

The "Third Generation" of the Frankfurt School

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appearing in *Intellectual History Newsletter* 22 (2000)

(See also the [Selected Writings of the Third Generation](#))

Critical social theory in Germany is currently in a period of transition. The 75-year-old "Frankfurt School" tradition was led first by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and then by Jürgen Habermas. Although Habermas and other members of the "second generation" remain active, his 1994 retirement marked the end of an era and the emergence of a new generation in critical social theory, led by Axel Honneth. Though the criteria for a generation are no less problematic than those of a "school" - there are thorny issues of who's in and who's out, or whether members of the new generation have so "betrayed" the tradition as to not belong to it - this changing of the guard allows some historical perspective on key turns in critical social theory in Germany.⁽¹⁾ The present essay aims to characterize this new generation of German critical social theorists both in its distinctiveness and in its continuity with the broad Frankfurt School tradition.

1. The Original Frankfurt School

The first generation of the Frankfurt School is relatively simple to identify, since they almost all worked for their namesake: the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*) in Frankfurt am Main. After an initial period under Carl Grünberg (1923-8), the Institute gained its recognizable character under the directorship of Max Horkheimer and included Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Otto Kirchheimer, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, and Friedrich Pollock.⁽²⁾

The Frankfurt School's distinctive approach to social inquiry sought to bring about emancipation from ideological blinders and to do so by bringing to awareness the conditions of our own knowledge of the world, a theme inherited from Georg Lukács. In the formulation worked out by Horkheimer,⁽³⁾ the thesis is that the social world can be understood *as* a social world. The social world lacks the "given" character of the natural world and must be seen as our construction. The very political implication of this is that the social world *could be otherwise*. This is something that traditional "bourgeois" social science tends to obscure, thereby perpetuating the status quo under capitalism. Carrying out this project involved a form of reflective social science that was able to provide an account of its own origins. And the best way to do this, it was felt, was to ground theoretical reflection in the ordinary self-understanding of participants in the social world, particularly in the domain of labor. This was the methodological conviction that guided the original group in the interdisciplinary projects they pursued, working together as a rather tightly coordinated team.⁽⁴⁾ This core focus was complemented by related work in the aesthetics of experience (Benjamin and Adorno) and work in political theory and political economy (Neuman and Kirchheimer). But the guiding concern of the original Frankfurt School was with emancipation through reflective social science, focused on the experience of the working class in particular.

After the Institute was shut down by the Nazis in 1933, the exiled circle remained relatively intact,

especially during the initial period in New York, where they were housed at Columbia University (not, as is often thought, at the New School for Social Research). Horkheimer, Adorno, and the others pursued the defining themes of the first generation - Freudian Marxist analyses of the roots of totalitarianism in mass culture - themes that became the basis for work carried out in Frankfurt, after the Institute for Social Research was reestablished under the directorship of Horkheimer (later rector of the University of Frankfurt). During this second heyday of the Institute (1950-70), the term "Frankfurt School" came to stand for a social-theoretic approach employing methods of qualitative social science to expose the ideology responsible for various societal pathologies.⁽⁵⁾

2. The Second Generation: Habermas and the Search for Normative Foundations

It was at the Institute for Social Research that Jürgen Habermas got his first research job, after a couple of post-doctoral years as a features writer for newspapers.⁽⁶⁾ Of the members of this second generation who were associated with the Institute - including Ralf Dahrendorf, Gerhard Brandt, Ludwig von Friedeburg, Oskar Negt, and Alfred Schmidt - no one compares in stature and influence to Habermas. This was not the case at the outset, however. After several years of empirical work at the Institut, Habermas ran into resistance from Horkheimer. In particular, in a move that represents the rough equivalent of denying tenure, Horkheimer refused to approve as a *Habilitationschrift* Habermas's 1962 monograph, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, seriously straining Horkheimer's relations both with Habermas and with Adorno, who was the advisor on the project. It was through the intervention of Wolfgang Abendroth, the sole West German Marxist professor of philosophy at the time that Habermas was able to habilitate in Marburg, subsequently accepting a position in Heidelberg.

Habermas returned to Frankfurt two years later (in 1964) as professor of sociology and philosophy, and from the work published in the 1960s, one can see how he was pulling away from his mentors at the Institute. What began to emerge as Habermas's distinctive approach to critical theory was a focus on specifying the conditions under which human interaction would be free from domination. Whereas the first generation had looked to various forms of economic, political, or psychoanalytic "crisis" as sites of emancipatory impulses, Habermas looked to the ideal of free interpersonal interaction as it was found in ordinary life and, specifically, in linguistic communication, to serve as the key source of emancipatory impulses.

