

INTRODUCTION

This book is about the communication of the human condition and the condition of human communication. Its theme addresses central issues of concern for those interested in understanding the inheritance of Frankfurt critical theory and the contributions to contemporary democratic visions such understanding can offer. The focus is theoretical but the intent practical—which characterizes all worthwhile political theory. I hope to show the promise of a concept of communicative freedom coupled with an ethic of communicative interest in and respect for the other and for otherness that are inspired by a reconsideration of Theodor W. Adorno's critical theory. It is my belief that Adorno's highly complex but often misconstrued thought furnishes important insights for the development of critical social and political thought under contemporary conditions.

In making these contentions, however, I will directly challenge the work of one who has championed the possibilities of intersubjective communicative relations for freedom and for democratic society today and who claims a direct relation to the tradition of Frankfurt critical theory in which Adorno worked: Jürgen Habermas. Habermas aims to preserve the critical spirit of modernity and the original aims of Frankfurt critical theory during a time when critical reason has become subject to serious questioning. He values a social and political theory that would reassure modern selves of their identity and the possibility of their reason in the face of the disasters and disappointments with which enlightening and rationalizing political action has been associated in the twentieth

century. Habermas believes that theoretically informed critique can remain reasonable while criticizing society, and indeed, that critical articulations are essential for freedom and democracy. He does not believe that we should give up on the idea of a rational society or on the possibilities of its realization through social change. But he thinks such an idea must be conceived according to his communicative theory and under the historical limit conditions of modern, differentiated, liberal-democratic society if the practical dangers associated with the utopian visions of planned socialist economies, neoliberal markets, or reactionary fundamentalisms are to be avoided.

For Habermas, critical theory itself took a 'dark' and ultimately fatal turn in the 1940s with the publication of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1972 [1947]), after which the development of its original program of a comprehensive social science with practical-political intent seemed impossible. From the 1960s, Habermas has led a broad-based effort among a new generation of critical theorists to reconstitute critical theory and recover this vision of a practical-political social science, an effort that culminated in his two-volume magnum opus, *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984; 1987). Central to this project was the clarification of the theoretical foundations for a universal human sociality by means of the concept of communicative rationality, which would meet the requirements of a *critical* social theory. While he has since stepped back from the original scope of this grand project, believing it to be overly ambitious at present, he has nevertheless remained true to the core concept of communicative rationality in his subsequent work. His social and political thought are still informed by a commitment to this notion, despite his shifts in focus and formulation. Recognition of the universal basis of communicative rationality, Habermas believes, offers the best hope for stability in the face of social complexity and human diversity, while at the same time it affirms the crucial political values of individual freedom, autonomy, and social solidarity.

I do not quarrel with Habermas about the importance of such calls for critique, communicative freedom, autonomy, solidarity, or achieving more effective democracy. Instead, I raise serious questions concerning his central ideas and the extent to which his theory actually meets the liberatory expectations of a critical social theory. In challenging Habermas's critical theory, I wish to propose an alternative reading of Adorno's critical theory that might better address these contemporary concerns. As a consequence, what I present here takes the overall form of a critique of Habermas via a recollection and interpretation of Adorno's work.

I.I. THE FRANKFURT SCHOOL AND HABERMAS: A SNAPSHOT VIEW

Both Adorno and Habermas are major figures associated with so-called Frankfurt school “critical theory,” a twentieth-century tradition of philosophy and social criticism that emerged in the context of Western Marxism. However, it should be noted that the appellation *critical theory* has proliferated in recent decades. It no longer primarily refers to the Frankfurt tradition but can apply to diverse theoretical perspectives and preoccupations in fields such as sociological theory, historiography, literary theory, and aesthetic criticism. For the sake of simplicity, in this book I shall use the term critical theory to refer to the Frankfurt tradition, though I acknowledge that many of the central concerns of critical theory are also taken up by others in the Western Marxist tradition, as well as in post-Marxist and poststructuralist theory.

