

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The contemporary historical conjuncture appears to simultaneously justify the project of Critical Theory and contradict its basic preconditions. On the one hand, the material effects of the latest capitalist crisis would seem to be an extremely concrete expression of the connection between social injustice and the irrationality of the capitalist system. On the other hand, advanced liberal democratic societies are undergoing a protracted crisis of values (Castoriadis, 1991). Even though this crisis of values has generated a diversity of normative positions and it is possible to identify progressive tendencies, the values that appear the most practically effective, especially individualist definitions of self-interest, are those antithetical to Critical Theory. From a historical standpoint, Critical Theory has previously confronted equivalent dilemmas. The difficulty, even the tragedy, of such dialectical disjunctions was constitutive of the Frankfurt School's programme. Critical Theory was, in large measure, originally developed in exile, and the term itself reflected an awareness of the distortions of Marxism's emancipatory intentions, whether as a result of historical developments that Marx had not foreseen, the authoritarian and bureaucratic character of Marxist political parties, or the misinterpretation of the complexion of theory (Jay, 1973; 1984; Held, 1980; Dubiel, 1985; Wiggershaus, 1994). The possibility of radical change is nevertheless an irrevocable presupposition of Critical Theory. However, it is not prospective change in general that is presupposed, rather Critical Theory presumes that the potentials for the abolition or radical transformation of the conditions of oppression, suffering and injustice are immanent in the development of society.

It may appear paradoxical that the contemporary tendencies that seem to undermine Critical Theory's programme, such as the power of global markets, the comparative regression in social policies in many advanced nation states which undercut the rights of citizens and workers and the diminishing power of some progressive movements to mobilize, give rise to consequences that make Critical Theory necessary and justified. These consequences include growing material inequalities in advanced capitalist societies, the experience of vulnerability ensuing from the dismantling of welfare state protections, the erosion of social solidarity, ideological confusions that means that the contesting of subordination and alienation is open to irrational expression, and the decline in the horizon of expectations, to use Koselleck's term, that ensues from the disillusionment with the outcomes of former progressive initiatives (Koselleck, 1988). This situation only appears paradoxical because the contradictory character of capitalist society has been occluded or is forgotten.

There are many reasons for the occlusion of conflict and its sources in social relations of domination and the experiences of injustice. One reason is particularly consequential, because its appeal consists in disputing the negative assessment of the contemporary developments that were just enumerated. This is the view that the conflicts of earlier phases of capitalism have been superseded (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). Now, while it is no doubt true that some of the parameters of addressing social injustice have changed, it is equally the case that preceding capitalist conflicts have been subject to *displacement* rather than overcome. What this means is that the major conflicts of capitalist society persist but that they are often manifested in new forms or in different domains, as well as undergoing periodic renewal at their source.

The two most influential critical sociological interpretations of *displacement* give a certain insight into how the notion of the superseding of the earlier conflicts of capitalist society could appear justified. Habermas argues that the dynamics of the capitalist economic system and the attendant conflicts of social class relations have been displaced through their mediation by other institutional mechanisms, especially by the state's intervention in the economy and the welfare state's consolidation of the social rights of citizenship (Habermas, 1976; 1987a). Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue that the displacement of conflict ensues from the establishment of a new legitimating regime of justification and the related processes of the re-categorizing of problems and the altering of interpretations of the instituted reality of capitalism more generally. In fact, Boltanski and Chiapello consider that the displacement that shaped the contemporary form of 'network' capitalism was conditioned by the social contestation over the regulated and organized capitalism that preceded it. Significantly, the model of organized capitalism had been the institutional basis of Habermas' interpretation of the displacement of the dynamics of liberal market capitalism and the modified expression of capitalist conflicts in crises of individual and social identity (Habermas, 1976; 1987a). Despite the evident semantic differences, in either case the modifications that underpin the displacement of conflict reflect progressive demands for reform and significant social struggles, whether for social protection, policy coordination, flexibility or participation.

The notions of displacement draw attention to how the persisting dynamics of capitalism, particularly the imperative of capital accumulation, limit and condition its modifications. Notions of displacement highlight the complications involved in comprehending these dynamics and the salience of ideological justification. In short, displacement serves to resituate and conceal antagonisms. It paradoxically introduces elements of uncertainty into critique while implying that capitalism incorporates supplementary justifications, such as that it is amenable to demands for fairness and autonomy. Claude Lefort's contention that ideology serves to fill 'the gap' that stems from the social order not being identical with itself discloses this purpose of supplementary justifications (Lefort, 1986). Lefort further argues that ideology seeks to contain the divisions that the social order constitutes through defining change in ways that reflexively articulates the principles of the existing social institution. In this

case, displacement references capitalism's persistence and restitution, rather than the innovative character of changes that may point beyond it.

Given that these accounts of the respective phases of displacement are defined in terms of capitalism's historicity, it is important to underline that displacement is itself conditioned by struggles and gives expression to struggles. This means that institutional modifications are partly expressions of ongoing dialectics of control, including the empowerment of capitalism in recent decades with accelerated globalization. The concept of dialectics of control refers to conflictual relations of interdependency, such as Marx attributed to class relations and to how the dynamic of the reproduction of capitalism is contingent on the exploitation of wage labour (Marx, 1971; Giddens, 1979). Dialectics of control, however, apply to a broader range of social contexts and practices than those of class relations and wage labour.

The fact that the preceding conflicts of capitalist society have been reconfigured is only one of the reasons why Critical Theory is in need of revision. Critical Theory develops through reflection on the limitations of its extant formulations, particularly relative to its aspirations and the changes in the social-historical context. The recognition of the social and historical conditioning of knowledge originally distinguished Critical Theory from 'traditional' theory (Horkheimer, 1972). Critical Theory includes a series of demands that distinguish it from other approaches in social theory and philosophy (Calhoun, 1995). It aims to provide an explanation and analysis of present society that is able to apprehend the developmental possibilities it contains and to identify the potentials for emancipation immanent in the needs or moral experience of subjects. These needs are 'radical', Agnes Heller argues, because they could be satisfied only through an emancipatory social transformation (Heller, 1984a). Critical Theory does not juxtapose an ideal state against existing conditions of oppression and inequality; rather critique focuses on those existing trends and developments that prefigure an emancipated society. The normative standpoint of critique presupposes, Honneth argues, a sociological determination of a pre-theoretical interest in emancipation; such as he claims to find are present in demands for respect and the practices of mutual recognition (Honneth, 1994: 225).

In its original formulation, Critical Theory was distinguished by the ties it has to those socialized subjects that seek to bring about such a transformation and by its reflection upon the social-historical context of its emergence. Critical Theory subscribes neither to traditional philosophy's model of contemplative reflection, nor the disinterested standpoint of modern science (Habermas, 1974). The validity of critique depended on its initiating processes of enlightenment that facilitate the autonomy of subjects and the future emancipatory practices that transform oppressive social relations. Critical theory thus 'sees itself as a necessary catalytic moment within the social complex of life which it analyses' (Habermas, 1974: 2).

The relationship of theory and political practice may have been permanently under strain, but it remains one of the defining considerations of Critical Theory.

In part, this is because Critical Theory contends that theory always has practical implications and that these practical consequences are concealed by traditional theories in various ways. For instance, traditional theories may function as ideologies that veil, disguise and misrepresent injustice and oppression, traditional theories may not only reflect the hierarchical structure of the social division of labour but they may also perform an important role in social coordination and integration, and traditional theories confirm the distinction between theory and practice (Marcuse, 1968; Horkheimer, 1972; Habermas, 1974).

