

Foucault, Marxism and History

Mode of Production Versus *Mode of Information*

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Polity Press

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First published 1984 by
Polity Press, Cambridge, in association with Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

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Polity Press
PO Box 202, Cambridge, CB1 2BT, UK

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108, Cowley Road, Oxford, OX4 1JF, UK

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432 Park Avenue South, Suite 1505, New York, NY 10016, USA

Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is intended as a set of essays examining the value of the recent works of Michel Foucault for social theory and social history. Foucault's works written since 1968 (*Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Sexuality* and numerous shorter pieces) contain some important advances in social theory and in the writing of social history. My purpose is to separate out those advances from other features of Foucault's thought which I find less beneficial. I am not attempting to give an assessment of Foucault's work as a whole but to focus on and analyze certain features of it.

To that end I situate Foucault's work in a double problematic: those of critical social theory and a new social formation that I call the mode of information. Although Foucault's politics may be ambiguous, his works are profitably situated in relation to critical theory. He provides, I will argue, models of analysis that contain theoretical elements which, properly interpreted, open up new directions for critical theory, directions that can lead it out of its current impasses. But these new directions only become apparent when certain important changes in the social formation of advanced trial society are recognized. To that end I have coined the somewhat infelicitous phrase 'mode of information' to represent these changes and to contrast the current situation to Marx's concept of the mode of production.

The term 'mode of information' designates the new language experiences of the twentieth century brought about for the most part by advances in electronics and related technologies. This is not an essay on the mode of information and I have not attempted to elaborate the term into a full theory. Nonetheless I found it necessary to develop the term if only to illuminate the theoretical advances I find in Foucault's work and to contrast them with the traditions of critical theory based on the concept of the mode of production. In a future work I propose to offer a general theory of the mode of information.

The first two chapters attempt to situate Foucault's recent works in relation to Western Marxism and to the classical texts of Marx. The remaining chapters examine the relation of the theoretical developments in the early chapters to the historical texts of *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*. The utility of Foucault's writing for a new kind of social history is the point in question.

My research was facilitated by collegial and institutional assistance. A Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1981-2 was invaluable in furthering my work. I also received a Summer Faculty Fellowship from the School of Humanities of the University of California, Irvine, as well as several grants from the Focused Research Program in Critical Theory at UC Irvine. Friends and colleagues provided criticism and encouragement, especially Jonathan Wiener, David Carroll and Frank Lentricchia. Anthony Giddens and John Thompson, editors of Polity Press, were especially generous with their time and helpful with their comments.

Earlier versions of three chapters, appeared in the following journals: Chapter 3 in *Social Research*, Vol. 49, Number 1; Chapters 2 and 5 in *Humanities in Society* Vol. 5, Numbers 3 and 4 and Vol. 2, Number 2 respectively. Their permission for later versions of these articles to appear in the present volume is gratefully acknowledged.

Foucault and Sartre

In the English-speaking world Foucault is often considered a post-structuralist. His ideas are examined in relation to those of Derrida and Lacan. Although there are good reasons for setting Foucault in the post-structuralist context, a compelling case can be made for an alternative strategy, one which depicts Foucault as a continuation of and departure from the Marxist tradition. In this book I shall consider only 'Western' Marxism. The juxtaposition of Foucault and Western Marxism is especially fruitful when one is considering Foucault's recent works, where the question of political commitment is in the forefront. *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality* can be interpreted as Foucault's response to the events of May 1968 in France, exploring a new leftist political position in which the traditional critique of capitalism and advocacy of the working class were held in suspense. If Western Marxism emerged as the theoretical response to the impasses of classical Marxism confronting the events from World War I to the Cold War, Foucault's recent books may be seen as a theoretical response to the difficulties of Western Marxism in confronting the upheavals of the 1960s and the new social formation emerging thereafter.¹

Western Marxism, a term coined by Merleau-Ponty in the postwar period, is defined most often as a response to the theoretical limitations of Leninism and the Social Democracy

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of the Second International. Its origins go back to Georg Lukács and Antonio Gramsci, but its chief manifestations were the work of the Frankfurt School in Germany² and the existential Marxists in France after World War II.³ Broadly speaking, the Western Marxists sought to redefine the place of the subject in Marxist theory by confronting Marx's positions with recent intellectual developments such as psychoanalysis and existentialism. They also examined the epistemological difficulties in the Marxist dialectic by reassessing its Hegelian roots⁴ and restricting more than Marx had done the metaphysical scope of dialectical thought.⁵ Finally, they shifted the attention of critical theory away from the means and relations of production toward issues of everyday life and culture. At every point a disturbing question pursued them: were they still Marxists or simply disgruntled intellectuals? In general, their political allegiance to Marxist political organizations was tenuous or non-existent. Theoretically, their position as Marxists was at best ambiguous. It was rarely clear if their work was supplementary to the classical Marxist concept of the mode of production, or a thorough going revision of Marxist doctrine which adhered only to the general spirit of the critique of political economy. These issues were especially difficult to clarify in a political context where the Western Marxists had no organic contact with class struggles. The events of May 1968 changed everything, because in these events a radical movement emerged outside the parameters of the Marxist parties, providing a political basis for a new critical theory. In this conjuncture the Western Marxists could at last tabulate the balance sheet of their relations to Marxism.

Foucault's intellectual trajectory kept him separate from the Western Marxists until after May 1968. He complains that his teachers never so much as uttered the words 'Frankfurt School'⁶, so that he was denied the opportunity of confronting a body of theory that he now thinks might have been of great assistance to him then and continues to interest him.

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The relation of Foucault to the French Western Marxists is however more complicated. Although a generation younger than Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, he was, like them, influenced by the Hegelian revival in the postwar years, since he studied with Jean Hyppolite, one of its chief representatives. He was also, like them, exposed to and attracted by German existentialism. His early work *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1954), was indebted to Ludwig Binzwaner, a psychologist who himself owed much to Martin Heidegger. Furthermore, Foucault's first major work, *Madness and Civilization* (1961), was animated by a critique of Western reason that was not entirely at odds with the anti-scientism of Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Finally, like the existential Marxists, Foucault moved in and around the French Communist Party in the early post war years. And yet, by the early 1960s, Foucault was much taken with structuralist currents of thought, tendencies which Sartre found so repellent.

Foucault's intellectual course thus ran somewhat parallel to that of the existential Marxists until the early 1960s. At that point he diverged radically from Sartre, considering his own position the antithesis of all philosophies of consciousness, including Sartrean existential Marxism. In this way the books of this period, *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963, though published in 1969), *The Order of Things* (1966) and *The Archeology of Knowledge* (written before May 1968), are ostensibly opposed to positions like Sartre's which rely on a theory of the subject. That much is certainly true. Yet even at this point of extreme opposition, I would maintain that it is possible to suggest certain similarities between Foucault and Sartre. Even though Parisian intellectuals understood Sartre as the antithesis of the new structuralist currents, both Sartre and the structuralists defined themselves in opposition to what has come to be called the Western metaphysical tradition. Sartre, after all, disputed the Cartesian concept of the rational subject as the epistemological and ontological ground of reality. While it is true, as the structuralists charged,

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that Sartre relied on what they saw as an idealist notion of the subject, it remains the case that the explicit intention of Sartre's thought, especially in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, was to undermine the metaphysical grounds of Cartesian reason, an intellectual direction akin to that of Foucault. It is also true that Foucault and others associated with structuralism denied the success of Sartre at this task. Yet during the 1970s, after the structuralist movement had passed its heyday, Foucault reconsidered the question of the subject, recognizing that, whatever the dangers it involved of a relapse into metaphysics, the question of the subject was impossible to avoid for critical theory. Without some theory of the subject (or subjects) it was not possible to account for resistance to authority.⁷ What had to be avoided for Foucault was a notion of the subject as transcendental and unchanging over time, traces of which were still to be found in Sartre's later work.

In the 1960s Foucault was openly hostile to all forms of humanism and philosophies of consciousness, a hostility that was also directed against Western Marxism in general and Sartre in particular. When Foucault trumpeted the call 'man is dead', he would no doubt have included Sartre among the humanists he was defying. After 1968, however, Foucault's icy hostility to Sartre and Western Marxism melted away. He began to acknowledge the importance of their standpoint and to many observers Foucault, more than anyone else, had taken up Sartre's position in the Parisian intellectual and political world.

Until he became ill in the mid-1970s, Sartre had been the twentieth-century version of Voltaire, an intellectual of diverse talents who championed under the banner of justice the causes of the oppressed and

without party or organization did battle with the established order. Sartre, like Voltaire before him, enjoyed broad popularity and was therefore relatively immune from retribution by the authorities. It is clear that Foucault has never attained the celebrity status of

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Sartre, but in the early seventies he began to champion the causes of several oppositional groups and to write political pieces for *Le Nouvel observateur*. He spoke on behalf of prison reform, and the rights of homosexuals; he supported the anti-psychiatry movement and the women's movement; he analyzed the importance of the revolution that overthrew the Shah in Iran.⁸ During these years Foucault was perhaps the most eminent and widely-acknowledged intellectual who participated in leftist politics. Ironically, Foucault was at that time criticizing the role and function of the traditional intellectual.

