Negation, Refusal and Co-optation: The Frankfurt School's Critical Theory of Political Protest

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Abstract

This article outlines how the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has influenced some key debates within social movement studies. The impact of Jürgen Habermas's sociology is widely acknowledged, especially with regards to our understanding of 'new social movements'. There have however also been several sustained, albeit lesser-known, attempts to bring the concerns of Theodor W. Adorno's negative dialectics and Herbert Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional society to bear onto social movement research. For this reason it makes sense to outline the relevance of the 'first generation' members of the Frankfurt School – something that is often missing from the most authoritative overviews and textbooks on social movement theory. Presenting a body of literature that often appears as fragmented or only on the periphery of social movement theory in this way reveals a number of common themes; such as negation, refusal and co-optation. To this end, the article provides a comprehensive theoretical overview of the multiple ways of how critical theory has made sense of social movements and argues that its concerns can be brought into a rewarding dialogue with contemporary social movement studies.

Introduction

In his 1937 essay *Traditional and Critical Theory*, Max Horkheimer set out a materialist framework for research that was not simply aimed at understanding society but at critiquing it. He advocated an immanent analysis of the inherent contradictions in capitalist society, which would reveal the fetishized antagonism of 'what is' and 'what could be'. A generalized social and material misery, Horkheimer contended, had become indefensible in the context of unprecedented productive capacities. Overcoming this irrationality would require a conscious correspondence of thought and being, a movement served by 'the theoretician whose business it is to hasten developments which will lead to a society without injustice' (Horkheimer 1972 [1937], p. 221). Critical theory thus conceived stands in a dynamic unity with the social movement, yet is not identical with it. A pure amplification of the present condition of (class) struggle would only function to reify the latter. The historical situation that presented itself to Horkheimer demanded of critical thought to be more than propaganda without becoming detached: 'Critical Theory … confronts history with that possibility which is always visible within it' (Horkheimer 1978 [1940/42], p. 106). The concern then was not with the affirmative declaration that this or that movement is the 'agent of history', but only negatively with the overcoming of social domination.

By the 1960s those loosely assembled by Horkheimer at the *Institute for Social Research* had received some notoriety as the 'Frankfurt School' and an ambiguous reception within the youth and student movements of Western Europe and North America (Kraushaar 1998). Frequent press reports at the time somewhat inflated this difficult relationship and presented it as a purely praxis-oriented one, making out Herbert Marcuse as the 'guru' of the increasingly fractured *Students for a Democratic Society* in the US, while the returnees Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno were later faulted with offering the philosophical justifications for armed-clandestine opposition to the West German state. In reality, by the 1970s critical theory had largely lost its influence in these movements, with many revolutionary groups turning towards more orthodox Trotskyism, Maoist-inspired Third-Worldism or associated anti-intellectual trends (Wiggershaus 1994, pp. 656–7).

Despite (or maybe because of) the rocky engagement with New Left radicals the work of the Horkheimer circle is usually omitted from mainstream social movement scholarship. Systematic references to the Frankfurt School, especially its 'first generation', are found only

sparingly in the textbooks on protest and mobilization and then appear mostly dispersed and in fragments. Even Marcuse remains conspicuously absent. Perhaps the editors of a recent book on European movements are right when they argue against the 'origin myths' of social movement theory that have prevented more unorthodox accounts from entering the discussions (Cox and Flesher Fominaya 2013, p. 7).

In what follows I run with this theme to review the impact of critical theory – with the specific meaning attached to the term by Horkheimer and colleagues – on social movement studies. At the same time I suggest that, if we take Horkheimer's theoretical framework seriously, we can appreciate a more fruitful relationship between the Frankfurt School and social movements in contemporary society. It should also alert us to some contemporary scholarship that is emerging at the peripheries of the disciplinary efforts of social movement theory; scholarship that leapfrogs the Habermasian re-imagining of critical theory to return to the writings of the 'first generation'. Despite the problematic posed by the Frankfurt School's pessimism and the continuing importance of Jürgen Habermas for understanding the debate around 'new social movements', it is argued that critical theory can meet the new questions and challenges presented to us by contemporary social protest.

