Critical Theory, Marxism, social evolution

An interview with Martin Jay

Jamie Keesling and Spencer A. Leonard

On October 31, 2015, Jamie Keesling and Spencer A. Leonard of the Platypus Affiliated Society conducted an interview with Martin Jay, author of The Dialectical Imagination *(1973),* Marxism and Totality *(1984),* Essays from the Edge: Parerga & Paralipomena *(2011)*, and *Reason after Its Eclipse: On Late Critical Theory* (2016) *among others. What follows is an edited transcript of their conversation.*

Jamie Keesling: Your book *The Dialectical Imagination* has had immense influence on the reception of Frankfurt School theory. What was the intellectual milieu toward which you were oriented in the 1960s and 70s? What were your motivations for undertaking the project?

Martin Jay: There were two basic milieux. One was the new interest in the intellectual migration emerging in the 60s, which really came into its own only in the 70s. There were a number of emigres who were still around and still very active in American intellectual life, but who were at the end of their careers and interested in sharing their experiences with a historian. My dissertation advisor, H. Stuart Hughes, had known quite a number of these people in the OSS. Hughes later wrote a book, *The Sea Change*, that dealt with the migration. It was the third part of a trilogy that began with *Consciousness and Society*. So the migration itself was a burgeoning field.

The second context was the rise of Marcuse as a figure whose work was to a great extent mysterious to Americans, myself included. Marcuse's mixture of Marx and Freud, his interest in the Hegelian dimension of Marxism, and his attempt to bring it up to date and make it relevant to the culture of the 60s, as well as his defiant utopianism—these were very novel for Americans in the 60s. I contributed to a collection edited by Karl Klare and Dick Howard called *The Unknown Dimension*, whose very title captures the lack of knowledge of Western Marxism among Anglo-Americans at that time. I did the chapter on Horkheimer, but there were also chapters on Korsch, Lukács, Gramsci, Sartre, and even Althusser. This was a collective project of retrieval in which a number of us were trying to recall what had been forgotten, identify what had not yet been translated, and promote what was still potentially useful in a tradition that departed from orthodox Marxism, and yet was more radical than social democracy or other kinds of revisionist Marxism. There were a number of other people at the time, centered around the journal *Telos* in particular, who were also trying to make sense of the Critical Theory tradition. I was friendly with many of them, but was never a core member of the *Telos* group, which had its own theoretical investments. The editor, Paul Piccone, was particularly interested in phenomenological Marxism, which I never found persuasive. Still, I was in dialogue with the people around *Telos* from very early on and contributed to some of the early issues of that journal.

JK: During the time you were conducting the research for *DI*, did you see the Frankfurt School as an ongoing intellectual endeavor?

MJ: At that time, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and Lowenthal were still alive, and Habermas was just beginning to make a name for himself in English. In Germany he was already quite well-known. The recovery of the earlier texts was still very much in process. For example, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was not yet republished even in German when I first started. It wasn't translated into English until 1972, around the time my book came out. So, there was a real sense of a treasure to be discovered. And, of course, some people were anxious to apply these ideas to current problems. These were not dead ideas to be preserved in a museum, but ones that still had enormous potential. Sometimes, to be sure, the surviving members of the School were not happy with the interpretations they were given and the impact they had. I was myself sometimes accused of expressing an elegiac attitude to the School's legacy rather than using it to inspire contemporary theory and perhaps even practice. However, I never thought you had to choose between historical retrieval and contemporary application. Obviously, you have to make sense of the ideas historically before you can use them in new circumstances. You had to see what their historical limitations were, rather than simply applying them wholesale to present problems.

In the United States at that time, the complicated and often mixed legacy of Critical Theory was scarcely known. Marcuse was the only major figure representing the School on these shores, which meant his differences with other members were not yet fully appreciated. Nor is it clear how seriously he was read by people who invoked his name. But in Europe, and in Germany in particular, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas were major players in the 1960s. Even if they were often chastised for not living up to the more intransigent radicalism of the Frankfurt School's earlier years by impatient students, they at least remained in tense dialogue with many of the most thoughtful of them. At times, of course, the conversation broke down, much to the delight of the mainstream public who enjoyed the spectacle of the revolution's children devouring its fathers.

JK: Quite famously, as in the case of Adorno! Today, of course, there are many scholars writing *about* Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, etc., but does *the project of Critical Theory* initiated by the Frankfurt School remain ongoing? If so, how has it changed? If not, what has caused this departure, especially given that society itself can hardly be said to have evolved?

MJ: I think it is always necessary to reconsider the project as the times change. There is, to be sure, always the reality of capitalism's ability to reproduce itself, so I would concede that the basic issue of the 19th and 20th centuries hasn't been resolved. But there are many other changes that need to be addressed. Just yesterday I was in a meeting of an international consortium of Critical Theory programs that is now in the process of being constructed. Judith Butler, Axel Honneth, Jay Bernstein, Hent de Vries, and Ann Stoler were among those there. The consortium will attempt to bring together programs from all around the world. Judith was just in Buenos Aires talking to leaders of programs in Latin America, and we have meetings scheduled for Cape Town and Istanbul. So, what has occurred is a globalization of Critical Theory, which inevitably means a broadening of its scope and an influx of new ideas. The consortium is anxious to avoid canonizing any orthodoxy, if indeed there ever was an orthodox Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Its energy is derived from certain Frankfurt School traditions, but it is also open to issues generated by postcolonial theory, responses to neoliberal globalization, gender theory, the crisis of secularization, and so on. A lot of the intellectual and political energy comes from the so-called Global South, so the application of a Eurocentric theory or European-American theory to what's happening in other parts of the world will inevitably have to be refracted through the historical circumstances in those countries, perhaps even in the idioms of their different traditions. We are very interested to see how that will evolve, but it's impossible for me or any other European or American to determine what will happen in advance. What amazes me, given that I started my dissertation almost 50 years ago now, is that Critical Theory in the broadest sense still remains a viable and stimulating program. It has now had several generations: Habermas, Albrecht Wellmer, Axel Honneth, Christoph Menke, Claus Offe, Hauke Brunkhorst, Rainer Forst, and Martin Seel, only to mention prominent German inheritors of the tradition, and then of course, many people in the Anglo- American world too numerous to name, as well as others scattered throughout the world. A couple of years ago I spoke at East China Normal University in Shanghai and discovered that my host, who was the main official of the university and a Party member, was a Habermas expert. So it's an evolving tradition that continues to ramify. Of course, there are debates within it and contests among those who claim to carry the torch. But what makes Critical Theory interesting is precisely its ability to grow creatively in different directions rather than simply following an original insight, or relying on the repetition of early texts as if they were somehow sacred.

Right now, the consortium is still embryonic. We hope to foster a loose international network to facilitate the exchange of both ideas and people. Each participating program will be able to feel that it isn't isolated, but situated in a global public sphere or at least a broad community of people who take seriously these traditions. Yesterday we had a long discussion about Chinese participation in particular. Although there is interest in Western Marxism and Critical Theory in China, some participants were nervous about the control still exerted by the Party over dissident intellectuals and activists and were concerned to avoid involvement with what might be called, to use an older terminology, front organizations. Most of us felt, however, that the nascent interest in Critical Theory was worth nurturing in the hope that an international conversation would enhance Chinese familiarity with the tradition, as well as contribute to our own understanding of what is happening in an extraordinarily important part of the world. Rather than vetting groups that want to get involved, most of us think it is unwise to exercise a gatekeeper function whereby we award an ideological Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. The consortium is a far cry from Communist Internationals, which expelled and excommunicated heretics from a party line.

JK: About there not being any room for conservative politics on campus and also a desire to keep the project of Critical Theory open to those who would identify as working through the legacy of the project—Is it inappropriate to identify conservative or reactionary tendencies and to exclude them?

MJ: The unrepentant civil libertarian in me thinks it's unwise and counterproductive ever to exclude different political positions in a university setting, where there should be a willingness to consider all sides of a question. What we consider objectionable ideas may also contain kernels of truth which may be lost if we suppress them. I'm willing to argue against people I disagree with. I'm willing to present what I think are better arguments to the other side and listen to their rejoinders. But I'm not willing *a priori* to say that there are ideas that are inappropriate on the campus. I was always very unhappy with Marcuse's repressive tolerance thesis, and not only because it seemed to me self-evident that that it would backfire on the Left. Once you begin to say there shouldn't be an argument that, say, supports the Vietnam War or is pro-Zionist or whatever, then people on the other side have every right to respond, "Well, I don't want somebody supporting, say, Hugo Chavez's version of socialism in Venezuela" or "I have no interest in having a Hamas representative come to my campus." Repressive intolerance is, after all, a two-way street. I've always thought that one can challenge an idea without having to shout it down. One can refuse to go to hear somebody but not stop other people from hearing them. I can't shake a simple ACLU libertarian faith in the value of free speech. The only limitations I would put on the absolute exercise of free speech is when it becomes hate speech or when it is performatively problematic. For example, a speaker who, say, denies the Holocaust or demonizes Muslims, or who spews racial epithets does not deserve a platform. This is not simply expressing an opinion, but rather is an act that has consequences. It humiliates, demeans, and injures in some deeply meaningful sense. But apart from hate speech of this kind we have to be steadfast in our willingness to allow obnoxious ideas to be heard. I remain enough of an old-fashioned liberal to believe that I always may have something to learn from an intelligent conservative or an intelligent radical of whatever stripe, even if dialogue ultimately proves futile in moving towards a consensus.

