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Book Author(s): Peter Uwe Hohendahl

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A well-known newspaper caricature, printed some twenty years ago, pictures the Frankfurt School as a closely knit group with Max Horkheimer as a large father figure watching over the other members of the school, among them Theodor W. Adorno and Jürgen Habermas. This view of the relationship between the members of the Frankfurt School was quite common in Germany at that time: Habermas was seen not only as a member of the school but more specifically as a disciple of the older generation, someone who had started out from the position of Critical Theory, as it was developed in the 1940s and 1950s by Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno. Although this interpretation cannot account for all of Habermas's early work, notably not for his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (Structural transformation of the public sphere, 1962), it was plausible enough to find wide acceptance. Yet it was no accident that Habermas's first major study, which traces the evolution of the public sphere from the eighteenth to the twentieth century and stresses the need for an enlightened and rational reconsideration of the public sphere under advanced capitalism, never found Adorno's and Horkheimer's complete acceptance. Their own critique of the process of Enlightenment differed so markedly from the position Habermas outlined that there could be no full consensus. In a certain way, I would argue, the later differences, especially those between Adorno and Habermas,

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were already foreshadowed in *Strukturwandel*, although Habermas, when describing the decline of the liberal public sphere under organized capitalism, made use of the critique of mass culture formulated by the older generation and certainly did not indicate that he was in disagreement with the analysis offered in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. On the whole, however, conventional wisdom, treating Habermas as a junior member of the Frankfurt School, was justified for the 1960s, when Habermas, for instance, defended the position of the Frankfurt School in the Positivism Dispute against Karl Popper and his allies of the Cologne school. While Adorno and Popper in their addresses to the German *Soziologentag* (sociology conference) of 1961 decided to suppress rather than highlight their theoretical and methodological differences, the younger generation, represented by Habermas and Hans Albert, did not hesitate to use a highly polemical rhetoric, in order to undermine the position of the enemy camp.¹ Habermas's insistence on the limitations of rational positivism and his emphasis on the need for a grounding of the humanities and the social sciences that is different from the methods of the natural sciences, clearly defended the position of Adorno. At least it was much closer to Adorno's understanding of the social sciences than that of Popper and the Cologne school.

The change of paradigm: Seen against the background of the rivalry between the Frankfurt and the Cologne schools during the 1950s and 1960s in Germany, there can be no doubt that Habermas's early work from *Theory and Practice* (1963) to *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1969) is part of the Frankfurt School, since it makes use of and relies on the analyses of the older generation, especially those of Horkheimer and Herbert Marcuse. Not only does Habermas share with classical Critical Theory a goal—the search for an

1. Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften* (Frankfurt, 1970), 9–38 and 39–70.

emancipated and free society—he also continues, although not without modifications, the discourse of his teachers. More openly than Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas returns to the Marxist problematic of Critical Theory, attempting to clarify the validity and function of Marxian theory vis-à-vis advanced capitalism. It is precisely this critical reexamination of Marxian theory, I would argue, that propels Habermas during the 1970s on a trajectory that distances him more and more from the position of Horkheimer and Adorno. By the end of the decade, friendly gestures notwithstanding, this process reaches a point from which, given the systematic development of Habermas's own theory, a return to the discourse of the old Frankfurt School is no longer possible. It seems that at this juncture Habermas wants to stress the break rather than the continuity. While the chapter devoted to Horkheimer and Adorno in *The Theory of Communicative Action* is still characterized by critical sympathy, his reassessment of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, published under the title "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment" in 1982, not only sharpens the critique of Horkheimer and Adorno but also displays a certain amount of acrimony absent from Habermas's earlier essays.² Habermas states in no uncertain terms that something went wrong in the evolution of Critical Theory during the 1940s. This harsh verdict is directed against Horkheimer's and Adorno's work from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on. In particular, it is directed against Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*.

This turn in Habermas's appreciation of the older generation definitely calls for an explanation. I believe that there is more involved than just an increasing theoretical estrangement be-

2. Jürgen Habermas, "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Re-reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*," *New German Critique* 26 (Spring/Summer 1982): 13–30; reprinted in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 106–30.

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tween the older and the younger generation. Habermas's earlier attempt to reformulate Marxian theory, by discarding a number of orthodox dogmas on the one hand and differentiating between labor and interaction on the other, did not result in a break because the open revision of Marxian theory in many ways simply spelled out what Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Adorno had already tacitly changed in their own theories since the early 1940s. Equally, the turn toward a theory of communicative action, the so-called linguistic turn in Habermas's work after *Legitimation Crisis* (1973), did not in itself necessitate the noticeable distress. There is an additional element that, taken together with Habermas's attempt to work out a communicative grounding of his theory, intensified the disagreement. What is ultimately at stake for Habermas is no less than the idea of rationality and the notion of a legitimate rational society. Rereading *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Habermas discovers that Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of reason owes as much if not more to Nietzsche than to Marx and the Marxist tradition. It is the Nietzsche connection that is, I think, responsible for the somewhat hostile tone, especially in the second essay. Again, I will argue, it is not Nietzsche's work in itself that creates the distress—Habermas had offered a critique of Nietzsche as early as *Knowledge and Human Interests*—but the intellectual atmosphere of the late 1970s and early 1980s in West Germany, where the revival of interest in Nietzsche was largely caused by the emergence of poststructuralism. As we shall see, it is Foucault's interpretation of Nietzsche that fuels Habermas's critical rereading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and of the later work of Horkheimer and Adorno.

Using explicit statements and implicit arguments from Habermas's systematic writings, I first want to document the growing rift between Habermas and the orthodoxy of the Frankfurt School. In a second step I want to look more specifically at the above-mentioned chapter in *The Theory of Communicative Action* and the essay on *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

This should finally lead us to a reexamination of the fundamental problems involved in the grounding of Habermas's own theory. My interest in Habermas's reassessment and critique of Horkheimer and Adorno, to state it explicitly, is not primarily historical. The question whether Habermas's interpretation is historically correct or not is, in the context of my argument, secondary at best. The evidence, for instance, that Habermas misunderstands the intention of Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*—a case that could possibly be made—will not be used as an argument against the critique of a specific position attributed to Horkheimer and Adorno.