Without understanding Foucault's new political status in the 1970s, his praise of Sartre in articles and interviews would be perplexing. Back in the 1960s a polite exchange of sorts took place between the two men in the pages of *La Quinzaine littéraire*. Sartre acknowledged the achievement of Foucault's *Les Mots et les choses*, but repeated a complaint he had registered against Lévi-Strauss: Foucault avoided the question of history, how one epistème is supplanted by another.⁹ A few months earlier in the same journal, Foucault dismissed Sartre and Merleau-Ponty as 'courageous and generous' men of an earlier era, animated by a spirit that had passed from the intellectual scene.¹⁰ Again in the same journal, in March 1968, only two months before the events of May, Foucault politely dismissed the 'enterprise of totalization' in philosophy from Hegel to Sartre, an enterprise no longer on the agenda.¹¹

Foucault continued with a statement of characteristic modesty: 'I think the immense work and political action of Sartre defines an era ... I would never accept a comparison -even for the sake of contrast - of the minor work of historical and methodological spade work that I do with a body of work like his.¹² Yet the intellectual generation gap revealed in *La Quinzaine littéraire* was shortly to be bridged as both men worked together in the 1970s for the journal *Libération*.

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After 1968 Foucault's attitude to Sartre and Western Marxism began to change. Sartre was no longer simply the philosophical enemy, as Foucault began to discover points of agreement and convergence of thought. In one interview Foucault praised the role that Sartre played in raising the intellectual and political consciousness of the French public: 'from the end of the war onwards ... we have seen ideas of profoundly academic origins, or roots ... addressed to a much broader public than that of the universities. Now, even though there is nobody of Sartre's stature to continue it, this phenomenon has become democratized. Only Sartre - or perhaps Sartre and Merleau-Ponty - could do it The public's cultural level, on average, has really risen considerably.¹³

Or here again Sartre is alluded to as a kind of leftist that Foucault identifies with: 'if the Left exists in France ... I think an important factor has been the existence of a Left thought and a Left reflection of political choices made on the Left since at least 1960, which have been made outside the parties... It is because, through the Algerian War for example, in a whole sector of intellectual life also ... there, was an extraordinarily lively Left thought.'¹⁴ Foucault's reference here is clearly to Sartre, Francis Jeanson and *Les Temps modernes*, which was a center for opposition to the Algerian war at a time when the French

Communist Party supported it. Foucault now sees himself as an heir to the existential Marxists who developed their leftist critique outside the CP. Speaking of his own debt to Nietzsche, Foucault is almost proud to find in Sartre a similar interest in Nietzsche. 'Did you know that Sartre's first text - written when he was a young student - was Nietzschean? 'The History of Truth,' a little paper first published in a *Lycée* review around 1925. He began with the same problem [as Foucault?] and it is very odd that his approach should have shifted from the history of truth to phenomenology, while for the next generation - ours - the reverse was true.'¹⁵ Foucault imagines

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Sartre and himself as children of Nietzsche, with the difference that Sartre strayed from the paternal heritage. Foucault identifies with Sartre as a brother and even regrets ('it is very odd that') their differences. After May 1968 Foucault carried out a reorientation and clarification of ideas that substantially altered the direction of his work. I am not so much interested in the question of the unity or inconsistency of Foucault's thought, but rather in the theoretical direction of his work after 1968. I will argue that at this time Foucault came to grips with issues that were central to Western Marxism and that the positions he took, while in some cases resembling those of Western Marxists, generally went beyond their positions toward a new formulation of critical theory. In short, Foucault both came to terms with the problematic of Western Marxism and carried it to a new level.

AFTER MAY 1968

The events of May 1968 signified that an oppositional stance toward existing society was possible beyond the confines of contemporary Marxist orientations. During the month of May new groups participated in the protest movement, groups not traditionally associated with the proletariat. The events were sparked by students, continued by professional and technical workers, and supported by younger factory workers who were not the mainstays of the Marxist organizations. These groups relied on new methods of action, such as the tactic of provocation which served to reveal the weaknesses of the established order rather than to overthrow authority and take power. They developed new organizational forms, notably the Action Committee which was radically democratic and was oriented toward the enactment of new kinds of social relations rather than toward mobilizing the strength of the revolt. And finally they formulated a set of

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demands in their wall posters that constituted a post-Marxist critique of society. The ideology contained in the wall posters spoke not only against capitalism, but also against bureaucracy and all non-democratic forms of social organization. It contested not so much exploitation, but alienation. Its focus was not simply the factory, but all sectors of everyday life. It demanded not so much an equal share for all in the spoils of capitalism, but an active participation (*autogestion*) and creative role in all social action.¹⁶

For most leftist intellectuals, May 1968 constituted a break in the traditions of revolution. It became apparent that a new social formation was being born and that a new critical theory would be required to account for it and formulate an opposition to it. In addition, the opening cleared by May 1968 led to a profusion of new protest movements, not all of them specifically anticipated during the events of May

themselves. The women's movement, the gay liberation movements, the movement for prison reform, the ecology and antinuclear movement, various regionalist movements and the anti-psychiatry movement all emerged in the early 1970s as responses to the events of May 1968. These new forms of protest created a new political mood, often characterized, in false imitation of the Chinese, as a cultural revolution. Traditional Marxism was woefully inadequate in accounting for the new aspirations, tending, if it dealt with them at all, to homogenize them into the labor movement. Foucault and others, like Deleuze, Guattari, Castoriadis, Lefort, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Morin and Lefebvre, took the situation more seriously and attempted to revise their thought in line with the new political exigency.

In Foucault's case, the themes of domination and power came to the fore. It has often been noted that, starting with his inaugural address at the Collège de France in 1970, Foucault began to stress the connection between reason and power. The *Discourse on Language* spoke of 'the institutional support' for 'the will to truth' and emphasized 'the manner in

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which knowledge is employed in society'.¹⁷ More to the point, Foucault defined his future studies as genealogies of discourse in which discourse was to be understood as forms of power. 'The genealogical side of discourse . . . attempts to grasp it in its power of affirmation, by which I do not mean a power opposed to that of negation, but the power of constituting domains of objects.'¹⁸ No longer would Foucault study only systems of exclusion, that which reason repressed; he would henceforth elucidate the mechanisms by which reason constituted and shaped forms of action. Power was no longer a negative, exclusionary function, but a positive formative one. In the 1970s Foucault's books on prisons and sexuality did just that.

Associated with the new concern with power and its new 'positive' definition was a tendency to associate reason with practice, a tendency that became more and more prominent after 1968. The structuralist concern with language and its autonomy that was prominent in *The Order of Things* (1966), gave way to an ill-defined but suggestive category of discourse/practice in which the reciprocal interplay of reason and action. was presumed. Reason, manifested in discourse, was always already present in history. There was not innocent language whose internal mechanisms were a scientific paradigm that could serve as a model for social analysis, as we find in Levi-Strauss's study of kinship. For Foucault, language organized as discourse was always associated with forms of discipline, disciplines that acted upon groups of humans and that in turn regulated the formation of discourse. This subtle yet ill-defined sense of the interplay of truth and power, theory and practice, became -- the central theme of Foucault's investigations. It characterizes his effort to go beyond structuralism and leads him into direct confrontation with the traditions of Western Marxism.

The purpose of presenting these indicators of change in Foucault's thought is not to prepare a brief for a detailed intellectual history. Instead, I have noted the new directions

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of his work after 1968 as a prelude to a systematic treatment of the relation of Foucault's work to that of Western Marxism. It should by now be clear that such a comparison is opposite and indeed crucial to current theoretical work. Foucault, finding support in Nietzsche, elaborated a new formulation of the

thesis that reason is within history, a thesis that is central to Western Marxism. Whereas figures such as Sartre and Marcuse presented this thesis in a Hegel-Marx form, Foucault did so by resort to Nietzsche. The differences in their formulations are no less decisive than their similarities.

REASON IN HISTORY

The Western Marxists argued that reason was shaped by class-bound history. Both the positions of the theorist and those of any ideologies found in the world are regulated by class. For the later Sartre, to take one case, the situation of the thinker, his being-in-the-world, is in the last analysis a class situation, with the mode of production providing the final horizon of thought. The reason-in-history thesis effectively undercut the pretense of reason as arbiter of reality; it served as a kind of Canteen condition of possibility for thought that protected the thinker against the idealist tendency to ontologize reason. And yet this protection proved, in most cases, to be inadequate. For the tendency in the Hegel-Marx tradition, best exemplified perhaps in Lukács, was to sub-ordinate the precautions of the reason-in-history thesis to the twists of the dialectic, arguing, through the back door, for an identical subject-object that all too frequently was another way of saying 'reason'. The historical dialectic moved through the class struggle; the class that represented the negation of the present was the privileged agent of history; the perspective of this class was therefore the true perspective, the perspective the theorist could adopt to grasp the totality. The theorist was then in a position to formulate the Truth. Such was the

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reasoning made possible by the Hegel-Marx thesis and such was the position taken by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, a founding work of Western Marxism.

What saved the Frankfurt School, temporarily at least, from foundering on the same dialectical reef was their perception that the dialectic had deviated from its course of proletarian revolution. After Stalinism in Russia, the Welfare State in the West and especially after Hitlerism in Germany, Horkheimer, Adorno and, to a lesser extent, Marcuse became convinced that the working class was not the negation of capitalism and did not provide a privileged perspective on history. Reason was therefore without its condition of possibility. In response to this situation, members of the Frankfurt School took a different position. Marcuse, for instance, at times defined the traditional position (*Reason and Revolution*), at times sought through a special reading of Freud a new subjectivity in substitution for the working class (*Eros and Civilization*) and at times could not decide between the two (*One-Dimensional Man*). Adorno, perhaps more than any other figure in the Frankfurt School, sought to re-examine the difficulties of the Hegel-Marx thesis. In *Negative Dialectics* and *Against Epistemology*, he attempted to work through the reason-in-history thesis so that their appearance of metaphysics would be prevented. Yet in both cases the Frankfurt School nurtured a certain nostalgia for the reason-in-history thesis that suggested a longing for a pre-Hegelian anchor. The privilege of reason was yielded reluctantly if at all. One finds in the writings of the Frankfurt School a clinging to the Enlightenment notion that freedom depends on the reason of the individual and the individual can exercise reason best in a condition of autonomy.

