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Critical Theory in Revolt:
Angela Davis, Rudi Dutschke, Hans-Jürgen Krah and the Frankfurt School, 1964-1972

Cecilia Sebastian
2022

This dissertation charts an alternative history of Frankfurt School Critical Theory through its critical reception and appropriation by students involved in anti-authoritarian, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist social movements in the United States and West Germany in the 1960s and 1970s. There, many student readers of the tradition, including those named in the title, found opportunities to refine and critique their mentors’ ideas about capitalism and the state, racism and fascism, technology and mass culture, and the nexus of theory and praxis. They resisted the domestication of Critical Theory into the purely academic discourse of philosophy, sociology, and political theory, and instead sought to recover and extend its revolutionary origins in order to draw lessons for the political struggles in which they found themselves involved: for decolonization and international solidarity, for peace in Vietnam, for liberation from the affluent society and from monopoly capitalism, and for an autonomous university that might resist the capture of critical knowledge by state and corporate power.

This dissertation reads these students as a distinct generation of Frankfurt School theorists, whose work is characterized by a reciprocal relationship between the content of their reception and the form of their political activism. In reevaluating the students’ radical ideas and political activities as genuine contributions to the tradition, it recovers an iteration of Critical Theory that is, first, transatlantic in scope; second, more attentive to the ways in which gender, race, and nation shape class stratification on global and local scales; and, third, committed to combatting their combined and uneven material manifestations through political action and organization.
Chapter 1 reads Rudi Dutschke’s articulation of the historical nexus of anticolonial liberation struggles and international solidarity movements as a revolutionary correlate for Theodor Adorno’s theory of non-identity. Its aim is to equip the latter to better function as a framework for conceptualizing universal material freedom without curtailing the legitimacy of particularist liberation movements. Chapter 2 considers how a cohort of students in Frankfurt, including Angela Davis and Hans-Jürgen Krahl, retooled Max Horkheimer’s early critique of fascism and state capitalism into an urgent critique of the U.S. war in Vietnam and of imperialism and its state gatekeepers more broadly. It further tracks how Krahl sought to articulate a theory of organization on the terms of Horkheimer’s critique that would be capable of withstanding bureaucratic capture in advanced capitalist society. Chapter 3 charts a line of continuity from Davis’s dissertation project on Kantian political philosophy to her subsequent formulation of prison abolition. Specifically, it recovers Davis’s affinity to a Frankfurt School reading of the latent dialectics in Kantian philosophy in order to show how prison abolition implicitly mobilizes a philosophical defense of human agency in the face of reified social structures, such as racism and the state. Chapter 4 reads together two student-led campaigns for university reform in Frankfurt and San Diego, whose respective organizers included Krahl and Davis. By placing these two campaigns in conversation, it locates a critique of the role of the university in furthering capital accumulation by entrenching the racial stratification of late capitalist society. In further documenting how the Spartacus Seminar (Frankfurt) and Lumumba-Zapata College (San Diego) each aimed at establishing accredited infrastructural conditions that would facilitate non-coercive forms of sociality and study, it sketches a dual power theory of organization that is absent in the original Frankfurt School corpus.
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A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of
Yale University
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Cecilia Sebastian

Dissertation Directors:
Jennifer Allen and Kirk Wetters

May 2022
Acknowledgements

The research for this dissertation was made possible by the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition and the staff at the Archivzentrum in Frankfurt, the Schlesinger Library at Harvard, UCSD’s Special Collections and Archives, and Yale’s Beinecke and Sterling Libraries. I thank Jenni Allen and Kirk Wetters for stewarding this project, and Victoria Baena, Max Chaoulideer, Tim Kreiner, Leigh Claire LaBerge, Lisa Lowe, Ulrich Plass, Nica Siegel, and members of the German colloquium for their comments on chapter drafts. Much of my knowledge of the discourses that inform this study was fostered in the working groups for Black Political Thought, Left Literary Studies, and Marxism and Culture, and in Karuna Mantena’s Theories of Political Action seminar in Fall 2018. Finally, I am grateful to students enrolled in Wesleyan’s Center for Prison Education and the Yale Prison Education Initiative and on campus at Albertus Magnus, Wesleyan, and Yale for their inspiration and for keeping me on my toes.
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Introduction

The Other Third Generation

Speaking in 2005 of her professor, mentor, and friend Herbert Marcuse, Angela Davis credited Marcuse with having taught her that she “did not have to choose between a career as an academic and a political vocation that entailed making interventions around concrete social issues.” Marcuse’s engagement in and with the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, Davis explained, had demonstrated to her that it was possible to be both a critical theorist and a revolutionary at the same time.¹

One event in particular served to underscore Davis’s assessment. In the summer of 1967, Marcuse had headlined the Dialectics of Liberation Congress in London alongside the Black nationalists Michael X and Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), the Beat poet Allen Ginsberg, and the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing. Davis had been in the audience with some of her comrades from Frankfurt. In fact, as one of their group, Lothar Menne, later recalled, they had funded their trip by producing a pirate edition of a work by Max Horkheimer, which they had transcribed and mimeographed in order to sell copies at SDS events in West Germany.² In London, they stayed with the radical English historian Robin Blackburn.³ Davis described the Congress in London as at once “a scholarly conference, an assembly of community activists and a ‘happening’—what we

¹ Davis, “Marcuse’s Legacies,” xi.
² Nadelson, Who Is Angela Davis?, 118. Based on Detlev Claussen’s compatible recollection, the pirated edition in question likely consisted of “Authoritarian State” and “Reason and Self-Preservation,” better known by the title “The End of Reason” (Claussen, “Kann Kritische Theorie vererbt werden?,” 272). Elsewhere, Davis has recalled having participated in making a pirate edition of Adorno and Horkheimer’s Dialectic of Enlightenment (Davis and Lowe, “Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 317). This Frankfurt cohort’s pirating initiatives are discussed further in chapter 2.
³ Nadelson, Who Is Angela Davis?, 118.
now call performance art.” Today, she added, it would “challenge our notions of community.” But Marcuse, she remembered, “felt very much at home in this environment, always pushing himself to communicate across the divides that usually define the language we use—across academic disciplines and across boundaries of race, class, culture and nation.” His thought, Davis concluded, “revealed how deeply he himself was influenced by the movements of his time and how his engagement with those movements revitalized his thought.”

More so than most, Davis has spent her life at the crossroads of this same chiasmus of critical theory and revolutionary practice, insisting on the urgency and viability of furthering their dialectical relationship. That she drew inspiration from Marcuse is a testament to his legacy, yet in context, it is not so surprising. As the events leading up to the 1967 Congress indicate, Davis wasn’t the only student to be inspired by Marcuse, nor was Marcuse the only member of the Frankfurt School from whom leftwing students in Davis’s generation drew motivation in their bid to transform the global capitalist status quo. Albeit more narrowly and reluctantly so than Marcuse, fellow Frankfurt School representatives Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer also emerged in the 1960s as intellectual forebears to pockets of the New Left. In the hands of their students, theirs became a movement-based Critical Theory, at once more oriented towards political action and organization and more attentive to anti-colonial, anti-racist, and radical feminist thought.

*Critical Theory in Revolt* charts an alternative history of Frankfurt School Critical Theory through its reception by students involved in the social movements of the 1960s and early 1970s

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4 Davis, “Marcuse’s Legacies,” xii.

5 Throughout, I use “Critical Theory” to refer to the specific canon or tradition of interdisciplinary social theory associated with members of the Frankfurt School and taken up by their immediate students in the 1960s. I use lowercase “critical theory” to refer more capaciously to any form of political, social or cultural thought that aims at social transformation. Quotations that explicitly mention “critical theory” – whether capitalized or lowercased – remain in the original.
in the United States and West Germany. There, many leftwing student readers of the tradition found opportunities to refine and critique their mentors’ ideas about capitalism and the state, racism and fascism, technology and mass culture, and the nexus of theory and praxis. This book reads these students as a generation of Frankfurt School theorists, whose critical appropriation of the tradition bore common currents, including some that were developed collaboratively. The above example of Davis and Menne pirating an edition of an early essay by Horkheimer in order to attend a conference in London with Marcuse offers one case in point. Subsequent chapters will recover further moments of transatlantic collaboration and comradeship between the years of 1964 and 1972.

In retracing this history, this dissertation queries conventional understandings of Critical Theory as a purely academic discourse of philosophy, sociology, political theory, and cultural criticism. I draw the title of this introduction, “The Other Third Generation,” from the standard periodization of the Frankfurt School into second and third generations represented by the German philosophers Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, respectively. By returning to the 1960s to chart an alternative lineage, I recover an iteration of Critical Theory that is characterized by a reciprocal relationship between the content of its exponents’ critique and the form of their political activism. For scholarship, then, the hope is that this earlier iteration may better transcend disciplinary boundaries that separate theory from history and treat categories of race, class, gender, and nation in isolation.

**A Verdict of History?**

In the annals of Frankfurt School intellectual history, histories of the West German sixties, histories of the Left, and leftwing social theory, there is a well-known anecdote about the Frankfurt
School’s relationship to political practice. It centers the afternoon of January 31, 1969, when seventy-six students at the University of Frankfurt occupied a seminar room at the Institute for Social Research, the institutional home of the Frankfurt School. After a stand-off that lasted an hour and a half, Theodor Adorno phoned the police, who arrested the students, loaded them onto a bus, and took them into custody. Hans-Jürgen Krahl, an advisee of Adorno who had spearheaded the occupation, was heard shouting “Scheißkritische Theoretiker!” at Adorno and his codirector, Ludwig von Friedeburg, as he was forcibly led away. Krahl was subsequently charged with breaking and entering, for which he later stood trial and was sentenced to three months in prison.

This January 1969 altercation has been heralded by Frankfurt School adherents and critics alike as emblematic of a conclusive rupture in the relationship between Critical Theory, as embodied by Adorno, and political practice, as embodied by his students. Bernd Leineweber, a student of the era, puts it this way: “Ever since this event, ‘bourgeois critique’ and ‘proletarian struggle’ have marched separately.” Marxist intellectual historian Heinz Lubacz concurs: “And with that, the divorce of critical theory from revolutionary practice was now final. Since then critical theory has remained, at least in Germany, an academic enterprise.” More recently, fellow intellectual historian Peter Gordon has offered a triumphant spin on the same narration: “This story has been told many times and has been embroidered with such symbolism that it too easily appears as a verdict of history, as if all that Adorno had come to represent were now obsolete. Fifty years

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7 Kraushaar, Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, I:398.
8 Leineweber, “Entsetzen und Besetzen: Zur Dialektik der Aufklärung in der Studentenbewegung,” 99. The quotation marks are references to the aphorism by Horkheimer that students graffitied on the outside of the building: “Bourgeois criticism of the proletarian struggle is a logical impossibility.”
9 “Radical Philosophers: The Frankfurt School,” radio interview from 1974, a copy of which is available in the Herbert Marcuse Nachlass, Na 3, 318.
later, however, the bitter memory of those final months has faded, and Adorno’s place in the canon of European philosophy seems secure.”

If Gordon is sanguine about this reputation, prison abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore supplies a scathing general assessment: “I am not of the Frankfurt School,” reads the memorable opening line of a 1993 article by Gilmore. “One must live a life of relative privilege these days to be so dour about domination, so suspicious of resistance, so enchained by commodification, so helpless before the ideological state apparatuses to conclude there’s no conceivable end to late capitalism’s daily sacrifice of human life to the singular freedom of the market.”

In affirmation, criticism, and lament, these commentaries substantiate the reputation of the Frankfurt School as one that, by 1969 at the latest, had abandoned its programmatic commitment to advance the truth contained in its critical concepts “unbendingly,” as Max Horkheimer had once insisted in “On the Problem of Truth.” In this 1935 essay, Horkheimer had stated confidently that “human beings who possess [the truth] […] apply it and carry it through, act according to it, and bring it to power against the resistance of reactionary, narrow, one-sided points of view.” Possessing the truth meant resisting the temptation to feel secure in one’s possession of it. Instead, it required an ongoing practical effort to probe, challenge, and correct all truths held dear: “The process of cognition includes real-historical will and action just as much as it does learning from experience and intellectual comprehension. The latter cannot progress without the former.”

Read against the historical backdrop of Horkheimer’s dialectical fighting words from his early years as

10 Gordon, “The Utopian Promise of Adorno’s ‘Open Thinking,’ Fifty Years On.”
11 Gilmore, “Public Enemies and Private Intellectuals: Apartheid USA,” 69. For still another memorable expression of the Frankfurt School’s apparent abandonment of revolutionary struggle, see Georg Lukács’s 1962 introduction to The Theory of the Novel, in which he described Adorno and his colleagues as having taken up resident in the “Grand Hotel Abyss” (The Theory of the Novel, 22).
the Institute’s director, the events surrounding the occupation of the Institute certainly looked as if the now safely tenured and widely revered professors of Critical Theory were comfortably sitting on their lessons “learned from experience and intellectual comprehension,” but no longer possessed the “real historical will and action” necessary to render these dialectical. Adorno’s decision to call in law enforcement in a moment of real or imagined danger suggested his desertion of the Frankfurt School’s early embrace of emancipatory struggles as inevitably fraught with contradiction.

In this dissertation, I understand the theory-praxis relation to be one of the most germinal seams of inquiry within the tradition of Critical Theory, on which most others converge. At the same time, I hope to overcome the specter of a hard theory-praxis split in the late 1960s by mapping an alternative lineage of the Frankfurt School through the very fraught historical contradictions that defined that decade’s theoretical debates on the subject in the first place. Doing so requires reframing the dominant narrative that ends in the rupturous occupation of the Institute on two counts. The first of these is to complicate the bifurcation of “theory” as the domain of the professors and “praxis” as the domain of students and agitators. This neat simplification has long enabled scholars to treat Critical Theory’s engaged student readers in the 1960s as part of the historical backdrop to an exciting theoretical debate that took place among the established members of the tradition: Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas.13 When students have been taken seriously as the latter’s primary interlocutors, the stakes of their intervention have often been treated as part of the tradition’s past legacy, as if what students had to say in the 1960s

13 For articles that prioritize the theoretical differences between the mentors over students’ actual intervention, see Abromeit, “The Limits of Praxis,” and Duford, “‘Who is a Negator of History?’ Revisiting the Debate over Left Fascism 50 Years after 1968.” For histories that do the same, see Jeffries, Grand Hotel Abyss, ch. 16, and Walter-Busch, Geschichte der Frankfurter Schule, 218-25.
remains dated in ways that, for example, Adorno’s cultural criticism is not. More often, the student-professor conflict has been evaluated on the terms of whether the students “correctly” understood and applied the theory in the first place, thereby recycling older critiques of Adorno and Habermas. Intentionally or not, all of these tendencies function to delegitimize the students’ role in the Frankfurt School tradition. In this dissertation, I argue in reverse: I accept students’ thought and practice as genuine contributions and seek to evaluate Critical Theory from their vantage.

Secondly, this thesis departs from the domestic lens through which both the Frankfurt School tradition and the site of much of its overtly political engagement, the West German student movement, have long been read. Instead, I draw evidence and inspiration from recent critical scholarship in both of these areas that have recovered their respective transnational and international coordinates. On the Frankfurt School, for example, intellectual historians Eric Oberle and Thomas Wheatland have chipped away at the myth that the prolific intellectual output of the Institute’s years in exile was a consequence of its “splendid isolation.” Their work demonstrates instead just how extensively American culture, politics, social research, and race relations shaped some of the Institute’s best known writings. Building on these studies, I argue that, in the 1960s, the transatlantic reputation of the Institute, together with its embodiment of a “living connection”

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14 See Demirovic, Der nonkonformistische Intellektuelle, ch. 7, and Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, ch. 8. This is also the sentiment of Gordon’s “The Utopian Promise of Adorno’s ‘Open Thinking,’ Fifty Years On,” quoted above.
17 Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 2.
to a more revolutionary German past, not only buttressed its appeal among politically active, internationally oriented students; it also underwrote its continuation as a specifically transatlantic tradition that endures into the present.

On the West German sixties, meanwhile, recent histories by Timothy Scott Brown, Maria Höhn, Jennifer Ruth Hosek, Martin Klimke, and Quinn Slobodian have helped to restore the West German scene to a vibrant international context of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist struggle, retracing often obscured connections between domestic actors and Black and Third World liberation struggles. This dissertation contributes to this bourgeoning area of scholarship while also challenging an emerging narrative that reads the influence of Critical Theory on the West German student movement as overblown at the expense of the movement’s internationalist and other impulses. While I recognize that there were tensions between the established Frankfurt School tradition, as represented Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas, and revolutionary internationalism, as voiced by their students, I read these tensions dialectically, demonstrating how their encounter in the space of the West German student movement proved germinative for Critical Theory. By recovering students’ attempts to fuse the insights of their mentors’ critique of advanced industrial society with the theoretical and practical forays made by Third World revolutionaries, I track the emergence of an iteration of Critical Theory that is, first, more international in scope; second, more attentive to the ways in which gender, race, and nation shape class stratification on global and local scales; and, third, committed to combatting their combined and uneven material manifestations through political action and organization.

20 See Brown, West Germany and the Global Sixties; Höhn and Klimke, A Breath of Freedom; Hosek, Sun, Sex, and Socialism; Klimke, The Other Alliance; Slobodian, Foreign Front; and Slobodian (ed.), Comrades of Color.

This Alternative History’s Roadmap

Rethinking the personification of the Frankfurt School and recalibrating its Germanophile lens accomplishes two things concretely: it expands the cast of characters belonging to the tradition, and it expands the geographic locus of their dialogue. The story told here starts in West Germany, and it ends in Southern California. It has three primary protagonists: Angela Davis, Rudi Dutschke, and Hans-Jürgen Krahl. 

If eclectic on the surface, this grouping also has historical coordinates. For instance, Davis and Krahl were roommates and intellectual interlocutors in Frankfurt between the years 1965 and 1967, while Dutschke and Krahl were frequent collaborators between 1966 and 1968, spearheading the “antiauthoritarian turn” within the Socialist German Student League (SDS) with which the West German sixties have become synonymous. While for their part Davis and Dutschke likely only crossed paths twice in Frankfurt and narrowly missed each other a third time in San Diego, they remained attentive to one another’s biographies and politics.22 As recently as 2012, Davis has spoken of the continued relevance of Dutschke’s thought for emergent social movements like Occupy.23 

What further binds Davis, Dutschke, and Krahl together in addition to the leadership roles each occupied in the social movements of the 1960s are the ways in which the conventual intellectual history of the Frankfurt School, as articulated by Martin Jay, Rolf Wiggershaus, and

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22 I refer to the SDS conference on Vietnam held in Frankfurt in May 1966 and to an antiwar protest, also in Frankfurt, that took place on February 11, 1967, at which both Davis and Dutschke were present. Subsequently, Dutschke’s tentative plans to relocate to San Diego towards the end of the decade fell through, not least because rumor of it sparked an anticommmunist backlash in the San Diego community. Additionally, for Davis on Dutschke, see Davis Angela Davis, 143. For Dutschke on Davis, see Dutschke, “Brief an Herbert Marcuse,” rpt. in Kraushaar, Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, II:730.
...tends to locate all three in its margins. Of the three, Krahl alone is regularly tied to the history and legacy of the Frankfurt School on account of his having spearheaded the rupturous occupation of the Institute. Nevertheless, his role in that event and others has not always been conducive to the critical perusal of his political and philosophical thought. Such perusal is made all the more challenging by the fact that, in his lifetime, Krahl wrote very little and published even less. He died in a car crash in 1970 at the age of twenty-seven. As a tribute, his comrades pieced together a posthumous collection of his writings, many of which remain abstract, incomplete, and historically specific to the internal problems of the SDS. This work builds on a handful of attempts to canonize his work as integral to the Frankfurt School tradition, while also positioning Krahl’s critique within a broader historical setting.

Dutschke’s work, by comparison, has enjoyed significant academic reception on account of his place of prominence within German cultural memory as the voice and face of the SDS. Yet while his close personal and intellectual proximity to Marcuse is well remarked by historians and biographers, his relationship to the rest of the Frankfurt School tradition has yet to be taken up in a systematic fashion. Moreover, like Krahl, whose death became inextricable from the demise of...
the SDS insofar as its remaining delegates voted to dissolve the organization at his funeral, the assassination attempt on Dutschke’s life in 1968 has sometimes functioned to timestamp Dutschke’s intellectual and political work as historical ephemera. This work hopes to facilitate instead his reception as an enduring critic of global capitalism and theorist of political action.

Like Dutschke and Krahl, Davis’s reputation is intrinsically linked to the sixties. In her case, her persecution and incarceration by the Nixon administration on account of her Communist Party membership and involvement in the Black freedom struggle led to a successful, multi-millions strong international campaign for her release in 1972, for which she remains globally well known. Unlike Dutschke and Krahl, however, Davis’s reputation also extends deep into the present. She continues to figure prominently in the multigenerational Black freedom struggle in the United States, while her resolutely internationalist and anti-capitalist commitments have secured her place in what remains of the international Left, with focal points in places like Brazil and Palestine. Her writings have thus retained a politically engaged audience, while her long career in the university, where she has helped to pioneer area studies in black radical feminism and prison abolition, has made her a frequent interlocutor for many disciplines. Given this range and reputation, it is perhaps not surprising that Davis’s Frankfurt School connection remains one of the least researched aspects her biography and her thought. My own research builds on recent forays in this direction, while locating Davis’s reception of Critical Theory in conversation with that of her West German peers.

For an excellent article on Davis’s travels and studies in the 1960s, which centers her Frankfurt School connection, see Young, “Angela Y. Davis and U.S. Third World Left Theory and Praxis.” For the connection between Davis’s writings on prison abolition and Georg Rusche’s and Otto Kirchheimer’s pathbreaking study Punishment and Social Structure (1939), which was the first English-language publication of the Institute for Social Research, see Mendieta, “The Prison Contract and Surplus Punishment: Angela Y. Davis’s Abolitionism.” For two studies linking Davis’s theoretical approach to Marcuse’s, see Lamas, “Angela Y. Davis,” and Farr et al., “Critical Refusals in Theory and Practice: The Radical Praxis of Herbert Marcuse and Angela Davis.” For a reading of Davis’s 1969 Hegel lectures as an expression of a “negative dialectic,” see Thompson, Phenomenal Blackness, ch. 5.
The central argument put forward here is that Davis, Dutschke, and Krahl represent a generation of Critical Theory whose work has been marginalized within the dominant history of the Frankfurt School in order to secure the latter’s reputation as an academic brand and enterprise absent a necessary relationship to contemporaneous political struggle. There is more to say shortly about the emergence and endurance of this reputation. But first, it is worth sketching the contours of the counter-history told in these pages in order to make a strong case for the existence and legitimacy of an alternative lineage. As documented here, this other generation very much emerged under the wing of Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse. Yet while its members were receptive to much of the original circle’s interwar theorizing about the interrelations between capitalism and the state, racism and fascism, technology and mass culture, and, most importantly, theory and praxis, they also recognized that some of these theories were less well suited to the task of understanding their own historical present, as shaped by U.S. and European neocolonial ventures in what revolutionaries then called the Third World, as well as by an emergent anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist international opposition among students, racialized minorities in Western countries, anticolonial freedom fighters abroad, and women. In their own theoretical and practical pursuits therefore, these younger Critical Theorists advanced a slate of new commitments that often departed from the contemporaneous positions of their mentors, even as they continued to lay claim to much of the methodology and canon of the Frankfurt School itself. Because at times these new critical forays were developed collaboratively under conditions reminiscent of the collective intellectual output of the original Frankfurt School circle, I read their instigators as belonging to a distinct generational cohort.29

29 My concept of generation is informed by Karl Mannheim’s seminal 1928 work on generations, in which Mannheim hypothesized that, analogous to class, generationally-specific forms of consciousness and praxis are conditioned by a given age-group’s exposure during youth to the same events and data, which “coalesce into a natural view of the
The West German student movement served as the original locus of generational formation and differentiation. However, it did not do so in a vacuum. In an early attempt to account for the revolutionary turn in the SDS, which in the span of five years had shed its reformist cloak as the college arm of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) to become an autonomous organization aimed at the revolutionary overthrow of global capitalism, Dutschke once pointed beyond the Federal Republic’s borders to the Congo and Vietnam. “We were studying all this information about the mechanisms and different stages of imperialism,” he wrote, “at a time when, with the Congo and with Vietnam, two sensorially manifest examples for the practice of the international counterrevolution were made visible.”30 Chapters 1 and 2 take up West German responses to events in the Congo and Vietnam in turn, reading them together with students’ reception of Critical Theory. In doing so, these chapters put forward a new origin point for the break between the Frankfurt School and the West German student movement in the 1960s, which is better remembered for the late-decade disagreement over whether or not it was possible for the students themselves to bring about social transformation in the Federal Republic absent a mass base.31 These chapters demonstrate that, even earlier, fissures between Critical Theorists and critical students emerged due to the absence of a theory of imperialism within the Frankfurt School corpus. In the period between 1964 and 1967, this absence became increasingly apparent when first Adorno and then Horkheimer offered apologetic accounts of Western aggression in the Congo and Vietnam that exposed their fundamental misunderstanding of anticolonial liberation struggles.

31 See Adorno, “Resignation,” and Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis.”
I argue therefore that students’ attempts to differentiate themselves from their mentors served as the original impetus for appropriating the Frankfurt School tradition for more revolutionary ends.

At the center of chapter 1 is the U.S. and Belgian orchestrated neocolonial backlash against the advances of the Congolese Simba rebels in 1964. This extension of the first Congo crisis was followed closely in the West German press, and, that December, Adorno offered some unscripted comments on recent developments in the context of a lecture on his negative concept of history. Specifically, Adorno read the pending defeat of the Simbas as evidence that anticolonial liberation movements were destined to perish to the superior violence of history, as embodied in Western neocolonial forces. He concluded that revolutionary violence as such could never bring about the reorganization of society according to freedom; only critical thought was capable of securing a semblance of freedom in history—and, then, only at the level of the individual thinker. In a first step, I demonstrate how Adorno’s negativism rests on a dehistoricizing reading of the events in the Congo as well as on a structurally rigid concept of violence that itself sits in tension with his more radical commitment, charted elsewhere in the same lecture, to upholding the autonomy, or non-identity, of the marginalized individual in history as the measure of concrete freedom. For an alternative account, I turn to Rudi Dutschke and the West German student movement’s contemporaneous response to both Critical Theory and the first Congo crisis. Dutschke’s reception of other sources, including the writings of Third World revolutionaries like Frantz Fanon, positioned him not only to critique the limitations of Adorno’s thinking, but also to embrace anticolonial politics as the most capacious form of freedom struggle in the historical present. Dutschke’s further experience of direct action in an African-led protest against the West Berlin visit of the neocolonial Congolese Prime Minister, Moïse Tshombe, grounded a concrete commitment to internationalism that was enduring for him. On the basis of Dutschke and Fanon
therefore, I read the historical nexus of anticolonial liberation struggles and international solidarity movements as the revolutionary correlate to which Adorno’s theory of non-identity might better aspire.

Chapter 2 has at its center another Frankfurt School commentary on anticolonial liberation struggle and neocolonial counterrevolution. In May 1967, Horkheimer publicly endorsed the U.S. war in Vietnam as a war in defense of freedom and human rights, and he patronized antiwar demonstrators—many of whom were students of his and Adorno’s—for not heeding to their shared Western “culture” with U.S. citizens. This chapter documents how a cohort of students in Frankfurt that included Angela Davis and Hans-Jürgen Krahl manually recovered and pirated Horkheimer’s out-of-print writings from the Institute’s exile period in order to counter the aged Horkheimer’s turn to racist and imperialist defenses of the status quo. Not only did these students redirect Horkheimer’s early critique of fascism and state capitalism towards an urgent critique of global capitalism and its state gatekeepers, but Krahl in particular propelled Critical Theory towards articulating for the first time a revolutionary organizational form capable of withstanding bureaucratic capture in advanced capitalist society. By recovering the events leading up to and following the altercation with Horkheimer, this chapter forwards one of the central arguments of this project: a historically accurate understanding of Critical Theory as a multigenerational project must necessarily begin with those students who, in the 1960s, clashed with the original members of the Frankfurt School over the historical and practical-political implications of the latter’s theory, thus prompting the first intra and intergenerational divisions within the tradition with lasting consequences for its academic legacy.

Chapters 3 and 4 expand the site of contest from West Germany to Southern California by following Angela Davis to San Diego, where she began a PhD in philosophy under Marcuse’s supervision in the fall of 1967. Chapter 3 recovers Davis’s dissertation project on the concept of force in Kantian political philosophy, which was interrupted when she was incarcerated by the State of California in 1970. Like Adorno and Marcuse, Davis read Kant as a latently dialectical thinker whose antinomies capture real historical contradictions between people’s innate capacity to reason and our continued subjugation to structures that impede our ability to act on that capacity. By bringing this dialectical reading to bear on Kantian political philosophy, Davis pinpointed at its center another contradiction between human reason and state coercion that would have to be overcome if society were to actually be organized according to freedom. By further outlining continuities between Davis’s Kantian critique of the state and her subsequent formulation of prison abolition, this chapter documents how prison abolition implicitly mobilizes a philosophical defense of human agency in the face of reified social structures and, as such, constitutes a revolutionary program for late capitalist society.

Chapter 4 returns to the occupation of the Institute in January 1969 in hopes of charting a different path through its legacy. Observing first how the university critique that actually motivated the occupation has often been overlooked in favor of reading the event through the heated correspondence that ensued between Adorno and Marcuse, it pinpoints a second oversight. Amidst the Adorno-Marcuse correspondence and roughly four months after Krahl led the fated occupation of the Institute, Davis led a more successful occupation at UCSD in which Marcuse himself was a participant. The student-led campaigns in Frankfurt and San Diego were termed, respectively, the Spartacus Seminar and Lumumba-Zapata College, and they each aspired to establish accredited infrastructural conditions that could facilitate non-coercive forms of sociality and study. By
reading these two campaigns and their motivating impulses together, this chapter locates a critique of the university’s role in producing instrumental knowledge to further capitalist exploitation by entrenching the racial stratification of late capitalist society. It reads the students’ proposed alternatives as a dual power model of organization absent in the Frankfurt School corpus. By way of conclusion, I suggest that the radical critical tradition that seemingly came to an end when Adorno called the cops on his own students continued in a different, poignantly inverted guise on the American West Coast, with Marcuse ceding the role of protagonist to his and Adorno’s erstwhile student, Angela Davis.

**Before and Beyond the Habermasian Turn**

The idea that there are generations of the Frankfurt School is not new to the intellectual history of this tradition. Rather, mapping the Frankfurt School’s afterlives into a second generation with Jürgen Habermas at its center and a third centering his one-time assistant Axel Honneth has become an enduring scholarly convention. Nevertheless, against this dominant trend, a handful of scholars have raised issues with Habermas’s inheritance of the mantle of the Frankfurt School. Notable among them is Detlev Claussen, a close friend to Davis and Krahl and fellow member of their Frankfurt cohort, who has demonstrated how the generational model was codified by a handful of Habermas’s own students and assistants writing histories of the Frankfurt School in the late 1970s and early 1980s, among them Helmut Dubiel, Axel Honneth, and Rolf Wiggershaus. Claussen notes critically that the Adorno-Habermas continuity thesis was achieved at the expense of Critical Theory’s original coordinates in materialism and critique. Its arrival instead at “an

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34 Claussen, “Kann Kritische Theorie vererbt werden?” 273, 275-76.
affirmative theory of modernity that treats academic discourse as the central production site of old and new paradigms” thus allowed for the preservation of the name “Critical Theory” despite having jettisoned its original commitment to measuring its own truth content from the extra-academic vantage of proletarian freedom in history.35

In a compatible vein, Eric Oberle has positioned his recent intellectual biography of Adorno and the Frankfurt School against Habermas’s steering influence over another aspect of the tradition’s reception history, the Dialectic of Enlightenment. Observing how scholars have largely “followed Habermas’s lead” in treating the Dialectic of Enlightenment as the Frankfurt School’s quintessential “retreat into theory,”36 Oberle documents how this interpretive move was in fact instrumental to Habermas’s own affirmative departure from the critical-theoretical tradition: “Building on the question of what readers were supposed to do with such a theory,” Oberle writes, Habermas “not only labeled the book nihilistic but presented its nihilism as the key to the larger story of critical theory and its failings.”37 In this way, Habermas came to position his own thought as a retreat from the precipice of despair in the interest of rescuing a progressivist and optimistic Enlightenment project. Albeit less cued to issues in the reception history, additional recent works by philosophers Amy Allen, Konstantinos Kavoulakos, and Stathis Kouvelakis have sharpened the critique of the Habermasian turn in Critical Theory by seeking to revive earlier articulations of the project—Adorno’s, Lukács’s, and Horkheimer’s respectively—as more capacious, more critical, or more urgent to today’s conversations.38

35 Claussen, “Kann Kritische Theorie vererbt werden?” 278.
36 Oberle, Theodor Adorno and the Century of Negative Identity, 122.
37 Oberle, Theodor Adorno and the Century of Negative Identity, 121.
38 Allen, The End of Progress; Kavoulakos, Georg Lukács’s Philosophy of Praxis; Kouvelakis, La critique défaite.
While I agree with Claussen, Oberle, and others that the retreat from Critical Theory’s negative and extra-academic tenets is a setback, I offer a different explanation for how the Habermasian hegemony came about in hopes of also illuminating a new path forward. The argument advanced across the next four chapters is that the historical source of our contemporary understanding of Frankfurt School Critical Theory as a multigenerational project lies in the 1960s clash between leftwing students and their mentors in the Frankfurt School over the students’ practical-political interpretation of their professors’ critical-theoretical writings. One immediate consequence of this clash was that Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas positioned themselves on the same side of the debate vis-à-vis the students (and Marcuse), thus generating the impression of multigenerational continuity despite theoretical differences between Adorno, Horkheimer, and Habermas—differences that were already becoming apparent to their students of the period. Moreover, this impression of multigenerational continuity within the Frankfurt professoriate rested on their shared opposition to the students’ political practice, whose own coordinates lay in the politics of international solidarity that defined the global sixties at large. Far from an inherent tenet of Critical Theory, then, the theory-praxis split that has so defined the legacy of the Frankfurt School is not only historical, but historically quite recent. Therefore, if we are to at all understand it in order to move beyond it, we’ll have return to the theoretical and practical forays of the tradition’s renegade students, who in many ways remained truer to the original project than the academic lineage that is recognized as its heir.

