Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?[1]

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Those unfamiliar with the current state of debate in the social sciences could be excused for thinking that the issue [discussed in this essay] is little more than a terminological controversy. But there is more at stake here than whether the contemporary stage of the world should be called „Late Capitalism“ or „Industrial Society.“ [It is important] to clarify whether the capitalist system, in whatever guise, still predominates, or whether industrialization has not made the concept of „capitalism“ itself obsolete, together with the distinction between capitalist and noncapitalist states and perhaps even the critique of capitalism itself; whether, in other words, Marx has become obsolete - currently a widely held view among Sociologists. According to this thesis, the world has become so thoroughly dominated by unanticipated technological developments that the notion of social relations - the transformation of living labor into commodities and, hence, the opposition between classes, on the basis of which capitalism was originally defined - has, by comparison, lost much of ils relevance, if it has not become illusory altogether. A case in point would be the undeniable convergences between the technologically most advanced countries, the United States and the Soviet Union. Class differences, defined in terms of living standards and class consciousness, are much less in evidence than they were during the decades following the industrial revolution - especially in the leading Western countries. Such predictions of class theory as

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those which foresaw general immiseration and societal collapse have not been fulfilled unequivocally enough to confirm the validity of the original theory. To speak of relative immiseration has something comical about it. Even if the law of the falling rate of profit - not unproblematic even in Marx's work - had proven to be correct, one would still have to concede that the capitalist system has been resilient enough to postpone the anticipated collapse indefinitely. In the first instance this is due to an immense increase in technological development which has enabled the production of a plethora of consumer goods from which all members of the highly industrialized nations have benefited. In the face of these technological developments, the social relations of production have turned out to be less rigid than Marx had expected.

The criteria by which class differences are judged - which empirical research euphemistically terms social stratification, stratification by income distribution, standard of living and education - are generalizations based upon findings about individual respondents. In this sense they are subjective. The original concept of „class" was intended to be objective, not meant to be linked to indices gleaned directly from the lives of the subjects themselves, however much even these indices may, de facto, be an expression of objective social laws. Fundamental to Marx's theory is the relative position of the entrepreneur and the worker in the process of production - in the final analysis, control of the means of production. The currently dominant sociological trends eschew this tenet as dogmatic. The dispute is a theoretical one and cannot be resolved by empirical research alone. For no matter how much important knowledge such research may contribute, according to critical theory it nevertheless tends to obscure the objective structures in question. Not even the opponents of dialectical thinking want to defer indefinitely discussion of a theory that expresses the real interests of Sociology. The controversy is in effect about interpretation - unless it is precisely the need for interpretation itself that is being banished as unscientific.

A dialectical theory of Society seeks out the structural laws underlying the empirical world, which manifest themselves in these empirical facts and are in turn modified by them. By „structural laws" it means historical trends which are derived, by and large cogently, from the constituents of the total system of Society. Marxian prototypes for these were the law of surplus value [Wertgesetz], the law of accumulation, and the law of collapse [Zusammenbruchsgesetz]. By „structure," dialectical theory does not mean conceptual schemes under which sociological data are subsumed in as complete and unproblematic a manner as possible. The aim is not so

much systematization as the total social system which precedes the procedures and results of the sciences themselves. This, however, does not mean that such a theory is exempt from factual validation. It must not become tendentious, if it does not want to degenerate into dogmatism and repeat by intellectual means what in the Eastern block has been perpetrated by the powers that be in the name of dialectical materialism. It would arrest what in fact in its own terms can only be seen as a state of flux. The fetishization of objective laws has its counterpart in the fetishization of facts. Dialectical thinking, acutely aware of the preponderance of these objective laws, criticizes rather than celebrates both them and the illusion that the course of the world is already determined by what is particular and concrete. Much more likely is that under the spell of the historical process the particular and the concrete are prevented from realization altogether. The term „Pluralism“ has a falsely utopian ring about it. It carries with it insinuation that the ideal world is already at hand. Its function is to assuage. For that reason a selfcritical dialectical theory must not accommodate itself comfortably to the general historical situation. On the contrary, it must break with the latter. Even dialectical thinking, however, is not immune from a false separation of thoughtful reflection and empirical research. Some time ago a Russian intellectual of considerable influence explained to me that sociology in the Soviet Union is a new science. He referred of course to the empirical kind. That sociology might have anything to do with the theory of society, which in his country is the officially sanctioned state religion, was an idea as foreign to him as the fact that Marx had himself done empirical research. Reified consciousness does not cease to exist just because the concept of „reification“ occupies pride of place. The humbug with concepts like „imperialism“ or „monopoly“ - innocent of all reflection upon the real state of affairs which these terms denote - is just as phoney and irrational as the attitude which, in the name of a blindly nominalistic view of the world, refuses to recognize that such concepts as „exchange-society“ express something objective, that they point to something which is obscured by exclusively empirical data. They are an indication of something which is by no means always easily translatable into operationally defined states of affairs. Both of these approaches are to be eschewed. In this regard „Late Capitalism or industrial Society?“ reflects from a position of autonomy the methodological aim of selfcriticizm.