For these reasons, Critical Theory is the critique of alternative theories, as well as an approach that draws upon them where appropriate in order to constitute new theoretical syntheses. It is not, however, simply the critique of ideology and false representations, Critical Theory is the critique of the social reality that gives rise to false representations and ideological misunderstandings, such as in Marx's view of religious consolation in response to suffering that appeared unamenable to change or the never achievable notion of freedom as consumer sovereignty in a society founded on commodity production and exchange (Marx, 1971; 1977c). The leading contemporary representatives of Critical Theory have, however, more cautiously formulated its practical implications. This prudence is no doubt a consequence of a heightened reflexivity regarding the complications of theory's relationship to practice and a product of an acceptance of the fallible character of theory. Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth have been drawn to North American pragmatist philosophy because of its practical cast and appreciation of fallibility. Pragmatism's practical character is evident in the interconnections it establishes between intersubjective communication and democracy (Habermas, 1987a; Honneth, 1995a; Browne, 2009a; 2009b).

Phases, Generations, Paradigms

It has become commonplace to speak of phases and generations of the Frankfurt School tradition of Critical Theory. The initial 'interdisciplinary materialism' of the 1930s, that was consistent with Horkheimer's original vision as director of the Institute of Social Research, is regularly seen as giving way in the early 1940s to the period dominated by the 'critique of instrumental reason' (Habermas, 1984; Dubiel, 1985; Kellner, 1989; Wiggershaus, 1994). Similarly, the notion of a second generation of Critical Theory has been used to differentiate the work of Habermas and that of several philosophers and social scientists closely related to his programme, like Albrecht Wellmer, Klaus Eder and Claus Offe (Held, 1980; Kellner, 1989; Wiggerhaus, 1994). In my opinion, Habermas developed a significantly revised Critical Theory; one explicitly intended to be an alternative framework to that of the 'critique of instrumental reason'. In terms of the present, while the notion of a third generation of Critical Theory is not necessarily incorrect and possesses some utility, it is potentially misleading with respect to the continuities that Honneth's theory has with that of Habermas. Honneth's core notion of recognition may ultimately be considered an alternate elaboration

of the intersubjective and communicative paradigm that Habermas initiated, rather than a movement beyond it (Deranty, 2009b). Be that as it may, the periodizing categories draw attention to how Critical Theory has undergone modifications in response to the changing social-historical circumstances and the advances in salient fields of knowledge, like the twentieth century ‘linguistic turn’ that emerged in otherwise quite different strands of philosophy and the social sciences (Rorty, 1967).

There is nothing unusual then about revising Critical Theory, but reorientations imply different trajectories of future development; and no doubt the continuity of current approaches with Critical Theory’s original programme can be disputed. The original intention of Critical Theory was to give contemporary relevance, in some form, to the Marxian project of the radical transformation of society. It is therefore worthwhile briefly sketching some of those developments that put this project into question and the resulting innovations that were undertaken within Critical Theory. There are three factors in the present which bear acutely on Critical Theory’s methodological preconditions: the longest standing stems from the demise of the proletariat as the historical agent of change, but the various actors Marxists have invoked as potential substitutes, like new social movements and struggles in developing nation states, have proven less than convincing alternatives. Likewise, the oppressive and bureaucratic character of state socialist societies has long cast a shadow over the project of a radical transformation of capitalist society. The dissolution of state socialist societies made the idea of a historical transition beyond capitalism appear utopian and at variance with the ‘normal’ pattern of social modernization. Last, production undoubtedly remains a central structure of modern society, despite whatever questions are posed by alterations in the distribution and organization of work, however anchoring a project of emancipatory change in production has itself become the subject of sustained critiques, especially by ecologists rejecting the ‘productivist’ value system of industrial society and contemporary analyses of the manifold sites of power. These critiques reflect a shift in definitions of emancipation and, somewhat paradoxically in light of the disrepute of notions of historical transition, an assessment of the intrinsic limitations to the implications of changes in the system of production. Above all, what makes these three factors outstanding amongst an array of problems is the fact that they represent second order difficulties consequent upon several original problems of Marxist critique.

In a sense, when measured against its aspirations, Marxism has been in perennial crisis, however, its contemporary predicament appears unprecedented (Arnason, 1980; 1984; Márkus, 1993). Of course, countervailing factors can always be cited in Marxism’s defence and the richness of Marx’s original statement means that it will continue to have adherents who consider it superior to later amendments. My analysis retrieves several important components of Marx’s theory for Critical Theory; for example, the centrality of the notion of dialectics of control to my analysis restores social conflict to a prominent position in the explanation of injustice and the dynamics of social reproduction. In a

similar vein, José Maurício Domingues has sought to renew Critical Theory through reactivating some of the resources of Marxist theory (Domingues, 2012). Likewise, the recent economic recession and the entrenching of greater inequality have meant that discussions of neo-Marxist political economy have garnered interest outside their field. Nevertheless, the arguments for substantially revising Critical Theory appear incontrovertible in light of Marxism's problems. Honneth summarizes different strands of this predicament in commenting that:

All in all, the suggestive potential of Marxist theory has clearly exhausted itself. Given that its scientific content has been refuted, its political claims historically relativized and its philosophical foundations subjected to critique, Marxism has become an object for the recollections of historians of theory. (Honneth, 1995b: 4)

Even if every aspect of this assessment is not taken to be definitive, Honneth's summation highlights why Habermas' rethinking and reformulation of the foundations of Critical Theory is significant. Habermas proposed that the paradigm of intersubjective communication and understanding is an alternative to the paradigm of production that derives from Marx. The paradigm change reflects a considerably different orientation to those previously taken within Critical Theory to the problems of Marxist social theory. The prior orientations can be loosely categorized as those of restoration and rectification. The first involved some attempt at restoring dimensions of Marx's propositions that had been subsequently obscured and distorted. The ensuing revisions were directed towards correcting the self-understanding, and misunderstandings, of the Marxist tradition, primarily through the presentation of a more sophisticated appreciation of Marx's thought and its philosophical sources. Indeed, the fact that some major texts of Marx only became available during the twentieth century, like the *Paris Manuscripts of 1844* and the *Grundrisse*, lent considerable justification to restorative approaches (Marx, 1977a; 1973). There can be little doubt that the restorative approach produced a greater understanding of the full range of Marx's theory. Whilst a restorative procedure could appear conservative, and no doubt this is the case in some instances, it more importantly often played a significant role in the renewal of Marxist perspectives opposed to the dominant strand of this tradition.

In any case, revisions of a restorative approach need not exclude the orientation of rectification, and they have clarified its basic prerequisites. Rectifying orientations seek to make good what appear to be omissions in Marx's theory; and, as such, the revisions which ensue result mainly from an extension of a Marxist perspective to new topics. Further revisions then emerge in response to problems that arise from so doing; within the tradition of Western Marxism the 'normal' response to compound difficulties was utilizing and integrating theoretical advances in related disciplines (see Habermas, 1979; Jay, 1984; Howard, 1988). The Frankfurt School belongs to the heterodox tradition of Western Marxism and its response to the confounding of aspects

of Marx's prognosis was precisely to extend the Marxist critique of capitalist society to new domains. This is apparent in Habermas' claim that six themes dominated the work of the Frankfurt School 'Institute of Social Research' until the early 1940s:

(a) the forms of integration in postliberal societies, (b) family socialization and ego development, (c) mass media and mass culture, (d) the social psychology behind the cessation of protest, (e) the theory of art, and (f) the critique of positivism and science. (Habermas, 1987a: 378–9)

It is worth noting that many of the Frankfurt School's extensions of the Marxist critique of capitalism were enabled by György Lukács' preceding conceptualization of reification. Lukács argued that the reification deriving from the prevalence in capitalist society of the commodity form conditioned the entire attitude of subjects to the world. Reification's expression of the dominance of objectivity over subjectivity therefore inflected bourgeois culture as a whole (Lukács, 1971). Under the influence of Lukács' synthesis of Marx's political economy and Weber's sociology of modernity, the Frankfurt School theorists would contend that the rationalization of production, as well as the rationalization of other institutions of capitalist society, intensified reification. In other words, rather than rationalization developing the forces of production that could underpin an emancipatory reorganization of society, it was consolidating social relations of domination and diminishing the potential of individuals to be autonomous (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972).

