

# Late Capitalism or Industrial Society? Opening Address to the 16<sup>th</sup> German Sociological Congress

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It has become customary for the outgoing chair of the German Society for Sociology to say a few words of their own. In this case, his own position and the meaning of the problems being posed are not to be strictly separated: each is unavoidably conjoined to the other. On the other hand he can hardly present definitive solutions, which is the whole point of discussion by the Congress. This theme was originally suggested by Otto Stammer. In the meeting of the Executive Committee charged with arranging the conference, it was gradually transformed; the present title crystallized out through "teamwork" [in English]. Those who are unfamiliar with the state of current debate in the social sciences can be forgiven for suspecting that this is a question of mere nomenclature; that experts have the idle luxury of pondering whether the contemporary era is to be named late capitalism or industrial society. In truth, it is not a question of mere termini but something absolutely fundamental. The presentations and discussions will be assisting us to ascertain whether the capitalist system continues to rule, albeit in a modified form, or whether industrial development has made the concept of capitalism itself, the difference between capitalist and non-capitalist states, and indeed the critique of capitalism, outmoded. In other words, as to whether the currently popular thesis in sociology, that Marx is obsolete, is correct. According to this thesis, the world has been so thoroughly determined by an unimaginably-extended technology [*Technik*: technics], that the corresponding social relations which once defined capitalism, the transformation of living labor into commodities and therein the contradiction of classes, is becoming irrelevant, insofar as it has not become an archaic superstition. All this can be related to the unmistakable convergence between the technically most advanced countries, the United States and the Soviet Union. In terms of living-standards and consciousness, class differences have become on the whole far less visible in the Western states in question than in the decades during and after the industrial revolution. The prognoses of class-theory such as immiseration and economic crisis have not been so drastically realized, as one must understand them, if they are not to be completely robbed of their content; one can speak of relative immiseration only in a comic sense. Even if Marx's by no means one-sided law of sinking profit-rate has not been borne out on a system-immanent level, one must concede that capitalism has discovered resources within itself, which have permitted the postponing of economic collapse ad Kalendas Graecus - resources which include the immense increase of the technical potential of society and therein also the consumer goods available to the members of the highly industrialized countries. At the same time the relations of production have shown themselves to be, in view of such technological developments, far more elastic than Marx had suspected.

The criterion of class relations, which empirical research is fond of referring to as "social stratification" [in English], strata divided according to income, life-style, education, are generalizations of the findings of specific individuals. To that extent they may be called subjective. In contrast to this, the more traditional concept of class was objective, meant to be independent of indices, which are garnered out of the immediate life of subjects, however much, by the way, that these express social objectivities. Marxist theory rests on the position of entrepreneurs and workers in the production-process, and ultimately of their control over the means of production. In the

predominant contemporary strains of sociology this conclusion has for the most part been rejected as dogmatic. The controversy needs to be sorted out theoretically, not simply through the presentation of facts, which indeed for their part make numerous contributions to the critique, but which in light of critical theory can also conceal the structure. Even the opponents of dialectics have no wish to delay a theory, which serves to account for sociology's own interests. The controversy is essentially one concerning interpretation - even if it were only the attempt to banish the demand for such in the purgatory of that which is extra-scientific.