Negative dialectics and social movements

The most obvious obstacle to bringing the Horkheimer circle into the vision of social movement studies is its profound 'pessimism'. In the era of national liberation, Adorno remained distinctly unsympathetic to Third World movements and their Western supporters, while the infamous disagreement with his doctoral student Hans-Jürgen Krahl led to the latter's arrest and trial. It signalled Adorno's remarkable indifference towards the new radicalism. His insistence on Auschwitz as the focal point upon which the twentieth century was to be judged rendered his thought at odds with an emerging New Left for whom the period was entrenched with a sense of possibility and departure from the old. In letter exchanges with Marcuse during 1969 Adorno also complained that the activist ideology of his students in Frankfurt made intellectual work increasingly difficult (Adorno

and Marcuse 1999 [1969]). Critical thought, he warned, should not simply be turned into an instrument to achieve political outcomes.

Despite this, Adorno is frequently cited as an inspiration for contemporary anti-capitalist activism. For example, the alternative globalization movement and the Zapatista struggle have been the impulse behind John Holloway's efforts to re-popularize Adorno's negative dialectics within activist communities (for example Holloway et al. 2009). While clearly more practically committed to forms of horizontal and prefigurative experimentation than many earlier critical theorists, Holloway evokes the power of negation against more ontologically-engaged autonomist theories that had gained traction amongst alter-globalization activists, as well as against more Leninist-inspired accounts that had stressed the importance of party-building (Holloway 2002a). In his essay *Why Adorno* Holloway makes the argument that a revolutionary subjectivity shall not become an identity, but a non-identity. His starting point is not the realization of an affirmative class identity but 'the scream' against the misfortune of living in a class society. Negative thought, accordingly, is 'the only form of thought adequate to a wrong world' (Holloway et al. 2009, p. 8; see also Bonefeld et al. 1992a, 1992b, 1995).

The emphasis on a 'no' with global resonance, as popularized by Holloway (2005) and others writing from within an Open Marxist perspective, have especially informed studies of Latin American movements and frequently focused on the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico (Holloway and Peláez 1998; Holloway 2002b; Tischler 2002, 2014; Dinerstein 2015). It stresses practices of horizontal self-organization and the rejection of traditional forms of organization through trade unions and political parties. Similar concerns are at the centre of Ana Dinerstein's conceptualization of the 2001 'Argentine Uprising', the complete rejection of politics-as-usual, and the establishment of 'spaces for prefiguring other realities not yet materialized' (Dinerstein 2014, p. 368), for example through worker-occupied factories. Like Holloway, Dinerstein borrows from the utopian Marxist philosophy of Ernst Bloch to describe such experiments as movements of hope (Boehm et al. 2012; Dinerstein 2014, 2015; Dinerstein and Deneulin 2012). Importantly, in the tradition of negative dialectics, the politics of autonomy in such struggles is characterized as evading identity categories and as necessarily anti-identitarian.

Given such writers 'hopeful optimism' about revolutionary politics it is striking that they remain so indebted to the critical theory of Adorno. By contrast, some of the more 'politically committed' Frankfurt School members, notably Marcuse and Oskar Negt, are conspicuous by their absence. Yet, where some have pointed to the pessimistic qualities in Adorno's and Horkheimer's work, others have tried to read them dialectically and pointed to the utopian potential in the interstices of cultural reproduction. In this sense, for Fredric Jameson, it is the one-dimensionality of the culture industry 'where it is precisely commodification, and the consumption desires awakened by late capitalism, that are themselves paradoxically identified as the motive power for some deeper dissatisfaction capable of undermining the system itself' (Jameson 2007, p. 142). To be sure, Adorno reluctance to put his theory to use for progressive politics has earned him the label of an academic mandarin finding refuge in the abstractions of modernist arts. However, his relevance for the field of social movement studies may lie precisely here: a re-examination of revolutionary activism's dilemma between subversion and recuperation, and for a non-identitarian politics of class struggle.