The rectifying orientation towards Marx's theory of capitalist society produced, to be sure, significant innovations. The revisions deriving from it have certainly gone beyond those that would result from simply taking into account subsequent changes. However, over time rectifying procedures appeared less capable of convincingly addressing the full range of problems and dilemmas comprising the predicament of Critical Theory. In its turn, this circumstance brought the original deficiencies of this orientation to the fore; these deficiencies have been explored in reappraisals of Horkheimer's interdisciplinary conception of Critical Theory and the research conducted under his auspices during the 1930s. Even sympathetic critics argue that, in spite of the syntheses countenanced by the Frankfurt School's receptivity to other theories, the revisions actually proposed were limited by a reliance on the guiding framework of Marxist political economy (Habermas, 1974; Benhabib, 1986; Honneth, 1991; 1995b; Hohendahl, 1991). This 'latent orthodoxy' is apparent, for example, in a 'functional for capital' interpretation of the socializing role of the family and an underestimation of the freedoms guaranteed by the institutions of bourgeois democracy in the critique of ideology. But, above all, it reflected a conception of emancipation that was almost entirely conditioned by the Marxist philosophy of history and the Frankfurt School's adherence to the founding category of social labour. Habermas considered that the Frankfurt School Critical Theory

reached a kind of theoretical and political impasse: its critique of instrumental reason and state regulated capitalism's totally administered society did not contain much prospect for emancipation (Habermas, 1984; 1987a).

Habermas' writings originally pursued the restoring and rectifying orientations, but, in the course of developing the revisions he saw necessary for Marxian theory, his critique underwent a process of increasing radicalization. Although it is certainly the case that these qualitative changes occurred in stages, they did culminate in a different orientation. Those problems Habermas identified in Marx's thought stimulated his construction of an alternative Critical Theory; especially determining this reorientation was Habermas' perception of the deleterious consequences that these problems had for Marxist theory and practice (Habermas, 1974). This lack of separation between Marx's thought and the failings of later Marxism contradicts a major tenet of restorative approaches. Despite his extended critique and presentation of an alternative communicative paradigm, Habermas claimed to have still retained in a revised form whatever remains of value in Marx's standpoint (Habermas, 1979; 1987b). Of course, the justification presented for this claim has changed substantially; it is based on conclusions drawn from orientations that are principally those of reconstruction and replacement.

Habermas' 'reconstruction of historical materialism' proved relatively unstable, because the core dimensions that would make up his alternative perspective, like communication, morality and rationality, informed his original critical analyses of Marx. Marx, he argued, had elided the difference between labour and social interaction; the latter is founded on the structure of communicative action and is oriented towards the achievement of mutual understanding, whereas labour is guided by an interest in the technical control of the material environment, and it is principally a type of instrumental action (Habermas, 1974; 1978a; 1978b). In retrospect, Habermas' 'reconstruction of historical materialism' appears to have only been a transitional work. Further refinements precipitated a much more far-reaching assertion: that is, that his theory of communicative action is an alternative and substitute for the original Marxist Critical Theory, instead of a component of the reconstruction of it. In other words, Habermas considers that his project displaces the Marxist original and should be considered, at least in some respect, a replacement for it (Habermas, 1979; 1984; 1987a; 1987b).

One of the major strengths of Habermas' alternate paradigm of understanding is its provision of normative grounds for critique. Habermas claims that the philosophy of consciousness, or the subject-centred reason, has exhausted its potential and that its irresolvable antinomies have been exposed, such as that it is perennially caught in the bind of converting subjectivity into an objectivity that the subject can reflect upon (1987b). Habermas' theory of communicative action sketched a different trajectory of rationalization in modernity, one originally initiated by the cultural transformation that derived from the rationalization of communication (Habermas, 1984). In short, Habermas argues that communicative rationalization initially shaped various spheres of society in the constitution of

modernity, especially law and morality. Yet, the instrumental-functionalist rationalization of capitalism and the bureaucratic state would delimit and somewhat undermine the communicative infrastructure to which the identity of subjects remained attached. Nevertheless, Habermas argues that communicative action remains a source of potential emancipation and that legitimacy has increasingly come to depend on the satisfaction of the procedures of democratic discourses (Habermas, 1996a).

Habermas' theory's various revisions imply that the legal and constitutional institution of rights and democracy in bourgeois society could form the basis of future progressive transformations. In his opinion this is especially important, because the sphere of production no longer represents a domain of substantial emancipation and a source of general autonomy in other spheres of society. Habermas' thesis is more complex than this synopsis conveys. Still, its general implications are reflected in the fact that, following *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas concentrated on developing his discourse theory of morality, justice and democracy, rather than extending and refining the social theoretical component of Critical Theory (Habermas, 1984; 1987a; 1990; 1996a). In short, discourse theory focused to a much greater extent on the concerns of normative political philosophy.

Normative Political Philosophy and Social Theory

After Habermas, it is hard to imagine that Critical Theory would revert to the paradigm of consciousness or the philosophy of the subject. Indeed, Honneth's theory of recognition has consolidated the intersubjective perspective in Critical Theory (Honneth, 1995a; 1995b). Nevertheless, Critical Theory does confront different lines of potential future development and, as will be explained in detail later, the normative and explanatory dimensions of Critical Theory have recently tended to diverge. The recent Critical Theory discussions have tended to be dominated by debates in normative political philosophy.

Given the substantial revival of normative political philosophy, especially under the influence of John Rawls' theory of justice, and the shift in Habermas' focus towards law and rights, there are good reasons why normative political philosophy has become so prominent (Rawls, 1971; Habermas, 1996a; 1998). This development is clearly related to Habermas' position on the emancipatory significance of the bourgeois constitutional heritage and the emphasis on democracy. For all the important and constructive discussions that have ensued, such as those on civil society and deliberative democracy, this predominance of normative political philosophy has some limitations from the perspective of a Critical Theory of Society. In particular, the dominance of the format of normative political philosophy has meant that the social theory component of Critical Theory has not received an equivalent elaboration. My book is, in large part, an attempt to rectify this deficit and to renew the social theory of contemporary society.