If a more radical living legacy of Critical Theory does indeed lie with its reception by internationally-oriented socialist students in the 1960s, then it is worth underscoring a second time the series of historical contingencies and scholarly oversights that have obscured this other multigenerational project in favor of one with Habermas as its linchpin. The failure of many historians of the tradition to consider its transatlantic legacy by following a figure like Davis is significant in this regard. Additionally, the loss of the West German SDS—together with the two most prominent voices of the alternative legacy of Critical Theory that it had housed, Dutschke’s and Krahl’s—left a vacuum in the West German university and public sphere that Habermas came to fill. Significantly, Habermas did not only play an outsized role in steering the reception history of the Frankfurt School, as Claussen and Oberle have documented. As the historian Quinn Slobodian has also argued, “The most important alchemist involved in transmuting the German ’68’s message from anti-imperialist revolution to system-immanent reform was the philosopher Jürgen Habermas.”

As Slobodian has noted elsewhere, the thesis undergirding Habermas’s 1960s revisionism was already in operation in the latter half of that decade. Objecting to the student movement’s embrace of the struggles of the Viet Cong, of Black people in urban America, of Latin American guerilla fighters and Cuban revolutionaries, and of Maoist China, Habermas spoke adamantly in 1968 that “the situations here and there are as incomparable as the problems they create, and the

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41 This is not to say that Davis hasn’t been mentioned by Frankfurt School historians. Her presence in Frankfurt has been cited as anecdotal ephemera (Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss*, 319-322; Müller-Doom, *Adorno: Eine Autobiographie*, 669); it has been mobilized to differentiate Marcuse from his colleagues for his political militancy (Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, xii); and it has undergirded calls for more research (Jeffries, “The Effect of the Whip: The Frankfurt School and the Oppression of Women”; Mesing, “Hans-Jürgen Krahl, For and Against Critical Theory: Introduction”). This dissertation is in part an answer to the latter call.


methods with which they must be confronted.” Critically, Slobodian observes that “Habermas’s statement contained an internal geography that mapped politics onto race onto populations in impermeable containers, with no potential for exchange or interaction,” and he notes how students countered Habermas’s logic with a defense of the “internationalism of protest.” Yet despite this early protest, Habermas’s Eurocentric hermeneutic continues to loom large. As the historian of race Fatima El Tayeb has written in a more contemporary register, Habermas’s prominent advocacy of a race-blind progressivism that has Europe as its subject continues to shape twenty-first century political discourse on that continent, despite more critical and capacious alternatives.

If scholars like El Tayeb and Slobodian have thus persuasively shown that Habermasian thought is not well equipped to think through questions of racial difference and social transformation, scholars working in Black and Critical Race Studies, such as Nikhil Pal Singh and Joseph Winters, have found in Adorno’s negative dialectics a model for thinking through both the ambivalence of racial progress and the historical endurance of categories of difference. Feminist and ecological studies, too, have found Adorno to be an useful interlocutor, while Marcuse’s utopianism has found an alternative reception in queer studies. As its final gesture, then, Critical Theory in Revolt hopes to strengthen the scaffolding beneath these welcome expansions of Frankfurt School Critical Theory by recovering a historical generation of scholar-activists who were in some ways already thinking about the tradition’s interlocutions with anti-colonial, anti-racist, and feminist studies and struggles. At a moment of resurgent social movements, it seems

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44 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 9. For the original, see Habermas, “Die Scheinrevolution und ihre Kinder,” 11-12.
45 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 9. Note that Slobodian misattributes the defense of an “internationalism of protest” to Clause Offe, a student of Habermas. The author of the quoted article is Arnhelm Neusüss, a member of the Marburg SDS (“Praxis und Theorie,” 52).
46 El Tayeb, European Others, 6-14.
47 Singh, Black is a Country, 44, 57, 237; Winters, Hope Draped in Black, 21-7.
48 See Heberle, Feminist Interpretations of Theodor Adorno.
fitting to recover this more radical iteration of Critical Theory, characterized by its commitment to pursuing an open dialectic of critique and politics.
Chapter One

Towards a Politics of Non-Identity:
Theodor Adorno and Rudi Dutschke on Praxis in the Era of Decolonization

One of the most dynamic areas of Frankfurt School reception in recent years has been in Black and Critical Race Studies, where Nikhil Pal Singh, Joseph Winters, and others have located in Theodor Adorno’s negative dialectics a model for thinking through the ambivalence of racial progress and the critical endurance of categories of difference, or “non-identity,” in history.1 As some of these forays have also demonstrated, there are at least two obstacles facing any scholar seeking to marry these “strange bedfellows,” as Winters describes them, for anti-racist political ends.2 One is the Eurocentrism that defined much of Adorno’s thought but was perhaps best captured in his essays on jazz, which document an insufficient understanding of Black cultural production. Notably, on this front, a number of recent studies have demonstrated how it becomes possible to read Adorno against his own grain through a deeper engagement with the music itself or else with the theory’s more critical coordinates.3 The other challenge is to avoid the magnetic logic of Adorno’s negativism. Best remembered as the central thesis of the Dialectic of Enlightenment, coauthored with Max Horkheimer, it bound reason to violence in a way that appeared to foreclose liberation struggle, insisting instead on criticality as the lone position of resistance in history. In light of this thesis and the related absence of a theory of praxis in Adorno’s

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1 See Singh, Black is a Country, 44, 57, 231, and Winters, Hope Draped in Black, 21-7. See also Oberle, Theodor Adorno and the Century of Negative Identity, and Thompson, Phenomenal Blackness. For a still more exhaustive list of scholars working in this nexus, see the line-up for the “Adorno and Identity Seminars,” hosted by Princeton University, Arizona State University, and the University of California at Berkeley in the spring of 2021 and archived online at: https://adorno-identity.net/documents/.
2 Winters, Hope Draped in Black, 21.
3 See, for example, Kronfeld, “The philosopher’s bass drum.” See also Oberle, Theodor Adorno and the Century of Negative Identity, ch. 1, and Okiji, Jazz as Critique.
corpus, the framework of negative dialectics raises the question of what a revolutionary politics of non-identity might actually look like.

This chapter serves a twofold purpose. First, it hopes to contribute to this critical nexus of scholarship by bringing to light Adorno’s little-known comments on the Congolese Simba rebellion in 1964, which offer a rare and unexplored instance in which Adorno spoke directly to questions of racial difference and historical progress in the language of negative dialectics and non-identity. In the context of a lecture elucidating his own “negative” concept of history, Adorno read the crushing defeat of the Simbas that November as evidence that anticolonial liberation struggle was doomed to succumb to the superior violence of history, as embodied in Western neocolonial forces. He concluded that revolutionary violence as such could never bring about the reorganization of society according to freedom; only critical thought was capable of securing a semblance of freedom in history—and, then, only at the level of the individual thinker. Through a close reading, I show how the comments in fact reveal Adorno’s profound skepticism towards anticolonial struggle to be a function of a structurally rigid and ahistorical concept of violence. As such, I argue, both Adorno’s negativism and his Eurocentrism sit in uneasy tension with his own commitment to upholding the autonomy of the marginalized, or non-identical, as the measure of freedom in history.

Having established the theoretical tenuousness of these two tendencies in Adorno’s thought, the second part of this chapter pursues the idea of a revolutionary politics of non-identity by placing Adorno’s skeptical comments on the Simba rebellion in conversation with its contemporaneous response in the West German student movement, as articulated by West Berlin student leader Rudi Dutschke. In the 1960s, the West German student movement constituted Adorno’s most frequent object of critique and sparring partner on questions of theory and praxis.
Yet the West German student movement was itself a product of internationalism, and, as this chapter documents, Dutschke’s own anticolonial politics were shaped in part in response to Adorno’s lack thereof. Although never articulated in the abstract terms of negative dialectics and non-identity, Dutschke was singularly insistent among West German student leaders about the movement’s need for anticolonial political education, having drawn on the writings of Franz Fanon and others in recognizing that the colonized occupied a particular standpoint in history from which alone a truly universalist politics of liberation could be imagined. Dutschke was also convinced that such a politics could only succeed if advanced on a global scale from multiple positions of opposition, which were not only structurally different but at times interdependent in ways that rendered them materially antagonistic to one another. The success of such a politics therefore rested on theoretical mediation and solidarity, an early semblance of which Dutschke located in global student-led direct actions against neocolonial rule in the Congo. By reengaging these ideas in the context of Adorno’s theoretical framework, this chapter puts forward the nexus of anticolonial struggle and international solidarity in the 1960s as a real historical correlate to the critical and emancipatory commitments housed in the theory of non-identity.

**Neocolonialism in the Congo**

Reiterating one chief lesson of Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja’s critical history of the modern Congo, the historian Quinn Slobodian has described that country as a “case study in neocolonialism” for international audiences in the early part of the 1960s. In the first half of that decade, events in the Congo exemplified to onlookers worldwide just how little political and economic self-

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4 Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties*; Slobodian, *Foreign Front*.
determination would be apportioned to former European colonies as they charted paths of independence. As a backdrop for reading Adorno’s and Dutschke’s commentaries, this opening section recapitulates Nzongola-Ntalaja’s account of the first Congo Crisis together with Slobodian’s assessment of its international reception. Although not all of their insights would reappear in as precise historical detail in Adorno’s and Dutschke’s commentaries, a brief overview at the outset can provide a historical standard for evaluating their accuracies and implications.

The key personality in the Congo’s movement for independence was the charismatic leader and gifted orator Patrice Lumumba. At the age of thirty-three, Lumumba had helped found the radical *Mouvement National Congolais* (MNC) in 1958, which championed a progressive independent state for the Congo, pan-Africanism, and the Bandung principle of bloc neutrality. Against the global backdrop of anticolonial struggle, the movement’s rapid gains in popularity forced colonial leadership to capitulate to a round table conference in Brussels in 1960, where a date for independence was set for June 30 of that year. In the first free elections that followed, the MNC won a plurality of parliamentary seats. They formed a coalition with a rival, the *Alliance des Bekango*, which placed the latter’s leader, Joseph Kasa-Vubu, in the ceremonial position of the presidency. Lumumba became prime minister.

Lumumba’s tenure lasted only three months. To an international audience, the circumstances of his swift deposal and murder indicated the willingness of Western countries to destabilize the independent governments of former colonies in accordance with their ideological visions and the material interests of their monopolistic corporations. Just two weeks into Lumumba’s rule, the southern province of Katanga seceded under Moïse Tshombe, the leader of the pro-Western regionalist party called the *Confédération des associations tribales du Katanga*. As Nzongola-Ntalaja documents, the secession had been prepared by white settlers in the region,
and it was welcomed by Western industries wanting to maintain unrestricted access to Katanga’s wealth of mineral deposits, which Lumumba’s government seemed poised to nationalize.⁶ According to another source, the Anglo-Belgian company *Union minière* provided 80 percent of the revenue for Tshombe’s regime.⁷

The army at Lumumba’s command, the *Armée Nationale Congolaise* (ANC), proved no match for Tshombe’s well-endowed troops, which were led by mercenaries who had cut their teeth in racial warfare: former German S.S. officers, Italian fascists, white racists from South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, and French O.A.S. officers who had fought against the Algerian war for independence. Lumumba appealed to the United Nations for military aid, but in a display of its function as a Western proxy, the United Nations granted him only peacekeeping troops, who were unauthorized to put down the rebellion. After a subsequent appeal to the Soviet Union for aid was made public, U.S., Belgian, and U.N. operatives drafted plans to orchestrate Lumumba’s removal, including one by CIA director Allen Dulles to poison him using cobra venom. In the final instance, the CIA’s role was only marginally less direct. The organization aided ANC colonel Joseph-Désiré Mobutu in staging a military coup—Mobutu’s first, to be followed by a second coup in 1965 that would last three decades. Lumumba was captured by Mobutu’s forces and delivered with the aid of U.S. and Belgian operatives into the hands of Tshombe’s officers, who murdered him in January 1961.⁸

News of Lumumba’s murder became globally public that February and prompted what Slobodian has described as “the first major internationally coordinated wave of protests by

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⁶ Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 100.
Sebastian – *Critical Theory in Revolt*
Chapter 1

polititized Third World students.” Slobodian reads these 1961 protests as a predecessor to the global protests against the U.S. war in Vietnam, thus locating the Congo as the inception point for a decade of internationally-oriented, movement-based politics. Demonstrations against Lumumba’s murder took place around the world, including in the German cities of Bonn, Hamburg, Erlangen, Kiel, and Frankfurt. In East Berlin, 15,000 people rallied in protest of Lumumba’s death. As in other parts of the world, many of the German protests were spearheaded by African students studying on exchange. Some of them were met with police force, such as in Bonn, where African and German students were dispersed by police water cannons.10

Following Lumumba’s murder, the United Nations deployed forces to end the Katangan secession in 1963, and Tshombe fled into exile. But the pattern of Western puppeteering and Tshombe’s role within it were not over. In 1964, supporters of Lumumba known as the Simbas—Swahili for lion—regained control of the eastern part of the country and established a people’s republic in Kisangani, then known as Stanleyville.11 Some Simbas subscribed to Maoism, and the rapid advances of their movement caught the attention of the Latin American revolutionary Che Guevara. The Soviet Union promised to send arms. Once again, the United States and Belgium intervened, now pressuring Kasa-Vabu, who had been reinstated to the presidency in the aftermath of Mobutu’s coup, to invite Tshombe to return from exile and quell the turmoil.

In July 1964, Tshombe was welcomed back and appointed (rather than elected) Prime Minister of the Congo. Tshombe quickly organized his military response to the Simba rebellion. He accepted military assistance from Western countries and repatriated many of the soldiers who had aided in his earlier attempt at Katangan secession, including hundreds of racist white

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9 Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 61.
10 Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 14; 19; 62.
mercenaries. In November of that year, Tshombe orchestrated an attack on Kisangani in coordination with U.S. and Belgian forces. Dubbed “Operation Red Dragon,” the attack supplemented Tshombe’s ground assault on the city with the deployment of some 350 Belgian paratroopers from five U.S. planes.\(^\text{12}\) The U.S. and Belgian support was framed as a project of rescuing white hostages. Yet, as Nzongola-Ntalaja writes, the “episode showed how major powers can cynically exploit humanitarianism and the right of humanitarian intervention as a smokescreen concealing their own interests.”\(^\text{13}\) When the dust settled, Tshombe’s forces had recaptured the city. Some seventy white hostages had been killed by Simba rebels; over a thousand Congolese were dead.\(^\text{14}\) Despite the popular support of other African countries and direct military aid from Cuba and Guevara, who arrived in March 1965 to train Simba rebels himself, the Simba rebellion was conclusively crushed the following winter, marking an end to the first Congo Crisis.\(^\text{15}\)

**Theodor Adorno’s Theory of Non-Identity**

Among those to comment on Operation Red Dragon, which garnered international media coverage, was Theodor Adorno. On December 10, 1964, Adorno referenced the recent events during a lecture course in Frankfurt on “History and Freedom,” which was devoted precisely to developing his own immanent critique of G.W.F. Hegel’s teleological concept of history. Far from persuasive, however, Adorno’s reading of this particular example revealed a weak link at the core of his negative historical project. For all of its insistence on non-identity, Adornian negative

\(^{12}\) Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 63.

\(^{13}\) Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 138.

\(^{14}\) Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 63.

\(^{15}\) Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila*, 131-139; for his account of fighting alongside Simba rebels, see Guevara, *The African Dream*. 

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dialectics subscribed to an exceedingly homogenous, or identical, concept of violence that threatened to derail his defense of the autonomy of the marginalized in history.

In lectures, Adorno was in his element. Famous for speaking in sentences that were *druckreif*—ready for immediate publication—Adorno would often reach for contemporary political or literary examples, or sometimes even quotidian ones, as a way of elucidating his complex thought. In the case of the lecture on December 10, the opening impetus came not from the Congo, but from Walter Benjamin’s “Theses on the Philosophy of History.” Written on the precipice of global war in 1939, these theses had offered some penetrating insights into the limitations of the Hegelian concept of history, which, in the hands of Second International determinism, had posited human history as an automatic progression towards universal freedom via the (often) violent resolution of social and spiritual contradictions. Adorno was skeptical of such an apologetic affirmation of historical violence and therefore marshalled Benjamin’s nineteenth thesis as a counter-reading. He read aloud Benjamin’s memorable gloss on Paul Klee’s “angel of history,” propelled by the winds of “progress” into the future as the violent wreckage of history amasses beneath him. “Where we perceive a chain of events,” Benjamin had written, the angel “sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet.”16 The continuum of history, Benjamin’s image suggested, was substantiated not by progress towards freedom, as Hegel had argued, but by ever amassing violence. Freedom, for Benjamin, necessitated a rupture in history’s sequence—and not its rote continuation.17

Now in his own terms, Adorno argued that Benjamin’s image had given “authentic expression for the union of the continuity and discontinuity of history,” as manufactured by

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violence. Historical violence was discontinuous because it disrupted given forms of social organization and brought about new ones. At the same time, its reemergence again and again throughout human history gave history itself the appearance of continuity. This double-edged character of history, Adorno argued, had been lost upon Hegel. Hegel had been too convinced that history had a destination that would be absent of violence; thus he had prized the function of violence in history as a temporary arbiter of contradictions. Against Hegel’s positive concept of history therefore, Adorno marshalled a negative one: the true universal in history was not freedom, but violence.

For his part, Adorno’s preferred formulation for the difference between his own conception of dialectics and Hegel’s was to say that Hegel had assumed the speculative formula of “the identity of identity and non-identity,” whereas Adorno’s own negative dialectics insisted on the “non-identity of the identical and the non-identical.” In application to history, Hegel’s model had embraced the violent resolution, or assimilation, of particular contradictions as progress along a universal continuum; by comparison, Adorno’s dialectics centered the importance of the historical particulars themselves. For Adorno, this difference in emphasis had moral implications. Hegel had famously described history as a “slaughter bench, at which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals are sacrificed.” Elsewhere he had written that human happiness occurred on the “blank pages of history.” By defending the “non-identical” in the dialectic, Adorno sought to resurrect the autonomy, wisdom, and happiness of that which was historically particular against the pervasive violence of history itself. Adorno recognized that when

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Hegel assumed the “identity of identity and non-identity,” he was ultimately justifying horrific violence towards individuals or small groups as a step in the direction of universal freedom. Adorno was convinced, however, that progress towards universal freedom could never be made at the expense of some individuals’ bodily and spiritual autonomy; such a “universal” was not, in fact, universal, though it may instantiate a new hegemony of a different kind of particular. For Adorno, then, the only adequate metric of freedom in history had to be the “blank pages of history” themselves—the moments in history where individuals or groups were not being subjected to violence. Not the identity, but the non-identity of the particular and the universal instantiated human freedom.

Adorno’s commitment to theorizing history and freedom from the standpoint of the non-identical had obvious appeal. It was both more attentive to the suffering of the marginalized individual, who was not already on the winning side of history’s violence, as well as more uncompromising towards any justification of domination as necessary for social advancement. It thus seemed to offer a way out of the profound negativism of the Dialectic of Enlightenment, where the dialectical inversion of its central thesis that “myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology”22 threatened to subsume historical difference under its chiasmus. As depicted there, reason qua history advanced according to an internal compulsion that sought to assimilate or else annihilate everything other to it. By interrogating this violent dialectic from the standpoint of the other, the object of violence, the new framework of non-identity seemed to reengage the possibility of freedom in history.

However, the conclusions that Adorno drew next in the lecture threatened to jeopardize those gains and reinstate the dehistoricizing tendencies of the early book. On the basis of his

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22 Horkheimer and Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, xviii.
critique of Hegel, Adorno next positioned the logic of violence in history as a “wretched exchange relation.” As envisioned here by Adorno, history was an inescapable “process involving the exchange of cause and effect,” according to which every act of violence generating a response of equivalent quality and quantity. If at first glance this understanding seemed to follow from Benjamin’s insight that violence manufactured the linear continuum of history, it soon entered a different register. The belief that every instance of historical violence was equally awful and equally interchangeable suggested a creeping homogeneity, or identity, to Adorno’s concept of violence, which left the non-identical entirely defenseless against its assimilation or elimination.

The untenability of this thesis became tangibly apparent with Adorno’s series of invocations of the recent events in the Congo. In the first of these, Adorno cited Operation Red Dragon as evidence of his thesis that the violence in history operated according to a logic of equal exchange. He thus told his audience: “If you read the newspapers and are able to imagine what is involved in the events in the Congo, you can reflect on the balance of horror between the atrocities committed by the natives and those committed by the forces of civilization by way of revenge.”

There’s little escaping the devaluation of African life required to put forward such an equivalence: the Simbas’ massacre of white hostages in Kisangani obviously did not add up the thousands of Congolese victims of Belgian colonialism and its neocolonial afterlife. As is clear from this

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23 Adorno, History and Freedom, 94.
24 Adorno, History and Freedom, 93.
25 In fact, Adorno posited his “exchange principle” as an interpretive derivation from Benjamin’s thesis. Yet Benjamin himself had not explicitly denied the possibility that violence itself might rupture the continuum of history. In another text titled “Toward the Critique of Violence,” Benjamin even posited a revolutionary “divine violence” of a different kind from the “mythical violence” that secured domination. The year following Adorno’s lecture, “Toward the Critique of Violence” was published by Suhrkamp with an afterword by Herbert Marcuse. In it, Marcuse drew an explicit connection between this text, the angel of history from the “Theses,” and the historical possibility of (violent) revolutionary rupture (see afterword in Zur Kritik der Gewalt, 99-107). Adorno’s alternative interpretation of Benjamin offered in the lecture may well have been developed as a critique of his former colleague’s reading.
26 Adorno, History and Freedom, 94.
example, then, the exchange principle of violence could only hold if European lives were valued over non-European ones. Yet this was in direct contradiction to the radical possibility of the theory of non-identity, which had insisted on measuring freedom in history from the standpoint of the oppressed and vanquished, not the rulers and victors.

That Adorno was ready to collapse the autonomy of the non-identical in order to prop up his identical concept of violence as history’s inescapable universal became clear with his second invocation of Operation Red Dragon. Coming late in the lecture, Adorno’s intention in returning to the Congolese example was to demonstrate conclusively that “historical particulars are constantly the victim of the general course of history.” This insight, as we’ve seen, had underlined his earlier critique of Hegel’s affirmative concept of history, upon which he had framed his negative rendition. Now, with reference to the Congo, Adorno wrote the following:

This too we may test against the recent events in Africa […] It is really the case that, under the rule of the totality, even the particular that opposes it nevertheless collaborates in weaving the web of disaster. It does so not just by lapsing into particularity, but by degenerating into something poisonous and bad. These natives who are running wild in Africa for the last time are not one whit better than the [Belgian] paras, than the barbaric paratroops who are struggling to make them see reason, i.e., to accept the benefit of a progressive civilization, in a manner that is familiar to all of you.27

Here, too, Adorno insisted on an equivalence between the Simbas and their neocolonial oppressors, thus recycling the racism of the previous example. Critically, however, Adorno now conceded a fundamental difference—a non-identity—between the forces of exchange. He acknowledged that the Simbas occupied the position of the particular, or non-identical, opposite the violent dialectic of history. This insight could have given way to a defense of their resistance efforts, violent though they were, as a material instantiation of autonomy in history. Instead, within the span of three sentences, Adorno’s commitment to the universal structure of history superseded the rest of his analysis, and he collapsed the non-identical alternative made possible by the Simba rebels with a

27 Adorno, History and Freedom, 96.
cruel moral judgment. By resisting, Adorno wrote, the Simbas became agents in perpetuating history’s violence. Adorno’s ironic acknowledgement in the end that the “benefit of a progressive”—that is, bourgeois—“civilization” could only obtain by means of colonial violence showed his racial blinders to be all the more at odds with his otherwise critical thought.

One consequence of this second passage is that both Adorno’s reasoning about historical violence and its racial underpinnings had come to replicate Hegel’s almost exactly, thus reviving the very apologetics that Adorno had set out to undermine. In the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel had characterized Africa as an “unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature.” The continent had represented, for Hegel, “the threshold of the world’s history,” and in his rendering it remained perpetually prehistoric, irrational, and violent.  

By characterizing the Simbas as “running wild in Africa for the last time,” Adorno unwittingly subsumed his own theory of non-identity within this apologetic model of history, thereby jettisoning the alternative trajectory of historical freedom to which anticolonial liberation struggle lay claim.

In the context of his comments on the Congo, Adorno did in fact venture a definition of freedom. This definition, too, followed from the example of Operation Red Dragon. Critiquing both Western and Soviet responses, he wrote: “The cheers that greeted the liberation of Stanleyville by the [Belgian] paras are just as revolting as the mendacious claims by the Eastern camp that liberating Stanleyville [Kisangani] from the natives and their atrocities was manifestly an instance of European imperialism.” While there is a greater semblance of actual critique to Adorno’s principle of equivalence here, insofar as the warring superpowers of the Cold War were wont to ideologically instrumentalize Third World struggle, Adorno’s refusal to pursue the non-

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29 For a critique of a tendency among dialectical thinkers to follow Hegel to his racist conclusions, see Terada, “Hegel’s Racism for Radicals.”
identity of the Simbas’ own position sent him backsliding into Hegel yet again. In place of positioning the Simbas as the placeholder of freedom against the totalizing violence of history, Adorno chose to center his own experience as a critical theorist. He wrote: “I would venture to say that if you have a free relation towards history—and I venture to say that in the sense in which I have tried to explain it to you, the philosophy of history is this freedom towards history—that would enable you mentally to rise above these two possibilities [of the West and the Soviet Union], above partisanship in this restricted sense.”

Having here defined freedom towards history as critical thought, Adorno had come full circle by reviving Hegel’s own assertion that freedom had been obtained in the mind of the philosopher himself. The only difference in Adorno’s rendition was that his standpoint of freedom towards history was “negative” rather than affirmative. Philosophically clear-sighted about history’s pendulum of violence, it objected, contra Hegel, to historical violence in theory, even as, with Hegel, it saw no way out of this violence in practice.

As seen here, Adorno’s limited engagement with developments in the Congo blunted the criticality of his own thinking, showing him to be susceptible to precisely the kinds of racial prejudice that had so often been the object of his political critique. At the same time, however, the transparency of Adorno’s misreading of the Simba rebellion suggests precisely where and how his critical thinking went awry. With negative dialectics, Adorno had set out to critique the onslaught of violence throughout human history. Against it, he had offered the radical insight that the autonomy of marginalized individuals and groups ought to supply the real metric of freedom in history. What could have followed directly from this insight was a practical-political commitment to defending that autonomy. Instead, Adorno collapsed the qualitative difference between

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30 Adorno, History and Freedom, 94. The bracketed “[Belgian]” and the italicized “is” are the editor’s emphasis. The other brackets are mine.
oppressive (neocolonial) violence and emancipatory (anticolonial) violence in favor of insisting on history’s enduring violence. The result was an undialectical, or identical, concept of violence that functionally served to legitimize the suppression of resistance in history. On the basis of this blanket concept of violence, moreover, Adorno wrote his way to the conclusion that the only standpoint of resistance in history was critical theory itself.

In the years and decades that followed, Adorno’s championing of theory as the only viable form of praxis would become a kind of calling card for Frankfurt School Critical Theory.31 One of its most famous formulations appeared in 1969: “For all its constraints,” Adorno wrote in an essay that would only be published after his death, “it [theory] is the placeholder of freedom in the midst of unfreedom.”32 These words were written as a critique of the West German student movement. In consequence, much of Adorno’s reticence towards praxis has been read as a historical critique of the students’ political action absent a mass base. While it is true that Adorno also voiced this version of critique,33 what remains unusual and insightful about Adorno’s 1964 formulation is that it offered a rare engagement with the emancipatory claims of a movement with a real mass base: anticolonial liberation. His rejection of the same was far from sound. In the months preceding and following Adorno’s comments, some of his own student-readers would articulate an opposite position, sometimes in direct response to what they perceived as the limits of Critical Theory. These readers would commit not only to the right of anticolonial freedom fighters to resist the oppressive violence of colonialism and neocolonialism, but also to the possibility that their resistance might rupture the continuum of history. In the Federal Republic, some of these same

31 For an early formulation of this reading of Critical Theory, see Jay, The Dialectical Imagination, xxviii-xxix; 253-80.
32 Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” 263.
33 See, for example, Adorno, Resignation.
readers would use direct actions to undermine institutional powerhouses that secured the imperialist world order.

What the remainder of this chapter will suggest therefore is that the nexus of anticolonial liberation struggle and international solidarity movements that characterized the uprisings of the global sixties gestures towards a genuinely revolutionary politics of “the non-identity of the identical and the non-identical.” Although shortened here to a simpler “politics of non-identity,” the analysis maintains the double axes of non-identity in Adorno’s original formulation insofar as its emphasis is also twofold. The primary axis is that which Adorno already recognized in the example of the Simba rebels: the non-identity between the position of the colonized and the assimilationist-eliminationist forces of capital that maintain history’s violent continuum. As seen above, Adorno had even recognized therupturous potential of the anticolonial dialectic, but he had doomed it to failure, in part, I suggest, because he had failed to recognize the second axis of non-identity that sought to reinforce the first: the solidarity movements that sprung up across the globe in support of the anticolonial vanguard. These movements were “non-identical” in the sense that, while some of them were anticolonial struggles that, though structurally similar, were nevertheless operating on historically particular terrain, still others were spearheaded by students and young workers in the West who occupied vastly different positions of class, race, and nation. Nevertheless, what the best of them shared was the mutual recognition that the only path to realizing universal freedom in history was through the total dismantling of colonialism and imperialism. This international emphasis on solidarity across lines of class, race, and nation begins to illuminate the contours of a truly revolutionary politics that refuses to instrumentalize or collapse categories of difference in its quest for actualization.
Rudi Dutschke’s Anti-Imperialist Critique

While one could make the argument for a politics of non-identity as represented by the uprisings of the global sixties absent individual thinkers or leaders, these remaining sections will follow one thinker in particular, the West Berlin student leader Rudi Dutschke. They do so for two reasons. In the first place, Dutschke was a keen reader of Critical Theory, and, as this section demonstrates, his internationalist politics brought him into productive conflict with members of the Frankfurt School. Dutschke thus helps articulate an alternative politics to Adorno’s that is nevertheless compatible with the aspects of the original theoretical framework. Second, as other scholars have shown, Dutschke’s internationalist politics were exemplary among Western student movement leaders, and he played a pivotal role in redirecting West German students’ attention outwards towards anticolonial and decolonial developments. While there is a danger to centering another Western perspective in imagining a “politics of non-identity,” the argument advanced here vis-à-vis Adorno’s own negativism is that such a politics is capable of rupturing the violent continuum of history, even and especially in the face of profound differences in global position, which only grow greater as capital accumulates. In this respect, it seems expedient to reengage with the internationalist politics of Dutschke and the West German student movement in order to probe both its promises and its pitfalls.

Dutschke, of course, never articulated any of his internationalist politics in terms of “negative dialectics” or “non-identity.” But he did critically engage with what he understood to be

34 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 52.
35 Slobodian, Foreign Front, chs. 2-3; Brown, West Germany and the Global Sixties, ch. 1.
36 For more recent account of capitalism’s tendency to entrench differentiated forms of exploitation (rather than to generate a homogenous global proletariat), see Hall, “Gramsci’s Relevance for the Study of Race,” 323. Hall’s argument is perhaps best encapsulated in Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s oft repeated formulation: “Capitalism requires inequality, and racism enshrines it” (Geographies of Racial Capitalism).
the Eurocentrism of the Frankfurt School, and, with the help of his reception of early Marxist critiques of classical imperialism and writings by Third World revolutionaries like Frantz Fanon and Che Guevara, he both envisioned and embodied an alternative path for Critical Theory.

Among West German students, Dutschke was perhaps singularly well-versed in Marxist theory on account of his East German upbringing. Born in 1940 in the Brandenburg countryside just south of Berlin, Dutschke had been schooled from an early age in Marxist-Leninist ideology. He first grew skeptical of state socialism as a teenager when he learned of the Soviet repression of the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. Citing his Christian faith, he became a pacifist. Then, as it became increasingly difficult to avoid the military draft, he fled to West Germany at the age of twenty-one. The escape proved to be a lucky break when the Berlin Wall was erected in the night of August 13, 1961, just three days after his arrival. Severed from his friends and family, Dutschke enrolled as a student at the Free University, where he fell in with a group of foreign students from Ethiopia, Latin America, and the Caribbean, who were similarly, if sometimes less permanently, cut off from their home countries. By 1964, this circle of friends had formed an “international working group” where they read “the ‘classics’ as well as the newest texts of Critical Theory and Marxism.”

Outside of the group, Dutschke found further opportunities to critically reengage his East German political education in his classes in sociology, history, and philosophy. As one historian has noted, Dutschke’s roster included courses on “Soviet foreign policy, Leninist strategy, the Bolshevik one-party state, and Soviet development policy in the Third World.” He also began working as a research assistant in the library of the Eastern Europe Institute. Although

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37 Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties*, 46.
38 Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 62. For the discussions of the international working group and Dutschke’s collaboration with foreign students, see Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 52-77.
the Institute had been established as an anticommunist outpost by the Ford Foundation, Dutschke used his library access for other ends, such as the regular perusal of the *Peking Review*, which was published in German translation by the Chinese Communist Party.\(^{40}\)

In 1964, Dutschke joined the underground organization *Subversive Aktion*, broaching the project of organized political practice for the first time. *Subversive Aktion* was the brainchild of the bohemian Dieter Kunzelmann. Its inaugural manifesto in 1961 had harnessed Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique of mass culture to a Situationist-inspired political program, which advocated the use of spectacular, parodic, and often illegal actions to shock the public into awareness of its own mass manipulation. Whether bemused or flattered, Adorno and Horkheimer even assigned the manifesto in their seminars.\(^{41}\) Dutschke’s decision to join *Subversive Aktion*, however, followed from the group’s critical turn away from the Frankfurt School. In May 1964, Kunzelmann and a friend named Frank Böckelmann papered campuses in Munich, Stuttgart, Tübingen, and West Berlin with “Wanted” posters containing a montage of quotations from Adorno’s works together with his home address. The poster, which included such aphorisms as “One doesn’t act and is acted upon,” was intended to indicate a “disparity between analysis and action” in Adorno’s thought.\(^{42}\) It called on students who felt similarly about Adorno’s alleged armchair revolutionism into joining their group. Dutschke was among them.\(^{43}\)

That same summer, *Subversive Aktion*’s newly started journal published a piece by Dutschke with the title “Discussion: The Relationship of Theory and Praxis.” Published under a pseudonym, the piece recycled the poster’s critique of the Frankfurt School’s lack of political

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\(^{40}\) Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 53-57.

