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Theory and Practice: The Politics of Critical Theory

The relationship between theory and practice was always a central focus of classical Marxism, and deeply influenced many versions of Critical Theory.[1] In the 1930s, its synthesis of philosophy, the sciences and politics was to serve, in Horkheimer's words, as a theoretical arm of political struggle: 'The Critical Theorist's vocation is the struggle with which his thought belongs. Thought is not something independent, to be separated from this struggle.'[2] For Marcuse, Critical Theory was linked with the project of human emancipation, and Habermas distinguished Critical Theory from traditional theory and science by virtue of its emancipatory interest; not by accident was one of his first major books entitled *Theory and Practice*.[3] Yet, despite the theoretical emphasis on practice, politics and emancipation, Critical Theory, with few exceptions, has suffered a political deficit. While the Critical Theorists produced detailed and comprehensive works in philosophy, social theory and cultural critique, their concrete political analyses and contributions are rather meager in view of the original concept of the theory which has been preserved in various forms through the decades but never fully realized. On the other hand, a thorough examination of the various Critical Theorists' political writings and interventions shows more significant political theorizing and engagement than has been noted in most studies. In this chapter, I shall examine some of the attempts to politicize or depoliticize Critical Theory from the 1960s to the present (8.1), and will then present a case for the need to repoliticize Critical Theory today (8.2), while attempting to link it once again to socialist politics and the most advanced new social movements (8.3). I shall conclude with some remarks indicating why I think that Critical Theory continues to be relevant today to the tasks of radical social theory and politics (8.4).

8.1 Critical Theory and Radical Politics

In the 1960s, the fragile theoretical and political unity among the major representatives of Critical Theory was shattered. With the eruption of New Left politics, Critical Theorists took extremely varied positions toward the 1960s radical movements.[4] These movements drew theoretical sustenance from Critical Theory, and sought support from its chief representatives. Marcuse generally defended the most radical wing of the student movement, while Habermas criticized some of what he considered its excesses, even as he defended many of its goals and positions. Horkheimer sharply attacked student radicals, and while Adorno sometimes supported their causes, he also distanced himself from the German New Left, and even called in the police to break up what he (wrongly) thought was a sit-in demonstration in the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt.[5] Since I have treated Marcuse's political writings and adventures with the New Left in detail elsewhere,[6] I shall focus here on Habermas's political writings and interventions and contrast Habermas's position with the growing distance from the radical politics of the 1960s by Adorno and Horkheimer.

Some of Habermas's first work in the Institute concerned studies of the political opinions and potential of students. In a study of Student und Politik (published in 1961), Habermas and two eminently politically oriented members of the Institute carried out 'a sociological investigation of the political consciousness of Frankfurt students'.[7] The study was similar to the Institute's earlier Gruppenexperiment which had attempted to discern the democratic and anti-democratic potential in wide sectors of German society after World War II through survey analysis and in-depth interviews.[8] Just as earlier Institute studies of the German working class and post-World War II German citizens disclosed a high degree of rigid authoritarian and authoritarian-conservative dispositions, so the surveys of German students disclosed an extremely low percentage (4 per cent) of 'genuinely democratic' students, contrasted with 6 per cent rigid authoritarians; similarly only 9 per cent exhibited what the authors considered a 'definite democratic potential', while 16 per cent exhibited a 'definite authoritarian potential'.[9] And within the more apathetic and contradictory attitudes and tendencies of the majority, a larger number tended toward authoritarian than democratic orientations.

Habermas wrote the introduction to the study – 'On the Concept of Political Participation' – which provided the conception of genuinely democratic political participation that was used as a norm to measure student attitudes, views and behavior. As he was later to do in his studies of 'the public sphere', Habermas sketched out various conceptions of democracy, ranging from Greek democracy to the various forms of bourgeois democracy

to current notions of democracy in welfare state capitalism. In particular, he contrasted the participatory democracy of the Greeks and radical democratic movements with the representative, parliamentary bourgeois democracy of the earlier stage of capitalism and the newer attempts at reducing citizen participation in the welfare state. Habermas defended the earlier 'radical sense of democracy' in which the people themselves would be sovereign in both the political and the economic realms against current forms of parliamentary democracy.

In his study Habermas defended principles of popular sovereignty, principles of formal law, constitutionally guaranteed rights and civil liberties as part of the progressive heritage of bourgeois society. His strategy was to use the earlier model of bourgeois democracy to criticize its later degeneration and decline, and thus to develop a normative concept of democracy which he could use as a standard for an 'immanent critique' of existing welfare state democracy. He believed that both Marx and the earlier Frankfurt School had underestimated the principles of universal law, rights and sovereignty, and that a re-democratization of radical social theory was thus an important task.

Student und Politik was published in 1961, and during the same period student radicals in the United States developed conceptions of participatory democracy, including emphasis on economic democracy.[10] Henceforth, Habermas himself would be concerned in various ways and contexts to develop theories of democratization and political participation. Indeed, from the beginning of his career to the present, Habermas's work has been distinguished by its emphasis on radical democracy, and this political foundation is an important and often overlooked subtext of many of his works.[11]

Habermas's focus on democratization was linked with emphasis on political participation as the core of a democratic society and as an essential element in individual self-development. In his study The Public Sphere (1962) contrasted various forms of an active, participatory bourgeois public sphere in the heroic era of liberal democracy with the more privatized forms of spectator politics in a bureaucratic industrial society in which the media and elites controlled the public sphere.[12] The bourgeois public sphere, which began appearing around 1700 in Habermas's view, was to mediate between the private concerns of individuals in their familial, economic, and social life and the demands and concerns of the state. The public sphere consisted of organs of information and political debate, such as newspapers and journals, and institutions of political discussion, such as parliaments, political clubs and public spaces where socio-political discussion took place.

The principles of the public sphere were open discussion of all issues of public concern, in which discursive argumentation was employed to ascertain 'general interests' and the public good. The public sphere thus pre-

supposed freedoms of speech and assembly and the right to freely participate in political debate and decision making. After the bourgeois revolutions, Habermas suggested, the bourgeois public sphere was institutionalized in democratic constitutional orders which guaranteed a wide range of political rights and which established a judicial system that was to mediate claims between various individuals or groups or between individuals and groups and the state.

In the bourgeois public sphere, public opinion was formed by political debate and consensus, while in the debased public sphere of late capitalism, public opinion is administered by political, economic and media elites which manage public opinion as part of systems management and social control. Thus, while in an earlier stage of bourgeois development, public opinion was formed in open political debate concerning matters of common concern which attempted to forge a consensus in regard to general interests, in the contemporary stage of capitalism, public opinion is formed by dominant elites and thus represents for the most part their particular private interests. No longer is rational consensus among individuals and groups in the interests of articulation of common interests the norm. Instead, struggle among groups to advance their own interests characterizes the scene of contemporary politics.

Habermas concludes with tentative proposals for 'a rational reorganization of social and political power under the mutual control of rival organizations committed to the public sphere in their internal structure as well as in their relations with the state and each other', although he did not really sketch out the features of a post-bourgeois public sphere.[13] Still, Horkheimer found Habermas's works to be too Left Wing, and refused to publish *Student und Politik* in the Institute monograph series, and then later rejected *The Public Sphere* as a habilitation dissertation, despite Adorno's support of Habermas's work.[14] Horkheimer seems too have become increasingly conservative, and thus rejected the work of the Institute's most promising student, forcing him to seek employment elsewhere. Habermas had no trouble, however, getting his works published and receiving academic positions; in 1961 he became a *Privatdozent* in Marburg, and in 1962 received a professorship in Heidelberg. In 1964, strongly supported by Adorno, Habermas returned to Frankfurt to take over Horkheimer's chair in philosophy and sociology; thus Adorno was ultimately able to bestow on the crown of legitimate succession on the person whom he thought was the most deserving and capable Critical Theorist.[15]

Meanwhile, Horkheimer and Adorno became more distanced than ever from both radical social theory and politics. A collective volume, *Sociologica II*, published in 1962, contained essays by Horkheimer and Adorno, both of whom seemed increasingly skeptical about the very possibility of developing a social theory of the present age (a skepticism that would appear later

in the decade in France among those identified with post-structuralism and postmodernism.[16] In an introduction to the volume, Horkheimer claimed that the 'objective [social] situation' contradicted the possibility of a synthetic, totalizing social theory, and that the fragmentary observations contained in the articles in the collection were grounded 'in the factual situation of society' and not in the 'weaknesses' of the authors.[17] Horkheimer also claims that the essays renounced analysis of contextual connections and mediations because of the difficulties of perceiving and analyzing the fundamental social processes of the present age.