It would be misleading to claim that this assessment is exclusively my own. The very latest contributions of Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser, as well as

those of other theorists, like Lois McNay, constitute a reaction to the predominantly political framing of contemporary discussions in Critical Theory (Honneth, 2014; Fraser 2009; McNay, 2014). Honneth identifies several problems that ensue from the independent development of the themes of normative political philosophy. In particular, normative political philosophy's method of formulating abstract principles and models contains the potentially irremediable problem that its conceptions of justice and freedom may have no actual connection to reality. In Honneth's opinion, there is no guarantee that the gap between claim and reality of these theoretically 'purified' conceptions can be bridged at all (Honneth, 2014: 63). Although this criticism does not entirely apply to the Critical Theory discussions, it illuminates some of the dilemmas that ensue from framing Critical Theory in the terms of normative political philosophy. Namely, it can lead to theoretical positions that are based on highly simplifying assumptions and to rather narrow conceptions of society. Honneth argues that there has recently been a tendency to conceive of all social relations as if they were legally constituted in order to make them consistent with the model of justice that is proposed. To some extent, a rather similar problem is present in extrapolating from Habermas' notion of democratic legitimacy depending on the fulfilment of formal procedures. It has to treat the substantive conditions of enacting justice and autonomy as either external additions or prerequisites that are presupposed in order to satisfy the procedure's basic criteria, like the participation of all concerned (Honneth, 2014).

There is much to be gained from engaging in normative political philosophy, although it is not difficult to perceive how its construction of principles and models often depends on a liberal and individualist conception of the subject (see Wagner, 2008). The more significant problem is the supplanting of the sociological standpoint that has defined Critical Theory. The original methodological intentions of Critical Theory ran counter to the notion of the independence of normative political philosophy. One of Critical Theory's defining features has been its interest in the sociological translation and practical realization of philosophical categories, like justice, reason and autonomy. In my opinion, it is important that this intention is retained, since it informs Critical Theory's heightened reflexivity and its method of immanent critique. Further, Critical Theory has always been defined as a programme of interdisciplinary research (Horkheimer, 1993). It presumes that knowledge drawn from different disciplines is necessary for comprehending the capitalist constellation. The recent relative lack of elaboration of the social theory component throws the whole interdisciplinary programme into doubt, because social theory provided the framework of this programme's integration and it established the historical perspective of Critical Theory's interpretation of emancipatory change.

The importance of synthesis to Critical Theory is evident in Fraser and Honneth's description of their respective ambitions 'to connect the usually discrete levels of moral philosophy, social theory, and political analysis in a critical theory of capitalist society'. This they claim is contrary to much of the work of those currently identifying with Critical Theory, who they claim

assume a disciplinary division and are reluctant to theorize capitalist society as a 'totality' (Fraser and Honneth, 2003: 4). The original interdisciplinary synthesis of Critical Theory was broader than the three levels just described. Psychoanalysis, in particular, was a crucial dimension of the Frankfurt School's theory of capitalist society, since it revealed some of the sources of the integration of individuals into this social order and their attachment to it, as well as elements of the individual that were resistant to the social order and that may constitute demands for liberation (Marcuse, 1966; Fromm, 1971). In the case of Habermas, the interdisciplinary synthesis expanded to include a wider variety of theoretical perspectives, like linguistic theories, genetic psychology, and elements of sociological systems theory. Yet, this did pose the question of whether some of the perspectives that Habermas drew upon were compatible with the intentions of a critical theory of society. In my opinion, Habermas for the most part adapted frameworks in a way that overcame the potential inconsistencies with Critical Theory, but his drawing on strands of functionalism undercut his major critical diagnostic intention, that is, of presenting a critique of functionalist reason (Habermas, 1984; 1987a). One could argue that this antinomy is one of the major reasons for the subsequent subordinating of the social theory component of Critical Theory.

The dialectical approach of Critical Theory partly shaped its interdisciplinary syntheses. The dialectical approach has different connotations, but a commitment to it constitutes a distinctive methodological background to Critical Theory. In one sense, the very idea of critique bears witness to a commitment to the power of negation. For Critical Theory aims to disclose how existing reality is in contradiction with its rational potential and how this contradiction manifests itself in forms of suffering, oppression and pathologies. For instance, Habermas argued that the mechanisms of the material reproduction of capitalist society, exchange value and administrative power, have developed to a point where they undermine the rationality of communication. This erosion of communication has given rise, in turn, to contemporary social movements and protests over the conditions of living, such as resistance to urban developments, opposition to the unequal legal treatment of minorities and the welfare state policies that are based on prescriptive definitions of identity, such as in relation to gender and sexuality (Habermas, 1987a).

Habermas' paradigm of communication draws on the early sense of dialectics as dialogue. However, his theory came to downplay the more ontological connotations of dialectics, which Marx had foregrounded. That is, the dialectical sense of the historicity of social development and the process character of society (Adorno, 1989). In other words, Marx's dialectical approach concerns the unfolding dynamics rather than the static representation of society. Similarly, Honneth's development of Hegel's original idea of struggles for recognition implies that the expansion of moral understandings derives from opposition and conflict (Honneth, 1995a).

Critical Theory has consistently deployed the dialectical method in order to account for the conversion between the subjectivity of social actors and the

objectivity of social institutions. The attempt to understand the interplay and mediations of this relationship necessitated the development of complex interdisciplinary frameworks. Marx's labour theory of value naturally represented an interpretation of the conversion between the subjectivity of the worker and the objectivity of the capitalist institution (Marx, 1971). However, the tradition of Critical Theory sustains the dialectical intentions of value theory, but it treats it less as an economic proposition in the narrow sense. Rather, it considers that the theory of value is concerned with a more general social theory problem. Namely, the problem of the contradictions of social reproduction; the theory of value is concerned with the dialectical relationship between the potentials for autonomy and the actual institutionalized constraints upon it.

It is in this latter dialectical sense that value theory represents something of a guiding thread for my analysis of the conflicts and structural contradictions of the contemporary capitalist constellation. My analysis takes into account how Habermas' conceptualization of the interrelationship of the lifeworld and the social systems of the market economy and the state-administration was intended to revise Marx's theory of value (Habermas, 1987a). It accepts that the processes of conversion and interchange have become more complex and mediated, particularly owing to the intervention of the state in the economy and the current combination of the dynamics of subjective incorporation and social exclusion.

'Critical Theory' and 'Radical Thinkers'

Given that my book explores how Critical Theory can be developed through the critique and synthesis of insights drawn from other social theories of the present development of society, it is necessary to briefly contrast the Critical Theory perspective that traces its lineage to the Frankfurt School with the more elastic use of the term 'critical theory' in contemporary discourses in the humanities and the social sciences. The latter usage typically covers a broad range of theories that are critical of contemporary capitalism (see Keucheyan, 2013). It often includes post-Marxist or radical theorists like Alain Baidou, Slavoj Žižek, Jacques Rancière, Antonio Negri, Judith Butler, as well as some post-structuralist and post-colonial perspectives, feminist theorists, and others. Now, many of these theorists have affinities with the Frankfurt School version of Critical Theory and it is not entirely unreasonable to claim that a case could be made for the salience of their writings to revising conventional Critical Theory in a way that is relevant to contemporary circumstances. These writers have offered neo-Marxist critiques of capitalism, they are certainly concerned with the critique of domination, many of them are influenced by psychoanalysis (more so than some recent work in the main tradition of Critical Theory), and several of them continue the interest in aesthetics that was a distinctive feature of the Frankfurt School Critical Theory as well. Yet, for these theorists to be taken as continuous with the Frankfurt School tradition would require disavowing the internal development of Critical Theory, the previously outlined

substantial considerations that led to its development and programmatic revisions. In particular, it would involve, to my mind, neglecting some of the core *problematiques* that have given Critical Theory its unique complexion.