Habermas's critique of the Frankfurt School: Axel Honneth has given a persuasive account of the changes of paradigm within Critical Theory.³ "Habermas implicitly takes the first step toward a reorientation of social criticism to re-establish critical theory's tenuous claims within the present historical context."⁴ Honneth rightly states that Habermas's own essays dealing with Marcuse, Adorno, and Benjamin do not systematically address the reasons why Habermas turned away from the position of the Frankfurt School in a late phase and challenged its historical and theoretical presuppositions. There are, however, clear indications that I want to bring into the foreground. While Habermas admires the aphoristic and stylistic qualities of Adorno's writings in his short essay "Theodor W. Adorno: Ein philosophierender Intellektueller" (A philosophizing intellectual, 1963)—which was, incidentally, not included in the later English edition of *Philosophical-Political Profiles*—the second essay on Adorno, published in 1969, already focuses on the problem that was to become crucial for Habermas's later reading of Adorno (and Horkheimer): Haber-

3. Axel Honneth, "Communication and Reconciliation in Habermas' Critique of Adorno," *Telos* 39 (Spring 1979): 45–61.

4. *Ibid.*, 46.

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mas concentrates on the dialectic of reason and Adorno's pessimistic conclusions.

As Habermas points out, for Adorno, "mastery of nature is chained to the introjected violence of humans over humans, to the violence of the subject exercised upon its own nature."⁵ Thus the Enlightenment, since it remains unreflected, cannot attain the level of rationality that it claims for itself; rather, this process stays on the level of self-affirmation gone wild (*verwilderte Selbstbehauptung*). Habermas then suggests that he has some doubts about this view and hints that he would not necessarily concur with the analysis of reason lying behind it, but in 1969 he does not fully develop these thoughts because he seeks to understand Adorno's position as the result of his biography and the historical experience of his generation. He traces Adorno's concept of negative dialectic, concentrating on its challenge to both formal logic and orthodox Hegelian dialectic, which favors synthesis, but he does not emphasize the difference between his own project and Adorno's philosophy. In the final paragraphs Habermas merely touches on these differences when he problematizes his own psychological interpretation of Adorno and calls for a more systematic treatment of the fundamental epistemological questions raised by Adorno's concept of negative dialectic. He points out that Adorno cannot overcome the basic contradiction between his insistence on negativity (*bestimmte Negation*) and his use of the idea of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*), a state that would transcend the gesture of negation.

At this juncture the alternative project, as it was announced and partially developed in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, comes into the foreground. Habermas argues: "The idea of truth, already implicit in the first sentence spoken, can be shaped only on the model of the idealized agreement aimed for in communication free of domination. To this extent the truth

5. Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (London, 1983), 101.

of a proposition is bound up with the intention of leading a genuine life."⁶ This statement, in which free communication becomes the basis for an authentic life, implicitly cancels the logic of reification on which Adorno's negative dialectic is modeled. Habermas is keenly aware that Adorno would not have accepted his premises and tries to explain why the older generation of the Frankfurt School would have resisted the idea of communication without domination as a real possibility for social organization. *Versöhnung*, the key term for Adorno's gesture toward an authentic social totality, must be grounded in a prerational understanding of nature, an understanding in which the dichotomy between subject and object does not exist. In Habermas's words, "Adorno (and also Benjamin, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Bloch) entertained doubts that the emancipation of humanity is possible without the resurrection of nature."⁷ Habermas concluded in 1969 that the "dialectic of Enlightenment," that is, the historical logic of rationality, is profoundly ambivalent with respect to the chances of humanity's escaping the logic of domination.

So the question arises: Is universal reconciliation ultimately no more than an extravagant idea? Habermas's cautious statements seem to indicate that he differs from the older generation in two respects. First, he is unwilling to accept the logic of total reification that dominates *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and second, he distances himself from a concept of reconciliation based on the notion of primal nature. In philosophical terms, Habermas at this point has moved away from the philosophical discourse of Hegel and the various schools that depend on the model of dialectical mediation.

By the late 1970s this critical stance becomes much more explicit in Habermas's work. This change, however, does not occur as a leap from one model to another, but rather as a critical reexamination that results in the development of a

6. *Ibid.*, 107.

7. *Ibid.*

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radically transformed discourse, using linguistic theories, theories of social action, and systems theory. The new model, which I cannot even sketch here, both replaces the Marxist Hegelian foundations of the Frankfurt School and calls for a systematic critique of these foundations. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas undertakes this reevaluation by tracing the concept of reification from Weber through Lukács to Horkheimer and Adorno. The charge is that Horkheimer and Adorno, by taking over and even broadening Lukács's concept of reification, maneuvered themselves into a position that did not allow them to conceptualize forces of resistance against the totally administered society.

In his reconstruction Habermas comes to the conclusion that Horkheimer's and Adorno's radical critique of reason (in its subjective and objective version) ultimately undermines the possibility of critical reflection itself. If critical thought, as Horkheimer and Adorno maintain in their later work, cannot formulate truth because it is already contaminated by the logic of instrumental reason, then the force of critical arguments is endangered. Critical reflection in its Adornian version can only hint at truth in the form of mimesis, but it cannot be developed as a theory with formal and methodological consequences. Habermas states this aporia in the following way: "The paradox in which the critique of instrumental reason is entangled, and which stubbornly resists even the most supple dialectic, consists then in this: Horkheimer and Adorno would have to put forward a theory of mimesis, which according to their own ideas, is impossible."⁸ To put it differently, according to Habermas the critique of instrumental reason through the concept of reification makes it impossible to ground theory in communicative interaction. The business of philosophy would come to an end because discursive methods would lose their

8. Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, 1984), 382.

validity under the spell of identifying thought. By the same token—and this should be kept in mind—without discourse there is no space left for social praxis. It is precisely for this reason that Habermas does not follow Horkheimer's and Adorno's critiques. Instead, he wants to show how the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, relying heavily on the concept of reification, must end up in an aporetic situation.