\(^{41}\) Fichter and Lönnendonker, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Studenten*, 100.


program. But in Dutschke’s version, the error was not due to Adorno’s bourgeois hypocrisy, but to Critical Theory’s narrowly Western purview. Germany’s leftwing intelligentsia, Dutschke alleged, had arrived at its cynical assessment of revolutionary possibility because it had neglected to think through “the international mediatedness of nation-states’ pseudo-autonomous moments.”

It had taken for granted the ability of advanced industrial society to mitigate its internal contradictions with the aid of the state and the culture industry. Thus, it had failed to see that the very form of advanced industrial capitalism represented only one manifestation of present-stage global capitalism—and a fragile one at that.

Part of the blame, Dutschke argued, lay with Hegel. Dutschke took direct issue with Hegel’s proclamation that “Europe is quite simply the conclusion of world history… Europe constitutes the consciousness […] its core is Germany.” This Western-centric myopia, Dutschke insisted, had led the modern-day Marxist “critical thinkers” working in Hegel’s direct lineage to declare the “stoppage of history” on account of the Western working class’s material and ideological assimilation.

Surveying the European working class, Dutschke readily conceded that “neither Germany nor Europe are in the present moment the bearers of world history.” But he insisted that revolution neither started nor stopped there. With reference to Cuba and Latin America, Dutschke put forward that the Third World had assumed the mantle of freedom in history.

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45 Qtd. in Dutschke, “Diskussion,” 193.
48 As another essay in the same edition makes clear, Dutschke was particularly hopeful that independent Brazilian socialists would topple the military regime there, which had gained power through a coup that spring. He read their present defeat as a “Russian 1905,” to be swiftly followed by a “Russian 1917” (“Die Rolle der antikapitalistischen, wenn auch nicht sozialistischen Sowjetunion für die marxistischen Sozialisten der Welt,” (August 1964) rpt. in Böckelmann and Nagel, Subversive Aktion, 169).
If already Dutschke’s intervention offers a remarkable anticipation and rejection of Adorno’s stoicism about revolutionary possibility in history, the conclusions he drew outline the historical-material coordinates of a theory of non-identity of his own. Even if the underlying contradictions in advanced industrial society appeared to have been suspended by the machinations of the state and capital, Dutschke insisted that, on a *global* scale, capitalism was in fact generating contradictions with profound potential for rupture. “The division between rich and poor,” he wrote, may have once fallen along class lines within European nation-states, but now it “reproduces itself on a global scale. Advanced industrial central Europe (the West) consumes – and produces as well – because undeveloped countries have been and will continue to be the suppliers of cheap raw materials and the outlets for expensive finished products.”49 Far from generating a homogenous global proletariat, in other words, imperialism perpetuated different and often interdependent forms of exploitation and expropriation.

Dutschke’s analysis here and elsewhere was underpinned by his engagement with Bolshevik critiques of classical imperialism. Critical in this reception was Leon Trotsky’s insight that global imperialist economy operated according to a law of combined and uneven development. In the early part of the twentieth century, Trotsky had realized that capitalist development outside of Europe could not simply follow the same pattern as capitalism’s original emergence within Europe because the two were already interdependent. Their interdependence meant that changes to the production process anywhere within their “combined” economy had consequences for other sectors, too. Crucially, not all of these changes advantaged workers to the same degree. Their impact was “uneven.” For instance, the introduction of new technologies in industrial factories in Europe might immediately improve the lives of European workers, but, at the same time, they

might dramatically increase the rate of exploitation among those colonial workers who sourced raw materials. As a result, the experience of exploitation among the world’s working population became less and less homogenous.\textsuperscript{50} Decades later, Dutschke was reasoning along similar lines. He, too, recognized that many workers in the highly industrialized centers of Western Europe no longer felt themselves to be subjugated by capital, even when, in the objective sense, they were still severed from the means of production and therefore still dependent on an exploitative wage-relation.\textsuperscript{51} They thus constituted a labor aristocracy, which had been bought off by the superprofits extracted from workers in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Given this assessment of the global situation, Dutschke quoted affirmatively the Bolshevik Nikolai Bucharin’s comment that “the most important factor in the collapse of the capitalist system is the disintegration of the connection between imperialist states and their numerous colonies.”\textsuperscript{52} Dutschke viewed Latin American revolutionary advances as proof of this possibility, though he was sober about the fact that political independence for many former colonies had not resulted in economic self-determination. Dutschke may well have had Tshombe’s neocolonial rule in the Congo in mind when he noted that, “as [seen] in Africa,” political independence had only served to make more visible the “hidden economic power relation that continued [to enforce] the dependence” of the new states on their former colonial oppressors.\textsuperscript{53} Though he made no claims as to how it best be done, the drumbeat of Dutschke’s essay was the insistence that these exploitative connections needed to be eroded from within Europe, too. Figuring out just how was

\textsuperscript{50} For Trotsky’s clearest articulation of this concept, see Trotsky, \textit{The Russian Revolution}, ch. 1. For two lucid explications, see Howard and King, “Trotsky on Uneven and Combined Development,” and Löwy, \textit{The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development}.
\textsuperscript{51} Dutschke, “Diskussion,” 192.
\textsuperscript{52} Qtd. Dutschke, “Diskussion,” 190.
\textsuperscript{53} Dutschke, “Diskussion,” 191.
a task that he deposited on the doorstep of the Institute for Social Research, when at the end of the essay he called out Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Ludwig von Friedeburg, and Jürgen Habermas (along with three unaffiliated leftwing intellectuals) by name for having sustained “a completely incomprehensible segregation of thinking and being, of theory and praxis within the contemporary reality of the Federal Republic.”

Reminding these thinkers that, “social truths in the form of a theory can only change the immediate social reality if they are concretely absorbed by the organized masses,” Dutschke insisted that they take their cue from global developments.

International solidarity was the first step towards revitalizing any domestic revolutionary project.

Already at this early stage in Dutschke’s political development, a number of promising threads can be discerned. They indicate real foresight about Critical Theory’s blind spots together with a certain degree of commitment to honing its practice. In the first place, Dutschke had put his finger on a crucial oversight in the Frankfurt School canon, namely its lack of a rigorous theory of colonialism and imperialism.

In the second place, he had insisted on centering the material interests of the colonized subject as the core commitment of Critical Theory. Doing so, he intuited, would at once offer a more adequately universal perspective on freedom in history, and it would begin to forge a bridge between critical theory and revolutionary struggle.

**Frantz Fanon and Non-Identical Praxis**

Two things came together for Dutschke in the fall of 1964 that concretized his thinking about anticolonial vanguardism in relation to political practice. The first was his reception of Frantz Fanon and Non-Identical Praxis.

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56 The absence of such a theory has been well-remarked in the scholarship; see Baum, “Decolonizing Critical Theory”; Bhambra, “Decolonizing Critical Theory?”; and Stötzer, “Critical Theory and the Critique of Anti-Imperialism.”
Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The second was Dutschke’s first experience of direct action at a demonstration against Moise Tshombe, who, as the Congo’s newly appointed Prime Minister, had traveled to West Berlin in late December 1964 in hopes of securing capital investments. Because these two encounters also happen to have bookended Adorno’s December 10 lecture, they allow us to imagine how a dialogue between Adorno and Dutschke might have transformed the theory of non-identity into a politics of international solidarity and praxis, had the one then been in conversation with the other.

In the fall of 1964 when Dutschke first learned of Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* had not yet been translated in German. Instead, Dutschke’s initial reception of it came by a way of a summary presentation by a French-speaking member of the international working group. Dutschke’s interest in the book would prove long lasting. Fanon’s dialectical concept of violence, his related dialectic of praxis and consciousness, and, finally, his repeat call for international solidarity would consistently reappear throughout Dutschke’s writings.

*The Wretched of the Earth* contained Fanon’s testimonial reflections on the Algerian war and Third World decolonization, which the Martinique-born theorist and revolutionary had dictated to his wife as he lay dying of leukemia in 1961. Jean-Paul Sartre, who penned the posthumous forward, was not the only person to read Fanon’s descriptive account as having a kind of prescriptive logic. The title itself was taken from “The Internationale,” the left-wing anthem, and, as the subtitle to a 1968 edition in English made clear, *The Wretched of the Earth* was championed in the years after its first publication as “the handbook for the Black revolution that

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57 “For the first time at the end of 1964 we heard a presentation on Frantz Fanon, well before his excerpted appearance in *Kursbuch Nr. 2*.” (Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 62). *Kursbuch*, the leftwing journal founded by the poet Hans Magnus Enzensbürger, published it the following year.
is changing the shape of the world.” From Che Guevara to Black Panther founders Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale, it fascinated its readers with its augury of a “new man” emerging from the dialectic of violence and consciousness posited in its opening chapter.

This first chapter was also significant for Dutschke. In it, Fanon depicted the colonial world as petrified by racism. He frequently characterized it as “Manichaean”: good and evil, spiritual and material, mapped onto colonist and colonized exactly, allowing for no exchange or interpenetration. “What divides this world,” Fanon wrote in the opening pages, “is first and foremost [...] what race one belongs to. In the colonies, the economic infrastructure is also the superstructure. The cause is the effect. You are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich.” The strict apartheid of the colonies, Fanon observed, was implemented and maintained by manifest violence. Violence in the colonies was never latent or mystified behind bourgeois ideology. Instead, it was the universal medium in which the white authorities of the state, whether police officer or soldier, interacted with colonized subjects.

Under these extreme conditions, Fanon intuited how the colonized came to the logical conclusion that “their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence.” In the first instance, he observed, the violence of the colonized was a reactive, mimetic act. But whereas the constant violence of the colonizers only served to entrench the Manichaean dualism of the colonies, Fanon demonstrated how violence in the hands of the colonized became dialectical, setting into motion a spiritual and material transformation. At the level of the individual

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59 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 6; 14-15.
60 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 5.
61 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 3.
62 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 3.
participant, violence proved capable of upending the rigidified and internalized racism upon which the oppressive and exploitative practices of colonialism rested, showing these to be mutable and surmountable. This same transformation was mirrored in the consciousness of the colonizing class, who, too, were shocked into awareness of the fungibility of their structural position. Meanwhile, Fanon saw that participation in anticolonial violence helped hone a collective political identity, whose aggregate material strength was capable of eradicating colonialism and forging the basis of some alternative form of social organization. For the colonized, in Fanon’s account, anticolonial violence was “absolute praxis.”

Many of Fanon’s early readers were quick to recognize a direct parallel between his account of anticolonial violence and the “life-and-death struggle” outlined by Hegel in the master-slave dialectic. The profundity of Fanon’s reading, however, come into clearer vision when compared to Adorno’s contemporaneous rewriting of Hegel. Both thinkers were steeped in Hegelian dialectics, but they were also each deeply cognizant of the profound dehumanization that violence effected on both its perpetrators and victims. They further recognized the pervasiveness of manifest violence in the colonized world as stemming from the violence of the modern world. In a passage to which Dutschke often returned, Fanon intuited that “between colonial violence and the insidious violence in which the modern world is steeped there is a kind of complicit correlation, a homogeneity.” This could well have been a sentence from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* or even from Adorno’s 1964 lecture, where the latter had reminded his audience that so-called

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63 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 44; see also 50-52.
64 Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114. For the early reader who alerted everybody to the connection, see Sartre, preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, xlv.
65 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 40. Dutschke excerpted from the paragraph in question on at least two occasions, although he did not quote this sentence in particular. See Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 69; Lönnendonker et al., *Die antiautoritäre Revolte*, 234-235.
“progressive civilization” came at the price of colonial domination. For Fanon and Adorno, violence was the awful norm of history, not its exception.

Nevertheless, by insisting that violence was not a homogenous category, but a dialectical, or non-identical, one, Fanon had opened up a possibility that Adorno would foreclose in 1964. In Fanon’s assessment, anticolonial violence was not only capable but necessary for rupturing the continuum of otherwise endless violence of domination. This total absence of alternatives rested on the strict, undialectical dualism that Fanon ascribed to the Manichaean world of the colonies. Where “the economic infrastructure is the superstructure”—that is, where racist ideology mapped onto the material reality of the colonies exactly—there was no contradiction between ideology and materiality that could otherwise prompt a dialectical transformation of a nonviolent character. Praxis alone, which in the first instance took the form of reactive violence, was needed to destabilize the ideological and material stasis. It was a conclusion that Adorno might have otherwise come to, having later remarked that “against a real fascism, one can only react with violence.”

But Adorno had missed the connection in 1964, even as Tshombe employed former SS officers in his U.S. and Belgian-backed mercenary army. It was therefore left to internationally oriented students like Dutschke to pursue such implications.

That Adorno had missed such a direct link between fascism and colonialism is made the more incredible by the fact that the same link was highly publicized in the Federal Republic in the winter of 1964. Slobodian and others have drawn attention to the wide circulation of two news reports on Tshombe’s employment of fascist mercenaries that made the rounds in November and December of 1964. In the popular illustrated magazine Stern, the journalists Gerd Heidemann and

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66 Adorno, “Keine Angst vor dem Elfenbeinturm.” Fanon also drew a comparison between fascism and colonialism in his opening chapter when he observed that, “Not so long ago, Nazism transformed the whole of Europe into a genuine colony” (The Wretched of the Earth, 57).
Ernst Petry authored an award-winning series of articles on a brigade in Tshombe’s army called Kommando 52, which had been under the leadership of a former Wehrmacht officer named Siegfried Müller since July 1964 and included a number of West Germans. The following month, the leftwing journal Konkret followed up on the same brigade with an article based on a series of interviews with the German mercenarys. Titled “Congo Atrocity,” the article revealed Müller not only to be unapologetic about his voluntary enlistment in the Wehrmacht and subsequent occupation of Poland; it also showed him glorifying Tshombe’s order to kill all wounded prisoners of war.67

The direct continuity between fascism and colonialism that the articles revealed came to provide the immediate backdrop for a protest against Tshombe’s visit to West Berlin on December 18, 1964, which proved pivotal for the West German student movement. West Berlin was one of the last stops on Tshombe’s weeks-long tour of Western Europe, where the newly appointed Prime Minister hoped to attract both government and private business investments for the Congo. As he rubbed shoulders with Europe’s elite, however, Tshombe’s public reception in European cities showed itself to be far from welcoming. Young people especially were incensed that the man most visibly linked with Lumumba’s murder now occupied the position of Prime Minister without having even been elected. Meanwhile, the crushing advances of his mercenary army against the Lumumba-inspired Simba rebels directed much of Europe’s attention to Tshombe’s neocolonial backers. In Paris, Rome, and Naples, Tshombe’s presence was met with protests by African and European students and Communists numbering into the thousands.68 In Munich, members of the Situationist-inspired group Subversive Aktion pelted Tshombe with stink bombs as he made his

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67 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 61-64. For similar coverage, see also Brown, West Germany and the Global Sixties, 38; 41.
68 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 65.
way to a meeting with the Cardinal Julius Döpfner. In West Berlin something similar was in store for Tshombe, as students belonging to the Socialist German Student League (SDS), the African Students Union, the Latin American Students Union, Anschlag (the West Berlin branch of Subversive Aktion), and other organizations prepared a silent protest for his touchdown at the Tempelhof Airport.

As a member of Anschlag/Subversive Aktion, Dutschke was among the protestors. He would later describe the anti-Tshombe protest as “the beginning of our culture revolution, in which almost all the conventional values and norms of the establishment are put into question.” Although the demonstration had received a police permit, its triumph followed from protestors’ spontaneous use of direct action. On the morning of December 18, some 800 students and residents gathered at the square in anticipation of Tshombe’s arrival. Almost a quarter of the protestors were foreign students, including a number of African exchange students who had come over from East Berlin. This large group of silent protestors soon found itself duped when police escorted Tshombe through a rear exit to avoid the kinds of confrontation seen at previous stops on his tour. But, then, as Dutschke recalled in his journals, “Our friends from the Third World stepped into the breach, and the Germans had to follow.” In a first act of spontaneous illegal action, some of the protestors circumvented the line of police officers supervising the protest and began marching the five kilometers from the airport to City Hall in Schöneberg, where Tschombe was scheduled to meet with West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt. Soon the rest followed suit, chanting in unison “Tshombe, out!” At City Hall, the protesters were again met with a line of police. This time, they

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69 Lönnendonker et al., *Die antiautoritäre Revolte*, 199.
70 Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 63.
72 Qtd. in Brown, *West Germany and the Global Sixties*, 39.
dispersed into small groups and, pretending to be shoppers, entered John F. Kennedy Square in front of City Hall where an open-air market was taking place. Having now consciously bucked the police and the legality of their protest a second time, they congregated directly in front of City Hall and began chanting. A small group of mostly African students even managed to break through the final police barricade and enter City Hall. Dutschke was among them, though he stopped short of entering the building. In his journals, he considered his hesitancy as a form of political immaturity.  

Brandt turned out to be in earshot of the turmoil and agreed to meet with representatives of the protestors ahead of Tshombe’s arrival. In a brief meeting, four African and two German students impressed upon the mayor the urgency of their critique of Tshombe’s neocolonial regime as well as the tactics they had used to gain Brandt’s audience. Their arguments proved persuasive when Brandt retroactively sanctioned the protest and extended a short and unceremonious welcome to Tshombe. As Tshombe was driven away from City Hall after having thus been snubbed, protestors bombarded his car with tomatoes. A U.S. military plane flew him out of West Berlin that same afternoon, a day earlier than scheduled. This series of humiliations, together with the singular position of West Berlin on the Cold War front, garnered the anti-Tshombe protest a slew of write-ups in newspapers across Europe as well as in Chicago, Washington, and New York; even Radio Peking was said to have reported on it.

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73 Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 73. For the events of the protest, see Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 64-70. For eye-witness accounts of the protest, see Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 63-64, and “Zum Verlauf der Demonstration gegen den Empfang Tschombés durch den regierenden Bürgermeister von Berlin,” 282-283.


75 Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 70.
For Dutschke, the spontaneous illegality of the protestors' actions had suggested a form of political action particularly well suited to an advanced industrial society, where revolutionary interests were lacking a mass base. The promise of direct action was threefold: it was capable of intervening in the international politicking of state leaders; it was capable of amplifying on anti-colonial message on a global scale; and finally, it was capable of penetrating the reified consciousness of its own participants in the interest forming new collectives.

These latter two functions were perhaps the most subtle, but they garnered a particular importance for Dutschke in his interest on growing a revolutionary base. Dutschke discerned that, by tactically transgressing the law, direct actions exposed “the fetishized rules of the game.” They drew public attention to the role of the juridical and police apparatus in maintaining and fortifying a restrictive and classed status quo on a global scale, while generating amongst the individual participants themselves an oppositional consciousness and political collectivity. In the Tshombe protest, for example, Dutschke saw that by first spontaneously and then intentionally routing police barricades, demonstrators had discovered their collective ability to upend laws and social norms that were usually experienced at the individual level as fixed and immutable. At the same time, the organic collectivity of their actions had fomented a shared consciousness committed to alternative forms of non-coercive social organization. Dutschke later recalled: “a spontaneous cooperation and solidarity had emerged [at the protest] among the diverse factions of the Left, which had at the time behaved in a sectarian fashion.”

Direct action thus offered a means of cultivating the strength and expanding the base of oppositional struggle.

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76 Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 63.
These reflections on the direct actions of the Tshombe protest bear the imprint of Dutschke’s extensive readings of theories of revolution, civil disobedience, and direct action.\(^7\) Dutschke’s emphasis on spontaneity recalls Rosa Luxemburg.\(^8\) His understanding of legality and illegality as constituting a question of tactics—not ethics—bears the imprint of Georg Lukács, about whom he would later write a dissertation.\(^9\) His stress on the psychological gains of praxis was certainly inspired by Fanon.\(^{10}\) At a still greater distance, one might discern resonances with Mahatma Gandhi’s *satyagraha* or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s theory of nonviolent civil disobedience.\(^{11}\) To be sure, Dutschke wasn’t committed to nonviolence on principle. Rather, what his understanding of direct action shared with all of these thinkers was, at its core, a dialectical interplay of praxis and consciousness. This interplay understood that, as collective political actions reshaped the world at a material level, they also transformed individual consciousness and engendered new collectivities. The converse was also true: gains in political consciousness created stronger collective struggles. Through Dutschke, then, these insights and their anticolonial commitments might be brought to bear on his earlier critique of the Frankfurt School to build a bridge from the theory of non-identity to a politics of international revolution.

Key in building this bridge was Dutschke’s own emphasis on the historical contradictions of and between first and Third World positions. In an important essay, Dutschke cited Fanon’s characterization of the colonized as the global historical subject to challenge the view that Dutschke’s own political program presented an “escapism that heroizes the movements of the Third World [and] finds no connection to the problematics of our local actions.” Dutschke insisted

\(^7\) For a fifteen-page syllabus Dutschke drafted for the SDS in 1966 on revolutionary theory from Marx to the present, see Dutschke, *Geschichte ist Machbar*, 45-60.

\(^8\) Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike, the Political Party, and the Trade Unions.”

\(^9\) Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 256-271; Dutschke, *Lenin auf die Füße zu stellen*.

\(^{10}\) Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, ch. 1; Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 59-61.

\(^{11}\) See Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance*; King, *Where Do We Go From Here*; and King *Why We Can’t Wait*. 
instead on reading anticolonial freedom struggles from the vantage of a Fanon-inspired historical materialism, which showed the Third World to occupy a critical “socio-economic position within the totality of poverty and dehumanization [that is] global society.” The expropriation and super-exploitation of the labor and material resources belonging to colonized subjects was at the heart of global capital accumulation. It generated what Dutschke described as a “dialectic of ‘real poverty,’” which in some parts of the world was giving way to armed anti-imperialist rebellion. Dutschke insisted on the need to generate further dialectical axes in order to multiply and internationalize the revolutionary potential of the first. He thus conceived of a second axis in a “‘dialectic of correct insight’ in the metropoles of advanced capitalist countries.” It was imperative, he thought, that people in advanced capitalist societies who occupied a position structurally distinct from colonized subjects—who were, in fact, material benefactors of colonialism—recognize, whether through theory, study, or political action, that the objective interests of colonized subjects represented the universal interests of humanity. If these more privileged students and workers could not yet wage revolution on account of the sublimated contradictions in their own societies, they could at least accelerate a manifest rupture of the same by way of “rational discussions and principled illegal demonstrations and actions.”

In Adornian terms, the politics advanced here were grounded in an understanding that the autonomy of the non-identical position of the colonized within and against the hegemony of global capitalism occupied a particular vantage from which an adequate measure of material freedom could be taken. But Dutschke went further than Adorno on two counts. First, he recognized the transformative agency of this position. Second, he insisted that it be intensified from multiple

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82 Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 69. The reference point for much of this argument was likely the final section of the “On Violence” chapter in Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 52-62.
vantages across the global capitalist spectrum. This meant that students and workers in the West not only had to aspire to an anti-imperialist consciousness through theoretical means or otherwise; they also had to act on it. What’s more, they had to so without collapsing the difference between their own position and that of the colonized through an escapist romanticism, a merely emotional identification. They thus had to imagine rigorous forms of practice, such as the direct action of the Tshombe protest, that could illuminate the embeddedness of global contradictions in local ones, while also leveraging their own differently agential positions to eroding the base of global capital. Dutschke characterized this project as “a gigantic, almost impossible task.”

Dutschke’s embrace of direct action by way of the Tshombe protest has had a diverse scholarly reception. The historian Timothy Scott Brown, for instance, has cited it as a compelling example of how “activists sought out the locally needed from the globally available,” thus fashioning what Brown describes as the “transnational imperative” of the global sixties. Slobodian has offered a more measured account. Although more attentive to the importance of Dutschke’s personal relationships with African, Caribbean, and Latin American students than perhaps any other scholar, Slobodian ultimately reads Dutschke as an advocate of “a model of vanguardism [for the West] based on leaps of psychological and emotional identification with Third World revolutionaries.” While I worry that this reading collapses the non-identical possibilities of Dutschke’s theorization of the relation between international solidarity politics and anticolonial struggle, Slobodian’s critical takeaway from the identificatory tendencies within the

84 Brown, West Germany and the Global Sixties, 20.
85 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 97.
86 One key textual basis for Slobodian’s framework of “identification” is a mistranslation. Slobodian writes: “He [Dutschke] referred to the internationalist coalition as the ‘identification of the thinking with the suffering,’ adapting Marx’s description of the cross-class opposition to the Prussian absolutist state” (Foreign Front, 98). Dutschke’s original is “the alliance [Bündnis] of thinking and suffering mankind,” and in the same paragraph Dutschke insisted repeatedly on thinking about the relationship in dialectical terms (Dutschke, “Vom Antisemitismus zum
West German student movement and the global sixties at large is an important one. As he observes, the internationalism of the 1960s at times came at the cost of effacing Third World historical particularity, such that, by the end of the decade, Third World individuals were predominantly represented as “injured bodies or heroic icons” in Western media and social movements.87

This observation might also be brought to bear on a political reading of the Adornian theoretical framework of non-identity. Taken together, Brown’s and Slobodian’s interpretations point to the profound possibility and perpetual challenge to a politics that aspires to bridge differences in geographic place, race, class, nation, and language. Such a politics must actualize forms of coalition and solidarity that neither assimilate the particularity of the already peripheral and marginalized into the dominant discourse of the metropoles through its instrumentalization, nor jettison it as irrevocably other through its mythologization. As a reader of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* will recognize, this distinction between instrumental reason and myth is nothing less than a violent dialectic. Its historically pervasiveness can be discerned in precisely those tendencies emanating from within internationally oriented Western student movements to romanticize the violence of anticolonial liberation struggle and its agents, or, relatedly, to verbally misuse them to legitimate cynical expressions of rebellion that offered no real contribution to advancing along a global revolutionary continuum.

Nevertheless, conceiving of the theory of non-identity as a *politics* also insists that, despite the pervasiveness of this negative dialectic, its disruption is possible. Locating the historical

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87 Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 205.
correlate of such a politics in the nexus of anticolonial liberation struggle and international solidarity movements in the 1960s, moreover, illuminates the contours of future revolutionary struggle, one that has international insurrection and solidarity on the scale of the global sixties as its baseline for social transformation. Dutschke himself would ultimately take one cue from the final pages of the first chapter of The Wretched of the Earth, where Fanon had placed the responsibility of restituting wealth to the colonies in the hand of the European masses. “This colossal task,” Fanon wrote there, “will be achieved with the crucial help of the European masses who would do well to confess that they have often rallied behind the position of our common masters on colonial issues.” He ventured further, “In order to do this, the European masses must first of all decide to wake up, put on their thinking caps and stop playing the irresponsible game of Sleeping Beauty.”

In the years that followed 1964, Dutschke spearheaded various forms of political education, action, and organization aimed at impressing upon the West German public their complicity in global capitalism and their shared interest in its revolutionary overthrow. Some of these will be charted in chapters 2 and 4. Not all were successful. But what they do attest to is the difficulty and urgency of articulating forms of political collectivity and solidarity that can adequately acknowledge vast differences in particular experience. Adorno’s theory may be better equipped than most to recognize those non-identities, but he fell short in its application and never articulated any forms of solidarity. Instead, he retreated to a position of a disempowered spectator. By contrast, Dutschke refused Adorno’s preemptively disengaged stance. Instead, he held fast to the notion that, as in every negative dialectic, against the overwhelming likelihood that attempts at international solidarity would end in failure, there was an ever so slight possibility of genuine social transformation.

88 Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, 62.
Chapter Two

On the State and Organization:
Max Horkheimer vs. Hans-Jürgen Krahl and the Frankfurt SDS

In the encounter of the Frankfurt School and the West German student movement, there are two events that few historians choose to overlook. The first took place on June 9, 1967, when second-generation Critical Theorist Jürgen Habermas accused West Berlin student leader Rudi Dutschke of propagating “left fascism” in the wake of the police killing of a student protestor.1 The second took place on January 31, 1969, when Theodor Adorno called the police on a group of seventy-six students who, led by his own thesis advisee, Hans-Jürgen Krahl, had occupied a seminar room in the Institute for Social Research. The significance of these two events should not be underestimated, and therefore each has its place in this history as well. Habermas’s comments will be addressed in this chapter, while Adorno’s decision shapes the final chapter. However, it deserves attention that these two conflicts bear a structural similarity that, when compounded, threatens to overdetermine any historical understanding of the relationship between the Frankfurt School and the student movement from the outset. In each case, the students appear as political actors, while their professors appear as critical theorists. In each case, the students are reprimanded for having ‘gone too far.’ Not only is there a too neat division of theoretical and practical labor, where the professors appear to monopolize the former and the students the latter, but one is also weighted more than the other. Theory appears determinate, practice conditional and ill-advised.

For this very reason, both events carry a great deal of symbolic weight in scholarly accounts that seek to parse, if not also defend, how established members of the Frankfurt School understood

1 Bergmann, Bedingung und Organisation des Widerstandes, 100-102.
the theory-praxis nexus as one in which theory itself had assumed the role of “placeholder” for socially transformative political practice.\(^2\) In an effort to challenge this legacy, this chapter puts forward as exemplary an earlier and less well remembered conflictual encounter between students and professors,\(^3\) in which the above roles were reversed with crescendoing consequences for the latter’s aversion to action. In May 1967, the Frankfurt SDS issued a rebuke of Max Horkheimer’s public endorsement of the U.S. war in Vietnam. In an open letter, the group accused Horkheimer of “falling behind [his] own analysis,” and, as proof, they outlined a weighty critique of U.S. imperialism on the base of Horkheimer’s own wartime writings on fascism.\(^4\)

In and of itself, this exchange undercuts a neat bifurcation of theory and practice to show how students in Frankfurt actively plumbed the archive of Critical Theory to orient their own politics and critique those of their mentors. By recovering the developments leading up to and following the exchange, this chapter documents the emergence of a cohort of students in Frankfurt who succeeded on both critical-theoretical and practical-political fronts. Not only did they transform Horkheimer’s wartime critique of fascism into an urgent critique of global capitalism and its state gatekeepers, but they propelled Critical Theory in a direction that it hadn’t gone before. As perhaps best articulated in the writings of one of their number, Hans-Jürgen Krahl, these students sought to imagine on the basis of Critical Theory’s social critique a revolutionary

\(^2\) Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” 263. For Frankfurt School histories that place special emphasis on one or both of these events in tracking the theory-praxis nexus for the established members of the Frankfurt School, see Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, xi-xxiv; Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss*, ch. 16; Walter-Busch, *Geschichte der Frankfurter Schule*, 218-25; Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, ch. 8. For histories of the West German student movement that do the same, see Fichter and Löndendonker, *Macht und Ohnmacht der Studenten*, 146-50, 194-6.

\(^3\) For two histories that lay special emphasis on this encounter, see Açikgöz, *Die Permanenz der Kritischen Theorie*, 72, and Kraushaar, “Einleitung: Kritische Theorie und Studentenbewegung,” 27. Although my own reading diverges from his, I am indebted to Kraushaar’s three-volume compendium *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung* for its chronicle of events and compilation of the primary materials that are at the center of this chapter.

organizational form capable of withstanding bureaucratic capture under late capitalist rule. Finally, by bringing the students’ intentions and insights to bear on Habermas’s “left fascism” accusation, this chapter begins to chart a path beyond this misplaced specter, which still haunts the West German student movement.\(^5\) Instead, I amplify the argument for (re)centering the students’ immanent critique in the contemporary understanding of the Frankfurt School as an enduring multi-generational project.\(^6\)

**The Frankfurt Cohort**

At the center of this chapter is the group of students who most likely had a hand in the critique that went into SDS letter to Horkheimer. In Frankfurt, they attended seminars together, engaged in political organizing, and occasionally cohabited as roommates. This section tracks their coalescence into a cohort from the autobiographical perspectives of two students in particular: Angela Davis and Hans-Jürgen Krahl. Davis and Krahl were born one year apart, and they arrived in Frankfurt in the spring and fall of 1965 respectively. Although they came to Critical Theory from very different vantages, the emancipatory promise they found in it was mutual and would grow in theoretical and political collaboration. In their example, we can begin to see how a distinct generation of movement-based Critical Theorists formed under the wing of the Institute for Social Research in the years 1965 to 1967.

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\(^5\) For an overview and critique of this tendency, see Mercer, “Specters of Fascism,” 119-27.  
\(^6\) For two compatible accounts that imagine a more practical-political “generation” of the Frankfurt School centering Hans-Jürgen Krahl, see Claussen, “Hans-Jürgen Krahl: Ein philosophisch-politisches Profil,” 426, and Mesing, “Hans-Jürgen Krahl, For and Against Critical Theory.” This chapter takes their interpretations seriously, while seeking to show just how the generational split emerged in divergent receptions of the U.S. war in Vietnam. See also Açikgöz, *Die Permanenz der Kritischen Theorie*, 60-79. In these pages, Açikgöz pinpoints the letter exchange between the Frankfurt SDS and Horkheimer as one in a series of events that engendered the first generational divide in the Frankfurt School. Still, Açikgöz doesn’t center Vietnam in his analysis, and his focus is on the emergence of a second generation in the Federal Republic around Habermas, thus reinstating the divide between theory/professors and praxis/students. My account centers a transatlantic generation of student radicals, who cut their teeth on anti-imperialist protest.
Hans-Jürgen Krahl’s rise to prominence within the West German SDS would eventually earn him the nickname of the “Robespierre of Bockenheim,” but his origins were far from revolutionary. Krahl was born in 1943 in a small town called Alfeld south of Hannover in Lower Saxony. He lost an eye in a bombing as an infant, and he wore a glass eye for the duration of his short life. Much of what is known about his childhood and adolescence stems from a court statement he gave in 1968, after having been arraigned for organizing a protest against the conferment of the German Book Trade’s peace prize to Senegalese president and author Léopold Sédar Senghor. In the statement, Krahl described the Lower Saxony of his childhood as still awash in the Nazi ideologies of blood and soil. Growing up, he told the court, “I could only move within a spectrum that ranged from the [national-conservative] German Party to the [local conservative-federalist] Guelph Party. I could not even access the ideologies of liberalism and parliamentarism.” Krahl’s first oppositional act had thus been to form a local youth arm of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) as an eighteen-year-old.

