

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I: CRITICAL THEORY, SCIENTISM AND EMPIRICISM*

Ben Agger

This paper develops a critique of the Hegelian Marxism of the Frankfurt School, arguing that theorists like Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno failed to repoliticize Marxism once they perceived that the working-class would not become a successful revolutionary agent. The redevelopment of Marxism by certain original members of the Frankfurt School exaggerated about the extent to which political rebellion could be isolated and contained by dominant interests. I argue that the early Frankfurt School's thesis of the decline of human individuality forced them into a position which denied the possibility of political radicalism.

I set two tasks for a critical theory which endeavours to repoliticize its orientation to social change. Task number *a* is to redevelop a concept of human nature which grounds the possibility of political struggle in the capacity of the human being to perceive his own exploitation and to envisage and work towards alternative institutions. I believe that the assumption of active, "constitutive" subjectivity must be the foundation-stone of contemporary Marxism. In eliminating this assumption, thinking that the human being has become totally dominated, Horkheimer and Adorno deny the possibility of emancipatory struggle.

Task number *b* is to reground the theory-practice relation in Marx's concept of the advisory role of critical theory. In this sense, theory *follows* and *guides* practice, locating it in an analytic totality and explicating its revolutionary significance. Horkheimer and Adorno severed the theory-practice relation in arguing that theory could only take the form of ideology-critique because human subjectivity was no longer perceived to be capable of revolt.

I argue that Marxism today must not prematurely abandon the possibility of social change under the influence of historical pessimism. I reject the thesis of the decline of subjectivity and I wish to challenge

*This essay has been improved by Prof. Gad Horowitz of the University of Toronto, Department of Political Economy.

Ed. This is the first of two interrelated articles, the second of which will appear in the Spring issue of the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Volume 1, Number 2, (May, 1977).

the overly defeatist attitude of Horkheimer and Adorno with regard to the actuality of constructive change.

I apply my insight about critical theory's failure to reengage empirical research and a praxis-orientation to the actual redevelopment of a Marxian social science. I examine certain historical aspects of Marx's theory and suggest how it might be amended in light of recent political and economic developments. The result will be a concept of *radical empiricism* which renews Marx's revolutionary science by developing the political significance of contemporary struggle to destroy authority-structures and the division of labour. Radical empiricism will become a political strategy, practised by a *dialectical sensibility* which refuses to separate thought and action, even beginning to "live" the revolution in its own activity.

I. Origins of Critical Theory: Marxism Redeveloped

In the early 1920s, Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch both took issue with the species of Marxism that had been developed in the Second International under the influence of theorists like Eduard Bernstein and Karl Kautsky. Lukács and Korsch opposed the neo-Kantian reconstruction of Marxism which separated the political from the scientific dimensions of Marx's theory of capitalism. Lukács polemicized against tendencies to conceive of Marxism as a variant of natural science which merely charted and adduced "laws" of social motion.

In a broader sense, Lukács and Korsch opposed *economism*, a theory of change which stresses the economic determination of socio-cultural and ideological forms. Economism, they believed, degraded the human being's purposeful contribution to the revolutionary process, suggesting instead that capitalism will *inevitably* collapse, given certain "contradictory" economic circumstances. Lukács and Korsch rejected "automatic Marxism"² because it gave too little weight to subjective and ideological factors in social analysis, and *thus* — they felt — it tended to reinforce a passive, even fatalistic attitude towards social change, eliminating the role of active subjectivity.

The philosophical reconstruction of Marxism attempted by Lukács and Korsch has been characterized as "Hegelian Marxist".³ Lukács returned to the message of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* which, he believed, was relevant to overcoming the sclerosis of Marxism. Hegel provided an active conception of human consciousness in the *Phenomenology* and in this sense he opposed the dualism between human consciousness and the sentient, extended world, developed by Descartes. Hegel deepened Kant's notion of a "constitutive", self-conscious human being who necessarily employs "categories of the un-

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

derstanding" (as Kant called them) with which to perceive and order the objective universe. Hegel went even further than Kant in suggesting that human beings could perceive the essence, or Reason, of empirical phenomena, enabling them to go beyond mere common sense experience. This faculty of Reason allowed people to comprehend and indeed to *construct* their world in accordance with the revealed natural *telos* of the world.

Lukács argued that this conception of a creative consciousness rested at the core of Marx's dialectical materialism. Moreover, he felt that the concept of subjectivity had been largely eliminated by neo-Kantian Marxists who endorsed deterministic models of social change. Marxism could only be revived, Lukács felt, if the subjective factor was upgraded, giving Marxian theory a new purchase on the psychological dimension of market capitalism which had become increasingly important since Marx's path-breaking work in *Capital*.

"Reification" was a term employed by Lukács to describe new conditions in capitalism: alienation, he felt, had become *heightened* due to new forces of ideological and psychological manipulation. Indeed, Lukács theorized that the working-class failed to revolt between about 1900 and 1920 *because* it was entrapped by a conservative, bourgeois consciousness, a "reified" consciousness unable to perceive the possibility of a qualitatively different social order and to act on that insight. Lukács called this the "ideological crisis of the proletariat", a concept which directly challenged the economic assumption that subjective factors were largely irrelevant to the revolutionary process, and that capitalism would collapse without subjective intervention.

The "ideological crisis of the proletariat" prolonged the life of capitalism. Western Marxism thus entered a holding-pattern, uncertain about its relevance to working-class sensibilities. Lukács felt that only by challenging the hold of "reification" (or deepened alienation) could the working-class be prepared for its imputed revolutionary potential and even seize power from the capitalist class. Lukács argued that the crisis of capitalism would only be resolved through "free action," explicitly opposing the deterministic model of social change endorsed by certain Marxists like Kautsky which explained the revolutionary delay by reference to purely objective economic factors.

Korsch for his part argued that ideology was an important social force and could not be treated only as an epiphenomenon, thrown up by the economic substructure. In 1923, Korsch published a work⁴ which implicitly converged with Lukács' 1923 book in arguing for a revalued concept of the subjective factor in Marxism. Korsch suggested that Marxism

BEN AGGER

was not deterministic in the sense that Marx took seriously ideological forms like religion and philosophy, refusing to reduce them merely to reflexes of the economic system.

Both Lukács and Korsch stressed the importance of conceiving of society as a *totality*, irreducible to economics. They both believed that Marx was not an economic reductionist, and they took inspiration from Marx's embryonic theory of ideology in their own attempts to comprehend the altered, developed character of capitalism in the 1920s.

For Lukács and Korsch, the key element in a revised Marxism was the *critique of ideology*, a critique designed to reveal the depths of proletarian consciousness to which exploitation had penetrated. Exploitation came to have psychological as well as economic significance. Proletarian consciousness could be manipulated and shaped by bourgeois ideology and thus exploitation could be occluded and mystified. Neither Lukács nor Korsch relinquished the theories of surplus value put forward by Marx to capture the reality of the exploitation of the worker's labour-power; they only analyzed *new* relations between economic infrastructure and ideological superstructure in the context of "late" or monopoly capitalism which issued in the "ideological crisis of the proletariat."

Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness* argued that Marxists must *return* to the literal Marx, bowdlerized and distorted by economic determinists of the Second and Third Internationals. He argued that Marx developed a concept of the social "totality," a concept of the *dialectical* relationship between economics and ideology. Although Lukács had not seen Marx's 1844 manuscripts when he published the essays comprising *History and Class Consciousness* in 1923, Lukács clearly endorsed Marx's implication that *alienation*, as Marx was to call it in 1844, took both economic and psychological forms. Reification, in Lukács' usage, was deepened alienation; Lukács used the term reification to describe the nature-like, mechanical quality of social relations under capitalism. He suggested that consciousness itself was being transformed into a dead thing, becoming merely another commodity.

In this sense, it is important to stress the continuity between the first stirrings of Hegelian Marxism in the early 1920s and Marx's critique of alienation. Lukács and Korsch believed that the working-class was still a necessary and a probable revolutionary agent. The perception of Hegelian Marxism by certain orthodox Marxists⁵ as a fundamental departure from Marx's theory of revolution is difficult to sustain in the light of Lukács' and Korsch's 1923 works. Korsch explicitly states that he is faithful to Marx's non-deterministic concept of social change in his revaluation of the subjective factor in the historical process.⁶

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

However, Hegelian Marxism, despite the apparent agreement between its co-founders on many issues of substance, is not homogeneous. Its own history is as complex and variegated as the history of organized Marxism as a whole. What has come to be called "critical theory", emanating from the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research or "Frankfurt School" founded in 1923, is a variant of Lukács' and Korsch's original work, although there are significant differences which have proven to be very consequential for Marxian theory in the years following World War II.