A straightforward answer to this question cannot be expected and should perhaps not even be sought after. When compelled to choose between alternative conceptions, even when these are theoretical ones, one is already acting under duress. Such alternatives reflect coercive situations that in an

unfree society are projected onto the intellect, which could do worse than contribute to its own emancipation by obstinately reflecting upon the nature of this bondage. The dialectician in particular should resist any pressure to opt for either „late capitalism“ or „industrial society,“ however unsatisfying he may find the lack of commitment inherent in this „on-the-one-hand/on-the-other-hand“ approach. He most especially - Brecht’s advice notwithstanding - should be on his guard against oversimplification; sheer force of mental habit is much too likely to suggest the standard answer, just as surely as his opponent will find the counter-argument with equal facility. Whoever holds to the insight of the predominance of the system and its structure over particular states of affairs will not, like his opponents, dismiss contradictions out of hand as an error of method or judgment, or seek to eliminate them through an internal reorganization of the system of scientific concepts. Instead he will trace them back to the structure of society as a whole, a structure which has been an antagonistic one ever since society has existed, and which remains so to this day. International conflicts and the permanent threat of a catastrophic war demonstrate this, most recently in the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. It is precisely this which is ignored by a „pigeonhole“ kind of thinking which projects the formal-logical principle of noncontradiction directly onto the subject matter under consideration. The point is not to choose between the above two formulas on the basis of one’s own theoretical position or personal inclination, but to realize that their relationship is itself an expression of the objective contradiction which marks the present stage of society, one which sociology should address at the theoretical level.

Certain prognoses of dialectical theory are in conflict with its other prognoses. A few have not come about at all. Some theoretical and analytical concepts have in the meantime led to antinomies which can be ignored only with difficulty. Yet other predictions, originally closely related to those which have remained unfulfilled, have been dramatically confirmed. Even those who reject the idea that theory should aim at predictions will not simply content themselves, in the light of these claims by dialectical theory, with the offhand conclusion that it is partly true and partly false. These are ambiguities requiring explanation. While proletarian class consciousness may indeed not exist in the advanced capitalist countries, this does not necessarily mean, as the commonly held view would have it, that social classes do no longer exist. Class was originally defined in terms of the means of production, not in terms of the consciousness of its members. There is no lack of plausible explanations for the absence of this class consciousness.