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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

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The Platypus Review

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Book Review: Doug Henwood

My Turn: Hillary Targets the Presidency

New York: OR Books, 2016

Gregor Baszak

"MY TWO CENTS' WORTH—and I think it is the two cents' worth of everybody who worked for the Clinton Administration health care reform effort of 1993–1994—is that Hillary Rodham Clinton needs to be kept very far away from the White House for the rest of her life… Perhaps she will make a good senator. But there is no reason to think that she would be anything but an abysmal president." With this epigraph, a quote by Brad DeLong, former Undersecretary of the Treasury during Bill Clinton's first term, Doug Henwood opens his short but effective takedown of Hillary Clinton: *My Turn: Hillary Targets the Presidency*. According to Henwood, DeLong has since then deleted the archives of the blog on which he had originally posted this warning and has refused to respond to Henwood's inquiry on whether he still believes it. The suggestion is: one wouldn't want to lose a Clinton's favor if one wants to have a shot at one of the lucrative Special Government Employee positions that Hillary apparently handed out unlike anyone before her as Secretary of State, most often to old associates who had proven uncompromisingly loyal to either of the Clintons. In turn these associates are able to exploit their status for their personal benefit (72 et seq.).

Politics as a personal racket—no one has perfected this science better than the Clintons, a power couple that decided very early in their political careers on what they deemed "The Journey," that eight years of Bill's presidency would inevitably be followed by eight years of Hillary (39–40). Since their origins in a petit-bourgeois suburban community in Illinois (Hillary), and a working-poor family in Arkansas (Bill), the Clintons' stints in politics, in "philanthropy," and on the generously compensated speaking circuit have allowed them to amass significant fortunes: Bill is now "the 10th-richest of our presidents, with a net worth of $55 million . . . But Hillary wasn't just sitting around baking cookies: she's worth $32 million" (96).

As the book's title suggests, Hillary's claim to the throne comes out of a sense of personal entitlement, and that she has not much more to say in her favor than "she has experience, she's a woman, and it's her turn" (14). Henwood notes that Hillary's own political career has been harmless at best, resulting in just minor achievements as Senator from New York (53) and as Secretary of State (65). As a matter of fact, the latter title seems to have been handed to Hillary purely as a gesture of peace after the contested 2008 primaries and has come with little responsibility—the majority of major foreign policy decisions were instead made by a circle of close Obama associates in the Oval Office.[1] At worst, Hillary's political career has been continuously one of personal enrichment and shady public-private deals cut with the help of her husband, on the edge of illegality (32). Furthermore, she helped to slash welfare (42–3) and advocated for the 1994 crime bill that caused "the incarceration boom that she now says she's against" (120) during Bill's presidency,[2] and assisted in expanding "U.S. imperial ambitions" as Secretary of State (77).

Interestingly and fortunately, however, Henwood extends his criticism beyond Hillary Clinton. He begins the book by echoing Sarah Palin's absolutely fair ridicule of the empty rhetoric of "hope" and "change" that had brought the Chicago Democratic machine politician Barack Obama to the presidency in 2008. According to Henwood, Obama's presidency can be summarized as in many ways as bad as that of his predecessor, George W. Bush (13), and in some other ways—such as Obama's cutting funds for Bush's much-praised federal anti-HIV efforts (109)—worse than it. Drawing on Walter Benn Michaels, Henwood refers to Obama's brand of politics as "the left wing of neoliberalism" (14): in either case, "you get rule by a moneyed elite, but the left variety is more attentive to optics" (84). In other words, in terms of economics and foreign policy there is not much difference between the Democrats and the Republicans, but the former certainly care more about positioning themselves as liberal in terms of social issues such as gay rights.[3] As liberal outlets such as *Salon* and *Slate* have rallied firmly around Hillary so far, and in their cute and starry-eyed way have begun to admire the candidate's ostensible "left" turn, Henwood finally concludes that this "is further proof that Democrats, especially liberal Democrats, are the cheapest dates around—throw them a few rhetorical bones, regardless of your record, and they're yours to take home and bed" (119).

Unfortunately, Henwood doesn't extend his criticism of the Democratic Party as such much further than that. He instead ends the book on promising criticism of such movements and social media campaigns as Occupy and Black Lives Matter. The latter Henwood takes as "characteristic of so much dissent today: more about self-affirmation and healing than about taking power" (135). However, what the organizational form of an actual attempt at seizing power by the Left should be, he leaves unanswered. Perhaps intentionally so: as Henwood acknowledges from the outset, Hillary isn't "The Problem," but rather "a symptom of a deep sickness in the American political system," which he then traces back to Constitutional checks on popular power, the two-party system, and the influence of elites in politics and the economy (19). Thus, he admits, his book on the presidential candidate Clinton at the same time is meant as a warning against exaggerating the "political importance of presidential elections" (20). But all this leaves him with is the vague argument that "anyone who wants a seriously better politics in this country has to start from the bottom and work their way up" (21). This is also why Henwood hesitates to make a full endorsement for the sort of politics Bernie Sanders represents. "If, by some freakish accident, Sanders ever got elected," Henwood writes, "the established order would crush him. We'll never find salvation, or even decency, from above" (21). Such a statement is more a platitude than trenchant political analysis, since it poses politics as a simple conflict between those "above" and those "below."

Hopeless or not, however, Henwood sees such a more genuinely left challenge and thus possibility in the candidacy of Bernie Sanders, irrespective of his qualifiers that Sanders' foreign policy—especially his stance on Israel—is problematic (118), and that he is less a socialist than a social democrat (119). For Henwood, the Sanders campaign proved "a jolt of life" for a primary season that would have been otherwise no race at all (140). The campaign has been portrayed by others as an opportunity to revive the working-class movement in America, which will occur if unions get involved in the Democratic primary process.[4] Predictably, though, the major unions have already backed Clinton, certainly so as not to alienate the party establishment in the future. The AFL-CIO, SEIU, etc. place themselves at the mercy of a party whose own pro-union commitments are a remnant of the New Deal coalition. These commitments, however, have diminished drastically over the last few decades, not only under Clinton's reign, but much earlier, under the Carter administration.[5]

This is perhaps why underlying the Left's support of Sanders is a hope to return to the seeming strength of the American labor movement in the immediate post–WWII era. Why this would be a triumph for the Left is unclear, though. The major unions were deeply embedded in the Democratic Party's Cold War liberalism, and played more the role of a racket reaching for its cut from the national surplus product than many leftists would have it.[6] The excitement for Sanders, therefore, looks misplaced and is reminiscent of earlier proxy candidates that the American Left placed its hopes on, for instance the young Communist movement's uncritical support for the populist Republican senator Robert La Follette. In reaction, Leon Trotsky warned in 1924 of "the political dissolution of the party in the petty bourgeoisie," losing its distinct character as a party for international socialism. "After all," Trotsky concluded, "opportunism expresses itself not only in moods of gradualism but also in political impatience: it frequently seeks to reap where it has not sown, to realize successes which do not correspond to its influence."[7] The Communist movement soon after submitted to President Franklin Roosevelt's anti-cyclical investment measures, which he distinctly presented as an attempt at limiting the reach of more radical challenges to the status quo of American society.[8]

To be sure, the present moment is no mirror image of the '30s, but mostly because the Left's struggles have been fought with continually lowered stakes and possibilities. To hope now that this almost century-old regression can be reversed by another commitment to the boundaries of the Democratic Party bureaucracy indicates a profound ignorance of the Left's own tragic past. Henwood correctly diagnoses a "public mood" which might be ripe for a "serious appeal from the left" (125). But no appeal is serious which attempts to channel these negative energies once more into the bureaucratic voids of the Democratic Party.