Lukács and Korsch were fundamentally orthodox in their orientation to Marx's original theory of economic crisis and proletarian revolution. Both were self-consciously engaged in a process of *deepening*, and not fundamentally transforming, Marx's theory. However, the "critical theory" developed by the Frankfurt circle represented a much more fundamental departure from the original theory than Lukács' and Korsch's work. Critical theory appeared to be more Hegelian than Marxian, more philosophical than political. The Frankfurt theorists were more sceptical about the prospect of proletarian revolution than were Lukács and Korsch in the 1920s.

The Frankfurt School initially embraced diverse theoretical perspectives. Orthodox Marxists like Karl-August Wittfogel joined with philosopher-aesthetes like Theodor W. Adorno and with psychoanalytically oriented thinkers like Erich Fromm. However, in the 1930s and early 1940s a distinctive perspective emerged which further set off critical theory from Lukács' and Korsch's Hegelian Marxism and from original Marxism.

This perspective shattered original Marxism in that it shed its theoretical allegiance to the working-class, an allegiance faithfully upheld by both Lukács and Korsch. Critical theory radicalized Lukács' analysis of the "ideological crisis of the proletariat" and of false consciousness by suggesting that the working-class had utterly lost its potential for revolt. Further, the Frankfurt theorists challenged the Marxian paradigm itself by suggesting that critical theory could no longer achieve a close, advisory relationship to political practice but would have to play a new, more circumspect "critical" role. The Frankfurt theorists believed that the prospects for a revolution, which might have appeared greater in the crisis-period of the 1920s than in the post-Depression period, had diminished and that the entire relationship between theory and practice had to be revised.

Where Lukács and Korsch attempted to balance the relation between economic forces and ideological forces (believing that they were faithful

BEN AGGER

to Marx in this) the Frankfurt theorists minimized economic forces. The analysis of false consciousness was extended and radicalized by Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno and Herbert Marcuse⁷ such that it nearly usurped the significance of Marx's original economic critique of capitalism.

The Frankfurt School theorists did not abandon suddenly the model of proletarian revolution. Initially, in the 1920s and 1930s, Horkheimer and his associates were sympathetic to the revolutionary aspirations of original Marxism. However, it was not long before the Frankfurt circle recognized that capitalism had changed qualitatively, even since the period when Lukács and Korsch developed their theories of class consciousness. In the Institute's journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, articles appeared which suggested that market capitalism had developed into late, or monopoly, capitalism, requiring new categories of analysis and thus new models of social change.⁸

Where Lukács could still retain the model of a class conscious collective subject (a class "in and for itself", the working-class), the Frankfurt theorists felt that the entire model of class consciousness needed to be rethought. Indeed, Horkheimer and others went as far as to intimate that human consciousness was far *more* exploited than Lukács and Korsch imagined. Lukács believed that the "ideological crisis of the proletariat" was owed to the entrapment of the working-class by bourgeois ideology, while the Frankfurt thinkers believed that this ideology went far deeper than ideology in the traditional sense, penetrating and distorting the deep subjectivity of the person.

Ideology in the original Marxian paradigm was deceptive in the sense that it mystified economic exploitation. Now, under late or monopoly capitalism, ideology assumes a more insidious function, preventing the development of a critical consciousness by occluding the possibility of a qualitatively different social order. The Frankfurt thinkers believed that the human being was nearly incapable of thinking theoretically and critically about his own domination. Ideology in this sense penetrated the psychological core of the human being, producing automatons charged with the infinite consumption of commodities and values. Ideology came to have more than a mystifying function (which it had under market capitalism); it now enhanced profit-levels by guaranteeing that the person would remain a willing partisan and agent of bourgeois society which required endless consumption.

This analysis of the new powers of ideology issued in a different kind of Marxism. No longer did the critical theorists assume that the working-class was either the necessary or the probable agent of social

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

change. Ideological pressures to conform and to consume deflected political radicalism of the original type. The Frankfurt theorist felt that consciousness itself was "in decline", owing to the new, harmonizing powers of ideology. Revolt in this sense was unlikely both in collective and in individual terms.

II. Scientism as "Para-ideology": Decline of Subjectivity

The thesis of the decline of an autonomous human being went far beyond Lukács' analysis of false consciousness. For Lukács, false consciousness could be demystified and reversed through a didactic type of political education, oriented to stimulating class consciousness. Hegelian Marxism in its original formulation was mainly concerned to return to Marx's dialectic between economic and ideological forces, opposing economic determinism which implicitly counseled passive political stances. Both Lukács and Korsch believed that Marxism needed to *retrieve* its revolutionary focus and praxis-orientation.

Critical theory in the Frankfurt formulation, however, was a product of a much more intense pessimism about the possibility of social change. Class consciousness failed to emerge from the post-Depression period, weakening Lukács' and Korsch's activist optimism about reinvigorating the working-class in western Europe. Moreover, Marxism-Leninism could no longer convincingly pretend to be a democratizing force in the Soviet Union. Where Lukács could praise Lenin as a great dialectician and revolutionary⁹ the Frankfurt theorists were far less sanguine about Soviet-style Marxism as it was given a Stalinist imprint.

Capitalism was further consolidated between the Depression and the end of World War II. The critical theorists believed that the period of sharp contradictions between "capital" and "labour" had ended, with the wide-spread unionization of workers and increasing state-intervention in the economy. Keynesian economics sanctioned an increased role for the state in stimulating the economy through the creation of jobs and through large capital expenditures. This development vitiated Marx's putative hypothesis that crisis was inevitable in a capitalist system. It turned out that there were mechanisms by which the rate of profit could be sustained and even increased and by which the working-class could be gradually enriched, thus ensuring their allegiance and compliance.

There is controversy over whether Marx "predicted" the collapse of the system or merely developed several possible scenarios, one of which was heightened class-conflict and collapse. This is an extremely important issue because the theory of the transition to socialism is tied in with the theory of collapse. The concept of the dictatorship of the

BEN AGGER

proletariat, I would argue, was never central to Marx and thus he was far from being a determinist in the sense of having predicted an inevitable collapse. If this reading of Marx is accepted, then the Frankfurt concept of the new powers of ideology and of state-intervention in strengthening the economic system can be seen as continuous with the original theory. Also, the critique of Marxist-Leninist state-socialism, (rooted in the putative necessity of a transitional proletarian dictatorship) is given license if the orthodox transition-scheme is rejected or amended.

Thus, it is *possible* to perceive the critical theorists' thesis of the decline of subjectivity (and the major revision of dialectical materialism which it occasioned) as Marxist in spirit. The clash between orthodoxy and revisionism has been productive in the sense that it has cast Marx as having been more ambiguous about the inevitability of social change than many orthodox Marxists have assumed. It can be argued that Marx appeared to stop short of predicting an inevitable collapse, thus supporting the Hegelian Marxist reconstruction of Marx as a dialectical (non-reductionist) theorist of change.

In any case, critical theory (whatever its Marxist credentials) went far beyond Lukács' and Korsch's reliance on time-worn models of revolutionary dynamics. The philosophical and psychological dimensions of Hegelian Marxism took on new significance in the hands of Horkheimer and his associates.

The crucial element in the critical theory developed in Frankfurt, and that which distinguishes its brand of Marxism from most earlier versions, was the thesis about declining, or "damaged", subjectivity. Since ideology was perceived to have developed greater powers of mystification, the concept of the critique of ideology must necessarily change. Indeed, critical theory was not to be didactic in the sense of exhorting workers to revolt but rather it exhorted all human beings to think critically about domination. The critique of ideology in this sense was transformed from a critique of the ideology of market capitalism and economic exploitation into a critique of bourgeois existence in general.