Before I retrace the line of Habermas's argument, I want to call attention to its context. The critique of the Frankfurt School at the end of the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* is part of a larger argument explaining the change of paradigm from a theory of teleological action to a theory of communicative action. The point of reference is the potential of rationality embedded in speech and linguistic communication, a rationality that remains, as Habermas claims, undeveloped in Max Weber's theory of action. Specifically, Habermas refers to the difference between rationality in the life-world and the rationality of systems and subsystems (economy, political system). By reconstructing the tradition of Western Marxism, Habermas wants to demonstrate that the heritage of Max Weber's theory of rationalization, as it can be found in Lukács well as in Horkheimer and Adorno, ultimately explodes the bounds of the philosophy of consciousness. The point of his argument is that the Frankfurt School, because of its dependence on the Weberian model of rationalization, fails to do justice to the problematic of the life-world—despite its own intentions.

Focusing on Horkheimer's *Eclipse of Reason*, Habermas underlines the similarity between Weber's and Horkheimer's interpretation of modern capitalist societies: their theories share an essentially identical model of rationalization. The history of modernity is seen as a process of disenchantment, with reason undermining the unquestioned validity of religion and ontology. Thus modern consciousness is characterized by a growing rift between knowledge and belief systems. This implies that morality and art are decoupled from the scientific

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pursuit of truth. Modern reason functions primarily as a tool for the promotion of self-interest and survival. Similarly, both Weber and Horkheimer stress the loss of individual freedom in modern society, Weber by calling attention to the impact of increasingly complex bureaucracies, Horkheimer, favoring psychological arguments, by pointing to the growing pressure of the social system on the individual. Habermas rightly acknowledges, however, that Horkheimer's conclusions differ significantly from Weber's reading of modern social organizations. He argues that these differences have to do with the impact of Lukács's theory of reification on the Frankfurt School.

Lukács, relying equally on Marx's theory of commodification and on Weber's theory of rationalization, fuses the concepts of reification and rationalization. As Habermas reminds us, this move in *History and Class Consciousness* allows Lukács to go beyond Weber and at the same time, I would add, to supplement Marxian theory. Habermas, however, is primarily interested in the theoretical limitations of this approach that are caused by Lukács's Hegelian reading of Marx. He sees two major deficiencies. First, Lukács's concept of reification relies exclusively on the concept of exchange value in *Capital* and therefore reduces all forms of rationalization in modern Western societies to a variation of reification caused by capitalism. As long as capitalism dominates social organization, reification is inevitable, not only in the sphere of social organization, but also in the realm of philosophy. Lukács argues, however, that this logic can be overcome because there are epistemological as well as social limits to the reification of reason. Also, this argument, in Habermas's opinion, depends on the use of Hegel's logic, a form of metaphysical thought that cannot be resurrected after its critique by post-Kantian philosophy.

Against Lukács's thesis of total reification under capitalism Habermas suggests that instrumental reason "establishes itself at the cost of practical rationality."⁹ Then he concludes:

9. Ibid., 363.

“Thus it makes sense to ask whether the critique of the incomplete character of the rationalization that appears as reification does not suggest taking a complementary relation between cognitive-instrumental rationality, on the one hand, and moral-practical and aesthetic-practical rationality, on the other, as a standard that is inherent in the unabridged concept of practice, that is to say, in communicative action itself.”¹⁰ To put it differently, Hegel’s logic of reconciliation, applied by Lukács to the problem of rationalization, remains a fiction, as long as it is carried out in the realm of theory only. This brings us to the second criticism: Habermas is equally opposed to the political solution of Lukács. He calls Lukács’s notion of a proletarian revolution guided by Marxian philosophy a mistake, because the revolutionary avant-garde as the standard-bearer of theory would need a knowledge of the total structure of society that is empirically not available.

Habermas’s critique of Lukács emphasizes two points: he challenges the reduction of rationalization to the level of reification caused by the capitalist economy, and he refuses to depend, as Lukács does, on a Hegelian reading of Marx that tries to solve the problem of practice in the sphere of philosophy. As we shall see, this critique reiterates many of the explicit or implicit arguments of the older Frankfurt School against Lukács—though I would like to add that a crucial part of Habermas’s argument is not based on his reading of Horkheimer and Adorno but on his own theory of social practice. As much as he attempts to carry through an immanent critique, using the nexus of intellectual history, he reverts occasionally to the systematic framework of his own theory. This is equally true of his reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

The following steps of the argument unfold in a rather straightforward manner. Since the Frankfurt School, especially Horkheimer and Adorno, find it difficult to follow Lukács’s Hegelian solution of the reification problematic, they have to

10. *Ibid.*, 363–64.

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reconsider the question of rationalization. They do this by decoupling the concept of reification from the historical development of capitalism. It seems that Habermas, who accuses Lukács of a reductive interpretation of rationalization and reification, approves of this criticism, yet at the same time he insists that this very move leads to the aporia I mentioned before. Habermas is distressed not so much by the way in which Horkheimer and Adorno de-historicize the concept of reification when they uncover the emergence of instrumental reason already in early Greek history, as by their tendency to blur the contours of the concept of reason itself. His criticism is carried out on two levels. He presents historical arguments in order to explain the strategy of the Frankfurt School, and he offers theoretical arguments to show why this strategy could not be successful.

The historical thesis, based on the work of Helmut Dubiel, can be summarized in the following way: (1) the Frankfurt School was faced with the peculiar development of Marxism in Russia, that is, Stalinism; (2) in Germany and Italy they encountered fascism, a political system that proved that capitalism could overcome its crisis by reorganizing the political order; and finally (3) they experienced in the United States the success of a capitalist system that integrated the underprivileged masses through organized mass culture (the culture industry).¹¹ As a result, so the argument goes, Horkheimer and Adorno could no longer rely on Lukács's theory of reification. While they still shared with Lukács the notion of a modern society largely determined by alienation, they could not share Lukács's view that this situation could be changed by the consciousness and the revolutionary action of the proletariat. To put it succinctly, their theory of fascism demonstrated why the consciousness of the masses would support advanced capitalism under the disguise of a new social order, and their theory

11. Helmut Dubiel, *Wissenschaftsorganisation und politische Erfahrung* (Frankfurt, 1978).

of the culture industry shows how the commodification of culture supplied the means for the integration of the masses into the existing social system.