Adorno in turn wrote that the growing irrationality, fragmentation and complexity of contemporary societies – which he interpreted as a function of the extension of the hegemony of capital into ever more realms of society and life – made it increasingly difficult to conceptualize the dynamics and processes of the whole:

The tendency toward concentration, which seemingly has diminished the market mechanisms of supply and demand; imperialistic expansion, which has prolonged the life of the market economy by pushing it beyond its own realm; state interventionism in the sector of economic planning, which has penetrated the realm of market laws – all of this has made extremely problematical the attempt to construe society as a harmonious (*einstimmige*) system, despite the total socialization of society. The growing irrationality of society itself, as manifested today in threats of catastrophe and society's obvious potential for self-destruction (*Selbstzerrottung*), become incompatible (*unvereinbar*) with rational theory. Social theory can hardly characterize society any more with a word that it no longer speaks itself.[18]

This seeming incarnation of social theory was especially surprising in Adorno, who had written in the positivism debate shortly before that 'The renunciation of a Critical Theory of Society by sociology is an act of resignation: they do not dare to conceptualize the totality because they despair of changing it'.[19] In fact, Adorno wavered throughout the 1950s and 1960s when attempting to characterize the contours of the existing society and forsaking social theory for philosophy and cultural criticism. Yet, in a penetrating essay entitled 'Society', Adorno sketched out a neo-Marxian conception of society, arguing that the fundamental social processes of capitalism continued to rule social life and remained the object of critique.[20] Adorno here uses Hegelian-Marxian categories of totality, mediation and contradiction to describe the ways in which society comes to dominate the individual:

Above and beyond all specific forms of social differentiation, the abstraction implicit in the market system represents the domination of the general over the particular, of society over its captive membership. It is not at all a socially neutral phenomenon, as the logistics of reduction, of uniformity of work time, might suggest. Behind the reduction of men to agents and bearers of exchange values lies

the domination of men over men. This remains the basic fact, in spite of the diffi-
culties with which from time to time many of the categories of political science are
confronted. (pp. 148-9)

In Adorno's conceptualization, society is organized around wage labor,
exchange relations, profit and accumulation, and class struggle. Thus he
tended to hold to the neo-Marxian conception of society developed earlier
by the Institute, though in *Negative Dialectics* and most of his later work
Adorno neglected social theory in favor of philosophical theory and critique.
Near the end of his life, in one of his last essays, 'Resignation', Adorno
defended the renunciation of practical politics by certain Critical Theorists
like himself, while defending the activity of thought and writing.[21] In
particular, Adorno argued that unthinking affirmation of practice over
theory simply reproduced the utilitarian/pragmatic aspects of existing
societies, and that only critical thought can understand the obstacles to
social change and thus make possible the transformation desired by those
activists who defame theory. Adorno attacked the 'pseudo-activity' of a
mindless activism which is based on a notion of 'pseudo-reality' (a phrase
coined by Habermas) to designate an illusory belief that reality conforms, or
can be made to conform, to the demands of the revolutionary ideology) and
which falls prey to sectarian illusions.

While Adorno's critique of sectarianism and activism that renounces
theory is convincing, as is his defense of the importance of theory, he did
not really apply his theoretical skills to analyzing the current political situ-
ation; nor did he participate in the political movements of the day, as did
Marcuse and, to a lesser extent, Habermas. Generally, Adorno failed to
analyze the specific contradictions and antagonisms that were generating
the struggles in the 1960s against administration and domination. He did
not develop his social theory much in the 1960s either, usually repeating his
earlier notions of commodification, rationalization, culture industries and
so on without adding much new substance or new concepts to the old
theories. In fact, Adorno was entering his last years of life and productivity,
and was deeply concerned with finishing his major works in philosophy and
aesthetics.

In *Negative Dialectics* (1966), Adorno transcended the dialectics between
philosophy, social theory and politics which had characterized earlier
versions of Critical Theory into philosophical critique and negation.[22] His
'non-identity' theory rejected concepts of mediation and determinate
negation, and transformed dialectics from a critical method of analyzing
history and society in the interests of socio-political transformation into
critique of philosophy. While he continued to defend radical thought and
critique, he tended to limit his 'negative dialectics' to destruction of
philosophical positions, and rarely engaged in concrete social analysis

and criticism, while distancing himself from the turbulent politics of the day.

Horkheimer, too, increasingly turned away from social theory and politics to philosophical and theological speculation.[23] A quasi-mystical yearning for 'the completely Other' (*das ganz Anderen*) moved to the center of his thought, which increasingly came to focus on theology. In interviews and articles he also took increasingly conservative political positions, as evidenced by his attitude toward Habermas and the New Left, whose politics he severely criticized. During this period, Habermas and others noted the anxiety which Horkheimer exhibited toward his early writings, and the ever greater distance he took from his earlier positions – such as the renunciation of critical social theory in the *Sociologica II* essay. In addition, Horkheimer had failed to produce anything of much interest or value for years, and it appears that his political regression was matched by theoretical collapse.

It would be a mistake, however, to discount the impact of the works of Horkheimer and Adorno and the earlier generation of the Institute on 1960s radical politics in Germany and elsewhere. While Horkheimer and Adorno did not participate directly in the struggles of the 1960s and usually distanced themselves from student radicals, their works had radicalized many young students, and they helped create an environment in which radical theory and politics could thrive. Indeed, I studied in Tübingen myself in 1969–71, and purchased copies of the key works of Critical Theory – along with copies of Lukács and Korsch – at student tables in the university and local radical bookstores. I also participated in a Critical Theory study group which was attempting to use the concepts and theories developed by Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse as a framework for radical politics. And many others of my generation in Europe and the United States were also radicalized through study of the works of Critical Theorists.

Wiggershaus points to the irony that, at the moment when Horkheimer was distancing himself most explicitly from student activism, his prestige, along with the influence of his earlier works, was growing in radical circles.[24] Marcuse's impact on the German New Left is well documented, and his visits to Berlin and Frankfurt in the 1960s are part of the mythology of the era.[25] Habermas was also involved in 1960s radical politics, and participated in the major political demonstrations and conferences of the day, while writing many articles analyzing, interpreting and often criticizing the student movement in West Germany.[26] Yet Marcuse alone among the first generation identified with and defended the radical movements of the day. Marcuse's motto of the 'great refusal' became one of the slogans of the movement, and he tirelessly defended, wrote for and lectured to the new radicals.