A dialectical theory of society concerns itself with structural laws, which condition the facts, in which it manifests itself and from which it is modified. By structural laws we mean tendencies, which more or less stringently follow the historical constitution of the total system. The Marxist models for this were the law of value, the law of accumulation, the law of economic crisis. Dialectical theory did not intend to turn structures into ordered schematas, which could be applied to sociological findings as completely, continually and non-contradictorily as possible; nor systemizations, but rather the procedures and data of scientific cognition of the already-organized system of society. Such a theory ought least of all to withhold facts from itself, to twist them around according to a *thema probandum*. Otherwise it would in fact fall right back into dogmatism and would repeat conceptually what the entrenched authorities of the Eastern bloc have already perpetrated through the instrument of Diamat: freezing into place what, according to its own concept, cannot be otherwise thought than as something which moves. The fetishism of the facts corresponds to one of the objective laws. Dialectics, which has had its fill of the painful experience of such hegemony, does not hegemonize in turn, but criticizes this just as much as the appearance, that the individuated and the concrete already determine the course of the world *hic et nunc* [Latin: here and now]. It's very likely that under the spell of the latter the individuated and the concrete do not even exist yet. Through the word pluralism, utopia is suppressed, as if it were already here; it serves as consolation. That is why however dialectical theory, which critically reflects on itself, may not for its part install itself domestic-style in the medium of the generality. Its intention is precisely to break out of this medium. It too is not immune before the false division of reflective thinking and empirical research. Some time ago a Russian intellectual of considerable influence told me that sociology is a new science in the Soviet Union. He meant of course the empirical kind; that this might have something to do with what in his country is a doctrine of society raised to a state religion was no more apparent to him, than the fact that Marx conducted empirical inquests. Reified consciousness does not end where the concept of reification has a place of honor. The inflated bluster over concepts such as "imperialism" or "monopoly," without taking into consideration what these words factually entail [*Sachverhalten*], and to what extent they are relevant, is as wrong, that is to say irrational, as a mode of conduct which, thanks to its blindly nominalistic conception of the matter at hand [*Sachverhalten*], refuses to consider that concepts such as exchange-society might have their objectivity, revealing a compulsion of the generality behind the matter at hand [*Sachverhalte*], which is by no means always adequately translated into the operational field of the facts of the matter [*Sachverhalte*]. Both are to be opposed; to this extent the theme of the Congress, late capitalism or industrial society, testifies to the methodological intent of self-critique out of freedom.

A simple answer to the question which lies in that thematic, is neither to be expected nor really to be sought after. Alternatives which compel one to opt for one or the other determination, even if only theoretically, are already mandatory situations, modeled after an unfree society and transposed onto the Mind [*Geist*], towards which the latter ought to do what it can to break unfreedom through its tenacious reflection. As completely as the dialectician may refuse to draw a defining line between late capitalism and industrial society, the less can he indulge in the pleasure of a non-committal on-the-one-hand-but-on-the-other-hand. He must guard against simplification, contrary to Brecht's suggestion, precisely because the well-worn commonplace suggests the well-worn response, just as the opposite answer falls so easily from the lips from his opponents.

Whoever does not wish to be hoodwinked by the experience of the preponderance of the structure over the matter at hand [*Sachverhalten*], will not, unlike most of his opponents, devalue contradictions in advance to methodology, to mere conceptual errors and attempt to stamp them out through the harmony of scientific systematics. Instead he will trace them back into the structure, which was antagonistic ever since organized society first emerged, and which remains so, just as the extra-political conflicts and the permanent possibility of a catastrophic war, most recently also the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, crassly demonstrate. This glosses over an alternative thinking, to that unbroken formal-logical non-contradictoriness which projects itself onto that which is to be thought. It is not a question of choosing between either form, according to one's scientific viewpoint or taste, but rather their relationship expresses for its part the contradiction which characterizes the current era, and it befits sociology to articulate this theoretically.

