EDITORIAL

Scott McCracken and Antony Rowland

The relationship between the Frankfurt School and cultural studies has always been a contested one and the articles in this edition of *new formations* reflect the diverse perspectives that have developed from that contestation. Yet, for much of the short history of cultural studies, the question might well be, 'What legacy?' Although the influence of the School in the early formation of cultural studies has been widely recognised, the developing field owed more to Gramsci and Williams than to Adorno, Horkheimer, Benjamin, Bloch or Marcuse. The impact of post-structuralism and postmodernism has only served to distance cultural studies further from the Frankfurt School. The debate has often been reduced to a hackneyed argument over the relationship between high art and mass culture. References are confined to the School's two most anthologised (and reified) essays: Adorno and Horkheimer's 'The Culture Industry', which Kate Soper refers to in this edition as the least nuanced piece within their oeuvre; and Benjamin's 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. As Esther Leslie remarks in her article, 'Space and West End Girls: Walter Benjamin versus Cultural Studies', it is a debate that is all too easy to parody at the expense of dialectical criticism: Benjamin is cultural studies' 'favourite son', while Adorno is labelled a 'white snob, an elitist in kid gloves'.

Recently, there has been a reconsideration of the Frankfurtian legacy, aided in the Anglophone world by new translations of Adorno, Benjamin and Bloch. The variety and complexity of their work is increasingly acknowledged as a resource in some of the newest and most dynamic areas of cultural studies: gender studies, postcolonial studies, Holocaust studies and queer theory; but, as the articles that follow demonstrate, how that resource is used is a matter of enduring dispute. In his essay, 'The Cultural Legacy of Critical Theory', Herbert Schnädelbach argues that, in Germany at least, the moment of critical theory is past, whereas Kate Soper, in 'Despairing of Happiness: the redeeming dialectic of Critical Theory', suggests that in British cultural studies it has not even begun. As Schnädelbach reminds us, even the term Frankfurt School is misleading. If we have persisted with it here, it is because, in the British and North American context, the term critical theory is often confused with the more general 'cultural theory' (or the even more amorphous 'Theory').

None of the contributors refuse the critical imperative, however. Neil Lazarus, in the essay that gives this edition its title, reminds us that Adorno's mastery of European culture was at once elitist and concerned to use his privilege against that cultural tradition - to 'hate it properly'. As Lazarus argues, one of critical theory's most powerful legacies is that it

gives us the tools to question the new 'traditions': for example, the contemporary orthodoxies of postmodernist and post-structuralist approaches. Here, at least, a comparison can be made with cultural studies, which has had to confront the same problem of working within and against tradition in its critique of those academic disciplines that saw their role as guardians of 'culture': for example, English, sociology, history, anthropology. Lately, the establishment of cultural studies as a field of study in its own right has seen continuing, and only partially successful attempts, to resist its encoding, disciplining and institutionalisation as a new tradition in the academy.

It is in this context of the entrenchment of new traditions that the return to critical theory should be understood. In order to escape the tyranny of the 'post-isms', a trap any collection using the term 'legacy' is in danger of falling in to, it is necessary to hate them properly in the Adornian sense: that is to own them and at the same time to use that knowledge to write against them. This means, of course, that the Frankfurt School alone can never provide easy or definitive answers to contemporary dilemmas; but the contradictory demands of its legacy will remain a source of debate within the new strands of cultural studies. Neil Lazarus and Graham Pechey argue that Adorno's critique of capitalist modernity should be deployed against his own Eurocentrism. For Esther Leslie, Adorno and Benjamin's negative dialectics should be taken up in opposition to cultural studies' waning political edge and its ahistorical categorisation of social groups and audiences. Eamonn Carrabine and Brian Longhurst, who are engaged in the kinds of audience research that Leslie critiques, attempt to trace Benjamin's legacy in the study of popular culture and relate it to sociological data. Their article is a reminder of the fraught relationship between the demands of theory and the empirical work on media audiences that the Institute for Social Research itself carried out. The same division has persisted in a different way within contemporary cultural studies between 'theorists' who track critical theory as part of a philosophical tradition (albeit one pursued more by literary and cultural theorists than traditional philosophers) and cultural studies' interest in the impurities of popular culture and the 'contamination' of activist politics which lies behind feminist criticism, eco-criticism and postcolonial studies. Kate Soper sees cultural studies' development 'under the influence of, and in tandem with, social politics' as one of its most productive elements.