The affinities between Critical Theory and the student movement appeared as well in the works of Rudi Dutschke, Oskar Negt, Hans-Jürgen Krahl and many others who formed the second generation of Critical Theorists. For example, Johannes Agnoli, a former student of the Frankfurt School, wrote with Peter Bruckner *Die Transformation der Demokratie*, which followed the Institute analysis of trends toward increased totalitarianism in contemporary capitalist societies. Agnoli and Bruckner claimed that Western capitalist democracies had developed new control mechanisms to contain social change and to manage social conflict. Their analysis of the mechanisms of social integration and sharp critique of contemporary capitalism were clearly influenced by Critical Theory.[27]

'Social peace' in West Germany, the United States and elsewhere was interrupted, however, by frequent student protest, which included spectacular demonstrations against United States intervention in Vietnam. Students and others influenced by Critical Theory were active in both Germany and the United States in the anti-war movement,[28] and helped extend protest against imperialism to protest against exploitation, social injustice and conservative education in the universities. In addition, many people of the New Left influenced by Critical Theory resisted trends toward Marxist-Leninist sectarianism when radical activism subsided in the 1970s, and many former radicals turned to orthodox Marxian forms of political organization. In an article 'Don't Organize by Interests, but Organize by Needs', Oskar Negt called for new political organization and strategies which would address people's needs for education, housing, community, sexual gratification and so forth and that would thus produce a new politics of everyday life in opposition to the sectarian politics of the Old Left. Negt criticized bureaucratic and authoritarian tendencies on the Left, and urged the New Left to follow democratic and participatory modes of organization that had been defended for years by Habermas and others associated with the Institute for Social Research.[29]

8.2 Techno-Capitalism, Crisis and Social Transformation

Habermas emerges as the most prominent representative of Critical Theory during the 1970s and 1980s. After coming from Frankfurt to become director of the Max Planck Institute for Study of the Scientific and Technical World in 1971, he followed the earlier Institute practice of combining social theory with philosophical and cultural critique. By the early 1970s, however, he was beginning to take a 'linguistic turn', and while he continued to conceive of Critical Theory as a mode of social theory and critique with radical political intentions, most of his work in the 1970s and the 1980s focused on philosophical themes, and transformed Critical Theory into

communications theory.[30] Thus, although Habermas returned to Frankfurt
in the early 1980s to again assume theoretical leadership of the Institute for
Social Research, he continued the practice of subordinating social theory
and radical politics – evident as well in the post-1940s works of the first
generation – to philosophy. Consequently, with the exception of Marcuse,
the efforts of the first generation of Critical Theorists to develop a Critical
Theory of society connected with the radical politics of the day had simply
ceased. Although Marcuse, Habermas, Offe and others associated with the
tradition attempted to develop Critical Theory in relation to the social,
cultural and political changes of the period, no one developed a new com-
prehensive synthesis comparable to the projects of the 1930s and 1940s.

Although they do not present their analyses in precisely these terms,
Habermas and Offe offer a theoretical foundation for a Social Democratic
reform strategy within contemporary capitalism.[31] According to their
analyses, crises of contemporary capitalist society and the state result from
conflicts between capitalist imperatives for the maximization of profit at all
costs and systemic needs for rational steering and management, democracy
and legitimacy. Crises in state management and the economy produce
legitimation crises which create the openings for readiness to support social
transformation toward a more rational society that they covertly identify
with socialism (see 7.3). Yet there are many crisis tendencies and possi-
bilities for more radical social transformation which Habermas and Offe do
not consider in their analyses. Critical Theory today should therefore
inquire into the new crisis tendencies emerging from the dynamics of
techno-capitalism. As Marx argued, accelerating automation, for instance,
is likely to increase unemployment dramatically, which will conceivably
promote serious economic and political crises.[32] Technological unemploy-
ment may overburden welfare state resources, and thus become a highly
volatile crisis tendency in the technological society of the future. Growing
unemployment would require increased welfare measures, to an extent
perhaps impossible under capitalism; this would increase pressures toward
implementing more socialist state planning, income redistribution, a
guaranteed social wage and so forth. Likewise, the need to re-educate
people for the new technological jobs of the future will also require
increased public expenditure on education, which in turn will require
expansion of the public sphere at the expense of the private sphere.
Further, health care provides another arena likely to provoke intense future
crises as cancer and AIDS epidemics overburden an already inadequate
health-care system. In all these cases, new health, education and welfare
programs will be needed to deal with growing social crises, which in turn
will put new pressures on the welfare state and require new attitudes toward
taxation, government programs, socialism and so on.

So far, the development of techno-capitalism has been highly uneven. While some sectors and regions have become ultra-modern and highly affluent, other sectors and areas are decaying and underdeveloped. Most cities in the United States, for instance, provide striking contrasts between ultra-modern, high-tech centers and decaying industrial areas and urban ghettoes. Furthermore, it is not clear whether future technological development will benefit the majority of the people or only the ruling elites and whether technical solutions will be found to the endemic crisis tendencies of capitalism. Consequently, while new technologies may increase unemployment, they also provide contradictory possibilities for the future. On the one hand, they provide new possibilities for capital realization and new forms of capitalist hegemony which may help stabilize capitalism indefinitely. On the other hand, they provide new possibilities for progressive social transformation and emancipation by eliciting the possibility of significant social restructuring. Thus, while new technologies may increase the power of corporate capital to control and run the entirety of the society in their interest, they also provide new weapons of struggle and transformation for those who wish to radically transform society.

Unfortunately Critical Theory has never developed adequate critical perspectives on science and technology. Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and many, although not all, of their later writings tended to equate science and technology with domination, and thus to ascribe a *negative* essence to technologies and science, which, in fact, can be used either to benefit and enhance or to dominate and destroy human life.[33] Habermas, by contrast, takes a more positive attitude toward science and technology, but by equating the two with instrumental action, he naturalizes existing science and technology (as reproducing an anthropologically grounded instrumental action) while ruling out the possibility of the sort of new technology imagined by Marcuse which would enhance human life and provide a synthesis of art and technique.[34] In addition, by essentializing technology, Habermas covers over the extent to which many existing technologies are the product of capitalist relations of production and thus have domination inscribed in their very structure and functions. From the perspective of the destructive aspects of some technologies like nuclear energy and weapons, the factory and assembly line, pollutants and destroyers of the environment and human life, as well as the potentiality of new liberating technologies, Habermas's failure to critique existing technologies more radically and to consider the possibilities of new technologies are real deficits in his theory. Likewise, his failure to speculate on how new technologies and new social movements might be used against capitalist relations of production and domination to be remedied by contemporary Critical Theory.

Following the lines of classical Social Democracy, Habermas tends to

assume that rational management and social organization, leavened by more democracy and public debate, will provide a more rational (post-capitalist?) society. Yet he does not consider the ways in which new technologies, new energy sources, new de-centralized institutions and new forms of organization might provide more radical and emancipatory alternatives to the present system of techno-capitalism. From these perspectives, both new 'radical technologies' and new uses of existing technologies would need to be created to provide a structurally different organization of society and a new way of life.[35] For instance, automation and robotization could replace alienating labor, and make it possible to decrease the length of the working day dramatically and to increase the realm of freedom. New computer technologies and data banks could be used to make information democratically available to all individuals in society, and could establish communication networks linking individuals of similar interests together, while making possible new modes for the exchange of information and ideas. New video technologies make possible new modes of media production, and provide the possibility of more control of one's communications environment. Public access television could make possible more participatory media and the communication of radical subcultures and groups excluded from mainstream media, while satellite television makes possible nationwide – indeed world-wide – communication networks which would allow groups and individuals excluded from public communications the opportunity to broadcast a wide range of alternative views.[36]

Consequently, while new technologies like computers, cable and satellite television, and other means of knowledge and communication may be commodified to increase capitalist profit and power, they may also be 'decom-modified' (to use Offe's term), and used against the system. That is, while these technologies may be used by capital as instruments of profit and social control, they may also be used by oppositional groups as instruments of social transformation to create spheres outside the control of capital (as with public computer and information centers, public access television, home computer networks, and the like). This will require new modes of political thinking and new political strategies, which will be sketched out in the next section.

Furthermore, and crucially, the new technologies make possible not only a new organization of labor, but also a new form of life which may lead beyond the stage of capitalism that for centuries has constituted a society primarily dedicated to production and labor. Fully automated production would dramatically eliminate – or least substantially diminish – living labor from socially necessary production, and might lead to a dramatically decreased work day and a great increase in leisure time. Divisions between manual and mental labor could be overcome, and machines doing most of the manual labor, as well as calculation and other forms of mental labor,

would free individuals from 'alienated labor', and make possible new forms of creative labor, new linkages between labor and everyday life and a new realm of freedom and leisure. Such transformation would require a whole new set of values, institutions, social practices and ways of life in a society which is now primarily organized around production and consumption. No longer would production be the core of individual life, and such transformation would create the space for an entirely new way of living.