Many prognoses of dialectical theory have a contradictory relationship to one another. Some simply did not fulfill themselves; certain theoretical-analytical categories have lead meanwhile to aporias, which can only be thought out of the world with the utmost artifice. Other predictions, originally closely associated with the former, have been resoundingly confirmed. Even those who do not reduce the meaning of a theory to its prognoses, would not hesitate to ascribe the claim of the dialectical one as partly true and partly false. These divergences require for their part theoretical explanation. That one cannot speak of a proletarian class-consciousness in the leading industrial countries does not necessarily refute, in contrast to the *communis opinio* [prevailing opinion], the existence of classes: class was determined by the position to the means of production, not by the consciousness of its members. There are no lack of plausible reasons for the lack of class-consciousness: that workers are no longer being immiserated, that they were increasing integrated into bourgeois society and its world-views, as compared to the period during and immediately after the industrial revolution, when the industrial proletariat was being recruited from paupers and stood half-extraterritorial to society, could not have been foreseen. Social being does not immediately produce class consciousness. Without the masses, and indeed precisely because of their social integration, having any more control over their social destiny than 120 years ago, they lack not only class solidarity, but also the full consciousness of this, that they are objects and not subjects of social processes, which nevertheless animate them as subjects. Class-consciousness, on which according to Marxist theory the qualitative leap forwards depended, was consequently and at the same time an epiphenomenon. If however no class consciousness emerges over long periods in countries supposedly determined by class relations, for example North America, insofar as it had ever been present there; if the question of the proletariat becomes a puzzle-picture, then quantity rebounds into quality, and the suspicion of a conceptual mythology can only be suppressed by decree, not assuaged by thought. This development is difficult to separate from the central plank of Marxist theory, namely the doctrine of surplus value. This was supposed to explain the relationship of classes and the increase of class antagonisms as something objectively economic. But if the share of living labor, from which all surplus value accordingly flows, sinks, thanks to the extension of technological progress, to a tendential limit-point, then this affects the central plank, the theory of surplus value. The current lack of an objective theory of value is conditioned not merely by what the academy narrowly defines as scholastic economics. It also refers back to the prohibitive difficulty of objectively grounding the construction of classes without the theory of surplus value. Non-economists may find it illuminating, that even the so-called neo-Marxist theories attempt to stop the holes in their treatment of constitutive problems with scraps of subjective economics. The responsibility for this is certainly not merely the weakness of theoretical capability. It's conceivable that contemporary society cannot be contained within a coherent theory. By comparison, Marx had it much easier, when he laid out the fully-fledged system of liberalism as a science. He only needed to ask whether capitalism corresponded in its own dynamic categories to this model, in order to produce, out of the determinate negation of the preexisting theoretical system, a system-like theory in its own right. Meanwhile the market economy has become so honeycombed, that it mocks any

such confrontation. The irrationality of the contemporary social structure hinders its rational development in theory. The perspective that the direction of economic processes is passing into the hands of political power, though it follows from the logical dynamic of the system, is at the same time also one of objective irrationality. This, and not simply the sterile dogmatism of its followers, should help to explain why for a long time no really convincing objective theory of society emerged. Under this aspect the renunciation of such would be no critical advance of the scientific spirit, but an expression of compulsory resignation. The regression of society runs parallel to that of its thinking.

In the meantime we are faced with no less drastic facts, which for their part can be interpreted *without* [Adorno's emphasis] the usage of the key concepts of capitalism only with the utmost violence and caprice. The economic process continues to perpetuate domination over human beings. The objects of such are no longer merely the masses, but also the administrators and their hangers-on. In terms of the traditional theory, they have become largely functions of their own production-apparatus. The much-belabored question of the "managerial revolution" [in English], concerning the supposed transition of domination from the juridical owners to the bureaucracy is correspondingly secondary. Then as now, this process produces and reproduces classes which, though not necessarily in the form of Zola's *Germinal*, at the very least a structure which the anti-socialist Nietzsche anticipated with the expression, all herd and no shepherd. In this, however, was concealed what he did not want to see: the same old social oppression, only now become anonymous. If the theory of immiseration was not borne out of *à la lettre* [to the letter], then it certainly has in the no less frightening sense, that unfreedom, one's dependence on the consciousness of those who serve an uncontrollable apparatus, is spreading universally over humanity. The much-maligned immaturity of the masses is only the reflex of this, this they are as little as ever autonomous masters of their lives; like in mythology, it confronts them as a doom [*Schicksal*: fate, destiny]. Empirical investigations show by the way that even subjectively, according to their reality-principle [*Realitätsbewusstsein*], classes are by no means so leveled out as one at times presumes. Even the theories of imperialism do not become obsolete due to the forcible withdrawal of the great powers from their colonies. The process which they referred to continues in the antagonism of both monstrous power-blocs. The supposedly outmoded doctrine of social antagonisms, including the telos of the final crisis, is being immeasurably trumped by manifestly political ones. Whether and to what extent class relations have been relocated onto those between the leading industrial nations and the much courted-after developing countries, remains to be seen.