On the whole, then, the book misses a great opportunity: to understand Hillary as a symptom to be sure, but less as one characteristic of a centuries-old American political order, and instead as one of the demise of the American Left in the 20th century—its liquidation into the Democratic Party. It might have been the journalistic "jolt of life" this primary season needed, but which *My Turn* ultimately didn't become. Rather, it is a useful compilation of facts and figures showing that the label "lesser evil" doesn't apply when it comes to Hillary Rodham Clinton—she "needs to be kept very far away from the White House" indeed. But the Left appears to be on the path back into the arms of the Democratic machine once again. Perhaps this calls for a book that instead stresses that the Left must be kept very far away from the Democrats. **|P**

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1 See also: Daniel De Luce, "Hagel: The White House Tried to 'Destroy' Me," *Foreign Policy,* Dec. 18, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/12/18/hagel-the-white-house-tried-to-destroy-me/>.
2 See also: Gregor Baszak, "Marxism through the back door: An interview with Cedric Johnson," *Platypus Review 79,* Sept. 2015, <http://platypus1917.org/2015/09/01/marxism-back-door-interview-cedric-johnson/>; and John P. Walters, "Rand Paul Attacks Hillary Clinton on Criminal Justice for African Americans," *Weekly Standard*, May 19, 2015, <http://www.weeklystandard.com/rand-paul-attacks-hillary-clinton-on-criminal-justice-for-african-americans/article/950424>.
3 Cf. Chris Cutrone, "The Sandernistas: The final triumph of the 1980s," *Platypus Review 82*, Dec. 2015, <http://platypus1917.org/2015/12/17/sandernistas-final-triumph-1980s/>; but see also Yasmin Nair, "Gay Marriage IS a Conservative Cause," YasminNair.net, Feb. 26, 2013, <http://www.yasminnair.net/content/gay-marriage-conservative-cause>.
4 Cf. Joseph M. Schwartz, "Bernie Sanders Can Help Revitalize the American Labor Movement," *In These Times*, Sept. 9, 2015, <http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/18388/bernie-sanders-unions-labor-movement>.
5 See Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2010).
6 Cf. Max Horkheimer, "On the Sociology of Class Relations" (1943), *Nonsite,* Jan. 11, 2016, <http://nonsite.org/the-tank/max-horkheimer-and-the-sociology-of-class-relations>.
7 *The First Five Years of the Communist International*. Vol. 1. (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), p. 13.
8 See his 1932 acceptance speech at the Democratic Party convention: <https://fdrlibrary.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/1932.pdf>.

Book Review: John Roberts

Revolutionary Time and the Avant-garde

London: Verso, 2015

Kim Charnley

FAMOUSLY, CLEMENT GREENBERG WROTE IN 1939 that the avant-garde is connected to the bourgeoisie by an "umbilical cord of gold."[1] This image has become so familiar that its peculiarities are rarely commented upon. The point is not simply the obvious one for Marxists, that art reflects the interests of a bourgeois class. The implication of this aureate biological metaphor is that a progressive bourgeoisie makes possible the gestation of new forms of culture, nurturing them in the midst of instrumentalism and kitsch. Surplus value, extracted from the lives of workers might be transfused, or transmuted, back into the lifeblood of cultural development. In 1939, this may have been a reassuring idea: but how is the avant-garde to be understood now, when art seems to bear witness to the gestation of a new kind of capitalist nightmare?

Artists who were once heralded for their ground-breaking work have thrown in their lot with multinational companies: Marina Abramovic's Work Relation of 2014, a "collaboration" with Adidas that reenacts a 1978 performance created with her former partner Ulay, though with sleeker footwear, is only the most execrable example of this trend. The art market, for its part, has shown itself to be in thrall to oligarchs without the maternal instinct that Greenberg counted upon. Their needs are simple: fungible assets that can support a few "theoretical" remarks, and stand a chance of showing a healthy return on investment once they are "flipped." Cue the remorseless rise of a species of post-conceptual painting that has been dubbed, brilliantly, "zombie formalism."[2]

Museums of contemporary art have come to model themselves on global brands. Unsurprisingly, their management is susceptible to the shifting values of patrons who no longer seem content with the naming of an occasional wing in return for their public service. Now the quid pro quo tends to include the promise of more concrete returns than a reputation for civic virtue. If this means curating a show in such a way that it will add value to a prominent donor's collection, it can be done. Or, in the case of the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, if it means founding an outpost that lends credibility to an undemocratic state where flogging and stoning are lawful punishments: no problem. Frank Gehry can design the building, and workers who are denied basic human rights can build it, and the "progressive" bourgeoisie can make their obeisance to absolute monarchs in the United Arab Emirates…

Across literature from the Left that has analyzed the development of the art world since the 1960s, there has been a consensus that the globalization of art is connected to the emergence of new forms of capitalism. The art market has become a gigantic Ponzi scheme, and contemporary art a research and development arm of neoliberal culture. But the problem must be understood in its full complexity, because it is from within art that the most vocal resistance to such developments is heard. Art is entirely profaned, entangled in the luxurious machinations of a 0.1%, and at the same time it generates resistance. One of the loci of such opposition has been the "social turn" a tendency that since the 1990s has seen increasing numbers of artists and artists' groups developing collectively-realized events or projects as art.[3] Typically, in these works, the boundaries are blurred between art, social experience and political activism in a way that recalls the program of the revolutionary avant-garde of the 1920s whose goal, famously, was to overcome the gap between art and the everyday.

However, critical debates about this work have been hampered by disagreement about what it might mean for art to invoke the avant-garde today. Art, of course, is in a very different place to the one that it occupied in 1939 when Greenberg wrote "Avant-garde and Kitsch." In fact, Greenberg's insistence on "medium-specificity", painting as the last redoubt of high culture, was part of the neutralization of the ideas of the avant-gardes of the 1920s. The Surrealists and Constructivists had been revolutionary Marxists who had hoped to use art 'to realize the communist expression of material structures.'[4]

Some commentators see the contemporary avant-garde as an entirely institutionalized category, a mere stylistic homage to the heroic phase of avant-garde experiment. Others, however, suggest that the contemporary avant-garde connects the present to an important lineage of artistic dissent.[5] John Roberts's *Revolutionary Time and the Avant-Garde* pitches in on the latter side of the argument, arguing that the social turn is an extension of an avant-garde "research project" which has intermittently recurred during the 20th and into the 21st century. Roberts maintains, however, that this avant-garde is misrecognized by art theory and art history: his book intends to clear away the deep-seated assumptions that cause such misrecognition. *Revolutionary Time* is therefore an art theoretical text, which offers conceptual tools that might assist avant-garde practice clearly to recognize itself as "a theoretically-driven set of practices necessarily embedded in the conflicts and divisions of the social world" (3).

The extended introduction to the book addresses the argument (heard from both the Left and the right) that the influence of the avant-garde upon art has been "a spiral of decadent self-destruction,"which must be halted by re-engagement with tradition, especially with painting (4). Such arguments hold that the experiments of the avant-garde are responsible for the depredation of art. Roberts counters that humanist complaints of this kind fail to comprehend the problem that has confronted art since the 19th century. The avant-garde is indeed symptomatic of the crisis of modernity, but it contains within it a vital and redemptive connection to this crisis. Painting, by contrast, has a "melancholic allure" but can only offer "the debilitated zones of 'personal creativity'… as a resistance to theory and a resistance to political praxis" (2).

Roberts's position derives from a reading of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's "end of art" thesis, which is spliced with Theodor Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* to produce a dynamic theoretical framework through which to view the avant-garde through the twentieth century and into the present. This is somewhat unexpected, because Hegel's thesis is more commonly taken to anticipate the inexorable decline of modern art, its falling away from authentic creativity into pluralist incoherency. Roberts, by contrast, insists that Hegel actually intended to affirm "a profound expansion and renewal of art" beyond its apparent terminus (9). Art's drift toward "conceptualization," as Hegel put it, is part of its critical reflection upon art's loss of contact with an embedded cultural tradition. The Adornian inflection of this point is that the avant-garde must challenge inherited forms of art, because the remorseless social upheaval of capitalism has made those inherited forms incoherent, or absorbed them into the culture industry, so that they are, incapable of authentically relating to the culture of the present. Although avant-gardes may seem to undermine the integrity of art, their challenge has become the only way for art to continue.

For Roberts, the avant-gardes of the 1920s are the key revolutionary example of the practice of art "after art": Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism were crucial because they disconnected art from painting, or "craft-specificity," allowing art to "place itself within the advanced technical relations of the epoch" (1). Across the twentieth century, but especially after the historical avant-garde was rediscovered in the 1960s, art "after art" crept out into other areas of cultural production. Art in general became increasingly theoretical, reflecting on its out-of-joint relation to the world, but it did so using the technical practices that were shaping that world: film, photography, publishing and the organizational forms of mass production itself.

Roberts argues for the avant-garde as an intermittent, but recurring "research project." For this reason, he is fundamentally in disagreement with Peter Bürger, one of the most influential critics of the "neo-avant-garde", the term he coined to describe the recurrence of avant-garde art since the 1960s. For Bürger, the "'historical' avant-garde" failed in its attempt to transform the relationship between art and life praxis in the 1920s. Once avant-garde art became consecrated by the museum, it became just another style, no longer revolutionary, but actually endorsed as bourgeois culture. Greenberg's version of the avant-garde was part of this process of assimilation, but even those movements of the 1960s who rejected high modernism – Fluxus, Minimalism and Conceptual art – were, for Bürger, a tame homage to a revolutionary attempt to destroy the art institution.[6]

Roberts, by contrast, argues for the enduring vitality of avant-garde practice, though he acknowledges that it must recognize its limitations. Roberts concedes that the historical avant-garde failed in its attempt to transform the everyday, but he insists that the failure is not one that can be readily assimilated by bourgeois society, or contained within narrative art history. As he puts it, the avant-garde is "a failed event that produces out of its failure a repressed potentiality that stands to open up the present and tradition" (91). The recurrence of avant-garde art throughout the 20th century is a sign that it has not been neutralized or assimilated.