The key turning point - and the end of the first generation's era - came around 1970 with the deaths of Adorno (1969) and Pollock (1970), and the departures of von Friedeburg (to become Hessian Minister of Education in 1970 and see through a controversially progressive democratization of the German education system), Horkheimer (who retired to Switzerland), and Habermas (who left for Starnberg in 1971). Moreover, after the founding of the Social Sciences Department in 1971, the Institute no longer offered courses, and became dependent on soft money for funds. Since then, the Institute for Social Research has receded as the institutional home of critical social theory in Germany, although it continues to operate to this day.⁽⁷⁾

In terms of theoretical developments, the defining years for the second generation were 1971-81 in

Starnberg (near Munich), where Habermas was director of the "Max Planck Institute for Research into the Conditions of Life in the Scientific-Technical World." At this think tank, Habermas put together the team of researchers that took critical social theory in a new direction.⁽⁸⁾ The work in Starnberg was extensively empirical, with Habermas and colleagues churning out working papers on ego-identity, communicative competence, moral development, societal pathologies, processes of rationalization, legal evolution, and so on. But this was also the period in which Habermas intensified his study of analytic philosophy of language as part of developing his universal pragmatics of communication.⁽⁹⁾ This work in Starnberg culminated in the defining work of the second generation of the Frankfurt School: Habermas's 1300-page *Theory of Communicative Action*, first published in 1981.

For Habermas and his generation, the program of the founders of the Frankfurt School lost its plausibility in its failure to solve the problem of normative foundations. Drawing on Lukács's radicalizing synthesis of Marx's concept of alienation and Weber's thesis of the "iron cage" of Western rationalization processes, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm, Benjamin, and others opposed "reification" of the human spirit by capitalist and bureaucratic forces, but its wrongness was taken to be obvious. Insofar as the standards of criticism were thought to need analysis, it was a quasi-metaphysical analysis rather than a project of normative justification. Moreover, despite their aspiration to provide a grounding of their critique in a self-reflective form of social science, Horkheimer and the others had no adequate explanation for how they could presume to occupy a privileged standpoint from which to expose ideology. In other words, they failed to apply their own standard of critical reflexivity to their own theory.

Habermas's own work in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (originally published in 1968) shared some of these weaknesses - something he acknowledges in his self-critical "Afterword".⁽¹⁰⁾ It thus became the task of *Theory of Communicative Action* to set a new course, one that could provide an adequate underpinning for the analysis of social reproduction, social pathologies, and directions for emancipatory transformation. In Habermas's own words, his aim was to develop "a social theory concerned to validate its own critical standard".⁽¹¹⁾ Thus Habermas is concerned with "critique" in two senses: in the Leftist sense of pointing out injustices and in Kant's sense of an examination of the conditions for the possibility for something, in this case, of the basis for critique in the first sense.

For Habermas, the normative foundations for critical social theory are to be found in the proper understanding of communicative action, in particular, of the "idealizing presuppositions" that must be undertaken by anyone trying to come to an understanding with someone about something. This approach combines a norm-based theory of how coordinated social action is possible with a "discourse theory" of how claims are justified. According to Habermas's discourse theory, every communicative act carries with it claims to validity (truth, rightness, and sincerity), where the validity being claimed is a matter being able to stand up to criticism under "conditions of discourse," namely, a context of justification that the participants view as beyond reproach. This "discourse theory" is at the center of his work on moral theory, democratic theory, rationality, and truth.⁽¹²⁾ According to Habermas's "communication-theoretic" account of social action, what makes it possible to coordinate action (and thus what solves what Talcott Parsons called "the problem of social order") is our ability to come to an understanding with each other about something, where this process of coming to an

understanding is again tied to open-ended processes of discursive justification. Indeed, it is our need for social coordination, according to Habermas's social pragmatism, that generates from within pressures toward reaching agreement, thereby unleashing "the rational potential of communicative action."

In addition to providing a "discourse-theoretic" account of normative foundations, Habermas's analysis of processes of communication is *itself* a direct contribution to critical social theory, particularly in his analysis of domination in terms of "systematically distorted communication". This is a theme that recurs in a wide variety of contexts, from his attacks on technocratic politics, to his defense of radical democracy, to his reinterpretation of reification in terms of the "colonization of the lifeworld". The key idea is that what is most pernicious in various trends in highly-industrialized societies - bureaucratization, militarism, technocracy, laissez-faire economics, privatization, mediatization, ideologically driven approaches to immigration and social policy, and so on - is the fact that entrenched interests are able to neutralize and squelch the sort of public political debate that would reveal the injustices of the *status quo*.