The Frankfurt theorists believed that the consolidation of capitalism strengthened the system's hold on individual psyches and wills. The "transcendent", critical faculty had been weakened by the positive ideology of advanced capitalism. In 1960, Marcuse was to lament the death of "negative thinking",¹⁰ stressing that political education needed to strengthen this capability. Further developing Max Weber's theories of instrumental rationality (involving the equation of social rationality with economic rationality such as mathematical accounting-

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

procedures), the critical theorists argued that *instrumental rationality* had become a new ideology to replace liberalism.

Instrumental rationality erased the distinction between means and ends. It stressed the importance of economic and bureaucratic efficiency, neglecting the study and critical examination of the purposes and goals of efficiency. The so-called "organization man" was a characterological product of instrumental rationality, being the type of person who worries only about the efficiency of social processes and not their qualitative dimension.

The concern with profit as such had been partly replaced by the concern with efficiency and stability in the context of the expansion and consolidation of capitalism. The vast bureaucratization of modern industrial society required that people not question the contents of administrative decisions and imperative commands but instead concern themselves only with the *accomplishment* of tasks set by custodians of the system.

The critical theorists lamented the development of pervasive instrumental, managerial and scientific ideologies. They believed that the relationship between means and ends was crucial for assessing the quality of a given social order. They argued that instrumental rationality was fundamentally irrational because it *veiled* the imbedded values which it secretly held dear. The apparent concern only with means and with technical efficiency concealed the type of ends and social values which bureaucratic capitalism had institutionalized. The critical theorists argued that the so-called rational society was based upon particular value-constellations such as the belief in private enterprise. Although Weber was not completely sanguine about the existential consequences of thorough-going technical rationalization, he was nonetheless a partisan of the superficially value-neutral approach to problems of social organization represented by instrumental rationality.

Critical theory perceived that "scientism", or the belief that social problems can be solved technically, without appealing to normative or political values, had become the new ideology of late capitalism. Liberalism had been superseded by the collapse of market conditions of free competition. Class-conflict had been institutionalized and largely (or at least temporarily) contained through the rise of big unions and an interventionist state. Liberalism belonged to an earlier period of capitalism, when the ideology of individual initiative was perceived to be more realistic by workers and entrepreneurs. The bureaucratization of capitalism that largely rendered liberalism obsolete for the concept of individual initiative evidently clashed with the new reality of a bureaucratized economy and polity.

BEN AGGER

One writer has characterized scientism and instrumental rationality (which, for our purposes, are terms which will be used synonymously) as a "para-ideology".¹¹ As a para-ideology, instrumental rationality does not provide the kind of total legitimation of the individual's place and function in society as religion and liberalism used to provide. Scientism appears to be above the political and ethical considerations which preoccupied past ideologies. An instrumental rationality which emphasizes technical efficiency depoliticizes decision-making and thus seemingly takes social and economic organization outside the realm of ideology and moral choice (a phenomenon which Habermas has called the "scientization of politics").

The function of *expertise* in resolving social and economic crises becomes paramount because, ostensibly, the expert does not concern himself with higher-order moral issues but is concerned only with efficiency. Thus, the para-ideology of instrumental rationality legitimates and rationalizes the essentially powerless position of the individual person in face of huge, complex systems which he cannot control or even fathom. This ideology defuses rebellion by convincing the person that dominant interests necessarily act in his best interests and that, in any case, there is nothing else to be done.

Critical theory rests on this new analysis of ideology, or indeed, of para-ideology (i.e., ideology which does not *appear* to be ideological). It argues that social conflicts are contained through the institutionalization of expertise which is fundamentally unchallenged by powerless citizens. The human being merely consumes decisions and values imposed by an economic and socio-cultural elite. In this context, the development of ideological or critical consciousness is only a remote possibility, given the depoliticization of authority and decision-making. The person comes to accept whatever is given to him, regardless of its ethical or moral content, thinking that experts necessarily know best.

Where before liberalism stressed the autonomy of subjective choice and taste, today the illusion of this autonomy has largely disappeared. Conformity replaces individuality as a paramount social value. Political radicalism does not emerge as a salient possibility within the flattened, apparently de-ideologized universe of technical rationality.

The decline of subjectivity emerges from a social context in which the person is manipulated by systemic forces which penetrate his innermost being, his "sensitivity". The experience of unfreedom is justified by an ideology of technocratic control which is seemingly above the dispute about competing ethics and values. The precarious economic position of

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

the average person requires that this average individual invest his trust in, and accord legitimacy to, experts who protect him against destitution. To do otherwise would be irrational according to the prevalent concept of rationality as involving trust in authorities.

Crisis is not eliminated, nor obviously is alienation. However, the causal relationship between capitalism and alienation is now mediated in a complex way so that the person cannot readily accuse particular individuals or elites of being oppressive. Domination is flattened out into a typical, common sense reality; it is nearly impossible to imagine a different, better world since the regime of technical rationality is self-perpetuating.

In this context, the concept of "damaged life" became critical theory's *leitmotif* in the hands of Theodor W. Adorno.¹² According to Adorno and Horkheimer,¹³ there has come to be an equivalency between myth and enlightenment, between belief and reason. Progress is debunked as an irrational process of false enlightenment. The aphoristic style of critical theory written between about 1947 and Horkheimer's death in 1973 reveals that the Frankfurt thinkers no longer felt that the causal connection between capitalism and alienation could be systematically unravelled. Everything is equally reified, including organized Marxism and its causal theory of exploitation.

In his philosophical master-work, Adorno states summarily that Marxism failed to change the world.¹⁴ His "negative dialectics" refuses to emerge in a positive synthesis, a concrete vision of communist life: philosophy becomes negative in the face of damaged existence. Adorno compared modern industrial society to the concentration camp, unwittingly relativizing the total horror of Nazi genocide. His version of critical theory unintentionally lost the specificity of Marx's critique of exploitation by descending to abstract negation, utilizing the concepts of the totally damaged life and of what might be called spurious subjectivity.

Adorno confused the non-existence of a philosophical concept of subjectivity with the empirical non-existence of struggling human beings (incinerated in the camp ovens). As a metaphor for pervasive false consciousness, the notion of spurious subjectivity may have had impact in stressing that organized Marxism had — temporarily — failed. But Adorno intended more than a metaphor in his notion of a negative dialectics. Critical theory abandoned the working-class and, with it, Marx's original concept of revolution. The experience of fascism seemed to reinforce the malaise and cynicism of the critical theorists excepting

BEN AGGER

Marcuse, whose deviation from the Frankfurt mainstream will be discussed below, in Section III).

While Lukács assumed a relatively undamaged, potentially activist human being, Adorno and Horkheimer thought that the human being had gone up in smoke, fully manipulated by imposed authority. In this context, critical theory abandoned its advisory relation to the working-class. Theory no longer presaged a qualitatively different social order (as Marx, Lukács and Korsch definitely intended); it merely reflected the disharmony of late capitalist society, imitating but not overcoming its substantive irrationality.

Adorno's concept of spurious subjectivity made a good deal of sense on empirical grounds. Adorno did not perceive a potentially radical working-class in the 1940s and 1950s; indeed, he perceived no collective movements which could be deemed revolutionary. Based on this evidence, critical theory's incipient despair seemed warranted, and the otherwise tendentious comparison of liberal democracy to a Nazi concentration camp could be justified, at least as a provocative hypothesis deserving of further inquiry. But there was nothing tentative or provisional about the concept of non-existent subjectivity. The Frankfurt critics were deeply committed to a mode of analysis which abandoned the concept of subjective autonomy, thinking that the individual as a separate monad no longer existed.

The thesis of declining subjectivity was tied in with the analysis of the changing social role of the family and particularly of the father. Since the publication of *Studien über Autorität und Familie* in 1936, the Frankfurt theorists have related the decline of subjectivity to the replacement of the father's function as an effective superego by society as a whole. The Frankfurt thinkers believed that the 19th century bourgeois family provided a haven for the individual, free to some extent from social determinations. But, they argued, the individual was no longer insulated by the family, now subject to unmediated domination from without. As entrepreneurial capitalism was transformed into monopoly capitalism, the father lost his prior economic dependence and became merely a fungible quantum of labour, an "organization man". Correspondingly, the father lost his importance as a feared and respected figure of authority and the process of socialization gradually became extra-familial.