Frankfurt school critical theory refers in the first instance to the writings of a loosely knit group of critical philosophers and social scientists associated with the privately endowed Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, the first establishment in the West founded explicitly to give institutional expression and support to Marxist research (for that reason alone, a unique and remarkable institution). Under the directorship of Max Horkheimer, who took over in 1930, the Institute supported the work of a number of thinkers and researchers who were involved in developing a comprehensive Marxist theory of social analysis that addressed the changed conditions of twentieth-century capitalism. Horkheimer was an adept and visionary ‘managerial scholar’ who assembled a core group of intellectuals to develop a new program of theoretical and historical research that came to be described as critical theory. The Institute for Social Research came into existence officially in 1924 and was affiliated with and located at Frankfurt University during the 1920s and early 1930s. Forced into exile after the rise of Nazi Germany, the Institute was eventually moved to New York City, where it continued to operate with a reduced level of support and activities. The Institute was reopened in Frankfurt in 1951 with the return of several core members, where it sustains activities in conjunction with Frankfurt University.

But Frankfurt critical theory is more properly a tradition of thought rather than a school, *per se*. There was no collectively held doctrine or set of propositions followed by all members since critical theory was conceived in opposition to orthodoxy and aimed instead at a supradisciplinary approach (see section 2.1). Moreover, many of the foundational analyses

and texts of the early figures that came to represent “Frankfurt” theory were written in exile from Germany—primarily in the United States and France. However, the measure of coherence that identifies this tradition for critical theorists is provided by the institutional setting (the Institute existed for the core members their entire careers), a founding ‘manifesto’ outlined in Horkheimer’s inaugural address in 1931 to which he and other members repeatedly referred during their careers, and the Institute journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (*Journal for Social Research*), in which members published their work. Admittedly, this coherence most clearly applies to the early period of the Institute for Social Research, but enough continuities have persisted by which a tradition of thought can be traced (even while the term “Frankfurt school” itself came into use only in the 1960s and was coined by outsiders). Among the figures commonly associated with Frankfurt critical theory besides Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas are Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Pollock, Otto Kirchheimer, Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, and Leo Lowenthal, many of whom became quite well known in Anglo-American intellectual circles.¹ (I provide a more detailed account of the Institute and its development in Chapter 2.)

Indeed, what is called the Frankfurt school tradition of critical theory has proved to be one of the most enduring forms of critical reflection in the twentieth century. This endurance can be seen not only in the persistent if loose intellectual cohesion and complementarity of those originally associated with the Institute during their careers (although there were also serious disputes and falling outs, such as that involving Fromm). Continuity is also evident in the substantial influence of the teachings of core figures such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse on young intellectuals in the decades following the second world war. Marcuse became a special authority for the student and counterculture movements of the 1960s, and critical theory acquired a rather mythical status in this period. Despite controversies with and condemnations from the student movement of the late 1960s and from New Left intellectuals, which afflicted Adorno perhaps most of all, the influence of Frankfurt school writings extended well into the 1970s. If there was a moment that signaled a crisis in radical social thought and practice, it may be the dashed hopes that followed the events of May 1968. As a crucial turning point for the popular movements for social change and their intellectual supporters, this moment fueled the development of alternate critical positions such as poststructuralist, post-Marxist, and feminist theory. A general decline in the influence of Marxism on critical thought has occurred in Europe and the West since

the end of the 1960s, and Frankfurt critical theory was most closely associated with the Marxist tradition.

The 1990s, however, saw a certain resurgence in interest in Adorno in the humanities, especially by Anglo-American critical thought, which has, inspired by his work, reassessed the aesthetic as an ethical category. Adorno has thus become, for some, the “conscience of our political and aesthetic crisis.”² Benjamin’s work also maintains a substantial intellectual presence today—among other things he is venerated as a founding figure in the relatively new but expanding field of cultural studies.