For instance, the pauperization of the working class has not in fact become worse. Instead the working class has been increasingly integrated into middle-class society, sharing its values to an extent that could not have been foreseen during and immediately after the industrial revolution, when the marginalized industrial proletariat was first recruited from the pauperized and the rural poor. Class situation does not straightforwardly translate into class consciousness. The great majority of the population who, by virtue of this very integration, have no more control over their own fate than they did 120 years ago, lack not only a sense of class solidarity, but also full awareness that they are the objects and not the subjects of societal processes - processes which, as subjects, they nevertheless keep in motion. The development of class consciousness, according to Marx, was to herald a fundamental historical transformation, yet Marx treated it as a mere epiphenomenon. At any rate, when in those countries in which the class relationship is most obvious - North America, for instance - class consciousness has not manifested itself for a long time (if it ever existed there in the first place) and when the question of the proletariat becomes such a thoroughly vexing one, then quantity changes into quality. As a result, the suspicion of mystification cannot be easily dismissed, except perhaps by decree. The core of the problem is Marx's theory of surplus value. It was meant to provide an objective economic explanation of the existence of social classes and of the growing conflict between them. If technical progress (or rather industrialization) causes the proportion of living labor - which according to Marx's theory alone determines surplus value - to fall to some negligible figure, then this challenges the entire theory of surplus value. That there is at present no objective theory of value is not merely because only the established schools of economic theory enjoy academic respectability. It is also a reminder of how extraordinarily difficult it is to give an objective explanation of the formation of social classes without recourse to the theory of surplus value. As a noneconomist one gets the impression that even the socalled neo-Marxist theories want to plug the various gaps in their account of central problem areas by borrowing from academic 'subjective' economics. There can be little doubt that it is not merely the deterioration in the capacity for conceptual thinking which is responsible for this. Perhaps today's world simply can no longer be captured by an internally consistent theory. Marx had in some respects an easier task since at the theoretical and scientific levels he was dealing with a conceptually coherent world view: that of liberalism. He needed merely to inquire whether the dynamic categories of capitalism themselves corresponded to this mental liberal model of it. By way of the determinate negation of the conceptual

schema with which he was faced, he wanted to bring forth a similar, in its turn systematic, theory. Such a strategy is no longer possible today: the market economy has become so obviously defective that it would make a mockery of every such attempt. The irrationality of the current social structure resists its rational grasp at the theoretical level. The view that control of economic processes is increasingly becoming a function of political power is true in the sense that it can be deduced from the dynamics of the system as a whole, and yet at the same time it points in the direction of objective irrationality. This, and not only the sterile dogmatism of the adherents of this view, could help explain why an objective and compelling theory of society has been lacking for so long. It may be, however, that abandoning all hope for such a theory does not so much reflect a strengthening of the critical scientific spirit as it is an expression of enforced resignation. There is an atavistic trend not only in society at large but also in the quality of the thinking about it.

Then again: there are compelling facts which cannot, in their turn, be adequately interpreted without invoking the key concept of ‘capitalism." Human beings are, as much as ever, ruled and dominated by the economic process. It is, however, not just the population at large which is subjected to this domination but also those in control and their entourage. The classical Marxist theory held that the powerful would eventually become appendages of their own machinery of production. The much-discussed question of the managerial revolution, according to which power has devolved from the legal owners to the bureaucracies, seems to be of secondary importance by comparison. Now as much as ever, the societal process produces and reproduces a class structure which - even if it is not the one depicted in Zola’s *Germinal* - is at the very least a structure which the antisocialist Nietzsche anticipated with the formula „shepherd-less, one large herd.“[2] This heteronomy is the result, however, of something Nietzsche himself did not care to see: that here we confront the same old social oppression, now become anonymous. If the increasing immiseration has not come about exactly in the way Marx had predicted, it most certainly has in the no less frightening sense that intellectual unfreedom and dependence upon a social apparatus no longer controlled by its operators, has now become universal. The much-lamented immaturity of the masses reflects their inability ever to

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also sprach Zarathustra* [1883-1885], Nietzsche *Werke* vol. VI, 1 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1968), p. 14 [*Thus spake Zarathustra* [1896], R.J. Hollingdale, tr. (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1874), „Zarathustra’s Prologue.“].

control their own lives, which they experience as blind fate, just as in mythology. Empirical investigations, for that matter, indicate that subjectively, in terms of their own conception of reality, social classes are by no means as leveled as at times has been assumed. Even theories of imperialism, now that the great powes have been forced to relinquish their colonies, are by no means outdated. The social processes to which these theories were meant to draw attention are as real as ever, namely in the conflict between the two monstrous power blocks. The ostensibly outdated doctrine of social antagonisms, with its telos of eventual disaster, is now overshadowed by the more obviously political ones. Whether and to what extent the class relationship should be reformulated to encompass the relation between the leading industrial nations and the developing nations courted by them is something which cannot be pursued here.

