7 Reappraisals of Critical Theory: The Legacy of the Frankfurt School in America

The participants in any discussion about Critical Theory in the United States have to keep in mind that Critical Theory is not identical with the Frankfurt School, at least not with the work of Horkheimer and Adorno or their disciples in postwar Germany. In this country, Critical Theory, particularly during the 1950s and early 1960s, was primarily associated with Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and Leo Lowenthal, originally members of the Institute for Social Research, who decided to stay in America after World War II. Clearly, the American New Left was informed and shaped by the work of Herbert Marcuse, rather than that of Adorno or Walter Benjamin. Of course, it is also true that Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man* prepared the way for the reception of Adorno's and Benjamin's more complex and demanding oeuvres during the 1970s. As Martin Jay has shown, the reception and integration of Adorno's work was a slow and uneven process, which, with good reasons, can be called incomplete even today.[1] Much of Adorno's and Benjamin's writings are not yet available in English and are still waiting to be discovered by American critics. Still, it would be misleading to argue that

1. Martin Jay, "Adorno and America," in his *Permanent Exiles: Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (New York, 1986), 120–37.

the theory of the Frankfurt School is not known in the English-speaking world. English editions, especially of Jürgen Habermas's writings, and numerous critical studies attest to its visibility. In fact, during the last decade, the presence of the "German" brand of the Frankfurt School has to some extent eclipsed the "American"contribution of Marcuse and Lowenthal, because the work of Adorno, Benjamin, and Habermas participates more openly in present theoretical discourse. This presence today clearly transcends the level of primarily historical interest, which had guided Martin Jay's first attempt to map the ideas and concepts of the Frankfurt School in *Dialectical Imagination* (1973) and Susan Buck-Morss's intricate analysis of the early Adorno in her book *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (1977).[2]

Today, we have to assess the presence of Critical Theory in different ways. We have to appraise its function within the contemporary configuration, which has radically changed since the initial reception of the Frankfurt School during the late 1960s. At that time, the work of Adorno, Benjamin, and the early Habermas was integrated into the American discussion as a way of reinforcing the project of Western Marxism. The oppositional and critical force of these writers was directed against the formalist preferences of the New Critics and liberal social theory, for instance, the theories of Talcott Parsons and his students. The emphasis was clearly placed on the aspect of radical intervention to be carried out by marginal social groups. In *Marxism and Form* (1971), Fredric Jameson articulated this concern by bringing together the voices of Adorno and Benjamin with those of Lukács and Sartre. Jameson's attempt at a synthesis underscored the refunctioning of Critical Theory in the American context. While the Frankfurt School in Germany was quite unwilling to join with Lukács, in the United States,

2. See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923–1950* (Boston, 1973); and Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York, 1979).

Critical Theory was brought in as a supplement to more traditional Marxist theory. This supplemental role—in the case of Jameson ultimately predicated on a Lukácsian model—had two strategic functions: first, Critical Theory was expected to provide Marxist literary criticism with a more refined model in which the mediation between social and aesthetic forces would be worked out in a more satisfactory manner; second, the influx of Critical Theory was expected to counter the growing influence of structuralist Althusserian Marxism, whose most visible proponent became Terry Eagleton.

It would suffice to glance at the reviewer section of *Telos*, on the one hand, and that of *New Left Review*, on the other, to get an impression of the ongoing struggle within the leftist camp. The relentless polemic of *Telos's* contributors against the new "orthodoxy" under the disguise of French structuralism relied implicitly and occasionally explicitly on the rhetoric of the Frankfurt School against orthodox Marxism. For the *Telos* circle, Marx could be rescued from the dead weight of the Third International only through the rigorous emphasis on the critical and subversive moment in his works. In this context, Critical Theory served as a weapon to undermine the structure of reified dogma. Yet even the Frankfurt School was not critical enough; the writings of its members too had to be purged of hidden orthodox elements. In his introduction to the *Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (1978), Paul Piccone outlined what he considered the essential aspects of the Frankfurt School. More important, Piccone underscored the need for a critique of Critical Theory in its own spirit. He argued: "Contrary to Left conventional wisdom, according to which the quandaries of critical theory are the result of its having jettisoned fundamental Marxist assumptions, the real problem was the exact opposite: the unwarranted retention of too much traditional Marxist baggage."[3] This indictment, apart from the question

3. Paul Piccone, "General Introduction," in *The Essential Frankfurt*

of its historical truth, reflects a very specific moment in the history of the New Left, namely the realization that its project had failed. The struggle for political and social emancipation was now perceived as a myth that had to be exploded—with the help of Critical Theory, especially Adorno's micrological criticism. At this juncture, Piccone resolutely rejected Marcuse's attempts at theorizing on a macrological level, which he saw as confirming, at least implicitly, the Lukácsian project of *History and Class Consciousness*. From this vantage point, the failure of Critical Theory has to do with the central flaw of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, its inability to articulate the dialectic of advanced capitalist societies in specific historical terms. As a result of this inability, "the dialectic becomes dehistoricized to cover the whole of Western civilization as the genesis of the domination of the concept. Consequently, critical theory does not even attempt to prefigure the future by elaborating the mediations necessary to bring it about, and becomes purely defensive: it ultimately retreats to defend particularity, autonomy and nonidentity against an allegedly totally administered society where thinking itself appears as a dispensable luxury."[4]

Piccone's critique focuses precisely on those moments that would resurface in the debate of the 1980s: subjectivity, autonomy, and nonidentity. What Piccone holds against Adorno is the unchallenged presence of a concept of totality that would necessarily marginalize nonidentity. In the totally planned society, resistance is antiquated from the beginning. Piccone's attempt to recuperate Critical Theory emphasizes oppositional impetus at the expense of content. For Piccone, the future of Critical Theory lies in its radically undogmatic rethinking of advanced capitalist societies, especially their political and cul-

School Reader, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (New York, 1978), v, xv.