It is certainly unfair to collapse a considerable diversity of ‘radical’ thinkers and critical approaches, but there are common divergences from the Frankfurt School tradition. In some respects, the key contrasts are the same as those that Habermas emphasized in his critique of postmodernism and post-structuralist approaches (Habermas, 1987b). Many of these radical theorists do not share Critical Theory’s methodological orientation, with its commitment to the concept of rationality and its normative universalism. Similarly, Critical Theory’s understanding of the dialogue between, and synthesis of, philosophy and the social sciences is not accepted by some of these radical theorists. The precise form and meaning of this relationship is contested within Critical Theory; however, it remains significant to the self-understanding of this tradition and it sets out some of the parameters for the justification of its critique.

Further, the political perspective of these ‘radical theorists’ regularly owes more to other strands of Marxism and it sometimes shades into the politics of orthodox or party Marxism. In the sense, that the approach that some ‘radical theorists’ have to politics is more instrumental and the other concerns or commitments of theory, like methodology, normative justification, or even rationality, are taken to be matters that are ultimately resolved politically or in combination with power. These are positions that tend to reflect the influence of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault in fields like those of cultural studies and postcolonial studies. In fact, it is not the perception of the imbrication of theory and power that separates these approaches from Critical Theory, but the conclusions that are drawn from it. For instance, the fact that some radical thinkers, like Chantal Mouffe, have contributed to the renewal of interest in the politics of Carl Schmitt may be indicative of the divergence from Critical Theory, even though it is true that this interest has antecedents in Walter Benjamin’s engagement with Schmitt in his ‘critique of violence’ (Benjamin 1978b[1955]; Mouffe, 1999). Schmitt’s critique of liberalism and his conception of politics as based on a division between friend and foe are certainly contrary to the democratic and deliberative perspective of Habermas’ Critical Theory (Schmitt, 2007[1932]; Habermas, 1998).

These heterogeneous strands of radical thought regularly dissent from Critical Theory’s underlying adherence to the intentions of the ‘project of modernity’, or the modernist articulation of its vision of the autonomous constitution of society. In some respects, it is the aspect of dissent rather than affirmation which has led to many of them being labelled critical theories. In fact, there has actually been a proliferation of the category of critique or critiques, often with the intention of emphasizing the acceptance of disputation and the diversity, or fragmentation, of progressive social and political movements, such as feminist, environmental, and identity (see Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). At the same time, the Frankfurt School tradition of Critical Theory may have come to be perceived as relatively less critical. This is probably because of its more

affirmative relation to liberalism and rights, as well as the priority that Habermas' discourse theory accords to agreement in determining social justice and normative justification. But it may simply be due to the view that the founding problems of Critical Theory belong to an earlier period and that its 'institutionalization' simply makes its theses seem predictable (see Honneth, 2009: 19). There have always been, to be sure, radical critiques of capitalism that diverge from Critical Theory, and which are opposed to its basic standard of critique. Critical Theory bases its critique on the existing but unfulfilled rationality of society. Habermas claims that Critical Theory is 'critical of the reality of developed societies inasmuch as they do not make full use of the learning potential culturally available to them, but deliver themselves over to an uncontrolled growth of complexity' (Habermas, 1987a: 375). This dimension of critique equally applies to alternative theories, irrespective of whether they are traditional or radical.

The recent generalization of critique reflects an appreciation of the multiplicity of injustices and the delegitimizing of formerly uncritical positions. It is fair to claim that Critical Theory can learn from struggles for justice, yet its methodology and perspective differentiate it from many forms of these struggles. Ultimately, it serves as a critical standard for assessing perspectives. In this respect, it is worth recalling Critical Theory's standpoint in relation to the workers' movement and how the Frankfurt School sought to explain the proletariat's diversion from its emancipatory potential. From this starting point, Critical Theory was forced to commence a process of rethinking the prospects and meaning of a general interest in emancipation. Similarly, Habermas' theory of the colonization of the lifeworld sought to understand and explain the then new protest movements, like the ecological, peace and anti-consumerist movements, potentials and how new conflicts were connected to the strains on the welfare state from demands for services and legitimacy (Habermas, 1987a). In his opinion, the explanatory intention of his theory was that of enabling a better understanding of those sources of discontent that are not entirely clear to the movements, and, by this, to counteract indiscriminate rejections of modern rationality. The latter took the form of elaborating the more expansive and democratic conception of communicative rationality (Habermas, 1984; 1986).

One of the problems of this approach was that it appeared rather distant from the substantive concerns of these movements and it did not fully satisfy its own explanatory intentions. Even so, Habermas' basic assumption remains correct. Critical Theory should provide a revised account of the conflicts that underlie contemporary movements and protests. It should constitute, then, not just a normative clarification of social struggles' demands for justice, but also a sociological explanation of the prevailing forms of domination and suffering. This explanation may coincide with or enhance those understandings of progressive movements opposing injustices, but it may constitute a critique of movements' explanations and serve to initiate dialogical reflection. Of course, Critical Theory must be open to learning from movements and their capacity to reveal injustices.

There are other ways in which the commitment to rationality differentiates the Frankfurt School tradition of Critical Theory from many of the other post-Marxist and radical perspectives that are often labelled ‘critical theory’ today. One of them is the extent to which Critical Theory has been shaped by its reception of Max Weber’s theory of rationality and Weber’s ambivalent vision of modernity (Weber, 1930; 1958). For Weber, rationalization harbours constraining and destructive consequences; particularly those of bureaucratic domination and the dissolution of those meanings and values that could either limit ‘purposive’ rationalization or give it a purpose beyond itself. Despite these dangers and the negative dimensions of rationalization, Weber believed that rationalization in the form of efficiency, predictability, the application of means, technological expansion, the growth in expertise and the disenchantment of magic and spiritualist interpretations of reality is so effective in modernity that there is no realistic possibility of renouncing it. In fact, Weber claimed that even the major alternative to capitalist rationalization would not result in a rupture with the destructive aspects of rationality. Socialism, Weber argued, would consolidate bureaucratic control and domination (Weber, 1994). As noted already, the Frankfurt School’s reception of Weber’s theory of rationalization was anticipated and mediated by Lukács’ theory of reification. Lukács argued that, although Weber’s depiction of many of the tendencies of rationalization was correct, Weber’s vision was affected by the reifying logic of capitalism and its tendency to make social processes appear to operate according to irresistible objective dynamics (Lukács, 1971). Without going into detail here, Lukács’ conception of the transcendence of reification through proletarian revolution was implausible by the time of the formation of the Frankfurt School.

It is probably sufficient to demonstrate the degree to which Critical Theory has been shaped by Weber’s theory of rationalization to note that it has pursued two almost contradictory positions in relationship to it. On the one hand, the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School extended and generalized Weber’s theory of rationalization. It detailed the penetration of rationalization into additional spheres of life, such as into leisure activities through the mass media, and sought to ascertain the deeper sources of instrumental rationalization, such as in the formation of human subjectivity and the mythical prehistory of Western civilization (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972; Marcuse, 1966). On the other hand, Critical Theory has sought to contest the implications of Weber’s theory of rationalization. In short, it has contested Weber’s conception on the basis of visions of a more encompassing and fulfilling meaning of rationality, for instance, challenging the repressive character of the corresponding model of subjectivity or explicating aesthetic experiences that expose the internal limits of instrumental rationality (Marcuse, 1966; Adorno, 1985). Habermas’ argument that communicative rationalization could enable a more balanced institutionalization of rationality similarly contests the conclusions that Weber drew about rationalization. Habermas envisages the possibility of a higher order democratic regulation of the currently dominant processes of the rationalisation of the capitalist market and bureaucratic state administration (Habermas, 1987a).