The 'second generation' and new social movements

Despite this, it is Jürgen Habermas's reworking of critical theory that has the most lasting impact on social movement theory. In the 1980s, the term new social movements (NSMs) sparked intense debate over the validity of its claim to 'new-ness' as well as over the relationship of countercultural protest to the labour movement (Melucci 1980, 1985, 1994; Touraine 1981; Kitschelt 1985; Offe 1985; Kriesi 1987; Klandermans and Tarrow 1988; Tilly 1988; Tucker 1991; Barker and Dale 1998). Several contributions were influenced by Habermasian critical theory at least in part and, in Germany, by exasperation with the sharp drift to the right of the established party system. Too much has been made of the alleged break of NSM theory with Marxist conflict analysis. In fact, accounting for the Frankfurt School's roots in Marxism, the German critics (Hirsch 1980, 1983; Offe 1985, 1990; Eder 1982, 1985) referred to the administered society as a 'class society' and understood the 'golden age' of the welfare state in Western Europe as fulfilling the integrative function of binding the working class to a consumerist society in an attempt to lessen the disruptive

effects of industrial conflict. For them the NSMs were not simply to be understood as rebellion by newly affluent youths and middle classes, nor as the revolt of diverse disenfranchised groups that did not find a voice in the traditional institutions of the labour movement. Rather, they were a direct result of a confrontation with state structures, especially educational, penal and rehabilitative institutions, as well as the increasing function of the welfare state in housing, health and social security provision.

The impact of Habermasian sociology (Habermas 1981, 1985, 1987) on social movement theory is well documented (see Edwards 2009). For him, the political and cultural rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s had given rise to a feeling that the distributive demands of the labour movement had become increasingly co-opted into the functioning of modern capitalist society. We can make sense of Habermas's NSM theory as a logical conclusion of (1) his colonization thesis, (2) his democratic theory, and (3) his distinction between instrumentality and communication. The first signifies a shift in the prevailing lines of conflict in advanced capitalism. For Habermas, the NSMs stand in direct opposition to the colonization of the lifeworld. They constitute the prime challenge to the advance of post-liberal capitalism by opposing profit-driven globalization processes (for example Crossley 2002, pp. 153–67; Edwards 2004, 2009). Second, Habermas's theory can be explained as an element of his deliberative democratic theory (della Porta and Diani 2006, pp. 223–50; Dryzek 1990, 2000). NSMs are treated as social actors that seek to construct a new public sphere where a deliberative politics outside of state institutions is possible. This requires a civil society that keeps checks on public institutions and corporate organizations and is therefore 'critical in its orientation to established power structures' (Dryzek 2000, p. 2). Third, this needs to be understood from the perspective of Habermas's dichotomous conceptualization of labour and interaction and as an attempt to break with the pessimism of the first generation of Frankfurt School theorists by imbuing the notion of communicative action with a more positive resonance (Postone 1993, p. 226–62; Alexander 1991; Honneth 1991; Calhoun 1992). Put simply, for Habermas the possibility of social change is situated 'at the seam between system and lifeworld' (Habermas 1981, p. 36).

Of course this framework has not come without its objectors, among them several working within the framework set by critical theory. Axel Honneth (1982) argues that it is this dualist

juxtaposition of instrumental work and communicative interaction that most characterizes Habermas's project (see also Tucker 1991; Cohen and Arato 1992; Ray 1993; Honneth 1995). However, he criticizes that it comes 'at the cost, in the end, of categorically eliminating those forms of resistance and emancipation which are rooted in the structure of the capitalistic work process itself' (Honneth 1982, pp. 45–6).