The theoretical line of the argument is built on these historical considerations. In particular, Habermas wants to clarify why Horkheimer and Adorno, by radicalizing the theory of reification and/or rationalization, undermine the basis of their own critique. Habermas suggests that the rejection of Hegel's logic of mediation, to which Lukács could still resort in order to solve the problem of reification, leaves a vacuum that weakens the structure of the theory. Critical reflection in its attempt to grasp and break through the barriers of reified social relations is left only with the procedure of negative dialectic—a procedure that forgoes the attempt at reconciliation. The suspicion that even Lukács's critique of the reified mind is based on a philosophy grounded in the concept of identity (Hegel) leads to the eclipse of reason altogether. There are no weapons left to fight against the phenomena of reification, at least not within the sphere of rational discourse.

This is the center of Habermas's criticism, an argument I have to unfold. The question is, How can critical theory, fighting against positivism on the one hand and attacking ontology on the other, grasp and demonstrate its own validity? Habermas suggests two possibilities: either this critical reflection must be grounded in a general theory "that elucidates the foundations of the modern natural, social, and cultural sciences within the horizon of more encompassing concepts of truth and knowledge," or it has to be linked to a form of self-reflection "that reaches down into the lifeworld foundations, the structures of action and the contexts of discovery, underlying scientific theory-construction or objectivating thought in general."¹² The second alternative is clearly the one favored by Habermas. Yet this observation is of secondary importance in my context. More important, by

12. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 375.

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setting up this opposition, Habermas prejudices the following reading of Horkheimer and Adorno. He argues that Horkheimer's response to the theoretical dilemma does not fit into his classification of the possible solutions, for Horkheimer calls for a self-reflection that demystifies the social processes that determine the boundaries of systematic thought. Habermas takes this statement as a first step toward a self-reflection of scientific theory, as it was carried out by the next generation of social scientists and philosophers. Yet he rightly stresses that the Frankfurt School did not pursue this project. Rather, Horkheimer and Adorno insisted on a radical critique of reified subjective reason, of instrumental reason.

Habermas suggests that this critique was doomed because it destroyed the basis of critical reflection altogether. The first step of his argument reconstructs the strategy of Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Habermas arrives at the following conclusion:

Horkheimer and Adorno detach the concept [of reification] not only from the special historical context of the rise of the capitalist economic system but from the dimension of interhuman relations altogether; and they generalize it temporally (over the entire history of the human species) and substantatively (the same logic of domination is imputed to both cognition in the service of self-preservation and the repression of instinctual nature). This double generalization of the concept of reification leads to a concept of instrumental reason that shifts the primordial history of subjectivity and the self-formative process of ego-identity into an encompassing historico-philosophical perspective.¹³

In his second step Habermas extrapolates the historico-philosophical horizon of Horkheimer's and Adorno's strategy. Through instrumental reason the human race attained

13. *Ibid.*, 379–80.

the domination of nature, but the price it had to pay for this achievement was the repression of subjectivity. This dialectic works against the traditional notion of Enlightenment as a process of human emancipation. Instead, history turns into a self-imposed catastrophe from which there is no escape. Confronted with the failure of reason, Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to anchor their own critique of this process in an approach that is not trapped in the dialectic of instrumental reason. They mean to overcome the constraints of rational discourse by moving to a procedure that retraces a state without the separation between subject and object. In the words of Horkheimer and Adorno: "But the constellation under which likeness is established—the unmediated likeness of mimesis as well as the mediated likeness of synthesis, assimilation to the thing in the blind discharge of life as well as the finding of likenesses in what has been reified in the process of scientific concept formation—is still the sign of terror."¹⁴

Habermas rejects this move to philosophical hyperspace, since it does not provide the basis for rational discourse, for communicative interaction. In other words, Habermas claims that this radical critique of instrumental reason cannot be validated in theoretical terms. It has accepted the distinction of classical philosophical systems on the one hand and has disclosed the horrifying consequences of instrumental reason on the other. As a result, it finds itself in limbo. In order to criticize modern positivism, it must revert to the fundamental concepts of classical philosophy such as truth; in order to show the ideological nature of the older philosophical tradition, it uses the instruments of modern rationality. Habermas concludes that the Frankfurt School paid a very high price for its skeptical turn during the 1940s. In this context his own project can be understood as a return to the problematic of the early Frankfurt

14. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York, 1972), 181.

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School, though he definitely does not mean to rely on their position in any dogmatic sense.

The dangerous influence of Nietzsche: Before I turn to Habermas's answer to the dilemmas of Horkheimer's and Adorno's later work, I want to address his essay "The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment" of 1982, which not only radicalizes his critique but also develops more clearly the contemporary background of the debate. In *The Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas suggested in passing that the later writings of Adorno were not too far removed from the philosophy of Heidegger—in spite of their own intentions. This suspicion is intensified in Habermas's rereading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1982. Although the essay is just as much concerned with the problematic of the foundations of a critical theory, both the strategy and the rhetoric differ significantly. The emphasis is placed on the critique of ideology and its increasing radicalization in modern European history. Again Habermas means to demonstrate that the approach of Horkheimer and Adorno in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* leads to a paradoxical situation: it results in a critique denouncing reason, though it is based on reason itself. Thus Habermas insists that Horkheimer and Adorno cannot fend off the consequences of Nietzsche's critique of rationality, whatever their own intentions may have been. "Nietzsche's critique," as Habermas puts it, "consumes the critical impulse itself."¹⁵

To position Nietzsche and his significance for Horkheimer and Adorno, Habermas describes the history of modern consciousness as a three-phased process. Whereas the initial intention of the Enlightenment aimed at the explosion of traditional worldviews, the second and third phases used a different model, namely the critique of ideology. The older model of ideology critique (Marx) works with the assump-

15. Habermas, "Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment," 23.

tion that the truth claims of theories can and must be questioned because these claims possibly rest on premises not derived from principles of reason but from presuppositions that reflect the self-interest of the theorist and his or her social group. This model maintains the ideas of the Enlightenment and uses them as the critical standard for the evaluation of existing social practices.