So began what Krahl later described to the court as his personal “odyssey through the organizational forms of the ruling classes” towards his conclusive rejection of them. In grade school, Krahl was exposed to the ideologies of antisemitism, ethno-nationalism, and homophobia. He was taught to condemn the Nuremberg trials and despise the English forces that had occupied Lower Saxony. Only at church did he learn for the first time that there had even been a domestic anti-fascist resistance. Upon leaving Alfeld for the university in Göttingen, Krahl next joined an exclusive fraternity called the Ludendorff Association and began reading the work of philosopher

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7 Bockenheim is the name of the neighborhood in which the University of Frankfurt was located.
8 For the events of the protest and the students’ critique of Senghor, see Kraushaar, Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, I:357-361.
and Nazi Party member Martin Heidegger. Discerning the nationalistic impulses in the latter’s philosophical thought—Krahl described Heideggerian philosophy as “a philosophy given to imperialist adventures”—he moved on to logical positivism and then finally arrived at Marxist dialectics. This latter discovery prompted his move to Frankfurt to study with Horkheimer and Adorno.\(^{11}\) His matriculation application in the spring of 1965 indicated that he hoped to become a high school teacher.\(^{12}\)

Things changed rapidly for Krahl in Frankfurt. Students and professors alike discovered his philosophical talent in seminars. He began to live as openly gay. He developed what one friend, Norbert Saßmannshausen, described as a “nomadic existence.” Krahl refused to move into a permanent living situation and instead cycled through various communal arrangements, friends’ couches, and student dorms. According to Saßmannshausen, Krahl lived out of a briefcase that became “legendary” among friends for just how little it contained: a few books, a spare shirt, and various notes and excerpts drafted on stationary paper.\(^{13}\) Likely these lifestyle choices were a personal means of demonstrating opposition to a society organized around private property and consumption. Most importantly for his political development, Krahl joined the SDS. “In the SDS,” he wrote in his 1968 court statement, “we learned for the first time that when the dominant class says ‘freedom,’ it means the freedom to take power and repress freedom, that when the dominant class says ‘tolerance,’ it means tolerance towards its rule and intolerance against those who may say anything, but can change nothing.”\(^{14}\) By his own account, then, the SDS was where the ideology critique of the Frankfurt School finally bore fruit.

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\(^{14}\) Krahl, “Angaben zur Person,” 22.
In comparison to Krahl, Angela Davis’s path to and through Critical Theory was less teleological, though it maintained a similarly open-ended negotiating between theory and struggle. Asked in a 2019 interview about how she first came to Critical Theory, Davis replied that already as a child she had “learned to adopt a stance of Critical Theory.” Growing up in segregated Birmingham, Alabama, she recalled, she and her sister had often asked their mother why they weren’t allowed to go to symphonies, libraries, amusement parks, and more. In reply, Davis remembered, their mother “would say that this is not the way things are supposed to be. And she would always say that one day, they will be different. So I’ve learned from the time I was a very young child to imagine a different future, to inhabit simultaneously a segregated world, but also to inhabit in my imagination a very different world.” For Davis, the critical-imaginative stance that she had honed as a child coping with racism primed her subsequent embrace of the theoretical tradition associated with the Frankfurt School, which she first encountered as an undergraduate student at Brandeis University. “I felt so drawn to it,” she recalled, “because of the insistence of Critical Theory on not accepting ‘what is’ simply because it is given, [but instead] to always recognize that things are going to change. And that as a matter of fact, we can be a part of the process that brings about the change.”\textsuperscript{15} For Davis, Critical Theory was not only an academic tradition, but a political sensibility. It was a way of seeing the world as fundamentally malleable through collective action.

Nevertheless, for Davis, as for Krahl, the academic tradition associated with the Frankfurt School proved formative. In her case, the ground was prepared at New York’s Elisabeth Irwin High School, where Davis read Karl Marx’s \textit{Communist Manifesto} and became friends with the children of a number of Communists and Black radicals. They included Bettina Aptheker, daughter

\textsuperscript{15} Davis and Richardson, “Keynote by Angela Davis ’65 with Julieanne Richardson ’76, H’16.”
of Communist historian Herbert Aptheker; Eugene Dennis, Jr., son of the Communist leader of the same name; and Mary Lou Patterson, daughter of William Patterson, who delivered the petition charging genocide against Black people to the United Nations in 1954. As teenagers, they formed an organization called *Advance!*, which convened among the stored papers of W.E.B. du Bois in the basement of the Aptheker’s house. As a group, they picketed Woolworth’s for its segregationist practices in the South and protested against nuclear armament.\(^\text{16}\)

Already a critic of capitalism when she arrived at Brandeis in 1961, Davis befriended a German student there named Manfred Clemenz, who introduced her to the history and writings of the Institute for Social Research. In the summer of 1964, following her junior year abroad in Paris, Davis spent several weeks with Clemenz in his hometown of Frankfurt, where she attended some of Adorno’s lectures on aesthetics and became acquainted with his students. Of that summer, she later wrote in her autobiography that, although her knowledge of German had been minimal at the time, the students around her had “translated the essential points of the lectures into English and French.”\(^\text{17}\) This early experience of multilingual intellectual camaraderie in Frankfurt led Davis to approach Herbert Marcuse, a professor in the philosophy department at Brandeis, at the beginning of her senior year. Their paths had only briefly intersected once before, when Marcuse spoke at a rally at Brandeis during the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. Marcuse had spent the rest of Davis’s second year at Brandeis teaching at the Sorbonne, only to return during Davis’s own year in Paris. Now, as a senior, Davis told Marcuse of her hopes to study philosophy as a graduate student in Frankfurt despite her lack of systematic philosophical training. Marcuse proposed that he guide Davis through weekly tutoring sessions on the history of philosophy, while she also

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\(^\text{16}\) Davis, *Angela Davis*, 111-113. Aptheker recalled the location of their meetings at the *Radical Commitments: The Life and Legacy of Angela Y. Davis* conference, hosted by Harvard University in October 28-29, 2019.

\(^\text{17}\) Davis, *Angela Davis*, 135.
audited his lectures on moral and political philosophy and took German language courses. At Marcuse’s behest, Davis enrolled as a senior in his graduate course on the Critique of Pure Reason, where she gave the first presentation on the transition from David Hume’s empiricism to Immanuel Kant’s idealism.18

A twenty-one-year-old Davis arrived in Frankfurt in the fall of 1965. After an initial semester in which she found herself barely scraping by on her stipend of $100 per month, she moved into a dilapidated factory building at Adalbertstraße No. 10, which was home to a sculptor and four other students besides herself. Krahl was one of them. The building had been scheduled for demolition when another student named David Wittenberg took it over and began renting the former office nooks in it to his peers. There was no hot water and the two common areas were heated with sooty coal-burning stoves, but it was a block from campus and the rent was cheap: 15 German marks ($4) per student per month.19 Davis remained at the factory for the duration of her stay in Frankfurt. In addition to Krahl, who moved on after a semester, other residents and friends of the factory included Detlev Claussen (who arrived in Frankfurt in the fall of 1966), Hans Glauber, Elfie Hieber, Thomas Mitscherlich (son of the psychoanalysts Alexander and Margarete), an Italian journalist named Claudio Pozzvoli, and Lothar Menne, a German student who had returned to Frankfurt midway through Davis’s stay after having spent a year studying with Marcuse in the United States. In a twist that was undoubtedly salient for these critics of late capitalism, under their command, the factory’s repurposed shop floor once again became a site of political organizing.

18 Davis and Richardson, “Keynote by Angela Davis ’65 with Julieanne Richardson ’76, H’16.”
19 Davis, Angela Davis, 139.
Initially however, they found themselves attending the same seminars and lectures. Almost all of the factory’s residents were enrolled in the philosophy and sociology programs. They therefore took courses with Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, and Karl Heinz Haag, as well as their younger postdoctoral assistants Alfred Schmidt and Oskar Negt. Conversations carried on outside of the seminar room as well. During the semester in which he was officially registered at No. 10, Krahl and Davis often conversed in the evenings about their mutual interest in Kantian philosophy. Likely Krahl was also enrolled in the seminar that Davis was then taking with Negt on Kant’s *Critique of Pure Judgment*. In fact, we might consider how Davis’s course roster, which can be gleaned from her archived notes, was representative of that of her cohort. Over the course of four semesters, Davis attended lectures by Adorno, Habermas, and Haag on aesthetics, the history of philosophy, the history of newer philosophy, the problems of a philosophical anthropology, and the philosophy of modern religion. In addition to Negt’s seminar on Kant’s third *Critique*, she also took his seminar on the *Critique of Practical Reason*. She was enrolled in Horkheimer’s and Haag’s cotaught seminar on Kant’s philosophy of religion, and she also attended Habermas’s seminars on Hegel’s political writings and Hegel’s critique of Kant, which met on Saturday mornings.

By topic alone, these courses hardly scream that a generation of anti-capitalist revolutionaries were in the offing. However, in the tradition of the Frankfurt School, Kant and Hegel—among other staid bourgeois philosophers—took on different proportions. Kant, for instance, was read as a proto-dialectical thinker. His famous antinomy on freedom became an opportunity for interrogating the problem of reification: the reduction of reason’s critical-practical

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20 Nadelson, *Who is Angela Davis?*, 105-106.
21 Papers of Angela Y. Davis, folders 60.18, 61.1, 61.3, 61.4, 62.7, 63.4, 63.5. For Horkheimer and Haag’s proseminar on Kant in the summer semester of 1966, Davis’s name is listed on the roster (Nachlass Max Horkheimer, Na l 899).
potential to technological rationalism. His aesthetics, in turn, suggested a means of bridging that collapse, in part by charting a rare link (for Kant) between the subject and the social.\textsuperscript{22} Hegel, on the other hand, was frequently a camouflage for talking about Marxian concerns. Of his own studies with Adorno and Horkheimer directly before this period, Alfred Schmidt later recalled how “‘Hegel’ was said when ‘Marx’ was meant.” He added humorously: “it’s fitting to recall the anecdote—which, if false, was nonetheless cleverly invented—that [Institute affiliate] [Helmuth] Plessner once sent Horkheimer and Adorno a postcard from Trier, on which was written: ‘Greetings from the birthplace of Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel.’”\textsuperscript{23} Trier was, of course, Marx’s birthplace.

Schmidt’s anecdote indicates another reason why the course catalog appeared so sedate on the surface: the caution and self-censorship of Horkheimer and Adorno. Habermas’s recollection that Horkheimer kept a complete set of the Institute’s discontinued journal, the \textit{Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung}, hidden in the basement of its new building is well known.\textsuperscript{24} In the Cold War period, Horkheimer did not want anyone to rediscover his and Adorno’s more explicitly Marxist and revolutionary writings from their exile period. Horkheimer had in fact only committed to returning the Institute to Frankfurt after ensuring that he could retain his American passport in case of a second exile. In the first decade after the return, Horkheimer exercised strict oversight over the political content of the Institute’s publications. His oversight only eased up in the mid 1960s as he transitioned to full retirement.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{22} Negt, “Gutachten über die Kant-Arbeit von Angela Davis.” This recommendation letter offers insight into the dialectical direction taken in Negt’s own courses on Kant. Davis’s extensive engagement with Kant is the subject of chapter 3. For an excellent account of the latent dialectics in Kant’s thought, which draws in significant moments on a Frankfurt School approach, see Wayne, \textit{Red Kant}.

\textsuperscript{23} Schmidt, “Wir wollen nicht so drauflos philosophieren,” 250.

\textsuperscript{24} Wiggershaus, \textit{The Frankfurt School}, 544.

\textsuperscript{25} In fact, Habermas was an early casualty of Horkheimer’s censorship. On account of the introduction that Habermas penned for \textit{Students and Politics}, originally an Institute study, Horkheimer refused to let the study be published with
In comparison to Horkheimer, Adorno was somewhat less guarded, and his younger, non-Jewish assistants even less guarded still. Both Negt and Schmidt had been SDS members themselves, and Negt in particular had played an active role in shepherding the SDS through its split from the SPD in 1960. Davis’s and Krahl’s mutual friend Detlev Claussen later recalled how important Negt’s and Schmidt’s seminars had been for the autonomous theoretical development of the Frankfurt SDS. In the winter semester of 1966 to 1967, Schmidt had taught a seminar on Marxism and existentialism, in which Claussen, Davis, and Krahl were all enrolled. It was one of the rare courses that copped to Marxism explicitly in its title, and its syllabus featured recent works by Marcuse and Jean-Paul Sartre together with Marx’s *Grundrisse* (first published in 1939).26 Marx’s distinction between manual and mental labor would become particularly important for these students, as they sought to understand the changing composition of the proletariat under late capitalism and their own role within it as intellectuals and future white-collar workers.27 Negt, meanwhile, used his seminars as venues for facilitating what Claussen described as the “theoretico-political development” of the SDS students. Though his courses were all explicitly framed around Kant—after he taught the second and third *Critiques*, he turned to Kant’s philosophy of law—they ballooned in the period between 1965 and 1967 from intimate twenty-person seminars to lectures attended by hundreds.28

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26 Zaru et al., “Krahl and his Conjecture: An Interview with Detlev Claussen.”
27 Chapter 4 deals at greater length with this critical insight.
Where it all came together was in Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s jointly taught advanced seminars. These were often held at the Institute, and they were attended not only by students, but by the postdoctoral assistants, Institute affiliates, and other faculty members as well. Thus it was here that generational differences in politics and interpretation became visible as they worked out in constructive opposition to one another. Adorno was on sabbatical for the summer semester of 1966 and the winter semester of 1966 to 1967. During that period, he finished and published *Negative Dialectics*, which drew both fascination and ire from his more politically oriented students for its determined departure from the Marxian theory-praxis dialectic. “You cannot abolish philosophy without realizing it,” Marx had written in 1844.29 “Philosophy,” Adorno countered in the opening line of *Negative Dialectics*, “which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed.”30 Students, assistants, and faculty alike convened for Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s advanced seminar on “Negative Dialectics [Part] I” in the summer semester of 1967. Claussen later captured the patriarchal character of the seminar room when he remembered how students would discern upon entry whether Horkheimer and Friedrich Pollock would be in attendance based on whether there were one, two, or three upholstered chairs stationed at the front of the room. (Both Horkheimer and Pollock had retired by this time to Montagnola, Switzerland, but Horkheimer was nevertheless listed as the official co-teacher of the seminar and frequently made appearances.) Naturally, no one else sat on upholstered chairs. “When Horkheimer was there,” Claussen remembered further, “Adorno didn’t talk to any of us. He was simply trying to present his ideas in order to hear what Horkheimer thought of them.”31

29 Marx, “Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*,” 59.
Although Adorno may have been fixated on Horkheimer’s feedback when the latter was around, it is not correct to say that he showed no interest in engaging with his student commentators. It has too often been alleged that Krahl was singular among students in garnering Adorno’s respect. In fact, Davis’s own reception in Frankfurt offers one compelling counterexample. Just as she had once given the introductory presentation on the transition from Hume to Kant as an undergraduate in Marcuse’s graduate seminar at Brandeis on Kant’s first *Critique*, she volunteered to give one of the two introductory presentations on *Negative Dialectics* in Adorno’s own advanced seminar on the subject. Negt later reported Adorno’s “highly positive” comments about Davis and the “instructive discussion between him and Angela Davis” that followed in the seminar session. True to the form of the German *Referat*, Davis’s presentation did not seek to rock the boat so much as to provide an overview and additional philosophical context for the text up for discussion. Her presentation centered Adorno’s own effort with “negative dialectics” to secure a framework for objective knowledge by way of reinstating the Kantian non-identity of the knowing subject—in this case, the scholar—and the object of study. As she demonstrated in the presentation, the danger with positive (Hegelian) dialectics was that its very method sought to assimilate the unknown into a philosophical system, and, as such, it enacted a kind of coercive violence on the object of study that functionally obscured its true meaning. By comparison, negative dialectics sought to reason from the perspective of the object, thus inscribing the non-identity of subject and object into its very method.

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32 For an excellent overview and critique of the series of obfuscating clichés about Adorno’s and Krahl’s relationship, see Maiso, “Hans-Jürgen Krahl: Social Constitution and Class Struggle,” 335.
33 Negt, “Gutachten über die Kant-Arbeit von Angela Davis.”
34 Davis, “Zur Einleitung in die ‘Negative Dialektik’ (Zweiter Teil),” Papers of Angela Y. Davis, folder 60.18, 1-19.
If there was a glimmer of critique in Davis’s presentation, it lay in her insistence on more than one occasion that negative dialectics must still have a “utopian dimension” on account of its continued commitment to objective knowledge of the social totality.\(^\text{35}\) Though she didn’t articulate it in these terms in the presentation, such a commitment would have had to bear some account of the subject’s ability to penetrate the totality as well. Outside the walls of the seminar room, students’ efforts to undermine or else reroute the central theses of *Negative Dialectics* in defense of praxis were taking on a steadily more overt character. Krahl is remembered to have quipped on more than one occasion that semester that “the only concrete thing in that book [*Negative Dialectics*] is the publication date.”\(^\text{36}\) Manfred Clemenz, Davis’s friend from Brandeis who had first introduced her to the work of the Institute and since returned to Frankfurt, channeled the same sentiment into a critical review that was published the following year. Titled “Theory as Praxis?” Clemenz’s review directly squared off with the implications of Adorno’s opening pivot away from Marx. The “central question,” Clemenz asked, was whether Adorno “had fallen for the same aporias that he had contested in Hegel.” Was Adorno’s “anti-system” just another version of Hegelian idealism?\(^\text{37}\) Tracking continuities between *Negative Dialectics* and Adorno’s earlier works, Clemenz observed that the “transition from theory to praxis is itself a moment of non-identity,” yet Adorno had rendered the constituents of such a transition—spontaneity and freedom—as “mere categories” that showed little capacity for concretization.\(^\text{38}\)

Published in July 1968, Clemenz’s review gathered together a number of concerns and criticisms that had gained traction over the previous years as Adorno’s own students increasingly

\(^{35}\) Davis, “Zur Einleitung in die ‘Negative Dialektik’ (Zweiter Teil),” Papers of Angela Y. Davis, folder 60.18, 13, 19.  
\(^{36}\) Schneider et al., *Trauma und Kritik*, 120.  
\(^{37}\) Clemenz, “Theorie als Praxis?,” 179.  
\(^{38}\) Clemenz, “Theorie als Praxis?,” 178-179.
took to the streets in spontaneous and organized protest against the U.S. war in Vietnam. Still earlier, however, Davis had experienced Adorno’s skepticism firsthand. When in the fall of 1966 Davis confided in Adorno her decision to return to the United States to join the Black freedom struggle the following year, Adorno told her “desire to work directly in the radical movements of that period was akin to a media studies scholar deciding to become a radio technician.”  

Little did he anticipate then the extent to which the radical movements of the global sixties would transform his own academic domain, Critical Theory.

**Max Horkheimer, the Frankfurt SDS, and the U.S. war in Vietnam**

Strikingly, it was not vis-à-vis Adorno but vis-à-vis Horkheimer that certain generational fissures first became cracks, opening a path to a far more imaginative interpretation of Critical Theory. The key moment was Horkheimer’s shocking endorsement of the U.S. war in Vietnam in May 1967, which compelled some of his own students, among them Davis, Krahl, and others, to manually recover his out-of-print archive in order to counter his imperialist apologetics with a more capacious critique of global capitalism. As this section retraces their critique and the theoretical framework that grounded it, it also underlines the significance of the U.S. war in Vietnam for the radicalization of the West German student movement more broadly. This radicalization paved the way for an alliance between the West Berlin and Frankfurt branches of the SDS that would help move the Frankfurt cohort’s critique of Horkheimer from the margins of the movement to its center.

“The American war in Vietnam is the event that played the deciding role in the mobilization and politicization of the [West German] students,” write historians Siegward Lönnendonker and

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Jochen Staadt, themselves former SDS members. The absence of ambiguity in their statement bears emphasis. Between March and December 1965, the number of U.S. troops stationed in Vietnam ballooned from 3,500 to 200,000. The ruthlessness of U.S. military tactics, such as carpet bombing and the use of chemical weapons like napalm, increased in kind. So did an antiwar opposition however, which became global on an unprecedented scale. As the historian Quinn Slobodian observes with respect to West Germany specifically, the war in Vietnam constituted “the first major war in the adult lives of West German students,” and, in contrast to previous wars, its brutality was made highly visible on television and in photographic print media. First gradually and then rapidly, students in West Germany who had long revered U.S. culture and politics turned on its hegemonic position in the world. In the years 1965 and 1966, antiwar protestors in the Federal Republic alone numbered into the hundreds of thousands. Frequently, they clashed with police. In her autobiography, Davis recalled a particularly harrowing demonstration in Frankfurt, where mounted police rode directly into a crowd of two hundred demonstrators outside the U.S. embassy, injuring many and badly trampling one female demonstrator. A riveting detail of Davis’s narration is that the demonstrators had fully anticipated this scale of police brutality. Thus, after having been dispersed outside the embassy, they implemented a second plan of action. They marched towards the center of the city, where, in small groups, they used sit-and-run tactics to disrupt the public transportation system for several hours.

40 Lönnendonker et al., Die antiautoritäre Revolte, 209.
41 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 80.
42 Slobodian, Foreign Front, 83.
43 Renaud, New Lefts, 246.
44 Davis, Angela Davis, 142-3. For additional coverage of this protest, which took place on February 11, 1967, see Kraushaar, Frankfurt Schule und Studentenbewegung, I:246.
In the West German student movement, one of the earliest and most vocal student critics of U.S. imperialism was Rudi Dutschke. As seen in the previous chapter, Dutschke was an aspiring Third Worldist, and already in 1964, he had imagined how students in the West could converge on the anticolonial liberation movements by spearheading political education and organizing direct actions against local institutions that directly underwrote neocolonialism. In 1965, Dutschke and some of his comrades in Subversive Aktion, the Situationist-inspired group he had joined the year previously, decided to openly join the West Berlin branch of the SDS. The decision was surprising because, despite its ouster from the SPD in 1960, the SDS still resembled the youth arm of a parliamentary party in its organization form. As such, it was weighted down by bureaucracy and a hierarchy of elected representatives who were often jockeying to become career politicians—a far cry from the anarchocommunist leanings of the Subversive Aktion members. Moreover, much of the SDS’s focus had remained trained on parliamentary politics and constitutional reform. In his journals, Dutschke explained his apparent turn by quoting the Spartacist revolutionary Karl Liebknecht’s own rationale for joining a different social-democratic organization in the early twentieth century: “We joined the USPD [Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany] in order to drive it forward, to have it within the reach of our whip, to get the best elements out of it.”

“I agree with this [Liebknecht’s] opinion,” Dutschke wrote in his journal. “But I include the important addition: through the SDS, those of us who stand for a revolutionary movement [will be able to] establish international connections.” For Dutschke, the SDS’s already significant network suggested a means for quickly disseminating an anti-imperialist revolutionary message across the country, as well as crowdsourcing international connections to forge coalitions with foreign groups.

45 Qtd. in Karl, Rudi Dutschke, 35.
Once in the SDS, Dutschke bumped heads with SDS leadership almost immediately. The leadership was then dominated by “traditionalists” who prioritized building up domestic alliances with traditional working-class organizations. Some traditionalists had been mentored by the Marburg-based Marxist political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth, who held that a gradual transition to socialism in the Federal Republic might be grounded in aspects of its constitution, known as the Basic Law.\textsuperscript{46} The discord between the traditionalists and the circle of students around Dutschke erupted on a national scale in February 1966. On the night of February 3, Dutschke and a group of forty activists papered West Berlin with posters that decried Western intervention in the Third World and called for the formation of an international liberation front. The instigators hadn’t sought police or internal SDS sanction for their action because the poster itself offered an allegation that was shocking even by the leftwing agitprop standards of the time. It directly accused the West German Chancellor Ludwig Erhard and parliamentary parties in Bonn of supporting “murder” and “genocide” in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{47} When five activists were arrested, four of whom were students, the SDS leadership moved quickly to oust the suspected instigators from its ranks. According to then SDS Vice President Hartmut Dabrowski, even Oskar Negt telephoned him to suggest that they be expelled from the organization.\textsuperscript{48}

On the evening following the illegal poster action, however, a meeting took place in Frankfurt that radically altered Dutschke’s bleak prospects. There, members of the Frankfurt SDS met with the national leadership to discuss the illegal poster action. According to historians Lönnendonker and Staadt, Hans-Jürgen Krahl, who had just turned twenty-three years old and was

\textsuperscript{46} Slobodian, \textit{Foreign Front}, 90; Renaud, \textit{New Lefts}, 216-220.
\textsuperscript{47} For the full text of the poster, see Lönnendonker et al., \textit{Die antiautoritäre Revolte}, 226-227. The University of Munich was also papered.
\textsuperscript{48} Lönnendonker et al., \textit{Die antiautoritäre Revolte}, 228.
at that point entirely unknown outside of Frankfurt, “made himself into the spokesperson for the proponents of the poster action.” As a direct result, they write, “the Frankfurt group pooled a majoritarian position against the national leadership, defended the action, and even sent a telegram of solidarity to the West Berlin SDS, which meant a lot to the Berliners.”\(^49\) In this way, Dutschke’s membership in the SDS was secured, and an alliance between Frankfurt and West Berlin in defense of internationalism and illegal actions was born.

The next blow to the traditionalists’ hegemony fell three months later in May 1966 at an SDS conference in Frankfurt on the U.S war in Vietnam, where Herbert Marcuse had been invited to give the keynote.\(^50\) In advance of the conference, a traditionalist SDS leader named Walmot Falkenberg attempted to sway Marcuse to use the keynote to censure Dutschke’s circle for what he called—with reference to Lenin’s famous putdown of anti-union and anti-party anarchists—an “infantile disorder of left radicalism.” Falkenberg expressed his hope that Marcuse might instead lay out the “concrete solidarity of interests” that the students in West Germany shared with the freedom fighters of the Third World.\(^51\) In his speech however, Marcuse did exactly the opposite.\(^52\) He outlined instead what he saw to be the challenges and conditions of revolution on a global scale. He argued that the immiseration of the global agrarian proletariat, its vital need for material transformation, the inability of the local bourgeoisie to meet real materials needs through capitalist means, and the existence of an organized revolutionary leadership all pointed to the real possibility

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\(^49\) Lönnendonker et al., *Die antiautoritäre Revolte*, 233.

\(^50\) See Lönnendonker et al., *Die antiautoritäre Revolte*, 242, and Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 94-99. Slobodian reads the conference in these pages as the “antiauthoritarian breakthrough.” Other scholars, including Lönnendonker and Staadt, date the clincher to Dutschke and Krahl’s joint *Organisationsreferat* in September 1967, which I discuss in the next section.


\(^52\) Slobodian, *Foreign Front*, 97.
of destabilizing the “world system of imperial capitalism.”

To do so successfully, however, he determined that it was vital that the Third World’s revolutionary impulse rebound within and against the core of capital located in advanced industrial societies. Citing the United States as his exemplar in the speech, he observed that the revolutionary willpower of large sections of the traditional working classes had been captured and sublimated by the state and the culture industry. Yet, contra his colleagues Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse insisted that there was still profound oppositional potential among ideologically and materially unintegrated groups whose marginalized positions in society made them more likely to be receptive to a critique of war and capitalism. In the United States, Marcuse suggested, these included intellectuals and students, racially segregated communities, women, and Catholics. Acknowledging that the specific interests of these groups were diverse and often antagonistic, Marcuse nevertheless insisted that their coalition alone represented the “precarious bridge” that might lead to “the unity of theory and praxis that we are all crying out for, which cannot be organized and cannot be calculated.” For Marcuse, then, it was precisely the “solidarity of reason and sentiment” across gender, race, class, and nation—and not the traditionalists’ “concrete solidarity of interests”—that illuminated the present path towards social transformation.

It is worth briefly drawing out the similarities between Marcuse’s analysis and Dutschke’s, as recollected from the previous chapter. Both had abandoned the dated framework of identifying the “subject of history” with (industrial) wage-laborers, simultaneously bypassing the resigned stance of their Frankfurt School colleagues towards social transformation. Instead, Marcuse and

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Chapter 2

Dutschke each approached the category of “proletariat” from a global standpoint, showing it to be highly differentiated and internally antagonistic. In fact, the single common characteristic of the proletariat was that everyone who belonged to it was severed from the means of production on account of a capitalist class predominantly located in the West. Race, class, nation, and (in Marcuse’s account) gender named some of the categories of difference that shaped the proletariat, and, as interdependent categories, they played out in ways that posed profound strategic and organizational challenges for any politics aimed at universal liberation. Thus Marcuse and Dutschke both intuited that the “shared concrete interests” that the SDS traditionalists desired was a terrible metric for a proletarian politics, since the material interests of waged workers in the West were structurally opposed to those of workers elsewhere, even when both groups de facto belonged to the proletariat insofar as they lacked autonomous access to the means of production. Such a politics, in other words, risked become particularist, perpetuating other forms of subjugation as it sought to transcend its own. Marcuse and Dutschke thus both opted for the structural standpoint of the colonized as the position from which to conceive a more maximalist vantage on freedom in history. For the colonized to arrive at freedom, they recognized, multiple systems of subjugation had to be overcome. Their resulting politics was one that had at its core a politics of anticolonial solidarity, even when that solidarity was grounded only in theory (or sentiment) rather than immediate material interest.

In terms of the internal wranglings of the SDS, the palpable affinity between Marcuse and Dutschke proved to be a win for Dutschke. In the wake of the conference, the traditionalists Helmut Schauer and Hartmut Dabrowski announced that they would step down from their appointments as president and vice president of the SDS, making way for two new appointments who represented
the budding Berlin-Frankfurt alliance: Reimut Reiche of Frankfurt and Peter Gäng of West Berlin.\textsuperscript{56}

But the traditionalists were not alone in their distress at both Marcuse’s argument and its popular reception among socialist students. Following Marcuse’s speech, Horkheimer confided to Friedrich Pollock his dismay at the arguments of their former Institute colleague. In their private conversation, Horkheimer railed against “the intellectuals [who] see only the horror of war, the unhappy Vietnamese, the ‘scorched earth policy’ of the American military operation.” “What they do not see,” Horkheimer proclaimed, “is the hell of a Chinese world order.” Incredibly, Horkheimer was convinced of the possibility of a Chinese invasion. “A withdrawal would not only mean an awful bloodbath in South Vietnam,” he told Pollock, as if this wasn’t already happening on account of the U.S. military operation, “it would also accelerate the way of the Chinese to the Rhine.” Horkheimer even ventured a connection between China and Nazi Germany: “One could draw a parallel between the position of many intellectuals today and those Oxford students [who said] ahead of the second world war: ‘We will not fight for King and Country.’”\textsuperscript{57}

According to Horkheimer’s comparative logic here, Western and U.S. imperialism presented a bulwark against a fascist threat from the East reminiscent of Nazi Germany. But Horkheimer’s conviction that Communist China presented such a threat had limited historical underpinnings. He admitted as much to Pollock in May: “We have far too little information to

\textsuperscript{56} Slobodian, \textit{Foreign Front}, 99.

\textsuperscript{57} Horkheimer, “South Vietnam und die Intellektuellen,” (May 1966), rpt. in Kraushaar, \textit{Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung}, II:204. Horkheimer’s specter of the “Chinese of the Rhine” evidently made the rounds within the Frankfurt School, because it became a point of repeat contention in the private correspondence between Adorno and Marcuse three years later, with Marcuse writing to Adorno in June 1969: “Here is, I suppose, the deepest divergence between us. To speak of the ‘Chinese of the Rhine’, as long as the Americans are based on the Rhine, would be an impossibility for me” (Adorno and Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” 130). For Adorno’s rejoinder, followed by still another rejoinder by Marcuse, see Adorno and Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” 132, 134.
judge what would be better [in Vietnam] for the preservation of individual freedom in Western countries: continue as is in the hopes of crushing the opposition? Escalate? Withdraw?"  What is clear from this statement and others is that Horkheimer’s guiding political compass in the postwar period was the preservation of bourgeois freedoms in the Western countries that had them. In 1968, Horkheimer would write in a barbed preface to the republication of some of his earlier essays that “the present day youth”—meaning the student movement—needed to understand that “to protect, preserve, and, where possible, extend the limited and ephemeral freedom of the individual in the face of the growing threat to it is far more urgent a task than to issue abstract denunciations of it or to endanger it by actions that have no hope of success.”  By the late 1960s, Horkheimer had forsaken leftwing revolution in favor of stabilizing a still liberal bourgeois order. His anticipation of a fascist backlash extended even to social-democratic politics. As the Frankfurt School historian Rolf Wiggershaus points out, already in the fifties, “Horkheimer had become a convinced defender of the CDU slogan ‘No experiments!’”  The slogan had been touted as part of the CDU’s 1957 reelection campaign, which had successfully convinced the electorate (and evidently also Horkheimer) that a win for the SPD might endanger the country’s economic recovery or else jeopardize the Federal Republic’s U.S. ties within the Cold War context. There was little that members of the Frankfurt School felt to be more conducive to a fascist reprisal than economic crisis, and, as seen already, Horkheimer’s sense of personal allegiance to the country that had granted him exile and extended his passport endured through the postwar period. For this one-time

58 Horkheimer, “South Vietnam und die Intellektuellen,” II:204. Pollock’s notes only reference Richard Lowenthal’s essay “Amerikas Engagement in Asien,” published that same month in Der Monat, a journal that was funded by the CIA. For a recent engagement and critique of Richard Lowenthal’s politics from the 1930s onward, see Renaud, New Lefts.
59 Horkheimer, Critical Theory, viii.
60 Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 554.
critic of the bourgeois state, the U.S military had become the chief ally in a rearguard campaign to preserve the semblance of freedom in the West, and the price paid by the rest of the world was a price worth paying.