In the categories of critical-dialectical theory I would like to suggest as a first and necessarily abstract answer, that contemporary society is above all an industrial society according to the level of its productive *forces* [Adorno's emphasis]. Industrial labor has become the model pattern of society everywhere and across all borders of political systems. It developed itself into a totality due to the fact that modes of procedure, which resemble the industrial ones, are extending by economic necessity into the realms of material production, into administration, the distribution-sphere and that which we call culture. Conversely, society is capitalism in terms of its *relations* of production [Adorno's emphasis]. Human beings are still what they were according to the Marxist analysis of the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century: appendages of machines, not merely in the literal sense as workers, who have to adapt themselves to the constitution of the machines which they serve, but far beyond this and metaphorically, compelled to assume the roles of the social mechanism and to model themselves on such, without reservation, on the level of their most intimate impulses. Production goes on today just as it did before, for the sake of profits. Needs have gone beyond anything Marx could have foreseen in his time, completely becoming the function of the production-apparatus, which they potentially were all along, instead of the reverse. They are totally governed [*gesteuert*: mechanically steered, governed]. To be sure, even within this transformation, as pinned-down and adapted to the interests of the apparatus as it is, the needs of human beings are smuggled in, something which the

apparatus never fails to direct popular attention to. But the use-value side of commodities has in the meantime been shorn of their last “naturally-grown” or self-apparent truth [*Selbstverstaendlichkeit*: casualness, self-evidence]. Not only are needs satisfied purely indirectly, by means of exchange-values, but within the relevant economic sectors produced by the profit-motive, and thus at the cost of the objective needs of the consumers, namely those for adequate housing, and completely so in terms of the education and information over the processes which most affect them. In the realm of necessities not directly connected with basic living standards, use-values as such are tending to dissolve or be exhausted; a phenomenon which appears in empirical sociology under termini such as status symbols and prestige, without really being objectively grasped by such. The highly industrialized countries of the Earth, so long as, in spite of Keynes, some renewed economic natural catastrophe does not occur, have learned to conceal the more visible forms of poverty, albeit not to the extent that the thesis of the “affluent society” [in English] would have it. The bane, however, which the system exerts over human beings, has only become stronger due to this integration, insofar as such comparisons can be reasonably made. It is undeniable that the increasing satisfaction of material needs, in spite of their distortion by the apparatus, hints incomparably more concretely to the possibility of a life without necessity. Even in the poorest countries, no-one need hunger anymore. That the envelope before the consciousness of the possible has nonetheless become thin indeed, is supported by the panic-stricken fright created by any sort of social enlightenment which is not broadcast by the official communication systems. What Marx and Engels, who strove for a truly humane organization of society, denounced as utopian for merely sabotaging such an organization, has become a palpable reality. Nowadays the critique of utopia has sunk into the common ideological stockpile, while at the same time the triumph of technical productivity strives to maintain the illusion that utopia, incompatible with the relations of production, has already been realized within its realm. But the contradictions in their new, international-political quality - the arms race of East and West - make that which is possible at the same time impossible.

To see through all this demands, indeed, that one does not cast the blame on what critique has time and again been side-tracked by, namely technics, that is to say the productive-forces, thereby indulging in a kind of theoretical machine-breaking on an expanded level. Technics is not the disaster, but rather its intertwining with the social relations, in which it is entangled. One need only recall how the conscious application of the profit-motive and power-motive [*Herrschaftsinteresse*: “power-interest,” used here in the sense of factory discipline] canalizes technical development: they fatally harmonize, in the meantime, with the necessity of supervision. It is not for nothing that the invention of means of destruction has become the prototype of the new quality of technics. By contrast, the potential of those which distance themselves from domination, centralization, and violence against nature, and which would also probably permit the healing of much of what is literally and figuratively is damaged by technics, is left to die on the vine.