While this analysis has its place in critical theory, I believe that the decline of the family has not eradicated subjectivity but only produced a different kind of subjectivity. The idea that subjectivity has declined as a result of the supersession of the family assumes that the bourgeois

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

family provided emotional sustenance of a kind which formerly allowed the individual to resist imposed domination. This is a very optimistic assessment of the 'old' bourgeois family, neglecting especially the psychic damage done to young girls and to the mother by the bourgeois nuclear family; here, as in other ways, the nostalgic yearning of the Frankfurt theorists for certain bourgeois institutions like the family and religion distorted their analyses of the present.

Adorno often indicated that modern society was fully reified. I submit that this assessment belongs to his essentially nostalgic mind-set which denigrated the present in favour of the past. He could not ultimately come to grips with the devaluation of intellectuality which was a by-product of a scientized mass society. Instead of searching for a new *kind* of intellectuality which overcame the role of the bourgeois scholar — such as Marcuse's "new sensibility" or my "dialectical sensibility" — Adorno could only fall back on the archetype of the lonely thinker. This aspect of Adorno's self-image was closely related to his attitude towards the alleged demise of subjectivity: in his thesis of spurious subjectivity Adorno meant to capture his own dissatisfaction with a society which does not listen to intellectuals.

If subjectivity no longer existed, in Adorno's sense, then theory had to abandon its traditionally advisory function. No longer could it be conceived as an expressive moment of radical activism, in the way that Marx and Engels suggested in *The Communist Manifesto*.¹⁵ Rather, theory was only to develop conceptually the full implications of the completely damaged life, following reification to its ultimate conclusion. Horkheimer and Adorno felt that nothing guaranteed a positive synthesis: subjectivity has been irrevocably lost and totalitarianism has become eternal.

For Marxist intellectuals who lived through World War II, this kind of pessimism was perhaps an essential prerequisite of spiritual regeneration and hope. Adorno wanted to show that fascism was not an aberration, discontinuous with liberalism, but was immanent in the logic of instrumental rationality which supplanted liberalism. However, the critical theorists did not overcome their deep fatalism after the war but became further entrenched in their gloom, rejecting the possibility of revolutionary social change.

The Marxist pedigree of critical theory was correspondingly weakened. In the hands of the original Frankfurt School Marxism was transformed from a revolutionary science into a critique of total domination. The advisory relationship between theory and practice was subsequently lost, with theory becoming merely a reflection on vanished practice.

III. Repoliticization of Critical Theory: Beyond the Concept of Spurious Subjectivity

The second-generation of the original Frankfurt School includes such theorists as Herbert Marcuse, Jürgen Habermas, Alfred Schmidt (the current Director of the Institute for Social Research), Albrecht Wellmer and Kurt Lenk. Although Marcuse was invited to join the Institute in the early 1930s, he belongs more to the second distinct period of critical theory than to the first, led by Horkheimer and Adorno and characterized by the thesis of spurious subjectivity.

The depoliticization of Marxism following World War II was a product of new historical circumstances in which radicalism was defused by rising productivity and affluence generated by a war-economy. The productive capacity of American industry was then unrivalled, providing the working-class and middle-class with goods and services heretofore reserved for elites and thus partially decreasing their resentment of those elites.

Adorno and Horkheimer endorsed a "negative dialectics" to suit this new, seemingly antagonism-free reality. Negative dialectics rejected a systematic concept of political radicalism, attempting to oppose domination philosophically. Critical theory distanced itself from organized Marxism in the belief that philosophy, and not politics, was to become a "radical" battleground. The kind of work produced by members of the original Institute during the post-World War II years signalled the growing abstraction and political disengagement of critical theory (e.g. Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*).

It was left for Herbert Marcuse to reinvigorate critical theory and, if possible, to counter its abstract character. I interpret Marcuse's *oeuvre* as providing a distinct counter-force to the thesis of declining subjectivity put forward by Horkheimer and Adorno.¹⁶ Marcuse implicitly opposed the analysis of spurious subjectivity, attempting to reground critical theory in psychoanalysis and a new concept of subjectivity.

Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, published in 1954, was a bold departure from the original Frankfurt reading of Freud as a sophisticated prophet of gloom,¹⁷ and ultimately served as the point of departure for Marcuse's subsequent work on sexual rebellion and on aesthetics.¹⁸ Marcuse did not appear to accept that the human being had been totally captured by bourgeois instrumental rationality. With Freud, Marcuse postulated the existence of a buried libidinal substratum (the id) which defied total manipulation. The sexual constitution of the human being held out against full-blown repression by advanced capitalism.

Admittedly, Marcuse sometimes repeated Horkheimer's and Ad-

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

orno's thesis about fallen subjectivity, especially in two 1956 essays which are contained in *Five Lectures*. *Eros and Civilization* contains passages about "abolition of the individual" and the "decline in consciousness". *One-Dimensional Man* suggests that the "second dimension" of critical consciousness has been irrevocably lost. Yet I read Marcuse in his more recent works (such as *An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt*) as *implying* that human subjectivity is not yet a victim of total reification. In *Eros and Civilization* he also suggests that a "rationality of gratification" remains dormant within human beings. This concept of an ineradicable core of libidinal creativity counters the thesis of heteronomous subjectivity.

The addition of a concept of sexuality to critical theory implicitly challenged the thesis of spurious subjectivity by emphasizing that the human being is an inexhaustible reservoir of buried creative (libidinal) forces. Marcuse argued that every human being has the capacity for erotic play, which can be enhanced and developed in a non-surplus repressive social order. While accepting the thrust of Lukács' analysis of reification, recognizing that capitalism could be sustained by the creation of "false" or distorted human needs, Marcuse suggested that the subjective capability of constituting — and also of changing — the world is not *eliminated* by reification but only *repressed*. In this sense, alienation is a less-than-total condition which in spite of its increasingly pervasive nature leaves the human being some scope for erotic, and, implicitly, political freedoms. Under capitalism, sexuality is often manipulated in such a way that erotic impulses can be inauthentically "liberated" in forms of what Marcuse calls "repressive desublimation", involving merely superficial types of free sexuality (e.g. mate-swapping in the context of a monogamous society).

Marcuse's more recent work, such as *An Essay on Liberation and Counterrevolution and Revolt*, develops the insights of *Eros and Civilization*. In *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse outlined the concept of the "new sensibility" to describe a human being who has become a socialist personality in his or her everyday life, refusing to oppress others in the name of distant future liberation. In discussing the significance of the New Left for critical theory, Marcuse stresses the necessity of "utopian thinking" which refuses to postpone indefinitely the discussion of alternative social institutions. Only by speculating about and attempting to create post-capitalist alternatives can people successfully begin to overcome relations of subservience and authoritarianism in the context of their own lives.

Marcuse further develops his analysis of erotic and aesthetic radical-

BEN AGGER

ism in *Counterrevolution and Revolt*. He believes that he salvages and does not subvert the revolutionary vigour of Marxism by articulating a subjective concept of radicalism — no matter how unorthodox it may appear. Marcuse is more traditionally Marxist than many of his critics suggest in that he explicitly rejects a romantic glorification of irrational, apolitical eroticism (e.g., in his exchange with Norman O. Brown).¹⁹ I do not believe that Marcuse dogmatically renounces orthodox political strategies but only *supplements* them with a concept of radical subjectivity.

In this sense, the thesis of non-existent subjectivity is rejected by Marcuse. Erotic impulses escape the levelling, homogenizing influence of instrumental rationality, preserving an essential core of unadulterated humanity *beneath* the appearance of the damaged life.

This is extremely consequential for critical theory in that it mitigates the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer and, most important, because it provides the key to developing more feasible political and theoretical strategies. By going beyond the concept of spurious subjectivity, Marcuse opens the vista of a reengaged Marxism which can once again intersect with existing political and social forces.

Russell Jacoby in his recent *Social Amnesia* has criticized the fetishism of subjectivity that has grown out of certain schools of post-Freudian humanistic psychology. Jacoby relies on Adorno's and Horkheimer's thesis of spurious subjectivity in stating that "the subjectivity that surfaces everywhere, be it in the form of human relationships, peak-experiences and so on, is but a response to its demise."²⁰ Jacoby extends Adorno's critique of the damaged life in arguing that social change has become nearly impossible.