In terms of the conceptual framework of dialectical critical theory, I would like to suggest, as a tentative and necessarily abstract answer, that contemporary society is most certainly an „industrial society“ from the point of view of the *forces* of production. Industrial production has everywhere become a model for society at large, irrespective of political systems. It is an allencompassing totality inasmuch as industrial procedures and methods reach into the spheres of material production, administration, and distribution, as well as into the sphere of „culture.“ They do so with economic necessity. On the other hand, contemporary society is „capitalistic“ in terms of the *relations* of production. People are still what they were according to Marx’s analysis in the middle of the nineteenth century: appendages of machines. No longer merely literally, in the sense that industrial workers have to arrange their lives in accordance with the dictates of the machines they serve, but in a much wider, metaphoric sense: they are forced to obey - as role-bearers - an abstract social mechanism without demur, and that right down to their most intimate emotional lives. Production requires the profit motive as much as it ever did. Human needs have become a function of the machinery of production, rather than vice versa, to a much greater extent than could have been foreseen in Marx’s day, although potentially they have been this all along. They are thoroughly manipulated. It is of course true enough that in this transformation, in being thus molded and shaped to the requirements of the social apparatus, human needs are to some degree met - needs which the social apparatus can then effectively mobilize in its own defense. But the use-value aspect of commodities has, in the interim, lost whatever immediate selfevidence it may once have possessed. It is not only that human needs are only met indirectly, by way of exchange value; in some sectors of the economy these needs are them-

selves created directly by the profit-interests themselves, to the detriment of objective consumer needs - adequate housing, for instance, and especially the need for education and for information about general events which most directly concern the consumer. In those areas in which exchange value is not a matter of naked selfpreservation, the tendency is for it to be enjoyed for its own sake. Empirical sociology deals with this phenomenon under such headings as „status-symbol“ or ‘prestige," without really grasping its objective significance. In the highly industrialized parts of the world it has been possible - at least, Keynes notwithstanding, as long as new economic disasters do not occur - to prevent the most blatant forms of poverty, although not as effectively as the thesis of the affluent society proclaims. However, the spell which the system as a whole casts over its members has been strengthened by greater social integration. At the same time it can hardly be denied that the increased satisfaction of material needs, however distorted by the system these may be, offers a concrete example of what life without poverty or need could mean. Even in the poorest countries nobody would need to starve any longer. There are few impediments to a better understanding of what is objectively possible. An indication of this is the extraordinary fear of general political education not part of the official communication system. What Marx and Engels had criticized as utopianism - for fear that such thinking would undermine a more humane organization of society - has now become a distinct possibility. The critique of utopian thinking itself has today degenerated to a stock ideological response, while the triumphs of technological production bolster the illusion that a utopian world - which is in fact incompatible with the existing relations of production - has already been realized within contemporary society. But the new direction these contradictions have taken in international politics, as indicated by the arms race between East and West, render impossible what is in fact objectively possible.

Recognizing all this, however, requires that one resist the temptation to blame technology (more precisely, the forces of production) for everything, or to engage - as critics are frequently wont to do - in a kind of highlevel theoretical Luddism. It is not so much technology itself as its interconnectedness with the social circumstances in which it is embedded that has become so fateful. One should bear in mind, for instance, that technological development has been channeled in a certain direction in deference to profit and power interests. By now there is indeed an ominous correspondence between this technological development and the need for control. It is no coincidence that it is the invention of new means of destruction which has become exemplary for a new type of technology. Its potential for

uses which, by contrast, do not lend themselves to domination, centralization, and violence against nature has remained rudimentary - although in all probability it could heal much of what the current technology has damaged either literally or figuratively.

Despite all assurances to the contrary and despite its dynamic appearance and increased productivity, certain aspects of contemporary society are nevertheless static. This holds for the relations of production, for instance, which now involve not merely ownership but also administration - all the way to the role of the state as the general capitalist. Inasmuch as the relations of production are being rationalized in the technical sense and thus assimilated to the forces of production, these social relations have doubtlessly become more flexible. But this development fosters the illusion that full employment and the maintenance of the status quo represent some kind of ideal. What is lost from view is that there is in fact a universal interest in the emancipation from heteronomous forms of work. The current, extremely fluid international situation is only temporarily stable. It is a product of forces which threaten to destroy it. Within the reigning relations of production, the human race is its own reserve army, as it were, and it is victualed accordingly. Marx's faith in the historical primacy of the forces of production, which were to dissolve the relations of production, has been far too optimistic. To this extent Marx, the avowed opponent of German idealism, remained true to idealism's affirmative theory of history. Faith in the world spirit has functioned as an alibi for many a later version of that social order which, according to the eleventh Feuerbach thesis, was to be changed. The relations of production, out of sheer selfpreservation and by means of patchwork and piecemeal measures, have continued to subordinate the unleashed forces of production. The preponderance of the relations of production over the forces of production, which have long since made a mockery of the former, is the symbol of the age. That the long arm of the human race reaches to distant and barren planets yet is unable to ensure eternal peace on earth, shows how absurd the situation is toward which the dialectic of social development is moving. That the actual course of historical events has so dashed the hopes of an earlier generation is to a large degree a result of the integration of what Veblen called the „underlying population." Only those who would place the abstract happiness of society as a whole higher than the happiness of individual human beings could wish this to be undone. This integration was itself a result of a development of the forces of production, although not in the sense of their primacy over the relations of production. It was a mistake to ever have thought of this mechanistically. The realization of this primacy of the forces of production