Contemporary society exhibits, in spite of all assertions to the contrary, as its dynamism and increase of production, static aspects. These include the relations of production. These are no longer merely the property of the owner, but of the administration, all the way to the role of the state as total capitalist. To the extent that its rationalization converges with technical rationality, a.k.a. the productive forces, they’ve undeniably become more flexible. This has created the illusion that the universal interest has its ideal as the status quo and universal employment, not the liberation of heteronomous work. But this condition, from an external political position quite labile, is a merely temporary balance, the result of forces, whose tension threatens to disrupt it. Inside the dominant relations of production, humanity is virtually its own reserve army of labor and is fed through as such. Marx’s expectation, that the primacy of the productive forces was certain to explode the relations of production, was all too optimistic. To that extent Marx remained, as the sworn enemy of German idealism, true to its affirmative construction of history. Trusting in the world-spirit benefited the justification of later versions of that world-order which, according to the eleventh thesis on

Feuerbach, was to have been changed. The relations of production have out of sheer self-preservation continued to subjugate the unbound forces of production, through piecework and particular measures. The signature of the epoch is the preponderance of the relations of production over the productive forces, which have nonetheless mocked these relations for some time. That the extended arm of humanity can reach to distant and empty planets, but that it cannot create peace on Earth, highlights the absurdity, towards which the social dialectic is moving. That things happened otherwise than was hoped for is not least due to the fact that the society has ingested what Veblen called the "underlying population." But the only ones who could wish that this be undone, are those who put the happiness of the abstract totality over that of living individual beings. This development depends for its part once again on that of the productive forces. It was never identical, though, with its primacy over the relations of production. This was never imagined as something mechanical. Its realization had for its precondition the spontaneity of those who were interested in the transformation of the relations, and their number has surpassed the actual industrial proletariat several times over. Objective interest and subjective spontaneity yawn wide from each other; these wither under the disproportionate hegemony of the existent. The sentence of Marx, that theory, too, becomes a genuine force as soon as it seizes the masses, has been turned flagrantly upside down by the course of the world. If the constitution of the world, through planned measures or automatically, hinders the simplest cognition and experience of the most threatening events and indispensable critical ideas and theorems by means of the culture- and consciousness-industries; if it hamstring, far beyond this, even the basic capacity to imagine the world differently than it overwhelmingly appears to be to those who constitute this world, then these locked-up and manipulated intellectual and spiritual conditions become indeed a genuine power, that of repression, just what its opposite, the emancipated Mind [Geist: mind, spirit, intellect], once wished to combat.

By contrast, the terminus industrial society suggests, to a certain degree, that it's a question of the technocratic moment in Marx, which this term would like to show the way out of the world, immediately in itself; as if the essence of society followed the level of the productive forces in lockstep, independent of its social conditions. It's astonishing, how rarely the sociological establishment actually considers this, how rarely it is analyzed. The best part, which by no means needs to be the best, is forgotten, namely the totality, or in Hegel's words the all-penetrating ether of society. This however is anything but ethereal, but on the contrary an *ens realissimum* [Latin: that which is real, materially existent]. Insofar as it is abstractly veiled, the fault of its abstraction is not to be blamed on a solipsistic and reality-distant thinking, but on the exchange-relationships, the objective abstractions, which belongs to the social life-process. The power of that abstraction over humanity is far more corporeal than that of any single institution, which silently constitutes itself in advance according to the scheme of things and beats itself into human beings. The powerlessness which the individual experiences in the face of the totality is the most drastic expression of this. Admittedly in sociology the leading social relations realize themselves in the social conditions of production, in accordance with their logical-extensive classificatory nature, far less palpably than in that concrete generality. They become neutralized into concepts of power or social control. In such categories, the point of the spike vanishes and thereby, one would like to say, that which is actually social in society, its structure. It is one of the tasks of today's sociological congress, to work towards changing this.