The curious aspect of Jacoby's work is that he also relies on Marcuse who in the mid-1950s appeared to endorse Adorno's thesis about subjectivity. As I noted above, I believe that Marcuse in his recent work goes beyond this thesis, providing critical theory with a new purchase on emancipatory strategies and a new concept of subjectivity. In an excellent review, Erica Sherover writes:

Hardly one to be accused of a cheerful positivism, Marcuse is fully aware of the dangers of a falsely happy consciousness. Like Jacoby, he sees the focus on subjectivity among the New Left as a response to objective social conditions, but, unlike Jacoby; he does not view this in a monochromatic fashion. While Jacoby argues too neatly that "the cult of subjectivity

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

is a direct response to its eclipse", Marcuse's discussion is truer to the ambiguous reality. Whereas Jacoby sees the focus on subjectivity simply as the abstract and impotent negation of advanced capitalist society, Marcuse sees the subversive potential of the "new sensibility".²¹

She adds: "Given that Jacoby's critique of conformist psychology seeks so much support in the writings of Herbert Marcuse, one can only be puzzled by his failure to mention either the *Essay on Liberation or Counterrevolution and Revolt*". Sherover shares my view that Marcuse begins to overcome the disengagement of critical theory occasioned by then-justifiable historical pessimism. The concept of a new subjectivity cannot be dismissed but must be viewed as a *possibility* within the horizon of late capitalism. I will argue that critical theory can articulate and foster the "new sensibility" as it struggles to be born, preventing its fetishism and escaping the fate of what Jacoby calls "social amnesia."

The relevance of Marcuse's implicitly creative concept of subjectivity is to force critical theory into empirical social research which can suggest and further develop new types of political radicalism. The impact of a Marcusean perspective is not merely to vindicate political optimism; rather, Marcuse provides a clue that "constitutive subjectivity" still exists and can be *discovered empirically* in the activity of rebellion and in the creation of alternative institutions.

By empirical research, I do not refer only to atheoretical fact-gathering. Empirical research here refers to a type of *historical analysis* of contemporary social forces which necessarily brings to bear theoretical and moral perspectives on social investigation. Empiricism has often been equated with atheoretical positivism, giving the impression that there can be no other type of empirical research. Marcuse intends to analyze perceivable social forces within the parameters of a theory of historical change, assessing the *meta-factual* nature of empirical phenomena (e.g. the revolutionary potential of unorthodox political forms such as the New Left). Social forces are not simply *reflected* by Marcuse's empirical methodology but are located in a theoretical totality which goes beyond the factual appearance of the New Left in order to seek its essential historical significance. When I conceive of a renewed empiricism, I distinguish between *types* of empirical investigation, some of which eschew atheoretical positivism.

The sclerosis of Marxism resulted from the retention of strictly

economic categories of analysis, where Marx did not minimize ideological and psychological forces. If this is accepted as a partial explanation for the irrelevance of orthodox Marxism today — in its deterministic, economistic forms — then efforts to reinvigorate and revise Marxism will take the form of rendering *complex* (i.e., non-reductionist) the analysis of exploitation.

In the hands of the first Hegelian Marxists, this revision proceeded apace. However, in the work of the original Frankfurt School, the revision of Marxism went too far in casting out entirely Marx's and Lukács' voluntaristic concept of a revolutionary agent. This development subtly reversed the original relation between theory and practice suggested in *The Communist Manifesto* by Marx and Engels.

In their attacks on utopian socialists, Marx and Engels implicitly suggested a concept of *radical empiricism* which oriented their later work, and to which Marcuse unwittingly returns. In this sense, *the critique of scientism and instrumental rationality offered by Horkheimer and Adorno discarded precisely the kind of radical empiricism which would have repoliticized critical theory and provided the concept of political activism lost by Hegelian Marxism after Lukács and Korsch.*

Both economism and critical theory withdrew from the imperative of revolutionary practice, the one thinking that the revolution would occur without subjectivity (or, strictly speaking, that the correct subjectivity would arise automatically in response to economic suffering), the other thinking that subjectivity did not exist. The analysis of captive, damaged subjectivity by the original Frankfurt theorists necessarily discarded the concept of a struggling, rebellious subject, capable of throwing off the yoke of exploitation. Marcuse's work suggests a new concept of radicalism, and further, a new concept of the relation between Marxist social science and political practice.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels argued that radical theory would stem from, and subsequently reflect upon, given historical circumstances. Marx's famous analysis of the dependence of consciousness on social being²² was not a *reduction* of thought to objective conditions but a deep formulation of the dialectical relation between critical theory and political activity. Marx believed that theorizing is a *retrospective* activity, emergent upon the heels of existing struggle and not antecedent to it.

Marx criticized the utopian socialists because they tried to draw up blueprints of future communism, believing that theory had a purely projective function. As a dialectician, Marx believed that theory could

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

only have a mediating, synthesizing role, following and guiding struggle, rendering it conscious of its motives and objective possibilities.

In this sense, Marx did not deny Hegel's formulation in *Philosophy of Right* about the owl of Minerva necessarily taking flight only at dusk (about philosophy's emergence after history had unfolded, as a retrospective activity). I submit that Marx did *not* deviate from Hegel's essentially retrospective, synthesizing concept of philosophy and theory, but only gave this concept of theory a revolutionary emphasis.

For Marx, then, social science was to "take flight" alongside of revolutionary activity, instructing and organizing that activity. Marx's empirical discovery which so influenced subsequent Marxist and bourgeois social science was his discovery of the revolutionary potential of the urban proletariat. Marx did not *impose* this insight upon history but extracted it from his analysis of social processes.

The eleventh thesis on Feuerbach is often taken to be a statement about the revolutionary contribution to be made by a critical social science. However, Marx did not intend that theory alone would change the world. Theory was to follow and to rationalize existing struggle. Indeed, the first thesis states that Feuerbach "sees only the theoretical attitude as the true human attitude". Political practice *includes* theoretical practice (i.e., the practice of thinking), although Marx implies in places that political and theoretical practice have different revolutionary priorities.

Marx's entire critique of German idealism echoes with the sentiment that idealism drops out the practical character of revolutionary activity; ultimately, Hegel reduced history to the immanent self-reflection of the Absolute Idea, subordinating practice to theory (and thus countering his own correct insight in *Philosophy of Right* about the subordinate status of thought).

Critical theory exaggerated the constitutive function of theory *because* political radicalism appeared absent during its formative period. Economism discarded the theoretical aspect of the revolution, while the critical theorists discarded the political aspect.

Marcuse implicitly returns to Marx's notion of the advisory, synthetic character of theory, refusing to conceive critical theory as a revolutionary oracle. The popular perception of Marcuse as a philosopher who relinquishes the revolutionary character of Marxism is unjustified in view of this interpretation. I read Marcuse as saying that there is a biological-libidinal human nature which provides subjective resources for rebellious, political activity. Marcuse goes deeper than the ap-

BEN AGGER

pearance of captive subjectivity in pursuit of a substratum of real autonomy. Marcuse endorses a biological, anthropological concept of this kind of human nature precisely *because* he does not want to appear to exaggerate the cerebral, theoretical roots of rebellion. Marcuse refuses to exhort people to revolt; rather, he only develops the consequences of existing, empirically discoverable rebellion, springing from the human being's inability to tolerate exploitation.

This reading of Marcuse inspires a critique of prior critical theory. Horkheimer and Adorno, I believe, exaggerated the capacity of an abstract, overly cerebral concept of reason to be an effective emancipatory stimulus. I read Marx and Marcuse as suggesting that revolt emerges from intolerable suffering caused by crises and contradictions in the social system, not from pure thought. The working-class will not awaken to their revolutionary potential by reading *Capital* (or, today *One-Dimensional Man*) but by reason of their subjectively experienced exploitation and unhappiness.

Thus, critical theory is to have the function of raising rebellion to the level of full radicalism: this is what it means to *mediate* and to *synthesize* existing struggle. As a dialectical theory, Marxism does not blind itself to shifts in systemic checks-and-balances, such as *rising* income-levels and *enhanced* welfare programs and social services. If Marxism is open-minded with respect to such developments, it will not prematurely attempt to take a more active didactic role in exhorting temperamentally unrevolutionary (or prerevolutionary) people to revolt.

The thesis of declining subjectivity advanced by Horkheimer and Adorno assumes a more cerebral subject than Marx or Marcuse presume. "Totally administered" life, as Horkheimer and Adorno called it, referred primarily to the administration of critical consciousness, not also to deeper libidinal domination. The concept of false consciousness is useful if it is not overstated. Once overstated, this concept minimizes prerational, inarticulate — even unconscious — sources of potential radicalism. People do not revolt or act constructively to transform society merely because they have read works of critical theory but because their current lives are no longer bearable. While critical theory can *organize* and *systematize* the rage behind revolt, it cannot cause revolt.