would have required the spontaneous cooperation of all those with an interest in the transformation of social conditions, whose numbers by now have long exceeded - by several orders of magnitude - those of the genuine industrial proletariat. Objective interest and subjective spontaneity, however, remain poles apart; the latter has practically withered under the oppressive predominance of the status quo. Marx's formulation, according to which theory becomes a material force in the world as soon as it takes hold of the masses, has been flagrantly inverted by the actual course of historical events. If society is so organized that it automatically or deliberately blocks, by means of the culture and consciousness industry and by monopolies of public opinion, even the simplest knowledge and awareness of ominous political events or of important critical ideas and theories; if, to compound it all, the organization of society paralyzes even the very ability to imagine the world differently from the way it in fact overwhelmingly appears to its inhabitants, then this rigid and manipulated mental condition becomes every bit as much a material force - a force of repression - as its counterpart, i.e., free and independent thought, which once sought its elimination.

The term „industrial society," on the other hand, evokes, in a certain sense, a technocratic reading of Marx. It also suggests that this element in Marx is still applicable in our world - even though Marx is at the same time treated as obsolete. The term „industrial society" implies that the very nature of society can be deduced directly from the state of the forces of production - i.e., independently of the prevailing social conditions. It is really quite astonishing how seldom these conditions themselves are discussed and analyzed in contemporary sociology. What is best - not that it augurs well for the future - is lost from view, namely the totality, that which Hegel termed the allpervasive „ether" of society. This, however, is anything but ethereal; it is the ens realissimum. Inasmuch as it is indeed abstract, it is an abstraction which is not to be blamed on a daydreaming and willful cast of mind, out of touch with reality, but rather on the system of commodity exchange, that objective abstraction to which society pays obeisance. Its power over human beings is more real than the power exerted by particular institutions, which in their turn are implicitly modeled on this general pattern drummed into people's heads. The helplessness which is experienced by the individual when confronted with the totality is a most palpable expression of this. But in sociology, with its bent for abstract-logical and classificatory thinking, these constitutive social relationships - these social conditions within which production takes place - are treated much more jejunely than is appropriate to this concrete totality [konkret Allgemeine].

They are trivialized to such terms as „power“ or „social control.“ These are categories which have lost their sting, for what is specifically social about society, its structure, is thereby lost from view.

A straightforward opposition between forces of production and relations of production, however, would not be very dialectical. They are interconnected with one another in complex ways; each presupposes the other. It is this which tempts one simply to reduce everything to the forces of production, when in fact it is the relations of production which are paramount. The forces of production are, now more than ever, mediated by the relations of production - so thoroughly and completely in fact that it is perhaps for this very reason that the relations of production seem to be so ineluctably real. They have become second nature to us. It is precisely this which is responsible for the fact that human beings are starving in many parts of the world - in absurd contrast to what is objectively possible. Even where material affluence is widespread, it seems to be afflicted by some kind of a curse, as if the inauthenticity of human needs has blighted the consumer goods themselves. It is quite definitely possible to distinguish between objectively „true“ and „false“ human needs, even if this must not provide anywhere in the world a pretext for the bureaucratic regimentation of life. Human needs, for better or worse, reflect the condition of society as a whole. They do not come first in this administered world, even if they may be welcome data for market research. A judgment about true or false needs would have to take the structure of society as a whole into account, together with all of its mediations. The illusory and distortive aspects of satisfaction of needs are today undoubtedly registered at the subconscious level, and this contributes to the discontent with civilization. A more immediate cause of the general unease however - even more important than the impenetrable interconnectedness of satisfaction of needs with profit and power interests - is the implacable and incessant threat to the one human need upon which all others depend: the simple interest in survival. Even the most sumptuous supply of consumer goods is something of a mockery in a world in which the bomb could fall any minute. There is however a direct connection between the international tensions, which are increasing right now to the point of threatening total war, and - taken literally - the relations of production. The threat of the one catastrophe is postponed and lessened by the other. The relations of production could hardly avoid the apocalyptic convulsions which further economic crises would bring in their wake, if an inordinate proportion of the gross national product - which would otherwise lack a market - were not being diverted for the production of means of destruction. This is also happening in the Soviet Union, despite the elimination of the market