4. Ibid., xvi.

tural systems. This radical critique includes the Adornian category of negativity, since the characteristic of postwar state capitalism is its ability to create and tolerate its own opposition. In this context, *Telos* for many years gave its support to the Habermasian version of Critical Theory, since *Legitimation Crisis* (1973) seemed to offer the kind of analysis that Piccone had sketched out in his introduction. The journal's more recent return to Adorno, and its simultaneous growing hostility toward Habermas, reflects yet another turn in the definition of "Critical Theory," a turn that articulates the interface of Critical Theory and poststructuralism.[5] Within the theoretical discourse of the 1980s, a new configuration has begun to emerge. Perhaps the crucial aspect of this new constellation is the breakup of Critical Theory, particularly the separation made between Habermas, on the one hand, and Adorno and Benjamin, on the other. Hence, the work of these theorists, despite the common background they share, has functioned in rather different ways.

The most obvious case is the theory of Jürgen Habermas, which in some quarters has been identified with Critical Theory. It is interesting to note, however, that its reception during the 1980s, highly controversial as it was, took a separate path from the Frankfurt School. Not only did Habermas's work address problems of social and political theory that the older generation had not articulated, but it also redefined the parameters in such a way that it opened a dialogue with theorists who would not have responded to Horkheimer's and Adorno's writings. The American discourse of the 1980s locates Habermas, and quite justly so, as a consistent defender of modernity. It is not accidental, therefore, that Thomas McCarthy's introduction to *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984) invokes the modernity/antimodernity opposition in order to outline the Habermasian project. The defense of reason must

5. See Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Back to Adorno," *Telos* 81 (Fall 1989): 5–29.

articulate itself as a critique of reason. More specifically, McCarthy situates this project and its relevance in the context of a post-Heideggerian and post-Wittgensteinian age that has thoroughly deconstructed the categories of the Western tradition.[6] While the details of McCarthy's introduction are of no particular importance in this context, the crucial question for someone who wants to introduce a theory based on linguistic consensus is its locus in the American discussion. For McCarthy, Habermasian theory indeed corrected and superseded the older Frankfurt School by exposing the decisionism of Max Weber's sociological model, which Horkheimer and Adorno took over too uncritically. Therefore, McCarthy suggests that Habermas was right to criticize Western Marxism, including the Frankfurt School, and replace it with a system/subsystem model. "He seeks to demonstrate that this model can make good the failure of orthodox Marxism to comprehend central features of advanced capitalism—in particular, government interventionism, mass democracy, and the social-welfare state." McCarthy concurs with Habermas's premise that the problems of modernity are not "rooted in rationalization as such" but are connected with failures of institutionalization, in particular with the colonization of the life-world by instrumental rationality.[7]

It is interesting to note that McCarthy's introduction to Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* refers only in passing to Habermas's earlier work. By contrast, Richard J. Bernstein's introduction to *Habermas and Modernity* (1985) offers a much broader historical perspective, beginning with the philosopher's early experience. Yet his account also places the emphasis on the "mature" work and the question of rationality/modernity (the Weberian connection). Not unlike McCarthy, Bernstein argues that the unresolved problem of

6. Thomas McCarthy, "Translator's Introduction," in Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society* (Boston, 1984), viii.

7. Ibid., xxxiii, xxxvii.

rationality (the Weberian cage of modern society), as it resurfaces in Lukács and later in Horkheimer and Adorno, propelled Habermas beyond the frame of the old Frankfurt School toward a better solution. This solution would overcome the aporias of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Clearly, the Habermas debate of the 1980s gravitates toward *his Theory of Communicative Action*, his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (English edition, 1987), and his writings on moral theory; this tendency pushes his early work toward the background. In keeping with this trend, Bernstein criticizes *Knowledge and Human Interest* (1969) as a flawed transitional work whose unresolved problems forced Habermas radically to reconceptualize his theory. The quasi-transcendental grounding of his theory clearly invoked criticism from the analytical and the poststructuralist camp. In 1969 Habermas's theory was still rooted in the tradition of a philosophy of consciousness (Descartes). What Bernstein observes and supports in Habermas's more recent work is a reworking of the older concerns with a system of human interests on the basis of a theory of universal pragmatics. Most important, however, as Bernstein points out, Habermas has left the realm of a philosophy of consciousness and turned to a dialogical model. For Bernstein and the Habermasians in North America—among them Thomas McCarthy and Seyla Benhabib—the rational defense of reason and modernity is possible and clearly desirable. By the same token, Critical Theory is wedded to a conception of rationality that clearly transcends instrumental reason.

Hence, in the Habermas debate of the 1980s it is generally taken for granted that the theory of communicative action supersedes negative dialectics. Even those who invoke the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, like Albrecht Wellmer and Martin Jay, by and large do not call for a return to the Frankfurt School. As a result, in the American discussion Critical Theory has become polarized. Its Habermasian version, certainly more prominent among social scientists and philosophers, speaks to a community with rather different concerns than the first gen-

eration of the Frankfurt School. Thus, the critics of Habermasian theory are not necessarily the critics of Benjamin or Adorno, as we will see later. Their objections have little in common with the orthodox Marxist critique of the Frankfurt School (even that of the praxis group) or the polemic of empirical sociology, as it was articulated by Karl Popper in the *Positivismusstreit* of the early 1960s. The criticisms of Thomas Lukes or Richard Rorty bring categories to bear on Habermas's work that would hardly be applicable to either Adorno or Benjamin.[8] Both of them draw on the Anglo-American philosophical tradition in their critical discussion of Habermasian social theory. What is characteristic for their ongoing debate is that its participants (we can add the names of Nancy Fraser, Seyla Benhabib, and Thomas McCarthy) are basically sympathetic to the Habermasian project, although they are in many instances not satisfied with its arguments and therefore highly critical of its results. By and large they share with Habermas a skeptical attitude toward poststructuralist models and approaches.

In this respect, Richard Rorty's contribution stands out, since it makes an explicit attempt to bring Habermas into the orbit of French theory and the postmodernism debate. Rorty summarizes the controversy between Habermas and Lyotard in the following way: "So we find French critics of Habermas ready to abandon liberal politics in order to avoid universalistic philosophy, and Habermas trying to hang on to universalistic philosophy, with all its problems, in order to support liberal politics."[9] Habermas's reluctance to give up metanarrative as a form of legitimation, Rorty feels, is related to his aversion to a form of social and political criticism that is "context-dependent" (instead of generalizable). Vis-à-vis these two positives, he argues—and more recently McCarthy has presented

8. Richard Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity," and Anthony Giddens, "Reason without Revolution? Habermas's *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*," in *Habermas and Modernity*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), 161–76, 95–124.

9. Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard," 162.

similar arguments—that there is no need for a metanarrative, that the legitimation crisis of the modern age resulted from Kant's interpretation, especially his move to split "high culture up into science, morality, and art."[10] Rorty strongly opposes this interpretation, since it valorizes a metanarrative of modernity that is too narrow (German) and too pessimistic. What is more important, however, than Rorty's cultural evaluation of Habermas's tradition is his insight that French poststructuralism—for instance, Foucault's theory—shares some of Habermas's problems insofar as it buys into the Kantian definition of modernity and therefore also into the Habermasian agenda (although of course not into his solutions). Hence his critique addresses both Lyotard (and Foucault) and Habermas, insisting on a new canon without subject philosophy and metanarrative but with a strong commitment to liberal (Habermasian) politics.

In terms of its historical significance, Rorty's essay helped to clarify not only Habermas's position vis-à-vis the continental philosophical tradition but also to map the fundamental conflict of the postmodernism debate that was initiated by Habermas's 1980 essay "Modernity versus Postmodernity" and later fueled by his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987). Since Habermas includes Horkheimer and Adorno in his fundamental critique, this debate has had an impact on the recent reception of Adorno as well. It was not entirely accidental that Rorty suggested a return to Adorno and Horkheimer as one way of getting away from metanarratives. On the other hand, it would be difficult to see Adorno outside the continental philosophical tradition that Rorty wants to cancel. For that reason, a philosophical alliance between Adorno and Rorty's pragmatism is unlikely—except for isolated points, such as the avoidance of dogmatic metanarratives and the need for mi-

10. Rorty, "Habermas and Lyotard," 166; Thomas McCarthy, "Practical Discourse and the Relations between Morality and Politics" (Paper read at a Habermas conference at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Oct. 1989).

crological criticism. Much of recent Adorno criticism has used similar issues in order to recover aspects of Critical Theory that were lost or repressed in Habermasian consensus theory.

Of significant import in this context is Joel Whitebook's attempt to reconstruct the contribution of Freud and psychoanalysis to Critical Theory.[11] While the primary interest of his essay is the reworking of psychological aspects of Critical Theory in Habermas's work, Whitebook resists the tendency of much recent Habermas criticism simply to discard the older Frankfurt School as "superseded" by Habermasian theory. To be sure, Whitebook's reconstruction of the Freudian components of Critical Theory is anything but uncritical. It points, among other things, to the limitations of id theory, as it was favored by Adorno and Marcuse, and to the somewhat pessimistic tone of id psychology. Whitebook specifically relates the "pessimism" of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to the authors' inability to come to terms with and integrate ego psychology. Yet, at the same time, he underscores the importance of the original agenda of the Frankfurt School by pointing out that Habermas, in his attempt to overcome the theoretical impasse of the early Critical Theory, also tends to shortchange the initial project.

Whitebook criticizes the Habermasian project for its neglect of the central concern of Adorno and Benjamin with happiness, a concern not grounded in abstract norms but linked to the concept of mimesis. As a consequence of its "linguistic turn," Habermasian theory of communicative action loses the sense of an "inner foreign territory," which defines Freudian theory and also its appropriation by Marcuse and Adorno. Hence for Habermas the category of alienation becomes less central and the problem of happiness a secondary one. His systematic distinction between happiness and social justice allows him to

11. Joel Whitebook, "Reason and Happiness: Some Psychoanalytic Themes in Critical Theory," in Bernstein, *Habermas and Modernity*, 140–60.

place in the foreground a notion of progress in the realm of morality, possibly at the expense of happiness. We should note that Whitebook acknowledges the theoretical advances of Habermasian theory over the older Frankfurt School, but he also wants to discuss the price for this gain. His critique boils down to the question of external reality and, more specifically, the question of the body. Thus he concludes: "we cannot defend the project of modernity—which must be defended—at the price of sacrificing the naturalistic tradition that runs from Feuerbach throughout the young Marx and Freud to the early Frankfurt School."[12]

Much of the recent discussion of Critical Theory has focused on the question Whitebook brings up in his assessment of Habermas's theory: Can one assume (with Bernstein, McCarthy, and others) that the theory of communicative action canceled older Critical Theory, or is there a need for a return to Adorno and Benjamin? To some extent, this question itself reflects the limited reception of post-Adornian Critical Theory in this country, for within the context of the German discussion it would not be plausible to perceive Habermas as the only heir to the Frankfurt School. Under these circumstances, resistance toward Habermasian theory can easily take the form of a "return" to older models, just as the dissatisfaction of the second generation of the Frankfurt School in West Germany articulated itself as a "return" to the Marxist origins of the Frankfurt School in the 1930s. This strategy of going back to the roots is sometimes linked to another move: the suggestion that the essence of Critical Theory is closely related to theoretical positions such as deconstruction or New Historicism. In this case, Adorno and Benjamin can be played out as potential allies against the Habermasian version of Critical Theory, or, on the other hand, Adorno can be framed—as in Bernstein's account—as a crypto-Heideggerian.

It may be appropriate at this point to examine the stakes of

12. Ibid., 160.

the debate. It goes without saying that the request for a return to Adorno and Benjamin has little to do with the historical moment of their writings. The contributors to *Telos*—where the call for a return has been most consistent in recent years—are not ultimately interested in a historical reconstruction of the Frankfurt School, for instance, its program of the 1930s and its evolution during the 1940s and 1950s. The core of the agenda involves a rejection of Habermasian theory, of its definition of progress, modernity, and social justice. In other words, the politics of Habermasian theory, its function within the American academy, has aroused the suspicion of the Left. By the same token, the decidedly more positive evaluation of Habermas in the writings of Perry Anderson (at Adorno's expense) reflects a significant change in the configuration of British Marxism.[13] Here it is deconstruction that serves as the negative force for the reevaluation. In both cases, the reappraisal of Critical Theory also involves reconfigurations in the understanding of oppositions and alliances. The political agenda, however, is rarely spelled out; typically, it is couched in epistemological and methodological terms. Unlike the 1960s and early 1970s, when theoretical issues were frequently reduced to political ones, during the 1980s we find a tendency to discuss political conflicts under the disguise of theoretical models. For this reason the contemporary contribution of Critical Theory is best assessed in the context of specific themes and issues.