But besides these legacies of philosophy and social analysis, perhaps the most important contribution to the endurance of Frankfurt critical theory is Habermas’s grand effort to substantially revise and reconstitute this tradition for a whole new generation of students and scholars. In no small way is Habermas’s success related to the crisis of the ‘crisis of Marxism’ in Western thought—the apparent decline in vitality of much Marxist discourse and analysis that emerged in the 1980s (see Agger, 1990).

While Adorno was a member of the inner circle of figures associated with the Frankfurt school from the 1930s to his death in 1969, Habermas is of a later generation. Habermas, whose relationship with Frankfurt critical theory began when he became Adorno’s assistant during the latter 1950s, is widely regarded as the direct inheritor of the mantle of this tradition from Adorno. This inheritance, however, has been substantially transfigured under Habermas’s intellectual leadership.³ Notably, Habermas’s transformation of critical theory involves an explicit rejection of Adorno’s central negative dialectic and what I might call his aesthetic-critical theory, which were developed as responses to the latter’s analysis of the fateful dialectic of enlightenment. Habermasian critical theory instead (sometimes) claims a heritage more directly from the original conception of critical theory articulated in Horkheimer’s early writings. Yet Habermas has introduced a number of new and quite different aspects to the program of critical theory in an attempt to revitalize and continue its critical spirit in the face of various theoretical and practical difficulties attributed to its later ‘Adornian’ developments. Thus Habermas is a contemporary figure of continuity and discontinuity in the tradition of critical theory.

Habermas has championed the turn to linguistic philosophy in critical theory with the thesis that the theory of communicative action provides the key to a comprehensive understanding of social action. In conjunction with these philosophical and sociological elements, he has also developed a robust political theory. The analysis of the universal communicative presuppositions of speech affords insight into the shape

of a rational and just politics at the same time as it indicates how a rationalized, self-reflective culture can also realize 'utopian' desires; that is, in traditional formulation, how the just citizen can also have a good life. Such bold and far-reaching claims rely on a theoretical move from a subject-centered, epistemological, and representational focus to an intersubjective, pragmatic, and linguistic one.

Habermas's rational orientation toward theory locates him within the modern tradition, but with a postmetaphysical twist: reason is no longer understood in the last analysis as a capacity or endowment of human subjects themselves (for this is a characteristic of subject philosophy). Instead, reason is to be understood as the organizing feature of linguistically mediated communication or communicative sociality itself. Human beings grow into language and their use of language transforms them: they are pragmatically 'communicating animals' whose needs, beyond basic physiological needs, and whose full life are realized only at the level of autonomous and free *communication* with others. It is ideally the life of fully rational linguistic communication that sets people free from the unreflective prejudice of tradition, the obscurity of myth, and the blind imitation of others. Reason and democracy are immanently related for Habermas. The rationality of modern language-use constrains and imposes limits, but it also establishes the genuine condition for the autonomy of the human self and the freedom for it to develop and grow. The specific idea of freedom here is tied to the act of human sociation through linguistically mediated truth-seeking. Any concept of truth that deserves its meaning entails the freedom to determine it. If truth is immanently related to practical language use, then the concept of freedom, too, can be discerned in the contours of linguistically mediated life. Clarifying the nature of reason can hence lead us to politically consequential conclusions.

Habermas's main critical claim is that the possibility of such a life has been systematically denied and distorted by the one-sided development of the potentials of modernity under the influence of capitalism and administrative power. Indeed, the logical and social limits of communicative action are limits beyond which only the subversion of language, society, and self occurs. The *telos* of communicative action—the free and equal achievement of mutual understanding and agreement—is undermined by all forms of systematically distorted communication, which becomes the new term for ideology. The critique of systematically distorted communication takes over certain aspects of the former Marxist critique of ideology and entails an idea of the conditions for non-distorted communication. Manipulative or distorted communication can be