Horkheimer and Adorno countered non-existent subjectivity with *cerebral radicalism*, fighting fire with fire. But this led nowhere, or at least not towards effective political strategies. The thesis of declining subjectivity involved primarily the decline in consciousness; yet consciousness was given a particularly cerebral meaning by Horkheimer and

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

Adorno. Cerebral radicalism fought declining subjectivity with negative dialectics, believing that there was nothing else to do but to think one's own despair. By contrast, Marcuse could avoid the disengagement of cerebral radicalism by developing a concept of subjectivity which was not completely dominated, and which was even engaged in its own self-emancipation. Horkheimer and Adorno looked, and saw only total domination: they thus retreated into transcendent thought. Marcuse looked and saw human struggle, motivated not by readings of Marx but by unbearable alienation. Marcuse's concept of radicalism was developed from the *evidence* of radicalism, not conjured up through pure cerebration.

Why did thinkers like Horkheimer and Adorno go as far as to suggest that the alleged demise of subjectivity required a strictly cerebral radicalism? The answer, I believe, lies in the failure of the original Frankfurt thinkers to integrate psychological with sociological perspectives in such a way as to comprehend the biological-anthropological foundation of human being. The original Frankfurt thinkers did not develop an adequate concept of *human nature* — and thus of a new subjectivity — because they accepted the orthodox Marxist critique of “philosophical anthropology” and of all theories which tend to hypostatize a static human nature.

The Hegelian Marxists were *historicist*, or reluctant to speculate about invariant dimensions of human needs and human nature. The historicist strain in Marxism was inspired by Marx's reluctance to speak concretely about details of life in communist society. Historicism issued in a concept of reified human being, providing grounds for the thesis of spurious subjectivity. Lacking a definite concept of human nature, Horkheimer and Adorno could not develop the concept of a subjectivity capable of overcoming reification.

Marcuse, by contrast, was reluctant to endorse the relativistic implications of historicism. His reconstitution of psychoanalysis was meant to introduce into Marxism an *empirical concept of human nature*, free to some extent from historical determinations. This allowed Marcuse to develop a concept of radicalism which was dependent on an active, struggling — not completely manipulated — human being.

Moreover, it allowed Marcuse to *perceive* struggling humanity in the process of its own self-liberation. Marcuse did not attempt to fit a pre-given image of authentic radicalism over existent struggle, necessarily finding it to be reformist and insufficient according to the criteria of cerebral radicalism; instead, he allowed on-going struggle to inform his own theoretical construction of relevant radicalism.

Marcuse could therefore overcome the resistance to empirical research of Horkheimer and Adorno in their later years.²³ The "empirical" to Marcuse was the birthplace of potential radicalism, the site of human self-emancipation, Horkheimer's and Adorno's thesis of spurious subjectivity *necessarily* eschewed praxis-oriented research because all social phenomena were perceived as being equally constituted by dominant, dominating interests. The appearance of radicalism, thus, could be discounted as a product of manipulated consciousness, making empirical research a useless attempt to validate the existence of non-existent subjectivity. One even gets the impression that Adorno discounted all rebellion which did not attain the philosophical erudition of his own work.

A concept of human nature is required by a radical social science which endeavours to *locate* and to *organize* on-going struggle. Otherwise, struggle will appear superficial and reformist. A concept of *ineradicable subjectivity*, produced by philosophical insight into the empirical nature of man, allows critical theory to overcome its resistance to a practice-oriented empiricism designed to locate and organize incipient radicalism.

IV. New Epistemological and Political Strategies: The Dialectical Sensibility

Critical theory in Marcuse's hands has begun to transcend its pessimism about effecting social change in late capitalist society. The transcendence of pessimism, and the subsequent repoliticization of critical theory, turns on the concept of human nature adopted by theorists. If empirical subjectivity still exists, political radicalism again becomes a meaningful possibility.

I submit that critical theory can overcome its proclivity for abstract philosophical negation and cerebral radicalism (a) by developing a concept of subjectivity which allows it to recognize and locate empirical instances of struggle to create new institutions; (b) by developing an orientation to the relation between theory and practice which more nearly approximates Marx's own concept of the advisory role of theory.

The first task can be characterized as involving epistemological strategies, the second as involving political strategies. These tasks are intimately related, inasmuch as a Marxian theory of knowledge relates directly to its attitude towards stimulating social change. Objectivistic epistemology tends to reinforce a fatalistic attitude to social change, as I have argued elsewhere.²⁴ Marxian positivism degrades the role of consciousness both epistemologically *and* politically, accepting an image of fully heteronomous subjectivity.

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

Again, I submit that the thorough-going critique of scientism by members of the original Frankfurt School led them to scrap the advisory role of theory and to abandon the prospect of effective radicalism. It is not the case that Adorno believed that change was impossible, for he remained a dialectical thinker, fundamentally uncertain about the future. He only abandoned the advisory role of theory (developed by Marx) in the belief that human subjectivity could not be perceived as revolutionary and thus theory could not improve and deepen its political possibilities. In overcoming the deep-seated historicism and purely cerebral orientation of the original Frankfurt School, critical theory will be able to develop a *possible concept of radicalism*, rooted in an image of constitutive subjectivity. Empiricism will take the form of uncovering the objective potential of radical activity. Radical social science will locate existing rebellion and thus counter its original tendency to view modern capitalism as a self-sufficient, automatic totality, capable of integrating all opposition.

Radical empiricism will construct the model of a constitutive human being. It will utilize particular examples of struggle to illuminate a broader theory of change. Epistemological strategies become relevant to political strategies in the sense that critical theory will *locate* empirical instances of rebellion in order to *illuminate* their radical potential. Theory will allow rebellion to think its own radicalism, to locate its sense of injustice and proposed alternative institutions in a theoretical totality. *Out of struggle will spring the resources for creating a theory to improve and to enhance struggle.*

Radical empiricism becomes a form of political activity as soon as it enters the dialectic of theory and practice (task number *b*). Radical empiricism sheds the disengagement of traditional, purely contemplative theories by *taking control* of the process of cognition. The division between manual and mental labour is overcome by what Gramsci called "organic intellectuals", intellectuals who refuse to remain aloof from human struggle. The organic intellectual does not rely on experts and dead authorities, believing that cognition is a constructive activity which must be renewed continuously, never able to rest with final and ultimate knowledge.

Radical empiricism is itself a political strategy; it challenges the scientific concept of disinterested knowledge, taking inspiration from Marx's concept of "practical-critical activity" in *Theses on Feuerbach*. Radical empiricism eschews the abstract tendencies of traditional theory by overturning the dualism between contemplation and action, a dualism which Lukács characterized as an "antinomy of bourgeois thought".

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

rationalize the workers' movement. Marx learned from struggling workers in order to teach them about their possible historical mission.

Radical social science will create a theory of change from empirical evidence of existing struggle (task number *b*). In order to perceive existing struggle theorists must utilize a concept of constitutive subjectivity which *provides for* the possibility of radicalism (task number *a*). If society is fully one-dimensional (a thesis falsely ascribed to Marcuse, one which he has never endorsed),²⁵ it would make no sense to harness examples of rebellion in creating a new theory of change. The issue here is that of the existence or absence of revolutionary agents. Critical theory stands or falls on its estimate of the *possibility* of social change. A theorist indulges his insight and imagination in taking a position on the possibility of change and, implicitly, on a concept of subjectivity. Once this step has been taken, certain empirical strategies suggest themselves. These strategies are oriented to developing a theory of change rooted in existing examples of rebellion.

My own position, with Marcuse and others, is that change is presently possible. My concept of subjectivity suggests the possibility that people can *and do* create alternative institutions. I am reluctant to accept the thesis of declining individuality; instead, I am concerned to locate existing rebellion in developing the foundations of a new, more relevant theory of change.

Once tasks numbers *a* and *b* have been accomplished, and a dialectical sensibility created, a radical social science can take wing. Assuming a concept of constitutive subjectivity *and* assuming an advisory role for a theory constructed with evidence from empirical cognition, a revised theory of change can be outlined.