In fact, after mass culture, probably the most frequently cited passages from the Frankfurt School focus on the question of political commitment. Herbert Schnädelbach provides a useful alternative perspective to British and North American takes on the school and claims that, in the post-war period, critical theory combined radical critique with political apathy. In the German Federal Republic, where ideas of critical theory slipped into violence, this question became one of complicity with past authoritarianism

and present complacency. In contrast, Sean Homer relates that in Slovenia the Frankfurt School functioned as the orthodoxy in official party circles, so that Slovenian critics like Slavoj Zizek define their critical social theory against the school. In Britain, Kate Soper contends, the opposite has been true; far from being the orthodoxy, there has been little by way of a direct bequest from critical theory to cultural studies. In the concluding article to this edition, she argues that British cultural studies has much to gain from a more direct engagement.

The 1990s saw the collapse of Soviet Marxism, long a target of the most prominent members of the school. Writing from the newly re-unified Berlin, this is the immediate context of Schnädelbach's historical analysis. But it has also seen the invocation of Frankfurt School thinkers as an alternative strand within Marxism by writers such as Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Jonathan Dollimore, Stuart Hall, and Fredric Jameson. Regrettably, few of these have yet to follow up their citations with a longer contribution to the debate. Neil Lazarus argues that postcolonial critics like Gayatri Spivak seem only willing to draw on the legacy when writing for 'theorists'; they occlude it whenever addressing the new postcolonialist audience. The exception is Fredric Jameson, who has long championed critical theory and who regards Adorno as an appropriate thinker for the postmodern age. This again is a controversial position. Schnädelbach argues that in Germany Adorno is studied unproblematically as one postmodernist amongst others; and to confirm again the contradictory legacy, Lazarus utilises Adorno as a resource against the encroachments of postmodernism, while Soper cites *Minima Moralia* against value-free postmodern cultural criticism, and the uncritical endorsement of Barbie dolls, Action Man and Teletubbies.

Written off for its political quietism or as redundant, the Frankfurt School has a habit of being re-invented. Writing against her critics in the *New York Times* in March 1999, Judith Butler, criticised in this edition for her attacks on Marxism, was moved to use the complexity of Adorno's prose as an example of the need to understand the world against the dictates of common sense.[1] The articles that follow demonstrate the rich reserves that critical theory has left us. Andrew Edgar and Barbara Engh find new resources in Adorno's theory of music and Benjamin's cultural criticism to open up new perspectives on queer theory and the relationship between humanity and machines. Sean Homer demonstrates the corrective importance of Frankfurt School theory to psychoanalytic thought. Deborah Parsons and Graeme Gilloch show just how central Benjamin's work has become to contemporary understandings of the city. Benjamin's concept of the *flâneur* has given rise to a flood of cultural criticism.

1. Judith Butler, 'A "Bad Writer" Writes Back', *New York Times*, Saturday 20/3/99, pA15.

The work of the various and often very different writers associated with the Institute for Social Research in the Frankfurt School is now being used to rethink our own interesting times. In cultural studies it is read against the grain for insights into postcolonial, feminist or queer theory. But above

all, it is, as Kate Soper argues, the critical pessimism that makes these writings of vital importance today. The concern of negative dialectics is always, in the last instance, to preserve a concept of the good life that provides us with the resources for hope in a forbidding climate, for a utopianism when better visions are rare indeed.

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