Habermas's focus on reaching mutual understanding and on progressive learning processes is very much in the Frankfurt School tradition of intertwining the explanation of societal transformations with a critical, normative perspective. But in contrast to the first generation's focus on structures of consciousness and crises of capitalist accumulation, Habermas focuses on general, universal features of communicative action, arguing that these provide a more defensible basis for social critique than the claims about consciousness central to the first generation's approach. Indeed, it is partly owing to Habermas's focus on the universality and unity of reason that has led postmodernists to look to not to him but to Adorno, Benjamin, and other members of the first generation for allies in developing their critical analysis.

The modernist impulse so central to Habermas's work is echoed in the other members of the second generation, albeit to different degrees. Albrecht Wellmer, for example, has sought to develop a version of modernity that retains the aspiration to truth while accommodating the aesthetic and postmodern insight that transparency of meaning, completeness of understanding, and certainty of knowledge are necessarily beyond our reach. With regard to "discourse theory," Karl-Otto Apel first introduced the idea before it was picked up by Habermas, and he has been the driving force behind the attempt to put discourse theory on more transcendental foundations. For Negt, von Friedeberg, political scientist Claus Offe, and others, the focus has been on trying to make sense of how, in complex societies, the impersonal imperatives of economics and politics can be tamed and kept from taking over more dimensions of social integration in complex societies than is necessary.

None of these theoretical developments occurred in a vacuum, of course. Habermas in particular is a famously engaged intellectual, intervening in debates over the student movement and university reform, the reluctance of Germans (and Heidegger in particular) to come to terms with their Nazi past, the deficits of pacifism in the face of human rights violations, the normative shortcomings of postmodern theory, the hijacking of German unification by nationalist fervor and corporate greed, and Germany's new post-national identity as a country of immigrants.⁽¹³⁾ But in all these cases, the motivating concern is the same: to restore, defend, and radicalize the universalistic imperatives of liberal democracy, procedural rationality, and modernist culture. This universalist focus has been the

target of numerous attacks, but it is motivated by a profound distrust for German tradition, stemming from the defining experience of this generation's coming-of-age. Habermas describes how, upon learning as a 16-year-old the full scope of the atrocities committed by Germans during the war, "I knew that, despite everything, we would live on in the anxiety of regression, that we would have to carry on in that anxiety. Since then I have cast about, sometimes here, sometimes there, for traces of a reason that unites without effacing separation, that binds without denying difference, that points out the common and the shared among strangers, without depriving the other of otherness."⁽¹⁴⁾ For Habermas's generation, the reliance on common sense so prevalent in progressive Anglo-American thought is just not an option.⁽¹⁵⁾

The second generation's "anxiety about regression" and the felt need for a bulwark against deep-rooted authoritarian and xenophobic traditions in Germany has had three prominent effects. First, it clearly contributes to the second generation's strong emphasis on constitutional principles, human rights, and the law, especially since the mid-1980s.⁽¹⁶⁾ Second, it added a great deal of heat to Habermas's confrontations during the 1980s with postmodernism, which he has tended to see as not simply mistaken but dangerous, for it attacks the primary resource that keeps us from slipping back into barbarism: communicative reason.⁽¹⁷⁾

Third, and most significantly, the second generation's concern about the resurgence of the insanity behind the Third Reich has encouraged its members to look beyond the German philosophical tradition. In particular, Habermas's reliance on Anglo-American philosophy seems at least in part to be motivated by a desire to have German and American intellectual cultures so intermarried as to render absurd the idea of a pure German "*Sonderweg*" (the "distinctive path" between Bolshevism and Americanism that was touted by Nazi intellectuals). In that regard, Habermas has been remarkably successful. Together with Karl-Otto Apel (and the third-generation sociologist Hans Joas), he made philosophically respectable the pragmatism of Dewey, Peirce, and especially Mead. And, in conjunction with Starnberg collaborator Ernst Tugendhat and the publisher Suhrkamp, he has helped open German philosophy departments to analytic philosophy. By the late 1980s, in fact, the key points of reference for Habermas's graduate students and associates were more likely to be Donald Davidson, Michael Dummett, or John Rawls than Adorno, Lukács, or Marx - a shift that generated quite a bit of confusion on the part of foreign scholars who had gone to Frankfurt in search of Continental philosophy.