My own discussion will focus on three areas, namely, conceptions of culture, the postmodernism debate, and the theoretical articulation of feminism. Obviously, these thematic concerns are interrelated, though they operate on different levels: among them, it is primarily the theory of culture that serves as a metalevel for the discussion of the other two, feminism and postmodernism. In its more differentiated conception of culture, Critical Theory is said to have made major gains in

13. Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Chicago, 1984).

comparison with traditional Marxism. In different ways, Benjamin, Adorno, and Marcuse criticized reductive base/superstructure models. For Habermas, a return to a traditional model was never in question; at the same time, however, from his early work on, his conceptualization of culture differs significantly from Adorno's attempts. These differences have left their traces in the American debate of the 1980s—not only in the encounter between Critical Theory and poststructuralist approaches but also in the less pronounced dialogue with Cultural Marxism and the New Historicism.

In certain ways both Marcuse's and Adorno's definitions of culture stayed very close to a rather narrow traditional conception of high culture (*Kultur*). Their work can positively invoke "culture" as the canonical tradition in literature or music. When Adorno practiced his method of close reading, the typical focus remained masterpieces of the high-culture tradition, for instance, Beethoven's late sonatas or Goethe's *Iphigenie*. Needless to say, this exclusive definition of culture, with its close proximity to a conservative understanding of culture as an autonomous aesthetic realm, has not attracted much attention lately. More important are two aspects of Adorno's theory that have informed the discourse of the New Left and more recently seem to resurface in the work of the New Historians. First, the autonomy of culture is not absolute but mediated through social conventions and institutions. Such a conviction rejects as ideology the abstract concept of culture and considers the cultural criticism based on such an abstract notion dogmatic and uncritical. Second, the relationship between high culture and mass culture must not be understood as an opposition but rather as a dialectical relationship that has to be examined as part of the social formation. It was precisely this aspect of Adorno's theory of mass culture that was not fully understood in the American mass-culture debate of the 1940s and 1950s, since this debate treated the opposition as an abstract dichotomy. The Frankfurt School's critique of mass culture not only undermined this dichotomy but, in doing so, also broadened

the concept of culture, bringing into prominence aspects that traditional criticism had constantly excluded from critical scrutiny. The recent canon debate is clearly indebted to Critical Theory, although the connection is rarely explicit, since the immediate impetus for the discussion frequently comes from studies of ethnic subcultures and women's studies.

Obviously, it would be misleading to describe the critical discourse of the 1980s as a straight continuation or even modified extension of the Frankfurt School—or of Western Marxism, for that matter. What current critical approaches have retained, however, is a sense of the intrinsic relation between cultural interpretation and social theory. In fact, in the present debate, the classical distinction between them, which still informed the work of the older Frankfurt School, has vanished. Cultural theory has subsumed social theory, primarily under the rubric of cultural practices. Conversely, forms of domination and coercive practices are no longer exclusively or primarily located at the level of the social system. The concept of affirmative culture, introduced by Herbert Marcuse in 1937, captures part of this shift but not all of it. His own work, as well as that of Adorno, remained linked to the category of the autonomous art work as the bearer of oppositional and utopian forces and thus could not embrace a broad anthropological concept of culture. For Marcuse and Adorno the "core" of culture, the advanced art work, escapes cultural hegemony through its own formal structure, which articulates the opposition against the social relations in which it is embedded.

For the ongoing critical debate in the United States, the differentiated concept of culture of the Frankfurt School has been fruitful, yet by no means binding. Classical Critical Theory becomes one of a number of voices; frequently it is used—for instance, in John Brenkman's *Culture and Domination* (1987)—as a critical force for the discussion of thematic problems. For Brenkman, a critical definition of culture has to hark back to the writings of Marx and Engels. In this historical unfolding of the cultural problematic, the contribution of the

Frankfurt School becomes a significant moment (but no more than that) in the history of Western Marxism. Moreover, on a critical note, Brenkman suggests that Western Marxism (and the Frankfurt School) remains bound to the tradition of scientific Marxism, that is, to "the reduction of culture to consciousness and of social relations to relations of production."[14] As a result, culture becomes eclipsed and depoliticized.

While this assessment is useful in the case of Adorno, it certainly misses the core of Benjamin's later writings, which are precisely concerned with the political moment in culture. Brenkman, however, is certainly justified in underscoring the need for a political definition of culture. Of course, in this statement not only is the concept of culture at stake, but so also is the concept of the political. The typical dismissal of Adorno's philosophy of art during the 1970s as quietistic was predicated on a notion of politics as radical opposition rather than self-reflexive subversion. In more recent definitions of the political, the micrological aspect of culture and the literary text—favored in Adorno's approach—plays a more important role. It is not accidental, therefore, that Brenkman in his reading of Blake's poetry comes back to the notion of internal contradictions and language practice. Where he turns away from Adorno is the latter's understanding of the art work as an autonomous construct. Instead, he wants to focus on the double movement of a reading that responds to overdetermined and multivalent poetic language. By invoking Freudian interpretation, he wants to stress the suspended or floating attention of Blake's reader. But this strategy of reading and situating the literary text is much closer to Adorno than Brenkman seems to realize. Where he does indeed transcend the Adornian scope of criticism is in his notion that interpretation, even in its ideal form, always contains a moment of resistance, that the ideal reader is always engaged in social practices that codetermine the act of reading.