No one presents the case of the old notion of reason always lying hidden in the reason-in-history thesis better than Jürgen Habermas, perhaps the last representative of the Frankfurt School. Habermas has been more explicit in defense of the Enlightenment than the older generation of the Frankfurt

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School. In his work on the history of communications one finds him postulating an ideal speech situation as the ground for a new, democratic public sphere in which the individual can exercise reason and attain the truth. For Habermas the ideal speech situation is always there in human communication, serving as a metaphysical support for reason.¹⁹ Historical materialism, to him, suffers badly if it degrades reason to an epiphenomenon of the mode of production. More recently, Habermas has turned to systems theory, to theories of moral and psychological development to find a transcendental ground for the emergence of 'pure reason' in history. In this case reason is once again inserted in history behind the back of classes and individuals, serving as a bulwark against tyranny and comfortably ensconced as human nature.

Foucault ironically defends the reason-in-history thesis by giving it up. Foucault's Nietzschean skepticism about truth enables him to take a radical stance with respect to reason; there is not truth, only truths, and there is no epistemological ground upon which one can stand to ontologize reason, to grasp the totality and claim it all leads to this or that. But Foucault's radical skepticism does not lead to nihilism, because it enables him to search for the close connection between manifestations of reason and patterns of domination. The couplet discourse/practice presumes this connection as a condition for studying it, a hermeneutic circle that is unavoidable, though full of logical contradiction. Foucault can study the ways in which discourse is not innocent, but shaped by practice - without privileging any form of practice, such as class struggle. He can also study how discourse in turn shapes practice without privileging any form of discourse. Thus he writes a history of prisons in which Benthamite doctrine, responding to the Enlightenment reformer's horror at Old Regime punishment practices, in part leads to incarcerating institutions which develop their own system of power to manage inmate populations, and this in turn leads to new discourses (criminology) that study 'scientifically' and

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finally influence the administration of prisons. The interpenetration of discourse and practice goes on interminably because they imply each other's existence from the beginning. In studying discourse it is not a question of perfect truth; in studying practice it is not a question of determining discourse. Both ontologizing tendencies are thus cut off from the start.

But Foucault's project would finally lead to nihilism unless a further dimension is given full recognition: the political dimension. For the couplet discourse/practice operates for the theorist as well as for the object studied. Foucault's discourse is also connected with politics. His own political motivation and situation shapes his discourse. He has recognized this explicitly:

I would like to write the history of this prison, with all the political investments of the body that it gathers together in its closed architecture. Why? Simply because I am interested in the past? No, if one means by that writing a history of the past in terms of the present. Yes, if one means writing the history of the present.²⁰

The important point is the following. Foucault's own situation is one in which discourses, like the one she writes, are institutionalized as the human sciences and play a decisive role in the formation of practice

(policy studies). In other words, Foucault has been able to develop the position that discourse and practice are intertwined in a world where domination takes the form of disciplines and discourse is organized into disciplines. In short, reason has become, in history, a form of power in a way that it perhaps was not before the eighteenth century. Foucault has come to terms with his situation, a world where the human sciences are organized and play a political role, by arguing for a position that looks at the human sciences only by de-ontologizing the concept of reason.

The Frankfurt School, in fact, began to recognize these same conditions. They were indebted to the work of Max

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Weber in this regard. Whatever the merits of Weber's position, and there is a large body of literature arguing the case for and against, he made the strongest case for the association of reason and domination as the central trait of modern society. In opposition to Enlightenment assumptions, reason for Weber was not the handmaiden of freedom. In bureaucratic organizations reason was shaped into instrumental rationality and as such was compatible with authoritarian institutions (the state, the army, the corporation). The human being might be, as liberals claimed, a rational animal, but he was not necessarily a democratic one. The 'iron cage' of bureaucracy foretold a 'soulless' and 'spiritless' fate for human society.

Weber noted that modern society brought with it a new form of organization which he called bureaucracy. Unlike feudal social organizations, bureaucracy established an impersonality in social positions. Arranged hierarchically, these offices evoked a form of behavior that required a certain motivational attitude on the part of social agents, an attitude that appeared to conform to the liberal assumption about essential human rationality but when analyzed further fell short of those hopes. Bureaucratic action, Weber contended, was indeed rational, but it was a special kind of rationality. In order to specify this rationality Weber created a set of modes of rationality, or 'ideal types', based on the means/ends distinction. Action could be rational in its ends or in its means; bureaucratic rationality was the latter type. The ends of bureaucratic action were generated by the hierarchy, beyond the reach of most bureaucrats. In addition, these ends were defined by the organization itself: the goal of bureaucratic action was to continue the bureaucracy. More important to, and originating with, bureaucracy was a form of action defined by its means. Bureaucratic action was motivated by the efficiency of means; according to Weber it was oriented to accomplish goals with the least expenditure of effort and it required a continuous calculation of means.

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Hence bureaucratic action was rational in that the means to attain goals were based upon calculations of efficiency. Bureaucratic action was instrumentally rational.²¹ Georg Lukács, a student of Weber, expanded this analysis of means-rational action into a general critique of 'reification' in capitalist society.

Weber's analysis of instrumental reason, however bears only superficial resemblance to Foucault's position. For one thing, Foucault does not invent ideal types and then match them against historical experience. Forms of rationality for him might be infinite. In addition, the ideal type loads the historical dice: implicit in Weber's analysis is a Kantian prejudice in favor of ends-rationality, as might be recognized by recalling Kant's famous moral maxim that action must be motivated by universal ends.²²

Foucault prefers to show the limits of the present by juxtaposition with a different past, not with an ideal. In addition, Foucault does not analyze social agents and their motivations as Weber does. He is concerned with a level of objectivity that he calls discourse/practice, a category which avoids Weber's subject/object dichotomy and presupposes a non-duality between ideas and practice. Weber's analysis remains tied to a 'humanistic' assumption of the split between motive and action. Finally, Foucault's analysis aims at the discourses of the human sciences (one of which, sociology, was in some part founded by Weber), whereas Weber, however ambivalently, presupposed the separation of science and social action. Indeed, the main and perhaps only point of contact between Foucault and Weber rests in their effort to examine the implication of reason in domination. The Western Marxists of the Frankfurt School addressed this problem at two points: in Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and in Habermas' critique of instrumental rationality, which, for my purposes, does not differ enough from Weber's position to justify separate treatment. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written after the Second

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World War by refugee German Jews, bears the mark of the holocaust. No perspective on modern history could be adequate after Auschwitz if it portrays the past centuries as the march of reason. Given the brutality and bestiality of the twentieth century, Western civilization was hardly a drama of progress. Horkheimer and Adorno sought to undermine the liberal (and Marxist) faith in reason by drawing a connecting link between the inventiveness of Odysseus and the fabrications of the contemporary 'culture industry', placing particular emphasis on 'the achievements' of the eighteenth century. The Western form of reason, they admonished, presupposed a large measure of domination by positing the world (other human beings and nature) as an object to be controlled.²³ In the West a component of irrationality was inherent in the evolution of Enlightenment from the outset, an irrationality which emerged all too clearly in the politics and culture of the twentieth century.

While the analysis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* contains rich suggestions, especially the parts on the culture industry which Adorno in particular developed in ensuing essays, it is limited by its level of analysis. Too often Horkheimer and Adorno concern themselves only with the 'great thinkers' of the past, missing the mundane levels at which reason becomes discursive practice. Their highly philosophical analysis and critique of reason misses the chance to present a detailed view of the disciplines of truth. Nonetheless, their refusal to take reason at its word and their insistence on investigating its imbrication with domination leads directly to the problematic explored by Foucault.

FROM LABOR TO DAILY LIFE

In addition to problematizing reason, Western Marxists have in common with Foucault a shift of interest away from the mode of production toward the 'margins' of everyday life. In

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a recent interview Foucault identifies himself with the French Western Marxists and credits them in part for the electoral success of the Socialist Party in 1981:

. . . the Socialist Party was greeted so responsively in large part because it was reasonably open to . . . new attitudes, new questions and new problems. It was open to questions concerning daily life, sexual life, couples, women's issues. It was sensitive to the problem of self-management, for example. All these are themes of Left thought - a Left thought which is not encrusted in the political parties and which is not traditional in its approach to Marxism.²⁴

The themes of daily life provide the area for a revitalized critical theory. In France these themes were pioneered by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in *Les Temps modernes*, Henri Lefebvre and Edgar Morin in *Arguments* and Cornélius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort in *Socialisme ou barbarie*.²⁵

The major theoretical break in France came with Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), where the analysis of everyday life became the central concern of critical theory. In a period when the working class seemed to have abandoned its historical project as outlined by Marx, Sartre re-examined the question of revolution in terms of the conditions for a free form of subjectivity and the obstacles to it. He analyzed the conditions in which a class disrupts its routines, focuses on its burden of subordination, envisages clearly a path to freedom and takes action to attain that end. To understand why these moments of revolutionary consciousness are so rare, Sartre investigated the modes of relationships and consciousness among subordinated groups in daily life. He hypothesized a form of interactive being termed 'the series'. In everyday life, the oppressed lie in a kind of group relationship in which each individual sees the other as a remote, hostile party. The individual posits him or herself with goals and purposes, such that others are merely obstacles. That we

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are in fact in groups Sartre argues with the example of reading the newspaper: many people do it and they do it at the same time, but they are in isolation even though they perform the same action at the same time. That we posit each other as obstacles Sartre argues by the example of the line of people waiting for a bus where each knows that the others might take a seat that could be his or hers. In these ways the population is atomized while remaining in groups and effectively deflected from attaining class consciousness.