However, there is a kind of Marxian empiricism which neither assumes the relevance of constitutive subjectivity nor conceives of theoretical cognition as advisory and practice-oriented. I submit that within bourgeois social science, Marxism is usually viewed as this type of empiricism, being merely a variant of value-free social science. I characterize this version as *Weberian Marxism* because it rests upon Weber's concept of value-free scientific objectivity, rejecting Marx's concept of practice-oriented empiricism developed, if briefly, in *Theses on Feuerbach*. Weberian Marxism is a product of the neo-Kantian Marxism of the Second International, further developing its dichotomy of knowledge and action.

While Horkheimer and Adorno overstated their critique of scientism, or appeared to do so, Weberian Marxists have neglected the theoretical significance of the critique of scientism. Marxist empiricism can take a

variety of forms, some of which depart from the dialectical epistemology embraced by Lukács and Korsch. Scientistic Marxism fails to endorse the practice-oriented implications of Marx's revolutionary science, believing that Marxian empiricism must take the form of value-neutral social science developed most systematically by Max Weber.

I contrapose Weberian Marxism to dialectical Marxism: Weberian Marxism separates Marxian social theory from radical political activity. Sociologists like Tom Bottomore²⁶ follow Weber in arguing that Marxian empiricism must formulate causal relationships which can provide greater comprehension of social dynamics. While the radical empiricism which I propose does not abandon the cognitive purpose of science, it is a *dialectical* empiricism in that it *intervenes* in the social processes which it cognizes. Marxist positivism, buttressed by Weber's canon of value-free objectivity, stands in a passive relationship to the objective world, failing to adopt the mediating, advisory role with respect to existing struggle that I believe Marx recommended.

Theory and practice are not identical, as certain critical theorists have unwittingly implied, believing that the critique of ideology and of captive subjectivity must *replace* political activism. But neither are theory and practice unconnected, as Weberian Marxists assume. Dialectical empiricism is unlike non-Marxist social sciences in that it seeks a particular type of information, namely, about how human struggle might be able to change society. Dialectical empiricism seeks to inform rebellion of its political possibilities. In this sense, Weberian Marxism does not think of itself as a special science — a science which struggles to make itself unnecessary by changing society — but only as an instance of value-neutral empiricism.

The Weberian Marxist *as a scientist* does not allow political commitments to affect his scientific cognition. However, the radical empiricist does not *separate* his life as a scientist from his life as a political partisan and activist. He does not make this separation because, as Marx bluntly reminded us, the point is to change the world, not only to interpret it.

Marxist social science either *acts* as a change-agent in society, advising and stimulating on-going rebellion; or it *reflects* social processes, refusing to unify cognitive and political roles.

I submit that the model of a revolutionary working-class will be replaced by a model of revolutionary self-management and deprofessionalization. In this sense, the class-specific attack on the capitalist division of labour launched by Marx will be *generalized* into an attack on all aspects of the division of labour, involving every class.

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

Following Habermas and Mueller,²⁷ I submit that economic crises, endemic to an earlier stage in the development of capitalism, have been displaced by new forms of crisis such as the crisis of *legitimacy*. This type of crisis has resulted from the near-collapse of liberalism and its ideology of individual initiative, a collapse which has eroded the bases of political and cultural legitimacy in advanced industrial societies. Legitimation crisis is peculiar to a form of capitalism which rests not on sharp class-conflict but on expanding professional and service sectors. The ideology of liberalism, suitable to an earlier form of market capitalism, no longer elicits mass belief in the rationality of the social system. Affluence has not in its own right guaranteed a stable political system, especially when human dissatisfaction in the spheres of work and leisure has not been mitigated by mere consumption.²⁸

Class-conflict is now largely replaced by cynicism about the rationality and humanity of the system. A cynical public fails to trust economic and cultural elites, and begins to reject the imposition of authority. In this sense, the locus of crisis and rebellion has changed since the time of Marx. Job-dissatisfaction and moral anomie have largely replaced poverty in advanced industrial society as manifestations of alienation.

In this context, resentment of exploitative economic elites is replaced by resentment of *imposed authority*. People feel that they can have no input to complex decision-making processes, nor control over their work-places, communities and social services. The world appears to be beyond the ken of subjective control, an illusion sustained knowingly by the ideology of scientism and technocracy which has largely superseded liberalism.

Marxism thus can be most effective by enhancing the struggle to *take control* over private and public existences. The on-going rebellion against authority imposed from above can be *mediated* and *organized* by modern critical theory, and raised to a higher level of theoretically self-conscious radicalism. For example, the movement to develop neighbourhood control in large urban centres can be seized upon by critical theory and informed about its own latent radicalism, its denial of imposed authority.

Instead of searching for a revolutionary working-class, which becomes more and more bourgeois as the scope and powers of unions expand, Marxists will instead search for movements to *take control* of social and political processes. They will attempt to provide a theoretical framework within which efforts to decentralize and deprofessionalize modern life can be perceived as radical. They will refuse to minimize the "revolu-

tionary" importance of these kinds of rebellion, no longer retaining the vocabulary of economic radicalism appropriate to an earlier stage of capitalism.

Paradoxically, the original Frankfurt theorists remained *more* traditional in their concept of radical scholarship than perhaps appearances indicated. The pessimism which I have attributed to critical theory was a product of disappointment about a quiescent working-class. Although the thesis of declining subjectivity seems to apply to all social groups, middle-class and proletarian, I argue that it was secretly meant to apply only to the fallen working-class. The critical theorists did not believe that critical consciousness *as such* had been eradicated, but only the critical consciousness of the working-class. Horkheimer and Adorno believed that certain radical intellectuals were privileged in that they were not captives of instrumental rationality.

The original Frankfurt theorists were bourgeois intellectuals in the sense that they did not believe that intellectual theoretical practice was a political activity and, consequently, that their own activity needed to be transformed. In this regard, the critical theorists failed to develop new concepts of radical scholarship, falling back on the archetype of "critical criticism", as Marx called it, or disengaged intellectuality. Had the Frankfurt theorists actually *revised* Marx's revolutionary science, they could have developed a concept of intellectual deprofessionalization and even self-management, becoming "organic intellectuals" in Gramsci's terms. Shifting the analytic terms of Marxian theory, from the class-specific model of proletarian activism to the generalized model of revolutionary self-management, might have allowed the Frankfurt critics to shed their own self-identity as traditional scholars, disengaged from politics.

That Adorno and Horkheimer in the late 1960s felt threatened by the West German New Left, by their blatant eroticism and attack on authority-structures and professional roles *including* traditional Marxist scholarship, is comprehensible in light of this interpretation. Critical theory could not adequately shift gears in developing a radical empiricism which would allow the theory of social change to be appropriately transformed. This issued in the traditionalist concept of professional scholarship which Horkheimer and Adorno retained.

A radical empiricism based upon a concept of constitutive subjectivity requires that the role of the intellectual be rethought. An orthodox Marxist shies away from the demystification of authority-structures because he fears that his own authoritative role will be weakened in the process. A Marxist who is not reluctant to abandon faith in a

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

proletarian revolution can become a practice-oriented intellectual, no longer reluctant to adjust his own intellectual and political self-image to the exigencies of on-going radicalism. I would argue that Marcuse could so readily come to terms with the New Left in the 1960s because he — alone among the Frankfurt theorists — was receptive to rebellion which did not fit traditional models, being a dialectical sensibility and radical empiricist.

Unless critical theory sheds its thesis of declining individuality and recaptures its advisory relationship to struggle (tasks numbers *a* and *b*, above) it will remain politically irrelevant. Marxists can either await a delayed revolution to be carried out by the working-class, or they can return to the inspiration of Marx's revolutionary materialism and his idea that radicalism provides theory with empirical and political resources and not the other way around. Critical theory seeks the promise of emancipation in unorthodox forms of struggle, constantly putting intellectual radicalism to the test of social and political practice, becoming a *living theory* which refuses to separate cognitive and political roles.