This turn to analytic philosophy represents perhaps the clearest departure from the first generation of Critical Theory - and not only from Horkheimer and Adorno's prejudices against the banality of all things American. Habermas's insistence on very high standards for justification has drawn him into debates about truth, rationality, normativity, and knowledge that are highly developed in Anglo-American philosophy. And his efforts to cash out his intuition that "traces of reason" are to be found in the deep structure of everyday situations in which people "come to an understanding about something in the world" have led him into the heart of very technical issues in philosophy of language. Initially, this may have been seen as a peculiarity of Habermas's own approach and a departure from the Frankfurt School tradition altogether, but that seems now to have changed. Some degree of familiarity with analytical philosophy has become an entry requirement for much of the critical social theorists.⁽¹⁸⁾ Once certain demands for rigorous argumentation have been internalized

and once certain technical theoretical issues can no longer be dismissed out of hand, critical social theorists have no alternative but to address these issues. In effect, Habermas's appropriation of analytic philosophy has raised the bar and made critical social theorists accountable for responding to more challenges than ever: they must appropriate the increasingly large *corpus* of the Frankfurt School tradition (along with its roots in Kant, Hegel, and Marx), stay informed and connected to empirical social science research, and now also answer to challenges from analytical philosophers (who spend *all* of their time on these issues).

The question is then whether anyone can master the full scope of critical social theory, once that scope has been broadened and the demands raised so high. As sociologists are quick to point out, the typical response to increasing complexity is specialization, and this is what we see happening in the third generation. Perhaps this is a good thing. But there is a danger that the field will become so compartmentalized as to render implausible the idea that there is such a thing as "critical social theory". In what sense can it be said that discussions of Adorno's aesthetics, debates about the conceptual status of constitutional rights to freedom of religious expression, and arguments over the exact nature of validity claims are all discussions *within* critical social theory? This is a problem with which the third generation must struggle.

3. The Emerging Third Generation: The Subjective Turn & the Return of the Contextual

Within the third generation of the Frankfurt School, there is really only one figure who comes close to sustaining the project of critical social theory in its full Habermasian scope, and that is Axel Honneth. Currently professor of social philosophy at the University of Frankfurt, Honneth is slated to also become director of the Institute for Social Research in May, 2001. Some discussion of his work will be useful as a prelude to discussing what is distinctive of the third generation as a whole.

Although not a student of Habermas's, he was hired by Habermas in 1984 for a six-year appointment as assistant professor. During that period, they worked together closely, frequently co-teaching seminars. Then, after a rapid succession of appointments at the Institute for Advanced Studies [*Wissenschaftskolleg*] in Berlin, the University of Konstanz, and the Otto Suhr Institute at the Free University of Berlin, Honneth returned to Frankfurt to take Habermas's chair in social philosophy in 1996. Through this period, however, Honneth worked hard to shore up the infrastructure of critical theory in Frankfurt, especially as a co-founder of the biweekly "*Humanwissenschaften*" section of the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, as the moving force behind several book series in critical social theory (with publishers Campus, Akademie, and Fischer, rather than Habermas's Suhrkamp), as the host to numerous influential visitors to the Frankfurt philosophy department, and as a member of the advisory board of the Institute for Social Research. Despite this centrality, however, Honneth has yet to have the opportunity that Horkheimer and Habermas had to assemble a team of researchers under his directorship, something that may well be crucial for being able to integrate the complex array of projects that make up critical social theory today.

Three themes in Honneth's work stand out as central to his approach, themes that are typical for the third generation: (1) a conception of history and society based on the struggle for recognition by social groups, (2) a contextualization of normative foundations in the deep structures of subjective

experience, and (3) greater attention to the "Other of reason". These three themes also represent important points of contrast with Habermas and the second generation. In highlighting the contrasts in what follows, however, it is important not to overestimate these contrasts, for Habermas and Honneth share the fundamental conviction that the social institutions that safeguard undistorted forms of intersubjectivity must be based, at least in part, on universalistic principles.⁽¹⁹⁾

(1) Honneth's account of "the social" focuses on the central role of conflict between social groups, rather than between individuals (as is assumed by Hobbesians and rational choice theorists) or between structural entities (as systems theorists, structuralists, and even post-structuralists assume). This reinterpretation of the social was the focus of Honneth's well-received dissertation, published as *Critique of Power: Stages of Reflection of a Critical Social Theory*⁽²⁰⁾. There he argued that, in their own ways, Horkheimer, Adorno, Foucault, and Habermas *all* end up marginalizing the genuinely *social* dimension of critical theory. What is needed, instead, is an account of the social that emphasizes that society reproduces itself through the often conflictual interaction of real social groups, which are themselves the products of ongoing activities of interpretation and struggle on the part of participants. On Honneth's view - developed in his most significant work to date, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict*⁽²¹⁾ - social groups represent both driving forces of historical development and (as we shall see below) resources for human flourishing. With regard to the first, historical claim, Honneth is opposing Marxian and Weberian strands of critical social theory that have focused on deep structural dynamics, be it the first generation's focus on the domination of nature by "instrumental reason", or Habermas's analysis of the conflict between "system" and "lifeworld", or Foucault's treatment of disciplinary regimes. Against such "hypostasizing" philosophies of history, and inspired both by his reading of the young Hegel and his generation's involvement with the New Social Movements, Honneth sees historical development as a matter of the emergence and struggles of social groups. Although he is somewhat more sanguine than many of his contemporaries about the degree to which these social struggles are part of a progressive *developmental* process, Honneth's consistent focus on the dynamic, "agonistic" nature of the social world is typical of a generation that is much more attuned to heterogeneity and uncertainty than Habermas is.