Horkheimer’s endorsement of the U.S. war in Vietnam became public exactly a year after Marcuse’s keynote. In May 1967, Horkheimer accepted an invitation to attend and speak at Frankfurt’s German American Friendship Week, which opened on May 7 with a military ceremony in the center of the city that drew an audience of two thousand. Some two hundred antiwar demonstrators also attended, seeking to disrupt the ceremony with smoke bombs, firecrackers, and projectile objects, as well as chants, hissing, and boos. Horkheimer’s arrival was met with individualized shouts of “Horkheimer, out!” as he took his seat in the place of honor next to the Hessian president Georg-August Zinn, the Mayor of Frankfurt Willi Brundert, and the Commandant of the Fifth U.S. Army Corps, General-Lieutenant George R. Mather. That night, Horkheimer gave a speech at Frankfurt’s America House. Some of the antiwar demonstrators were in the audience here, too, and they heckled Horkheimer as he attempted to speak. Going off script, Horkheimer seized the opportunity to upbraid the demonstrators. In bluntly patronizing terms, he told his audience that, “when American chooses to wage war—now listen carefully—America chooses to wage war it is not about defending the fatherland, but about defending the constitution, defending human rights.” He accused the antiwar demonstrators of a naïve hypocrisy: “He who judges should at least think about these things; he should at least, when he talks of Vietnam, consider that we would not be here together speaking freely if America had not intervened to save

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Germany and Europe from the most horrible totalitarian terror.” Horkheimer felt that the U.S. intervention in World War II exculpated it from all subsequent critique.

Horkheimer’s reasoning only grew more convoluted and problematic as the speech continued. At times, he sought to shore up the U.S. position by naturalizing the violence in Vietnam as a reflection of the violence of history. He conceded, for instance, that “there was no doubting the horror [of Vietnam],” but concluded that “horror is part of the world in which we live.” All developed countries, he claimed, were implicated in evil by doing business with “representatives of regimes where totalitarian rule is wielded.” Plainly, Horkheimer felt that the U.S. war in Vietnam was no worse than the international politicking of other Western governments, if not also that the United States had no real agency in halting it. As apparent already in his private conversation with Pollock, Horkheimer’s rational was distinctly sinophobic. His racism was made still more explicit at the end of the speech, when Horkheimer cited the titular “German American friendship” of the week’s military celebrations in order to suggest that the antiwar demonstrators recognize and heed to their shared “culture” with Americans. “There are not that many nations [Völker] left who can actually defend that which we call culture,” he contended. Just how far Horkheimer was willing to go in the interest of this muzzled cultural chauvinism became clear when he disavowed the existence of his own anti-fascist bibliography to his audience: “During the period from ’33 to ’50,” he said, “I published a lot in America, yet in effect, with very few small exceptions, I wrote nothing against the Third Reich, because I told myself, it is too easy to criticize Germany from the other side of the ocean.”

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The claim was provably false. Days later, it supplied the backbone to the Frankfurt SDS’s public rebuke of Horkheimer’s comments. Together with the comments themselves, the rebuke appeared as an open letter in the Frankfurt student newspaper diskus. Its tone was polite, but unwavering. The letter pointed out a series of illogicities in Horkheimer’s argument. For instance, he had conceded that violence of the war in Vietnam was horrific, and yet, by also insisting that the U.S. military effort was “in defense of the constitution” and “human rights,” he had implicitly allowed that some people’s rights were more worthy of defense than others. Fearing that Horkheimer was “falling behind [his] own analysis,” the authors of the letter ventured a different explanation for the war. The U.S. war in Vietnam, they argued, did not stem from any universal interest in defending democratic constitutionalism. Rather, they wrote, “a politico-economic analysis” would reveal that the U.S. war economy was a means of averting capitalistic crises, while the war itself generated an “ideologically enforced fear of a ‘communist threat’” that served to keep dissenting voices and oppositional forces within society in lockstep. “An analysis of social relations in the USA,” they argued, would reveal that “the fascisization process [Faschisierungsprozeß] of American society was accelerating.” As proof, they pointed to two domestic examples that had been subject to profound state repression: the red scare and the Black freedom struggle. The former had revealed a mainstream willingness to equate communism with fascism under the common header of “crime against humanity” in the interest of reinforcing the status quo, while the latter had evidenced the paucity of “basic civil rights” extended to Black people and other people of color. Against this backdrop, they wrote to Horkheimer, “any invocation of the cultural tradition of America [is] a macabre farce.”

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The students had built their argument on the basis of Horkheimer’s own wartime writings, the existence of which Horkheimer had so surprisingly disavowed in his speech at the America House. At one juncture in their letter, they recalled Horkheimer explicitly to his own argument in “The Jews and Europe” with a direct quote: “an appeal against fascism to the liberal ideology of the nineteenth century is itself an appeal to the instance in which fascism triumphed.”\textsuperscript{66} Fascism, they reminded Horkheimer, wasn’t an alternative to bourgeois liberalism; it was its logical outgrowth—one that the students now saw on the horizons of U.S. society.

Horkheimer’s wartime account of the continuity between bourgeois liberalism and fascism had been motivated by his own experience of the Weimar Republic’s rapid collapse, but he had subsequently grounded it in a comparative structural analysis of Nazi Germany, New Deal America, and the Soviet Union that proved germane for his student critics. In Horkheimer’s early analysis, each of these three regimes had represented a different model of what he sometimes called “state capitalism” or elsewhere simply the “authoritarian state.” Fascism was represented by Nazi Germany and—contrary to his later revisionism—bore the brunt of his critique. Nevertheless, within Horkheimer’s comparative framework, “integral statism” (state socialism) as represented by the Soviet Union and “reform capitalism” as represented by the United States were not only structural similar to fascism, but fairly fluid alternatives. Despite their ideological differences, Horkheimer argued, in each of these three forms, the state had fully usurped the “invisible hand” of the market by bringing production and distribution into its bureaucratic domain. As such, it was better able to manage the kinds of cyclical crises that might otherwise generate political upheaval. Of the three forms, moreover, Horkheimer recognized reform

\textsuperscript{66} SDS Gruppe Frankfurt, “Offener Brief an Max Horkheimer,” II:231. For the original, see Horkheimer, “The Jews and Europe,” 91.
capitalism to be the most unstable. He considered it was far more likely to tip into fascism than the state socialist alternative because the privatized ownership of the means of production was continuous under fascism despite their state bureaucratic management.\(^{67}\)

The Frankfurt SDS’s assessment that the build-up of U.S. war economy presented a concerted effort on the part of state bureaucracy to stabilize cyclical crises converged with Horkheimer’s early analysis, though it was likely also an indication of students’ familiarity with more contemporary “welfare-warfare” critiques of the U.S. war economy by Marcuse, Paul Baran and Paul Sweezy, and others.\(^{68}\) A more interesting element of the students’ immanent critique of Horkheimer was their diagnosis of an emergent fascism in the United States on the basis of its domestic and foreign racial politics. By recalling Horkheimer specifically to his 1939 essay “Jews and Europe,” they drew attention to the fact that his own narration of the transition from reform capitalism to fascism in Germany has precisely centered the state’s strategic mobilization of racism in response to economic crisis. That Horkheimer now appeared to have reneged on this insight in favor of a cultural racism raised a number of questions for the authors of the open letter, together with a request for a meeting. Specifically, the students wanted to hear from Horkheimer whether the critique of society “had ever acknowledged its relevance for a social praxis that aims at transformation.” Was Critical Theory merely critical \textit{in theory} but reconciled to a bourgeois social order \textit{in practice}? Horkheimer’s late comments suggested as much. But the letter writers also offered a second formulation of this question that made the stakes of it even clearer: “in the


\(^{68}\) Fred Cook first advanced the notion of “warfare state” as a critique of the U.S. military-industrial complex in 1962. His account informed Marcuse’s critique of the welfare-warfare state, which was reached an international audience in 1964 with \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, ch. 2. Baran and Sweezy extended the critique in 1966 with \textit{Monopoly Capital}, chs. 7-8. Notably, Paul Baran had worked as an assistant to Pollock at the Institute for Social Research in the late nineteen twenties and early nineteen thirties. This was the period in which Pollock undertook studies of the state organized economy of the Soviet Union, which would come to ground his and Horkheimer’s formulation of state capitalism.
development of Critical Theory,” they asked, was there a direct “line of continuity right up to [Horkheimer’s] support for American imperialism?”69 This second framing drew out the particularist implications of the former. If Horkheimer resigned Critical Theory to the defense of bourgeois liberalism, he was tacitly endorsing the price at which it came, and which he had devoted half of his life to denouncing: racial empire.

To the theoretical questions raised in the open letter Horkheimer may well have added a logistical one. How had the students gotten hold of his wartime writings? The Institute’s journal, the Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung, had never been printed in Germany, and Horkheimer had ensured that the Institute’s own set was not readily available for perusal. What Horkheimer didn’t know was that, by night, the dilapidated factory building at Adalbertstraße No. 10 was running a pirate publishing industry. Decades later in an interview, Davis recalled the multistep process by which a pirated edition of the Dialectic of Enlightenment had been made: “We typed the text on stencils, mimeographed it, and sold it for the cost of its production.” She also added: “A similar edition of Georg Lukács’s History and Class Consciousness was also produced.”70 In fact, their publication list had not stopped there. According to Claussen, Davis and Lothar Menne had spearheaded a group who had made a pirated edition of Horkheimer’s Eclipse of Reason together with his essay “Authoritarian State.”71 For his part, Menne recounted how the factory residents had once made a pirate edition of “a text by Horkheimer” (perhaps the same) in order to fund their trip to the Dialectics of Liberation Congress in London in July 1967, where Marcuse was scheduled to speak alongside New Left luminaries such as the Black radicals Stokely Carmichael and Michael

70 Davis and Lowe, “Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 316-317.
71 Claussen, “Kann Kritische Theorie vererbt werden?” 272. For Eclipse of Reason, Claussen uses the German title Vernunft und Selbsterhaltung, which translates to “reason and self-preservation.”
X, the Scottish psychiatrist R.D. Laing, and the American poet Allen Ginsberg. After lengthy “powwows” at the factory, the group had at last settled on this plan, determining that if they could sell five hundred copies, their cost of travel would be covered. For Davis, London would be a stopover on her return to the United States. As Menne recalled, while many of the participants quickly tired of the task, Davis stayed up and typed through the night.72

Notably, No. 10 was not the only site of illicit publishing in the Federal Republic. According to one study, works by more than eight hundred authors were reproduced in pirate form by students in the 1960s, and among them, roughly one-fifth bore an affiliation to the Institute for Social Research. The most pirated author was the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, who had no Institute affiliation, but in second place was Horkheimer himself, with a total of thirty-nine pirated titles bearing his name.73 Of Horkheimer’s works, Claussen remembers that “Authoritarian State,” Dawn and Decline, and the Dialectic of Enlightenment were particularly popular among them.74

Based on Claussen’s, Davis’s, and Menne’s recollections, some of these titles had been pirated at No. 10 in the late spring and early summer of 1967. Read against the backdrop of Horkheimer’s comments that same May on the U.S. war in Vietnam, their pirating initiative appears motivated. The same socialist students who had found Critical Theory to be a productive venue for critiquing advanced industrial society were keen on reclaiming that body of work as independent of one of its foremost representatives in the country, whose political stance had so clearly reneged on the commitments of that tradition as articulated in his own early writings. As Davis later recalled in an interview, “because many of the student leaders were directly inspired

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72 Nadelson, Who is Angela Davis? 118.
74 Claussen, “Der kurze Sommer der Theorie,” 155-156.
by the history of the Frankfurt School [...] we were able to critically engage with Adorno’s ideas. Interestingly enough, many of Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s ideas were mobilized in challenging this advocacy of theory as the only possible mode of practice.”75 Davis didn’t expand further on just how her cohort had challenged Horkheimer’s (and Adorno’s) praxis-aversion specifically, but the open letter from May 1967 suggests where their efforts had begun. The letter had reminded Horkheimer that he had been the one to chart a line of continuity from bourgeois liberalism to fascism; to now retreat into the former was to betray his early analysis. The students had themselves returned to Horkheimer’s critical analysis of fascism to outline the urgency of a critique of U.S. racial capitalism in both its internal and external manifestations. If Horkheimer had once written that those who do not speak of capitalism should stay silent about fascism, the students now offered an updated injunction: to speak of fascism without assessing its contemporary coordinates in racial empire was to place the critical theory of society in the arsenal of its enemies. For some of these same students, the logical next step was to show not only that these systems could be directly challenged, but when and how.

**Hans-Jürgen Krahl on Antiauthoritarian Organization**

The meeting that was scheduled between the Frankfurt SDS and Horkheimer to discuss their disagreement did not go according to plan on account of a series of events that permanently changed the course of the West German student movement and—as argued here—that of the Frankfurt School. On June 2, 1967, roughly two weeks after the exchange of open letters in Frankfurt, a first-time student protestor named Benno Ohnesorg was shot and killed by police at a

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75 Davis and Lowe, “Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 317. My emphasis. For a compatible account of the upsurge in pirating as a means of recovering the revolutionary tradition of the past, see Hanloser, *Lektüre und Revolte*, 9.
West Berlin demonstration against the visiting Shah of Iran.76 One week after that, Jürgen Habermas accused Dutschke of propagating “left fascism” at a conference in Hannover convened in the wake of the shooting. By the time the anticipated meeting in Frankfurt took place on June 12, the terrain of debate had shifted under everyone’s feet. This section contests Habermas’s accusation on the basis of the critique of fascism developed by the cohort of students in Frankfurt, which took on greater prominence in the student movement as Krahl and Dutschke consolidated their leadership. As it documents how Krahl in particular helped to propel Horkheimer’s early critique of the authoritarian state towards the articulation of an antiauthoritarian organizational form, it also forwards a new explanation for the multi-generational legacy of the Frankfurt School. The initial generational differentiation in the Frankfurt School, I argue, concerned the students’ practical-political appropriation of the tradition. But Adorno’s, Horkheimer’s and Habermas’s shared criticism of the students generated an impression of continuity among these members of the Frankfurt professoriate, despite already apparent theoretical differences between Adorno’s and Habermas’s thought. In this way, a framework was laid for a multigenerational narrative premised precisely on the excision of its more radical student readers, even as these students continued to work in the tradition’s direct theoretical lineage.

At the center of the June 1967 conference in Hannover where Habermas leveled his “left fascism” criticism was a debate over whether the events in Berlin had altered the terms of engagement in political struggle. In this debate, Habermas placed conservative strictures on the purpose and potential of the students’ campaign. According to him, student actions could, at a maximum, generate public awareness for the political critique that motivated them; in and of

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76 For an excellent account of the events of June that situates them in the context of dissident Iranians’ critique of the Shah’s rule, see Slobodian, Foreign Front, ch. 4.
themselves, they were not capable of transforming society in any material sense. Habermas thus warned that any initiative undertaken by the students that aspired to anything other than “political enlightenment” would be accountable for the repressive violence of the state that it provoked. In the open floor discussion, he put his assessment in still stronger terms. Demonstration, Habermas claimed, aimed at generating a public conversation and was therefore “fully legitimate.” But “provocation,” he insisted, desired to transform the “the latent violence” of the ruling class into a “manifest violence.” As such, it was itself a form of “violence” with “fascistic implications.”

According to Habermas here, because the students’ actions were capable of provoking a backlash that might accelerate a transition to fascism, they were also culpable of it.

Krahl was among the first to counter Habermas’s strictures, which seemed to replicate the logic of those mainstream critics who had faulted the student movement for the death of Ohnesorg rather than the police who had kettled and shot him. “Do tomatoes seriously provoke violence?” Krahl asked rhetorically, calling attention to the non-threatening tactics that were typical of student demonstrations. Krahl pointed instead to the “over-bureaucratized state apparatus” and its “technologically highly equipped and proportionally armed executive violence” as itself a provocation for the students. Not the students, but the state was the agent of repressive violence, he reminded the audience. Krahl insisted further that the state’s capacity for repressive violence required an organized response. “Ritualized forms of conflict [and] ritualized forms of provocation,” Krahl argued, were needed to make demonstratively visible the material nonviolence of the movement’s interests.

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77 Bergmann, Bedingung und Organisation des Widerstandes, 48.
78 Bergmann, Bedingung und Organisation des Widerstandes, 75.
79 Bergmann, Bedingung und Organisation des Widerstandes, 72.
Dutschke, too, came out forcefully in favor of student agency and organization in his own speech, which followed immediately after this discussion. Addressing Habermas directly, Dutschke accused the former of overstating the objectively non-revolutionary situation in the Federal Republic at the expense of almost all forms of political agency. Dutschke argued instead that, given that the material conditions for a transition to socialism were ripe, “everything depended on the conscious will of the people.”80 To this, Habermas responded with the critique of the hour, accusing Dutschke of mobilizing a “voluntarist ideology” that amounted to “left fascism.”81

The June 1967 exchange is notably not only for the generational divisions on display, but also because it launched one of the catchwords that would come to haunt the West German student movement.82 Importantly, the link between the students’ actions and fascism implied in Habermas’s original accusation was not even substantive. Habermas had not claimed that there was anything fascistic or even authoritarian about the students’ aspirations in and of themselves. Rather, what garnered the accusation of “left fascism” was the potential for student actions to prompt a repressive state response that itself might accelerate a return to fascism. In this sense, Habermas was actually repurposing a structural critique of late capitalist society’s fascist potential in order to delimit the student movement’s political intervention as, at best, capable of defending and maintaining the bourgeois democratic status quo.83 Dutschke and Krahl drew different implications from a similar structural critique: they feared that without social transformation through organized practice, democracy itself was in peril.

80 Bergmann, Bedingung und Organisation des Widerstandes, 78.
81 Bergmann, Bedingung und Organisation des Widerstandes, 101.
83 For an account of Habermas’s generation as motivated by a defense of bourgeois democracy, see Moses and Neaman, “West German Generations and the Gewaltfrage,” 281-5.
This observation bears emphasis because the language of “left fascism” would take on psychological connotations when later appropriated by Adorno. In the immediate aftermath of this initial altercation, however, Adorno remained firmly in the camp that it was the mainstream opposition to the student movement that exhibited authoritarian tendencies, not the student movement itself. When he and Horkheimer convened with the Frankfurt SDS just days after Habermas’s comments in the meeting that had been originally scheduled to discuss Horkheimer’s position on Vietnam, Adorno characterized the public opinion of the student movement as demonstrating “an overwhelming ‘antisemitic syndrome’” in its portrayal of students as “brainy, jobless, happy.” Still, notable here is that Adorno’s critique centered the psychology of fascism, in place of its structural composition. Moreover, where Adorno saw eye to eye with Habermas was in his equally firm diagnosis that, while Ohnesorg’s killing had shown conclusively that students were targets of the state, it had not altered the objectively non-revolutionary situation in the Federal Republic. So long as the working class remained ideologically and materially integrated, Adorno argued, the students’ actions merely amounted to “the movements of caged animals in search of escape.” As the only student to be singled out by name in the meeting minutes, Krahl found little support among his mentors for his argument that state violence constituted the real provocation and necessitated an organized resistance. Instead, Adorno formulated an early version of the critique that he would repeat many times in the coming years. Characterizing the student movement as tending “to censure thought in view of its goal,” he suggested in the meeting that it was more important that theory be able “to articulate the blockage. [...] Theory must be logically

84 Steffen, “Tiere an Ketten – SDS und Horkheimer,” rpt. in Kraushaar, _Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung_, II:264. This meeting took place on June 12, 1967.
consistent, otherwise praxis will be false.”  

Davis, who was likely in attendance, later put it this way: “[Adorno] insisted that the only sure way to move along a revolutionary continuum was to effect, for the present, a retreat into theory. No revolutionary transformation was possible, he said, until we could figure out what went wrong in the theory.”

Less than a month later, however, Adorno was subjected to a prank that would sharpen his criticism of the student movement. Well before the events of June 2, Adorno had been invited to speak at the Free University in Berlin on the subject of classicism in Goethe’s Iphigenia. Despite public requests to speak to the recent political developments, Adorno chose to stick to his seemingly apolitical original topic. In front of an audience of a thousand, a group of students unfurled a large banner that read “Berlin’s Left Fascists Greet Teddy the Classicist.” After further disruptions, some two hundred students walked out. It was the first in a series of public disruptions targeting him individually that Adorno would come to interpret as a problematic form of theoretical censorship. In addition to these disruptions of his own lectures, Adorno was haunted by the rumor in 1969 that members of Frankfurt’s action-oriented “leather jacket faction” had trashed the dorm of a student in Krahl’s more theoretically oriented cohort on account of the student’s desire to study. Adorno cited the event in an essay in which he wrote that the vandalizers had graffitied on the dorm room wall “whoever occupies himself with theory, without acting practically, is a traitor of socialism.” In his private correspondence with Marcuse that same semester, Adorno defended Habermas’s term “left fascism,” which Marcuse had dismissed as a contradiction in terms, on two counts. Like Habermas, Adorno advanced an accelerationist

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87 Davis and Lowe, “Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 317.
88 Kraushaar, Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, I: 264-5.
89 Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” 263. For the actual details of the event, see Kraushaar, Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung, I: 409.
argument in arguing that student movement “inflamed an undiminished fascist potential in Germany.” But he now added that the students’ modes of engagement themselves replicated a fascist syndrome: “the technique of calling for a discussion, only then to make one impossible; the barbaric inhumanity of a mode of behavior that is regressive and even confuses regression with revolution; the blind primacy of action; the formalism which is indifferent to the content and shape of that against which one revolts, namely our theory.” Here and elsewhere, Adorno was convinced that, in rendering action an imperative, the students had hollowed it out of leftwing content and endowed it instead with an authoritarian character.

It should be possible to recognize both the value of Adorno’s critique and its limits. What it diagnosed was the endurance of the authoritarian personality within a movement that aspired to its opposite. Yet in couching this critique in the language of “left fascism,” Adorno not only overstated the power of the student movement; he also aided in psychologizing fascism’s emergence in lieu of either a structural critique of the integration of late capitalism and the state or a political critique of the components of a fascist movement. To this end, another historian has found it necessary to stress that, “after all, the student movements had charismatic leaders, but they never articulated a Führerprinzip, did not center their ideology in racism, had no connection to a mass political party, and had no mass paramilitary organization.”

More importantly, some of Adorno’s own students were conscious of these conflicting impulses within the movement and actively trying to mitigate them, while also maintaining the utility of a critique of fascism. There was no single West German student leader who was more invested in engaging with the movement’s problems and its potentials on the terms of Critical

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90 Adorno and Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” 131-2.
Theory than Hans-Jürgen Krahl. More than one commentator has described Krahl’s thought as a form of “immanent critique.”93 One historian, Phil Slater, renders it metacritical as well: “The student movement’s appropriation of ‘critical theory of society’ was metacritical not in a purely theoretical sense, but in a practical manner,” he writes. “The critique of ‘traditional theory’ became an awareness of the need for organized ideological struggle.”94 As Slater demonstrates, Krahl was pivotal in propelling the critique of advanced industrial society towards articulating organizational solutions.

One key document of this endeavor was the Organisationsreferat—literally, the presentation on organization—which Krahl and Dutschke coauthored and presented at the twenty-second annual federal assembly of the SDS in September 1967. Already their altercations with members of the Frankfurt professoriate in June and July of that year had demonstrated a shared intuition on the part of these two students that organized resistance was necessary. Their joint presentation sought to articulate its precise form. Remarkably, it did so by recourse to Horkheimer’s critique of the authoritarian state, recovered just five months earlier by Krahl’s cohort in Frankfurt to undercut Horkheimer’s imperialist apologetics. Now, in the Organisationsreferat, Horkheimer’s critique was newly propelled to transcend its own theoretical confines.

The joint Organisationsreferat was itself organized into three parts: it opened with a critique of political economy; this critique was then used to ground strategic conclusions for political struggle, and these, in turn, were used to elucidate the requisite organizational

94 Slater, Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School, 83.
consequences for the SDS. Horkheimer’s critique of state capitalism provided the frame for the foremost third. Dutschke and Krahl saw evidence of the emergence of a centralized command economy in a series of recent state responses to the gradual tapering of the economic growth rate that had characterized the period of West Germany’s “economic miracle.” They drew ominous conclusions from other recent events that suggested that the consolidation of political and economic power in the hands of the state had gone largely unopposed with the framework of bourgeois democratic society; in fact, bourgeois democratic society underwrote the consolidation of state power, just as Horkheimer had anticipated. Dutschke and Krahl pointed to two examples that were at the forefront of the September SDS meeting: one year earlier, the CDU and SPD had formed a “a grand coalition” which, spanning 95% of the seats in parliament, signaled the end to an effective parliamentary opposition. Meanwhile, the circumstances surrounding the police killing of Ohnesorg suggested just how easily repressive violence could go unchecked within a liberal society where much of the mass media was devoted to indoctrinating the public with the interests of the state, rather than contesting them.

Significantly, Dutschke and Krahl actually varied from Horkheimer’s anticipation of fascism in that they did not foresee an immediate increase in similar acts of repressive state violence absent an economic crisis or another kind of disruption that might force the state to intervene. Instead, they argued that the state’s use of manifest coercion had largely receded behind a web of ideological manipulations—here akin to the culture industry—that had been

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Therefore the present form of state capitalism was bottoming out in a kind of integrated stasis.\textsuperscript{98}

In a second departure from their mentors in the Frankfurt School, Dutschke and Krahl insisted that “the critique of the system of manipulation” could not remain “mere cultural criticism.” It had to become political. In one of the most memorable passages of the presentation, they suggested that, “Marx’s critique of anarchism, of subjective voluntarism—that Bakunin had banked entirely on revolutionary will and ignored economic necessity—is now obsolete.”\textsuperscript{99} This assertion revived the argument that Dutschke had already outlined in June, when Habermas had accused him of advancing a “voluntarist ideology.” Where the material conditions for a transition to socialism had already obtained, Dutschke had argued then, the transition itself depended on the conscious will of the masses.

In hoping to harness the “cultural criticism” of the Frankfurt School directly to the need for penetrating the reified consciousness of the masses through political action, Dutschke and Krahl drew inspiration from abroad. In Che Guevara’s focus theory, they found evidence for the possibility of manufacturing the objective conditions for social transformation through subjective

\textsuperscript{97} Dutschke and Krahl, “Organisationsreferat,” II: 288.

\textsuperscript{98} Dutschke and Krahl use the Horkheimerian term “integral statism” to describe this stasis. Their use of the term is misleading, since Horkheimer in fact used “integral statism” to describe the form of state socialism represented by the Soviet Union, where the means of production were owned by the state. It’s clear in the Organisationsreferat that Dutschke and Krahl did not anticipate any sort of state seizure of the means of production, and at one juncture, they even define “integral statism in opposition to state capitalism” as the form of advanced capitalist political economy in which private ownership of the means of production is retained \textit{[beibehalten]} amidst the expanding role of state bureaucracy in the economy (Dutschke and Krahl, “Organisationsreferat,” II:288, my emphasis). It is an odd terminological move, since Horkheimer and his colleagues typically used “state capitalism” to designate the form in which the means of production remain privatized (see especially Pollock, “State Capitalism”). I’ve been unable to ascertain the reason behind Dutschke’s and Krahl’s terminological switch, and I am not aware of another scholar who has noted the mistake.

activity. Fashioning themselves as “urban guerillas,” they envisioned students undertaking direct and subversive actions that would jolt public sentiment into popular revolt, similar to how Guevara’s revolutionary strategy in Latin America had mobilized small bands of guerilla fighters in rapid assault-and-retreat tactics on strategic junctures of the colonial system, which proved hugely effective in winning public support for independence. In the Federal Republic, Dutschke’s and Krahl’s aims were obviously much narrower. In part, they actions were intended to complement Guevara’s “propaganda of bullets,” but they also hoped that their actions would make possible “a qualitatively different kind of political experience,” which had been suppressed to date by the internalized schema of systemic manipulation.

Dutschke and Krahl drew implications from their Guevara-inspired political strategy for the organizational structure of the SDS itself. Characterizing the SDS as “organizational hybrid,” they suggested that, insofar as it had retained much of the organizational form of the youth arm of a parliamentary party, it had enabled revisionist bureaucracy to creep in through the backdoor, jeopardizing the organization’s revolutionary aims. In bold theoretical tones, Dutschke and Krahl thus concluded that “The problem of organization is the problem of revolutionary existence.”

Their conclusion had bearing for Horkheimer’s critique. In “The Authoritarian State,” Horkheimer’s critique of state consolidation had run in parallel with a critique of the bureaucratization and cooptation of the traditional organizational forms of the Left. Workers’ parties and trade unions, he had observed, had jettisoned the abolition of bourgeois rule in favor

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100 “Guevara’s answer for Latin America was that the revolutionaries must not always wait for the objective conditions for the revolution, but rather that by means of the focus, they can create the revolution through subjective activity” (Dutschke, Vom Antisemitismus zum Antikommunismus,” 69).
of realizing the bourgeoisie’s own liberalist ideological goal. Thus they had sought to strike deals with their capitalist bosses or else wrangle for majorities in parliament in lieu of waging revolution in the interest of total liberation.\footnote{Horkheimer “Authoritarian State,” 7.} In a rare moment, Horkheimer had even gestured towards an organizational form better equipped for moving along a revolutionary continuum: “The theoretical conception which, following its first trailblazers, will show the new society its way—the system of workers’ councils—grows out of praxis. The roots of the council system go back to 1871, 1904, and other events.”\footnote{Horkheimer, “Authoritarian State,” 10.} Dutschke’s and Krahl’s own Guevara-inspired vision of autonomously organized “urban guerilla” cells converged on Horkheimer’s councilist vison, while pointing it outward towards Third World internationalism. In this way they spun Horkheimer’s revolutionary clock forward: from 1871 and 1904 to 1917, 1936, and 1968.\footnote{For the citation of other historic ruptures during “1968,” see Renaud, \textit{New Lefts}, 234-277. Renaud directly links organization form to historic rupture: “The revolutionary tradition in general was lived as a simultaneity of historic ruptures; that is why activists in 1968 found it easy to conjure up 1936 or 1917 or 1871 or 1789. Only after the event and at the level of analysis do historical processes come into view.” (\textit{New Lefts}, 275).}

Dutschke’s and Krahl’s proposed reorganization of the SDS did not take place on precisely the terms of the \textit{Organisationsreferat}. But what did follow their presentation was a consolidation of the SDS behind their shared “antiauthoritarian line,” prompting a two-and-a-half-year period of intense political engagement in the Federal Republic and worldwide. This period bore witness not only to a debilitating assassination attempt on Dutschke’s life in April 1968, but also to Krahl’s death in a car crash in February 1970. At his funeral that March, the remaining delegates of the SDS agreed to dissolve the organization.

Krahl’s life was as inextricable from the SDS as his death is from its demise. In the years leading up to his death, Krahl continued to pursue the idea of autonomous self-organization both
theoretically and practically. For him, organization presented both the problem and the solution to advanced capitalist society. He was convinced that, in an advanced capitalist society, it was not only possible, but necessary to engender forms of organization capable of withstanding bureaucratic or ideological capture. With reference to the utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch, Krahl sometimes called these organizational forms “concrete utopias.” They were slices of a non-coercive social life that pointed the way to alternative futures, however distant they may be. Within these organizational forms, Krahl thought that critical thought and comradeship would flourish and grow to the point of being able to directly challenge capitalism. Without them, he feared that even the ability to imagine an alternative way of living at the theoretical level would disappear, thus vanquishing the project of realizing freedom in history.106

In this way, Krahl differed from his advisor, Adorno, in the latter’s assessment that theory alone provided a placeholder for praxis in the absence of a revolutionary mass movement. For Krahl, theory itself was vulnerable to cooptation and valorization, and thus required a form in which its critical impetus could serve political struggle. While Krahl’s further thinking on this subject will be pursued in chapter 4, it is worth emphasizing here that, in a different way, the question of organization converged on Adorno’s other worry about the student movement’s inner “authoritarian” impulses. Although it fell short in reality, Krahl’s and Dutschke’s hope for the SDS was one in which an antiauthoritarian sensibility might flourish within the alternative social conditions of the organization itself. It is clear that, for Krahl, some semblance of this possibility was achieved in his own Frankfurt cohort. As he wrote in 1968: “In the SDS I learned what solidarity means, namely, to cultivate forms of sociality that are able to get clear of the oppressions

and subjugations of the ruling class.”\textsuperscript{107} What Krahl ascribed here to his circle of comrades points to the greater expanse of his vision.

Notably, however, it is not “organization” that is the usual legacy of the Frankfurt School, but “cultural criticism.” In fact, one direct consequence of the political alignment of the students’ faculty skeptics was the image of an intragenerational “Frankfurt School” that was hostile to revolutionary \textit{praxis}, even and especially as Habermas’s own theoretical trajectory moved in the historicist liberal direction of communicative action. Nevertheless, if what bound Adorno and Horkheimer to Habermas was a late-stage political affinity amidst emerging theoretical differences, what bound the student movement to Adorno and Horkheimer was their theoretical continuity in the face of diverging political interpretations. Pivotal in this continuity was the students’ multidirectional reinterpretation of Horkheimer’s own critique of state capitalism. It came to underpin a critique of imperialism in relation to advanced capitalism and imagine a corresponding revolutionary organizational form capable of resisting their statist harbingers.