condemned not only because it is evidence of unfreedom, of domination or oppression, but also because it undermines the basis of stable and successful human interaction. Limited communication prevents genuine interpretive action and thereby denies the realization of the communicating actor's life, potentials, and meaningful relations with others. Habermas thus continues to be concerned with questions central to critical theory such as those of freedom, autonomy, solidarity, ideology critique, and the possibility of a genuinely rational democratic society. But with this turn to a linguistic, intersubjective-centered approach, he has necessarily abandoned as aporetic, dangerous, or at least paradigmatically outdated critical theory's fixations with the aesthetic and a 'new sensibility'—that is, with a substantially new ability to perceive and experience that would help constitute the liberated society. Such involvements were central to critical theorists' aims to foster a non-instrumental concern for and relationship to others, a new compassion or passionate care that could be universalizable. For Adorno, it should be noted, there were important limits to such new sensibilities. Christian love, as one example of an ancient "new sensibility," cannot be universalized in large, complex, modern societies; it is best suited to small, intimate communities where the intensity and identifications required for such ethical relations can be concentrated. Adorno, by contrast, sought a new sensibility and communicative ability that approaches the other not on the ethical levels of the familial or the intimate, which assume and oblige significant knowledge of and closeness to the other, but as a stranger, as different and alien. Adorno wanted to foster a "nearness by distance" (*MM*: 112/89–90) in which difference could be maintained, even celebrated, in a process of self-reflective contemplation, learning, and communication that would not require the kind of constitutive identification of traditional conceptions of community. A new sensibility was also important for better or more liberatory encounters with the non-linguistic sources of human existence, from human bodily drives and desires that were being increasingly manipulated by new media and industry technologies to the non-human otherness of the natural world that was being destroyed or assimilated by capitalist development. These preoccupations contributed so much to the critical theorists' utopian visions.

However, Habermas's model has by no means received universal assent among those sympathetic to the tradition of critical theory nor indeed has his theory been readily adopted as a political guide by any contemporary social movements dedicated to progressive democratic aims. Indeed, it is severely criticized and in general dismissed by contemporary poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics who themselves claim

to articulate a far more compelling and defensible intellectual spirit that might be adopted in contemporary progressive and democratic struggles against domination and oppression. This kind of latter claim has become more commanding after the much heralded ‘death’ of Marxism, since critical theory in general is most consistently associated with Marxist theory and practice. Postmodernist critics are insistent of the need to abandon any kind of grand or totalizing theory in the face of the barbarous realizations and utter failures of the universalizing modern project in its various guises, including the brutal examples from the former Soviet empire. It bears mentioning in this context that figures of the Frankfurt school were highly critical of Soviet-style Marxism during a time when this was exceptional among left intellectuals in the West.⁴ In light of the fall of actually existing European socialism, early Frankfurt figures such as Adorno—who was consistently critical of command as well as market economies—now deserve further attention and might even seem fresh to critical intellectuals today.

Adorno, I shall argue, was also centrally concerned with communication, with the way in which a communicative freedom could be fostered. Yet unlike Habermas, the former pursued this through the cultivation of an awareness of the ‘objectivity of subjectivity’ and reflection on the non-identical content of human sociality. Adorno presents a very different version of the communicative awareness and ethical understanding of reason than that theorized by Habermas—one that is, I will contend, quite incompatible and non-contiguous with Habermas’s but still of great value today.

My general contention in this book is that, despite the many valuable insights and contributions to critical social theory offered by Habermas’s theory, there are serious difficulties with and drawbacks to it that reach ‘paradigmatic’ proportions when gauged against the achievements of Adorno’s critical theory. In the last analysis the communicative direction suggested by Adorno’s negative dialectic indicates the more promising route for critical theory and democratic politics today. This is not to say that Adorno’s theory does not contain substantive problems of its own—it does. Any critical theory today inspired by his theory will need to be aware of such problems while drawing on what is essential and valuable in the call of his work. For now, given that the Habermasian (mis)construal and criticism of Adorno’s position are generally better known today than the actual content and claims of the latter’s theory, clarification and elaboration are still necessary tasks. My specific argument, which I hope to sustain in various ways throughout the text, is that the focus on the aesthetic and the concerns with new sensibility and understanding born of an awareness of the objectivity of subjectivity

(which animated much of Adorno's most important writing) are *crucial* for a critical theory and for democracy and cannot be abandoned without substantially weakening the possibilities of both. But it is precisely the critical Adornian insights into the objectivity of subjectivity that must be sacrificed if one is to accept the paradigmatic 'advance' Habermas offers.