(2) This same skepticism toward universalistic categories and formal proceduralism is found in the third generation's approaches to normative foundations. Here the recurring themes are: the importance of attention to the concrete other, the unavoidability of substantive ethical assumptions, the pluralistic character of reason, and the contextual nature of applying standards. The challenge, of course, is to give these concerns their due while still addressing the concern so central to Habermas's project: the question of how we are to justify the normative standards to which critical social theory must unavoidably appeal in challenging injustices of the *status quo*.

Honneth's proposed solution is to locate the critical perception of injustice more generally within individuals' negative experiences of having broadly 'moral' expectations violated.⁽²²⁾ In lived experiences of denigration and disrespect, he argues, we can see most clearly what it means to deny persons what they deserve. Importantly, however, this is not a matter of being able to deduce this from the outside. Rather, the sense of being wronged - and the moral claim that is thereby raised - comes from *within* the subjective experience of victims of disrespect and is given expression, under certain cultural conditions, in social struggles. According to Honneth, although some social struggles

are driven by self-interested conflicts over resources, once the ideology of instrumentalist reason is undermined, we can see these struggles as also giving expression to moral claims that can serve as normative standards. In many ways, Honneth's approach is thus closer to that of the first generation of Frankfurt School than to Habermas's views, in that he looks to the experience of being subjected to domination (especially in the context of labor) to find the normative core for social critique.

It is out of the history of social struggles that Honneth reconstructs the normative standards for social criticism. The possibility for sensing, interpreting, and realizing one's needs and desires - in short, the very possibility of being *somebody* - depends crucially on the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. These three modes of relating practically to oneself can be acquired and maintained only intersubjectively, through relationships of mutual recognition. These relationships are not ahistorically given but must be established and expanded through social struggles. The 'grammar' of these struggles turns out to be 'moral' in the sense that the feelings of outrage and indignation generated by the rejection of claims to recognition imply normative judgments about the legitimacy of social arrangements. Thus, in place of Habermas's focus on undistorted relations of communication as revealing a standard of justification, Honneth focuses on the progressive overcoming of barriers to full interpersonal recognition, barriers such as legal exclusion and cultural denigration, as well as rape and torture. In this way, the normative ideal of a just society - what Honneth calls, in a phrase intended to synthesize liberalism and communitarianism, a "formal conception of ethical life" - is empirically confirmed by historical struggles for recognition.

Social groups are thus not only agents of social transformation; they also provide the necessary conditions for human flourishing. In one way, this claim represents a point of continuity with earlier generations of the Frankfurt School, such as the work on workers' experiences of community, the familial sources of the authoritarian personality, and the associational life central to a thriving public sphere. But Honneth's left-wing communitarian critique of social fragmentation strikes a chord that is distinctive of this generation that has lived through the period in which the traditional sources of solidarity and "social capital" have declined.⁽²³⁾ Drawing on themes found in the early writings of Hegel, Marx, and Lukács⁽²⁴⁾, Honneth aims to keep alive a sense of "romantic anti-capitalism" against the hegemonic anti-utopianism of current market Liberalism, at least in this sense: that critical social theory must foster a sensitivity to the devastating personal suffering caused by market forces. The question of how best to foster this sensitivity has been taken up recently in Honneth's very interesting debate with Nancy Fraser over how best to reconcile the more culturally driven "politics of recognition" with the more economically driven "politics of distribution".⁽²⁵⁾

(3) The notion of fostering a certain "sensitivity" already points to the importance of emotions in Honneth's work, and that has brought with it attention to the place of the unconscious and the extra-rational in human life. For Honneth, as for many in his generation, this more appreciative attitude toward the Other of reason goes along with a more appreciative (though still critical) engagement with French philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida, and Levinas - more appreciative, in particular, than Habermas. The heightened attention to the Other also includes a return to the first generation's emphasis on psychoanalysis, in this case in the work of object-relations theorists such as Donald Winnicott and Daniel Stern.