The Weberian *problematique* of rationalization in Critical Theory concerns the question of institutionalization. Rationality is considered a precondition for overcoming injustice and it underpins the interest in universal emancipation. Yet, rationalization not only extends organization and regulation, it expands domination. The dependency that rationalization creates upon its institution undermines prospective social alternatives.

Syntheses and Problematiques

In my opinion, the current interest in other strands of radical thought is partly a result of the deficiencies in the social theory component of recent Critical Theory. Still, it should be kept in mind that the limitations of much contemporary sociological theory and social scientific research have contributed to the distancing of Critical Theory from them. My analysis will later highlight how the implications of even relatively proximate sociological theories are somewhat inconsistent with the Critical Theory methodology of immanent critique. Moreover, Honneth is right to argue that several dominant strands of current sociology have become largely detached from the background of this discipline in practical philosophy (Honneth, 2012: 98). There are, of course, important exceptions to this thesis, such as the substantial works of Luc Boltanski, Laurent Thévenot, and Hans Joas, on social action, values, and morality (Boltanski and Thévenot, 2006; Joas 1993; 2000). Nevertheless, there are grounds for doubting the very possibility today of a synthesis of normative political philosophy and substantive social theory. However, such a synthesis is, in my opinion, a task that is necessary for the renewal of Critical Theory. For this reason, my analysis engages selectively and constructively with the arguments of contemporary critical sociologists, like Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, Pierre Bourdieu, and Saskia Sassen, to clarify and expand its position on dimensions of capitalist modernity's new constellation, such as the contrast between the normative ideal of global cosmopolitanism and the actual experiences of injustices. In many ways, my conceptualization seeks to refine existing positions in Critical Theory. To this end, theories of the practical constitution and transformation of institutions, particularly those of Anthony Giddens and Luc Boltanski, are drawn upon to capture the dynamics of agency and the dialectics of control.

Similarly, Cornelius Castoriadis' notion of social imaginaries is relevant to the overall framing of my book, without this always being explicit. In some respects, Castoriadis' work developed from a confrontation with problems similar to those that shaped the Frankfurt School's Critical Theory. Castoriadis' engagement with Max Weber's theses is likewise pivotal to the development of his social theory. Weber's vision of the prevalence of bureaucratic rationality in modernity influences Castoriadis' interpretation of capitalist domination's hierarchical structure and this organizational form's contradictions, such as its dependence on the creative capacities of individuals that it is unable to generate, whereas Weber's theses about the cultural formation and long-term consequences of instrumental rationality are modified by Castoriadis in his

conception of the modern imaginary of the project of the unlimited (pseudo-) rational domination and control of nature and society (Castoriadis, 1991; 1997a; 1997b). This conception has parallels with that of the Frankfurt School's critique of instrumental reason, particularly Horkheimer and Adorno's depiction of the dialectic of enlightenment, although there are differences in the respective historical genealogies (Horkheimer and Adorno, 1972; see Browne, 2016). In my opinion, the intentions of Castoriadis' critique of the contradictions of capitalism remains broadly correct, but this critique needs to be revised in order to take into account the changes in capitalist ideology and the partial rupture with the bureaucratic organizational form. These changes, I argue, are part of the contemporary redeployment of the capitalist imaginary. This redeployment has significantly altered the interpretative horizon of capitalist societies and projections of emancipatory transformation.

Although it is by no means fully developed in this work, my analysis implies that Critical Theory should pursue two apparently contradictory intentions in relation to capitalism. On the one hand, Critical Theory needs to develop its substantive political economy of capitalism. It might be argued that the revisions of Critical Theory, including the change to the communication paradigm, have contributed to stagnation in the area of political economy and a reliance on other accounts. In my opinion, this limits the critique of these other perspectives as well. If I have understood her correctly then the development of Critical Theory's substantive political economy would appear to be an intention that informs Nancy Fraser's recent work (Fraser, 2013a; 2013b). On the other hand, Critical Theory should question or deconstruct the entire notion of an economy and, to use Castoriadis' term, the social imaginary significations that enable the economy to appear as a coherent and self-contained social system. In this respect, the approaches of Castoriadis and Boltanski to institutions appear particularly suited to this task. In particular, they enable a more complete critical interrogation of the economy than Honneth's attempt to formulate a normative correction of the market so that it fulfils its potential as an institution of social freedom (Castoriadis, 1987; Boltanski, 2011; Honneth, 2014; Browne, 2014a; 2014b; 2016). To reiterate, even though there is a tension between these two demands and they appear methodologically opposed, it is important that both are pursued. In fact, Boltanski and Chiapello describe how a somewhat equivalent synthesis underpins their work on the new spirit of capitalism and its interpretation of a historical transition within this system of production (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005).

The intentions of the Marxist adaptation of Weber's theses are salient to my analysis in another way. Critical Theory seeks to explain contemporary trends in a manner that delineates prospective transformations. It aims to provide a longer-term perspective on historical processes, bringing this historical perspective to bear on current developments (see Calhoun, 1995). I argue that this longer-term perspective has, to some extent, been absent from contemporary Critical Theory. My analysis does not, to be sure, fully rectify this omission, however, the historical standpoint of Critical Theory is a basic supposition of

my approach. The diminution in Critical Theory's historical perspective is likewise a reflection of its distancing from social theory and a product of the recent marginalizing of historical reasoning in sociology and other areas of the social sciences (see Inglis, 2013). My attempt to bring a historical perspective to bear on current social developments leads at various junctures to incorporating certain considerations drawn from the perspective of *multiple modernities* and the related, though different, approach of *global modernity*. These frameworks instructively combine historical sociology and social theory.

The multiple modernities perspective, that is particularly associated with Shmuel N. Eisenstadt and Johann P. Arnason, can be interpreted as building on Weber's comparative historical sociology, such as those of agrarian civilizations and world religion (Eisenstadt, 2000; Arnason, 2005a). Multiple modernities breaks with the former notions of historical convergence and emphasizes instead the diversity of the social-historical programmes of modernization and the various cultural backgrounds and *problematiques*, especially how the latter continues to impinge upon the former. The perspective of global modernity similarly involves an expanded perspective on historical change. It accentuates how intersecting developments in diverse temporal and spatial contexts generate modifications in the forms of modernization and how change can be precipitated by 'modernizing moves' that mobilize potentials for collective creativity, whether those of movements, institutions, and organizations (Domingues, 2012; Wagner, 2012). Of importance to the analysis of social conflict, the approaches of multiple modernities and global modernity have attempted to renew sociological conceptions of collective agency. Multiple modernities highlights how critique has been influenced by the antinomian strands of longer-standing cultural interpretations of the world. The perspective of global modernity has, however, emphasized the significance of historical discontinuities, such as the ruptures that ensue from crises and the actions of collective agencies. According to the proponents of global modernity, this emphasis distinguishes its standpoint from the civilizational frameworks that are connected to the multiple modernities perspectives (Domingues, 2012; Wagner, 2012). The latter arguably prioritizes, to a greater extent, historical continuities and the 'commonality' of the beliefs, values and identities of collectives (Wagner, 2012: 68).