For Moishe Postone too, the distinction that Habermas makes between system and lifeworld would mean that capitalism does not entail a system-inherent contradiction. It implies that 'socialism represents not a society *beyond* capitalism – a new historical form – but an alternative, less distorted version of the same historical form' (Postone 1993, p. 254). Drawing on Pollock and Horkheimer, Postone instead offers a critique of the 'Archimedean standpoint' of traditional labour movements as well as of the dualist politics of anti-imperialism (Postone 2006). His perspective is especially pertinent where it confronts the German peace movement of the 1980s. He attests the German left nationalist and anti-American subtexts as well as a structural unwillingness to confront the country's antisemitic past (Postone 2005; Schlembach 2014, pp. 71–94).

Similarly, Nancy Fraser's feminist objection to Habermas's dualism remains committed to the idea of an interdisciplinary investigation into the 'social totality' as imagined by earlier Frankfurt School theorists, moving against the challenges posed by poststructuralism and by increasing disciplinary specialization within critical social theory itself (Fraser 2009, 2013; see also Benhabib 1986; Cohen and Arato 1992). Fraser's is a political position concerned with the fragmentation of an emancipatory social movement into specialized 'interest groups' and their institutionalization. The rise of NSMs for Fraser was linked to what she calls 'state-organized capitalism'. Where feminism emerged as a 'subaltern counterpublic' to the hegemonic forces of late capitalism, she argues that social movements have since been too inward looking and left the official public sphere to be contested by non-emancipatory actors. Her strongest criticism is here directed at second-wave feminism in the United States and its position in the transformation of state-organized capitalism to neoliberalism. Here she points to the 'disturbing convergence of some of its ideals with the demands of an emerging new form of capitalism' (Fraser 2013, p. 210).

Others, such as several of Habermas's assistants, made a significant impact on social movement scholarship, remaining closer to the research framework set out by communicative action theory. Claus Offe's writings were able to capture forms of alternative political integration that sought to undermine the structures of the state and its institutional infrastructure. Initially these themes were framed with reference to the dynamics within the class structure of society and the possibilities for collectivizing individual interests in the workers' movement (for example Offe and Wiesenthal 1980). However, with the increasing pressure on German social democracy Offe questioned traditional notions of reform rooted within the union movement. It led him to the recognition of protests at the margins of society and of attempts to build alternative civil society organizations that were not reliant on bargaining negotiations with state actors. In an engagement with American social movement theory, Offe (1985) argued against the collective behaviour paradigm of social protest as transitional deviance from the norms of modernizing societies caused by material deprivation and other (temporary). The activist base of the NSMs in Western Europe was formed of the most integrated sectors of society. These movements' alternative values could not be understood as romanticized or irrational as they often sought to oppose the negative effects of bureaucratic and technological management rather than imagining an authentic past of small, communal life – the values of autonomy and identity were entirely modern and rational. 'Newness', in this sense, does not refer to a clash between established, 'rational', and challenging, 'irrational', value systems. Rather the emergence of new political actors and cultural goals consisted of a becoming visible of 'contradictions and inconsistencies *within* the value system of modern culture' (Offe 1985, p. 853, emphasis in the original).

Joachim Hirsch attempted to put the analysis of 'the alternative movement' on more rigorous Marxist foundations. Yet, the issues at the heart of critical theory were clearly present, such as in the attempt to overcome the rather sceptical reception of the new ecology, feminist and youth movements by the Old Marxist left. The latter often considered these new 'trends' as not more than a bourgeois exodus from the social-revolutionary struggles of yesteryear. Exemplifying the suspicions towards the welfare state, Hirsch (1980, 1983) advanced the notion of a Fordist security state, which combined the social security

befitting of Western welfare regimes with increasing surveillance of private lives – a potent mix of institutional reform and brutal repression. While the security state creates new areas of conflict, it regulates them through the establishment of 'quasi-state apparatuses', such as mass parties and labour unions, which act as intermediaries between the demands of the working class and an emerging world market. Yet at the same time the rationalized system of state bureaucracies becomes unable to integrate marginalized populations. Conflict develops 'between the corporatistically unified political apparatus as a whole and extra-institutional social movements forming in opposition' (Hirsch 1983, p. 86; for a critique of Hirsch's analysis see Bonefeld 1987).