In Roberts's terms, after the Thermidor of the 1930s, when Nazism and Stalinism dispersed or liquidated avant-garde membership, the avant-garde could only be recovered as a "suspensive" form: cross-cut by tensions that enforce political and artistic limitations. The materials from which these suspensive avant-gardes are created are the incompletely understood or misrecognized artistic strategies bequeathed by a revolutionary avant-garde that was defeated. The process of this struggle to negate art, in Roberts's argument, must take place in and through the cultural space of art, and it is inevitably marked by the contradictions of its historical conjuncture.

Art historical accounts of the avant-garde, even those that are theoretically sophisticated, tend to resort to narratives of stylistic progression. Roberts, by contrast, provides an explanation based on crisis, on the decomposition of art within the socio-economic maelstrom that is required for capitalism to function. Paradoxically, this bleak mise-en-scène allows for a kind of optimism. The avant-garde response to crisis, which must be continually reinvented, is one of negation: a negation of artistic tradition in the first instance, but also a negation that points beyond tradition toward alternative possibilities for the reinvention of social reality. This "second negation" (59–63), which was most powerfully communicated by the avant-gardes of the 1920s, because of their contact with the revolution of 1917, remains a potentiality of the "post-conceptual" art of the social turn.

Chapter two includes a lucid account of the diverse reception of Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* across Anglophone as well as German debates. For a student of Adorno, this chapter alone is probably worth the price of the book. The discussion hinges on the meaning of autonomy for Adorno's various interpreters, each of whom pursues a different trajectory through the intricate dialectic of *Aesthetic Theory*. Whereas some, for example J.M. Bernstein and Andrew Bowie, affirm the autonomy of art as a kind of "radical aestheticism, "Roberts takes a post-aestheticist position—represented by Peter Osborne and Stewart Martin besides Roberts himself—that describes critical autonomy amid the anti-aesthetic, post-medium tumult of contemporary art.[7]

Chapter three teases out the absences and political cul-de-sacs, involved in any recovery of the avant-garde legacy. It does so by examining the different kinds of belatedness experienced by avant-garde collectives located in two very different national-historical contexts: conceptual art in the 1960s and 1970s, especially focused on the group Art & Language in the United Kingdom and the practice of the group *Chto Delat* in Russia since the early 2000s. In the 1960s and 1970s in the UK, the emergence of Art & Language helped to set in place the conditions for contemporary art, though the group imploded in the mid-1970s at the point that their post-conceptual practice became most politically

"John Roberts" continues on page 4

Critical Theory, continued from page 1

Spencer Leonard: You spoke of Dick Howard and Karl Klare's book and of the *Telos* group in the 1970s. Practically all the major works of Lukács, Korsch, Adorno, and Horkheimer were translated into English in this period. Indeed, Marx's *Capital* was even retranslated, so that on the whole the reception of this work in English seems to have been driven by an underlying impulse to find some way to reconstitute Marxism (or something that could genuinely take over from it) as, so to speak, the culminating act of the New Left. By contrast, the reception since the 1980s seems less purposeful or simply academic. Marcuse's work has been positively obscure, while Adorno and Horkheimer have almost been transformed into mandarin types, conservative cultural critics. Was an opportunity missed there? What lessons are to be learned from that "failed" reception in the 1970s?

MJ: I hesitate to make grand generalizations about the reasons why the hopes of the 60s were ultimately unrealized. All the glib expectations about a terminal crisis of "late capitalism" proved wrong as capitalism turned out to be far more resilient than many on the Left expected. The disastrous Vietnam War meant that the leftward movement of domestic politics during the years immediately after the Kennedy assassination was blunted, especially after the deaths of King and Bobby Kennedy in 1968. And of course, many members of the working class, such as it was, were easily turned away from any progressive agenda by appeals to their patriotism, their cultural anxieties, and, alas, their often latent racism. Sometimes the Left deluded itself by believing in, for example, the Cultural Revolution in China as a genuine expression of revolutionary effervescence or putting too much faith in socialist countries like Cuba or Vietnam, which turned out to be more authoritarian than democratic. What also has to be remembered is the "missed opportunity" was global, as comparable movements in Europe and elsewhere also fizzled in one way or another, often producing as a result conservative reactions and leaders like Thatcher and Kohl. This is not to say that nothing progressive was accomplished, just that the system-changing hopes of Marxism were yet again thwarted.

JK: What about the Frankfurt School's Marxism, especially that of Adorno? How has the reception in academia illuminated or obscured this?

MJ: Well, it depends how we define Marxism, which is always the key issue. These were people who clearly took a lot from the Marxist tradition. They understood the importance of class analysis and the commodity form; they understood capital as a totalizing force in contemporary culture. They understood that to make radical changes they would need to think beyond capitalism. Having said that, they were also aware of the fact that Marxism had certain theoretical and historical limitations. Like every theory, it was a product of its time. Marx in many explicit ways was limited by what could be experienced in the 19th century in the "advanced" countries of Europe and North America. The capitalism of his day was, of course, not the capitalism of the Frankfurt School, let alone ours. They were struggling to rethink a Marxism that had to meet the challenge of fascism, which Marx had not really anticipated, and make sense of the failure or inability of the working class to be the "subject of history." They began in fact to rethink the entire concept of history having *a subject*, which comes largely from Hegelian Marxism and started to move in the direction that leads to Habermas's explicit disarticulation of labor and symbolically mediated interaction. His critique of consciousness philosophy and the importance of intersubjectivity were anticipated in some of their work, even if they were less optimistic about the possibility of communicative rationality in a largely irrational totality. By the time they returned to Germany after their exile, they began valuing radical democracy, even pluralism, rather than holding on to the hope for a single, universal maker of history. In fact, well before their return, they understood the need to combine insights from Marxism with those derived from other thinkers, such as Freud, Nietzsche, even Weber, however much they may have resisted certain aspects of their thought. From the beginning, theirs was an experimental Marxism rather than an orthodox one. However much they may have disdained liberalism, they were never attracted to organized parties on the Left, whether Communist, Trotskyist, or Social Democratic. They didn't even join the New Beginning, which was an alternative attempt to renew Marxism by finding a middle ground between communism and social democracy. They always kept their distance from practical movements, a reticence which, of course, continued when Horkheimer and Adorno rejected Marcuse's embrace of the New Left. Whether this was a deficit, as Lukács always argued when he mocked them as living in the Grand Hotel Abyss, or rather a source of their creativity, is still a point of some dispute. My own feeling is that it was ultimately a benefit, even if they were troubled about the costs of the increasing gap between theory and practice.

JK: The prevailing critique of the Frankfurt School's Marxism says something like "Marxism is a closed philosophical system, an orthodoxy." I wonder how you engage with this sort of criticism. Must we not turn this criticism around and insist that the Frankfurt School project comes out of Marxism as the root of negative criticism?

MJ: Negativity in the broadest sense has been around ever since philosophy saw itself as a rational alternative to an existing reality that was not very rational. Whether or not this was in more idealist forms—Platonic, Kantian, or Hegelian—or whether it was translated into a more materialist idiom, depended on circumstances. I think negativity itself exists in many different philosophical systems, and the Frankfurt School certainly took seriously the ways in which Marx and the tradition that came out of his work had embodied something more than just philosophical negativity. Marx's evident desire was that philosophy should become active in the world through practical realization, which meant locating the most potent sources of embodied negativity existing outside the theoretical sphere. When the proletariat failed or was unable to play the role he had hoped it would play, it seemed necessary to search for alternative embodiments of negativity. The Frankfurt School began by being cautiously hopeful that other candidates could be found. Marcuse, as I mentioned earlier, still remained interested during the sixties in student movements or other marginalized groups as possible concrete embodiments of the "power of negative thinking." But, by and large, the core of the Frankfurt School grew more skeptical and cautious about the existence of coherent, self-conscious movements, understood in class terms or otherwise, that could serve as the vanguard of emancipation. They understood that diffuse, and indeterminate negativity remains in the world, in the sense that many groups insist on radical change and decry the status quo, but, alas, not necessarily in a progressive direction. Whatever one may say about fascism, it drew on a "negative criticism" of liberal democracy and bourgeois society. And one could say that the Tea Party today and the Republicans in Congress are as negative as you can get, far more interested in stopping things from happening than building anything new. So in a way we can say they express a malign, rather than benign, negativity. In other words, negativity by itself, without rational critique, without plausible goals and laudable values, is insufficient. Critical Theory was always aware of the fact that there were both problematic and potentially emancipatory embodiments of indeterminate negativity and knew from bitter experience how the former could gain the upper hand.