Yet it is not that Habermas is all that disrespectful of his teacher. Adorno occupies a special position for Habermas not only in Frankfurt critical theory, but in the philosophical tradition itself. Adorno's remorseless critical insistence on the paradoxes of the "philosophico-historical concept of reason" inherited from Lukács and the Western Marxist tradition leads Habermas to describe him as "the most systematic and effective thinker" he has known (1986a: 97–98). Habermas's praise is for Adorno's unflinching stand in the face of the philosophical implications of the dialectic of enlightenment, without ever giving up on the critical idea of reason no matter how bleak the possibilities for freedom seemed historically. It is instead Adorno's inability to get beyond the limits of what is called subject-centered reason except by way of the allegedly inadequate appeal to aesthetic mimesis that Habermas finds his greatest and most unambiguous fault.

The crux of the Habermasian position is that Adorno fails to make the paradigmatic turn to the pragmatics of language and communication that must be made if critical theory is to break definitively with the philosophy of consciousness (*Bewußtseinsphilosophie*) or philosophy of the subject (*Subjektsphilosophie*). Central to my treatment of Habermas and Adorno will thus be the analysis of this so-called "paradigm shift," which I regard to be decisive in assessing their respective positions. More generally, given the influence of linguistic philosophy on social thought across the board, this switch may be one of the most important theoretical issues for critical social theory today. Hence the achievements—but really more important the *failures*—of this paradigm shift in critical theory provide general topics for the present work. But Habermas does not exactly claim to have given up on the utopian critique of Frankfurt school critical theory. For as Habermas has developed the core elements of his theory, which find their single most comprehensive expression in his major *Theory of Communicative Action*, he has also sought to use the characterization of a paradigm shift to establish the way in which the most worthwhile features of Frankfurt critical theory can be preserved in his theory. Not only is there here a claim to continuity with critical theory, but also a claim that the important limits of older critical theory can be traced to the 'paradigm' of consciousness philosophy—that its aporias and dead-ends can be resolved *only* in the shift to the theory of communicative action.

This meta-theoretical shift is inaugurated in the context of critical theory by Habermas and K. O. Apel and has proved to be highly influential among many social and political theorists over the last decades. Indeed, according to one Habermasian commentator, the paradigm shift in critical theory has brought with it “irreversible gains” (Benhabib, 1986: 345). This transformation in critical theory is inspired by the achievements of the more general shift to linguistic philosophy in twentieth-century philosophy and social theory pioneered by those such as Gottlob Frege, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Ferdinand Saussure, J. L. Austin and Noam Chomsky; of late, the work of Jacques Lacan has also been emphasized in association with a linguistic turn.⁵ Habermas draws especially from the speech pragmatics of Austin and John Searle and from the transcendental-pragmatic arguments of Apel. The very phrase *paradigm shift* speaks to the significance of this dimension in Habermas’s theory, and I think it not an exaggeration to say that this meta-theoretical and methodological shift provides the basis for much of his substantive theory within and after *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971a), although evidence of the turn to language and communicative theory is present as early as Habermas’s inaugural lecture at Frankfurt University in 1965 (*KHI*: 301–17). Even before this his commitment to free public communication in the context of the structural transformation of the (bourgeois) public sphere is central to his *Habilitationschrift* (1989c). But it was only with the emphatic paradigmatic shift in *Theory of Communicative Action* that Habermas ceased to struggle with the reconstruction of historical materialism (see Habermas, 1979a) and explicitly *replaced* it with his new theory. It is also in *Theory of Communicative Action* that he formulates his most devastating critique of Frankfurt critical theory.