The theme of atomization was richly explored by French Western Marxists during the 1960s. It was the major concern of Henri Lefebvre in books such as *Daily Life in the Modern World* (1968), and Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* (1967). Books and articles were devoted to the topics of consumerism, urbanism, the family, sexuality, education and leisure, each attempting to understand how subordinated groups suffer domination and lose control over their communal existence. The theme of alienation developed in Marx's early writings was turned to repeatedly for conceptual guidance. But Marx restricted the scope of the concept of alienation to the worker in the factory; the Western Marxists employed it to clarify the conditions of many groups in daily life. The conclusion was inevitable: the workers, suffer domination not only in the factory but in all sectors of life and the workers, are not the only group to suffer domination. Women, children, the aged, students minority groups, consumers, residents - atomization and alienation are widespread phenomena and these phenomena cannot be grasped by exclusive reference to the workplace, or by the categories that were developed to analyze the exploitation of labor. Marxism was doubly inadequate: its categories were not broad enough to reveal domination

outside the workplace and the social formation had changed since the time of Marx, requiring a break' with the classical themes of the critique of political economy even in the realm of work.

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Once it was clear that forms of domination existed outside the workplace, the question arose of methods and theories adequate to the task of analysis. Lukács' theory of reification and Gramsci's concept of hegemony were studied. In more drastic departures from classical Marxism, existentialism and phenomenology, psychoanalysis, structuralism and semiology were all explored by Western Marxists. The general problem faced by Western Marxists was that classical Marxism was not easily transferable to realms of daily life beyond the workplace. They encountered a theoretical limitation of classical Marxism by which the specificity of domination outside the workplace was lost or slipped away through the closure brought about by the theory of the mode of production. Lukács, for example, had applied his theory of reification in the workplace to a general cultural critique of capitalism. But the mechanisms by which workers are treated as things in the capitalist economy are not the same as those by which bureaucracy positions the general population. And the literary expression of bureaucratized life, for instance in Kafka, did not conform to the stylistic tenets of realism which Lukács saw as the counterpart to the critique of reification.

In the case of Gramsci, the same problems obtained. His theory of hegemony was meant to account for the active role of ideology and politics (the superstructure) in the class struggle. Gramsci argued that under capitalism, political domination is separate from economic exploitation. Unlike the feudal system, bourgeois civil society prescribes different locations for work and for force or coercion. The workers are not subject to the political will of the bourgeoisie in the way the peasants were to that of the nobility. Instead, capitalism asserts the hegemony or domination of the bourgeoisie through the mediations of politics and ideology. Although this line of thought can be very fruitful in drawing out the connections between politics and the economy, its theoretical strategy is to illuminate only those aspects of politics and

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ideology that are pertinent to the relations of production. Gender politics, for example, are in general not analyzable using the category of hegemony.

When the Western Marxists discussed aspects of daily life in terms of the category of alienation the same slippage back to the mode of production took place. One could show that consumers were alienated in the marketplace through advertising, that students were alienated in the classroom through the system of examinations, that women were alienated in the home through isolation and so forth. In each case, however, it was assumed that the source of alienation remained the workplace and that other forms of alienation were derivations from that source. Ultimately, the struggle over alienation in the workplace took priority and the specific forms of domination in everyday life would be taken care of almost automatically after the capitalist economy was overturned by the proletariat.

THEORETICAL SUPPLEMENTS TO MARX

Due to the theoretical closure inherent in Marxism, Western Marxists found it necessary to confront classical Marxism with the theoretical developments of the twentieth century. By supplementing Marxism with psychoanalysis or existentialism, the dialectic could perhaps be opened up. Sartre's efforts in this regard are particularly noteworthy. They reveal both the strengths and the limitations of the strategy of supplementation. In particular, Sartre's existential Marxism demonstrates the difficulty of joining two conceptual systems into a coherent whole and brings to light the dangerous underlying assumption in the effort, notably the category of totalization.

Sartre's Existentialism

Sartre, in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, noted the limits

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of Marxism in the analysis of everyday life and called for a strategy of supplementation.²⁶ If he were, successful, the dialectic would become a totalizing theory that was not reductionist. Each sector of capitalist society would be given its due weight as a mediation in the overall dialectical scheme. The family, for instance, would be shown both as generating its own form of domination and as a sector in the totality. In order to account for the relative autonomy of each moment of the dialectic, it was necessary to elaborate, Sartre contended, a vast scheme of categories designed to prevent premature closures and reductionism. The key to this categorical apparatus was the concept of totalization. Sartre argued that an adequate critical theory must specify two moments of totalization: one at the beginning and one at the end of the analysis, one at the epistemological level and one at the ontological level. At the ontological level, it was presumed that at any given moment human history or society was a totalization in process, a structural whole built by human beings, a sum of the intentions of human agents, albeit a sum reflecting their alienation more than their direct aims. In addition, Sartre argued that the condition of this history was the ontological possibility that human beings could all will the same totalization (freedom), that they could act upon this intention to create a social order which would have that freedom as its purpose, and that they could thereby eliminate alienation (the effects of otherness) and produce a world in which they would become free subjects. It should be noted that Sartre was perhaps the last major thinker to propose this Hegelian possibility.

At the other end of the analysis, at the epistemological level, Sartre also argued for the necessity of totalization. He resorted to existential phenomenology to show that all perception requires totalizations, that an observer is always privileged in drawing together disparate acts in an historical field revealing a totalization, even though individual actors may not be cognizant of it. Like a commanding general in a

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battle, the knowing subject necessarily takes a view of the whole and sees the parts in relation to it. Each individual totalizes in the act of living and the knower does the same. Sartre maintained that human subjectivity was the activity of totalizing the field and this was the basis for totalizations by the theorist.

Not that the theorist had automatic access to the totality, however. Instead, the theorist totalized because consciousness in each instance was free and therefore had the totality as a possible basis for commitment. Both as a perceiver who could draw together the disparate aspects of the field and as a conscious actor who could choose any number of possible courses of commitment, the human subject totalized. Accordingly, the responsibility and task of the theorist was to carry out totalization in the realm of knowledge. The theorist's totalization was not the perfect, certain, objective knowledge of God or Descartes, because the theorist was situated in a specific historical field and had a specific history. The theorist's totalization was profoundly his own, but it was also available to others who could choose to adopt it. In this way, dialectical reason was both subjective, limited by the situation of the theorist, and objective, a possible project for everyone.

With the category of totalization, deriving from existentialism Sartre had reformulated Marxist epistemology. No longer could Marxism fall prey to scientism and present its case in objectivist terms. At the same time the totalizing dialectic preempted the reductionist step inherent in the theory of the mode of production. Each moment of the dialectic was preserved in its relative autonomy; forms of domination in the family, for instance, were not reducible to those of the workplace. Nonetheless, each mediation remained connected with the totalization, but in this case the totalization did not mean the destruction of capitalist relations of production. It meant instead the adoption by all subordinated classes of the goal of totalization itself, the creation by free subjects of a world without classes and domination. These subjects

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would recognize their freedom by their commitment to a free society and would make themselves into these free subjects through the practice of creating that society.

At one time in the 1960s Foucault regarded Sartre's scheme as an error of the grossest sort. Sartre had committed the most basic sin of founding knowledge on the basis of a philosophy of consciousness. All the illusions of the philosopher's position were reproduced by Sartre in embarrassing explicitness. In no sense, Foucault thought, could the philosopher - theorist create representations of his or her thought which could serve as the standard of knowledge. Sartre's rescue of Marxism by use of the lifeboat of existentialism was a failure that would certainly drown the endangered victim, critical theory. Exchanging the alleged certitudes of scientific Marxism for the preposterous subjectivities of existentialism was no basis for a renewed critical theory.

And yet there were elements of Sartre's position overlooked by Foucault, which went in the direction he wanted to carry critical theory. Foucault's work has been concerned with developing a form of knowledge which did not claim too much for reason, which was not subject to the Nietzschean critique of the philosopher's will to power. In some respects Sartre's dialectical reason conformed to these strictures. Sartre did not assert that dialectical reason led to objective knowledge; nor did he claim that the theorist developed certain knowledge of the totality. Sartre insisted that the theorist was situated, like everyone else, and that his or her knowledge was limited to the perspective, as Nietzsche would say, afforded by each individual's historical and social location. In the 1970s Foucault would write his books on prisons and sexuality, as we have seen, insisting on the rootedness of his project in the present.

Even with these possible points of concordance, there remain profound differences between Sartre and Foucault - most notably on the question of totalization. Foucault was so deeply concerned to limit the scope of the theorist's

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epistemological position that he refused to systematize his position or even to elaborate concepts to any great extent. He refused to explore at all the position from which he attained knowledge and at times went so far as to grant that he was a simple positivist in order to avoid the task of self-reflection. Sartre took a position at the other extreme: he found Marxism so in need of epistemological clarity that he based the entire edifice of critical theory on the act of knowledge. Because consciousness is free (or undefined), the individual totalizes his or her project and thus the entire effort of knowledge comes back to the individual's need to choose a course of action. The elaborate complexity of the totalization returns to the epistemological moment of the theorist's choice of himself or herself. Critical theory, however, compelling though it may be as an analysis of the historical moment, is no more than the personal voice of the theorist.