SL: In many respects, perhaps in every respect, the very designation "Critical Theory" in the writings of the 1930s and 1940s seems synonymous with Marxism, however critical, non-traditional, or simply in-distress. And, certainly, while Horkheimer may have succumbed to depoliticization and Habermas felt the need to in some sense break with them, Adorno's fidelity to both Marx and Marxism seems unwavering throughout his corpus, as a work like "Late Capitalism or Industrial Society" seems only to reinforce. Given this, what do you make of the now notorious statement you reported from your interviews with Adorno to the effect that Marx wanted to turn the world into a workhouse?

MJ: To be honest, I have great trouble accepting the premise of this question. The notion of "unwavering fidelity" is appropriate to a religious believer, not to a critical theorist. It implies that there is a body of doctrine, a catechism, which every true believer upholds without any deviation. It implies that those who fail this test deserve to be banished as heretics or apostates. To the extent that the Marxist tradition could lend itself to this sort of orthodox definition, it fell prey to the very reification it ostensibly sought to criticize. There can be no question that Adorno, broadly speaking, learned an enormous amount from Marx. He understood the centrality of exchange and commodification. He recognized the dogged persistence of class differences even when class struggle was muted. He abhorred the injustices of capitalism and never lost a certain utopian hope that it might one day be replaced by a better alternative.

And yet in too many respects to detail now, he felt unconstrained by adherence to the letter of Marx's texts or the interpretations of those who claimed to be his faithful exegetes. Not only, as I said earlier, did he seek inspiration from alternative theorists like Freud and Nietzsche, as well as artists like Beckett and Schoenberg, he also felt little attraction to either the scientistic or humanist alternatives that vied for supremacy in 20th century Marxist debates. By situating the exploitation of capitalism in the longer narrative of man's domination of nature and the rise of instrumental rationality, he recognized a more fundamental source of our current dilemma. Although you can always find texts such as the one you cite that show he preferred calling the current totality "late capitalism" to "industrial society," it is important to remember that the former term was also used by Habermas in his *Legitimation Crisis*, whose German title is *Legitimationsprobleme im Spätkapitalismus*. Would you want to say he was also "unwaveringly faithful" to Marx? The irony, of course, is that both of them were wrong insofar as capitalism was by no means "late" enough when those texts were written. Indeed, for all of its instabilities and dysfunctions, it shows no signs of being replaced by anything meaningfully better in the foreseeable future.

As for Adorno's remark that Marx wanted to turn the world into a workhouse, which is only notorious to those who think it is inconsistent with his "unwavering fidelity," it accords perfectly with Adorno's critique of the fetish of productivism and the reduction of human emancipation to unalienated labor. Horkheimer had already said something similar in his early aphorisms, and Marcuse argued against the repressive "performance principle" allied with technological reason in *Eros and Civilization*. And of course, Benjamin, who was so influential on Adorno, had as many positive things to say about Fourier as about Marx.

One could, of course, get into a debate over whether or not Adorno's charge was an accurate understanding of Marx's own position, citing on either side the different texts—which are not in fact very numerous—where Marx hinted at what he wanted to turn the world into after the Revolution. I need not remind you of the work Moishe Postone has done in challenging the idea that Marx adopted a trans-historical labor theory of value. Frankly, the issue of what Marx "really said" seems to me a thoroughly unimportant question, except for true believers in the sacredness of his texts or for intellectual historians who seek the holy grail of subjective intentionality that ostensibly lies behind texts. What is important is that Adorno was right in questioning the fetish of production and labor and insisting that any meaningful notion of liberation had to go beyond it.

JK: For a time, the university seemed to promise refuge to a generation of disappointed 60s and 70s-era radicals. Are we now seeing a return to the sort of conservatism historically associated with university campuses? How do you imagine the future of the university as a place for Leftist intellectualism?

MJ: Let me speak to my experience at Berkeley, as it is very hard to generalize. As it happens, I was interviewed by NPR earlier this week for a program on students at Berkeley, then and now, for which they also interviewed a number of current students. I was struck by the extent to which the Berkeley students on the program remain committed. They don't present themselves as forming anything as grandiose as a Movement, and they're certainly not self-designated Marxists joining one or another Trotskyist splinter group, as might have been the case 40 years ago. They're rarely people who have intransigently utopian aspirations, but they are often politically active and idealistic about change. They are concerned about lots of real issues in the world and want to do more than simply talk about them. Two or three years ago when the #Occupy movement emerged, many Berkeley students took part. Though #Occupy was ephemeral, it placed on the table the issue of inequality that has finally become a national concern. Of course, there were different issues in the 1960s, such as the draft. that presented an immediate existential threat to people of a certain age, which meant a lot of students were motivated by the fear that they would have to fight and perhaps die in a war that they did not support. Today we have professional armies and fight wars with drone technology, so that kind of fear plays no role in motivating rebellion. What has, of course, remained constant is the persistence of racial inequality and discrimination in ways that many students find deeply objectionable. But we have to acknowledge that students today are by and large less financially secure than in the 1960s, which means that they are understandably less quick to sacrifice their careers for living the counter-cultural or politically extremist lives that Marcuse celebrated as "The Great Refusal."

As for campus attitudes toward politics, the right will tell you, and there's a column about this in today's *New York Times*, that most universities and colleges are in fact totally intolerant of conservative thought. They argue that faculties are overwhelmingly liberal or radical and that among students the prevailing wisdom is a knee-jerk soft Leftism, exemplified by obsessions with identity politics, hate speech, and Palestinian rights. The buzzword "political correctness" is their way of stigmatizing anything they can't criticize using persuasive arguments. The prevailing consensus on campus is, to be sure, more or less on the Left, at least in terms of the spectrum of American politics in general. Now whether this is an overly moderate leftism resistant to any attempt to move the conversation further to the Left depends on which campus and which versions of the Left we're talking about. At Berkeley, we still have a variety of different positions. Some militant students challenge conventional norms of civility to voice a more intransigent radicalism that seeks change "by any means necessary." But the majority seem to me less dogmatic in their search for answers to questions that no one can really claim are definitively resolved by any one tradition of thought. In this sense, many are closer to the spirit of Critical Theory than those who would police its borders and insist that it remain faithful to a putative Marxist orthodoxy. **|P**

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engaged. *Chto Delat*, by contrast, demonstrate the clearest articulation of how "socialized autonomy" might be realized as an avant-garde practice in the current global conjuncture. The comparison is intended to situate the political space of the avant-garde and to identify its risks. It also situates the avant-garde as a discourse that must emerge "from below." (126)

Roberts does not suggest that art is about to complete the revolution in the human sensorium proposed by the historical avant-garde, of course. Rather, the expansion and professionalization of art education since the 1960s has had the ironic effect of building a reserve army of artistic labor, precariously employed and struggling for visibility at the very margin of the art world, caught in the contradiction between art's promise of freedom, and the pitiless economic reality of the "art industry." The theorist and artist Gregory Sholette has described this growing mass of artists as the "dark matter" of the art world.[8] Roberts prefers to describe a "second economy" of art: one that operates outside of the art market and the established museum and biennial circuits. This, for Roberts, this is the contradictory space of the "suspensive avant-garde."

The allusion to "revolutionary time" in the title of the book, underlines Roberts's insistence that the avant-garde is betrayed by conventional art historical narration. The idea of revolutionary time is derived from Walter Benjamin's theoretical project, which aimed to release "historical alertness" (49) from the numbing historicism of capitalist chronology. Roberts describes such rupture as "revolutionary futures past." (48) They are not reenactments or academic retrievals, but instead represent moments of what Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge call "historical obstinacy": refusal to accept the burial beneath a supposedly inevitable progression from past into future. In place of this profoundly ideological ordering, revolutionary time posits a "now" that "contains presciently prefiguratively all temporal possibilities." (48)

In a short review of this kind, it is impossible to explore this argument in all its complexity, or its full implications. To return to the comments at the beginning of this review, one inference might be that the only art worthy of the name is now being produced beyond the market and the museum, in the precarious "second economy" at the art world's margins. This certainly is one way that Roberts's insistence on the renewal of art "from below" might be understood. This interpretation raises questions about how such work might be seen, or circulated beyond a primary audience, or whether indeed it need be. Throughout the book Roberts privileges the avant-garde as a kind of collective subject "for itself": he is not interested in establishing an art critical space where works might be appraised. On the other hand, it is important that this work is art: Roberts is emphatic that to abandon art in favor of political activism is a mistake.