The paradigm shift is thus ostensibly the *Aufhebung* of older critical theory. The German *Aufhebung* is an apt term for this shift (although it is rarely used in this context) for, among other things, it underlines in Habermas’s relationship to Frankfurt critical theory the sense of negation and preservation. This said, however, the present effort should not be understood as dogmatic: an original critical theory is not to be defended against its watering down, corruption, or destruction in the new critical theory. Neither can Habermas’s theory simply be dismissed from the perspective of postmodernity as modernist, rationalist, or formalist and hence itself outdated (the accusation of modernism and the commitment to a rational society may also implicate Adorno from this position). One of the contentions of the present work is that Habermasian critical theory is altogether a *different kind* of critical theory to that committed to negation—which might group Adornian, poststructuralist, or deconstructionist

critiques together (this is an assessment Habermas himself would not entirely disagree with, of course). Yet Habermasian theory has more in common with what critical theory rejects as traditional theory than Habermas would like to admit. This is why the paradigm shift can be emphasized so usefully: understanding Habermas depends on understanding his translation of the language of critical theory. What follows in these pages is a critical examination of the logic and arguments that lead Habermas, and those who by and large agree with him, to abandon the older 'paradigm' of critical theory for the new line of critique.⁶

1.2. CONFLICTING PARADIGMATIC ISSUES

Naturally, the criticism of the philosophy of consciousness and subjectivity was a dominant concern for Adorno, as summed up in his critical concept of the dialectic of enlightenment itself. But, according to Habermas, Adorno is nevertheless trapped within the paradigmatic limits of the subject's concern with knowing and acting even while he remains such an unyielding critic of its philosophical and social self-reflections. In the absence of the turn to language and communicative action, Habermas sees no defensible alternative to the subject of modern philosophy and he will not tolerate its utter effacement as might be discerned in structuralism or poststructuralism. For him, the ultimate emptiness of the philosophy of consciousness must be overcome by the theory of communicative action which accounts for subjectivity in a far more satisfactory way. This is to be achieved by moving the self-reflection of reason into this new field rather than, as in Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, for example, attempting to overcome the subject simply by switching from a metaphysics of subject and object to a 'metabiology' of relations between systems and environments that succeeds only to the extent that it loses any purchase on *critique* (*PDM*: 368–85). Adorno is also important in this respect for Habermas (and for myself) precisely because he sought to take the self-reflection of reason to a higher level and thereby to negate the philosophy of consciousness *without* sacrificing a profound and unrelenting critique of domination.

That Adorno did not finally succeed in this endeavor, according to Habermas, is arguably less important than the spirit of the former's critique. Habermas's critique of Adorno is certainly intended to be final, to foreclose on the project of the negative dialectic once and for all. But, in contrast to his earlier criticisms of Adorno that advocated a break with the orientation toward reconciliation or utopia, Habermas now recognizes a fundamental utopian element in Adorno's critique that he, along

with others such as Albrecht Wellmer (1985; 1991) and Seyla Benhabib (1986), believe is (indeed, must be) preserved in the theory of communicative action for it to qualify properly as a critical theory. In Wellmer's words, Adorno's utopian projection of a "'non-violent' synthesis" is not to be found in some new relationship to the Other of discursive reason, but rather is precisely the regulative idea that discursive reason has of itself, rooted in the conditions of language (cf. Habermas, 1986a: 156–57; Wellmer, 1991: 14). Once the move to the theory of communicative action is made, an ethic of discourse can be uncovered in the dialogic relation between participants in rational speech that meets Adorno's requirement for the recognition of difference—*but within rather than beyond the world of logos*. A normative foundation for critique is then to be discovered within a communicative rationality that draws upon the suppressed rational potentials of modernity and hence offers theory a secure basis from which to criticize current conditions.