Critical Theory today should therefore attempt to analyze the emancipatory possibilities unleashed by techno-capitalism. In *Farewell to the Working Class* and *Paths to Paradise*, André Gorz documents the far-reaching transformations that increased automation will bring and proposes a dual systems theory of an organization of society in which labor and production would be greatly diminished in relation to leisure and free time.[37] In Gorz's projection, within a new 'politics of time', individuals would have to have a given number of hours during a projected lifetime in exchange for a guaranteed income. He claims that this seemingly utopian projection might be a necessary solution to massive technological unemployment, which will require fundamental rethinking of the very premises, organizational principles and nature of society and everyday life. And it would provide possibilities for a dramatically decreased work week, new forms of culture and leisure and new possibilities for human and social development.[38]

Offe likewise proposes breaking the connection between labor and wages and eliminating the centrality of the labor market in the organization of society. Instead, he proposes opening up the boundary between the labor market and 'other forms of useful activity and income claims'. This would entail the 'uncoupling' of labor and wages, so that there would be a 'citizenship right' to a basic income, independent of one's contributions to social security or retirement programs. This break with the primacy of labor markets would require dramatically new taxation policies and 'a consciously designed dual economy' with an enlarged public sector. The dual economy would aim 'to institutionally recognize, promote, secure and extend the limited sphere of informal, self-organized and independent labour ... to subject it to the same criteria of social justice which claim validity in the formal employment sector of the society'.[39]

Thus both Gorz and Offe envisage the possibility of a radically new organization of society necessitated by the crises produced by the introduction of new technologies in the labor force. Now, to be sure, by the 1980s the introduction of automation and computerization primarily had the effect of bringing increased misery to the majority of the working population affected by automation, while bringing increased wealth and power to a privileged few. Automation of coal-mining in the late 1940s and 1950s produced massive suffering and the poverty area known as Appalachia, while automation of the automobile, steel, oil, chemical and other sectors of

(highly unionized and relatively well-paid organized labor) big industry led to unemployment for the workers or for many of the workers who managed (for how long?) to hold on to jobs to accepting new jobs with lower pay, fewer benefits and less power. More generally, as Harry Braverman has argued, the de-skilling of labor through mechanization and automation has weakened the position of the working class vis-à-vis capital, and quality of work and life has deteriorated for many sectors of the working class.[40] So far automation and techno-capitalism have been a disaster for the working class; yet it is still an open question as to whether technological unemployment generated by new technologies and automation will generate new economic and political crises which will lead to far-reaching social transformation that will ultimately benefit everyone, or whether techno-dystopia is our fate.[41]

Yet, crisis tendencies emerge in techno-capitalism as well. Analysts of the process of deindustrialization stress the same contradictions between capitalism and community in ways that provide graphic illustrations of Habermas's analysis of how the intrusion of the imperatives of capital into the life-world have a destructive impact on traditional forms of life.[42] In particular, Bluestone and Harrison demonstrate the ways in which an unregulated capitalism inevitably destroys community; they also provide convincing arguments for the need of public controls on corporate investment and better governmental regulation to prevent corporations from arbitrarily closing down factories and bringing about the destruction of communities.

Other critics have stressed growing contradictions between capitalism and democracy and the need to curtail unrestricted capitalist development in the interests of preserving traditions of democratic rights and freedoms. Analyses of the crisis of democracy connect with themes central to Habermas's version of Critical Theory, and call for renewed emphasis on developing a multidimensional critical theory. Likewise, continued discussions of the contradictions between capitalism and individuality build on the earlier Institute analyses of 'the end of the individual'.[43] As techno-capitalism develops, it is likely that these and other crises will intensify, and therefore that both detailed analysis and political responses to contemporary conflicts and crises should be part of an agenda for Critical Theory today.

Indeed, the crisis tendencies of techno-capitalism could lead either to the necessity of building a new type of more progressive social organization or to an increasingly repressive class society organized in the interests of the few. In the United States during the Reagan–Bush era, the ruling classes have dramatically increased their share of the wealth,[44] while public squalor has increased proportionally, with scores of homeless individuals roaming the streets, unable to find either work or housing, and so far no federal programs have even attempted to deal with the problem. Health-care

systems are breaking down, and the AIDS epidemic – which the Reagan administration did little to ameliorate either directly or by providing funds for research – threatens to dramatically increase these burdens in the future. Farm bankruptcies mushroomed, and the economy was overburdened with skyrocketing federal debt and deficits. Bank failures proliferated, and Third World inability, or (justified) reluctance to pay off their astronomical debts threatened the entire international banking and monetary systems.

On the level of politics, the Reagan administration exhibited an unrivaled level of corruption, lawlessness and irrationality, which is likely to increase the rationality crises and legitimation crises that it attempted to surmount in its earlier years. On the level of everyday life, the threat of unemployment, a decline in the standard of living, rising suicide and divorce rates and increased drug and alcohol addiction testify to accelerating motivation crises that may threaten the rationality and functionality of the system. Thus, whatever sort of political administrations appear in the coming decades, it is not clear how techno-capitalism will be able to provide jobs, income and a meaningful existence in an age of growing computerization and automation. It is probable, therefore, that the economic, rationality, legitimation and motivation crises which Habermas described will intensify, as will the prospects of a new class politics and intensified political struggle. So far, however, no radical challenge or compelling alternative politics has emerged, and the dominant paradigms visible today within techno-capitalism range from techno-liberalism to techno-fascism, all of which operate within the premises and structures of the existing capitalist system.

To keep abreast of the great transformation now under way, with its great dangers and exciting possibilities, Critical Theory must carefully chart the trajectory of techno-capitalism and continue to theorize and criticize the transformations of the economy, political sphere, culture, society and everyday life brought about by the vicissitudes of the current configurations of capitalist society. Against postmodernists and ideologues of the post-industrial society who claim that we are already in a totally new historical stage, I would argue that we are in a transitional stage leading to either a new stage of capitalism or a post-capitalist society. During this transitional period, categories from classical Marxism, Critical Theory and other critical social theories are thus of at least some use in describing, criticizing and transforming the existing social order, but we must also be open to new theories and political strategies as well.

Consequently I would argue that contemporary forms of modernity are still forms of *capitalist* modernity, and are thus best conceptualized as forms of techno-capitalism. Yet the current form of techno-capitalism requires a neo-Marxism in which the state, culture and technology are concep-

tualized as relatively autonomous and fundamental social (and asocial) forces. Crucial aspects of this new Marxism are found in Critical Theory, which provides many indispensable starting points for theorizing the new social conditions of techno-capitalism. Thus, while against the fossilized Marxism of the Second and Third International, it makes perfect sense to go back to Marx and advocate *Marx against Marxism*, the retrieval of genuine Marxism has already taken place in such thinkers as Lukács, Korsch and Gramsci and in Critical Theory. Consequently, there is no need to go further back. It is now time to go forward. But until we are beyond capitalist modernity, it is questionable to assert that we are beyond Marxism or that we are now in a post-Marxist condition.

Yet, against rigid Marxian blueprints concerning the inevitability of the collapse of capitalism and the transition to socialism, Critical Theory today must operate with notions of an open future that do not depend on any determinate socio-economic trajectory or pre-given political strategy and blueprint. On the other hand, Critical Theory needs to take much more determinate political positions and to contribute more systematically and resolutely to developing a radical politics if it wants to continue to be relevant to the struggles, movements and political challenges of the future. With this in mind, I shall now sketch some perspectives for a new politics informed by the tradition of Critical Theory.

8.3 New Social Movements and Socialist Politics

In this section, I want to discuss the affinities between the most advanced theoretical positions within Critical Theory and the most progressive new social movements, in order to suggest ways in which Critical Theory can be repoliticized today. My argument is that the Institute's conception of the relationship between theory and politics developed in the 1930s is still useful today and provides a method for contemporary radical social theory, and that many positions within the tradition of Critical Theory have a remarkable affinity with many new political movements of the present. I therefore believe that Critical Theory has important contributions to make to radical politics today, and that its theoretical and political positions can in turn be refreshed, reinvigorated and strengthened through repoliticization.