Ultimately, the book seems to say that the avant-garde "researches" the impossible tensions that striate its attempt to be free of capitalist subjectivity. How can this be described as an optimistic prospect? For this reader, it powerfully evokes and affirms practices that work to shift the dead weight, the nightmare, of capitalist subjectivity. Even though the book makes no promises, nor could it, its entire theoretical trajectory is intended to show that the avant-garde, though ephemeral, continues to exist as a vital potential within art. Indeed, it always stands ready to negate the neutralization that is the price of its contact with bourgeois, or neoliberal culture. The avant-garde cannot be absorbed because it founds its collective subjectivity upon the stress-points that neoliberal culture must deny. One might observe that what is true of the legacy of avant-garde, is also true of the legacy of revolution. **|P**

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1 Clement Greenberg, "Avant-Garde and Kitsch," in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate* ed. Francis Frascina (London: Harper & Row, 1939 / 1985).
2 Walter Robinson, "Flipping and the Rise of Zombie Formalism." *Artspace*. <http://www.artspace.com/magazine/contributors/see_here/the_rise_of_zombie_formalism-52184>.
3 Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents," *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (2006).
4 "Programme of the First Working Group of Constructivists" cited in Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso,2013) p.142.
5 For an vehement argument against the avant-garde see: Grant Kester, *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art in a Global Context* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011). For a spirited defense: Marc James Léger, *Brave New Avant-Garde: Essays on Contemporary Art and Politics*. , Kindle ed. (Arlesford: Zero Books, 2012).
6 Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
7 See, Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All : Philosophy of Contemporary Art*, (London: Verso, 2013); Stewart Martin, "Autonomy and Anti-Art: Adorno's Concept of Avant-Garde Art," Constellations 7, no. 2 (2000).
8 Gregory Sholette, *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of Enterprise Culture*, Marxism and Culture (London; New York: Pluto Press; Distributed in the U.S.A. exclusively by Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

Entryism, continued from page 2

government and for Tsipras to become prime minister? We, of course, claim that it was a mistake, since, as long as a government (even when it is composed of members of left parties) does not touch the private property of means of production (i.e., the social foundations of the question of power) and does not make itself into an instrument for smashing the existing state apparatus and replacing it with a new state apparatus based on council power, then it is still a capitalist government, a government that manages capitalist relations of production. Such a leftist government cannot be called a "workers' government," if we want to follow Trotsky's definition of that term. For Trotsky, "workers' government" was only a popular term for "dictatorship of the proletariat."[22]

If the concept and practice of entryism makes any sense, it denotes an opportunity to exert revolutionary influence on the occasion of acute conflict inside a certain organization. It is only ever a short-term tactic. Long-term or "deep" entryism, as conceptualized and practiced by the CWI and the IMT, can only result in an adaptation to reformist political positions. Not only can it not yield the results that are claimed, it is an obstacle for building a revolutionary organization, which is in reality postponed indefinitely. Within our (post-)modern societal framework, moreover, there is an even more basic question, namely whether a revolutionary overthrow can be effectuated only in consequence of the contradiction of wage labor and capital, the view that gave a certain historical sense to Marxists' strategic orientation towards reformist mass organizations, the dominant organizations of the classic labor movement. In the 21st century it seems more likely that the "revolutionary subject" is in fact variously configured revolutionary subjects, between which no *ex ante* common political connection exists except that all fight for the overcoming of domination and exploitation. Revolutionary organization seeking to meet current conditions should not only be a convergence of different Marxist tendencies, it should also employ different theoretical approaches drawing upon analyses of racism, feminism and psychoanalysis in order to develop a contemporary revolutionary program. This is indeed a demanding claim, but there is no revolutionary preparatory work that is simpler. **|P**

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1 The audio recording is available at <http://platypus1917.org/?powerpress_pinw=22543-podcast>.
2 Lenin, *What is to be Done? Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 31.
3 Available online at <http://www.sozialismus.net/content/view/1792/1/>.
4 Ibid.
5 Available online at <http://www.sozialismus.net/content/view/1057/127/>.
6 Ted Grant, "Problems of Entryism," available online at <www.marxists.org/archive/grant/1959/03/entrism.htm>.
7 Available online at <http://www.sozialismus.net/images/stories/cwi_imt_2.pdf>.
8 Grant, "Problems of Entryism."
9 Peter Taaffe quoted via <http://www.sozialismus.net/images/stories/cwi_imt_4.pdf>.
10 Available online at <https://www.sozialismus.info/Files_static/Grundsatzprogramm.pdf>.
11 Available online at <http://www.sozialismus.net/images/stories/cwi_imt_4.pdf>.
12 Available online at <https://www.sozialismus.info/Files_static/Grundsatzprogramm.pdf>.
13 Available online at <http://www.sozialismus.net/images/stories/cwi_imt_4.pdf>.
14 *Programme Commun de Gouvernement du Parti Communiste Français et du Parti Socialiste (27 juin 1972)* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1972), 39.
15 ibid., 38
16 <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Democratic_Confederation_of_Labour>.
17 Available online at <http://www.sozialismus.net/images/stories/cwi_imt_4.pdf>.
18 Available online at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist_Party_%28Portugal%29>.
19 Woods, Alan, "Bolshevism: The Road to Revolution," available at <http://www.marxist.com/bolshevism-old/part1-5.html>.
20 Lenin, "Our Programme" (1899), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1899/articles/arg2op>.htm>. Lenin's passage runs as follows:

> There can be no strong socialist party without a revolutionary theory which unites all socialists, from which they draw all their convictions, and which they apply in their methods of struggle and means of action. To defend such a theory, which to the best of your knowledge you consider to be true, against unfounded attacks and attempts to corrupt it is not to imply that you are an enemy of *all* criticism. We do not regard Marx's theory as some thing completed and inviolable; on the contrary, we arc convinced that it has only laid the foundation stone of the science which socialists *must* develop in all directions if they wish to keep pace with life. We think that an *independent* elaboration of Marx's theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for this theory provides only general *guiding* principles, which, *in particular,* are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than in Russia. We shall therefore gladly afford space in our paper for articles on theoretical questions and we invite all comrades openly to discuss controversial points.

21 Woods, Alan, *Bolshevism: Road to Revolution*, quoted in <http://www.sozialismus.net/images/stories/cwi_imt_4.pdf>, and available online at <http://www.marxist.com/bolshevism-old/part1-5.html>.
22 As Trotsky says in *The Transitional Program*, "This formula, 'workers' and farmers' government,' first appeared in the agitation of the Bolsheviks in 1917 and was definitely accepted after the October Revolution. In the final instance it represented nothing more than the popular designation for the already established dictatorship of the proletariat." Available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/tp-text2.htm#wg>.

Are there stages of consciousness? What do they mean for entryism as political strategy?

DGS_TaP and systemcrash

ON AUGUST 6th IN FRANKFURT AM MAIN in Germany there was a Platypus panel on the question, "What is a left political organization?" [1] Among the panelists was Daniel Behruzi from the German section of the Committee for a Worker's International (CWI), whose American section is Socialist Alternative and whose British, Irish, and Australian sections are all named the Socialist Party.

Towards the end of his introductory comments, Behruzi stated the following: It is a lesson of history that consciousness doesn't leap to revolutionary conclusions. Rather, it is a process. The consciousness of individuals may make leaps, but the consciousness of the masses—whether reformist, left-wing reformist, or centrist—traverses specific stages to each of which there corresponds a specific organizational expression, whether it be parties, tendencies, or other types of political organization. For this reason we support each step in the direction of building-up independent working class organizations. Revolutionists must participate in such developments. They should participate in every stage of the process of politically rebuilding the labor movement, pushing all such efforts ahead while recognizing that new organizations do not become revolutionary in an instant. The consciousness of the masses must pass through intermediate steps such as forming political parties like SYRIZA, PODEMOS, and, here in Germany, the original WASG (West German predecessor of Die Linke), and then Die Linke. Even when they are partly reformist or simply politically confused, these intermediate steps represent stages towards the establishment of political class organizations. The examples we've given are useful approaches and it is crucial to push them ahead on both the political as well as the organizational level.

It is idle to claim that revolutionists should not soil their hands with such work but rather should remain ensconced in the ivory tower to better to proclaim their revolutionary truth. We, as revolutionists, are obligated to help the progressive sections of the class to draw the correct lessons, to recognize the necessity of the socialist reshaping of society.

This is why the SAV in Germany works not only as an organization of the united front inside the trade unions (that, for us, is self-evident) to demand more combative and democratic policies, but we also work as a Marxist tendency inside Die Linke and to resolutely advocate for left-wing positions. For instance, we argue there against participation in capitalist governments. We do not say: We are alone on the Left. Despite political differences, we join with other left tendencies in the anti-capitalist left. We harbor no illusions that the entirety of Die Linke could itself become a revolutionary party. Still, the development of Die Linke and the struggles that happen around it are important for the building-up of new class organizations and the development of consciousness.

We practice a dual task approach: building-up of the revolutionary organization and development of cadres, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, participation in and support for the rebuilding of the labor movement.