In his work since *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth has extended his normative view to capture

more fully the aesthetic dimension of subjectivity and the emotional basis of moral sensitivity. Against Habermas's more exclusive focus on the individual ego's capacity for self-determination, Honneth has emphasized the creative power of the unconscious. Echoing themes from Castoriadis, from Adorno's concept of the non-identical, as well as themes from the "ethical turn" in postmodernism, Honneth has sought to make room in his critical social theory for the voices that have been silenced and marginalized as the "other" of reason - while at the same time retaining his commitment to the Enlightenment heritage of emancipatory reason. ⁽²⁶⁾

Looking more broadly now at the "third generation" of the Frankfurt School as a whole, we can notice first of all that the political consciousness of this generation is shaped by a different constellation of events than those influencing earlier generations. The original Frankfurt School generation came of age in the struggle to understand the non-revolutionary consciousness of the majority of German workers (despite their "objectively revolutionary" situation), and then faced, as mature theorists, the discovery of National Socialism's crimes against humanity. The second generation came of age in the face of revelations of Nazi atrocities, and experienced the transformations around 1968 as mature theorists. The third generation was born out of 1968 and the new social movements of the 1970s, and faced as mature theorists the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rise of the politics of ethnicity, and the acceleration of globalization.

Taking Honneth as the gravitational center of this generation (at least in Germany⁽²⁷⁾), and with the usual caveats in mind, I would hazard the following list of the members of this third generation of the Frankfurt School (key publications are listed in the bibliography): Habermas students Lutz Wingert, Josef Früchtl, Martin Löw-Beer, and Rainer Forst (though Forst is arguably the leading figure of the nascent *fourth* generation); Alfred Schmidt students Hauke Brunkhorst, Micha Brumlik, Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, and Gunzelin Schmid Nöerr; Wellmer students Christoph Menke and Martin Seel, Apel students Matthias Kettner and Wolfgang Kuhlmann; as well as Ulrich Beck, Helmut Dubiel, Günter Frankenberg, Klaus Günther, Hans Joas, Gertrud Koch, Ingeborg Maus, Herta Nagl-Docekal, Bernhard Peters, and the late Hinrich Fink-Eitel. Their areas of research interest can be seen as breaking down along the same lines of the three themes identified in the discussion of Honneth's work.

(1) With regard to the analysis of social conflict, the third generation has been focusing on issues involving the development of new forms of social integration, civil society, social solidarity, and cosmopolitan multiculturalism as counterweights (or "counter-publics,") to the disintegrating pressures of neo-liberalist policies and the rising tide of nationalism (especially in the work of Beck, Brunkhorst, Brumlik, Dubiel, Forst, Frankenberg, Lutz-Bachman, Maus, and Peters). Especially since the late-80s, this generation has been well-read in American political theory (e.g., John Rawls, Ronald Dworkin, Michael Sandel, Michael Walzer, and Iris Young), but their reception of ongoing debates between liberalism and communitarianism have led in different distinctively German directions. The appropriation of liberalism has been radicalized as a discussion of *international justice*, in terms of human rights, international law, and critiques of capitalist globalization. Communitarianism has gotten more uptake among progressive political theorists of this generation than among English-language critical theorists, partly due to the enduring influence of Hegel, Simmel, Tönnies, and the young Marx. In addition, the higher awareness of issues of integration, cultural identity, and nationalism may have something to do with the fact that, like the original

generation of the Frankfurt School but unlike the second generation, several members of the third generation are Jewish. [\(28\)](#)

(2) Those members of this generation who focus on issues of normative justification have taken up the task of further developing the discourse ethics developed by second-generation theorists, and have typically focused on the "messier" dimensions of application, contextual justification, the role of emotions, the Carol Gilligan-Lawrence Kohlberg debate on moral development and gender, evaluative claims about the good life, and applied ethics (Brumlik, Forst, Kettner, Seel, Löw-Beer, Nagl-Docekal, Günther, and Wingert). Again, the focus on human rights and democratic theory represents a further new development, one that gives the law a much more prominent role in developing normative foundations than that afforded to it by Habermas, at least in his publications prior to the point where the third generation came on the scene (Brunkhorst, Forst, Lutz-Bachmann, Maus, and especially professor of jurisprudence Günther). [\(29\)](#)

(3) Finally, there have been those who have explored further the role of the "other of reason". In particular, Menke, Seel, Früchtel, Fink-Eitel, and Koch have focused on the emancipatory potential of aesthetic experience, drawing largely on Hegel's and Adorno's work, but often in combination with that of Nietzsche, Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault, and others. In addition, Hans Joas approaches the issue of how to accommodate within social theory the *creative* and *innovative* moment of impulse and initiative in a more pragmatist vein, drawing, like Honneth and Habermas, on Mead's concept of the "I" and the "me".