There is an element of intellectual honesty in Sartre's position that Foucault cannot afford to overlook. The position of the theorist is crucial to the knowledge he or she develops. If knowledge is presented as coming from no one and nowhere, regardless of the modest claims made for the validity of that knowledge, a certain duplicity is introduced into the text, a duplicity through which the text assumes an objective authority that Foucault for one would not want to claim. In the end, Sartre's insistence on the personal nature of his knowledge is more Nietzschean, more respectful of the danger that knowledge is a form of power by other means, than Foucault's withdrawal from the text in unreflexive modesty. Foucault's salutary warning not to treat his text as a police dossier becomes an excuse for hiding in an epistemological closet.

There are nevertheless good reasons for Foucault's elusiveness: in Sartre's hands the urge to self-reflection ends in the justification of the theorist. Starting from the simple need to define his consciousness, Sartre ends with an airtight, overblown system that commands allegiance from the oppressed

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of the world. The totalization of his situation leads to an imposing hulk of theorization that stands over the populace like a tyrant commanding action and commitment. What began for Sartre as an effort to reduce the scope of reason through a clarification of the Marxist dialectic, ends in a tremendous expansion of the power of the intellectual. Sartre's dialectical reason pre-empts the initiative from the movement of protest, compelling conformity to theory at the expense of free practice. The epistemological need of critical theory is to find a path between the reticence of Foucault and the forthrightness of Sartre, a path that will respect the limits of reason by acknowledging the situation of the theorist without hiding the reflexive presence of the author in the text.

Sartre and Foucault differ even more sharply on the question of the object of theory and again there are strong arguments on both sides. For Sartre, the social-historical field consists of a dialectical interplay of men and things. While Sartre pays some attention to the transformation of the world of -things (the mode of production), his major concern is the world of human subjects (series, groups-infusion) and the introduction of otherness into subjectivity (alienation) by the mediation of things. The main issue for Sartre is subjectivity: how can human beings recognize and realize their freedom in the ongoing totalization of history? The emphasis in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is on the Obstacles that subjects confront in the effort at self recognition. In other words Sartre's focus is the conditions for

resistance to domination, a focus that no doubt grew out of his experience with the Resistance during World War II and corresponds to the situation of an increasingly prosperous, advanced industrial society (France in the later 1950s), one that contained no substantial oppositional movement.

The object of theory for Foucault, while at first glance completely divergent from Sartre's, could be read as the opposite side of the coin of critical theory. Writing after the

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structuralist attack on the subject, Foucault, in the 1970s, favors, objectivity as a field of investigation. He tries to make intelligible modes of domination or 'technologies of power' that escaped the attention of classical Marxism. Technologies of power, such as the Panopticon or disciplinary system, are composed of conglomerations of discourses and practices, minutely arranged for the control of the body and the mind. This level of intelligibility could not be approached by reference to the subject or forms of consciousness, but rather through a careful analysis of the field of objectivity. Foucault is in this, respect firmly at odds with Sartre, Resistance and the modes of subjectivity associated with it are not a serious problem for Foucault, who simply asserts that opposition to domination is ever-present.²⁷ In the 1970s the impetus of May 1968 was succeeded by numerous forms of opposition, seemingly at every point of power in the social field, a marked difference from the situation in which Sartre wrote. Attention to the political conjuncture must not, however, sidestep the important theoretical issues that separate the two thinkers. Yet one could draw the conclusion that the respective concerns for resistance and analysis of domination are complementary, not necessarily contradictory.

The issue on which Sartre and Foucault do butt heads is not so much the field of investigation, but the status of the subject. Foucault remains suspicious of positions which rely on a centered subject as a source of intelligibility. Individual self-consciousness is ruled out as an object of knowledge, a requirement that is central to Foucault's projects of the 1970s. In *Discipline and Punish* he is able to locate his object, technologies of power, only by an investigation that puts aside the rationality or agency of the individual or group. He looks for mechanisms of discourse/practice that are out of phase with the self-consciousness of the individual. In *The History of Sexuality* he goes a step further, defining his object as discourse/practices through which the individual is constituted as the subject of truth. In this case the rational

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individual is seen not as a proposition to be defended (or refuted), but as the consequence of social-historical processes, not as the intentional goal and underlying basis of history but as its illusory result. In a social system such as ours, based on (1) the assumption of a rational human nature and (2) the dissemination of scientific disciplines which are implicated in power relations, the task of critical theory, for Foucault, is to show how the subject and the disciplines are constituted under the sign of the truth. In this context the rational subject could not be considered an origin or cause.

What is often forgotten is that Sartre began his career with a strategy which he maintained almost throughout. Sartre, who was considered the chief defender of the subject by the structuralists, defined himself in opposition to all philosophies of mind as early as 1939.²⁸ With his existentialist - phenomenological assumptions, Sartre opposed French academic idealism in which the rational subject

was a metaphysical center. Instead, the phenomenologist posited consciousness as a relation, a lack which flowed out to things and the existentialist depicted human reality as dispersed in the world, existing not centered in rationality. Sartre's major works, *Being and Nothingness* (1943) and *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960) continue and elaborate further this theme.

Sartre does, however, posit a center for the subject not in terms of rationality but in terms of meaning. Consciousness creates meanings, it produces meaning even as it is lost in the world with others. According to some theorists, such a view of the subject is essential for a post-structuralist critical theory. The problem with Sartre's position for a thinker like Foucault is that Sartre theorizes the subject who produces meaning in ontological rather than linguistic-social terms. Kristeva, for example, praises Husserl for 'the fact that he has drawn attention to this object-constituting subjectivity which produces positioned consciousness in the act of predication', but not for 'the metaphysical affirmation of "being" or "presence" as the origin of meaning'.²⁹ In Sartre's

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case there is an effort to go beyond the ontological formulation of the meaning-producing subject of *Being and Nothingness* in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Here Sartre employs social and historical categories to indicate transformations in the modes of subjectivity, without completely escaping the ontological level. In this sense, Sartre has moved in a direction similar to that of Foucault and works with the same problematic, without going as far as Foucault in surpassing the rational subject. For his part Foucault has still not completely come to terms with the problem of subjectivity, in that he has been unable to theorize the production of meaning by subjects or account for resistance to domination.

Theories of Language

If phenomenological existentialism is one methodology employed by Western Marxists to resolve the limitations of classical Marxism, linguistics is another. In his book *Mythologies*, Barthes demonstrates the power of structural linguistics for an analysis of the languages of everyday life. He reveals the ideological mechanisms at work in advertising, fashion and numerous leisure activities. When daily life is viewed as a field of linguistic meanings (semiology), a process is uncovered whereby social institutions are naturalized, given the appearance of universality, and conflicts are hidden behind masks of floating signifiers. Semiology, Barthes argues, illuminates the mechanisms of domination in the processes through which meaning is produced in daily life.

The work of elaborating semiology into a completed critical theory was carried out by Jean Baudrillard. Continuing the work of Barthes and also Lefebvre, Baudrillard develops a theory of the historical transformation of modes of signification.³⁰ To demonstrate the linguistic mechanisms of present-day consumer society is not enough. Unless the morphology of linguistic forms is analyzed, it would appear that certain language structures are themselves universal, a

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position that runs counter to the tenets of historical materialism. In this spirit Baudrillard analyzes the

historical origins of the contemporary semiological mechanisms. In advanced capitalism signifiers (words) are split off from signifieds (meanings) and referents (things), just as other structuralist linguists have shown. But this language pattern is a historical phenomenon, going back to the Renaissance. Before that time language was characterized by the use of symbols in which all the linguistic elements were integrated, not split asunder. Baudrillard relies especially on anthropological evidence to support his contention.

The predominant linguistic form in advanced capitalism is not the symbol but the signal. Since the linguistic elements are fragmented, signifiers are able to 'float' as it were in the space of social practice and be combined with signifieds and referents at will. In fact, the process of production has been transformed by these floating signifiers. Capitalists no longer rely on 'use value', the imagined or real utility of a commodity, to sell their products. Instead, in the process of advertising, signifiers are attached to commodities seemingly at random. Qualities that are desired by the population (sexiness, self-confidence) are attributed to commodities irrespective of their functionality or material utility. Thus shaving creams promise sex appeal; deodorants guarantee self-confidence, automobiles are a means to an active social life; soft drinks are the key to community, love, popularity; and so forth. The process has advanced to such a degree that the mode of signification is central to the capitalist mode of production.

The mechanism of the signal, whereby signifiers are attached to commodities, assures an immediate if unconscious response by the receiver of the message. The communications of advertising are mediated through electronic conduits. The advertiser constitutes the subject by carefully manipulating the structure of the message with the desired goal of an immediate reception of the meaning, a reception

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that precludes rationality. Signals short-circuit the process of critical thought; the consumer is not to weigh carefully the possible utility of a commodity (does the signifier in fact correspond to the referent?), but instantaneously assent to the message and hopefully purchase the product in an impulsive act of semiological consumption. Taken as a whole, signals, constitute codes, Baudrillard maintains, into which the subject is inserted and from which there is no escape. At first Baudrillard regarded his semiological critique as a supplement to standard Marxism: the capitalist mode of production, splitting use-values from exchange values, creates the conditions for the code. At a certain point it becomes necessary for the process of capital accumulation to create a consumer society. Once basic needs are met, capitalist growth requires the formation of new needs and turns to the signal for that end. The new needs of the working class are emotional and social, so capitalists offer love and community through the same products that had earlier promised faster means of transportation or better nutrition. The semiology of advertising reveals yet another stage in the dialectic of capitalism.