Habermas has noted some connections between the most advanced social movements of the present age and the positions of Critical Theory.[45] Developing a position that he, Offe and others had defended earlier, Habermas argues that new conflicts no longer arise in areas of material reproduction, and are not primarily class conflicts. Previous conflicts between capital and labor, Habermas argues, are displaced into new realms and take new forms. In particular, 'the new conflicts arise in areas of

cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization. They are mani-
fested in sub-institutional, extra-parliamentary forms of protest' (p. 33).
These conflicts concern in part efforts 'to defend or reinstate endangered
life styles', and they concern '*the grammar of forms of life*' (p. 33). By this,
Habermas means that the new social movements represent a break from
the old politics of parties and representational democracy, and revolve
instead around problems of quality of life, individual self-realization,
norms and values, participation and human rights. The movements are
rooted primarily in the new middle class and the younger generation, and
consist of 'a colorful mixture of groups on the periphery' (pp. 33-4). Most
of the groups oppose unregulated economic growth and development. They
include

the antinuclear and environmental movement; the peace movement ...; the
citizens' action movement; the alternative movement (which comprises urban
scenarios with squatters and the elderly, homosexuals, disabled people, etc.); the
psychological scene with support groups and youth sects; religious fundamentalism;
the tax protest movement; parent associations; school protest; resistance to
'modernist reforms'; and finally, the women's movement. (p. 34)

With the exception of the women's movement, which he interprets as an
offensive movement seeking new rights and privileges, Habermas sees most
of the other new social movements as defensive in character, seeking to
protect the environment, cities, neighborhoods, traditional values and so
on against what he calls 'the colonization of the life-world', by which
capital, technology, the state and so forth attempt to dominate and control
domains of everyday life previously immune from such penetration. These
movements attack highly specific 'problem situations' concerned with the
quality of life.

What sparks the protest is the tangible destruction of the urban environment, the
destruction of the countryside by bad residential planning, industrialization and
pollution, health impairments due to side effects of civilization-destruction, pharma-
ceutical practices, and so forth. These are developments that visibly attack the
organic foundations of the life-world and make one more drastically conscious of criteria of
livability, of inflexible limits to the deprivation of sensual-aesthetic background
needs. (p. 35)

In addition to compensating for the pain and deprivations of unfettered
capitalist technological development, the new social movements contain
further emancipatory potential, Habermas believes, by virtue of their
furthering alternative practices and counter-institutions to the established
institutions which are organized around the market and state and ruled by
money and power (p. 36). The new social movements thus tend to instantiate
forms of participatory democracy, which Habermas believes is necessary
for genuine democratization and self-realization. The counter-institutions

and alternative practices thus both block and limit capitalist and state control, while providing beginnings of a new society organized around community, democratic participation and self-realization.

Such a highly synoptic and generalized presentation of new social movements is bound to cover over differences between the movements, and from a United States perspective, it seems a mistake to include 'religious fundamentalism' within the new social movements. For, in the United States at least, most religious fundamentalist groups tend to the Right, are rarely democratic and often attack progressive forms of modernization while supporting some of the more reactionary and destructive forms of capitalist modernity (nuclear weapons, imperialist intervention and so on). Yet it is significant that Habermas has attempted to link Critical Theory with the new social movements, and has challenged others to relate Critical Theory to radical politics – a challenge taken up by Offe, Klaus Eder and others in the second and third generations.[46]

The growth of the Green movement and party in West Germany stimulated many of these efforts, as have the struggles of the peace movement in the 1980s. In an article 'A New Social Movement?' Eder provides a typology of social movements, and interprets the new social movements as responses to developments within capitalist modernity. He distinguishes between cultural movements which present anti-rationalist positions as responses to excessive societal rationalization (nineteenth-century romanticism and forms of the 1960s counterculture are his examples), and political movements which seek political power or institutional restructuring. The 'new social movements', he claims, contain neo-romantic and neo-populist forms, and often combine cultural and political tendencies (the ecology movement is his paradigm case).

In general, 'social movements' are prototypically 'modern' phenomena and involve responses to developments within modernity. For Eder, 'modernity entails that cultural orientations can be challenged'; thus social movements which contest dominant social forms and institutions play a role in constituting society itself (p. 10). His examples here are nationalist movements for political emancipation and the labor movements. A social movement, Eder claims, 'must have a self-image and a clear idea of who those are against whom it defends a way of life' (p. 11). Building on (social) action theory (developed by N. J. Smelser and Alain Touraine), Eder argues that new social movements are defined by 'a collective identity, an antagonistic relation to an opposed group, and a common field of action' (p. 16). In general, social movements 'move society by providing an alternative cultural model, and a moral order to institutionalize it' (ibid.). It is instructive to compare the new ecology movement with the trade union movement, Eder suggests, since the ecology movement wishes to overturn the productivist bias of the previous social order and to replace the model of

unlimited growth and development of productivity with an ecological model based on limiting growth to enhance the quality of life. Eder thus sees new social movements pushing beyond modernity toward a post-industrial order, and interprets them as advancing new values and a new mode of life – goals stressed earlier by Marcuse and other Critical Theorists. Eder also suggests that the new social movements exhibit the virtues of autonomy and reflexivity against the heteronomy of capitalist and state rationalization – goals congruent, once again, with classical Critical Theory.

Different sectors of the Left have taken dramatically different positions vis-à-vis the new social movements, and have offered conflicting interpretations of their origins, nature and potential.[47] Some have celebrated the new movements as providing a progressive substitute for the working-class movement now dismissed as reactionary or obsolete. Others have dismissed the new social movements themselves as reactionary, either from an orthodox Marxian standpoint which insists on holding onto the working class as the revolutionary subject or from a neo-Adornoesque stance which criticizes their alleged impurities. In particular, many American followers of Critical Theory have eschewed participation and sympathy with these movements, and instead have engaged in a distanced critique of the alleged limitations and imperfections of the movements, using an Adornoesque ultra-radicalism to criticize the compromises, conservative elements and failures of the new social movements.[48]

For example, Paul Piccone claims that the post-1960s political movements practice 'artificial negativity' which, allegedly, only rationalizes and strengthens the existing order.[49] On this account, the 'totally administered society' has rationalized and homogenized the system to such a degree that it requires injections of 'artificial negativity' as an 'internal control mechanism' to keep the system from stagnating. All new social movements, therefore, simply spur the system to carry out necessary reforms which its bureaucratic inertia impede, or are themselves the (perhaps unwitting) agents of bureaucratically directed systemic reforms. 'Artificial negativity' is contrasted by Piccone with a (never really clarified or concretized) 'organic negativity' which would supposedly develop institutions, practices or free spaces outside and totally other than the administered system of neocapitalism.

In opposition to either uncritical celebration of the movements or one-dimensional rejection, other theorists have attempted to provide more complex interpretations of the movements and to speculate on ways in which the new social movements could be synthesized with a new democratic, socialist politics. In an article on the new movements, Chantal Mouffe offers perspectives close to earlier Critical Theory positions.[50] She interprets the new movements as resistance to the commodification of life and the hegemony

of capital in the restructuring of capitalist societies from the end of World War II to the present. This restructuring – and here the theory is congruent with Critical Theory – involved bureaucratic intervention by the state in ever more domains of the economy, society, culture and so on, combined with a homogenization of culture and everyday life with the triumph of the consumer society and culture industries. Consequently the new social movements manifest resistance to domination of society by capital and the state, and represent struggles against commodification, bureaucratization and homogenization.

On the positive side, the new social movements exhibit radicalized demands for democracy, equality and citizen participation during an era when the restructuring of capitalist hegemony involved efforts toward de-democratization and increased domination. Mouffe's interpretation of the offensive and positive demands of the new movements thus seems preferable to Habermas's interpretation of their mainly defensive character. In addition, she points to the contradictory potentials of the new movements, indicating how they can be steered to either the Left or the Right.