In including so many approaches in this generation of the Frankfurt School, I have perhaps erred on the side of identifying a constellation of German figures - many of whom may be unfamiliar outside of Germany - who have taken up various strands of the tradition, as it was expanded by the second generation. Some have closer ties than others to the lineage and core doctrines of either the original generation or Habermas's. What they do minimally share, however, is an approach to critical social theory that is motivated partly at least by opposition to pernicious forms of abstraction - including well-intentioned abstractions that make oppression invisible. Motivated by concerns that emerged with the identity politics of the 70s and a sustained by a (still limited) engagement with feminist and racial/ethnic issues, members of this generation focus on the failure of liberal capitalism, along with certain strands of contemporary philosophy and social science, to accommodate difference and particularity.

CONCLUSION

Given the length of the Frankfurt School's trajectory - and given the degree to which its scope was broadened by Habermas - it is hard to say that its members have shared any single defining methodology or concern. Indeed, both Habermas and Honneth tend to resist the "Frankfurt School" label, since it creates the mistaken impression of a continuous research program. Yet, standing back, one can discern recurring questions that tend to be ignored outside this tradition of critical social theory: What must processes of socialization and social integration be like in order for individuals to be able to resist oppressive institutional forces? What form of mass culture is compatible with social justice and societal self-determination? And what alternatives are there - especially in the domain of

work - for eliminating or at least taming the dominance of instrumental rationality?

These are questions with which the third generation of the Frankfurt School continues to be engaged. Their interest in issues of exclusion, marginalization, emotions, and otherness have drawn them in the direction of French philosophy as well as Anglo-American cultural studies and political theory - much as Habermas's concern with foundational issues of normative justification and the deep structure of communication led him to analytic philosophy. Whatever the influences of French and Anglo-American ideas on the second and third generations of the Frankfurt School, and however much critical social theory has gone from its German-Jewish roots to being a transnational tradition, it is clear that German critical social theory is still alive and well, and living in Frankfurt. ⁽³⁰⁾

NOTES (see also the [Selected Writings of the Third Generation](#))

1. Much of what follows undoubtedly reflects my own specific perspective as a graduate student studying with Habermas and Honneth in Frankfurt (in 1987-88 and 1992-3) and as a philosophically trained member of an even younger generation.
2. For an interesting discussion of the comparison between the "inner circle" of the first generation, and the particularly interesting outer circle, see Axel Honneth, "Critical Theory," in *Social Theory Today*, ed. A. Giddens and J. Turner (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 347ff. For an overview of the Frankfurt School's history, see Martin Jay, *The dialectical imagination : a history of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Boston : Little, Brown, 1973); Susan Buck-Morss, *The origin of negative dialectics : Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York : Free Press, 1977); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans. M. Robertson (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994); Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. Benjamin Gregg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985); and Zoltán Tar, *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1977).
3. See especially Max Horkheimer, "Traditional and Critical Theory," in his *Critical Theory* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972; originally 1937), 188ff.
4. The results of this interdisciplinary research were published in the house journal, *Die Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* ["Journal for Social Research"] until the Nazis closed the Institute.
5. That said, we also already find in Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (from the exile period) early indications of the first generation's turn away from social theory toward the more resigned stance found in Horkheimer's late writings on religion and Adorno's aphoristic aesthetics.

6. It is interesting to note that, according to Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno were not much interested in discussing the pre-war work of the Institute, to the point that Horkheimer kept the copies of the *Zeitschrift* locked in the cellar of the Institute. [See Habermas's interview with Honneth et al, "Dialectics of Rationalization," in *Autonomy and Solidarity: Interviews with Jürgen Habermas*, ed. Peter Dews (London: Verso Press, 1986), p. 95.]
7. For current information on the current activity of the Institute, see the web site: www.rz.uni-frankfurt.de:80/ifs/.
8. Particularly important for this new direction were the influence of developmental psychologists Rainer Döbert and Gertrud Nunner-Winkler, the social evolutionist Klaus Eder, the sociologists Helmut Dubiel and Ulrich Rödel, and the Heideggerian *cum* analytic philosopher Ernst Tugendhat.
9. Many of the writings from the Starnberg period can be found in *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* ["Studies for and Elaborations of the Theory of Communicative Action"] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984). An English edition of these writings is in preparation by Barbara Fultner for MIT Press.
10. Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. Jeremy Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).
11. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), xli.
12. See especially the essays in the excellent collection *On the Pragmatics of Communication*, ed. Maeve Cooke (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998) and Habermas's new collection of essays, *Wahrheit und Rechtfertigung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1999).
13. For an overview, see Robert C. Holub, *Jürgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
14. Habermas, *The Past as Future: Interviews with Michael Haller*, trans. and ed. Max Pensky (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 119-20.
15. Thus, the pragmatist approach to social criticism taken by Americans such as Richard Rorty or Cornell West is simply not an option for Habermas. It may seem ironic that someone so theoretically committed to deliberative democracy and pragmatism has as little faith in common sense as Habermas does. Part of the skepticism has to do with German history, but it also has to do with his theoretical commitment to a vigilant conception of critical reason, according to which we find, in the everyday practices of ordinary individuals, ideas of truth and moral rightness that transcend any settled common sense and challenge the taken-for-granted authority of traditions we inherit. This is a key point of contention in his debates with Hans-Georg Gadamer, a translation of which can be found in Gayle L. Ormiston and Alan D. Schrift, eds., *The Hermeneutic Tradition: From Aristotle to Ricoeur* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989). This skeptical stance toward hermeneutics and common sense is much less prominent among members of the third generation.