Almost as soon as he developed this position, Baudrillard became dissatisfied with it on the grounds - of its reductionism. The mode of signification is not so closely tied to the mode of production. Very quickly he began to argue for the relative autonomy and then the complete autonomy of the mode of signification.³¹ Marxism, he contends is committed to a productivist model of society, whereas the implications of critical semiology leads to an exchangeist position. Meanings are created in the process of social interaction, as anthropologists like Mauss and Sahlins have shown, not through the process of production. Historical materialism is chained to a utilitarian/functionalist view of society which relegates pre-capitalist formations to subsistence positions. Only capitalism has solved the riddle of the surplus,

reinvesting it to generate growth. But non-capitalist societies also generate surpluses, Baudrillard responds, with the difference that what

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they do with the surpluses (in potlatches or gift exchanges) is determined not by any utilitarian rationality but by the process of the exchange of meanings. The full analysis of the code, Baudrillard concludes requires a theoretical divorce of the mode signification from the mode of production.

Baudrillard's work, manifesting the difficulty Western Marxists have in attempting to supplement classical Marxism, bears some resemblance to Foucault's position. They both seek to give full weight in a critical theory to language and they both seek to present linguistic experience in relation to historical-social action. Baudrillard's polemical attack on Foucault, *Oublier Foucault* (1977), ended all chance of dialogue between the two. Yet they are both concerned with the constitution of the subject in linguistic practice, a similarity that suggests possibilities for further investigation. Baudrillard himself did not pursue immediately his earlier positions, but went off on a different path, starting with *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (1976), a path that led him away from the concerns of critical theory.

Another Western Marxist who took a 'linguistic turn'³² is Jürgen Habermas, the main figure of the Frankfurt School after the deaths of Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse. Habermas dissolves the Marxist concern with labor in an analytic division of labor, interaction, and language.³³ Once he abandoned the reductionism of the base / superstructure model, Habermas investigated the foundations of critical theory in terms of language. He argues that inherent in ordinary language is a truth criterion that could serve as a basis for democratic politics.³⁴ This truth criterion is located not at the grammatical or syntactical levels of language, but at what Habermas calls the pragmatic level, the level at which language is an act of communication. Unlike the semiologists Barthes and Baudrillard, Habermas is not interested in language as a code with an internal logic. Instead, he moves critical theory closer to the point where language and action intersect. 'Communicative interaction' is the field that he

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investigates. While this strategy is certainly suggestive for critical theory, Habermas does not take full advantage, of it. The fruitful line of investigation would be to look at changes in speech situations, especially those brought about by the electronic technologies of the recent past. Instead, as we have seen, Habermas is interested only in an 'ideal-speech situation' which serves as a foundation for the autonomous rational individual.

Even though Habermas and Foucault are often seen as the main figures of critical theory and debates have been arranged between them in hopes of furthering theoretical work, there is not much agreement in their positions. For Habermas is wedded to the Enlightenment value of individual autonomy through reason, while Foucault questions the relation of reason and democracy. Habermas furthermore, resorts to transcendental grounds for theory, such as the ideal speech situation, while Foucault is more rigorously historical, preferring to trace the emergence of differing patterns of discourse/practice without privileging any. Habermas is more systematic theoretically and utopian politically, while Foucault is suspicious of systems and reticent about the elimination of domination in the future. All in all there is not much room

for agreement between them and Habermas' position increasingly appears as a Kantian step backwards for critical theory.

Psychoanalysis

The third important methodology associated with the Western Marxist effort at theoretical renewal is psychoanalysis. Freud's ideas have been very popular with critical theorists since the early attempt by Wilhelm Reich to synthesize historical materialism and psychoanalysis. Although Reich had little association with the Frankfurt School, Horkheimer was interested in Freud's thought and organized a project, with the important participation of Erich Fromm, to study the

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relation between authority and the family along psychoanalytic lines. Since the publication of *Studies on Authority and the Family* in 1935, Frankfurt School theorists returned again and again to the problem of reconciling Marx and Freud. In this vein, there are Adorno's essay on social psychology, Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *Five Lectures. Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia* (1970), and Habermas' *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971).

Aside from Habermas, who is concerned with the epistemological value of the therapeutic experience, the themes treated by the Frankfurt School are similar, though there are important differences in emphasis. In general they applaud psychoanalysis for providing a mediation between the understanding of the individual and society. Freudian categories lead, they contend, to an appreciation of the significance of the superstructure: consciousness, ideology and sexuality. Psychoanalysis explains, as Marxism cannot, regressions in history - best exemplified by German fascism, but also by the infantile longings elicited by the culture industry.³⁵ The central theme in the Frankfurt School's use of psychoanalysis is, however, the notion of sexual repression. Marcuse and others expand the Marxist critique of capitalist political economy with a Freudian critique of bourgeois libidinal economy. In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse translates Freudian categories into a Marxist lexicon. Hence the reality principle becomes the performance principle and the parallel with Marx's surplus value is Freudian surplus repression. By means such as these, the Frankfurt School adds the critical value of psychoanalysis to historical materialism without presenting an internal critique of either position. Although many important essays resulted from this intellectual direction, it does not evoke a re-evaluation of either position, or lead to a redefinition of the requirements of a critical theory of society.

In Foucault's writing psychoanalysis appears in an entirely different register. Instead of using Freud's theory in his

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historical essay on sexuality, for Foucault, psychoanalysis is part of that history. He is critical in particular of the hypothesis of sexual repression that is associated with the Frankfurt School and with Reich. Given his theory of discourse Foucault maintains that bourgeois culture does not repress sexuality, but through the spread of discourses on sex, including psychoanalysis, forms of sexual practice are created. The

subject is formed as one for whom sexuality is his or her truth, the deep secret of the self that is ultimately its center. In addition, psychoanalysis plays a role in Foucault's history of sexuality as a mechanism of discourse/practice not totally unlike the confessional a power relation where the client/ subject is constituted and reconstituted in the discourse of the therapeutic situation. Foucault denies any animus toward Freudian theory, yet his *History Of Sexuality* promises to provide a devastating critique of this human science that claims to be one of liberation from repression, but practices and enacts a mode of domination. In France the appreciation of Freud had to wait until the 1960s³⁶ when interest was stimulated by the importance of Wilhelm Reich's ideas by thinkers such as Jean-François Lyotard³⁷ and by the development of a peculiar form of psychoanalysis mixed with Hegelian phenomenology and linguistic structuralism that is associated with the work of Jacques Lacan. For our purposes, Lacan's importance rests with his influence on Althusser, Baudrillard and Deleuze/ Guattari. In Lacan's complex and often opaque formulations, the subject is constituted in the unconscious through a process mediated by language, which fixes the subject in decentered misrecognition of itself. In *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1972), Deleuze/Guattari expand and reverse the Lacanian position to present an elaborate critique of advanced capitalism. Like Foucault (and perhaps this was the basis for their association in the early 1970s), Deleuze positions psychoanalysis within the field of his critique, interpreting it as a form of libidinal 'territorialization'

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or 'coding'. Far from providing a means of comprehending psychic formation, the Oedipus complex is a parental vehicle for at the same time eliciting and suppressing the sexuality of the child. In capitalist society the natural flux of the libido is coded in the family where in earlier social formations it is territorialized directly by politics. The aim of Deleuze/Guattari is to 'deterritorialize' the libido, liberating its schizophrenic flux. Even though Foucault cannot be identified with such Reichian politics of sexual liberation, there are moments when his argument comes close to that of Deleuze/Guattari. In *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1*, after a long discussion of the way sexual discourses are forms of domination that draw the subject into particular modes of sexuality, Foucault raises the question of liberation from sexual domination.

We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power; on the contrary, one tracks along the course laid out by the general deployment of sexuality. It is the agency of sex that we must break away from, if we aim - through a tactical reversal of the various mechanisms of sexuality - to counter the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance. The rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures.³⁸

This passage, so difficult to interpret, contains a rare example of utopian political thinking in Foucault's texts. He writes not simply of resistance to power, which is unusual for him, but also of overturning domination (in the area of sex) and establishing a new liberating regime (of sex), a possible political statement perhaps without parallel in his major writings.

It is clear that when he speaks of 'the deployment of sexuality' he signifies the contemporary forms of discourse/ practice which constitute the 'sexuality' of the subject. In other words, our culture generates specific modes of sex

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which Foucault labels 'sexuality'. Against the Frankfurt School's thesis of repression and in common with Deleuze/ Guattari, Foucault includes the so-called 'sexual liberation movement' as part of the dominant form of sexuality.³⁹ Hence to affirm one's sexuality and reverse Victorian prudery is not an act of liberation but a move within the dominant discourse, an act that does not liberate the individual from oppression, but rather fortifies him or her within it. The point of interpretive difficulty and textual surprise occurs when Foucault offers an alternative practice that would, he thinks, be liberative. We must remember that Foucault argues effectively against making such statements by claiming that that is not the role of the intellectual: the oppressed subjects must speak for themselves. Nevertheless, in this context, Foucault shifts voices and writes as a political subject, not merely as an analyst of politics.

Foucault trumpets the 'counterattack' against the dominant form of sexuality with the sounds 'bodies and pleasures'. Normally, Foucault speaks of bodies as always within discourse/practice, never as innocent or natural, never outside social forces. Yet in this passage he seems to rely on a notion of the body which prefigures social domination. Like Deleuze/Guattari's concept of the free flux of libido, Foucault here falls back upon the body as a point of resistance to sexual authority. If this is so, the prevalent understanding of Foucault as a pessimist who sees no escape from domination must be revised. Instead, he must be viewed as one who posits the possibility of resistance to domination and the elimination of domination, for that is what is presupposed in his call to arms of 'bodies and pleasures'. And yet this revolutionary statement, this 'tactical reversal', sits motionless in the text smugly looking out at the reader with an expression- less enigmatic stare. Foucault refuses to develop the statement at all. The reader never finds out what is the nature of 'bodies and pleasures' that have escaped the 'deployment of sexuality', never learns the basis of the resistance (underlying

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innocence, natural powers, libidinal flux, unconscious drives, and so forth).