Still, the alternative did not lose all of its proponents. From behind bars in 1970, Angela Davis said this of her two years in Frankfurt: “[it] taught me one basic fact: Marx was right when he said in the 11th of the Feuerbach theses that philosophers as philosophers have simply interpreted the world and that the point, however is to change it.” Davis hadn’t been present for the \textit{Organisationsreferat} in September 1967. She had left the country in July of that year, just weeks after the meeting between the Frankfurt SDS and Adorno and Horkheimer. Still, she had been present and active in much of the initial retooling of Critical Theory. She explained further: “This I experienced by witnessing and participating in the student movement growing conscious of itself, growing conscious of the need to break away from the mentors—the very philosophers

\textsuperscript{107} Krahl, “Angaben zur Person,” 22.
who had stimulated the students to comprehend the nature of Marxism—and to begin to act, to act directly. This action took the form of increasingly militant demonstrations against U.S. imperialism, its aggression in Vietnam, its flunkies in West Germany and also the form of moving to organize the dispossessed at a grass-roots level and the attempt to involve labor.” For Davis, the possibility presented by the West German student movement proved life-altering. As she said in the interview: “It was my involvement in the demonstrative political activity led by the German SDS (Socialist Students League) which made me realize that I had to come home to wage the fight among my own people, Black people.”

It is this fight to which the next chapter turns.

\[108\] Davis, “Prison Interviews with Angela Y. Davis,” in Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning*, 191.
Chapter Three

Abolition | Revolution:
Angela Davis’s Kantian-Marxist Archive

Angela Davis left Frankfurt for California in the summer of 1967. She enrolled in the graduate program in philosophy at UCSD, and, two years later, she defended a dissertation prospectus titled “Towards a Kantian Theory of Force” before a committee chaired by Herbert Marcuse. It was one of the last things she would write before becoming a person of public interest. In August 1969, Davis came to the attention of California’s neoconservative governor Ronald Reagan when her Communist Party membership was reported by two newspapers. She was fired from her first academic job at UCLA, and the statewide grassroots campaign to win it back made hers a household name. One year later, in August 1970, the State of California charged Davis with conspiracy, kidnapping, and murder in relation to a deadly shootout at a courthouse in San Rafael, Marin County. She became the third woman in history to land on the FBI’s Ten Most Wanted list when she went underground. Her subsequent capture, incarceration, and trial prompted an international outcry, as people around the world saw in Davis’s example the hollowness of the notions of freedom and equality that American democracy claimed to represent.¹

It is impossible not to read Davis’s incarceration as an inflection point that transformed her academic trajectory. Her own publication record shows it. Behind bars, Davis helped pioneer not one but two theorectico-political programs: black radical feminism and prison abolition.² She has

¹ For a first-hand account of the trial, see Aptheker, The Morning Breaks. For a study of its contemporaneous reception, see Roman, “‘Armed and Dangerous.’”
² See Davis, “Reflections on the Role of the Black Woman in the Community of Slaves.” The early formulation of prison abolition in Davis et al., If They Come in the Morning is discussed in this chapter.
continued to expand their interlocking frameworks ever since. Against the presumption of absolute rupture, however, this chapter centers the continuity in Davis’s critique of the state prior to and after her incarceration. In the late 1960s, Davis had already begun to query the antagonism between material freedom and state coercion in the context of her dissertation project on the philosophy of the German idealist Immanuel Kant, which bore the imprint of her academic training with members of the Frankfurt School. In the context of her political organizing with the Black Panther Party, the Che Lumumba Club, and even the West German student movement, she had engaged at length with Marxist theories of the state and revolution. Come 1971, these provided fertile ground for developing a critique of the judicial-prison system in the context of late capitalism, helping to hatch the pathbreaking project of prison abolition.

As it maps connections between Davis’s critique of the prison, her early embrace of Marxism, her virtually unknown studies in German philosophy, and the collective contexts that fostered each, this chapter accomplishes three tasks. First, it highlights Davis’s expansion of a Frankfurt School reading of Kant as a latently dialectical thinker whose antinomies reflect historical contradictions that continue to shape reality. Second, it outlines the resonances of Marxist critiques of fascism and the state to the early project of prison abolition. Finally, as it snapshots Davis’s thought in stages, it documents how Davis’s formulation of prison abolition implicitly mobilizes a philosophical defense of human agency in the face of reified social

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3 For her most recent work in this intersection, see Davis et al., *Abolition. Feminism. Now.*

4 In fact, the 1971 formulation predated a number of other seminal texts with which the modern history of prison abolition is typically linked, including Thomas Mathieson’s *The Politics of Abolition* (1974) and Fay Honey Knopp’s *Instead of Prison: A Handbook for Prison Abolitionists* (1976). For Davis’s summary of their importance, see Davis and Rodríguez, “The Challenge of Prison Abolition,” 215.

5 To date, the only publication by Davis that explicitly engages with German philosophy are her 1969 “Lectures on Liberation,” which were published for the first time in 2010 as an introduction to Frederick Douglass’s autobiography.
structures and, as such, constitutes an urgent theory of revolution for late capitalist society, heretofore absent or incomplete in these other discourses.

Towards a Kantian Critique of the State

Understanding the relevance of Davis’s dissertation project for her abolitionist thought requires a deep dive into the philosophical architecture of Kant’s œuvre, which is the first objective of this section. At stake in Davis’s dissertation project was the problem of freedom, which, in Kant, centered the disjunct between theoretical and practical reason. Like her mentors in the Frankfurt School, Davis read this disconnect as a reflection of real historical contradictions: our human ability to think rationally and therefore critically would seem to promise the possibility of reorganizing our lives in the interest of greater freedom, yet, in actual fact, we experience the world as a series of imperatives that limit our freedom and fly in the face of our own moral reason. What was new in Davis’s inquiry was that she took up this contradiction from the vantage of Kant’s political philosophy and philosophy of history, exposing still another poignant articulation of this fundamental problem. If, as the prototypical expression of bourgeois political theory, Kant had famously tied freedom to a state-structured society, when read against the grain, his political philosophy and philosophy of history also showed human freedom to be at logical odds with state coercion, suggesting the historical abolition of the latter was necessary in order for the former to be realized in history. By teasing out these implications, this section recovers a philosophically grounded critique of the state with a far-reaching commitment to self-determined political struggle.

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6 For a critique of Kantian scholars who treat Kant’s three *Critiques* as additive, thereby missing this queen of contradictions that renders Kant a latently dialectical thinker, see Wayne, *Red Kant*, 7-25.
There is an immediate practical impediment to full comprehension of Davis’s Kantian critique, however. Davis never had a chance to finish the dissertation. Instead, the contradiction between human freedom and state coercion at its center was rendered deeply personal when she was pursued and incarcerated by the State of California in the fall of the 1970. Although she expressed hope in finishing the dissertation after her acquittal in June 1972, it’s not clear that she ever received funding to do so.\(^7\) Thus, what is here surmised about the direction and implications of her project is based on the available material in her archive, specifically, a dissertation prospectus defended in May 1969, a subsequent progress report on dissertation research, an undated lecture on “Kant’s philosophy in general,” and a series of drafted summaries of key political texts by Kant.\(^8\)

In order to fully appreciate Davis’s reading, some preliminary orientation in the larger Kantian project is needed, for which the undated lecture offers a starting point.\(^9\) The lecture recollected that, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant had set out to determine what we can objectively know about the world. Specifically, his aim had been to synthesize the rationalism of René Descartes and the empiricism of David Hume, both of whose models Kant found promising, yet both of which had also memorably ended in aporias.\(^10\) Descartes had made pure thought the basis of knowledge but discovered that he could not prove without a doubt that the empirical world is not an illusion created by an evil demon. Hume had given primacy to the senses only to realize he could not demonstrate conclusively that because the sun had risen every single day of human

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\(^7\) In an undated letter written sometime after her acquittal to Gary Nash, Chairman of the UCLA Angela Davis Defense Fund, Davis inquired whether there might be funds left to sustain her work on the dissertation. She wrote there that: “Although two years have already passed since I was able to do any serious work on my doctoral dissertation, I have not abandoned the idea of completing it” (Davis, “Letter to Gary Nash,” Papers of Angela Y. Davis, Folder 16.4).

\(^8\) See folders 60.19, 61.1, and 61.5 in the Papers of Angela Y. Davis.

\(^9\) Davis, “Lecture on Kant’s Philosophy in General,” Papers of Angela Y. Davis, Folder 61.5.

history it would also rise again tomorrow. Thus, Kant realized that, in place of knowledge conforming to empirical data in the world, empirical data must conform to knowledge. He characterized his reversal in the first *Critique’s* opening pages as a Copernican Revolution in philosophical thought. The human subject, he hypothesized, is host to a series of a priori forms and categories, such as time, space, and causality, which dictate the ways in which objects in the outside world are apprehended by the senses and ordered by the understanding. It was therefore thanks to these two faculties, the intuition (sense-perception) and the understanding, that the empirical world is objectively knowable.

One immediate limitation that results from Kant’s conceptual architecture of the intuition and the understanding, however, is that it renders experience thoroughly determined. It suggests that empirical data confirms and conforms to universal and necessary laws of nature as comprehended by the faculties of intuition and understanding because those very faculties make use of the same relational logics of causality, substance, reciprocity, and so forth to organize experience in the first place. Aware of this problem, Kant determined that human consciousness must have a third faculty, *reason*, which is capable of transcending these strictures. According to Kant, reason generates new concepts in pure thought that are not beholden to the empirical realm, including freedom. In the first *Critique*, Kant even posited that “the ultimate end of the pure employment of our reason” was practice, action.

As Davis’s lecture acknowledged, rendering freedom a function of reason was both promising and problematic. On the one hand, it suggested the possibility of transgressing the

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12 Davis, “Lecture on Kant’s Philosophy in General,” 3-5.
13 Davis, “Lecture on Kant’s Philosophy in General,” 5.
14 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 730-4. For the importance of this passage, see Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, 58.
conceptual architecture of the understanding, but on the other, it seemed to be entirely delimited by those same strictures. Articulated as the third antinomy in the first Critique, the problem of freedom came into full view with the Critique of Practical Reason, which was concerned precisely with the moral-practical question: “what should I do?” Kant argued there that to act morally is to act in accordance with reason, or—to use the memorable formulation of the categorical imperative from the Groundwork—to “act only in according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should a universal law.” According to Kant, to act on such rational principles that are valid for any and every person facing similar circumstances is to be free, since only in the instance where a person is guided by their self-determined, objectively rational insight can they be said to be the true subject, or author, of an action, rather than the object of their particular instincts and inclinations. In the lecture, Davis glossed the radical potential of this concept of reason with an instructive invocation of anti-racist protest: “Cops brutally beat young Black students — as happened yesterday at Dorsey H[igh] S[chool],” she wrote. “The question for me would not be ‘what should I do about this,’ if I confined myself to understanding. It would be: what will the laws of experience determine me to do.” Without reason, in other words, the violence of racism would only ever be experienced as an immutable authority, akin to a natural law. But reason contains the radical possibility of transcending this perception in order to posit an alternative, and, through action, bring about a rationally organized society in which freedom prevails.

Still, if Kant’s radical concept of reason presented the possibility of transcending the reified dictates of experience, of which racism offers an urgent example, his philosophical architecture also implicitly attested to the reality in which most people perceive racism as a natural law, rather

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15 Davis, “Lecture on Kant’s Philosophy in General,” 6; 10-1.
16 Kant, Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals, 30.
17 Davis, “Lecture on Kant’s Philosophy in General,” 7.
than as a *naturalized*—and therefore mutable—one. As Davis wrote in another instance: “When I protest & try to take measures to end the genocide of Black people in this country, I am not conceiving my acts to be the result of mere circumstances – bec[a]use I am Black, bec[a]use I have been involved in the liberation struggle, etc. The principles acc[ord]ing to which I act apply to everyone – however most people act acc[ord]ing to their immediate interests, often mistaking them for general principles.”

Even though reason generates the possibility of contesting the ordering logics of our lives through rationally guided action, Davis acknowledged, most people merely accept to live by those logics.

Taken together, these two examples point to the appeal of Kant for Davis. His philosophical architecture allowed one to reflect on real historical contradictions between the socially transformative capacity of human agency and its subjugation to reified structures. As she wrote at one juncture in the lecture: “There is a split right down the middle of the human being. He is presumed to be two different beings at the same time—on the one hand a being thoroughly determined by natural, psychological laws—on the other hand a free, intellectual being capable of autonomy.”

In this analysis, Davis’s reading of Kant was close in proximity to Marcuse, who elsewhere had located in Kant’s architecture a profound expression of the threat posed to reason by its reification under modernity. For Marcuse, the split between theoretical and practical reason in Kant, compounded by his tendency to delimit the moral realm of the latter to the conceptual constraints of the former, anticipated the reduction of reason’s transformative capacity to the mere reception and internalization of the ordering logics of the day: productivity, efficiency,

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technological rationality, profitability, in short, capitalism. Reason, in other words, was under perpetual threat of being subsumed to the mere understanding.\textsuperscript{20}

For Davis, this Kantian gulf between epistemology and ethics, or theory and practice, came to a head in the political philosophy and philosophy of history. Here, too, it is worth recalling the basic contours of these theories in Kant before diving into Davis’s reading. Like many Enlightenment philosophers before him, Kant was a social contract theorist. He believed that freedom could only be realized within a civil society governed by laws backed by the coercive power of the state. Kant had arrived at this conclusion by comparing his own society to a mythical state of nature. The state of nature, he believed, was an inherently unfree realm. In it, people’s actions were driven by necessity rather than rational (free) intent; they were forever subject to the arbitrary interference of other people, which voided their capacity for self-determination. Because such perpetual unfreedom was incompatible with Kant’s understanding of the human subject as rational and free, Kant concluded that it had been historically justified to use violence to compel people to leave the state of nature and enter civil society. By the same logic, he also legitimimized the state’s capacity to punish people who did not comply with the law. Without the possibility of enforcement, the rule of law could provide no guarantee of freedom. With the possibility of enforcement, however, the state could ensure its citizens a base level of political (negative) freedom. This basis might in turn provide the framework in which people could pursue their moral-practical (positive) freedom as defined previously by the categorical imperative.\textsuperscript{21}

As Davis observed in her dissertation prospectus, this latter transition from political freedom, as secured by the coercive machinations of empirical states, to practical freedom, as


\textsuperscript{21} See Kant, \textit{Political Writings}. 
ascertained from the categorical imperative, hinted at a line of mediation across the theory-practice gulf. But it also raised a host of logical complications and moral-political concerns that were at the heart of her project’s inquiry. These were made explicit in the prospectus, which specifically proposed to “shed some light” on Kant’s overlooked political philosophy and philosophy of history by way of the category of “force,” or Zwang in German, usually translated into English as coercion. As Davis noted, there was an inherent contradiction between Kant’s portrayal of empirical force, or violence, as “prohibited by reason yet necessitated by historical progress” and his “optimistic belief in the eventual abolition of force as being the prerequisite for the reign of reason in human society.”

This contradiction raised a two-part question: “Are there, in Kant’s political theory and philosophy of history, forms of violence which tend to perpetuate themselves and thereby militate against his idea of a rationally organized society based on freedom? Can it be maintained that precisely in order to achieve Kant’s ultimate goal for man certain forms of violence prevail?”

Significantly, the question of whether the necessity of historical violence stood at odds with a vision of a future free of coercion was not new in the annals of philosophy and modern social theory. G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Frantz Fanon name just a few of the thinkers who are better remembered than Kant for having determined that force, or violence, was the fundamental player in historical processes and, for that matter, freedom struggle. Considering the proximity between Davis’s inquiry and these other initiatives helps to make audible the political immediacy of her project. By what means do we as a society arrive at a future ruled by reason and free of violence? Are those means themselves violent, and if so, do they indeed propel progress towards freedom, or might they instead block it? More pointedly, whose violence propels progress towards

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freedom, and whose violence blocks it? Legal coercion, crime, revolution, and war—to name a few of the salient examples Davis pulled from Kant—were not amorphous actions. They had subjects, and those subjects ranged from anonymous individuals to militarized states.

Nevertheless, that Davis’s primary vehicle for addressing the problem of violence was *Kant*—and not Hegel, Marx, or Fanon—is among the most intriguing aspects of the project. Here, her intellectual biography offers some insight. Davis’s interest in Kant had begun early and endured throughout her studies. Kant had been one of the first German philosophers whom Davis had read at length as an undergraduate at Brandeis University, after Marcuse invited her to audit his graduate seminar on the *Critique of Pure Reason* during her senior year. Marcuse had even had Davis give the introductory presentation in the course charting a path from Hume to Kant. During the next two years in Frankfurt, Davis sought out multiple courses on Kant. With Oskar Negt she read Kant’s second and third *Critiques*; with Max Horkheimer and Karl-Heinz Haag she studied Kant’s philosophy of religion; with Jürgen Habermas she worked through Hegel’s critique of Kant; and with Theodor Adorno she worked through Adorno’s own reading of Kant in *Negative Dialectics*. For Adorno, too, she gave an introductory presentation. Negt would later write of Davis in a recommendation letter that: “It deserves special attention that she does not attempt to reconstruct Kant’s philosophy ex post — from the viewpoint of Hegel’s dialectic —, but that she rather builds her account on those theorems whose solutions by themselves engender dialectic.”

Together with the knowledge of the radical reception of Kant underway amongst Frankfurt School

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25 Davis and Richardson, “Keynote by Angela Davis ’65 with Julieanne Richardson ’76, H’16.”
26 See folders 60.18, 61.1, 61.3, 61.4, 62.7, 63.4, 63.5 in the Angela Y. Davis Archive for various handwritten notes, xeroxed copies of presentations by other students, xeroxed copies of professors’ lectures (esp. Haag), and final papers/presentations by Davis for courses listed above. For Horkheimer and Haag’s proseminar on Kant’s philosophy of religion in the summer semester of 1966, Davis’s name is listed on the roster (Max Horkheimer Archive, Na 1 899).
27 Oskar Negt, “Gutachten über die Kant-Arbeit von Angela Davis.”
theorists, we might borrow Negt’s insight into Davis’s commitment to its method as a key to unlocking the series of Kantian contradictions that Davis outlined in her prospectus.

In the prospectus, Davis isolated three areas of concern in which Kant’s stated or implied relationship between force and freedom devolved into contradiction. The first squared off with the transition problem from legality to morality. As Davis observed there, not only had Kant “deduced the notion of justice from the moral law,” he had also positioned the “legal order [as] the empirical base for the unfolding of the morality in the empirical individual.” Thus there appeared to be a conduit between legality and morality from either end that promised to bridge the strict division of empirical and conceptual realms as defined by the philosophical architecture of the first Critique. Nevertheless, as Davis also observed, this conduit was bound up with the empirical fact of state coercion in ways that could prove problematic for the actualization of Kant’s radical notion of practical freedom. If Kant conceived of the state as primarily concerned with coercing individual behavior into agreement with the law (regardless of the law’s moral content), his framework would logically legitimize the basest despotism. Doing so would further collapse any necessary connection between the political freedom that provided the state’s justification and its citizenry’s ability to realize their moral freedom. “It is thus implied,” Davis ventured, that the Kantian state is primarily concerned with the “moral maturation of its members,” to which its coercive capacity is secondary and “theoretically might be eliminated at some point in history.” Though only a tentatively drawn conclusion in the prospectus, Davis’s articulation of its possibility pointed towards a more radical reading of Kant as warranting the abolition of the state.

The second area of concern centered the relationship between Kant’s “Idea of the state in general” and its manifold empirical manifestations. Here, too, contradictions emerged in the implied transition from the one to the other. As seen in the first and second *Critiques*, Kant was an idealist. He believed that human reason was able to discern a priori certain “ideas,” which (among other things) provided the moral principles that guide human action. One idea was that of the state, which Kant had ascertained in the political philosophy to be the custodian of freedom.\(^{30}\) The implied relationship between the idea of the state and empirically existing states posed a problem, however. “Any existing empirical state,” Davis wrote, “instead of being the manifestation of the Idea, can easily become a surrogate for the Idea.”\(^{31}\) Here, too, what was at stake for Davis was the extent to which the coercive capacity of empirical states would be sanctioned by Kant’s political theory in the name of securing freedom. Posed as a question: were all existing states universally justified in their use of coercion by virtue of Kant’s idealism? Or else was it possible that people were instead justified in exercising resistance and even revolution to bring an existing state in line with its guiding idea? If Kant insisted on state supremacy, Davis observed, then individuals would find themselves in a maximum “limbo of ineffectiveness.” She again outlined the logical necessity of an alternative: if not the political philosophy, then Kant’s moral philosophy must sanction a natural right of resistance.\(^{32}\)

The final area of concern addressed in Davis’s prospectus was Kant's philosophy of history. As she wrote in some subsequent research notes to the dissertation, it was here that she unearthed the most evidence for a “rupture” in the Kantian concept of force.\(^{33}\) As seen already,

\(^{30}\) Davis, “Towards a Kantian Theory of Force,” 4-5.


\(^{32}\) Davis, “Towards a Kantian Theory of Force,” 5.

Kant had retroactively sanctioned the historical violence that had (allegedly) been required to compel people to leave the state of nature and enter civil society. \(^{34}\) Even as it affronted the moral autonomy of individuals, he had deemed this form of violence objectively necessary from the standpoint of history’s progress towards freedom. But this reasoning, Davis now observed, generated a tension between history and morality: “If war is a condition for the unfolding of history then history and morality are directly opposed to one another (which would be untenable) or else, morality must have a historical dimension which was not explored by Kant.”\(^{35}\) Davis noted a related problem in Kant’s well-known insistence that it is morally wrong for individuals to engage in revolution and war, despite having determined their objective historical necessity. “As a justified means to an end,” she wrote, historical force appeared to be relegated by Kant “to the ‘objective’ spheres of human life (the state, history).” Yet if this was to be the case, she observed, recycling the logic of the previous section, reason itself would be “doomed to inefficacy.” Thus Davis concluded more urgently: “This, however, militates against one of the most fundamental principles underlying the Kantian concept of reason: reason must become practical, reason must be capable of assuring the ultimate reign of eternal peace and freedom.”\(^{36}\) Once again, the necessary transition from pure to practical reason appeared poised to shore up the actualization of human freedom—in the form of self-determined revolution or otherwise—against limiting incursions of the state and other historical forces.

As evident in these concluding words, the red thread through the dissertation prospectus was the radical promise of Kant’s concept of practical reason. Time and again, Davis recalled its

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\(^{34}\) For two different critiques of the myth of the “state of nature” in Enlightenment thought, see Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, and Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti.”


primacy as dictated by its framing in the first and second *Critiques* in order to call into question those formulations that elsewhere appeared to give credence to state supremacy and other determinate historical structures. Thus, even when Kant’s reasoning in the political philosophy and philosophy of history appeared logically pat and menacingly authoritarian, Davis was able to substantiate a dialectic on the basis of Kant’s own architecture.

Davis defended the prospectus in May 1969 before a committee chaired by Marcuse and featuring the Kantian philosopher Rudolf Makkreel, Humean philosopher David Norton, philosopher of law Herbert Morris, and a young Fredric Jameson, professor of literature.\(^7\) A subsequent research report, filed sometime in the following year, confirms her methodology of choice. In it, Davis characterized her intention to find “workable solutions” to the problems she had identified that would “not do violence to Kant’s philosophy.”\(^8\) Buttressed by a host of available scholarship in German, French, and Anglophone contexts, the progress report was more detailed than the prospectus. Yet what it firmly indicated was that the contradictions that Davis had outlined in the prospectus were just that: *contradictions*. In one instance, she observed that there appeared to be no “direct transition from morality to legality via moral freedom.”\(^9\) In another, she wrote: “I have discovered that it is not possible, through a purely internal analysis of Kant’s philosophy, to uncover the underlying reasons for his absolute rejection of a right of resistance entailing the use of force against the only legal possessor of the right to use force [the state].”\(^{10}\) And yet, as she ascertained in still another set of notes, Kant’s philosophy of history “might be said to implicitly justify revolution, i.e., that revolution which is attempting to bring about a better

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order in terms of the satisfaction of human needs.”  

Elsewhere she wrote even more candidly: “My fundamental criticism of Kant’s political theory [...] is that he allows the civil law & its executor to acquire a kind of transcendental validity which cannot be touched by empirical deviations even though the law & the ruler themselves do not satisfy some of the real transcendental conditions. The fact that Kant does allow for a very sublimated form of resistance – the freedom of the pen – which, it seems would be the only ‘good’ use enlightenment can be put to according to Kant, does not mitigate the gap which is created in his theory by the lack of some real form of translating moral principles into reality.” Here as before, Kant’s political philosophy proved exceedingly hostile to any sort of practical challenges to the state. As a means of critique, academic freedom alone was sanctioned by Kant. Yet even so, as Davis’s dialectical reading demonstrated, the necessary rational and moral coordinates of both the political philosophy and the philosophy of history could still be read to logically legitimize and even demand political intervention against its express prohibition.

Exactly how Davis might have presented her findings in a final manuscript can only be surmised. Months after her prospectus defense, she was fired from her first professorial job at UCLA on account of her Communist Party membership. Davis’s dismissal had emanated from the highest echelons the state, the governor’s office. In a historical confirmation of her own thesis, it showed academic freedom – “the freedom of the pen” as Kant had called it – to be a limited guarantee. One year later, when Davis was pursued by the State of California on trumped-up charges that faced the death penalty, the central contradiction between practical freedom and state coercion became lived experience.

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41 Davis, “[Untitled manuscript on Immanuel Kant and Johan Friedrich Fries’s philosophies of history],” Papers of Angela Y. Davis, Folder 61.5, 5.
Nevertheless, if Davis’s close proximity to her Frankfurt School mentors is any indication, one thing can be said about her final project with some degree of certainty: Davis had likely never anticipated that she would be able to resolve theoretically any of the contradictions she had outlined in Kant. Instead, the stubborn persistence of the contradictions between force and freedom that Davis had isolated in her research recalls something that Adorno once said about the objective of all philosophy: “The profundity of philosophy […] is not a matter of its capacity for resolving contradictions, but rather of its ability to bring to the surface contradictions that are deeply embedded in the subject under investigation, to raise such contradictions to the level of consciousness, and at the same time, to understand the necessity for them; that is, to understand their meaning.” 43 In still another lecture, Adorno offered his high estimation of Kant’s ability to execute this fundamental task of philosophy: “Kant’s greatness manifests itself in the completely frank and open way in which he makes these contradictions explicit.” 44 Like Adorno, the brilliance of Kant for Davis lay in his honesty. Kant’s elaborately complex and frustratingly inconclusive philosophical system positioned reason and freedom as the antitheses and antidotes to oppression at the same time as it showed them to be deeply mired in and constrained by historical violence and state coercion. In this sense, the theoretical contradictions that Davis had isolated the prospectus illuminated the material conditions and practical challenges that shaped the present political terrain most acutely. For instance, we might agree that the state ought to be concerned with the moral content of the law and material freedom of its citizenry, but in actual fact, states are concerned with coercing human behavior into conformity with laws regardless of their right or wrongfulness. By a similar token, we can discern just how frequently a state’s use of coercive

43 Adorno, Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, 82.
44 Adorno, Problems of Moral Philosophy, 58.
violence goes unimpeded by virtue of the circumstances in which there is little check on its usage beyond the state’s own idea of its legitimacy.

Yet just as one might read in Kant’s political philosophy a reflection of the material forces that shape our worlds, including the stultifying powers of modern political institutions, Davis had located in his moral philosophy and philosophy of history the promise of their transformation. Even if Kant hadn’t admitted it, his framework insisted on political action; it justified resistance and revolution.

**A More Marxist Formulation**

On January 30, 1970, Davis gave a keynote titled “Man and the State” to the annual California Negro Leadership Conference. In the context of Davis’s intellectual biography, the timing of the speech is notable. On one end, it came approximately eight months after the prospectus defense and four months after Davis’s reinstatement to her UCLA job, from which she had been fired by the UC Board of Regents for belonging to the Communist Party. The grassroots campaign that had helped carry the successful court challenge had turned Davis into a public figure of consequence, bringing her to the attention of the organizers of the leadership conference as well. On the other end, the January speech took place some two weeks before Davis joined the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee, which dates the beginning of her intensive engagement in anti-prison work. Thus “Man and the State” snapshots Davis’s critique of the state before it came to focalize the carceral system specifically as a critical juncture for social transformation.

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45 Davis, “Man and the State,” A-D. Subsequent citations reflect that the pages of *People’s World* magazine, where this speech was published, were numbered, not lettered. For a recent auto-critique of her early usage of implicitly masculinist concepts, such as the “man” in the titular “Man and the State,” see Davis, “Introduction to the City Lights Edition of Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, An American Slave.”
Just as the timing of the speech is significant for understanding the evolution of Davis’s thought, so too is its context. The venue of Black politicians and community leaders gave Davis the opportunity to articulate the pressing political implications of the immanent critique of the state that she had worked in the context of her Kantian dissertation project. “The state,” Davis concluded urgently in the speech, “is everywhere a limiting force […]. If freedom were to become the mode of existence for men in their concrete social lives, then the state would have to cancel itself out for lack of a purpose.” 46 Davis drew direct links between the coercive impetus of the state and the interests of capital, and she doubled down on its specific function in late capitalist society to exercise a form of ideological control. As Davis thus deepened her account of the state’s objective to stunt people’s critical and imaginative capacities, she once again sought to shore these same capacities up as an available means of combatting it.

The forthright anti-statism of Davis’s conclusion was presaged by the seize-or-smash framework that opened the speech. What immediately strikes the reader of “Man and the State” is how explicitly it adopted the terms in which Marxists of early twentieth century Europe had argued over the efficacy of instrumentalizing the state — through legal electoral processes or otherwise — to end capitalism. 47 “If we decide that the state can be the condition for the perfection of freedom,” Davis wrote in 1970, “then all our energies should contribute to bringing the state closer to its democratic ideal.” Or, she continued, “if we agree with Marx that as long as the state prevails, it bears witness to a freedom in chains, then our efforts ought to be directed toward the eventual destruction of the state. For only after smashing the state would it be possible to begin erecting a

46 Davis, “Man and the State,” D.
47 For some exciting contributions to this early discourse that set the tone for subsequent engagements, see Luxemburg, Reform or Revolution; Lenin, The State and Revolution; and Lenin, “‘Left-Wing Communism,’ an Infantile Disorder.”
society free from exploitation and alienation, racism and suppression.” Having faced no shortage of state-sanctioned retaliation for her own membership in the Communist Party, Davis left little doubt about her intention to make the case for the continued truth of a Marxian critique of the state for the anti-capitalist and anti-racist liberation struggles of the present.

Already Davis’s attention to the antithesis between freedom and state coercion displayed significant affinity with the dissertation project. The first part of her speech followed her earlier argumentation more or less precisely. Bourgeois theorists, she explained at the outset, now listing Kant among them, had conceived of the state as a necessary condition of freedom and therefore a permanent fixture of civil society. They had insisted that individual freedom is inherently at risk of incursion due to other people’s pursuit of their freedom, and they had concluded that a state is necessary in order to secure a framework in which all individuals can maximize their freedom within limits. The means available to the state to enforce these limits was force itself. At once familiar and familiarly problematic from the dissertation project, Davis made quick ends of this bourgeois theory in the speech. In the first place, she observed that, in practice, bourgeois states had long failed to live up to their alleged purpose. Their lengthy coexistence with slavery—the very antithesis of freedom—offered one damning example. Nevertheless, Davis also noted that the muddy historical record of the bourgeois state did not immediately invalidate the theory. “The obvious problems encountered in an attempt to translate the theory [of the bourgeois democratic state] into practice do not in themselves militate against the validity of theory,” she wrote. “What we have to show, then, is that the problems of bourgeois democracy flow directly from the theory itself.” Here, too, immanent critique was the method of choice.

48 Davis, “Man and the State,” A.
49 Davis, “Man and the State,” B.
If Davis’s stated method was reminiscent of the dissertation project, however, its subsequent application took a different turn. Davis left behind the specifically Kantian framework of the dissertation and instead provided a critical intellectual history of modern theories of the state. Friedrich Engels offered the starting point. According to Engels, Davis explained to her audience, the bourgeois state did indeed exist to resolve conflict between people. Yet it was not because conflict is natural to the human condition. Rather, the interpersonal conflict that the bourgeois state mediates is class conflict, Engels had argued. The modern state had emerged historically in order to suspend the volatile contradictions endemic to a society in which one class owns the means of production and everyone else is forced to sell their labor for a wage in order to survive. Through the instrument of the state, the bourgeoisie thus meted out certain rights in the form of political freedoms to certain sectors of the citizenry, like the predominantly white, male, property-owning population, to generate the appearance of a civil society ruled by freedom. But this appearance came at the high cost of the larger citizenry’s material autonomy to organize their own lives and labor. Insofar as the state functioned as a condition of material freedom, then, it functioned exclusively as a condition of the bourgeoisie’s ability to own property and to exploit workers. Any challenges to those privileges could be met with the full force of the law. So understood, the modern state presented “the crystallized expression of the domination of man by man, of the subordination of one group of men to another,” Davis concluded.50

The burden of proof lay with Davis to demonstrate the continued relevance of Engels’s assessment for postwar democracies in the West, where allegedly the people—the demos—rule themselves. To do so, Davis turned her attention to what she described as the “more inconspicuous channels of coercion” used by political democracies to subjugate their citizenries to bourgeois rule.

50 Davis, “Man and the State,” B.
What had receded somewhat with the emergence of political democracies, she argued, was the state’s use of “overt violence” in coercing the lower classes into line. Control was now predominantly exercised through what Davis described as ideological “subterfuge,” which “subject[ed] the individual to such a degree of manipulation that he becomes little more than a bundle of artificially created needs – needs of the state, needs of the ruling class.” Her characterization had a Marcusean ring to it, thus bringing her critical intellectual history of the state up into the present. As Marcuse had shown, consumer culture, mass media, even institutions of education instilled in people certain reified ideas and desires that destroyed their biological drives for material flourishing and aesthetic stimulation, thus rendering them largely complacent in their inhuman subjugation.\(^5^1\) Davis put this thesis in more starkly political terms: “newspapers, radio, television,” she wrote in one instance, “indoctrinate the people in accordance with the interests of the state.” Elsewhere, Davis observed how racism had emerged as an extremely powerful form of ideological subterfuge. “Racism is control over the racist, for it determines his life space, the possibilities of his action,” she wrote. Functionally, racism worked to ensure that the working classes remained fractured and discordant, unaware of their collective freedom to transform the conditions of their oppression.\(^5^2\)

Davis’s principle target in the speech was the state’s use of these more subtle channels of coercion to convince its citizenry that the state itself was “the only natural place for democracy.” With the aid of the mass media, she observed, the state had reduced the notion of “equality” to political equality, strategically obfuscating the rampant economic inequality that defined life under capitalism. It had similarly drained the notion of democracy of its material content. In common

\(^5^1\) Marcuse, “Liberation from the Affluent Society,” 80-1. This lecture was given at the Dialectics of Liberation Congress in London in July 1967, which Davis attended.
\(^5^2\) Davis, “Man and the State,” C. My emphasis.
parlance, “democracy” had come to signal a representational form of government in the interest of property rights—and not the ability of individuals and communities to organize their time and labor according to their needs and desires. “Instead of laying the groundwork for individuals to become autonomous, free human beings,” Davis wrote unsparingly, the so-called democratic state “is forced to negate the very possibility of freedom.” The state had thus reneged on its (alleged) originating impetus and the justification of its very existence.