14. John Brenkman, *Culture and Domination* (Ithaca, 1985), 100.

What emerges in Brenkman's discussion is a fundamental dissatisfaction with the social theory of the older Frankfurt School. Indeed, for Brenkman the most apparent weakness of Adorno's later theory stems from the fact that he and Horkheimer failed to develop a more flexible model of capitalist societies after 1944. While Adorno considerably refined his aesthetic theory and criticism during the 1950s and 1960s, his concept of the advanced capitalist society as a totally administered society froze and did not take in later developments. The moment of reification becomes the final word for all social practices. Therefore, the subjective moment, unable to express itself socially, moves into the art work. This, however, means that the true locus of Adorno's late social theory is his aesthetic theory. The definition of the art work as a monad contains more than Adorno's explicit formulations of the relationship between society and art; it is the core of Adorno's theory, namely, the complete entwinement of the social and the aesthetic. To this we have to add the political aspect. The work of art is the site of political resistance. Still, Brenkman's critique addresses an important point. In Adorno's later theory the social agent is underprivileged; or, to put it differently, the social structure dominates the individual and his or her social practice. By harking back to Raymond Williams and British Cultural Marxism, Brenkman means to insert a different understanding of cultural practice, which undercuts the society/art dichotomy. The political significance of this strategy deserves attention. Its intent is to mobilize the interaction between poetry and society as an interaction between two discursive practices in such a way that the outcome is not already predetermined. In order to reestablish the political thrust of the Marxist tradition, Brenkman abandons Adorno's social theory as well as the premises of his micrological analysis, turning to a psychoanalytical approach instead.

If the political aspect of culture is at the center of the recent debate (and the case for this emphasis can be made), the legacy of Critical Theory comes into play in various and contradictory

forms. Different strands and phases can and have been played out against each other. Clearly, the concept of the political in Benjamin's criticism figures differently from that in Habermas's theory, for instance. But in spite of considerable differences of emphasis and outspoken disagreement about the legacy of Critical Theory, one is struck by a common element in more recent essays and books. Whereas the tenor of the discussion in the 1970s stressed the distance toward the older Frankfurt School for political reasons, the critical discussion of the 1980s has recuperated the political force of Critical Theory, especially in the writings of Benjamin, but also, more surprisingly, in the work of Adorno. For example, in *Modern Culture and Critical Theory* (1989), Russell A. Berman argues that Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* contains a political message that speaks to the contemporary situation, though mediated through a historical analysis of the mid-1940s. The radical move, Berman suggests, consists of educating the individual for autonomy. "For critical theory, autonomy is the project of the subject who has not yet escaped heteronomous determination but who might do so, a potential indicative of the openness of history not closed off by the idealism of an epistemic logic of genealogy."[15] We should note that the target of this polemical formulation is no longer a conservative defense of freedom or an orthodox Marxist conception of class struggle but Foucault's concept of genealogy with its stress on power. What Berman wants to bring into the foreground are the different political implications of two positions that seemingly concur in their critique of the Enlightenment. The point of this comparison is that Critical Theory, unlike Foucauldian genealogy, is not satisfied with a pessimistic account of structures of domination. Instead, it marks the moment of freedom in the resistance of the victim. This

15. Russell A. Berman, *Modern Culture and Critical Theory: Art, Politics, and the Legacy of the Frankfurt School* (Madison, Wis., 1989), 15.

reading of Adorno stands in clear although unacknowledged opposition to that of Habermas in the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, notwithstanding that it shares the turn against genealogy. Clearly, the attempt to revitalize Adorno, particularly in the area of cultural criticism, has created a division in the appropriation of Critical Theory. This strain becomes more visible in the postmodernism debate—a debate that has been labeled as an exchange between "German" and "French" theory, represented by Habermas and Foucault.

This is not the place to review the entire debate.[16] My observations will focus on the role of Critical Theory as a force in the definition of postmodernism. In this context, it is important to remind ourselves that Critical Theory is not identical with Habermasian theory. This is especially true in regard to the analysis and evaluation of modernity. The voices of the Frankfurt School have to be carefully distinguished. The intervention of Jürgen Habermas in 1980, which has made for a great deal of agitation in various camps, must also be understood as part of an ongoing debate within the Frankfurt School about the Enlightenment and its implications. It was prefigured already in the controversy between Benjamin and Adorno about the loss of aura and the function of mass culture and the new media (film).

For a number of reasons it is not entirely surprising that the response to Habermas's project has been ambiguous and strained among American critics, who are fundamentally sympathetic to Critical Theory. Moreover, from the vantage point of the American discourse on postmodernism, the contribution of Habermas came at a rather late stage of the debate. As Andreas Huyssen points out in his essay "Mapping the Postmodern," the debate about the end of modernism emerged in the

16. Two recent contributions questioning postmodernism in a Marxist frame are David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1989), and Douglas Vellner, ed., *Postmodernism/Jameson/Critique* (Washington, D.C., 1989).

United States during the 1960s.[17] Critics like Leslie Fiedler and Ihab Hassan introduced the term to examine contemporary literature. It was only during the late 1970s that the concept of postmodernism surfaced in France and Germany, where it took on a much broader meaning. The initial discussion dealt with the fate of the avant-garde after World War II and focused on the expansion of the literary and artistic opposition during the 1950s. The postmodernism debate of the 1980s, on the other hand, fueled by the contributions of Lyotard and Habermas, addressed a much larger issue, for the opposition modernism/postmodernism was now linked to another opposition, namely, modernity/postmodernity.

In his by now notorious essay "Modernity—an Incomplete Project," Habermas boldly subsumed the aesthetic debate under the historical debate about the post-Enlightenment age.[18] In doing so, he implicitly invoked the entire trajectory of Western Marxism from the early Lukács to the late Adorno, since in all its stages Western Marxism had to respond to the central problem: how do we understand and evaluate the transition that occurred during the eighteenth century? Clearly, through the amalgamation of modernism and modernity on the one hand, and of postmodernism and postmodernity on the other, the stakes became much higher—as did also the ensuing confusion. While Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (1974) conceptualized the problem of the end of the (classical) avant-garde in terms of a linear development from modernism to the avant-garde and its historical demise during the 1930s, thereby historicizing both Adorno and Lukács, the expansion of the debate during the 1980s has undermined the very teleology on which Bürger's argument was predicated.[19] As a result, the his-

17. Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986), 179–221.

18. This famous essay originally appeared in *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981) and was reprinted in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Port Townsend, Wash., 1983), 3–15.

19. Bürger's important work came out in Germany in 1974. See Peter

toricization of Adorno, which Bürger had emphasized, became again an open question. Similarly, Leslie Fiedler's strident attack on the ideology of High Modernism, which certainly included the position of Adorno, in a curious way supported the very distinction it wanted to undermine by reversing the traditional evaluation.[20] This reception of the Frankfurt School's cultural politics had to be exploded before a new appropriation could occur.