The passage in question reveals a central tension in Foucault's position, one that provides an important comparison with the Western Marxists. Like them, Foucault writes critical theory which illuminates modes of domination. Like them, Foucault is dissatisfied with both classical Marxism and the official Marxisms of 'actually existing socialist societies'. Like them, Foucault argues for the possibility of change, change which would eliminate domination. Like them, Foucault sets the epistemological limits of his text in the situation of the writer. Unlike the Western Marxists, however, Foucault refuses to investigate the sources of resistance. He rejects in turn Sartre's notion of free totalization; Marcuse's notion of erotic sensibility; Habermas' notion of the ideal- speech situation; and the general Western Marxist commitment to a concept of dialectics. Though he is right to be skeptical of these grounds of revolution, he nonetheless faces the problem that he cannot avoid completely some reliance on a notion of a resisting subject. As a result he slides into a celebration of 'bodies and pleasures' without having the theoretical justification for doing so.

Althusser

A comparison of Foucault with Althusser, another theorist in the camp of Western Marxism, reveals with particular clarity the extent to which Foucault has continued and broken away from the problematic of Western Marxism. Althusser, unlike Sartre, comes to terms with structuralism and language theory, arguing that Marx had anticipated these trends. In works after 1845, *The German Ideology* and *Capital*, Marx and Engels, according to Althusser, shed their Hegelian skins and established the science of historical materialism by theorizing the object (the mode of production) without resort to the subject,⁴⁰ an achievement that appears

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to parallel that of Foucault. Althusser maintains a commitment to science in a way that the Nietzschean Foucault does not; but in eliminating the metaphysical support of the rational subject their work bears some similarity.

After dismissing the problem of the subject in his work of the 1960s Althusser found himself returning to that topic after May 1968. In his essay of 1970, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Althusser approaches the concept of the subject through Lacan's linguistic Freudianism. First Althusser, like other Western Marxists, rejects the classical Marxist formulations of the problem of ideology. The base/superstructure distinction, with its allowance only for the relative autonomy of the superstructure, is replaced by the problematic of reproduction. The role of ideological formations emerges clearly when the question of the reproduction of the relations of production is posed. One can then focus on the mechanisms through which hegemony is maintained. Althusser reasons that ideology promotes reproduction by establishing the subject as a subject in an imaginary relation to society. Ideology provides the subject with the illusion that it is a center of meaning, so that the subject lives its relation to society in a way that reproduces the existing class struggle. But ideology is not understood as pure ideas; it makes its appearance only in practice and is institutionalized or materialized in what Althusser calls, 'Ideological State Apparatuses' (school, family, politics, law, trade unions and communications. media).⁴¹

Althusser's formulation of the problem of the subject as constructed through mechanisms of practice that invoke ideology reveals a certain similarity with Foucault's theory of discourse/practice. Foucault, like Althusser, grants no truth value to discursive systems, regarding them as mechanisms of power that constitute subjects. Both thinkers are also alike in refusing to divide ideas and action into separate realms. And both are concerned with unmasking systems of domination. But there the parallels end. Foucault gives more

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weight to discourse, since for Althusser ideology remains a functional category (reproducing class relations) without much inner complexity or interest. So long as ideology satisfies the criteria of positing a centered subject, Althusser wants little more to do with it. Foucault investigates more concretely the specific forms of subjectivity constituted by discourse. For in the end, Althusser is concerned only with the effects of ideology on the working class, whereas Foucault investigates diverse social groupings, i.e. prisoners, homosexuals, the insane and medical patients.

Underlying these differences between Foucault and Althusser is a more fundamental one having to do with their relative commitments to Marxism. As a Marxist, Althusser theorizes the totality through the

category of the mode of production. Foucault, rejecting the category of totality in general and the Marxist version of it in particular, refuses to limit himself to an analysis of the working class. The category discourse/practice is thus not inserted into a totalized theory but floats like a hawk over the social historical process, ready to swoop down upon any topic that seems appropriate. The theoretical choice offered by these two theorists is dramatic and urgent. In my view Foucault's position in the present context is more valuable as an interpretive strategy and ultimately, although this may strike a discordant note,, more Marxist. If by Marxism one means not the specific theory of the mode of production or the critique of political economy, and not even the supposed dialectical method, but instead a critical view of domination which as historical materialism takes all social practices as transitory and all intellectual formations as indissociably connected with power and social relations - then Foucault's position opens up critical theory more than Althusser's both to the changing social formation and to the social locations where contestation actually occurs. In a world where social processes increasingly depend on information processing and where protest is diffused in multiple non-centered sites, a

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totalization through the determination in the last instance of the economy, such as Althusser's, is more mystifying than heuristic.

The conclusion is inescapable that Foucault is continuing the work of the Western Marxists by other means. Rejecting almost the entire intellectual edifice of critical theory, Foucault nevertheless remains within its problematic. The crucial theoretical question that remains is, To what extent does Foucault's rejection of so much of the Western Marxist tradition of critical theory lead to a gradual dissipation of that tradition or to a renewal of critical theory along new lines?

Before engaging this, question directly I want to explore the fault lines of classical Marxist theory, to look for those places in the Marxist position that in the present context are obstacles to critical theory. In particular I will analyze systematically the Marxist concept of labor in the context of an advanced industrial society increasingly dominated by what I call the mode of information. In establishing the limitations of the Marxist position on this question, I will point to the places in Foucault's work that provide avenues of advance.

NOTES

1. Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (London: New Left Books, 1976) and for a different view, see Russell Jacoby, *Dialectic of Defeat: Contours of Western Marxism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).
 2. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973) and David Held, *Introduction to Critical Theory: Horkheimer to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).
 3. Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).
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4. Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941).
 5. Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973, original edition 1966) and Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).
 6. Georges Raullet, 'Interview with Michel Foucault', *Telos*, No. 55 (Spring, 1983), p. 200 and Michel Foucault, 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault, Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983) for a statement by Foucault on his political position prior to his death.
 7. Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp. 142, 117.
 8. For a sample of these writings see 'Manières de justice', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, No. 743 (February 5, 1979); 'Un plaisir si simple', *Le Gai Pied*, No. 1 (April 1979); 'Lettre ouverte à Mehdi Bazarga, Le Nouvel Observateur, No. 752 (April 9, 1979); and 'Inutile de se soulever?', *Le Monde*, May 11 - 12, (1979).
 9. *La Quinzaine littéraire*, No. 14 (October, 1966), p. 4.
 10. *La Quinzaine littéraire*, No. 5 (May 16, 1966), p. 14.
 11. *La Quinzaine littéraire*, No. 46 (March 1, 1968), p. 20.
 12. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
 13. Georges Raullet, 'Interview with Michel Foucault', *Telos*, No. 55 (Spring, 1983), p. 210.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. 204.
 16. For a more complete analysis of May 1968, see Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*, Chapter 9 and also Arthur Hirsh, *The French New Left: An Intellectual History from Sartre to Gorz* (Boston: South End Press, 1981). For a selection of documents from May 1968, see Schnapp and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The French Student Uprising: An Analytical Record*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, original edition 1969).
 17. *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, trans. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), p. 219.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 234.
 19. *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1979, original edition 1976) and *The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol., 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).
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20. *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1977, original edition 1975), p. 31.
21. Selections of Weber's classic formulations may be found in H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. the editors (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958). Informative discussions of Weber's position are found in Wolfgang Mommsen, *The Age of Bureaucracy: Perspective on the Political Sociology of Max Weber* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974); Anthony Giddens, *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1971); and Jeffrey Alexander, *Theoretical Logic in Sociology, Vol. 3. The*

- Classical Attempt at Theoretical Synthesis: Max Weber* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
22. *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. Marvin Fox, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1949, original edition 1785).
 23. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Seabury, 1972, original edition 1944), p. 6 and passim.
 24. *Telos*, No. 55 (Spring, 1983), p. 209.
 25. These developments are traced in Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France*.
 26. This argument is made in *Search for a Method*, trans. Hazel Barnes (New York: Knopf, 1963) which appeared as the introduction to the *Critique* although it was first published separately.
 27. In an interview entitled 'Powers and Strategies', he affirmed, ' . . . there are no relations of power without resistances . . . ' Trans. in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge . . .*, p. 142.
 28. 'Une Idée fondamentale de la phénoménologie de Husserl: l'intentionnalité', *Situations I*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1975, original edition 1947), pp. 38-42.
 29. Cited in Rosalind Coward and John Ellis, *Language and Materialism: Developments in Semiology and the Theory of the Subject* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 132.
 30. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Charles Levin (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981, original edition 1972).
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31. *The Mirror of Production*, trans. Mark Poster (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975, original edition 1973).
32. Martin Jay, 'Should Intellectual History Take a Linguistic Turn?: Reflections on the Habermas-Gadamer Debate', in D. LaCapra and S. Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 86-110.
33. 'Technology and Science as "Ideology" ', in *Toward a Rational Society*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, original edition 1968).
34. *Communications and the Evolution of Society*.
35. See, for example, Theodor Adorno, 'On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening', in Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (eds.), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (New York: Urizen, 1978), pp. 270-299.
36. Sherry Turkle, *Psychoanalytic Politics: Freud's French Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 157.
37. *For example, Dérive à partir de Marx et Freud* (Paris: 10/18, 1973).
38. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 157.
39. Marcuse, of course, reversed his earlier position in *Eros and Civilization*, coming to see the sexual revolution as a product of 'repressive desublimation' brought about through the channeling of sexual drives in late capitalist society. *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964).
40. *Reading Capital*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1970, original edition 1968).
41. 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), p. 137.