In general, theorists within the tradition of Critical Theory have not conceptualized adequately the importance of the struggles of the 1960s or the contradictory potential of the new social movements. Yet, as I have noted, some theorists within the tradition have attempted in various ways to repoliticize Critical Theory and to develop new political positions. Against Carl Boggs and others who argue that the new social movements require the development of a new *post-Marxist* theory and politics,[51] I shall argue in the following discussion that there is a remarkable affinity between the theoretical perspectives of Critical Theory and the new social movements and that a reconstructed and neo-Marxian Critical Theory can provide a viable framework for a new radical politics in the present era.

Toward a New Politics

To begin, some versions of Critical Theory have a natural affinity for the peace and environmental movements. Critical Theory's critical perspectives on the domination of nature and alternative values of peace, security, reconciliation and so on provide both a theoretical framework and a set of normative values which could help provide a theoretical foundation for a new politics. In addition, its dialectical perspectives allow the formulation of linkages, or mediations, between such things as nuclear weapons and energy and the imperatives of capitalism and imperialism, thus providing the systematic social critique lacking in many single-issue movements. Likewise, the (sometimes) dialectical perspectives within Critical Theory on technology, rationality, individuality and nature provide critical perspectives on these phenomena which could counterbalance tendencies toward

technophobia, irrationalism, personalism, naturalism and so forth that some of the critics of new social movements cite and deplore. That is, while neo-romantic and technophobic positions simply denounce all technology, and sometimes modernity itself, as repressive and dominating, in contrast to technocratic ideologues who celebrate all technology and modernization as inherently progressive, a more differentiated view could sort out which technologies and development projects, what kind of growth and so on actually benefit human life and which benefit primarily capital and its agents. By providing such differentiated positions, Critical Theory could thus make potentially significant contributions to contemporary political movements.

In many versions of Critical Theory, however, 'social ecology' is under-developed, although this situation has been changing in recent years.[52] In addition to an environmentalist perspective, Critical Theory offers perspectives on cultural and sexual politics which are rather akin to some of the more progressive tendencies in the new social movements or provide correctives to common deficiencies in various movements. Critical Theory has always been concerned with the aesthetic-erotic dimension of experience, and has defended pleasure, happiness, play and sensual gratification. Its emphasis on the body and its materialist focus on needs and potentialities thus lends itself to dialogue with the sort of sexual politics advanced by progressive feminism. Indeed, Critical Theory has always emphasized the importance of human sexuality for individual life, and has stressed the need for better human relations between and within the sexes. Critical Theorists have also pointed to the importance of the family as an instrument of socialization, and have criticized the ways in which the patriarchal family produced authoritarian personalities while oppressing women and children (see Chapters 3 and 4). While some (male) Critical Theorists often projected male attitudes and perceptions in their works, others like Marcuse had relatively progressive perspectives on sexual politics, and responded positively to the emergence of a new feminist movement in the 1960s.[53]

In any case, Critical Theory is, as I argued earlier (4.1), consistent with development of the sort of critique of patriarchy and demand for women's liberation advanced by feminism. So far, Critical Theory has not productively developed feminist perspectives, though recent efforts have been made to link Critical Theory with feminism. Seyla Benhabib, for instance, ends a critique of 'the aporias of Critical Theory' with a call to develop an 'emancipatory politics in the present that would combine the perspective of radical democratic legitimacy in the organization of institutional life with that of a cultural-moral critique of patriarchy and the industrial exploitation of the nature within and without us'.[54]

Critical Theory's emphasis on the importance of culture and the

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emancipatory role of art might also contribute to a revitalized cultural politics. As I argued earlier, the particular fetish of 'high art' by Adorno and others and their contempt for all forms of popular art have traditionally rendered Critical Theory extraneous to projects of cultural revolution (5.3). Yet there is no reason why the present generation needs to repeat the peculiar aesthetic biases of the first generation of Critical Theorists, and there are indications that Critical Theory might yet develop more nuanced perspectives on contemporary culture and alternative cultural practices.[55]

Developing theories and politics of alternative cultural practices will require more attention to oppositional movements in film, television, the arts and other cultural arenas than has so far been evident within the tradition of Critical Theory. From these perspectives, Critical Theorists could then devise theories of subversive and alternative cultural practices similar to earlier projects carried out by Guy Débord and the situationists and a variety of other groups in many countries. For example, within the aestheticized environment of contemporary society, production of alternative billboards, wall-murals, graffiti and other modes of cultural expression could project images and messages counter to the productions of consumer capitalism.[56] Alternative film and video could produce subcultures of oppositional culture which, via public access and satellite television, could even enter mainstream culture. By taking culture seriously and politicizing its production and effects, Critical Theory provides a framework for future theoretical and practical work within cultural politics which could contribute to expansion of the domain of political struggle.

Since the media and information are playing increasingly central roles in the constitution of consciousness and experience under techno-capitalism, the repoliticization of Critical Theory requires more emphasis on the politics of information. This will include reflection on the use of information and media by radical political groups and movements and on ways of democratizing information and media so as to serve the interests of the entire society, while increasing the scope of political participation and democratic debate.[57] Such projects would counter the efforts at monopolization and control of the media and information by dominant social powers, and thus could be an increasingly important part of the politics of the future which will be increasingly mediated by information and media.

For example, community information centers could teach computer literacy to individuals, and make accessible data banks of information now inaccessible to those who cannot afford to pay for it or who do not possess computer information retrieval skills. Such projects could also involve community computer bulletin boards which would make available information and the exchange of ideas between those who had access to home computers and a modem to link them with the computer center and its data banks and bulletin boards. Critical Theory should be concerning itself with

such information alternatives and with reflection on how progressives might intervene in the production of a future information society which would serve human needs rather than those of capital accumulation and bureaucratic power.

A repoliticized Critical Theory should also concern itself with consumer politics, the politics of education and peace research, and indeed, individuals influenced by Critical Theory have been producing impressive work in these areas.[58] Furthermore, the utopian tradition of Critical Theory helps nourish visions of an alternative organization of society and another way of life. As a response to the specter of technological unemployment, Critical Theory could outline a realm of freedom beyond socially necessary labor, and could project a new mode of social organization, centered on sociality, community, development of human potentialities, play and gratification, rather than the labor and productivity which have characterized capitalist modernity. This would imply a break in history that might justify a discourse of 'postmodernity' (which now is mostly a rhetoric of novelty and change with many regressive features).

Reversing the productivist bias of modernity, Critical Theory could provide new values and new visions of life which could be the basis for a nonrepressive society – which would be the first in history to break with the continuum of oppression and domination which has defined human life so far. Already Marcuse has attacked what he called the 'performance principle', and sketched outlines for a nonrepressive civilization.[59] The utopian impetus of Critical Theory and its interest in emancipation render it relevant to the most radical demands for social restructuring and transformation, and Critical Theorists should once again take up Marcuse's efforts to imagine the contours of a nonrepressive civilization. Such claims raise the question of the relationship between Critical Theory and socialism.

Critical Theory, Democracy and Socialism

As noted, Critical Theory's radical critique of capitalist modernity makes it possible for it to provide critical perspectives on the state and on what has been called the crisis of the welfare state, or the 'crisis of crisis management'. The analyses of Critical Theory make it clear that the state in capitalist countries is a capitalist state, and that in order to solve the fiscal crisis of the state, its deficits, rationality crises and so on, incursions must be made against the prerogatives of capital. Thus, a tradition of Critical Theory provides socialist perspectives on the state which make it clear that reforms alone will not solve the problems of contemporary society, and that without dramatically limiting the hegemony of capital over the state – and the rest of society – the state will not be able to provide the planning, programs, personnel, budget and so forth to solve fiscal and rationality

crises and other related problems of techno-capitalism (see 7.2, 7.3 and 8.2).