The following, more radical model of ideology critique extends the suspicion to the procedures of reason itself. "With this type of critique Enlightenment becomes reflexive for the first time; it now carries out the project on its own products, i.e. its theories. But the drama of Enlightenment reaches its peripeteia or turning point when the critique of ideology itself is suspected of no longer producing truth—it is only then that Enlightenment becomes reflexive for a second time."¹⁶ This final phase is that of Nietzsche and of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* "this critique of ideology describes the self-destruction of the critical faculty."¹⁷ More specifically, Habermas argues that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* owes its dangerous force to Nietzsche's philosophy; from Nietzsche, Horkheimer and Adorno take over the interpretation of reason as a mere instrument of self-preservation and power.

In this context I can develop neither Nietzsche's theory of truth nor Habermas's reading of it. It must suffice to summarize Habermas's arguments. Habermas emphasizes the aesthetic turn in Nietzsche's philosophical writings, a move that cancels established values of knowledge and morality. Nietzsche, Habermas suggests, "enthrones taste, 'the Yes and No of the palate' as the sole organ of knowledge beyond Truth and Falsity, beyond Good and Evil."¹⁸ This move consistently undercuts the rationality of Yes/No positions. Thus both descriptive and

16. *Ibid.*, 20.

17. *Ibid.*, 22.

18. *Ibid.*, 25.

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normative statements are reduced to expressions of evaluation. (The sentence "x is true" should be read "I prefer x.") In Nietzsche these value judgments are no longer grounded in cognitive principles that can be demonstrated; rather, they express a claim to power. The core of this approach is an aesthetic sensibility and productivity, the excitement of the will by the beautiful. The theory of the will to power, however, is untenable, Habermas argues, because it is contradictory. It is unable to valorize its own claims. In Habermas's words: "If, however, all proper claims to validity are devalued and if the underlying value judgments are mere expressions of claims to power rather than to validity, according to what standards should critique then differentiate? It must at least be able to discriminate between a power which deserves to be esteemed and a power which deserves to be disparaged."¹⁹

The section on Nietzsche in Habermas's Adorno essay is of crucial importance in two respects: it serves to demonstrate the deficiencies of a totalizing critique of ideology, and it calls attention to the present poststructuralist debate. Habermas holds that Horkheimer and Adorno, under the impact of Nietzsche's theory of power, end up in an aporia similar to that of Nietzsche. Thus their own version of Critical Theory loses its critical edge because it follows a self-contradictory strategy. This conclusion concurs with the analysis presented in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In the Adorno essay of 1982, however, Habermas stresses the impact of Nietzsche rather than the Marxist heritage because he wants to bring into the foreground an unresolved problematic embedded in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The procedure of unmasking the Enlightenment, showing that reason ultimately reverts to myth, leads to a theory of power deprived of possible strategies to overcome the impasse. Negative dialectic, always turning back to the abyss of yet another turn of suspicion, cannot address this problematic. It remains unresolved.

19. Ibid., 27.

Habermas and Foucault: Habermas comes to almost identical conclusions in *The Theory of Communicative Action* and his Adorno essay of 1982, although in the first case he puts the blame on the heritage of Western Marxism (reification), whereas in the second he makes the influence of Nietzsche responsible for the wrong turn of the Frankfurt School. This convergence is slightly puzzling: from the point of view of intellectual history, the two traditions that Habermas uncovers in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are not easily reconcilable. In theoretical terms the two arguments do not necessarily belong together. The thesis that Horkheimer and Adorno, under the influence of Nietzsche, developed a totalizing critique of ideology is not identical with the thesis that Horkheimer and Adorno, by generalizing the concept of reification, arrived at a radical critique of instrumental reason. One could argue, however, that the two claims at least support each other. When we describe the history of modern consciousness as stages of an increasingly radical critique of its own presuppositions, we can also use this framework to position the transformation from Lukács's theory of reification to the critique of instrumental reason in the writings of Horkheimer and Adorno. We observe the same move toward a totalizing critique of reason undercutting the rationality that was used to carry out the project in the first place. Still, the logic of reification, as it was first fully developed in *History and Class Consciousness*, is significantly different from the theory of power in the writings of Nietzsche and Foucault. For Habermas, however, who is primarily looking at the strategical aspect, the two positions converge because they both aim at the destruction of rationalism.

Historically, I feel, Habermas is on safer ground when he develops the problematic of the late Frankfurt School out of the tradition of Western Marxism. For the strategy of his own project, on the other hand, the confrontation with the post-structuralist interpretation of Nietzsche, particularly that of Foucault, has become more crucial. The reason for this turn is as follows: since Habermas has consistently maintained that

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Lukács's solution to the problem of reification is no longer viable, the defense of rationalism has become at the same time more difficult and more urgent. If Foucault's critique of reason is correct, Habermas's own theory of communicative action built on rational consensus through speech acts is in jeopardy. The skepticism of Foucault's genealogical history is a position that Habermas has to challenge in order to secure the viability of rational discourse. By the same token, incidentally, Habermas has to confront Luhmann's systems theory, which argues in favor of social systems without subjects and meaning (*Sinn*). The common denominator is "positivism," or the elimination of claims for meaning and validity.²⁰ Foucault's radical rereading of history results in relativism, since the genealogical historian cannot sustain his or her position when confronted with the question why a specific view of history should be preferable to another one (the same problem that Habermas found unresolved in Nietzsche).