Klaus Eder, who had joined Habermas as an assistant in Starnberg, also questioned the rational actor models of protest mobilization, whereby social movements act at the sub-level within an established state system and political economy. Eder argued that the decision on whether the NSMs were to be described as a social movement *tout courts* was not only a matter of establishing whether they had the 'ability to act collectively but also by its ability to relate to a new way of developing society' (Eder 1993, p. 117). What the accounts of Hirsch, Offe and Eder have in common is their concern with explaining changing class compositions and their role in movement politics. Eder's key concern for example was with the relationship of NSMs and their class constituencies. He maintains that class conflict and collective action are not necessarily treading on the same path in an advanced capitalist society. As such culture has taken on a more important role in mobilizing people to participate in collective behaviour. The new middle class constructions of class may produce a new social movement, but its particular relation to neo-populist and neo-romantic movements might also produce moral crusades or pressure groups instead (Eder 1985).

Whilst this critical theory framework has been fundamental in applying social movement research to protest in pre- and post-unification Germany, for example in work by Margit Mayer (Mayer 1991; Bartholomew and Mayer 1992; Mayer and Roth 1995) and Roland Roth (1994, 1998; Roth and Rucht 1987, 2000), there are still only rare explicit reference to earlier Frankfurt School sociology. Mayer's work on 'right to the city' movements (Mayer 2009; Brenner et al. 2012) brings critical theory into contact with urban studies. Roth published a book on radical subjectivity in Marcuse (Roth 1985) and has been a leading

commentator on contemporary citizens' participation, further moving the association of post-Habermasian critical theory towards deliberative democratic theory and 'democracy from below' (Roth 1994).

A return to Marcuse, eros and the great refusal

By the beginning of the 1990s, many of the themes developed within NSM theory appeared outdated, not least due to the increasing institutionalization of radical movements and the co-optation of their *modus operandi* by a globalized market society. Habermasian critical theory tried to grasp this new reality by reintroducing notions of democracy, rational deliberation, law and social justice. But what about the instances where protest appears in very different forms, violent and raw, or silly and absurd? Some forms of opposition speak a language that the rational-institutional order cannot understand, something that has found expression in the resistance to translate collective action into pragmatic demands or the refusal to represent ideas in concretely-articulated 'political' terms. The dualism of system and lifeworld, of organization and spontaneity, is inadequate for a period in which mobilization is the result of a more immediate and unmediated political experience. Specifically, the question of riots and social unrest cannot be understood unless embedded in a wider analysis of post-political consumerism and the culture industry (Winlow et al. 2015).

Some social movement scholars have therefore looked further back, and re-engaged with the social philosophy of Herbert Marcuse. Rather than the conception of movements as rational actors, Marcuse's analysis allows for the focus on a more emotional dimension:

> ...the rebellion often takes on the weird and clownish forms which get on the nerves of the Establishment. In the face of the gruesomely serious totality of institutionalized politics, satire, irony, and laughing provocation become a necessary dimension of the new politics (Marcuse 1969a, p. 63–64).

It is this dimension which stresses autonomy from institutionalized politics that has influenced social movement research to look favourably at outbreaks of social disorder that

cannot be captured in terms of rational actor models. While for some 'the intellectual and emotional refusal "to go along" appears neurotic and impotent' (Marcuse 1964, p. 9), others regard these as forms of resistance. The study of emotions has of course had a big impact on the literature on mobilization, as in the work of Lauren Langman (2005, 2013, 2014) whose studies of alienation, popular culture and US protest movements in the 21st century are influenced by earlier Frankfurt School authors. Langman contends that structural conditions have effects on the micro-level of movement interactions and trigger their emotional responses to objective injustices. As such he argues for a renewed look at the subjective experiences of neoliberal society. The development of the Marcusian notion of radical subjectivity (on this theme see Kellner 2004) has also been employed to understand the more or less spontaneous 'combustion' in situations where riots and unrest have spread in short spaces of time to multiple localities (Garland 2015). Explanations leaning towards the existence of rebellious subjectivities here work as counter-proposals to the technological determinism that frequently points to social media as the trigger for protest.