economy there. The economic reasons for this are clear: the desire for more rapid economic growth in this backward country brought about a dictatorial and austere administration. The freeing of the forces of production has resulted in new constraints by the relations of production: economic production has become an end in itself and has prevented the realization of the original goal, namely uncurtailed and genuine freedom. The bourgeois concept of socially useful labor, which is being satanically parodied in both of these political systems, was originally measured by the yardstick of the marketplace, by profit, and not ever in terms of plain usefulness for the people themselves, let alone in terms of human happiness. This domination of the relations of production over human beings requires, as much as ever, the most highly developed forces of production. While these two realities are conceptually distinct, this bedeviled situation cannot be grasped by isolating one from the other. They illuminate one another reciprocally. Overproduction - which stimulated the original expansion and in turn captured and then transformed the ostensibly subjective needs - is now spouted forth by a technical apparatus which has become so autarchic that it would become irrational (i.e., unprofitable) if it sank below a certain volume of production. Overproduction is consequently the inevitable result of the existing relations of production. The only sense in which the forces of production are not hampered by the relations of production is in the prospect of total annihilation. The methods of centralized control with which the masses are nevertheless kept in line, require a degree of concentration and centralization which possesses not only an economic, but also a technological aspect, for instance - as the mass media exemplify - the technical possibility of controlling and coordinating [gleichschalten] the beliefs and attitudes of countless people from some central location - something which requires nothing more obtrusive than the selection and presentation of news and news commentary.

The power of these unrevolutionized relations of production is greater than ever and yet, since they are objectively anachronistic, they are damaged, afflicted, and out of kilter. They no longer function automatically. State intervention in the economy is not - as the old school of liberal thinking believed - an extraneous and superfluous imposition, but is essential to the working of the system as a whole. It is the very epitome of selfdefense. Nothing could illustrate the concept of dialectics more strikingly. Hegel's Philosophy of Right - a work in which bourgeois ideology and the dialectic of bourgeois society are inextricably linked - proceeded in an analogous fashion: it had to postulate the necessary of state intervention as a countervailing force to society's own immanent dialectic. Its absence, in Hegel's

view, would cause society's disintegration. Hegel had to postulate an impartial state apparatus - itself supposedly unaffected by the balance of power in society - which intervened to reduce social conflict by means of a police force. This intervention by the state is at the same time part of society's immanent dialectic, comparable to the way in which Hegel's polar opposite, Marx, had visualized the revolution of the relations of production: on the one hand as something inherent in the historical process itself and yet, on the other, as an event which could be brought about only by an act qualitatively different from the internal dynamics of this system. It has sometimes been argued that it is precisely this state intervention in the economy and, even more so, the fact that largescale and longterm planning have long since become a fact of life, which proves that late capitalism, having overcome the anarchy of commodity production, can no longer be termed „capitalism." But this view ignores that the social fate of the individual is no less precarious now than it was in the past. At no time has the capitalist economic model functioned in the way its liberal apologists have claimed. Already in Marx's work it was seen as an ideology and criticized accordingly. Marx demonstrated how little the selfconception of bourgeois society corresponded to the actual reality. It is not without a certain irony that it should be precisely this critical point - that even in its heyday liberalism was not really liberal - which has now been revived in the thesis that capitalism is not really capitalistic. Even this is indicative of a fundamental change. Measured by its own rationale of a free and just exchange, bourgeois society had always been irrational, unfree, and unjust. But as bourgeois society has deteriorated even further, this selfconception is itself disintegrating. This is in turn then chalked up by the spokesmen for the current situation as a plus, a situation in which integration has in fact become a cover for social disintegration. What is extraneous to the economic and social system - right through to the tendency toward overt politicization - now reveals itself as a constitutive feature of the system as a whole. State intervention in the economy confirms the survival ability of the system, but indirectly also the theory of the breakdown of capitalism; the telos of state intervention is direct political domination independent of market mechanisms. The expression „managed" society [formierte Gesellschaft[3] has carelessly blurted this out. This regressive tendency within liberal capitalism has its correlative in a regression at the intellectual level - a regression