In the American configuration of the 1980s, some of the most interesting contributions to the problem of postmodernism and postmodernity have come from those critics who follow neither Habermas's line of argument nor the chorus of Foucauldian and Derridian counterattacks. Hal Foster's volume *The Anti-Aesthetic* (1983) and the fifth issue of *Cultural Critique* (1986/87) can be understood as attempts of the American Left to respond to the ambiguous shift in the discussion brought about by Habermas and Lyotard. In this context, Fredric Jameson's essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society" is a key to the interface between the American Left and Critical Theory. On one level, Jameson's analysis of postmodernism stays close to the thesis of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which links modern mass culture to advanced capitalism. Jameson views postmodernist culture as an extension of that logic: postmodernism corresponds to a change in postwar capitalism. "The 1960s are in many ways the key transitional period, a period in which the new international order (neocolonialism, the Green Revolution, computerization and electronic information) is at one and the same time set in place and is swept and shaken by its own internal contradictions and by external resistance."[21] In

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Bürger, *Theorie der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt, 1974). It was not translated into English until ten years later. See Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984).

20. Leslie Fiedler, "Cross the Border—Close the Gap," in *A Fiedler Reader* (New York, 1977), 170–94.

21. Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," in Foster, *The Anti-Aesthetic*, 113.

the immediate context, the question whether Jameson's assessment is plausible is not important; what matters is the clear connection of his position with the Frankfurt School. On another level, however, Jameson breaks away from a notion of autonomous art that Adorno never gave up. By defining the postmodernist style as pastiche, as a repetition without authenticity, he undercuts the avant-garde/mass-culture opposition on which Adorno's theory was predicated. From Adorno's point of view, this would mean that the moment of resistance in culture, which for him was inevitably coupled with the advanced art work, had vanished. The consequence would be complete despair, since hope, as Adorno tells us at the end of *Negative Dialectics* (1966), is linked to the nonconceptual particular, especially to the work of art.

Interestingly enough, Adorno's "pessimism," which overshadowed the German debate of the 1970s, has not had a major impact on the American postmodernism discussion of the 1980s. As Andreas Huyssen observed in 1981, the absence of a perceived downturn after the Second World War, as well as the absence of an indigenous American avant-garde (in the radical sense of the term), provided a dynamic to the postwar years that was missing in Europe. Thus he labels American art of the 1960s as the "colorful death mask of a classical avant-garde."[22] Yet the American endgame of the avant-garde, defining itself as postmodernism, is played out as rejection of high modernism and nostalgia for the historical avant-garde. While Huyssen, very much in the tradition of Critical Theory, points to the potentially affirmative character of postmodernism (for instance, its delight in pop culture), he carefully refrains from the Adornian tendency to view the end of the avant-garde as a complete closure of history. Rather, he concludes by underscoring the need for regaining a sense of history (beyond a notion of triviality) and a conception of cultural identity. At the same time, he does not advocate a return to the classical

22. Huyssen, *After the Great Divide*, 168.

avant-garde, whose claims to cultural and social regeneration have lost their validity.

This evaluation of postmodernism takes issue with the Adornian "pessimism" but also with Habermas's defense of modernity and (by implication) modernism. Huyssen's critique of Habermas, more suggested than strictly argued, stresses two points: the need for a more differentiated and dialectical account of the modern age than Habermas offers, and a strong suspicion against a theoretical project that relies on a totalizing view of history. These suggestions, clearly formulated against the background of poststructuralist theory, can be taken as an indication that the issue of postmodernism has encouraged a reorientation within the appropriation of Critical Theory. This reorientation often involves a more or less critical turn back to Adorno, as well as a (sometimes only implicit) distancing from the Habermasian "project of modernity." A good example of this complex move is the reading of Adorno in Russell Berman's recent work, *Modern Culture and Critical Theory*. Writing in a somewhat different context from Huyssen, Berman nevertheless provides (like Huyssen) a version of the Frankfurt School legacy that does not follow the Habermasian line in responding to postmodernism.

Berman develops his position by defending aesthetic autonomy (as Adorno's theory defined it) against Peter Bürger's critique. What Berman objects to in Bürger's theory of the avant-garde is Bürger's strong claim about the necessary linear development leading toward postautonomous art. Berman considers that Bürger's model overemphasizes "the predominance of a single aesthetic model within an institutional phase."[23] He argues that Bürger's central thesis about the failure of the avant-garde (and the consequent lapse into postautonomy) is based on the problematic assumption that the avant-garde constituted the hegemonic art form of the early twentieth century. Against this, Berman contends that the avant-garde was only

23. Berman, *Modern Culture and Critical Theory*, 49.

one strand in the configuration of modernism, and that it has maintained its critical position apart from the historical logic of monopoly capitalism. Consequently, Berman can valorize the avant-garde and its critical function, thereby opposing both postautonomous decline and postmodernist indifference. This argument rescues Adornian aesthetic theory without burying itself in the mood of despair that tinges much of Adorno's later writing.

In no way do I want to imply that Huyssen's and Berman's approaches to the problematic of postmodernism are identical. In fact, they clearly disagree. While Huyssen underlines the moment of subversion in postmodernist pluralism, Berman, more in the spirit of Adorno, tends to dismiss postmodernism as affirmative eclecticism. "The cultural theory of postmodernism provides the affirmative description of that which is merely given. Although it may carefully sketch power structures and practical strategies, its rejection of emancipatory autonomy precludes any systematic critical project."[24] What they do share, however—and this is the crucial point—is a sense of resistance to theoretical constructs of the kind that Habermas's later theory offers.

Obviously, the issue of postmodernism has not only divided the American Left, it has also brought about different and conflicting receptions of Critical Theory, ranging from an acknowledgment of postmodernist pluralism to a critique of its affirmative character based either on Adorno's idea of aesthetic truth or Habermas's notion of a loss of rational criticism. Similarly, there are also different emphases in the explicit or implicit political agenda connected with these positions—though these differences seem to be less pronounced than the theoretical ones. During the 1980s, the appropriation of Critical Theory in the United States, through its contact with other theoretical traditions, has (successfully, I believe) resituated the Left within the American discourse. While the theoretical

24. Ibid., 51.

interface has not necessarily changed the epistemological models, it has clearly redefined the political position of the Left, in particular its understanding of the theory/practice relation. What the question of postmodernism has helped to clarify for Critical Theory in this country is the inadequacy of the revolutionary models of the 1960s and the need for a broader definition of cultural practice, a conception in which the cultural and political are seen as complements rather than oppositions.