We do not see great chances for convincing the German CWI section (SAV) with our questions and arguments to stop their long established collaboration, through entryism, with Die Linke. Still, this question is part of an international debate, one that reemerges again and again. For instance, Worker's Power, the British section of the League for the 5th International (L5I), fancies collaborating within the Labour Party, while the Greek section of the CWI supports the SYRIZA spin-off Popular Unity. Two former member organizations of ANTARSYA (Anticapitalist Left Cooperation for the Overthrow) do the same thing.

Why should we believe that reformist, left-wing reformist, or centrist groups are "steps forwards to the building of class independent organizations"? The precondition for class independence is the conviction that wage-workers have interests completely different from those of the capitalist class and that it is therefore necessary to connect and coordinate their efforts in a way that is organizationally and politically independent of all bourgeois parties, institutions, and ideologies. This insight is itself already an element of revolutionary programmatics and organizing. By definition, reformist and left-wing reformist organizations—nevermind centrist groups—lack such independence. Work within such political forces therefore does not develop "class independence," just as collaboration within corporatist trade unions changes nothing regarding co-management and the reformist character of wage struggles.

Trade unions, and for our point of view this is decisive, are by definition organizations that work inside the framework of the capitalist mode of production. The reason is that they are dedicated to the improvement of the conditions for the sale of labor power, whereas communism means overcoming the commodity form, overcoming the fact that labor power is a commodity. Accordingly, a political organization as defined by Lenin—and we assume that Trotskyist organizations such as the CWI claim to be Leninist—articulates "irreconcilable antagonism of their interests to the whole of the modern political and social system."[2] There are, of course, bourgeois political organizations that articulate completely different interests. But from the Marxist point of view the distinction between economic and political organizations (between trade unions and political parties) is justified just by the difference between working inside the framework of the capitalist mode of production, on the one hand, and the aim of transcending this framework, on the other. If this difference were not at stake, then it would indeed follow that we share the anarcho-syndicalists' preference for a single organization, which is, at the same time, both a trade union and a political party.

It follows, then, that what is at stake when we criticize entryism is not getting one's hands dirty. This happens within revolutionary political activism as well. So, the issue is not moral or hygienic purity, but political effectiveness. Why should it be effective to slave inside a reformist organization for years only to leave it in the end (or to be pushed out) and to move on to the next club? Should we not instead focus our limited resources on what is really intended? We agree with a paper of the Revolutionary Socialist Organization (RSO), which exists mainly in Austria, Germany, and Switzerland, but which has a chapter in Manchester as well:

> We are not interested in initiating left-reformist structures, as certain organizations from the Trotskyist tradition propose by covering their entry into a party with the slogan, "For a New Worker's Party," while the party being entered does not see itself in that way. . . [We certainly see] no sense in initiating a reformist organization ourselves in order to then have to argue inside that organization . . . in favor of revolutionary politics. Among other things, this risks, if we are not successful inside that organization, having to contend with a new organization that submits to the constraints of capitalism. Our focus should be on propagating revolutionary attitudes and the building-up of revolutionary structures as necessary vehicles for fundamental societal change.[3]

Or, as another statement from the same paper maintains, "The foundation of each effective re-grouping is in our opinion a revolutionary program and revolutionary practice."[4]

From our point of view, the optimum revolutionary activity is to make a revolution. The minimum is to act in a way that brings us closer to revolution. From this the question follows: What brings on the revolution? Is it being a member of a party (and justifying a party) that never talks about revolution? One that, so long as it is an opposition party, raises reformist illusions? And that, upon entering the government of any bourgeois state, conducts neoliberal policy? A party that articulates its analysis and political ideas in terms borrowed from bourgeois and social-democratic discourse, such as freedom, equality, social justice, and democracy, without referring to the class character of any state or democracy? A party that, if it talks about capitalism and anti-capitalism at all, constantly conflates neoliberalism with capitalism, lacking clear Marxist concepts of class rule, mode of production, relations of production, and so on?

Even if the conception of "stages of consciousness" that Behruzi elaborated were true, this need not imply that inside great reformist, left-wing reformist, and centrist organizations it is easier, or even possible, to radicalize each stage of consciousness. Why should it be easier to talk with people inside of an organization rather than outside? If such organizations really possess potential for radicalization, then they must be involved in street activism, in which case revolutionists can talk with members of that organization in the streets without joining them in the back room. So, unity of action in the realm of trade unions and social movements is a better alternative to entryism. Moreover, fliers can be distributed even when a demonstration or discussion meeting is not organized by an alliance, but only by a single organization.

Entryism has very low chances for success and high chances for failure. Typically, it ends with leaving the organization, being expelled, or assimilation to the host organization. Behruzi himself admitted as much in Frankfurt when he conceded, "We harbor no illusions that the entirety of Die Linke could itself become a revolutionary party." So, then, why join at all? Why not only join, but build up reformist parties with the time, energy, effort and enthusiasm of revolutionaries, as the German CWI section did in the case of WASG and Die Linke in the Western areas of Germany? After all, there is a high price to pay for entryism. Within its framework there are greater obstacles to maintaining programmatic independence than there are with autonomous organizations plus alliances and a unity-action policy. There are limits to what can be said within reformist organizations. For instance, it would be pointless within the German Left Party to argue for smashing the bourgeois state apparatus. Not only does this argument fall on deaf ears, comrades who insist on it will lose other arguments as well. In addition, entryism often results in reduced visibility of one's own organization, because activities are conducted under the name of the organization entered. A revolutionary minority inside a party dominated by reformists and gradualists is constantly faced with the devastating alternative: Either carry on trying to repell with motions, press releases, and emergency meetings the right's latest attacks on the left wing of the party—their solo runs of the members of the party who do not uphold even the party's few commitments, say—or let the right do what it wants, allowing them to dominate the representation of the party to the mass media and general audience.

Finally, though we are not in agreement amongst ourselves as to whether even Trotsky's concept of short-time entryism was correct, it is clear that Trotsky never advocated long-term entryism within a reformist mass party.

Let's now take up Behruzi's theory of stages of consciousness and their links to different types of organizations, each with its own specific political character. Two questions arise here: 1. Are they (the theory and linking) logically consistent? 2. Are they supported by historical evidence? Because most left-wing people don't like theoretical arguments, preferring instead to make a fetish of experience and practice, we start with historical examples. We chose those on which former leading members of the CWI they themselves rely. Still, it is necessary to raise the historical and theoretical foundations of the CWI, for which we rely on the booklet that the Revolutionary Socialist Organization (RSO) dedicated to a critique of the CWI and the IMT, the latter being a split-off from the CWI.[5]

Here again is the position Behruzi upheld at the Frankfurt Platypus panel,

> The consciousness of individuals may make leaps, but the consciousness of the masses—whether reformist, left-wing reformist, or centrist—traverses specific stages to each of which there corresponds a specific organizational expression, whether it be parties, tendencies, or other types of political organization. Given that, we support each step in the direction of building-up of independent working class organizations.

But it is not self-evident that revolutionaries should adapt their organizational structure to each stage of consciousness. Certainly, it is no less plausible to argue that communists should do everything for, and should focus their work on, having a resilient revolutionary organization at their disposal at the time when not only the vanguard, but the masses too, are ready for revolutionary ideas. Here is Ted Grant's reasoning for the contrary position:

> "All history demonstrates that, at the first stages of revolutionary upsurge, the masses turn to the mass organizations to try and find a solution for their problems."[6]

If this justifies collaboration with reformist mass organizations, then presumably this is so right up to the moment of revolutionary upsurge. Yet in Frankfurt, Behruzi upheld the thesis that the failure (as a socialist revolution) of the German November Revolution of 1918 was caused by, among other circumstances, the fact that no adequate revolutionary organization was available. Even today when the CWI seems willing to break with reformist mass organizations a little sooner than Grant, one of the forefathers of their tendency, was, they still uphold his thesis that, "The LP (British Labour Party), as the political expression of the organized trade union movement, represented the organized working class and sections of the unorganized workers as well. Thus the only way in which the work of revolutionists would not be stultified was within the mass milieu."[7] Today in Germany it is not the SPD, but Die Linke, with which we should collaborate, but what remains constant, the CWI maintains, is that, "workers inevitably radicalize themselves in the 'traditional mass organizations.'"[8] Grant thus explicitly distances himself from the Leninist approach, which he termed "sectarian" and which he accused of lacking any basis in historical experience:

> To the sectarian splinter groups on the edge of, or to the left of, the Fourth International . . . the problem is posed in the simplest of terms: Social Democracy and Stalinism have betrayed the working class; therefore the independent party of the working class must immediately be built. They claim the independence of the revolutionary party as a principle, whether the party consists of two or two million.[9]

Though we do not consider it fruitful to analyze abortive developments inside the labor movement by using the subjective-moralistic term "betrayal," and though we would consider it presumptuous to call two, 20, or even 2,000 people a "party," we are nevertheless convinced that the autonomous organization of revolutionaries remains a necessity.