The considerations that shape the perspectives of multiple modernities and global modernity open the way for Critical Theory to engage with an expanded range of contexts and projects of transformation. It could be argued that such an extension was constrained, rather than precluded, by the approach to history in Critical Theory. Multiple modernities and global modernity, however, enable a slightly different engagement with Weber's theory of rationalization. Like the theories of Castoriadis and Boltanski, they reopen the question of the contested institution of rationality while illuminating the reconfiguring of rationalization. Without expanding on this reconfiguration in detail here, there has been a departure from the equation of rationality with bureaucratic forms of organization and, to put it cryptically, an awareness that rationality needs

to incorporate a greater sense of contingency (Wagner, 1994; 2001a; 2001b; Browne, 2010).

In some ways, these developments evidence the influence of Critical Theory's critique of instrumental rationality and the struggles that they inspired against the 'one-dimensional' society (Marcuse, 1964). The outcomes of these struggles have been significant in their undermining some of the former authoritarian forms of organizing social relations, such as in relation to the family and education. Yet, in other domains progressive changes have had perverse consequences. For instance, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) detail how the meaning and referent of the values of the 'artistic critique of capitalism', like self-expression and self-actualization, were modified and rendered compatible with the market system. In a similar vein, it is possible to perceive how institutional changes that were inspired by progressive struggles have diverged from their original purpose; for example, the expanding of educational opportunities has coincided with the corporatizing of universities.

These kinds of processes undermining progressive social reforms are described by Honneth as instances of the contemporary 'hollowing out' of social freedom in various institutional spheres (Honneth, 2014). I argue that it is necessary to revise the notion of reification in order to explain the effects of contemporary institutions' contradictory imperatives and the disempowerment of subjects that ensues from the divergence of institutions from their intended purpose.

In short, my contention is that the original reform of institutions is shaped by conflicts anchored in dialectics of control, but that the changes tend to be of the order of the regulation and displacement of the injustice underlying the conflict, such as we saw at the outset in relation to the welfare state. The new form of reification results from the reflexive relationship that develops in relation to the altered constellation. For example, the welfare state did not just remain dependent on capitalist accumulation, but the implications of state actions became factored into processes of commodification in markets. Further, this results in second order processes that intervene in the original context of interaction and that qualify the capacities of institutions, so that the trade in currencies comes to affect the action of national states. Naturally, second order processes have always been part of social interaction and the exchange of commodities and the commodification of money have a long historical development under capitalism. What differs in the contemporary period is the scale and intensity of second order abstractions; this derives partly from increasing complexity, altered temporal horizons, appreciations of contingency, and globalization's dynamics, especially deregulation and 'financialization'.

In this context, it might be argued that the recent Critical Theory of Honneth and Fraser are much less concerned with the problem of rationality and that they are more concerned with the questions of justice and freedom. It is certainly true that Honneth has questioned the continued relevance of the former Critical Theory conception of the structural constraints on rationality and capitalist rationalization, such as the constraint implied by Habermas' notion

of the limits set by the communicative reproduction of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987a; Honneth, 2012). Indeed, Honneth argues that formerly critical 'normative principles' have become, in somewhat inverted forms, elements of system reproduction and legitimations of capitalist expansion (Honneth, 2012). Given this development, Honneth proposed a programme of Critical Theory that investigated the paradoxical contradictions of capitalist modernization and the attendant injustices in various spheres of social relations, like the family, work, law, and politics. 'A contradiction is paradoxical', Honneth and Hartmann argue, 'when, precisely through the attempt to realize such an intention, the probability of realising it is decreased' (Honneth and Hartmann, 2012: 178).

My analysis consolidates this critical conception of contemporary developments, but proposes that they should be explained in terms of the social dynamics of dialectics of control. Similarly, I contend that this critique of the paradoxes of capitalist modernization in the advanced nation states should be supplemented by the analysis of global modernity (Domingues, 2012; Bringel and Domingues, 2015). One important implication of this supplementation is that it results in a qualifying of the assumed transcendence of the conflicts and contradictions of the earlier phases of capitalist modernization, rather it opens the way to a better understanding of their current forms of articulation and displacement. Indeed, it is a central thesis of globalization theories that developments are regularly contingent on processes in a different context. Nevertheless, Critical Theory still aims to perceive potentials for emancipatory change in rationalization. It is probably worthwhile at this point briefly restating some of the intentions and presuppositions of Critical Theory that have been sketched. These intentions and suppositions give Critical Theory its distinctive orientation and they have been highlighted in the introduction because they demarcate the Frankfurt School tradition from the more elastic contemporary use of the term 'critical theory'. In addition, they clarify elements of the framework elaborated in this text and its justification.

First, from the outset, Critical Theory has always involved a synthesis of different perspectives. Second, Critical Theory has applied some version of a dialectical method. Third, the synthetic orientation and dialectical method are salient to the interest of Critical Theory in clarifying and transforming the relationship between the subjectivity of social actors and the objectivity of social institutions. Fourth, the problem of rationality has been central to Critical Theory; rationality has been a basic justification of critique and a determinant of progressive change, yet the predominant versions of rationality in capitalist society have been an object of critique. Fifth, after Marx's turn to social practice, Critical Theory has sought to determine the practical function of philosophical ideal and endeavoured to explicate the sociological translation of philosophical categories. Like the notions of reason and rationality, philosophical notions are criticized as ideological legitimations of domination and simultaneously understood to be normative aspirations to be practically realized. Sixth, the sociological framework of Critical Theory has been shaped by theses about capitalism's historical evolution and the diversion from Marx's

predictions. In this regard, the assessments of the class compromise of post-liberal capitalism and the Weber-inspired view of the extension of bureaucratic administration in modernity were particularly significant.

Contradictions and Social Conflicts

It is undoubtedly the case that the current historical phase of capitalism contains new dimensions that Critical Theory needs to take into account, whilst contemporary capitalism preserves many of the features that have been the object of earlier critique. In fact, the commodity form and instrumental rationality remain integral to the capitalist system as a whole and what is really novel is the modes of their ideological concealment, including the explicit equating of formerly antithetical values like aesthetic experience with them. Taking these changes into account, this work makes a substantive contribution to the development of the social theory component of Critical Theory. In the first three chapters, it presents an analysis of the structural contradictions of contemporary capitalist modernity. These contradictions, I argue, involve differing dialectics of control and they are found to involve different forms of conflict. It may be said that these structural contradictions involve different institutions and dynamics of domination and injustice. To reiterate, I take the labour theory of value as something of a guide, but treat it not so much as an economic proposition. Rather, it is taken to be concerned with the transaction or interchange between the subjectivity of actors and the objectivity of institutions. The concern with this interchange, which Habermas, for instance, sought to explicate in terms of the transference between lifeworld and system, is not simply an analytical consideration, such as with regard to the effectiveness of social coordination (Habermas, 1987a). For Critical Theory, the processes of emancipatory change presuppose the formation of a new subjectivity and not just an alteration of the 'objective' institutional structures.

There are three contradictions that are explored in these chapters: first, that of collective self-determination in relation to the tension between globalization and democracy, second, that of the alienation intrinsic to the compelled, but thwarted participation in the interchange between social action and social institutions, and, third, that of the exclusionary integration that is connected to the contemporary misalignments of social integration and system integration. Of course, these are by no means the only forms of social contradictions that give rise to injustice and oppression in capitalist societies. However, these contradictions are considered relevant to other conflicts and, to some extent, they have a mediating role in relationship to them. For example, Nancy Fraser's account of the 'fortunes of feminism' highlights intersections between gender subordination and capitalism which are analogous, if not equivalent, to the mediation that is disclosed in my analysis of these three contradictions and dialectics of control (Fraser, 2013b). In short, Fraser shows how the adaptation of capitalism complicated and limited the project of the emancipation of women.