Mode of Production, Mode of Information

If Foucault's recent works derive from and surpass the Western Marxist tradition, they also present a formidable challenge to the classical Marxist theory of history. Before assessing the value of Foucault's critical theory for the writing of social history, I want to examine and assess the position of Marx. From the perspective of the critical theory of society, a questioning of the value of Marxism is long overdue. Marxism itself may now be an obstacle to social criticism. What is needed is a relentless, systematic critique of Marxism, one that roots out those features that were problematic from the beginning, those that have become obsolete, and those that have proven themselves inadequate for the task, while preserving those that retain their critical powers.

The historical changes of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries call into question many features of the Marxist position. Indeed, Marxism is haunted by the specter of history. Marxism has changed history, but so too has history changed Marxism. Emerging in the midst of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth century and proclaiming itself the gravedigger of that society, Marxism today fails to inspire the revolutionary will of the proletariat in the centers of advanced capitalism. It has proved itself instead the great hope of the colonized urban and rural masses in largely pre-industrial social formations. Marxist theory foretells the advent of communism

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in the developed capitalist social formations, those places where, the organic composition of capital is weighted towards machines not labor, where the immiseration of the proletariat exacerbates social contradictions, where the rate of profit has long been declining, where all society has come under the rule of the commodity. Yet precisely in these places, where liberalism has long been relegated to the status of an historical curiosity, Marxism, too appears to be a relic out of the past.

Confronted with these changes Marxist theorists often turn a deaf ear. Marxism is not only a movement; it is also a theory. Marxism raises history to an epistemological principle, but history in turn calls into question the truth-value of some Marxist categories. More than anyone before him Marx opened philosophy to the world, bonded theory to practice, intertwined reason and history. Marx posited the theoretical necessity of taking the situation into account, establishing the context as the pretext of thought. Science could develop, he contended, only by adopting the point of view of the proletariat. For Marx this theoretical act was not moral but epistemological. In order to avoid the pitfalls of ideology, that is, the intentional or unintentional justification of the world as it is, Marx elevated history to the status of a condition of knowledge. Only by comprehending the world as a transitory social formation, therefore as an historically limited phenomenon, could philosophy achieve scientific truth. The historical-social world becomes the internal limit of reason, the nontranscendental foundation of the categories of thought. And yet today Marxists are seemingly unable to respond to changes in the world. What Sartre long ago said of Stalin applies now more generally: Marxists are idealists who continuously restate Marx's categories, who confront the world with the theory of the mode of production, insulating reason from history and saluting the hegemony of Marx's thoughts over a world that has long since belied them. Even beyond the reach of governments that proclaim themselves socialist, Marxists act like the bishop in Brecht's *Galileo*,

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refusing to look through the telescope for fear of discovering that reality refutes cherished illusions.

In the critique of Marxism, what must be avoided are the traditional stances in opposition to Marx, and these are many. There are classical anarchism and Trotskyism which find a moral flaw in some aspect of Marxism, the former rejecting it completely, the latter seeking to reconstitute it whole outside the evil of Stalin. There is the Frankfurt School stance of benign neglect of Marx's texts. Here the basic anti-capitalist impulse is kept, but the object of critique shifts to the superstructure. With the possible exception of Adorno, the Frankfurt School retains the fundamental premises of historical materialism, never questioning them directly but instead refining and elevating the level of critique. There are also the existential Marxists, among whom I counted myself at one time, who preserve the totalizing power of Marx while expanding the scope of the theory through the concept of mediations. Here again certain limitations of the theory are acknowledged, without, however, a complete commitment to their critique. There are, finally, a host of basically political postures against Marx which focus on the practice of specific socialist regimes and find them wanting in some regard. In this case the critique is limited to an attack on the leadership of the proletarian movement, or to a specific version of it such as the Social Democrats, the Bolsheviks, the Maoists. This strategy too leaves untouched the theoretical premises of Marx and assumes that, though mistakes have been made elsewhere, one can do it right when the time comes. Of course the time never comes as Chronos continues uninterruptedly to mow the wheat of capitalist history.

The first assumption in Marx's texts that needs to be questioned is the notion of human beings acting upon nature. Marx constitutes the social field as one in which human beings act upon natural materials to produce useful objects. This is, of course, the activity of labor from which Marx derives the entire complex of ideas known as the mode of

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production, as well as those ideas associated with the critique of political economy. In *The German Ideology* the figure of laboring man and woman is posited as a 'premise', one that is necessary for the writing of history. Marx reasons that

. . . we must begin by stating the first premise of all human existence and therefore, of all history, the premise, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to 'make history'. But life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself. And indeed this is an historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today, as thousands of years ago, must daily and hourly be fulfilled merely in order to sustain human life... Therefore in any interpretation of history one has first of all to observe this fundamental fact in all its significance and all its implications and to accord it its due importance.¹

The fate of the doctrine of historical materialism hangs on Marx's fundamental 'premise' that men and women work in order to survive, a statement that arrived like a thunderbolt in the Hegelian Germany of

the 1840s. Social theory rapidly had to shift gears. It had to abandon the airy reaches of the human species' self-constitution in spirit in order to arrive at the earthly steppes of the laboring animal, one who fashioned the world, then became its object, only to become conscious of this dialectical detour and hopefully in the end to make the world once more, this time in a shape consonant with freedom.

Marx cautiously bestows upon his position the status of a 'premise' and regards the cognition of history as an act of 'interpretation'. At the epistemological level then, Marx's claim for his theory of history falls outside Descartes' absolutism, the quest for certainty. If historical materialism is not grounded on a claim to a truth superior to other theories of history, what then is the basis of its value? In

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The German Ideology Marx does not attempt to justify his 'premise' or his 'interpretation' in epistemological terms. He presents his view coherently, appealing to the reader to recognize its advantages. It is as if Marx were saying to the reader, 'Surely you cannot deny that human beings must labor in order to eat, clothe and house themselves.' Once that postulate is granted Marx is content to go on and elaborate the concept of the mode of production, a concept which demonstrates that class struggles (and politics generally) derive from contradictions in the relations and forces of production. Still the original turn in Marx's argument to the 'premise' of labor remains little more than that, a premise.²

What is most surprising to me about Marx's relative silence on the issue of the labor premise is the strong contextual case that could have been made for it but was not. For in the mid-nineteenth century Western Europe was undergoing a great transformation precisely in the way men and women labored. The institution of the factory and its incorporation of steam power, all within a capitalist legal context, were altering drastically and therefore *making historical* the act of labor. Before the nineteenth century one could argue that labor was a constant, a relatively unchanging feature of the social landscape, unworthy of attention by historians because of its stagnant quality. That position was of course incorrect, but it was plausible. In the nineteenth century industrial capitalism was upsetting patterns that had endured for a thousand years, and its implication, as Marx noted well, was 'the automatic system' (automation) which might do away with manual labor altogether and inaugurate the 'realm of freedom' in place of the 'realm of necessity'.³ For whatever motive, Marx chose not to bolster his argument on contextualist grounds and instead to present his analysis of industrial capitalism as the conclusion reached by his theory. And at that level one can examine the premise of labor as a possible source of limitation to the theory of historical materialism.

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The premise of labor contains within it a Hegelian sub-premise: that the social field consists of subjects (laborers) and objects (matter), and that the interaction between the two results in the transformation of both. Marx, it is true, revises Hegel's position, insisting on the independence of the object and thereby resisting the Hegelian tendency to collapse the relationship of the two into the immanence of the subject. What interests us, however, is the way this subject-object relation limits the critical capacity of historical materialism. In a later moment of the theory it plays a crucial role in the determination of alienation and exploitation as the specific features of the capitalist system that require revolutionary transformation. In the instance of alienation, Marx's structural critique of capitalism contends that under this mode of production the subject-object relation is reversed.⁴ The laborer becomes the object of the machine, as men

English Literature, Literary Theory, Linguistics, Film Theory, Media Theory, UGC NET JRF Exam Preparation, Novel Analysis, Research Papers Nasrullah Mambrol. The anti-establishment ethos of New Historicism was profoundly influenced by Foucault's theories of Power/Knowledge and Discourse. Foucault observed that the discourse of an era brings into being concepts, oppositions and hierarchies, which are products and propagators of power, and these determine what is "knowledge", "truth" and "normal" at a given time. #4011 in History & Theory of Politics. #1854 in Sociology (Books). Would you like to tell us about a lower price? Written in 1984, after the publication of Foucault's first volume of The History of Sexuality, but too early to digest the succeeding volumes, Poster clearly and succinctly outlines the main features of Marx's philosophy and that of the Western Marxists, highlighting the ways in which Foucault's methods could be employed to sharpen Marxists analysis. Yet while Foucault's approach reveals these important similarities to Marxism, the differences, claims the author, are fundamental. These concern his rejection of Hegel's conceptions of history and society as a unified developing totality, his rejection of essences and teleology, and his rejection of any utopian impulse revolving around the laws of economic development or the role of the proletariat in history. Foucault's own conception of change, in fact, is represented in ways that are altogether different to Marx's approach, and ultimately supports localistic forms of re