In even more dramatic ways than postmodernism, feminism has challenged received conceptions of culture and politics. In the case of West Germany (East Germany followed a different path altogether), it has led to a split between Critical Theory and feminist theory, since the cultural criticism of the Frankfurt School did not address the concerns of women. As far as the United States is concerned, the major strands of feminist theory that have dominated the discourse of the 1970s and 1980s—American feminism, represented by such critics as Susan Gubar, Sandra Gilbert, and Elaine Showalter, and French poststructuralist feminism (Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva)—followed different epistemological and methodological trajectories.[25] Only more recently has Critical Theory become a distinct voice. In the feminist debate, however, the locus of Critical Theory appears to be rather different from that of the postmodernist debate. Its critical edge has turned, to a large extent, against the "French" poststructuralist version of feminism. Hence its position is by and large closer to, but clearly not identical with, more traditional versions of Marxist theory emphasizing the *historical* nature of women's issues.[26] In this somewhat ambivalent alliance, the work of Jürgen Habermas, frequently attacked in the cultural debate, has become a focal point for a number of important questions.

25. See Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London, 1985).

26. See Sara Lennox's article, "Feminist Scholarship and *Germanistik*," in *German Quarterly* 62 (Spring 1989): 158–70.

In her essay "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender" (1985), Nancy Fraser squarely addresses the problem of conceptualizing gender differences in the theory of communicative action.[27] The question of gender rarely surfaced in Adorno's work and was linked with the question of revolutionary movements in Marcuse's late writings only in a very general way, but Fraser rightly insists that Habermasian theory, because of its universal claims, has to respond to feminist issues on a number of levels, namely thematic, methodological, and epistemological. One obvious difficulty for a feminist appropriation is Habermas's silence on the specific social and cultural problems of women. One possible strategy to overcome this drawback would be to mobilize the distinction between labor and communication in Habermas for a critique of the bias in traditional Marxist theory toward male-dominated production, but one has to grant that, in terms of the structure of Habermasian theory, the male/female opposition does not fit easily into the difference between labor and symbolic action. Thus, Fraser suggests a more "structural" approach to the question of women's work, grafted onto the distinction between system-integrated and socially integrated (symbolic) actions. Furthermore, Fraser refers to the Habermasian division between life-world and system (typical for modern societies) in order to mark the difference between the private and the public sphere. In short, Fraser takes over major parts of Habermas's social theory for her own project, yet with the proviso that they have to be reworked for the articulation of feminist concerns.

From the feminist point of view, the private/public distinction mirrors the distribution between "productive" work and family. By putting the category to an empirical test, Fraser tries to show that the Habermasian distinction misses the mark,

27. Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," *New German Critique* 35 (Spring/Summer 1985): 130.

that it especially does not adequately reflect the function of the family and the role of women in it. From a normative point of view, according to Fraser, the public/private distinction equally fails to address the imbalance of the traditional family structure. Specifically, Fraser notes a contradiction between the idea of social progress in Habermas's theory (which is expressed in terms of differentiation) and the norm of social justice. While social progress is linked to a process of differentiation in which the modern family and, with it, women are limited to the private realm, the idea of social justice cannot, as Habermas would agree, tolerate gender difference. To some extent, this critique misses the tension within the Habermasian concept of the public sphere, the tension between its factual and its normative aspect, by conflating these levels in Habermas's theory. What is more important, however, is the more general charge of gender blindness of the theoretical model that has defined Habermas's work since the mid-1970s. Fraser contends that his blindspot can be traced to the "categorical opposition between system and lifeworld institutions," which contains a bias toward a male-oriented society.[28] This critique simultaneously rescues other parts of Habermasian theory, however, among them the cultural interpretation of needs and the dialogical process of satisfying them.[29] For Fraser, the reception of Critical Theory is conceived as a selective and critical appropriation in which feminist concerns define the boundaries of acceptance.

Fraser's pragmatic strategy, with its somewhat understated understanding of the common ground, addresses primarily social problems but does not take up the larger issue of cultural difference that has defined the direction of feminist literary criticism. In this context, the question of the public sphere would take on a somewhat different meaning. Using Haber-

28. Ibid., 131 (also see esp. n. 47).

29. Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 171.

mas's *Strukturwandel der Oeffentlichkeit* (Structural transformation of the public sphere), Rita Felski has argued that the women's movement has created an important counter–public sphere within a male-defined society.[30] In her emphasis on the division within the public space and the possibility of undermining the hegemonic public discourse, Felski clearly extends Habermas's conception in a direction that moves her close to the position of Negt and Kluge.[31] The point Felski wants to make is that a feminist public sphere opens up new spaces of resistance that could and should be occupied by a variety of approaches and theories. "Given the complex interpretations of state and society in late capitalism, one can no longer postulate the ideal of a public sphere which can function outside existing commercial and state institutions and at the same time claim an influential and representative function as a forum for oppositional activity and debate."[32] By stressing the need for a discussion arena, she moves the reception of Habermas to the level of metatheory, a move that allows her to integrate Critical Theory in a more general way. Felski does not limit her discussion of feminist theory to specific doctrines of the Frankfurt School; rather, she underscores a critical perspective on the recent American conceptualization of women's studies. In particular, her approach raises the question of how feminist studies in the field of literature affect social and political structures. Felski rightly calls attention to the situation of late capitalist countries where the differentiation of the cultural and the po-

30. Ibid., 27.

31. See the introduction to this book for a discussion of Negt and Kluge. The position to which I refer here is developed in their book, *Oeffentlichkeit und Erfahrung: Zur Organizationsanalyse von bürgerlicher und proletarianischer Oeffentlichkeit* (Frankfurt, 1971). Negt and Kluge stress the class-based notion of a counter–public sphere, but this argument is clearly analogous to Felski's gender-based version of resistance. Both positions arise directly out of the critique of Habermas's more univocal account of the public sphere.

32. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 171.

litical spheres does not encourage the immediate impact of one sphere on the other.

Unlike Fraser, who is looking for a positive social model for the application of women's concerns, Felski stresses the "Adornian" aspect of Critical Theory, that is, its mode of critical reflection, as it engages theoretical positions. Again, it is the level of metatheory that becomes relevant for feminism, for instance, in a critique of feminist aesthetics both in American and French theory. Felski's metatheoretical method is especially telling in view of attempts to construct transhistorical modes of feminist writings. Within the American discourse, this project has frequently assumed a distinctive female sensibility grounded in a gendered experience. Yet, as Felski argues, this project is open to serious criticism because it overlooks significant social and cultural differences. "There are, moreover, obvious problems with a theoretical position which enshrines existing ideologies of sexual difference through reference to the supposedly intuitive and emotional quality of female consciousness, thereby merely reaffirming rather than questioning the authority of existing gender stereotypes."[33] Coming from Critical Theory, Felski argues that the lack of a sophisticated theory of ideology has typically trapped American feminism in an undifferentiated male/female dichotomy.

Whereas Felski's criticism of American feminism targets especially its reliance on ahistorical conceptions, her objections to French theory make a very different use of Critical Theory. Here she places in the foreground the similarities with Adorno's aesthetic theory, pointing to the problems involved in a modernist aesthetics. This critique builds on the post-Adornian concept of the avant-garde (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Bürger), which has radically deconstructed the logical connection between the political and the aesthetic avant-garde. Like

33. Ibid., 27.

this critique, an advanced feminist position also has to question assumptions about a necessary connection between "avant-garde" fragmentary writing and political subversion. Making use of Mary Jacobus's critique of Hélène Cixous, Felski argues against any attempt to ground feminist criticism in the gendered nature of language.[34] For her this construct must fail because it dogmatically separates the feminine question from the social question and thereby "reiterates and is easily assimilated into a long-standing cultural symbolization of woman in Western society."[35] If Elaine Marks's statement, "Reading becomes the subversive act par excellence," is programmatic, the proximity to Adorno's aesthetic theory is indeed of crucial importance for a critical reading of *écriture féminine* (female writing or discourse).[36] Clearly, in this respect Felski tends to side with a Habermasian position that deflates the political claims of immanent criticism and, by extension, fragmentary, subversive writing. This critique emphasizes the need for contextualization: only the specific historico-social context allows the feminist critic to make political use of negativity. This leads to a method of reading that consistently deontologizes the feminist project, deconstructing the notion of an absolute distinction between the writing of males and females. The politics of writing and reading is not predetermined by fixed gender differences, rather, they have to be negotiated in the public sphere. Furthermore, the social and political function of a literary text has to be established within the context of the actual appropriation, that is to say, its subversive moment does not mechanically translate into political opposition.

Given the centrality of the concept of the public sphere for Felski's argument, it is not surprising that she turns to Habermas's *Strukturwandel*. We have to note, however, that her

34. Mary Jacobus, "The Question of Language: Men of Maxims and *The Mill on the Floss*," in *Writing and Sexual Difference*, ed. Elizabeth Abil (Brighton, 1982).

35. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, 37.

36. Quoted in ibid., 39.

appropriation of Habermas's work, like that of Nancy Fraser, is selective. She clearly does not subscribe to the entire project of the early Habermas, which was not particularly sensitive to women's issues. Instead, she integrates those aspects of the Habermasian theory of the public sphere that help her to articulate the resistance of patriarchal societies to the needs of women. It is in this context that she examines the claims of feminist aesthetics and argues that there "remains, then, both an interaction and an inevitable tension between the spheres of 'feminism' and 'aesthetics.' "[37] It is a tension that cannot be resolved in either direction. The critical edge of literary analysis has to question the autonomy of the literary text as much as the social and political ideologies that determine the institution of literature. Again, this claim is rather close to Critical Theory in its general approach, even where Felski disagrees with specific theorists.

When Eugene Lunn examined the interface between Marxism and modernism in *Marxism and Modernism* (1982), he could still safely assume that the project of Western Marxism was more or less intact. Hence his own analysis traced the trajectory of German Marxism from Lukács to Adorno and Benjamin as part of the larger project of Western Marxism. In his conclusion, he (cautiously) affirmed Adorno's position on the avant-garde and mass culture while, at the same time, leaving some space for a Brechtian or Benjaminian position. Such an affirmation is, I feel, no longer possible. During the last decade, the meaning of the four theorists whom Lunn examined (Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno) has changed in a major way. This does not mean that their work can be discarded. The question is its appropriation. It seems that the construct "Western Marxism" has lost some of its usefulness for the present debate. For one thing, Critical Theory, even in its traditional definition, does not easily fit this term anymore. Jürgen Habermas cannot be called a Western Marxist. Furthermore, Crit-

37. Ibid., 179.

ical Theory has opened up and moved in various directions by interfacing with different theoretical traditions. As a result, the conception of critical theory itself has altered. Boundaries that used to be stable have collapsed and new borderlines have emerged. This revisionism has been most visibly carried out by the New Historicists—theoretically speaking, a blend of the neo-Marxists (Frankfurt School), poststructuralists (Foucault), and cultural anthropologists (Clifford Geertz)—but it also appears, as I have tried to show, in the postmodernism debate. There is an obvious danger in this eclectic blending—the loss of the oppositional force, the "mainstreaming" of Critical Theory. The New Historicists have not always avoided this danger. But, on the other hand, there are considerable gains. To refuse the opening, to insist on the traditional boundaries, means to get caught in the past and to close off the future. The survival of Critical Theory depends on a self-critical reappraisal of its own tradition and of its locus within different cultural and political configurations. This ongoing process implies a different attitude toward its past, namely a nonlinear view of its own development and an acknowledgment of complex theoretical constellations. Of course, the early Frankfurt School, especially Horkheimer, was striving toward an interdisciplinary project in which the Marxist model was expected to be hegemonic. Forty years later and under very different circumstances, Jürgen Habermas made another attempt using a linguistic model. Both projects failed in their desire to favor a particular model. It seems that during the 1980s Critical Theory has been most effective as a local theory in a dialogical situation with different approaches and methods, receiving its strength from concrete social conflicts and struggles.