It is indeed precisely a freedom equivalent to the freedom projected by Adorno that Habermas claims to have determined with the theory of communicative action—and *without* the need for a radical rupture with capitalist modernity. Whoever "meditates" on Adorno's enigmatic statement that the reconciled state would "find its happiness where the alien remains distant and different in its lasting nearness, beyond the heterogeneous and beyond that which is one's own" (*ND*: 192/191) will become aware, Habermas contends, "that the condition described, although never real, is still most intimate and familiar to us. It has the structure of a life together in communication that is free from coercion. We necessarily anticipate such a reality. . . each time we speak what is true. The idea of truth, already implicit in the first sentence spoken, can be shaped only on the model of the idealized agreements aimed for in communication free from domination" (Habermas, 1983d: 108–9). What Adorno was looking for, Habermas asserts, were the structures of "reciprocity of mutual understanding based on free recognition," in which "the ideas of reconciliation and freedom are deciphered as codes for a form of intersubjectivity" (*TCAI*: 390–91). Although this form of intersubjectivity is, for Habermas, idealized in presuppositions made most transparent in the rather specialized form of discursive speech, it can be discerned even at the level of everyday speech and action.

For Habermas, this avenue of inquiry is far preferable than the resolution to leave the potentials of modernity completely behind, which he sees as philosophically irresponsible and politically dangerous or regressive. According to Habermas, it is especially the radical critiques of reason and language by such post-Nietzschean critics as Michel Foucault

and Jacques Derrida that entail a loss of the subject and of reason, the abandonment of enlightenment in an attempt to escape from its dialectic of reason and domination. The radical critique of reason and language ultimately escapes the (totalizing) domination of reason and language only at the price of its own coherence. The critique of instrumental reason must, for Habermas, remain rational if it is to have a voice at all, but this effort continually seems, at root, to refer to something *beyond* reason, *beyond* language, for the sake of which the truth of its critique stands.⁷ Habermas believes there is something fundamentally wrong with such programs of critique.

Although Habermas is rather less critical of Horkheimer and Adorno in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (1987) than he is of the other, mostly post-Nietzschean figures discussed in this text, it is nevertheless significant that Horkheimer and Adorno are included in the radical line along with these contemporary critics. His inclusion of them ironically lends Adorno a contemporaneity that Habermas no doubt does not really intend, but which has not been lost on commentators (see the introduction and essays in Pensky, 1997). I draw this parallel between Habermas and Adorno to suggest branching critical routes from similar sources and concerns. Each figure is to be seen in his own way as negotiating alternative, yet incompatible paths away from the philosophy of consciousness and the subject. As such, I want to affirm the relevance of Adorno's critical theory distinct from Habermas's. But I also suggest that Adorno's position is nevertheless divergent from current poststructuralist critical theory that seeks to address quite similar concerns. These distinctions, I think, make Adorno's theory a stronger contender for progressive allegiances in light of Habermasian and dialectical critiques of postmodernism. The work at hand seeks to clarify these alternatives in order to show what has been lost, sacrificed in the shift to Habermasian theory, yet what must nevertheless be preserved for a reconstructed critical theory at the turn of the millennium.

Nonetheless, many current commentators sympathetic to the reconstruction and revitalization of Frankfurt critical theory accept in large part Habermas's critique of Horkheimer and Adorno and his assessment of the latter's contribution to critical theory. Habermas does appear to offer a way out of the self-consciously aporetic critical theory that Adorno develops in his major texts, and perhaps this also enhances the former's appeal. Many critical writers who align themselves with the Habermasian project and in opposition to poststructuralist critical theory find Habermas's formulation of the issues for critical theory compelling and hence largely ignore Adorno. For those who embrace full-fledged poststructuralist

theory, a selective appropriation of Adorno is possible, but significant revision or abandonment of older critical theory also seems necessary. My sympathies and position seem to lie somewhere in between the two.