Employing the dual-task strategy Behruzi outlined in Frankfurt, the SAV, the German section of the CWI, is an organization in its own right, with its own media, local groups, etc., instead of acting only as a current inside Die Linke. Yet, they still seem to maintain what Peter Taaffe, General Secretary of the British section and member of the CWI's International Secretariat, claimed in 1973, namely that Grant's 1959, "Problems of Entryism," "is rightly considered as a key document of the tendency, showing clearly where we differ from the sects in our perspective for the mass organizations," and, "If the workers start to move, they will pour into the mass organizations."[10] Our evidence for this is that the program of the German CWI section approved in 1999 and amended in 2005 states: "In the wake of intensified class conflict and development of class consciousness the recreation of a broad workers party will come. . . . SAV supports the building up of such party."[11] In other words, for the CWI, "more intensive class conflicts" are likely to result at first in a "broad," but not revolutionary, party, and presumably it will be correct to support the building-up of such a party. This is equivalent to what the Militant tendency, already in the time of its Labour Party entryism, claimed with only the word "broad" substituted for "mass." As the RSO argues in their pamphlet "CWI und IMT—Die Militant-Tendenz und ihre Nachfolger" ["CWI and IMT—The Militant Tendency and its Successor"]:

> For decades Grant [today, the IMT] and Taaffe [still, the CWI] shared the same schematic conception of the consciousness of the masses. According to the Militant, it is a "general law," that the masses, when they become active, "orientate towards great, well-known organizations, and again and again try to change them; only after countless attempts and only in the case of colossal historic events the working class will look out for alternatives." This scheme, already propounded in "Problems of Entryism" eventually became the political foundation of the CWI.[12]

For historical examples, we take reference to the IMT's booklet, "Work in the Mass Organizations." This seems legitimate to us given that the historical examples belong to an era before IMT's split-off from CWI, an era when there was no difference between CWI and the later IMT. We also take it to be undisputed that the time around 1968 (especially in France) and 1974 (when the military dictatorship in Greece ended and the Carnation Revolution took place in Portugal) were periods of "more intense class struggle." All three examples—France, Portugal, and Greece—involved quite small parties that routinely employed radical rhetoric so that one could get the impression their approach would be "more left" than the approach of the great "in name only" Communist parties. Regarding this, we maintain the RSO's position: "Through these examples the IMT-leadership disproves its own theory," according to which the workers in the case of radicalization "inevitably" pour into the mass organizations.

The Parti Socialiste (PS) in France in 1968 (which, in the 1960s, received no more than 5% of the vote for president) was, like PASOK in Greece in 1974, a very small party. Yet regarding it, the IMT could say, "this party in the 1930s was a mass organization of the proletariat and [through it] the historical memory of the class has survived the past three decades and in this way social democracy is re-emerging onto the scene."

Regarding the small French Parti Socialiste, which after 1968 massively increased, the IMT sought the line of least resistance. The Greek PASOK was the founding of a new party by the left wing of the bourgeois-liberal Union of Centrists and some small left-wing student groups that emerged during the military dictatorship. It was a party, in other words, that had nothing to do with the tradition of the Greek labor movement and its mass organizations. According to the IMT's reasoning, the masses in France must have poured into the French Communist Party and the same in Greece. There should have been no place for small organizations at the margins, as the Parti Socialiste or a new left party such as PASOK. Contrary to what the IMT claims, the events of 1968 and 1974 do not show "the enormous reserves of support for the mass organizations," but rather the enormous reserves that reformism in that situation had in the end, albeit a reformism with radical rhetoric.[13]

Before its election victory, PASOK demanded that Greece leave NATO and not join the European Community. When governing, neither happened, though a considerable quantity of social and anti-clerical reforms were implemented. The French PS in 1972 signed a common program with the French Communist Party and the left-liberal Mouvement des Radicaux de Gauche, which announced "a transformation in the direction of socialism," [14] a "French way to socialism,"[15] to be achieved by means of nationalizations, reduction of working time, and various other measures favored by left-wing social-democrats. One wing of the Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail,[16] a trade union close to the PS, claimed that by the 1980s there would evolve collective, auto-gestionary organization by the workers of all enterprises.

As for the Portuguese Socialist Party (PSP), it was not even founded until 1973. After the Carnation Revolution, the PSP developed from a party of cadres into "a people's party." As the RSO remarks, "The IMT leadership writes within its own text, that the Portuguese Socialist Party before 1974 was "hardly more as a sect of immigrants." The PSP had adopted an extreme left phraseology. Its leader Mário Soares even talked about the 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' giving expression to the revolutionary mood in the society."[17] Although in 1975 the Portuguese Communist Party gained 12.5 percent of the votes, it was outshone by the PSP.[18] The new Portuguese constitution included the terms "socialism," "socialist society," and even "classless society." From these examples we can draw some conclusions. First, in case of an intensification of class struggle, the people do not pour inevitably into already-existing, left-wing organizations (which in France in 1968 and in Greece in 1974 would have been the Communist party of each country). Second, if small organizations can make their name in such situations, then size is no argument for entryism within a reformist organization even when they employ radical rhetoric. It is not necessary to rest content with lip-service revolutionism, and it makes sense to offer a revolutionary option sooner rather than later, without the reformist intermediate step.

In the background of the theory of stages of consciousness is an evolutionist objectivism, which claims that wage workers evolve socialist consciousness automatically. The RSO criticizes this position as follows: "Grant's alleged Marxist orthodoxy shares much in common with Karl Kautsky's bending of Marxism into a 'naturalist philosophy of evolution.'" While this critique addresses a quote from Alan Woods from the era after the split-off of the IMT from the CWI, nevertheless both the CWI and the IMT rely on it. The quotation runs as follows: "From a lifetime's experience of exploitation and oppression, the working class, beginning with the active layers which lead the class, acquires a socialist consciousness. . . . The class struggle itself inevitably creates not only a class consciousness, but a socialist consciousness."[19] The German CWI section, SAV, repeats this in its *Grundsatzprogramm*: "In the era of declining capitalism, primarily the conditions themselves . . . change the consciousness. . . . Through a series of generalized class struggles socialist consciousness will emerge."

If socialist consciousness inevitably evolves out of class struggle, out of the mere "experience of exploitation" (the class struggle "from above"), why then is an organization, a party needed at all? Why bother debating different programmatic conceptions about which program is adequate to a given situation? For the Lenin of *What is to be Done?,* it was precisely the revolutionary party that, once Marx and Engels had laid the "foundation stone,"[20] was the place for the "formulation" of the socialist ideology. Here's how the RSO spells out the Leninist conception: "Not the intellectuals as a social group, as Kautsky in the tradition of enlightened philosophy claimed, brings socialism into the proletariat. Rather, the most conscious section of the class, which is together with other revolutionists united within a socialist organization of cadres, tries to develop socialist consciousness in other parts of the class."

Considering the CWI's substitution of the automatism of class struggle for the role of revolutionary organization, it is unsurprising that Alan Woods calls Lenin's critique of spontaneism explicitly an "extremely lamentable theoretical slip" and a "one-sided and erroneous presentation of the relationship of the working class and socialist consciousness."[21] If socialist consciousness inevitably evolved from class struggle, then within that imaginary world a revolutionary organization indeed is unnecessary for achieving the radicalization of the mass consciousness. Rather, it is sufficient to wait for workers to split off from their reformist mass organizations in consequence of the radicalization of their consciousness. The constitutive role played by revolutionary organization goes unrecognized on such a view, being demoted to serving as a mere technical instrument for the imposition of certain demands assumed to emerge independently.

Even if it were true that the mass consciousness developed on its own and led "inevitably" to socialist consciousness, it still would not follow that to each successive stage of consciousness there corresponds a definite organizational expression. Regarding how mass consciousness is displayed on the organizational level of politics, the RSO observes:

> On the whole slew of new conditions—on the experiences that the proletariat in class struggles creates and the role of reformist organizations there; on whether the reformist organizations join the government and, when they do, whether hopes are still connected with that or only frustrations; on the international conditions, which can point in different directions; on the balances of political forces within the labor movement, i.e., whether there are relevant forces outside of the reformist parties that are more radical, that can become visible to the workers; etc.—all this in turn depends on whether such organizational alternatives were built up in time. For the consciousness of the masses is neither in its political aspect, nor its organizational aspect, a force of nature. In different historical situations it can, to varying degrees, be influenced by the subjective element, by revolutionary organization.

Finally regarding Beruzhi's confession of being "against participation in capitalist governments": Despite the fact that we share this conviction, we still want to ask: In the opinion of the CWI, was the SYRIZA-led government in Greece, even prior to the referendum, not a capitalist government? Was it correct to collaborate with it? Or was this government capitalist from the beginning? And was it not therefore a mistake for SYRIZA to join this

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