16. In the case of Habermas, see "Law and Morality," trans. Kenneth Baynes, in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 8, ed. S.M. McMurrin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988), 217-79; *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996); and the contributions to his 1995 debate with Rawls in *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, ed. by Ciaran Cronin and Pablo De Greiff (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).

17. See esp. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, and the essays in *The New Obscurity*.

18. Because I am focusing on those members of Habermas's generation who have joined him in engaging, at least to some degree, analytic philosophy, I will not have much to say in what follows about members of the second generation who either have been concerned exclusively with empirical studies (von Friedeburg and Nunner-Winkler) or have restricted themselves to keeping alive the flame of the older generation (Alfred Schmidt).

19. Like Habermas, Honneth criticizes Foucault, Lyotard, and other neo-Nietzscheans or postmodernists with - as he puts it with regard to Lyotard - becoming "ensnared in the premises of his own thought; the antipathy to universalism forbids a solution to the very problem which he came up against with his demand for an unforced pluralism of social language-games. For, if recourse to universal norms is on principle blocked in the interests of a critique of ideology, then a meaningful argument in support of the equal rights to coexistence of all everyday cultures cannot be constructed" ["An Aversion Against the Universal: A Commentary on Lyotard's Postmodern Condition," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 2 (1985): 155].

20. German: Suhrkamp, 1986. English, translated by Kenneth Baynes, MIT Press, 1991.

21. Translated by Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1996). German original: Suhrkamp, 1992.

22. This is the central theme of *The Struggle for Recognition*, esp. chapters 5, 6, and 8. For Honneth's own account of how he came to this position, see Honneth's "Afterword to the Second German Edition (1988)", reprinted as a preface in the English translation of *Critique of Power*.

23. In addition to Honneth's collection of essays, *Desintegration* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994), see also Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, trans. M. Ritter (London: Sage, 1992) and Gerhard Schulze, *Erlebnisgesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1993).

24. Honneth, "A Fragmented World: On the Implicit Relevance of Lukács' Early Work," in Honneth, *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Charles W. Wright (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 50-60.

25. A volume containing this sustained debate between Fraser and Honneth is forthcoming from Verso Press.

26. On this range of issues, see especially "The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge

of Postmodernism" in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, ed. Stephen White (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 289-323; and "Decentered Autonomy: The Subject after the Fall" in *The Fragmented World of the Social*, 261-71.

27. It could be argued that the tradition is being kept alive as much outside Germany as within by such figures as Andrew Arato, Kenneth Baynes, Seyla Benhabib, Jay Bernstein, Richard Bernstein, James Bohman, Susan Buck-Morss, Jean Cohen, Fred Dallmayr, Peter Dews, Alessandro Ferrara, Jean-Marc Ferry, Nancy Fraser, David Held, Agnes Heller, David Ingram, Martin Jay, Douglas Kellner, Thomas McCarthy, David Rasmussen, William Rehg, Gillian Rose, Steven Vogel, Georgia Warnke, Stephen K. White, Joel Whitebook, and others - many of whom studied with Habermas or Marcuse.

28. Micha Brumlik, Gertrud Koch, and Martin Löw-Beer have worked hard to keep issues of the Holocaust and the place of Jews in Germany high on the cultural-political agenda, in part through the journal *Babylon*. Although the first generation was predominantly Jewish, the second generation includes, to my knowledge, only one Jew, namely, Tugendhat, who has since returned to his native Venezuela, in part because of the difficulties he faced as a Jew in Germany; see his *Ethik und Politik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992).

29. Especially important for the topics of human rights, globalization, and cosmopolitan democracy is the ongoing series of conferences organized principally by Matthias Lutz-Bachmann and James Bohman, which have been held in Frankfurt and in St. Louis. See, for example, *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant's Cosmopolitan Ideal*, ed. Bohman and Lutz-Bachmann (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

30. For comments on earlier drafts, I would like to thank Casey Blake, Howard Brick, Bert van den Brink, Rainer Forst, Axel Honneth, Pauline Kleingeld, Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, Thomas McCarthy, Kevin Olson, Thomas Schmidt, and Chris Zurn.