The implications that Davis drew from this conclusion were far reaching. Characterizing the state as “everywhere a limiting force in the service of particular interests,” she insisted that the state “would have to cancel itself out for lack of a purpose” if society were to be organized according to the principles of reason and freedom. For Davis, this wasn’t only an observation. It was also a program. “A critique of bourgeois democracy must be bound up with a movement to institute real democracy,” she wrote in a crystal-clear commitment to critical theory’s capacity to further political practice. “Insofar as the state possesses and uses material force in order to arrest this movement, the state itself is a primary target.”

The ultimate illegitimacy of the very existence of the state had been implied in Davis’s dissertation project, where Davis had shown that the very “idea” of the state in Kantian philosophy was permanently at odds with Kant’s practical notion of freedom, which itself was both the objective and definition of being human. Nevertheless, the form it took in “Man and the State” was significant. In the first place, it made the political direction of the unfinished dissertation project both more overt and more immediate to the historical reality of bourgeois democracy. At the same time, it expanded Davis’s immanent critique of the state (and the Kantian framework in

53 Davis, “Man and the State,” C.
54 Davis, “Man and the State,” D.
which it had previously been embedded) to include the state’s more latent, ideological means of coercion. In this precise focus, the speech bore something in common with Davis’s undated lecture, mentioned earlier, in which she had leveraged the transgressive potential of Kant’s concept of reason against the empirical and ideological staying power of racism. As the speech indicated, the state, too, appeared as a fixed and insurmountable element of the social landscape. Yet it, too, could be combatted.

Davis drew only one explicitly strategic implication from her line of argument. Its precise content suggests that it was intended as a word of caution to her immediate audience. “The absolute condemnation of black politicians,” Davis asserted towards the end of the speech, “is withheld only from those who take their leadership from the mass struggles of black people. Such politicians must realize that their function is primarily negative: they must make demands on the political structure which expose, for the masses to see, the incapacity of the state when confronted with the real needs of black people.” Davis’s triply negative formulation here is insightful for what it simultaneously allowed. It neither rejected participation in electoral politics outright, nor the possibility that certain kinds of political representation could prove useful under some circumstances. What it openly rejected, rather, was the possibility that the state itself could ultimately assuage the suffering inherent to a society organized by capitalism. That possibility, as

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55 Davis, “Man and the State,” D
56 Davis’s own biography supplies some evidence of her receptiveness to electoral politics. Just two years earlier, she had worked on the 1968 presidential campaign of her friend and Che-Lumumba comrade Charlene Mitchell, who had headed the Communist Party ticket. As she later recalled in her autobiography: “we weren’t so much interested in the number of votes she would pull, as in her ability to reach people who otherwise would never have been inspired to consider political alternatives outside the Republican and Democratic parties, and economic alternatives outside monopoly capitalism. Charlene’s candidacy gave us the opportunity to speak about socialism as a real solution to the problems confronting the working class, and especially Black and Brown people” (Davis, Angela Davis, 191). Her rationale here is consistent with that outlined in “Man and the State.” In the 1980s, Davis herself would run twice on the Communist Party’s ticket as its vice-presidential candidate.
we’ve seen, was foreclosed by the state’s own intrinsic rationale, which was bound up with coercion and violence in ways that were antithetical to the actualization of freedom.

**Abolition | Revolution**

The lone strategic implication outlined in the “Man and the State” speech was soon to be buttressed by an imaginative political program. Writing together with her childhood friend and longtime comrade Bettina Aptheker, Davis offered her earliest formulation of prison abolition from behind bars in 1971, roughly a year and a half after her appearance at the leadership conference. Notably, this first formulation was buttressed by yet another deep dive into the archive. *Fascism*, Davis and Aptheker now argued, was the horizons of U.S. society.\(^57\) Its precise contours could be discerned from the state’s enhanced reliance on “coercion, manipulation, and control.”\(^58\) Still, if Davis and Aptheker’s diagnosis gestured towards the historical past, the program they outlined was one for the future. Even in its markedly “utopian” formulation in 1971,\(^59\) prison abolition presented a revolutionary theory attuned to the ideological manipulation, racial stratification, and state managerial proliferation of advanced industrial society.

No account of a theory of revolution can ignore the formative role played by historical events. In Davis’s case, her own persecution and incarceration by the State of California were complexly bound up not just with her initial case against the State regarding her UCLA job, but also with the case of George Jackson and the Soledad Brothers. Davis had first learned about the Soledad Brothers from a local newspaper in the middle of February 1970, just weeks after her

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\(^57\) For a persuasive account of the contemporary utility of Davis’s and George Jackson’s conceptions of fascism, see Toscano, “The Long Shadow of Racial Fascism.”

\(^58\) Davis and Aptheker, preface to Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning*, xiii.

January 30 speech.\textsuperscript{60} George Jackson, John Clutchette, and Fleeta Drumgo were three Black men incarcerated at Soledad prison who had been indicted for the murder of a white prison guard the previous month. The three had long been targeted by prison guards for their militant political leadership behind bars, and their indictments were widely seen as a convenient frame-up. If convicted, they faced the death penalty.\textsuperscript{61}

Since her return to the United States, Davis had organized with the Black Panther Political Party, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party for Self Defense, and the Che-Lumumba Club, an all-Black chapter of the Communist Party based in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{62} To this list, she added the Soledad Brothers Defense Committee in February 1970. Already in the news due to her ongoing wrangle with Ronald Reagan and the UC Board of Regents, Davis leveraged her own public platform to raise awareness about the injustice of the Soledad Brothers’ case. Through her work with the Committee, she met George Jackson’s mother, Georgia, and his younger brother, Jonathan. She also began a correspondence with George Jackson himself, who was also emerging as a person of prominence on account of his published prison letters.

Jackson had been incarcerated in 1961 for stealing $70 from a gas station at gunpoint. Sentenced with one year to life, he had been denied parole every year since. Eventually, he had

\textsuperscript{60} Davis, \textit{Angela Davis}, 250.

\textsuperscript{61} The events leading up to the indictment of the Soledad Brothers attest to the pervasive racist violence of the U.S. carceral system. On January 13, 1970, guards at Soledad had introduced a racially mixed group of prisoners to the exercise yard in full knowledge that conflict could ensue. When a fist fight broke out, a white prison guard named Opie G. Miller had opened fire on the group in the yard, killing three Black men named Cleveland Edwards, Alvin Miller, and W.L. Nolen. Nolen was a close friend and political mentor to George Jackson. Only recently, Nolen had filed a civil suit alleging that prison guards intentionally fomented racial strife among inmates. Three days after the killings, Miller, the sharpshooter, was exonerated by a grand jury, who ruled the deaths “justifiable homicide.” As the news of the exoneration spread through the prison that day, another white guard named John V. Mills was thrown from the third tier of a cell block in what might have been a case of mistaken identity due to the similarity of his and Miller’s last name. The indictments of Jackson, Clutchette, and Drumgo followed swiftly. For a more detailed account of these events, see James, “George Jackson,” 84-87. See also Sun Yee, “Death on the Yard,” 36-40.

\textsuperscript{62} Davis, \textit{Angela Davis}, 149-250.
begun to devote his time behind bars to reading revolutionary theory by Marx and Engels, as well as V.I. Lenin, Leon Trotsky, and Mao Zedong. Jackson was not alone in his studies, and together with a group of friends, he had helped form the Black Guerrilla Family. Though classified as a “gang” by the State of California, the group in fact concentrated on political education. As Jackson wrote later, their aim was to “transform[] the black criminal mentality into a black revolutionary mentality.” Prisons, their efforts demonstrated, could become a site of revolutionary recruitment and radical organizing.

Jackson’s personal revolutionary transformation was captured in his published letters, which also offered an incisive account of the racist violence that structured the prison system. Accounting for the ways in which white prison guards instrumentalized race to pit prisoners against one another, Jackson wrote of racism in one instance: “It destroys the logical processes of the mind.” Elsewhere he turned the logic of criminology on its head: if prisoners were “mentally defective,” he wrote, then “what can we say about these asylums since none of the inmates are ever cured. Since in every instance they are sent out of the prison more damaged physically and mentally than when they entered.” Far from a project of rehabilitation, Jackson recognized the prison system as a means of social control. He further intuited a link between the political persecution of militants on the outside and the widespread criminalization of poor people of color. Just as prisons served to contain the radicalism of racial capitalism’s critics, they also served as a “surrogate solution” to the problems emergent from the same source, which targeted society’s underclass.

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63 James, “George Jackson,” 85.
64 Jackson, Soledad Brother, 16.
65 Jackson, Soledad Brother, 21.
66 Jackson, Soledad Brother, 25.
If Jackson’s own incarceration supplied evidence of the latter function, then the state’s pursuit of Davis offered a salient example of the former. From August 1969 onwards, Davis had been subjected to incredible public vitriol for her Communist Party membership, including a slew of anonymous death threats. Patrol cars regularly followed her home, using well-worn intimidation tactics.\(^{68}\) She was even stalked by her own house manager, forcing her to move apartments.\(^{69}\) Like many other Black organizers, Davis owned firearms for self-defense, and the Che-Lumumba Club appointed a bodyguard to her around the clock. Jackson’s younger brother, Jonathan, sometimes accompanied her in a similar position. On August 7, 1970, Jonathan Jackson entered the Marin County courthouse in San Rafael, California armed with multiple weapons publicly registered in Davis’s name. On trial that day was a prisoner named James McClain, who had been charged with the attempted stabbing of a San Quentin prison guard. Two other men incarcerated at San Quentin, William Christmas and Ruchell Magee, had been called as witnesses to the stabbing incident. Jackson armed McClain, and, together with Christmas and Magee, hustled five hostages, including the district attorney and the judge presiding over the case, into Jackson’s van. A shootout with the police ensued, as it was prison policy to shoot-to-kill escaping prisoners regardless of the danger it presented to others. Jackson, McClain, Christmas, and the judge, Harold Haley, were killed. On account of the weapons’ registration, a warrant was issued for Davis’s arrest on counts of conspiracy, kidnapping, and murder, setting into motion the national manhunt that would land Davis herself behind bars.\(^{70}\)

Davis was captured by the FBI in October 1970 in New York City and jailed there at the Women’s House of Detention. Shortly thereafter, she was extradited to California, where she was

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\(^{68}\) Davis, *Angela Davis*, 219-220.

\(^{69}\) Davis, *Angela Davis*, 240-246.

\(^{70}\) Davis, *Angela Davis*, 277-278; James, “Angela Davis,” 62-63.
incarcerated first at a jail in Marin County and then in San Jose. As the campaign for her academic freedom was rapidly retooled and upscaled by friends and comrades on the outside into an international campaign for her political freedom, Davis set to work on the only means of resistance available to her from solitary confinement: immanent critique. With the aid of her lawyers, she managed to be appointed as co-counsel in her own case, which gave her the ability to request reading materials relevant to her trial. From jail, she published multiple essays and co-edited a volume of prison writings together with Aptheker, titled *If They Come in the Morning: Voices of Resistance.*71 In addition to essays by Davis, the volume contained contributions by other incarcerated Black militants, including the Soledad Brothers Jackson, Drumgo, and Clutchette; Black Panthers Huey P. Newton, Erica Huggins, and Bobby Seale; and Davis’s short-time co-defendant Ruchell Magee, who was the lone Black survivor of the police shootout in San Rafael.

Davis and Aptheker summarized the “central conclusion” of the book in their jointly authored preface as follows: “the entire apparatus of the bourgeois democratic state, especially its judicial system and its prisons, is disintegrating. The judicial and prison systems are to be increasingly defined as instruments for unbridled repression, institutions which may be successfully resisted but which are more and more impervious to meaningful reform. Rather they must be transformed in the revolutionary sense.”72 A page later, they characterized their objective as the “abolition of that system [the prison] in its present form.”73 Appearing here for the first time in Davis’s written oeuvre was the project of prison abolition, ascertained as the logical implication of her comrades’ cumulative critique.

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71 For Davis’s other essays from this period, see Davis, “Reflections on the Black Women’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” and Davis, “Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation.”
72 Davis and Aptheker, preface to Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning,* xiii. My emphasis.
73 Davis and Aptheker, preface to Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning,* xiv. My emphasis.
For readers familiar with Davis’s later work on abolition, one of the most striking things about this first formulation is that it was grounded in a critique of fascism. According to Davis and Aptheker, the extent to which the present state was reliant on extreme tactics of repression to maintain its rule “reveal[ed] fascist trends at the heart of ruling circles.” Meanwhile, their “intensity” offered “a measure of the fascist nature of the government.”74 In 1971, Davis and Aptheker were certainly not alone in tracking in comparisons between the U.S. state’s crackdown on Black people and the fascist regimes that had overtaken parts of Europe three and four decades earlier. The title of the volume that they had co-edited, *If They Come in the Morning*, was borrowed from the fierce closing lines of James Baldwin’s open letter to Davis: “We must fight for your life as though it were our own—which it is—and render impassable with our bodies the corridor to the gas chamber. For, if they take you in the morning, they will be coming for us that night.”75 In the same letter, Baldwin characterized America’s prisons as “our concentration camps,”76 and he described an enchained Davis’s photograph on a recent cover of *Newsweek* as reminiscent of “the Jewish housewife in the boxcar headed for Dachau.”77 Just two years earlier, moreover, in July 1969, the Black Panther Party had organized a conference in Oakland inaugurating a United Front Against Fascism to oppose mounting state repression of Black militancy. Davis was no longer a member of the Panthers then,78 but she had attended the conference. At the time, she had voiced skepticism about a tendency among the speakers at the conference to conflate fascism with racism. She disagreed with those speakers who had insinuated that “the monster of fascism had already

74 Davis and Aptheker, preface to Davis et al., *If They Come in the Morning*, xiv.
78 For Davis’s affiliation with the Black Panther Party, which began in the fall of 1968 and ended in the spring of 1969, see Davis, *Angela Davis*, 191-6; see also James, introduction to *The Angela Y. Davis Reader*, 6-8.
broken loose and that we were living in a country not essentially different from Nazi Germany.” Still, she hadn’t rejected the “potential for fascism tomorrow.”

Now, in 1971, Davis and Aptheker drew on an archive of anti-fascist thought to give that diagnosis broader credence.

In their preface, Davis and Aptheker made explicit that they understood fascism to be a product of late capitalism. Fascism was immanent to the bourgeois organization of society—not its antidote. “As Marxists,” they thus wrote, “we view fascism not only in terms of the terrorist methods to which it has recourse, for these may be present before the fascist arrangement is consolidated. Fascism represents the triumph of the counterrevolution, that is, fascism is the preventive counterrevolution to the socialist transformation of society.” Their formulation harkened explicitly to Marcuse’s notion of “preventive fascism.”

More broadly, however, this formulation and others in the volume resonated with the emphasis that the larger Frankfurt School had placed on the authoritarian tendencies, structures, and personalities that flourished under bourgeois rule, thereby laying the groundwork for fascism to coalesce as the dominant political form in the event of material crisis. As Davis and Aptheker wrote in the preface: “the advent of fascism is not a single event—a sudden coup d’etat— but rather a protracted social process. The maturation of fascist tendencies is a correlative to the maturation of the revolutionary process, both arising out of the acute and general crisis of the social order.”

Writing as they were in the wake of the 1930s and 1940s, which had seen fascism manifest in parts of Europe to stabilize capitalism after the 1929 stock market crash, Davis and Aptheker were cognizant of the fact that, while crisis might garner political intervention, its socialist character was no guarantee.

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79 Davis, Angela Davis, 198-199.
80 Davis and Aptheker, preface to Davis et al., If They Come in the Morning, xiv.
81 See also the explicit citation of Marcuse on preventive fascism in Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation,” 37.
82 Davis and Aptheker, “preface to Davis et al., If They Come in the Morning, xv.
Davis outlined the material makings of a crisis of late capitalism in one of her solo pieces in the volume. *Automation*, she observed there, was a direct consequence of the “internal dynamic of the capitalist system,” and it was generating a crisis of unemployment.\(^8\) That crisis, moreover, was experienced unevenly along lines of race. “When the economy begins to falter,” she observed, Black, Chicano, and Puerto Rican people were “forever the first victims, always the most deeply wounded,” whereas “when the economy is on its feet, we continue to live in a depressed state.”\(^8\) Davis’s triangulation of the links between racism, automation, and wagelessness recalled the work of Detroit organizer James Boggs, and perhaps it was inspired by it.\(^8\) But where Boggs’s account had centered the eroding revolutionary potential of organized labor, since companies could now pull from a growing reserve of unemployed people desperate for wages of any kind, Davis drew a further connection between this nexus of material crisis and the state’s expanding coercive capacity.

Davis first acknowledged a connection between growing unemployment and crime. Wagelessness, she reasoned, compelled people “to resort to criminal acts, not as a result of conscious choice—implying other alternatives—but because society has objectively reduced their possibilities of subsistence and survival to this level.”\(^8\) But she also insisted that crime alone couldn’t explain the “vicious circle linking poverty, police, courts, and prison” to urban Black life. Those institutions had further incentives. “The ironclad rule over our communities, the institutional practice of genocide, the ideology of racism,” she wrote, “have performed a strictly political as

\(^8\) Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons & Black Liberation,” 35. For Marx’s account of automation as an immanent trend in capitalism, see *Capital*, 762-872. For a recent reengagement with his theory in contemporary context, see Benanov, *Automation and the Future of Work*.

\(^8\) Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons & Black Liberation,” 38.

\(^8\) See Boggs, *The American Revolution*.

\(^8\) Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation,” 36.
well as an economic function.” Courts, police, and prisons directly underwrote the “extract[ion] [of] superprofits from the underpaid labor of over 15 per cent of the American population,” while as a “superstructure of terror,” they also served to clamp down on the emergence of organized resistance. Davis thus anticipated how the process of fascism, which was already existent in the margins of society, could expand to the center as crisis deepened. “While today,” she wrote in one instance, “the threat of fascism may be primarily restricted to the use of the law-enforcement-judicial-penal apparatus to arrest the overt and latent revolutionary trends among nationally oppressed people, tomorrow it may attack the working class en masse and eventually even moderate democrats.”

In light of Davis’s familiarity with Horkheimer’s critique of the authoritarian state, as charted in the previous chapter, it is worth pausing to note some of the similarities between these two structural accounts of fascism. In his wartime essays, Horkheimer too had pinpointed a nexus between the surplus crises of late capitalism, the expansion of the state’s managerial function and coercive capacity, and, finally, their uneven impact along racial lines within the citizenry. He had specifically recognized the latter to be a combined function of historical circumstances and political strategizing. In twentieth century Germany, Jewish people had been historically and culturally linked to the circulation sphere on account of ancient laws and enduring practices of discrimination; due to that sphere’s anticipated obsolescence through to the market management practices of a monopoly capitalist state, Horkheimer saw how their fate fell to the biopolitical management and control of the state. At the same time, he anticipated that the Jewish people would not remain the Nazi state’s only target as the crisis deepened. “The pogroms,” he wrote in one

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87 Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation,” 40.
88 Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons and Black Liberation,” 41.
instance, “are politically aimed more at the spectators than the Jews.” Davis’s account mastered a similar nexus of racism, economic crisis, and state violence, but with a shift in focus towards the racialized labor surplus emergent in the production sphere. Still, the state’s crisis management practices also showed themselves to be markedly similar: legal discrimination, police violence, ghettoization, criminalization, incarceration, and ultimately genocide.

Where Davis departed from her predecessor necessarily was in her full-throated formulation of a revolutionary anti-fascist praxis, its agents, and its targets. As already seen, she and Aptheker had seen the pending crisis as a moment ripe with transition towards fascism or its true opposite: socialism. What mattered therefore was the political ground that had been prepared prior to the moment of economic collapse. In one of her solo pieces, Davis followed the Panthers’ renewal—via Frantz Fanon—of the Marxian notion of the “lumpenproletariat.” Davis reminded her readers that Marx had described “‘criminals’ and the lumpenproletariat” as capable of “the most heroic deeds and the most exalted sacrifices, as of the basest banditry and the dirtiest corruption.” Her own emphasis lay on the former: those on the margins of capitalism’s wage-relation had more to gain from opposing and reimagining its specific form of social organization than those still within it. Already, she reasoned, mounting state repression, the crisis in unemployment, and the visibility of revolutionary organizations had worked to enhance oppositional consciousness. “Prisoners—especially Blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans,” she observed, “increasingly […] contend that they are political prisoners in the sense that they are largely the victims of an oppressive politico-economic order, [they are] swiftly becoming

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90 For the Black Panthers’ reception of Fanon, see Cleaver, “On the Ideology of the Black Panther Party.” For an overview of Fanon’s argument, see chapter 1.
91 Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation,” 35.
conscious of the causes that underlying their victimization.” These men and women had turned the repressive logic of their own incarceration on its head. They had transformed the negative racial and legal categories that had been imposed upon them by the state into affirmable political collectivities.

Centering the agency of the racialized subproletariat in revolutionary theory also shifted the sites and objects of anti-capitalist struggle from shop floors and bosses to prisons and cops, recalling Davis’s intuition in the 1970 speech, now “the state is the target.” To be sure, Davis hadn’t forsaken the project of a proletarian assault on the capitalist production process as such. Rather, she acknowledged in one of her essays in the volume that the advances of automation in combination with the state’s expanding coercive apparatus meant that organized labor, too, was more vulnerable to assault than ever before. Eroding the state’s coercive capacity head on could therefore also help to place obstacles in the way of its crackdown on that struggle.

Across the 1971 volume, the idea of prison abolition was repeated only four times: once in one of Aptheker’s solo pieces, once in a letter from Davis to Ericka Huggins, and twice in a letter by Soledad Brother John Clutchette. In fact, as Davis later said of its original formulation, it had been more an expression of the “utopian impulses of young people trying to be revolutionary” than anything else. From a lexical standpoint, the validity of this recollection is palpable: some variation on “revolution” appears on nearly every other page of the volume. It points to the

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92 Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation,” 37.
93 Davis, “Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation,” 42.
94 “The issue is not only reform, but also to mount a struggle to abolish the present functions and foundations of the prison system, an effort which can finally succeed only with the abolition of capitalism” (Aptheker, “The Social Function of the Prison,” in Davis et al., If They Come in the Morning, 57. My emphasis).
95 “Beyond this, prison reform obstructs, falsifies, mis-leads, attacks and oppresses the call for abolishing U.S. neo-concentration camps.” He continues further on: Today’s prison system should be abolished because it is a system predesigned and constructed to warehouse the people of undeveloped and lower economical communities.” (Clutchette, “On Prison Reform,” in Davis et al., If They Come in the Morning, 152-3. My emphasis).
historicity of the volume as drafted in a period of mass movements, in which its authors could be hopeful about the historical possibility of transition.

Nevertheless, that the theory would endure beyond its historical origin point is anticipated in Davis’s second formulation: “So much work remains to be done around prisons in general—pending revolutionary change, we have to raise the demand that prisons in their present form be abolished.”\footnote{Davis, “A Letter to Ericka from Angela,” in Davis et al., \textit{If They Come in the Morning}, 125. My emphasis.} There is a subtle echo of the Panthers’ motto of “survival pending revolution” in Davis’s phrasing that points to a reckoning with the non-revolutionary situation that had been manufactured by advanced capitalist society. Though there were more revolutionary organizations on the ground in the late 1960s and early 1970s than in any time in recent history, large sections of the proletariat remained beholden to the present status quo; they had been ideologically and materially “integrated”—as members of the Frankfurt School would say—by the machinations of the state and the culture industry. Moreover, so long as they remained complacent, the state maintained its monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Against this backdrop, prison abolition suggested a means of moving along a revolutionary continuum in the absence of rupture. It suggested a form of revolutionary practice absent revolution itself. In seeking at once to contain and erode the state’s coercive footprint, it imagined a future in which the capitalist class would be left with no material power to enforce its rule. Still more, it imagined a society in which there was no coercive mechanism to suspend freedom.

**Prison Abolition Today**

In the decades following Davis’s acquittal, the demand for prison abolition expanded in multiple directions. Most significantly, as scholars and organizers including Davis herself developed their

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97 Davis, “A Letter to Ericka from Angela,” in Davis et al., \textit{If They Come in the Morning}, 125. My emphasis.
critique in conversation with other prison abolition traditions and in opposition to historical prison reform movements, they located the U.S. campaign within a Black abolitionist tradition spanning from slavery to lynching, Jim Crow, and now mass incarceration. Their work achieved broader resonance after the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis in May 2020, when abolition emerged as the watchword of the present, carried forth by Black Lives Matter protests. The protests have been the first to rival in size the uprisings of the 1960s, and their popularization of the abolitionist message suggests that, for the first time in decades, large groups of people in the United States have once again begun to conceive of politics in terms of revolutionary social transformation.

In this contemporary context, recalling the anti-capitalist, anti-fascist and anti-statist commitments of Davis’s early formulation of prison abolition has real purchase. In addition to violent repression, the contemporary Black Lives Matter movement has faced unprecedented forms of what Davis described in 1970 as the state’s “more inconspicuous channels of coercion,” as for-profit corporations, non-profit corporations, and mainstream political parties have sought to capture and redirect its revolutionary energy into piecemeal reforms. Meanwhile, decades of neoliberal politics and the rise of a proto-fascist rightwing have compelled many Leftists to defend institutions that they recognize to be inadequate to the ultimate task of overcoming the combined impact of racism and capitalism. Davis’s own public endorsement of the Democratic Party ticket in the 2016 and 2020 presidential elections offers one case in point. Far from a reformist reversal, however, Davis has made clear that she doesn’t think that the Democratic Party can be “a vehicle

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98 For a summary overview of all of these directions, see Davis, Are Prisons Obsolete?
99 Davis, “Man and the State,” C.
100 Taylor, “Five Years On, Do Black Lives Matter?”
for transforming America.” Rather, to this schooled critic of fascism, tolerating the alternative is no alternative. Davis’s endorsement, then, is tactical. It suggests a way of remaining guided by a revolutionary objective while recognizing that some political terrains can be more conducive to advancing radical movements than others.

Perhaps the most salient remnants of the early campaign for our present moment is the one that is least explicit in the 1971 formulation. It is Davis’s philosophical defense of human agency in the face of reified and entrenched social structures, such as capitalism, racism, prisons, police, political parties, and ultimately the state itself. As recently as 2014, Davis has quipped in an interview that “whenever we attempt to organize radical movements, we must recognize that in a sense we can never predict the outcome of our work. […] At the same time, you have to act as if it were possible to change the world; I am rewriting the Kantian categorical imperative here.” In fact, she laid the framework for such a reinterpretation as early as 1969.

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102 Davis and Platt, “Interview with Angela Davis,” 47.
In the history of the Frankfurt School, one archival find has garnered more scholarly attention than perhaps any other: the fiery correspondence that ensued between Theodor Adorno and Herbert Marcuse after the former called the police on a group of students who had occupied the Institute for Social Research on January 31, 1969. The correspondence, which captured the conflicting views of these two representatives of the Frankfurt School on the political possibility of the 1960s social movements and the role of Critical Theory in them, has spawned an oft-cited English translation and multiple scholarly articles.¹ It receives pride of place in most monographs that follow the history of the Frankfurt School through its explosive encounter with the West German student movement in the 1960s to Adorno’s death in 1969.² Its most cited paragraph is probably one of Marcuse’s: “If the alternative is the police or left-wing students,” Marcuse wrote scathingly to Adorno from San Diego that April, “then I am with the students.” Marcuse continued: “there are situations, moments, in which theory is pushed on further by praxis—situations and moments in which theory that is kept separate from praxis becomes untrue to itself. We cannot abolish from the world the fact that these students are influenced by us (and certainly not least by you)—I am proud of that and am willing to come to terms with patricide, even though it hurts sometimes.”³

¹ See Duford, “‘Who is the Negator of History?’” and Abromeit, “The Limits of Praxis.” For Esther Leslie’s introduction and translation, see Leslie, “Introduction to Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” and Adorno and Marcuse, “Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement.”
³ Adorno and Marcuse, “Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement,” 125.
These specters of influence, patricide, and a theory-praxis split still haunt the Frankfurt School of the 1960s. Yet there is a danger to prizing Adorno’s and Marcuse’s theoretical reckoning with any one of these over the critical-political impetus that underlined the students’ actions in the first place. Such a focus misses the forest for the trees on at least two counts. First, it neglects the basic insight of the Frankfurt students’ university critique, which drew attention to how, by the late 1960s, institutions of research and higher education were becoming contested sites of state and capital capture. Second, it overlooks the fact that there was not one but two student-led occupations that took place during the course of the Adorno-Marcuse correspondence, and the second had a remarkably different outcome than the first. Four months after Hans-Jürgen Krahl spearheaded the January occupation of the Institute, in an event after which, as one scholar has put it, “‘bourgeois critique’ and ‘proletarian struggle’ marched separately,” Krahl’s former roommate Angela Davis led another occupation across the Atlantic at UCSD, in which she, Marcuse, and two dozen Black and Chicana undergraduate students belonging to the Lumumba-Zapata coalition broke down the locked door of the Registrar’s Office and hunkered down. It was a daring act within a months-long campaign demanding that the university’s new residential college recruit a supermajority Black and Mexican-American student body, adopt self-governance, and feature a curriculum “devoted to the relevant education of minority youth and to the study of the contemporary social problems of all people.” The action proved partly successful when the administration agreed to appoint members of the Lumumba-Zapata coalition to the new college’s planning committee, where they began to put their vision of a revolutionary institution of education into practice.

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This final chapter recovers the historical and theoretical interventions of the Spartacus Seminar in Frankfurt and Lumumba-Zapata College in San Diego. By pairing these two initiatives together, it outlines a critique of the university’s historical role in advancing capital accumulation by entrenching racial difference in late capitalist societies. If members of Frankfurt’s Spartacus Seminar were particularly attuned to the ways in which the university valorized new knowledge and white-collar workers, thus generating a white managerial working class ideologically bound to the state, members of the Lumumba-Zapata coalition were attentive to how Black and Chicanx students, as the last to enter the university, were instrumentalized within an ideological project of representation, at the same time as they often continued to occupy a position of material precarity that belied the myths of equal opportunity and economic advancement.

Just as relevant as the critique of these differently assimilationist and divisive tendencies within the university, I argue, are the practical models with which students sought to contest them. Both the Spartacus Seminar and Lumumba-Zapata College aspired to establish infrastructural conditions that could facilitate non-coercive forms of sociality and study. Their mutual attempts to commandeer corners of the accredited university as sites of horizontal teaching and learning, I suggest, illuminate a dual power theory of organization that fills an absence in the original Frankfurt School’s corpus. By thus recentering the insights and motivations of these two campaigns, this final chapter illuminates a path for a more radical iteration of Critical Theory beyond the alleged theory-praxis split.

**Critical Theory and the Critical University**

The details of the denouement of the student-led occupation of the Institute in January 1969 are

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6 Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, ch. 2.
the substance of legend. Adorno’s phoning of the police and Krahl’s six-day incarceration were followed by the disruption of one of Adorno’s lectures through a nude group performance that April, Adorno’s unexpected death by heart attack in August, Krahl’s death in a car crash the following February, and the dissolution of the West German SDS at his funeral in March 1970. Less well remembered is that all of this was presaged by the students’ critique of the technocratization of the contemporary university in late capitalist society. This chapter therefore begins by foregrounding the emergence of this university critique within the broader West German student movement between 1967 and 1969. As I will show, already at play was a formative reception of one of the key critiques of the Frankfurt School—the problem of reason’s reification—coupled with a recognition that the same problem required organizational solutions. One of the first of such attempts at a solution was the project of the Critical University in West Berlin, which would be cited as an exemplar by the Spartacus Seminar and, still later, by Lumumba-Zapata College.

The idea that reason’s active, practical-moral capacity was at risk of being reduced to “a mere instrument” is a trademark critique of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and one of the unifying elements of the first generation’s research agenda. In his important 1937 essay “Traditional and Critical Theory,” for example, then-director of the Institute Max Horkheimer took specific issue with what he termed “traditional theory” for measuring truth against empirical facts and mathematical logic. “The forces which guide the life of society, those rulers of the day,” Horkheimer reasoned grimly, “are tacitly accepted by science itself as judges of its meaning and value, and knowledge is declared powerless.” Subjugating philosophical and scientific inquiry to

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7 Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason, 37. See also Horkheimer’s “The End of Reason,” which he wrote as the philosophical companion piece to the contemporaneous political statement, “The Authoritarian State,” discussed in chapter 2.
the status quo, Horkheimer argued, blunted reason’s critical potential. It functioned to entrench rather than transform an unjust status quo, insofar as it gave scholarly cover to such hegemonic values as efficiency, instrumentality, and productivity.

The threat that the production and circulation of knowledge would be subjugated to the demands of capital and thus rendered politically toothless was felt acutely by leftwing students enrolled at West German universities in the 1960s. That decade saw a wave of technocratic university reforms that students interpreted as a state-orchestrated initiative to funnel knowledge workers and bureaucrats directly into West Germany’s postwar economy. At a podium discussion in Hamburg in November 1967, West Berlin student leader Rudi Dutschke offered this gloss of the students’ critique: “ever more productive intelligence—technical and economic and pedagogical intelligence—is needed in order to reach a new height of socio-economic production. One needs to understand that this is the real material foundation for what is called the reduction of duration of study [Studienzeitverkürzung], for what is called mandatory ex-matriculation [Zwangsexmatrikulation], for what in general is called academic reform. This is the real reason. It’s about the transformation of the university, about so-called integration.”