On the other hand, in order to militate against the state becoming a repressive bureaucratic apparatus, efforts must be made to dramatically increase the boundaries and extent of democracy. Critical Theory lends itself to theorization of the connections between socialism and democracy, and in view of the consistent tradition of individualism within Critical Theory and its attendant critique of bureaucracy and domination, it naturally has strong affinities with the tradition of democratic socialism. While no Critical Theorist has yet proposed a fully developed conception of socialism, Marcuse was already calling for a 'new concept of socialism' in the 1960s, and there has been a recent proposal from within the tradition of Critical Theory calling for reflection on new de-centralized organizations of the economy which would be built on municipalization – that is, on municipal ownership of key industries – rather than on nationalization.[60] Yet the calls for radical democratization which ritualistically conclude all politically correct books of the Left today, often neglect the issues of a planned economy and the full development of technology, individual potentialities and what Marcuse called the 'pacification of existence' in *ODM*. Such measures would seem to necessitate a mixture of political democracy and allocation of planning and distribution responsibilities to a political class. So far, discussions of democratization within Critical Theory have for the most part focused on the conditions for unconstrained consensus and domination-free communication; but the earlier demand for a 'rational society' needs to be supplemented by emphasis on relationships between a planning and steering sector and those areas in which a more participatory democracy would be possible.

In addition, the issue of institutionalization and the development and preservation of democratic institutions and civil society needs to be taken up by Critical Theory today.[61] Moreover, following Marcuse's demands that socialism also contain a new way of life, Critical Theory today should take up the issue of socialist humanism and the humanization of society in ways sensitive to environmentalism and consistent with the perspectives of eco-socialism.[62] While these issues in view, one sees that Critical Theory has some definite contributions to make to the problem of combining democracy, ecology and socialism, for Critical Theorists like Marcuse have attempted to humanize the tradition of socialism, while others like Habermas have attempted to democratize it.

Yet many issues remain to be developed within a future repoliticized Critical Theory, such as developing theoretical and political linkages with anti-imperialist movements, consideration of the politics of race and ethnicity, and the politics of health. Sympathy for the oppressed and concern for human suffering require solidarity with oppressed peoples,

much of whose oppression derives from the policies and practices of the imperialist superpowers. Here the emphasis on solidarity within some versions of Critical Theory provides linkages between various movements of oppressed people which might help overcome the one-sidedness of many of the new social movements.[65]

In many ways the new social movements highlight some of the blind spots of previous socialist politics in their varying Social Democratic, Communist and ultra-Leftist forms. Many traditional socialist projects have failed to address issues of gender, race, ethnicity or sexual politics. Many varieties of socialism have failed to address environmental concerns or to make peace and arms reduction an important priority. Much socialist politics has neglected culture, as well as the concerns of the individual and everyday life. On the other hand, reflections on some of the more progressive elements of the socialist heritage also show the limitations of the new social movements, which generally lack analysis of the political constraints under which they act. In many of these movements, there are few, if any, linkages between the specific interests articulated by the various movements and more general, or generalizable, interests. In particularistic social movements (any and all of which may fall prey to this problem), few linkages are made between the specific interests or programs advanced and what they have in common with other social movements. A new politics of the future, however, could mediate between a socialist politics and new social movement politics by articulating interests, values and goals held in common, while also articulating and respecting differences between various groups and agendas. This might require a temporary moratorium on attacks on each other by members of socialist and new social movements in favor of the exploration of common goals and ends. It could also involve the formation of new organizations – such as the Austin Peace and Justice Coalition which provides an umbrella organization that attempts to coordinate activities among progressive groups and provide local (or national) coalitions among them.

From this standpoint, the theoretical perspectives of Critical Theory could provide the conceptual means to promote dialogue between the demands and struggles of the most advanced contemporary movements. Such a dialogue might promote consensus around shared issues and concerns and respect for differences, in the interests of promoting a potentially more efficacious counter-movement and counterculture to mainstream political movements. While there has been concern in some quarters that Habermas's emphasis on consensus could lead to authoritarian manipulation and the repression of differences, I would counter that the emphasis on the preservation of individuality and particularity within Critical Theory, militates against repressive political centralization and authoritarian bureaucratic politics – as does its emphasis on democratization.

On the other hand, socialist emphasis on planning and dialectical perspectives on technology and rationalization could help overcome the often technophobic and irrationalist perspectives of some in the new social movements. Rather than simply limiting growth and development, a socialist perspective would call for planned growth in the interests of the majority of the people. Rather than seeking a return to nature or premodernity, socialism would plan for a better future, building on the accomplishments of the past and learning from past mistakes. The dialectical perspectives of a repoliticized Critical Theory could therefore help mediate between the perspectives of a new socialism and those of the new social movements. For these reasons I believe that Critical Theory has many contributions to make to radical politics today, and that a repoliticization of Critical Theory will invigorate, strengthen and radicalize the theory. Such discussions inevitably evoke criticism, however, from those who believe that radical social theory is properly grounded in working-class struggles, movements and organizations.

For traditional and some forms of contemporary Marxism, the proletariat is the privileged agent of revolution and social transformation, and thus – on this view – radical politics should concern itself primarily with the working class, especially the industrial working class, or proletariat, which allegedly has the power to bring the capitalist system to its knees and even to overthrow it. From the late 1930s to the present, Critical Theorists have been extremely skeptical concerning the role of the proletariat within various projects of revolutionary politics, and they were in the forefront of radical theorizing which attempted to develop theories of social transformation which did not depend on the proletariat as a revolutionary subject. Their skepticism concerning the exalted role of the proletariat within the classical Marxian theory of revolution and its pessimism concerning the possibility of a dramatic revolutionary upheaval within contemporary capitalist societies was grounded in a series of empirical studies and theoretical reflections that provided strong arguments for the need for a new politics and a rethinking of the problematic of political transformation toward a post-capitalist world in the most technically and militarily advanced capitalist societies.[64]

Yet it must be admitted that failures to carry out a thorough and differentiated class analysis and to investigate the radical potentials of different class strata and groups have been among the major deficiencies of Critical Theory. Against those on the Left and the Right who claim that the concept of class is no longer of fundamental importance to social theory and politics,[65] it can be argued that in a curious way, the concept of class has become even more central to radical social theory in the era of technocapitalism. Consequently, it would appear that it is time for a *new class*

analysis of the new stratifications and reorganization of the working class, rather than for an abandonment of class analysis and politics.

Against theories of the vanishing or diminishing of class contradictions in contemporary capitalism, recent studies have disclosed that class divisions and distinctions are growing.[66] In particular, the decline of the standard of living of the middle class and the growth of an underclass threaten the stability of contemporary techno-capitalism. Bluestone and Harrison argue, for example, that democratic capitalism requires a large middle strata as the foundation of a stable socio-economic order. Without a large buffer zone between the rich and the poor, the capitalist class and the underclass, a capitalist society is inevitably conflict-ridden and unstable. The dominant trends of social development in recent years, however, are class stratification between a shrinking upper class, a growing underclass and a compression of the middle classes downward such that class divisions and inequalities are increasing rather than diminishing.

The growth of an underclass and the deterioration of the situation of both the industrial working class and the middle class within techno-capitalism raise questions concerning whether a new proletarianization is taking place. Although earlier Critical Theorists assumed a basic class division within contemporary capitalism, they never undertook any systematic examinations of class and class struggles. The result was a serious political deficit within classical Critical Theory and a failure to connect the theory with struggles actually going on. A new class politics thus involves analysis of the role of unions and organized labor within the social movements of the future, and this is surely one of the areas in which Critical Theory has been most under-developed. Such studies also involve more intensive analysis of labor, production and the workplace, including analysis of new technologies. Such studies should return to the investigations of automation by Pollock and others, and should proceed to the present with analysis of the role of information and media, as I suggested in the chapter on techno-capitalism and at the beginning of the discussion in this chapter.

It would be a great mistake, however, to attempt to return to an older class politics at the cost of ignoring the new social movements. Rather, Critical Theory should investigate today the possibilities of a new class politics, the radicalization of the new social movements and the possibilities of fusing a class and cultural politics with the new social movements. None of these alone will be adequate to the demands which the crises of techno-capitalism will pose in the future, as we move into the 1990s. For example, the critique of nuclear weapons in the peace movement directly attacks the prerogatives of some of the most powerful corporations in the military-industrial complex and their militarist sponsors in the state apparatus.