It is least of all permissible for dialectical theory to simply set up the productive forces and relations of production as polar opposites. They are delimited by each another, each contains the other in itself. Exactly this leads to the bland recurrence of the productive forces, where the relations of production have the upper hand. The productive forces are, more than ever before, mediated through the relations of production; so completely perhaps, that these appear exactly for that reason as their essence; they have completely become a second nature. Their responsibility lies in this, that in an insane contradiction to what is possible, human beings across great stretches of the Earth live

in misery. Even where an abundance of goods is the norm, this stands as if under a curse. The necessity which extends deep into the illusionary appearance [Schein], infects goods with its illusionary character. Objectively true and false needs can indeed be differentiated, though nowhere in the world ought to be signed over to bureaucratic regimentation for this reason. In needs exist always what is good and what is bad in the entire society; they may be the next best thing to market surveys, but they are not in the administered world in themselves the first thing. To judge between true and false consciousness would, according to the insight into the structure of society, require that of all its mediations. That which is fictitious, which distorts all satiation of necessities nowadays, is undoubtedly perceived unconsciously; this contributes significantly to the contemporary discontent in culture. More important than even the almost impenetrable quid pro quo of need, satisfaction and profit- or power-motive is the unrelieved and continuing threat of one need, on which all others depend on, the motive of simple survival. Delimited to a horizon in which at any moment the bomb can fall, even the most riotous display of consumer goods contains an element of self-mockery. The international antagonisms which, however, for the first time are building to a truly total war, stand in flagrant context with the relations of production, in the most literal sense imaginable. The threat of one catastrophe is displaced by the catastrophe of the other. The relations of production could scarcely maintain themselves without the apocalyptic earthquake of renewed economic crises as tenaciously as they do, if an inordinate share of the social product, which would otherwise be unsaleable, were not dedicated to the production of the means of destruction. In the Soviet Union something similar is at work, despite the removal of the market economy. The economic reasons for this are obvious: the requirement for speedy increases in production in the underdeveloped lands necessitates tight, dictatorial administration. Out of the unfettering of the forces of production emerged renewed fetters, those of the relations of production: production became its own end and hindered the purpose of such, i.e. undiminished and fully-realized freedom. Under both systems, the capitalist concept of socially essential work is reduced to a satanic parody: in the marketplace it is based on profit, never on self-evident utility for human beings themselves or their happiness. Such domination of the relations of production over human beings requires above all the fully-matured state of development of the forces of production. While both need to be differentiated, those who wish to grasp the merest part of the baleful spell cast on the situation must constantly use one as a means of understanding the other. The overproduction which drives that expansion, through which the apparently subjective need is received and substituted for, is spit out from a technical apparatus which has come so far towards realizing itself, that it has become, under a certain volume of production, irrational - that is, unprofitable; it is necessarily realized by the relations of production. It is solely from the viewpoint of total annihilation that the relations of production have not fettered the forces of production. The dirigiste methods, however, with which in spite of everything the masses are kept in line, presuppose a kind of concentration and centralization which has not only an economic side but also a technological one, as the mass-media go to show; i.e. that it has become possible to homogenize the consciousness of countless individuals from just a few points, through the selection and presentation of news and commentary.

The power of the relations of production, which were not overthrown, is greater than ever, and yet at the same time they are, as objectively anachronistic, everywhere diseased, damaged, riddled with holes. They do not function by themselves. Economic interventionism is not, as the older liberal school thought, something cobbled together from outside the system, but is rather system-immanent, the embodiment of self-defense; nothing could illuminate the category of dialectics with greater clarity. This is analogous to what became of the erstwhile Hegelian philosophy of law, wherein bourgeois ideology and the dialectic of bourgeois society are so deeply interwoven, in that the state, presumably intervening from beyond the reach of society's power-struggles, had to be conjured up out of the immanent dialectic of society in order to damper and police the antagonisms of such, lest society, following Hegel's insight, disintegrate. The invasion of that which is not system-immanent is at the same time also a piece of immanent dialectics, just as, on the opposite end of the