In his writings Marcuse stressed the role of aesthetics and spontaneity, giving little support to the rational mobilization model of social movement studies. In fact, rationality is critiqued as technological, where

> …individual protest and liberation appear not only as hopeless but as utterly irrational… Rational behavior becomes identical with a matter-of-factness which teaches reasonable submissiveness… (Marcuse 1941, p. 423).

It is this aesthetic and emotional side of Marcuse that takes his work also beyond the deliberative theory proposed by Habermas. For example, Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison (1998) take Marcuse's writings in the 1960s as a cue for their work connecting culture, aesthetics and politics in their book on music and social movements. Further, Marcuse's work can help us understand social protest today, linking it for example to the Occupy movement or global justice activism (see the special issues of Radical Philosophy Review 2013a, 2013b).

Marcuse's writings are used to similar effect by George Katsiaficas, one of his former students (Katsiaficas 1987, 2006, 2012, 2013a, 2013b), in suggesting an erotic and magnetic

impulse emanating from mass political events and uprisings. In his books on the global reach of 1968 and on the uprisings in the 1980s in South Asia, Katsiaficas develops some of Marcuse's central concepts to apply them to the diffusion of the new sensibilities and spontaneous movements through what he calls the 'eros effect'. The concept tries to grasp the global spontaneity of mass political rebellions and attests agency to an innate human desire for solidarity and the replacement of hegemonic norms by values of equality, cooperation and justice. Yet the social structures of system rationality do not allow for such spontaneous feelings of global solidarity except at times when politics and everyday life come together in 'moments of excess' (Free Association 2011) through an eroticization of political experience. More recently, Del Gandio has further extended the concept of the eros effect to explain the 'magnetic allure of mass rebellion' to suggest that moments of excess 'emanate a tangible and experiential feeling that attracts people to radical activity' (Del Gandio 2014, p. 129; see also Del Gandio and Thompson 2015).

Another former student of Marcuse, Angela Davis – influenced also by having studied with Adorno, Habermas and Oskar Negt – loosely extends some of his thought into the realm of black liberation and abolitionist movements without losing this focus on the possibility of recuperation. Davis (2003, 2005) warns of the dangers of arguments for prison reform as a more 'realistic' alternative to abolitionism and the potential for this pragmatic turn unintentionally legitimizing worse conditions for those imprisoned. Instead of finding alternative and 'better' forms of punishing, the activist-scholarship of Davis lends its support to the social movements that seek to dismantle the prison-industrial complex through new forms of community.

The rapprochement of theoretical work and praxis-oriented scholarship echoes Marcuse's support for the radicalism of his time, which was often in contrast to the more detached positions of Adorno and Horkheimer. Nonetheless, despite the assertion that Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* was 'one of the most important books of the 1960s' (Kellner 1991, p. xi), it has rarely been discussed at length in social movement theory. It does not fit comfortably alongside other accounts of new social movements because, unlike theories of the post-industrial or information society, Marcuse's analysis remains firmly wedded to a more materialist – albeit un-orthodox – view, with the party-form, anti-imperialism and

false consumer consciousness as central themes amidst a 'society without opposition.' Further, Thomas Wheatland has also made the argument that the relationship of the exiled Horkheimer circle to the emerging New Left in the US has often been overstated (Wheatland 2009). Even in the case of Marcuse, often regarded as the 'guru' of the New Left, Wheatland questions to what extent his popular books and essays were actually read within the student movement.