There are equally relations between each of the contradictions, with one being in some respects a subset of the other. This is especially the case for the way in which the contradiction between globalization and democracy, partly expressed through the crisis of the welfare state, then become manifested in the displaced form of the exclusionary integration of half-positions, such as that of workers without citizenship. The latter forms of exclusionary integration have a longer history; the purpose of my analysis is to highlight how their contemporary expression is connected to unfolding tendencies and conflicts involving dialectics of control. In particular, I analytically contrast the reification that is manifested in such instances of social disintegration and exclusion with the alienation of the compelled, but thwarted, participation of subjects in institutions. There are overlaps and complex entanglements between the three contradictions in substantive or empirical contexts. These interconnections reflect the institutional displacement of conflicts in capitalist societies and how the structuration of social contradictions is more complex and layered than logical contradictions. In other words, the dialectic of control in each domain of conflict affects the others, although there are substantial differences in the degrees and formats of the respective conditioning of one another. The sense of contestation that ensues from the social contradiction of an ‘incompatibility among the elements or parts of a system’ is conveyed by Alberto Melucci’s claim that:

In diachronic terms, any remedial action to keep a system within its compatibility limits tends to produce contradictions. These contradictions, furthermore, generate a form of collective action which, depending on the area one is referring to, will fall under one of the various categories analysed above. Incompatibilities among the inner elements of a specific system (for example, with a political system or an organization) and incompatibilities between different systems are factors which activate social movements and other forms of collective action. (Melucci, 1996: 52–3)

There is, moreover, always a type of hermeneutic contradiction present in conflicts involving dialectics of control. That is, hermeneutic contradictions in the general sense of the meanings attached to antagonisms and in the more specific sense Luc Boltanski proposes: where there is a tension between the pragmatic enunciation and the semantic, which is stabilized by institutions (Boltanski, 2011; see Browne, 2014a; 2014b). For this reason, hermeneutic contradictions point to the elements of indeterminacy and reflexivity that pervade conflicts. These can make it difficult to define the exact parameters of conflicts, because the linkage between conflicts and contradiction presupposes some framing of the relationship between the semantic ‘reality’ and, what Boltanski terms, the ‘world’ that goes beyond it (Boltanski, 2011). In a similar vein, Castoriadis’ contention that in heteronomous societies the creation of coherence depends on concealing the tension between the instituted social imaginary and the instituting imaginary draws attention to the horizons of meaning that are mobilized in conflicts and delimited in the identification of contradictions

(Castoriadis, 1987; 1997a; 1997b). What this means is that the constitution of institutions is at stake in dialectics of control, even though this is generally veiled and concealed by the reliance on instituted realities, including the mundane modes of signification in language and the distributing of value through money.

At the same time, each of the three contradictions represents potentials for normative progress and they are each connected to demands that link justice and autonomy. This is particularly important, because Critical Theory seeks to overcome the division between normative and empirical modes of analysis. It likewise seeks to disclose immanent potentials for emancipation and democracy, which contradict the instituted actuality of domination and injustice. The fourth chapter explores the contemporary dilemmas of the distinctive Critical Theory methodology of immanent critique. It sketches, on the one hand, how Habermas responded to the Frankfurt School's diagnosis of the decline and diminution of immanent potentials for transformation through the change to the paradigm of communication, which opened the way to an alternate conception of rationality and democracy. At the same time, Habermas' primary interest in the normative grounding of critique would result in a distancing of Critical Theory from the sociological analysis of the historical development of contemporary society. In some respects, this outcome was inconsistent with Habermas' intentions, but the ensuing deficiencies in Critical Theory warrant a consideration of the potential syntheses and selective incorporation of conceptions drawn from the seemingly most relevant theories of the present. However, it is found that the approaches of postmodernism, the risk society perspective and the implications of significant theories of globalization may intensify the conundrums of immanent critique and that they each represent deficient perspectives. This analysis equally shows that Critical Theory remains the critique of the limitations of other theories of society and that it bases this critique on its claim to greater reflexivity concerning conditions of theorizing in the present.

There have been two distinctive, though related, responses to the current conundrums of critique. In some respects, both reflect the turn to democracy as the basic orienting signification and intention of critique. One response has been partly conditioned by the crisis of the welfare state and the loss of confidence in the possibility of a transition from capitalism. In this case, critique has turned to 'utopian' modes of justification and to the category of 'hope' (Browne, 2005). This is because these notions seem to combine a temporal orientation to the future with normative principles. The affective and emotional complexion of hope and utopian imaginaries is a major source of their appeal, but this reveals some of the limitations of such an approach to the renewal of critique. The other response is that of reworking the synthesis of positive liberty and social justice that has been a general formulation of the emancipatory intentions of Critical Theory. Although there are considerable overlaps between these two responses, the latter is more strongly grounded in the specification of an immanent potential for social progress, whereas the recourse to hope and utopia are reactions to the questioning of social progress. It is the synthesis of positive liberty and social justice that is explored across the latter chapters of this work.

Habermas' discourse ethic and Honneth's theory of the struggle for recognition are suggestive of the synthesis of positive liberty and social justice, although it is Honneth's later conception of social freedom that is found to most approximate to the intentions of this synthesis. Fraser's notion of participatory parity is shown to be another attempted formulation in recent Critical Theory of the intended synthesis of positive liberty and social justice. Her conception, arguably, does not have as fully developed a notion of social constitution. Fraser's critical presentation of the respective justice claims of recognition and redistribution serves to highlight the revisions of Honneth's theory of social freedom, particularly its emphasis on institutions. In many respects, my analysis agrees with the intentions of the notion of social freedom, but considers that Honneth's formulation is seriously flawed in its actual elaboration. In this respect, I argue that Honneth's important notion of social freedom cannot deal with the dynamics of the three contradictions that are outlined in the earlier chapters. It neither fully encompasses the corresponding sense of emancipation, nor does it adequately explain the conditions of domination, oppression and injustice that limit social freedom. I propose that incorporating a stronger sense of dialectics of control would lead to a better understanding of social freedom. Further, I claim that an effective transformation of social relations of domination would involve the sense of collective, as well as individual, agency that is alluded to in the aspired nexus of positive liberty and social justice. The connection of Critical Theory to social practice is preserved in the radical democratic implications of this nexus.

In the tradition of Critical Theory, the explanation of historical processes has coincided with the theoretical elaboration of concepts and categories. This work seeks to explain the relevance of many of Critical Theory's key categories, like alienation, critique, injustice and domination. Naturally, even simply restating conceptions in this manner necessitates revisions and redefinition. This is one way in which this work deploys the reflexive and synthetic approach of Critical Theory. Despite its some times abstract formulations, including proposing new conceptions, this work accepts the methodological requirement of grounding its conceptions in the practical experience of subjects and their potentials for emancipation. It seeks to disclose and clarify potentials for autonomy and justice through theoretical reflection, as well as illuminating the social structures that impede them. At the same time, it is worth noting that this work does not deal with certain themes that were integral to the original Frankfurt School programme of Critical Theory. Notably, it does not deal with aesthetics and the mass media; similarly, its discussion of psychoanalysis and later psychological perspectives is limited to a few cursory remarks. The proposals advanced in this work still have, in my opinion, a certain relevance to these themes. Finally, this work does not circumvent the vicissitudes of critical theory; it nevertheless hopes to demonstrate the open-ended dialectical imagination of Critical Theory. The dialectical imagination is contrary to so much of contemporary reality that conspires against it.