The Marxist intellectual can become a dialectical sensibility, engaging in his own particular type of subjective revolt against imposed authority. The dialectical sensibility does not separate theory and practice, envisaging instead a radical intellectuality which itself contributes to social change. It remains for this type of theoretical practice to be articulated.²⁹

Sociology
Bishop's University

BEN AGGER

Notes

1. See pp. 37-39 of *The Communist Manifesto*, in *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, edited by Lewis S. Feuer, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1959, on this.
2. "Automatic Marxism" is a term used by Russell Jacoby to characterize deterministic Marxism which eliminates the subjective factor. See Russell Jacoby, "Towards a Critique of Automatic Marxism", *Telos*, no. 10, and "Politics of the Crisis Theory", *Telos*, No. 23 for the development of this concept.
3. See George Lichtheim, *From Marx to Hegel*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1971, on this characterization.
4. Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1970.
5. See the critiques of Hegelian Marxism by Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, London, Allen Lane, 1969, and by Lucio Colletti, *Marxism and Hegel*, London, NLB, 1973. For a critique of their critiques, see my "On Science as Domination", in *Domination*, edited by Alkis Kontos, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1975, pp. 185-200.
6. "(Marx and Engels) always treated ideologies — including philosophy — as concrete realities and not as empty fantasies". Karl Korsch, *Marxism and Philosophy*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1970, p. 73. "(Marx's) was a materialism whose theory comprehended the totality of society and history, and whose practice overthrew it." p. 77.
7. See, for example, Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason*, New York, Seabury Press, 1974, Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1972; Theodor W. Adorno *Negative Dialectics*, New York, Seabury Press, 1973, Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, London, NLB, 1974; Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1974.
8. For example, see Marcuse's essays from the early years of the Institute, *Negations*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968. Also see Horkheimer's "Authoritarian State", *Telos*, No. 15, for a seminal analysis of the transformation of market into state, or monopoly, capitalism.
9. See Georg Lukács, *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of his Thought*, London, NLB, 1970. "... Lenin is the greatest thinker to have been produced by the revolutionary working-class movement." p. 9.
10. See the Preface to the second edition ("A Note on Dialectics") of Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1960, for his articulation of the concept of "negative thinking".
11. See pp. 101-112, Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975, on scientism as a "para-ideology". "... the para-ideology of science and technology makes the exercise of governmental power acceptable by seemingly depoliticizing politics. Scientific and technological knowledge conceal class-specific interests, value systems, and the nature of domination. Because scientific methodologies do indeed develop independently from group or class interests, it is easy to convey implicitly the idea that decision-making based on science and technology is just as detached from special interests. This invocation of scientific methods seriously and deleteriously obscures the political process. The extent to which the para-ideology of science and technology is accepted by the population is unknown, but traces of it can be found in the refracted belief that solutions to social problems can and will eventually be found through scientific research and the application of technological knowledge. Such a belief cements the status quo by de-emphasizing political

DIALECTICAL SENSIBILITY I

- solutions to society's problems'. *Ibid.*, p. 111. Also see Jürgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as 'Ideology'", in his *Toward a Rational Society*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1970. Habermas' essay is an original contribution to the critique of scientism, from which Meuller draws much of his inspiration.
12. The phrase "damaged life" is taken from the sub-title of Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, London, NLB, 1974. For a discussion of the relevance of this concept for critical theory, see my "Marcuse and Habermas on New Science", *Polity*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Winter 1976, especially footnote 7.
 13. See Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, New York, Herder and Herder, 1972, on the equivalency of myth and enlightenment.
 14. "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed. The summary judgement that it had merely interpreted the world, that resignation in the face of reality had crippled it in itself, becomes a defeatism of reason after the attempt to change the world miscarried.", p. 3, Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, New York, Seabury Press, 1973.
 15. "The theoretical conclusions of the communists are in no way based on ideas or principles that have been invented, or discovered, by this or that would-be reformer. They merely express, in general terms, actual relations springing from an existing class struggle, from a historical movement going on under our very eyes.", p. 20, *Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy*, edited by Lewis S. Feuer, Garden City, New York, Doubleday, 1959. This is a classic formulation of the relation between action and theory, a formulation which I consider essential to dialectical materialism.
 16. For one expression of the thesis of declining subjectivity see Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*, New York, Seabury Press, 1974, especially the chapter entitled "Rise and Decline of the Individual", pp. 128-161. Also see Russell Jacoby's *Social Amnesia*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1975.
 17. See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, Boston, Little, Brown, 1973, pp. 103-106. "It was . . . left to the member of the Institute's inner circle who had had the least to do with the psychological speculations of the American period to attempt once again to reconcile Freud and Marx in an optimistic direction. In *Eros and Civilization*, Herbert Marcuse sought to rescue that 'revolutionary Freud' whom Fromm had dismissed as a myth and whom Horkheimer and Adorno had turned into a prophet of gloom". p. 106.
 18. See Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1969 and Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1973. For an interpretation of Marcuse's sexual and aesthetic theories, and a discussion of differences between Marcuse and Adorno in this regard, see my "On Happiness and the Damaged Life", in *On Critical Theory*, edited by John O'Neill, New York, Seabury Press, 1976.
 19. "What is to be abolished is not the reality principle: not everything, but such particular things as business, politics, exploitation, poverty.", pp. 235-236, "Love Mystified: A Critique of Norman O. Brown", in Herbert Marcuse, *Negations*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1968.
 20. Russell Jacoby, *Social Amnesia*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1975, pp. 17-18.
 21. Erica Sherover, review of Russell Jacoby's *Social Amnesia*, *Telos*, No. 25, Fall 1975, p. 203.

BEN AGGER

22. "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness.", p. 2, Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, New York, International Publishers, 1970.
23. Horkheimer and Adorno did not entirely reject empirical research as such. "The usual objection, that empirical research is too mechanical, too crude, and too unspiritual, shifts the responsibility from that which science is investigating to science itself. The much-castigated inhumanity of empirical methods still is more humane than the humanizing of the inhuman.", p. 123, *Aspects of Sociology*, by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, London, Heinemann Educational Books, 1973. However, they did not employ empirical research to suggest new political strategies but only to reveal the depths of which domination had penetrated.
24. See my Doctoral thesis in the Department of Political Economy, University of Toronto, 1976, "The Uses of Marx; The Concept of Epistemology in Contemporary Marxism", for a discussion of the relationship between Marxist positivism and a fatalistic attitude to social change.
25. Although *One-Dimensional Man* ostensibly posits the decline of subjectivity, Marcuse is clear that social change is not impossible. He characterizes the present historical situation as "ambiguous". He says: "*One-Dimensional Man* will vacillate throughout between two contradictory hypotheses: (1) that advanced industrial society is capable of containing qualitative change for the foreseeable future; (2) that forces and tendencies exist which may break this containment and explode the society. I do not think that a clear answer can be given." p. xv, Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1964.
26. In *Marxist Sociology*, London, Macmillan Press, 1975, Tom Bottomore develops a version of Marxian empiricism. He criticizes the Hegelian Marxists for allegedly abandoning Marxism's revolutionary purpose. Instead, he proposes a type of Weberian Marxism which separates the cognitive intentions of Marxian empiricism from the political goal of communism. "... sociology (is) an empirical science which comprises observation statements of diverse kinds within a theoretical framework, and aims to establish classifications of social phenomena functional correlations and causal or quasi-causal connections; ... Marxism (is) an attempt to construct and develop a general social science in this sense." p. 67. Bottomore's notion of a "general social science", is, I would argue, antithetical to Marx's concept of a dialectical epistemology. A general social science merely interprets the world, maintaining a passive attitude with respect to the possibility of its own activism. Bottomore's critique of critical theory and of Hegelian Marxism in general flows from his conception of Marxism as a general social science. The critical theorists made claim "to the possession of a privileged insight into the truth about history that could be opposed to any merely empirical, sociological account of historical events in all their disturbing nastiness." pp. 47-48. Bottomore here invokes criteria of cognitive validity taken directly from Weber. But I submit that all theoretical knowledge is a product of "privileged insight into the truth", in his terms, and that no theorist can be on any more solid footing than his own insight into possible historical scenarios. Had Marx been a Weberian Marxist in this sense, he probably would have failed to advance bold hypotheses about the development of capitalism which emerged in *Capital*.
27. See Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1975, and Claus Mueller, *The Politics of Communication*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1975. They both develop the analysis of legitimacy crisis as the foundation of a new Marxism.
28. See William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1976, on the relationship between human needs and consumption in advanced industrial society.
29. This concept of "living theory" is further developed in "Dialectical Sensibility II: Towards a New Theoretical Practice," forthcoming in *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*.