spectrum, Marx thought of the overthrow of the relations of production as something compelled by the course of history, and nevertheless as something to be realized outside the closure of the system, as a qualitatively different action. If one argued, on the grounds of interventionism and from the standpoint of large-scale planning, that late capitalism [consumer capitalism] has moved beyond the anarchy of commodity production and is therefore no longer really capitalism, the response must be that the social destiny of the particular within this latter is more contingent than ever before. The model of capitalism never applied so purely as its liberal apologists wished to think. It was already in Marx's day a critique of ideology, which was supposed to reveal how little the concept which capitalist society had of itself had to do with reality. Not the least of the ironies of this critical motif is that liberalism, which even in its heyday was nothing of the sort, has today been refunctionalized in support of the thesis that capitalism is actually not what it is. This, too, points to a transformation. What since time immemorial in capitalist society was, in relation to free and fair exchange, and indeed by consequence of its own implications, irrational (that is to say, unfree and unjust) has increased to the point that its model has collapsed. Exactly this has become a condition, whose integration has turned into the prototype of disintegration, which is appraised as an asset. That which is alien to the system reveals itself to be the inner essence of the system, all the way into its political tendencies. In interventionism the power of resistance of the system has confirmed itself, indirectly in the theory of economic crisis; the transition to domination independent of market forces is its telos. The catchphrase of the "prefab society" is unwitting testament to this. Such a reconfiguration of liberal capitalism has its correlate in the reconfiguration of consciousness, a regression of human beings behind the objective possibility, which today would be open to them. Human beings are sacrificing the characteristics which they no longer need and which only hinder them; the kernel of individuation is beginning to come apart. It's only in recent times that signs of a counter-tendency are becoming visible in various groups of young people: resistance against blind adjustment, freedom for rationally chosen goals, disgust before the world of swindles and illusions, meditations on the possibility of transformation. Whether the socially ever-increasing drive towards destruction triumphs in spite of this, only time will tell. Subjective regression favors once again the regression of the system. To borrow a phrase which Merton employed in a somewhat different context, because it became dysfunctional, the consciousness of the masses flattened out the system, such that it increasingly divested itself [*sich entauesern*: to relinquish, divest oneself of; also to conceptually disclose, to realize] of that rationality of the fixed, identical ego, which was still implicit in the idea of a functional society.

That the forces of production and the relations of production are one nowadays, and that one could immediately construe society from the standpoint of the productive forces alone, says that the current society is socially necessary appearance. It is socially necessary because in fact previously separated moments of the social process, which living human beings incarnate, are being brought into a kind of overall equivalence. Material production, distribution, consumption are administered in common. Their borders, which once separated from inside the total process of externally separated spheres, and thereby respected that which was qualitatively different, are melting away. Everything is one. The totality of the process of mediation, in truth that of the exchange-principle, produces a second and deceptive immediacy. It makes it possible for that which is separate and antagonistic to be, against its own appearance, forgotten or to be repressed from consciousness. This consciousness of society is however an illusion, because it represents the consequences of technological and organizational homogenization, but nonetheless fails to see that this homogenization is not truly rational, but remains itself subordinated itself to a blind, irrational nomothetism [*Gesetzmaessigkeit*: lawfulness, juridicality]. No truly total subject of society yet exists. The mere appearance ought to be formulated as follows, that everything socially existent today is so thoroughly mediated, that even the moment of mediation is itself distorted by the totality. There is no standpoint outside of the whole affair which can be referred to, from which the ghost could be called by its name; the lever can be deployed only by means of its own incoherence. That is what



Horkheimer and I described decades ago as the concept of the technological veil. The false identity between the constitution of the world and its inhabitants through the total expansion of technics is leading in the direction of the confirmation of the relations of production, whose true beneficiaries one searches for in vain, just as proletarians have become invisible. The self-realization of the system in relation to everyone, even functionaries, has reached a limit. It has turned into that fatality, which finds its expression in the current situation, to use Freud's words, in free-floating angst; free-floating, because it can no longer be fixed on living beings, people or classes. The only relationships ultimately realized between people, however, are those buried under the relations of production. This is why the overwhelming organization of things remains at the same time its own ideology, virtually powerless. As impenetrable as the bane [Bann] is, it's only a spell [Bann]. If sociology is to do more than just furnish welcome information to agents and interests, by fulfilling those tasks for which it was once conceived, then it is up to it, with means which do not themselves fall prey to the universal character of the fetish, to ensure, be it to ever so modest an extent, that the spell dissolves itself.

### **Theodor Adorno**

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### **P.S.**

\* <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/adorno/1968/late-capitalism.htm>

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