Hence Habermas uses a similar strategy against Foucault: the inner logic of genealogical historiography becomes the target of his critique. Specifically, he wants to demonstrate that the seemingly objective approach of discourse analysis simply represses the fundamental hermeneutic configuration involved in the encounter between the historian and the material. The historian, whether it is explicitly stated or not, always takes a position. If we follow Foucault's position and assume that all knowledge is power and therefore critical only vis-à-vis other forms of knowledge/power, we undermine the basis of genealogical history. In this case the knowledge provided by critical historiography is as much part of the will to power as the practices under investigation. Habermas concludes: "Every counter-power moves within the horizons of the power which

20. See Jürgen Habermas, "Genealogische Geschichtsschreibung: Ueber einige Aporien im machtheoretischen Denken Foucaults," *Merkur* 38 (Oct. 1984): 745–53.

it opposes, and as soon as it is victorious transforms itself into a power complex which then provokes a new counter-power. The genealogy of knowledge cannot break out of this vicious circle."²¹ As soon as critical knowledge has successfully challenged established knowledge/power, it becomes power, a vicious circle from which the genealogy of knowledge cannot escape. Hence, Habermas concludes that a critique that does not reflect on its own methods and theoretical premises is chained to this aporia.

While I think that Habermas's formal argument is persuasive, I am less certain whether it is strong enough to challenge Nietzsche's and Foucault's assumption that there is no ultimate meaning in history. To put it differently: the proof that Foucault's project is contradictory in terms of its own logic is not the same as proving that his pessimistic view of history is wrong. The rational critique can demonstrate the contradictions, but this strategy does not automatically secure the meaning of history. In particular, it does not prove that social practices are embedded in reason. The rationality of social practices, especially the validity of certain social practices in comparison with others, and the assumption that human history can be deciphered as a meaningful process toward a goal, have to be grounded in a different way. Foucault, who does not share Habermas's conviction that human practices are determined by rationality (in its emphatic sense), makes a different use of rational methods. His genealogical analysis seeks to undercut the presumed foundations of knowledge and the teleological constructs of history relying on unquestioned notions of continuity and logical sequence. "The search for descent," Foucault writes in his discussion of Nietzsche, "is not the erecting of foundations: on the contrary, it disturbs what was previously considered immobile, it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent

21. *Ibid.*, 749.

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with itself."²² In this context the concept of emergence takes on a meaning different from Habermas's usage. While Habermas seeks to understand genealogy in Nietzsche as the search for validity (the validity of the older forms), Foucault wants to stress the dangers of historical reconstructions along the lines of development or evolution. "As it is wrong to search for descent in an uninterrupted continuity, we should avoid thinking of emergence as the final term of an historical development. . . . These developments may appear as a culmination, but they are merely the current episodes in a series of subjugations."²³ Yet Foucault overstates his claim when he goes on to say that history is the "endlessly repeated play of dominations" and concludes: "The domination of certain men over others leads to the differentiation of values; class domination generates the idea of liberty; and forceful appropriation of things necessary to survival and the imposition of a duration not intrinsic to them account for the origin of logic."²⁴ This view of history totalizes the process of history as much as the liberal view stressing progress. While we can possibly agree that in all historical situations known to us human interaction has been determined by domination, it does not *eo ipso* follow that this insight can be generalized and extrapolated into the future. This, then, is the case that one can make for Habermas's position: granted that human practices have been shot through with violence, granted further that history has been propelled by the drama of power, we cannot logically exclude the possibility of change, unless we believe in eternal laws of history for which we would need more than empirical examples. The question then arises whether and how human beings can escape the fate of power, how they can become masters of their own history. This is obviously the central Marxian question.

Let me briefly state Habermas's answer. He infers from his

22. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, 1977), 147.

23. *Ibid.*, 148.

24. *Ibid.*, 150.

analysis of Horkheimer's and Adorno's writings that the approach of the philosophy of consciousness to a subjectivity not contaminated by instrumental reason has failed and cannot be restored. Attempts by Dieter Henrich and others to rescue subjectivity by differentiating between subjective and instrumental reason result in the same aporia already diagnosed by Adorno. Hence, this approach has to be replaced with an intersubjective orientation undercutting from the very beginning the logic of reification inherent in instrumental reason. This project, Habermas believes, can be developed out of existing social theories, especially those of George Mead and Emile Durkheim. So Habermas proposes a shift of focus rather than a new philosophy. "The focus of investigation thereby shifts from cognitive-instrumental rationality to communicative rationality. And what is paradigmatic for the latter is not the relation of a solitary subject to something in the objective world that can be presented and manipulated, but the intersubjective relations that speaking and acting subjects take up when they come to an understanding with one another about something."²⁵ Habermas understands this approach as the alternative to systems theory as well as the genealogy of knowledge, approaches where concepts like subject and object can be replaced by system and *Umwelt* (environment) and the problematic of subjectivity hence can be reformulated in terms of complexity aimed at self-preservation. Instead, Habermas offers a different reading of modernity. The process of disenchantment, the "decentration of our understanding of the world and the differentiation of various universal validity claims," seen by Luhmann as the historical background of systems theory, prepares the way for a reconsideration of intersubjective relations.²⁶ The very lack of fixed, overarching worldviews calls for an intersubjective interpretation of reality. Only a theory of communicative action, Habermas is con-

25. Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, 392.

26. *Ibid.*, 397.

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vinced, can combat the reduction of subjectivity to the level of mere self-preservation (and power games). Obviously, this theory, unlike systems theory, cannot limit itself to the explanation of facts and structures; it is involved in claims for validity. Habermas emphasizes this element when he states: "The utopian perspective of reconciliation and freedom is ingrained in the conditions for the communicative sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*) of individuals; it is built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species."²⁷

Systems theory and the life-world: It is not my task in this book to analyze the foundations of this theory. Still, I want to discuss some of its aspects. In contrast to Parsons's systems theory, Habermas suggests a dual focus: he differentiates between system and life-world. The concept of the life-world, taken from phenomenological sociology (Schütz), refers to ordinary social situations where human beings interact. The life-world can be described in terms of narrative presentations of historical events and social situations. Among them are cultural events, for instance, aesthetic projects the function of which is to express the worldview of a social group and thereby help to integrate its members. The phenomenological analysis of the life-world primarily uses a hermeneutic approach; it reconstructs the life-world from the point of view of the participating actors. (The meaning of the events is seen through the eyes of the involved actors.) The actors, operating inside of their life-world, are involved in reaching a common understanding about the facts, the experiences, and the norms of their reality. Hence, it is also the transcendental horizon of their agreements and disagreements, their disputes and their claims. This pertains especially to language and culture. The actors cannot distance themselves from culture and language in the same way they can detach themselves from the objective

27. *Ibid.*, 398.

reality of facts. Since communication is based on speech acts, the actors are always involved in the use of language.

