

## Emancipatory Theory

Truly, I live in dark times!  
The guileless word is folly. A smooth forehead  
Suggests insensitivity. The man who laughs  
Has simply not yet had  
The terrible news.

What kind of times are they, when  
A talk about trees is almost a crime  
Because it suggests silence about so many horrors?

. . . .

Bertolt Brecht. *To Those Born Later*

When evil-doing comes like falling rain, nobody calls out  
'stop!'

When crimes begin to pile up they become invisible.  
When sufferings become unendurable the cries are no  
longer heard. The cries, too, fall like rain in the summer.

. . . .

Bertolt Brecht. *When Evil-Doing Comes  
Like Falling Rain*

Recent developments in the political economy of North America have cast into sharp relief the problematic character of human emancipation. Deflationary economic tendencies combined with the spectre of cultural depression have effectively nullified traditional strategies of radical humanism. The present retrenchment of public bureaucracies and the apparent dissolution of liberal- and social-democratic states into a vacant nihilism have undermined accepted estimations of critical political thought, pointing to the sheer necessity

for a debate on the implications for human liberation of fundamental transformations in advanced capitalist society, the very object of emancipation-inspired theories of social change.

The present collection of essays on emancipatory theory is intended to initiate such a debate. While commonly taking as their point of departure Marx's theory of capitalist contradictions, the essays which follow sharply diverge from Marx's particular empirical models of crisis and breakdown, developing new images of a re-energized radical humanism. Each of the essays, in different ways, carries on an internal dialogue with Marx and Marxism, attempting to come to grips with the socialist heritage. It is fair to say that none of the essays abandons Marx's theory of class-struggle but, recognizing the historical and ontological transformations effected by late capitalism, they represent a concerted attempt to move Marxism into the 1970s and beyond. Emancipatory theories remain Marxist because they accept Marx's theories of alienation and of deep-seated internal contradictions. They surpass the Marxism of the Second and Third Internationals because they are willing to revise models of crisis and strategies of appropriate class-radicalism. In this sense, it is possible to distinguish between the logic of internal contradictions, which still remain, and the empirical manifestations of these contradictions. The contradictions intensify, while crisis-forms differ, requiring new types of radical praxis, optimally democratic in character, formulated by emancipatory theories of socialist transformation.

Emancipatory theory, preserving as it does Marxian formulations concerning fatal contradictions which ultimately capitalism cannot contain without anticipating its own negation, seeks to transcend classical Marxism in coming to terms with the social upheavals of the second half of the twentieth century. For emancipatory theorists, the project becomes one of recovering the radical humanism of Marxism while exploring, in an imaginative way, the psychoanalytic, phenomenological and historical dimensions of human bondage.