We may now discern two central and related issues concerning the paradigmatic transitions that are to be addressed in the present study. The first concerns the very real problems with the philosophy of consciousness and subject philosophy and the entwinement of critical theory with these problems. This issue requires an account of the main reasons why Habermasian theorists regard as necessary the general paradigm shift in critical theory. This entails a specific elaboration of Habermas's critique of Adorno, which is given primarily in Chapter 4 along with a more general discussion of the paradigm shift. Adorno's own unsystematic critiques of the philosophy of consciousness appear especially in sections 2.2, 4.4, and Chapter 5. For Adorno, as for Habermas, the kind of thought represented by the philosophy of consciousness contains fundamental faults. For the purposes of the present study, there is no question that an alternative is required.

The second main issue is whether, as Habermas contends, Adorno is finally to be located *within* this thinking, even as the latter is fundamentally critical of it (although not quite in the kind of 'paradigmatic' way Habermas advocates). In Chapters 2, 4, and 5 I present my reasons for thinking that Adorno's critical theory offers a route away from the philosophy of consciousness that is more promising than Habermas's. In the course of my contrasts of Adorno's and Habermas's critical theories, I contest the success of Habermas's solution to the aporias of Frankfurt theory and, more broadly, to the aporias of subject and consciousness philosophy themselves. Due to the entwinement of the paradigm shift with the substance of Habermas's theory, this is also hence a contestation of the Habermasian inheritance of critical theory, a contestation undertaken for the sake of the democratic potential lost in the abandonment of the negative dialectic. While Habermas's systematic misunderstanding of Adorno enables him to present the paradigm shift and the development of his theory in a rational and compelling way,⁸ he neglects the crucial arguments and claims of Adorno that threaten his position most centrally. These arguments and claims in no small part address consciousness philosophy, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and ideology critique. Habermas's criticisms of Adorno as well as his theory of communicative action beg many questions concerning these topics—questions Adorno attempts to answer most centrally.

The substance of the study opens in Chapter 2 with an exploration of some main motifs of early Frankfurt critical theory. This serves as

an introduction to some of the central issues pursued in the book. The theme of this chapter is the crisis of ideology critique, which all contemporary critical theory has been obliged to address in some way. This includes a discussion of the decisive dialectic of enlightenment to which both Habermas's theory and Adorno's later work respond. In Chapters 3 and 4, I turn to an examination of the specific achievements of the paradigm shift as they appear through the lens of Habermas's notion of communicative rationality. Chapter 3 examines Habermas's theory as a *critical* theory of society, that is, as a theory of social pathology or repression, with a particular focus on the analysis of the Marxist concept of real abstraction in section 3.3. In this chapter I assess Habermas's view of the systematically suppressed rational potentials of modernity from the perspective of the critique of reification. In Chapter 4 I converge on Habermas's claim to have discovered the universal basis of sociality in the pragmatic relations of speech. Having established the intellectual context of Habermas's engagement with critical theory in the previous chapter and the basis for his own paradigmatic shift in the early sections of this one, a reconstruction and assessment of his critique of Adorno follows in second half of Chapter 4. The central Habermasian criticism of performative contradiction (which is leveled at poststructuralism as well as Adorno's theory) is given special attention with respect to the radical critique of reason and the negative dialectic. Here I offer a defense of Adorno on the basis of *dialectical* consistency rather than Habermas's preferred *performative* consistency, and draw out the inadequacies of Habermas's notion. Finally, in Chapter 5, I offer a further critique of Habermasian theory as non-utopian coupled with an interpretation of Adorno that attempts to move his thought in promising directions for contemporary concerns. In the final sections I investigate the possible alternatives toward which Adorno's thought points that can be drawn from a reading of his aesthetic-critical theory. I defend the Adornian notion of the mimetic 'shudder' as a pivotal point through which to access an alternative communicative ethic and freedom appropriate for a renewed critical politics.