Now, Habermas's thesis is this: a theory of communicative action must be grounded in the hermeneutic understanding of the life-world, but it cannot stay on this level because social relations cannot be reduced to social interaction. Therefore, the view from the inside has to be supplemented by the external perspective offered in systems theory. "I would like to suggest conceiving societies as simultaneously system and life-world."²⁸ Societies are conceived in terms both of systems and of life-worlds. This dual approach would also apply to the cultural sphere. While hermeneutic theories (Gadamer) interpret the relationship between the subject and the work of art as a dialogue between two subjects (both raise questions and give answers), Habermas insists on the systematic and functional character of culture as well. By this I mean that culture has to be treated as a part of the social system in which it operates. When the analysis moves to this level, we step out of the commonly acknowledged cultural tradition of our life-world and shift to a functional reading of the events, norms, and objects in which we normally participate as actors. Yet, Habermas does not simply want to replace the first perspective by the second—which would be a structuralist notion. Rather, he wants to combine them. He calls attention to the shortcomings of the phenomenological interpretation of the life-world (the bias for cultural aspects) and postulates a reorientation that would include the legitimate aspects of systems theory.

On the other hand, Habermas reminds us that the life-world cannot automatically be subsumed under the system. More specifically, he argues that the historical differentiation of the social system resulting in increased complexity leads at the same time to a situation where system and life-world are clearly

28. Jürgen Habermas, *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*, vol. 2 *Zur Kritik der funktionalistischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt, 1981), 180.

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detached from each other. The process of differentiation implies a rift between system and life-world. "The social system definitively explodes the horizon of the life-world, removes itself from the pre-understanding of communicative everyday praxis, and remains accessible only to the counter-intuitive knowledge of the social sciences that have developed since the eighteenth century."²⁹ The result is the *Versachlichung* (reification) of the life-world; this would apply not only to the spheres of morality and law, but also to the cultural sphere. System differentiation, then, leads to the formation of new institutions dealing with specific problems in terms of their own logic.

Let us consider the implications for the realm of art more closely. As soon as the differentiation occurred in the sphere of art and literature in the eighteenth century, we observe the emergence of a new institution. This institution, the institution of art, performs specialized functions that cannot be duplicated by other social institutions. Thus validity claims in the sphere of art do not have the same meaning as claims made by moral or scientific theories. Specifically, Habermas, following Parsons, defines the claims of art to meaning as expressive values. Accordingly, the autonomous institution of art prescribes the reception of the individual work of art. That work is primarily received under the auspices of *Wahrhaftigkeit* (authenticity), as distinguished from *Wahrheit* (truth). The process of differentiation within the social system, in other words, assigns art a specialized function. This reorientation both sharpens and limits art's specific validity claims. To put it bluntly: as part of the cultural subsystem, art loses the central place it occupied in traditional societies, where it was bound to religion and morality.

Literary criticism and the life-world: We have to contemplate the consequences of this strategy. The grip of systems theory

29. *Ibid.*, 258.

marginalizes art by insisting on its expressive function as the primary one. The aesthetic experience is detached from cognitive and moral truth. In Habermas's work, however, this analysis should not be understood as a plea for aestheticism. On the contrary, Habermas is well aware of the critical force of modern artistic movements. In his critique of Daniel Bell he argues—and this brings him close to Adorno again—that the avant-garde of the twentieth century fulfilled an important critical task. He writes: "These discontents [of modern societies] have not been called into life by modernist intellectuals. They are rooted in deep seated reactions against the process of *societal* modernization. Under the pressure of the dynamics of economic growth and the organizational accomplishments of the state, this social modernization penetrates deeper and deeper into previous forms of human existence."³⁰ In this context, Habermas stresses the critical function of modern art and vigorously defends it against the neoconservative praise of unquestioned tradition. He calls on communicative rationality in order to undercut the power of the economic and administrative logic that determined the historical process of modernization. Yet, on the level of systems analysis, he accepts the separation of art from science and morality. Hence, the standards for the appreciation and evaluation of art are different from those developed by ethical and scientific theories. In the realm of theoretical analysis (dealing with the system) we are left therefore with an unbridgeable gap between the specialized institution of art (as part of the cultural subsystem) and the life-world. (Like Peter Bürger, Habermas is convinced that the attempts of surrealism to destroy the institution of art and reconnect art and life-world have failed.)³¹ Still, as we have seen, the task for Habermas is to relink system and life-world. In our example this would mean the specialized institution of

30. Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (Winter 1981): 7.

31. See Peter Bürger, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, 1984).

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art and the use of art in everyday life have to be brought together again; the alienated analysis of the expert and the impoverished experience of the layperson have to be reintegrated. But how good are the chances for this project? Habermas is cautious enough to voice his doubts because the logic of the social system has been more powerful than the resisting forces within the life-world.

It seems that Habermas has maneuvered himself into a difficult position: on the one hand, using systems theory, he traces the process of social differentiation that leads to the institutional detachment of art from the life-world; on the other hand, he postulates the revival of the life-world and with it the revival of a common aesthetic experience that can be connected to other modes of experience, such as the moral sphere. Yet, this task of relinking is not an easy one because the differentiation of values, as it has been accepted by the institution of literary criticism, denies an immediate integration of the various modes of experience. This was one of the reasons why Adorno in his aesthetic theory heroically refused to support a strictly Kantian interpretation of art (through the category of taste) and insisted on the *Wahrheitsgehalt* of the work of art, on a moment of truth that is at least equivalent to, if not more valid than the truth claims of philosophical discourse. Thus Adorno does not acknowledge the dichotomy between the life-world and the institution of art. His analysis, which is clearly that of an expert critic, relies on hermeneutic procedures that must satisfy the institutional level as well as the experience of the life-world. The truth claims of the work of art cannot be restricted to one level. In fact, Adorno maintains that the redemption of the reified life-world can be conceived only through the understanding of the authentic work of art. This claim, of course, leaves him with the problem of explaining how the extreme complexity of the modern work of art can be related to our daily experience. The more Adorno emphasizes the validity of modern art by contrasting its aesthetic structure with the depraved language of everyday communication, the

more he widens the gap between the work of art and the general public. Obviously Habermas does not want to pursue this approach, primarily, as we have seen, because he does not share Adorno's notion of a completely reified reality under advanced capitalism. He clearly means to redeem the life-world in its various modes. But how can this be done in the realm of art?

