articulations of critical theory as to the current social situation, in order to advance the critical theory of society and make it a weapon of radical social change.

51. In a recent lecture commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Frankfurt Institute, Habermas noted that he now stood "beyond" (jenseits) critical theory, which in his view was now part of the history of German culture and did not belong to the present status of science. See the report of Habermas lecture in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, July 18, 1974.