3 The allusion here is to a term coined by the Ludwig Erhard administration in the 1960s. See Karl-Heinz Schwank, *Formierte Gesellschaft: Schlagwort oder drohende Gefahr?* (Berlin: Dietz, 1966).

to a point behind what is objectively attainable. People are losing those personality traits they no longer need and which have even become a hindrance. The very core of individuation is beginning to dissolve. In recent years, on the other hand, traces of a counter movement have also become visible, primarily among the most diverse sections of the youth, namely resistance to blind conformism, freedom to opt for rationally chosen goals, disgust with the condition of the world as the hoax and illusion it is,[4] and an awareness of the possibility of change. Only time will tell how significant a movement this is, or whether society's collective drive to selfdestruction will triumph in spite of this. Subjective regression, however, favors regression of the system as a whole. Because the consciousness of the masses has become dysfunctional (to borrow a term by Merton), its regressive tendencies have begun to influence the social system as a whole. Increasingly the ability to maintain a rational and coherent ego identity, which even the concept of a functional society still implied, is lost.

It is a socially necessary illusion that the forces and the relations of production are now one, and that society can therefore be analyzed in an unproblematic and straightforward way from the point of view of the forces of production. The illusion is socially necessary because aspects of the total social process, which were originally separate and distinct, tangible human beings included, have been reduced to a kind of general common denominator. Material production, distribution, and consumption are all collectively administered. Though these are different spheres within a total social process, they are nevertheless separated by boundaries which once heeded the qualitative differentes which exist between them - boundaries which are now disappearing. It is all of a piece. The totality of the mediation process - in fact that of the market - produces a second, illusory immediacy. This makes it possible to ignore the divisive and antagonistic aspects of actual experience and to repress them from consciousness. Such an attitude toward society - even if it does justice to the technological and organizational processes and to the uniformity produced by them - is nevertheless quite illusory. It fails to See that these unifying processes are by no means rational, for they remain subordinated to blind and irrational causal processes. There is no such thing as a collective societal subject. It is an illusion which could be described by saying that everything that today exists in society is so thoroughly mediated that it is precisely this moment of media-

4 "Welt als Schwindel und Vorstellung": wordplay on Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1819) [*The World as Will and Idea* (London: Trübner & Co., 1883-1886)].

tion itself which is beginning to disappear from view. An Archimedean point from which the nightmare can be defined no longer exists. The only possible approach is to seek out its internal inconsistencies. That is what Horkheimer and I had in mind decades ago when we referred to the „technological veil." The false identification of the world as it now is with its inhabitants is a result of the enormous expansion of technology. In effect this amounts to an affirmation of the relations of production, for whose beneficiaries one searches almost as much in vain these days as for the nearly invisible proletariat. The increasing autonomy of the system as a whole from those who contribute it, including those in control, has reached its limit. It has become a general fate, which now finds expression, as Freud put it, in an omnipresent freefloating anxiety; freefloating because it is no longer able to attach itself to anything that is alive, either people or classes. In the final analysis, however, it is only the relationships between human beings that lie buried beneath the relations of production which have been rendered autonomous. The omnipotent social order thereby creates its own ideology, and renders it virtually powerless. However powerful a spell it may cast, this nevertheless remains just a spell. If Sociology, rather than being a willing purveyor of welcome information for agencies and interest groups, is to achieve something of that purpose for which it was originally conceived, then it must contribute, however modestly, by means which are not themselves subject to universal fetishization, toward breaking the spell.

(Transl. Frederik van Gelder)