It is certainly the case that the Frankfurt School theorists were sensitively aware of the dangers of co-optation and knew that rebellion can quickly turn into affirmation. Instead of the subordination of thought to practice, they wanted to uphold its independence from the instrumentalist imperative to 'serve the cause'. Marcuse frequently spoke out against the focus on political rights usually associated with liberal democracies – voting, lobbying, peaceful protest marches. He argued that in the totally administered society such recourse to democratically-granted liberties only serves to justify and strengthen the status quo. By contrast, Marcuse argued for the 'great refusal', safeguarding against the risk that 'in a repressive society, even progressive movements threaten to turn into their opposite to the degree to which they accept the rules of the game' (Marcuse 1969b, p. 97).

Conclusions

As challenges to the dominant theoretical paradigms in social movement studies abound – for example those taking into account culture (Baumgarten et al. 2014; Jasper 2014; Johnston and Klandermans 1995), emotions (Goodwin et al. 2001; Flam and King 2005; Ruiz-Junco 2013), or collective identity (Fominaya 2010; McGarry and Jasper 2015) – it is worth noting that renewed attention has been paid to critical social theory too (some recent examples are Barker et al. 2013; Cox and Nilsen 2014; Fominaya and Cox 2013; Schlembach 2014). It is true that the consideration of the impact on social movement studies of Marxism in general and of the Frankfurt School more specifically necessitates further exploration of their relevance today, especially with regards to pro-democracy and anti-austerity protest: how would contemporary critical theory make sense of protest in the age neoliberalism

(Masquelier 2013), and how could it inspire alternative forms of social organization (Gunn and Wilding 2014)?

It is perhaps in Honneth's theory of recognition that we find the most explicit theory of social movements that is still connected to the concerns of critical theory post-Habermas. For Honneth, the negative experience of misrecognition can be the source of a normatively justified opposition to cultural and economic injustice (Honneth 2007; Fraser and Honneth 2003). Yet certain environmental contexts must be given to avoid this experience from being expressed as pathology, contexts in which the 'means of articulation of a social movement are available' (2007, p. 139), and in which collective expressions of solidarity can flourish.

However, where Honneth allows us to value normative claims to social rights and cultural respect, we may wonder whether the turn to recognition signifies a shift away from movement politics towards the politics of identity. If I have aimed to show the continued relevance of the first generation of Frankfurt School authors, it is because their instance on social conflict as struggles *against* identity. The political Adorno 'will always be local and unassured, motivated by singular experiences and negativity rather than pre-given appeals to universality' (Hammer 2006, p. 8).

For this purpose, the task is twofold: on the one hand the theoretical re-appreciation of Marxism's reception in the Horkheimer circle; on the other hand the formulation of a critical theory of contemporary society as an expression of its social movements. The following Horkheimer aphorism, authored under a pseudonym, entailed this task for many of the student radicals at the time: 'If socialism is improbable, it will require an all the more desperate determination to make it come true' (Regius [Horkheimer], cited in Krahl 2014 [1971]). At the same time, the danger of a collapse of philosophy into the predominance of practice would have appeared intolerable to Adorno. For him, critical thought had to retain its independence from the instrumental command to 'just do it'! This command to *act* in the face of injustice remains all pervasive in contemporary activism. There are good reasons for this. The imperative to secure the means of existence against economic and political

injustices is sometimes so paramount that reforms need to be gained that leave the system of domination untouched. On the other hand however, critical theory points to the fetishizing effects of the purity of action, its anti-intellectual nature, and the danger that well-intentioned protest can turn into its opposite form. If there is one lesson to learn from the Frankfurt School it is that counter-movements exist, as movements from above (see Cox and Nilsen 2014), but also as moments in history where populist movements from below create the pre-conditions for authoritarian change. Or, as Adorno warned against some forms of collective action: 'A modicum of madness furnishes collective movements … with their sinister power of attraction. Individuals cope with their own disintegration, with their private paranoia, by integrating themselves into the collective delusion, the collective paranoia' (Adorno 1998 [1969]: 265–66).

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