These struggles have an immediate political and economic thrust, and could be linked with other efforts to radically alter the priorities of state budgets and the privileges of certain sectors of corporate capital and to advance struggles for economic conversion from a war to a peace economy.

Consequently, I am suggesting that Critical Theory today should attempt to provide systematic and comprehensive theoretical and political perspectives linked to the radical political movements and struggles of the present age. I shall conclude therefore with some reflections on the meta-theoretical structure of a Critical Theory needed to encompass these theoretical and political concerns.

8.4 For Supradisciplinary Radical Social Theory with a Practical Intent

A repoliticized Critical Theory should return to history and study the crises and struggles of the past decades. Such perspectives will suggest that techno-capitalism is a terrain of struggle between different social forces and tendencies. This sort of historical analysis – rather than abstract philosophical conceptualizations – will provide the grounding for a new Critical Theory, and will show that the values, norms and alternatives advocated by Critical Theory are rooted in existing social movements, tendencies and struggles. Repoliticizing Critical Theory thus involves historicizing it as well.

In this book I have charted the development of efforts to develop a Critical Theory of society by theorists associated with the Institute for Social Research. We have seen that Critical Theory provides a dialectical, totalizing social theory which describes the contours, dynamics and tendencies of the present age, as well as the possibilities for radical social transformation. I have argued that new socio-economic conditions, new configurations of culture and technology, and new social tendencies and developments require a constant updating and revising of Critical Theory and radical politics, and have attempted to make some contributions to clarifying these issues.

I wish to conclude with several brief indications of why I believe that Critical Theory today continues to be relevant to these tasks, and will summarize my positions concerning its limitations. First, I have suggested that Critical Theory provides a set of supradisciplinary inquiries into the many dimensions of social reality and their interconnections within a social system full of contradictions and antagonisms during specific historical eras. Critical Theory thus provides a comprehensive, multidimensional social theory which both builds on and surpasses the limitations of specialized disciplines. Against empiricist and postmodernist critiques of totalizing

social theory, I would argue that Critical Theory provides a much needed framework to carry out social inquiry and critique today, and that its multi-perspectival approach overcomes the one-sidedness of specific disciplines while providing the basis for a more comprehensive, many-sided, multi-dimensional social theory than other competing models.

The most compelling argument against totalizing theories is that a total-izing perspective gives a one-sided, reductive (Hegelian or Marxian or Weberian or whatever) perspective on contemporary social reality, and thus precludes more multidimensional approaches. Yet I have argued that Critical Theory is compatible with a multiperspectival approach which allows a multiplicity of perspectives (Marxian, Freudian, Weberian, feminist, post-structuralist and so on) to articulate a complex, multidimen-sional social reality.[67] In addition, its rejection of identity theory and belief in the nonidentity between concept and object rules out all dogmatic, reductionist approaches, while its respect for particularity and individuality militate against repressive totalizing narratives. Yet, with some exceptions, it refuses to fall prey to a nihilistic skepticism concerning the impossibility of conceptualizing contemporary social reality by projecting theoretical perspectives that at least attempt to chart the fundamental tendencies and developments within contemporary society.

Secondly, I have suggested that the specific thematic focuses of Critical Theory center on fundamental problems for social theory today. Earlier stages of Critical Theory focused on such novel and important themes as the merger of the economy and the state in state capitalism, the genesis and nature of fascism and the authoritarian personality, the integration of the working class, the culture industries and the consumer society, the institutionalization of science and technology and many other issues central to critical social theory in the last several decades. In the last two chapters, I have argued that the theoretical framework, categories and methods of Critical Theory make it especially appropriate to addressing such issues as new technologies and their impact on social and class structure, politics and culture and the crises of techno-capitalism. Every era must develop its own radical social theory and politics, and I believe that the tradition of Critical Theory provides an excellent starting point for a new theory of today's techno-capitalism, its crisis tendencies and its potential for emancipatory social transformation. For Critical Theory is a theory of history, and its historical perspectives sensitize it to historical changes, developments and novelties.

Thirdly, in this chapter I have argued that Critical Theory provides an illuminating and useful social theory for radical politics today. Critical Theory is by definition bound up with social critique, and it should return to earlier demands for a unity of theory and practice. Moreover, its themes are relevant to many of the new social movements which have appeared in

the last decades, and its systematic, global viewpoint might enable it to play a role in providing a more unified and democratic Left in the future.

Having briefly mentioned its contributions and virtues, I wish to conclude by pointing to some of its limitations and blind spots, and to some of the directions that Critical Theory today should take to overcome these limitations. Critical Theory has frequently been deficient in empirical and historical research, and has often failed to provide clear historical presentations of its theoretical positions. Future Critical Theory should therefore put more effort into empirical and historical research, and to more successfully integrating theoretical and empirical work than it has done in the past. Particularly in the last decade since Marcuse's death, Critical Theory has been overly theoretical and has exhibited both sociological and political deficiencies. This has been a result of the academization of Critical Theory and an excessive focus on its foundations and philosophical components at the expense of developing radical social theory and cultural critique connected to transformative politics.

It seems that as the crisis of philosophy deepens and more analyses of 'the end of philosophy' appear every year,[68] those desperate to save philosophy recycle Critical Theory and distill it in homeopathic doses in an attempt to keep alive the rapidly disintegrating corpus of modern philosophy. Yet another alternative presents itself. One way to reconstruct philosophy in the present age is to carry through new syntheses of philosophy, social theory and radical politics, as was attempted by Critical Theorists in different ways at different stages of development. Thus, rather than subsume social theory into philosophy, Critical Theory today might produce new syntheses of philosophy, social theory, cultural critique and radical politics. In any case, the dimension of substantive social theory has been neglected in recent years by Critical Theorists, and if it is to continue to be relevant to the theoretical and political concerns of the present age, Critical Theory today should provide a systematic and dialectical analysis of the economy, the state and the political realm and its linkages to culture, ideology and everyday life. This Critical Theory of contemporary society would analyze the mediations, connections and contradictions between and within these spheres. Such dialectical analysis involves both making connections and demonstrating the contradictions that provide the opening for political intervention. Traditionally, Critical Theory has been better at making connections than in demonstrating contradictions and openings for political struggle and transformation. The entire tradition of Critical Theory provides parts, or aspects, of a theory of society, and Critical Theory today should reassemble these parts and add new dimensions to provide a Critical Theory of the present age linked with radical politics.

On the other hand, Critical Theory should continue to pursue those tasks in which it has always excelled: cultural theory and ideology critique.

Although it is often argued that Critical Theory overemphasizes culture and the 'superstructures' at the expense of political economy and the 'base', I would argue that techno-capitalism today requires more and better analysis of culture and the superstructures precisely because of the increased importance of culture, technology, media, information, knowledge and ideology (which encompasses all of the above) in ever more domains of social life – indeed, they increasingly constitute the very base of society itself. Moreover, in a society that is increasingly ideological, ideology critique increases in importance and relevance for both social theory and radical politics.

Finally, Critical Theory has traditionally been bound up with the vicissitudes of capitalist modernity and Marxism, and has – in my interpretation at least – provided a series of attempts to reconstruct the Marxian theory to account for and attack new developments within the vicissitudes of capitalist modernity. In view of current postmodern claims that modernity is now over and post-Marxist claims that classical or even neo-Marxism is no longer relevant to the theoretical and political tasks of the present age, Critical Theory needs to address these critiques and to appraise which features of Marxism and modernity continue to be operative and which have been surpassed. This study is only a prolegomenon to such a project, and has proceeded through historical and analytical investigations of the tradition of Critical Theory with the aim of discovering and assembling aspects that could be used by radical social theory and politics today. I have also pointed to those aspects of Critical Theory which I believe to have been historically superseded and transcended. The task now is to proceed with the many theoretical and political tasks of the present age, with careful glances back at where we have been, systematic and critical analyses of where we are, and resolute struggles for a better future.