Two strategies are conceivable for the solution of this problem: either one has to find a mediating element between the system and the life-world, between the institution of art and everyday aesthetic experience, or one has to undercut the dichotomy by showing that it is a false one, by showing, in other words, that the use of language in ordinary communication and its use in fictional literature are not fundamentally different. In the second case the autonomy of art would be erased. Brecht's aesthetic would be a step in this direction. Habermas has not favored this approach, however. In his most recent essay on the distinction between philosophy and literary criticism, he has argued instead that the leveling of language in the project of deconstruction leaves us with no means to confront and solve the problems we encounter in our life-worlds. Most notably, he argues that Richard Rorty's notion of language as a permanently floating process would destroy the possibility of a meaningful practice because this concept of language cancels the yes and no of communication. "The yes and no of communicatively acting players are so prejudiced and rhetorically overwhelmed by linguistic contexts, that the anomalies that appear in phases of exhaustion are depicted only as symptoms of a diminishing vitality, as part of the aging process, as processes analogous to nature—and not as the result of failed solutions to problems and inadequate answers."³² Against the "holistic" approach of Jacques Derrida and Richard Rorty, Habermas emphasizes the process of linguistic differentiation:

32. Jürgen Habermas, "Exkurs zur Einebnung der Gattungsunterschiede zwischen Philosophie und Literatur: Ueber Idealisierungen im Alltag" (1985, manuscript), 34–35.

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the discourses of science, law, and morality have become separate and therefore each has developed according to its own logic. Consequently, Habermas in his attempt to relink system and life-world must favor a model of mediation. Literary criticism, to give an example, has the task of mediating between the literary system, as it is articulated in the institution of art, and the ordinary language of communication. Since modern art beginning with romanticism is increasingly inaccessible to the general public, it becomes the mission of the critic to translate the *Erfahrungsgehalt* (experience content) of the art work into the language of ordinary communication. A similar function, incidentally, is assigned by Habermas to philosophy. It is supposed to mediate between the expert discourses of science, law, and the like, and ordinary communication.

My reservations about this model are twofold: first, I have some doubts about the chances for the success of this translation. Given the complexity of expert discourse, it is problematic to assume that ordinary language is adequate for the articulation of subtle aesthetic problems. This is, of course, one of the reasons why literary criticism has lost its mediating function between the advanced work of art and the general reading public. The rhetoric of modern criticism is no more accessible than the structure of advanced works of art. Second, Habermas's approach, much like that of the Young Hegelians, is a one-way street: it traces only the flow from the level of the system to the level of the life-world. Yet it would be crucial also to explore the possible impact of ordinary language on expert discourse. What can ordinary language contribute to the discourse of the experts?³³ In what way is the analysis of the critic also grounded in his or her daily experience? In certain ways Adorno's aesthetic theory can do justice to this dialectic by holding on to a notion of aesthetic truth that integrates the expert discourse and ordinary experience through the idea of

33. See Peter Uwe Hohendahl, *The Institution of Criticism* (Ithaca, 1982).

mimesis—an idea that Habermas wants to limit to the prera-tional phase of human development. In a different way Der-rida's project of deconstruction undercuts the logocentric tradition of European philosophy. Habermas seems to under-estimate its critical potential when he charges that Derrida reduces philosophical and literary writing and reading to the problem of rhetoric. Instead of assuming with Habermas that deconstruction aestheticizes all language (everything becomes literary criticism), one can also argue that deconstruction is an attempt to relink the formal discourse of the experts and or-dinary language by problematizing both. In the realm of literary criticism this means, as Habermas notes critically, that the special status of poetic language is denied. But it is not quite evident why Habermas is not willing to use the critical force of deconstruction against the logic of differentiated systems. It seems that Habermas overstates his case when he describes deconstruction as a purely literary approach without concern for problem solving in the realm of the life-world. Thus my suggestion would be: if we want to free the life-world from the constraints of the overarching system and its institutions, there is room for the project of deconstructive criticism, precisely because it questions the logic of systems.³⁴

One reason why premodern literary criticism—say that of the seventeenth century—could more easily connect literature and life in its discourse is that ordinary language and poetic language were not yet conceived of as fundamentally different. Both followed the same rules of rhetoric. Only with the emer-gence of the concept of aesthetic autonomy in the eighteenth century does the transition from poetic to ordinary language become problematic. Although it is not likely that we can return to the literary system of premodern classicism, its his-torical existence should remind us that the autonomy of art is

34. See, for instance, Michael Ryan, *Marxism and Deconstruction: A Critical Articulation* (Baltimore, 1982), and the critical remarks of John O'Kane, "Marxism, Deconstruction, and Ideology: Notes toward an Articulation," *New German Critique* 35 (Fall 1984): 219–47.

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not a transhistorical category but rather a concept grounded in specific historical conditions. Looking back at the evolution of the institution of art from the eighteenth to the twentieth century we can understand the claim for the autonomy of poetic language as a critical response to the process of differentiation at the level of the social system. Yet this process had its own dialectic: as soon as the concept of autonomy was firmly installed in the institution of art, it became conventional. Today it hardly has the subversive force it had about 1800. Similarly, Habermas's attempt to rescue the autonomy of art as the sphere where language playfully creates new worlds and thereby offers counterfactual possibilities—as Habermas emphasizes against Mary L. Pratt—no longer has the same critical edge.³⁵ The whole issue of the life-world, I suggest, is still an open question in Habermas's recent work—a question that definitely deserves further attention and possibly has to be reformulated to reach the goal that Habermas has in mind.

35. Mary L. Pratt, *The Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, Ind., 1977).