By linking the white-collar labor demands of an evolving economy to the state’s willingness to streamline the university’s internal organization for the same ends, Dutschke’s analysis sharpened the critique of political economy that he and Krahl had charted together months earlier at an SDS conference in Frankfurt. In their jointly authored Organisationsreferat that September, the two men had placed the Hungarian economist Ferenc Jánossy’s recent data on the declining growth rate of West Germany’s economic miracle within a Horkheimer-inspired framework of monopoly state capitalism in order to account for a series of recent state interventions in the so-called free market.

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9 Qtd. in Karl, Rudi Dutschke, 55-56.
They intuited that the state would continue to expand its managerial power so as to be able to shore up an economy vulnerable to cyclical crises. Now, with regard to the university, Dutschke had identified one particular arena of civil society that had become a key part of the state’s crisis-management plan. As he contended at the Hamburg panel, far from an epiphenomenon of bourgeois society, the university had become “a moment […] in the valorization process of capital.” Its “product”—in the form of intellectual labor and knowledge—was integral to the smooth operation and continued expansion of an increasingly organized and automated industrial economy.

As Dutschke’s analysis also made clear, however, bureaucratic efforts to integrate the university into the production process had been anything but smooth. Instead, the state’s attempts to route unprecedented numbers of first-generation German students through the public university system had generated a localized surplus crisis at the site of the university that had deeper political-economic coordinates. Dutschke described the university scene as consisting of “massive seminars, sinking academic standards, professors overburdened with bureaucracy, threats of semester reductions and mandatory ex-matriculation, a politics of austerity on the part of the university administration, and last but not least hikes in tuition fees.” According to one statistic that was circulated as part of a student organizing campaign, forty to fifty percent of students enrolled at the Free University in Berlin left the university without a degree, and only ten percent of those who finished obtained the kinds of managerial positions that a university degree claimed to ensure. Indeed, the crisis was so apparent that Dutschke could quip in one speech of a “waiting army of reserve students.” This riff on the Marxian “reserve army of labor,” relocated to the

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10 Qtd. in Karl, Rudi Dutschke, 55.
11 Qtd. in Karl, Rudi Dutschke, 57.
12 Lönnendonker et al., Die antiauthoritäre Revolte, 182.
13 Dutschke, “Demokratie, Universität, und Gesellschaft,” 150.
university, illuminated underlying tendencies within late capitalist political economy that boded still broader potential for crisis. The automation of industrial production and the concomitant deskilling of labor were changing the class composition of the labor market. While some workers were absorbed into an expanding managerial labor force, the reduction of socially necessary labor time was making it more difficult for an increasing number of workers to sell the only property left to them: their labor-power. They would be shunted into a “structurally unemployed” surplus population, whose biopolitical management and control fell to the state.14

In response to the university crisis, a group of students that included Dutschke organized the first Critical University at the Free University in West Berlin. The idea for a “critical university” had emerged as an amalgamation of various international inspirations and domestic organizing efforts. Dutschke and his close friend Bernd Rabehl had for some time been working on the idea of a “counter university” that would bring together young workers and students. They were inspired in part by the Marxist workers’ schools of the Weimar Republic that had been conceptualized by the likes of Bertolt Brecht, Karl Korsch, and Karl Wittfogel, but they were also attentive to student mobilizations in the United States, in particular at UC Berkeley in 1964.15 At Berkeley, thousands of students used civil disobedience to challenge McCarthyite restrictions on political speech and activism on campus. At the height of the actions, one of the student leaders, Mario Savio, gave a famous speech in which he turned then-president of the UC system Clark Kerr’s well-known endorsement in *The Uses of the University* (1963) of the technocratization of the contemporary university on its head. Whereas Kerr had underlined the productive output of

14 For their diagnosis of a permanent and growing surplus population, see Dutschke and Krahl, “Das Organisationsreferat,” rpt. in Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, II:289. For a contemporary account of universities as mechanisms for mitigating labor surplus, see Boggs et al., “Abolitionist University Studies: An Invitation.”

15 Lönnendonker et al., *Die antiautoritäre Revolte*, 179-180.
knowledge and workers as a central function of the university, Savio issued a humanist rejoinder:

“If this is a firm, and if the Board of Regents are the Board of Directors, and if President Kerr in fact is the manager, then I tell you something—the faculty are a bunch of employees and we’re the raw material!” In defense of the students’ turn to civil disobedience, Savio continued, “There’s a time when the operation of the machine becomes so odious, makes you so sick at heart that you can’t take part! […] And you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers, upon all the apparatus—and you’ve got to make it stop!”

In West Germany, students like Dutschke and Rabehl had worked out a similar critique of students’ economic instrumentalization by way of the university, and now they too hoped to throw a wrench into those mechanics.

Independently of Dutschke and Rabehl, another group of students in West Berlin, which included Wolfgang Nitsch and Wolfgang Lefèvre, had begun envisioning a “critical university” in the summer of 1967. Nitsch’s original idea was for students to self-organize courses that would run parallel to the accredited university. After some debate, the plan expanded to encompass two parallel projects: a “political university” would foster coordination between the university-based student movement and local workers and high school students, while a “socio-critical university” would organize discipline-specific counter-courses to the university’s accredited curriculum and circulate reviews and summaries of accredited courses.

Nitsch’s and Lefèvre’s circle met with Dutschke’s group, and their shared impulses were fused into a single model in early July 1967. A week later, they issued the first brochure of West Berlin’s Critical University. The brochure articulated what was now the Critical University’s

16 Savio, “Sit-in Address on the Steps of Sproul Hall,” (2 December 1964). See also Kerr, The Uses of the University.
17 Lönnendonker et al., Die antiautoritätä Revolte, 180-181.
threefold function: to critique the university and lobby for practical academic reform; to foster political consciousness and intensify political practice; and to prepare students to continue their critical-political work in future institutional workplaces. Concretely, these objectives would be realized by commandeering unused spaces at the Free University and repurposing them as “action centers,” where students could spearhead political campaigns and lead their own working and reading groups. In the initial brochure, working groups in five subject areas were proposed. When the finalized course catalog of the Critical University was published three months later, there were thirty-three proposed working groups. Some were conceived as supplementary courses to the overtaxed accredited curriculum; others were crash courses in Erbauungsliteratur, or political education; others still were centered on political campaigns. Two thousand students and a handful of faculty members attended the inaugural session of the Critical University, which was held in the Free University’s largest auditorium.

As the name indicates, West Berlin’s Critical University was not only a self-organized attempt to disrupt the administrative integration of the university into the capitalist valorization process; it was also a late effort to realize an organizational form amenable to the original critique of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. Through “critique,” Horkheimer had hoped to revitalize the revolutionary potential of critical reason that had been so badly blunted and bent in the service of the instrumental reason of domination. In 1937, Horkheimer had thus tasked critical theory with overcoming the “alienation [of] value and research, knowledge and action” by proposing that it take the proletariat’s objective (if not yet subjective) interest in emancipation as its “single existential judgment,” its epistemological standpoint. What Horkheimer hadn’t done, however,

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18 Fichter and Lönnendonker, Macht und Ohnmacht der Studenten, 155-156.
19 Lönnendonker et al., Die antiauthoritäre Revolte, 185.
was chart a theory of organization that might adequately facilitate the desired “dynamic unity” between the critical intelligentsia and the exploited masses, one that would render its theoretical “presentation of societal contradictions not merely an expression of the concrete historical situation but also a force within it to stimulate change.” In fact, as an advanced research institute, the Institute under Horkheimer’s command had been singularly sequestered within an academic milieu. For a significant part of its history, its members did not even teach, meaning that they could not even directly influence that sector of the population that was poised to gain a privileged footing within the work force. The project of the Critical University promised to take a diametrically opposite approach. It imagined an organizational form of intellectual study and exchange that could ward against the reification of reason and capitalistic valorization of intellectual labor, as it also sought to chart a connection to the world outside the academic milieu. These intentions provided the formative backdrop for a different attempt at organizational form, this time at the heart of Critical Theory in Frankfurt.

The Spartacus Seminar

The occupation of the Institute for Social Research in January 1969 was the sequel to a similarly raucous campaign one month earlier to reform the Sociology program of study. While this December campaign shared the critique of academic political economy that underlined West Berlin’s Critical University, in other ways it departed from the West Berlin model. Whereas the Critical University had been autonomously organized alongside the normal workings of the established university, the Spartacus Seminar—as the Frankfurt campaign was called—was a concerted attempt to commandeer the accredited channels of academic study for more

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revolutionary ends. Its dual power mode of organization hadn’t been an integral part of the West Berlin project, nor of the theory of organization that Dutschke and Krahl had put forward in their Organisationsreferat. In place of waging political campaigns from the margins, the Spartacus Seminar hoped to destabilize the technocratic organization of the university by competing for legitimacy from within its core.

Like the Critical University in West Berlin, the December campaign in Frankfurt had kicked off in response to reforms across West German universities to mitigate a glut of students. At the start of that month, students enrolled in the Education program at the University of Frankfurt had learned that their program of study would be reduced from eight semesters to six. The majors had quickly rallied, and on December 3, 1968, twelve hundred students in the Education program issued a campus-wide call for a boycott of classes and the organization of counter-courses. They were promptly joined by students in English, German, Law, Medicine, and Sociology. Under the banner of “Active Strike,” the solidarity boycott spread across the university.

As the Active Strike gained momentum, a number of star students in the Sociology Department, who were also leaders in the Frankfurt SDS, decided to use the momentum to push for institutional, pedagogical, and curricular reform in their own program of study. They included many familiar faces and some new ones. Hans-Jürgen Krahl, Detlev Claussen, and Lother Menne were there. So were former SDS presidents Karl Dietrich and Frank Wolff, their older brother Reinhard Wolff, another former SDS president named Reimut Reiche, and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, by then internationally known as “Danny the Red” [Dany le Rouge] for his role in instigating the

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22 “It might well have provided a new strategy to achieve democratic university reform: the use of the preemptive self-organization of courses and the extension of the form and content of studies as a means of exerting pressure for the implementation of an up-to-date conception of reform” (Wiggershaus, The Frankfurt School, 632).
23 See chapter 2 for a lengthy engagement with this document.
May 1968 revolts in France. These students organized a town hall and drafted a list of demands. They wanted “a fundamentally new organization of the Sociology program aimed at the practical communication of social career opportunities and political activity.” Their aim was to fashion a site in which students could “reflect on what theoretical and political work must be done for the removal of late capitalist forms of power, how these have now become quite clear through the student protest movement over the years, and how this work can find the appropriate material compensation.”  

In short, they hoped to institutionalize the connection between their university studies and revolutionary struggle.

Concretely, the Sociology students proposed to radically democratize decision-making processes over the department’s curriculum and pedagogy, faculty hires, funding, and accreditation. An early pamphlet that circulated among students called for student input on course content and a classroom pedagogy that would foster more egalitarian social practices, in place of the “authoritarian teaching situation” inherent to a traditional lecture format. A subsequent pamphlet entitled Negative Catalog issued demands to faculty, which included abolishing preliminary exams, assembling a board of students and faculty to decide over future faculty and assistant appointments, allocating a portion of the department’s financial resources to student-led initiatives, and accrediting working groups that were being organized as part of the Active Strike.

Still another pamphlet entitled The University Belongs To Us! advertised ten working groups for striking students to attend. These were Revolutionary Theory, Qualitative Content Analysis, Organization and Emancipation, Career Opportunities for Sociologists, Materialist Epistemology, Marxist Legal Theory, the Authoritarian State and the Constitutional State, Authority and

27 “Negativkatalog,” II:501.
Communication, Socialization, and Political Economy.\textsuperscript{28} While many of these titles point to the students’ desire for more overtly leftwing course content aimed at parsing the broadly political, theoretical, and organizational problems of the present, others underscore the students’ self-reflection about their own structural positioning as future white-collar researchers within an advanced industrial society. Qualitative Content Analysis and Career Opportunities for Sociologists, for example, suggest that the students in the program were keen on developing a leftwing pre-professionalization curriculum that would enable them to put their skill sets to the service of the resistance, or at the very least, would help them avoid generating research that could be easily valorized within the capitalist system.

Five days into the Active Strike, on December 8, the Sociology students escalated their demands for program reform by occupying the Sociology Department on Myliusstraße, thus bringing the Department’s accredited curriculum to a near-total stop. Participants in the occupation graffitied the facade of the building with the words “Active Strike,” “Spartacus Seminar,” and an aphorism from Max Horkheimer’s 1934 \textit{Dawn and Decline}. “If socialism is unlikely,” it read, “it requires an even more desperate conviction to make it true.”\textsuperscript{29} Under the banner of the Spartacus Seminar, a number of the working groups began. The students continued to fire off missives to their faculty, and they maintained control of the building by rotating nightly shifts.

Eight days into the occupation, on December 16, the striking students held a plenary meeting in a nearby student dorm, to which Hans-Jürgen Krahl and a group of peers invited the faculty of the Sociology Department. Jürgen Habermas, Ludwig von Friedeburg, and Alexander Mitscherlich appeared. By way of preamble, Habermas voiced the faculty’s support for the self-


\textsuperscript{29} Kraushaar, \textit{Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung}, I: 377.
organized working groups, as well as their desire for these to be continued and possibly accredited. At the same time, however, Habermas insisted that the students vacate the building on grounds of its private ownership, and he recycled a critique of the students’ chosen method of action that he had issued the week prior in one of his philosophy lectures. (Philosophy courses had continued to convene despite the disruption in the Sociology Department). Habermas told the striking students that, insofar as their occupation aimed to disrupt academic work entirely, it attacked “the basis of enlightenment, render[ing] enlightened political practice impossible.” He therefore accused the students of instrumentalizing thought and knowledge, arguing that their efforts discredited the very political practice they aimed to ground. If escalated further, he warned, they would amount to a dogma no different than “the intellectual prototype of a fascist or Stalinist.”

One of the students to respond to Habermas’s critique was Reinhard Wolff, a member of the Spartacus Seminar who had previously been involved in the Critical University in West Berlin. Wolff’s comments sought to redirect Habermas’s attention to the students’ university critique by reminding him that a “business as usual” approach to the university did not guarantee unencumbered enlightenment: rather the opposite. By way of example, Wolff pointed to how the traditional organization of the seminar room or lecture hall actually functioned to entrench social hierarchies by structurally positioning students as dependents on their professors’ intellectual authority. Wolff explained to Habermas that the students’ actions were aimed at discovering antiauthoritarian organizational alternatives: “In an institution like this one,” he suggested, “it

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30 The building on Myliusstraße was rented to the university, and the owners had threatened to terminate the rental contract if the occupation did not end promptly.
32 Reinhard Wolff is listed among the student presenters at the inauguration of the Critical University in West Berlin in Lönnendonker et al., Die antiautoritäre Revolte, 185.
should be possible to find forms in which you [Habermas] actually enter in the process of academic work as a participant, a perhaps especially qualified participant, where you dismantle all institutionalized authoritative restraints.” What the students desired, Wolff explained further, was not to disrupt the circulation of knowledge, but instead to work with faculty to develop forms of collaborative teaching and learning that resisted hierarchical social relations. “It is the chance of this strike,” Wolff insisted, “to attempt this in practice for the first time in the Federal Republic.”

The boldness of Wolff’s claim underscored what was new about the Spartacus Seminar’s approach vis-à-vis its predecessor in the Critical University, which Wolff cited explicitly. While both the West Berlin and Frankfurt projects wanted to beat back the expanding influence of the state and capital on the university in order to establish an alternative link between academic study and leftwing political struggle, the Critical University had largely operated in the margins of the university by supplementing its existing curriculum through organized self-study, or else by waging campaigns against pending university reforms. By comparison, the Spartacus Seminar sought to institutionalize its revolutionary political project as the Sociology Department. It thus imagined the possibility of contesting the legitimacy and reach of the technocratic university by establishing a recognized site and model of non-coercive study and learning at its core. So conceived, there was an air of V.I. Lenin’s concept of dual power at work in the vision of the Spartacus Seminar. Originally coined as a descriptor for the competing hegemonies of the bourgeois Provisional Government and the Petrograd Soviet, a worker’s council, between the period of February and October 1917, dual power highlighted the possibility of building up alternative institutions within and amidst bourgeois ones that might progressively erode the latter’s

authority. Although on a vastly smaller scale, the Spartacus Seminar put forward the university as one such site of contest.

The students’ far-reaching vision was not to be realized. The plenary meeting of December 16 was followed the next day by a written request, signed by Adorno, Habermas, Mitscherlich, and von Friedeburg that the students abandon the building on Myliusstraße. The statement repeated the faculty’s support for the students’ self-organized working groups and expressed hope that these might become accredited in some form, but it also recycled Habermas’s early position that the students’ actions housed an inherently anti-intellectual, and therefore proto-authoritarian, impulse. Under threat, the students abandoned the building, which was secured by police on the morning of December 18.

The onset of the winter holiday break two days later put the working groups on hold, and the students’ attempt to revive their campaign the following month met the roadblock that has since garnered such an outsized place in Frankfurt School history. On the morning of January 31, 1969, seventy-six students convened outside the Sociology Department on Myliusstraße in hopes of holding a strategy session in one of its seminar rooms. Having been alerted to their plans, Habermas ordered that the building be locked, and a police detail was stationed inside. At Krahl’s suggestion, the group marched west to the Institute for Social Research, which was located roughly a kilometer away on the Senckenberganlage. There, they took over a seminar room. After a standoff with Adorno and von Friedeburg lasting an hour and a half, Adorno phoned the police, who arrested the students, loaded them onto a bus, and took them into custody. Krahl was heard shouting “Scheißkritische Theoretiker!” at Adorno and von Friedeburg as he was forcibly led away. Krahl alone was charged with breaking and entering and spent six nights in jail.\footnote{Kraushaar, \textit{Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung}, I:397-399.} Adorno
refused to drop the charges, and Krahl stood trial for them that summer. Both men died within months of their final encounter in court.

Shortly before his death, Krahl had the opportunity to reflect on the Active Strike during a teach-in. In a little-remembered auto-critique, Krahl worried aloud that the striking students had been so intent on strong-arming formal, institutional change that they had at times lost sight of the critique of the academy, and of the positivistic sciences in particular, that had guided its intervention in the first place. In what might thus be read as a partial concession to his faculty critics, Krahl warned against anti-intellectualism and mere “verbal radicality” in the student movement, observing that these, too, threatened to erode the critical capacity of reason.36

Nevertheless, Krahl maintained the student movement’s central critique that the critical-practical capacity of reason still housed in parts of the university was under threat of permanent foreclosure due to the encroaching influence of the state and the profit-driven economy. He pointedly objected to Habermas’s idealization of the university as a model form of society, describing the latter’s concept of praxis as one that “reduces itself to the idealism of an uncoerced communication of minds in a parliamentary utopia, an entirely academic society.”37 Instead, Krahl characterized the university as a “workshop [...] caught up in the contradictions of the technologization process.” He quipped that “it should be a relief to the representatives of the unproductive disciplines to be able to now give up on their fixation on the forever lost concept of culture. When the contradictions of productive labor have been carried into the university, then more and more ideologues of the ruling class can follow the command of the Communist Manifesto and place their intellectual powers in the service of the liberation struggle.”38 Krahl was well aware

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that placing theory in the service of struggle was no easy task, yet, contra his mentors in the Frankfurt School, he insisted that the theory-praxis split was not an irreversible problem. Ever wary of mystifying the “proletariat” as something irrevocably other to the student movement, Krahl, like Dutschke, remained attentive to the ways in which technological advancement engendered a new composition of the working class, whose internal fault lines might be read in terms of Marx’s distinction between manual and mental labor. Those differences, Krahl realized, necessitated mediation in the form of organizational solutions.

Throughout his life, Krahl’s own locus of struggle remained the university. He insisted on maintaining a dialectic between organizational form and theoretical content in the continued campaign for university reform. “As I see it,” he wrote, “reform represents a dialectical possibility that points to a revolutionary strategy for questions of formal institutionalization.” Krahl’s assessment here suggested a new way of navigating the classic reform/revolution divide, wherein institutionalization could be transformative in a revolutionary sense, so long as its content remained rigorously true to its transformative objective. In a sense, this assessment had already been at the heart of the Spartacus Seminar’s campaign to become accredited as the Sociology Department. If the students had fallen short in maintaining the dialectic between curricular critique and infrastructural overhaul in their own actions, as Krahl later recognized, their actions had nevertheless put forward this dialectic as necessary. As such, they had contested the idea that theory was the only viable form of praxis (Adorno), or that academic speech was capable of altering historical forces of domination without being altered by them (Habermas). For the students of the Spartacus Seminar, critical theory still held promise for liberation struggle, but it was a promise that had to be deliberately renewed within and against its institutional site of practice.

Lumumba-Zapata College

Unbeknownst to the members of the Spartacus Seminar in January 1969, students on the far side of the Atlantic were poised to attempt a similar dialectic later that year in their own campaign for university reform. The campaign for a Lumumba-Zapata College in San Diego would meet with greater success than that in Frankfurt. It certainly helped that students found faculty support at critical junctures along the way, such as when Herbert Marcuse accompanied student organizers in their occupation of the UCSD Registrar’s Office. Yet the lessons to be derived from pairing the two campaigns extend well beyond the broader resonances of the differing political sensibilities of Adorno and Marcuse. By placing the Lumumba-Zapata campaign in conversation with the Spartacus Seminar, a more holistic critique of the university emerges, one that underscores its role in perpetuating racial stratification in late capitalist society. At the same time, the coalition form of the Lumumba-Zapata campaign itself illuminates how differentiated forms of domination and exploitation can be bridged by organization.

Where the Spartacus Seminar in Frankfurt had mobilized in response to semester reductions, the student campaign at UCSD was sparked by a different administrative response to a similar crisis of surplus. UCSD was one of six UC campuses founded in the early 1960s to accommodate a surge in first-generation students, not unlike that seen in West Germany. Though it was originally envisioned as a graduate and research institution that would encompass the preexisting Scripps Institution of Oceanography, public interest in an undergraduate institution led to the purchase of a campus in the neighborhood of La Jolla in 1958. La Jolla’s first residential college, Revelle College, opened in 1963 with a science-oriented curriculum. It second residential college, Muir College, opened in 1966 with a humanities focus. Even before Muir College opened
its doors, the UCSD administration had already formed a provisional planning committee to envision the university’s third college with a curriculum devoted to the study of history and the classics. The third college would eventually open in 1970, but not before a coalition of Black and Chicano student activists forced a radical reimagining of its aims.

The chair of the third college’s provisional planning committee was a historian named Armin Rappaport, who had been hired from UC Berkeley by UCSD in 1965 as the third college’s first provost. Rappaport’s objective over the next few years was to draft a master plan for the new college’s government and curriculum. When Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, one member of Rappaport’s committee floated the idea of naming the college after the civil rights leader. The suggestion came to nothing; however, the committee did decide to include an ethnic studies program in the new college’s curriculum, and Rappaport approached the Black Student Council (BSC) for student input.40

BSC was then a very new organization. It had been founded the year earlier by Angela Davis, who had only just relocated from Frankfurt to San Diego to pursue her doctorate in philosophy with Marcuse. Upon arriving at the La Jolla campus in the fall of 1967, startled by how few Black people she had come across on campus, Davis decided to organize a Black student union. Together with a Black couple identified only as Liz and Ed in her autobiography, she reached out to some fifteen to twenty Black students and employees that first semester, hoping not only to boost numbers but to build solidarity across rank. About ten students showed up for their first meeting, along with Joe Watson, a professor of chemistry, who became their group sponsor. Soon thereafter they gained an additional mentor and advocate in Keith Lowe, a Jamaican

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When Rappaport reached out to the group on behalf of the third college’s planning committee the following year therefore, BSC was still a very small organization. The total number of Black undergraduate students enrolled at UCSD in the academic year of 1968 to 1969 was 33, or just 0.9% of the total undergraduate population. After first being contacted by Rappaport, BSC decided to form a coalition with the Mexican American Youth Association (MAYA) on campus, which was then only slightly larger than BSC, in hopes that they might double their influence on Rappaport. In addition to Davis, the coalition came to include Nicholas S. Aguilar, Curtis Bagby, Chato Benitez, Calvin Cagnolatti, Jr., Robert Carrillo, George Carrillo, Sal Castro, Israel Chaves, Martha Salinas Chaves, Azzan Davis, Vincent C. de Baca, Sam Frankel, Juan Gomez, Kenneth Hicks, Delwin Holt, Jose Luis Lisares, Jr., Joseph Martinez, Milan Lalic Molina, Raul Montes, Jide Ogunlana, Ellsworth Pryor, Maria-Elena Salazar, Raquel Salazar, and Edward Spriggs. The merger also gained a valuable addition in Basque professor of literature Carlos Blanco. As their talks proceeded with Rappaport, the coalition and their faculty advisors drafted in secret a proposal for the new college that well exceeded the addition of a single ethnic studies program.

42 Estrada and Harris, *An Historical Overview of the Third College at the University of California at San Diego*, 7.
43 There were 44 Chicano undergraduate students—a mere 1.1% of the total undergraduate student body—on campus in 1968 (Estrada and Harris, *An Historical Overview of the Third College at the University of California at San Diego*, 7).
44 For this list, see meeting minutes and other paraphernalia in UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 0001, Box 28, Folder 4; RSS 0001, Box 106, Folder 1; RSS 1132, Box 4, Folder 5. See also Dorn, *Third College Twentieth Anniversary*, ch. 1.
45 Of the precise authorship of the Demands, historian Bob Dorn has written in summary that “Most often it is Angela Davis’s name that is attached to the writing of the Lumumba-Zapata demands; hers with Carlos Blanco’s (whose penmanship is on drafts circulated to coalition members) and Keith Lowe’s (a Jamaican professor of literature whose visa, according to various accounts, was revoked by the Nixon State Department while he was out of the country early in 1969, preventing his return) and those of Azzan Davis (no relation to Angela), Milan Molina, and Angela’s sister, Fania. People who came to Third [College] early but just after its birth, like anthropologist Joyce Justus, say they were told the coalition’s manifesto was the work of a group led by Angela Davis, probably working with Herbert Marcuse” (Dorn, *Third College Twentieth Anniversary*, 8). Dorn also notes that early critics of the college preferred to attribute
The proposal was unveiled on March 14, 1969 in a meeting with Rappaport at which the UCSD Chancellor William McGill was also present. In McGill’s recollection, some fifty members of BSC-MAYA looked on as Davis read aloud the collectively authored proposal, which called for “the Third College [to] be devoted to the relevant education for minority youth and to the study of the contemporary social problems of all people.” “To do this authentically,” Davis read on, “this college must radically depart from the usual role as the ideological backbone of the social system, and must instead subject every part of the system to ruthless criticism. To reflect these aims of the college, it will be called Lumumba-Zapata College.”

What followed was a vision of a college that would, first, enroll a student body of 35% Black and 35% Mexican-American students; second, completely overhaul the traditional college’s governing structure in order to devolve power in administrative and admissions decisions to elected student and faculty representatives; and, third, introduce a curriculum that heavily featured the theory and history of revolution and the critique of political economy so as to prepare “Black and Brown people [in their role as] the vanguard of social change.”

The explicitly revolutionary vision for the university as outlined in the Demands was predicated on a scathing indictment of the contemporary university’s instrumentalization in the service of a profit-driven economy and Cold War security state. The coalition cited a local example in UCSD’s own Scripps Institute, whose ties to the U.S. military underscored the university’s part in furthering state-sanctioned economic exploitation by providing a site and resources for
developing military technology used in its neo-imperialist ventures.\footnote{48 BSC-MAYA, “Lumumba-Zapata College: B.S.C.-M.A.Y.A. Demands for the Third College, U.C.S.D.” 6.} On a still broader scale, the coalition lampooned the university’s role as a crucial outpost in the state’s campaign to ideologically assimilate more of its populace. “If the high schools and colleges are not devising more efficient techniques of mystifying the students with irrelevant inanities,” they wrote, “then they are consciously subjecting them to a cold-blooded and calculated indoctrination into a dehumanized and unfree society.”\footnote{49 BSC-MAYA, “Lumumba-Zapata College: B.S.C.-M.A.Y.A. Demands for the Third College, U.C.S.D.” 1.} Like their peers in the Spartacus Seminar therefore, the Lumumba-Zapata coalition was well-attuned to the university’s economically and ideologically assimilationist functions.

What was new in BSC-MAYA’s indictment, however, was its attentiveness to the differently racialized forms these ideological and economic objectives assumed for a diverse student body. As they noted, “we were accidentally the chosen ones, the privileged few who, according to the powers that be, are the exceptions that challenge the rule — the existence of White racism.” At a time when universities were purported to be the seat of enlightened anti-racism and “the key to equal opportunity for all,” the tokenized presence of students of color in fact enabled the perpetuation of a white status quo, while also directly underwriting the counterrevolutionary agenda of “Black capitalism.”\footnote{50 BSC-MAYA, “Lumumba-Zapata College: B.S.C.-M.A.Y.A. Demands for the Third College, U.C.S.D.” 1.} As they wrote, “In the case of minority students, it is miseducation which has caused us to unconsciously sever ourselves from our communal and cultural roots, if not to be seduced into the system which exploits our community. Black capitalism, especially as formulated by the Nixon administration, divides the minority people into exploiters and exploited, the exploiting class being the college-trained bourgeoisie. Each new Chicano and Black businessman has already been listed into the war army of exploiters.”\footnote{51 BSC-MAYA, “Lumumba-Zapata College: B.S.C.-M.A.Y.A. Demands for the Third College, U.C.S.D.” 1-2.}
of the Nixon administration, Black capitalism had indeed aimed at financially underwriting entrepreneurship and homeownership among an emergent Black middle class so as to counter the appeal of Communism among the broader Black populace.\(^{52}\) Similar initiatives were directed towards other minority groups, including indigenous people.\(^{53}\) As the Lumumba-Zapata coalition demonstrated, not only were initiatives like Black capitalism bound up in the idea of a still more thorough exploitation of minority communities, but they were directly aided by the university. Thus, far from providing a means of group economic advancement, the racial diversification of the capitalist class as enabled by selective university access perpetuated racial divisions within the working class, thereby stunting its revolutionary potential.

Read against the backdrop of the Spartacus Seminar’s university critique, the Lumumba-Zapata coalition’s assessment offered a critical expansion. The economic and ideological instrumentalization of the university in advanced capitalist society, it suggested, went hand in hand with a project of racial stratification and differentiation. As universities were retooled in the mid-1960s to generate new kinds of knowledge and skilled workers for the increasingly automated industrial economies of Western countries (as identified by the Spartacus Seminar), they also played a critical role in maintaining an underclass permanently severed from these same forms of material and ideological assimilation (as pinpointed by the Lumumba-Zapata coalition). The division between these two sectors of the proletariat was starkly racialized, with white members of the working class gaining access to university education and therefore economic advancement, while non-white working people continued to be “systematically […] denied the benefits of that society.”\(^{54}\) In this vein, the coalition’s summary observation in the context of their broader critique

\(^{52}\) Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, 56-57.
\(^{53}\) Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, 57.
of political economy, that “minority people serve as a special labor reserve or ‘fill,’ distinct from the white working class,” turned out to have extremely localized coordinates. Under late capitalism, the university was instrumental in facilitating the uplift and integration of white surplus industrial labor while continuing to subjugate its non-white counterpart.

In an effort to disrupt the conscription of Black and Chicanx students into this exploitative project, the coalition laid claim to UCSD’s third college. As one MAYA member, Milan Molina, remarked later, “all of a sudden we said: it’s the Third [College]; this is the Third World, so we want the whole college, okay?” As mentioned already, BSC-MAYA’s first demand was for a supermajority of Black and Chicanx students to comprise Lumumba-Zapata College’s student body. Additionally, however, they enumerated a series of necessary infrastructural and curricular reforms. They demanded, for example, that elected students sit on the College’s Board of Directors and admissions committees in order to ensure marginalized voices at all levels of decision-making. They wanted comprehensive financial aid to be extended to all admitted students so that no student would have to work or go into debt in order to study. They also put forward a curriculum for the new college that featured nine new subject areas: Revolutions, Analysis of Economic Systems, Science and Technology, Health Sciences and Public Health, Urban and Rural Development, Communication Arts, Foreign Languages, Cultural Heritage, and White Studies. If the first two of these attended explicitly to the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist aims of the coalition, the remaining seven were aimed at social transformation on only a slightly subtler register. Reiterating their objection to turning a profit off of scientific research and innovation, the coalition outlined a science-oriented curriculum that aimed instead at the “satisfaction of human

56 Dorn, Third College Twentieth Anniversary, 10.
needs” in areas like healthcare, housing, transportation, environmental control, waste disposal, and fair government.\(^{59}\) In turn, it highlighted the aesthetic and cultural interests of communities of color in envisioning a humanities curriculum where students could learn and practice non-European languages, literatures, and fine arts, while also learning to critique the “colonial perspective” through which these were conventionally taught.\(^{60}\) In an additional aesthetic reinforcement of their revolutionary program, they insisted that the architecture and landscape of the new college reflect its African and Mexican heritage.\(^{61}\)

Some of these demands were not the first of their kind. Just a week before the BSC-MAYA proposal was unveiled at the March 14 meeting with McGill and Rappaport, the administrations of San Francisco State and UC Berkeley had finally ceded to what remain the longest student strikes in U.S. campus history, led by a coalition of Black, Filipino, Mexican-American, and Asian-American student organizations known as the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF). The TWLF students had been on strike for five months at San Francisco State and three months at UC Berkeley, demanding that their universities establish independent ethnic studies programs, offer open enrollment to minority students, and hire and retain more faculty of color. Although they met with tremendous harassment, police brutality, and criminal prosecution, the striking students and their community members could claim at least partial victory when their institutions established the first College of Ethnic Studies and first Ethnic Studies program in the country.\(^{62}\) Moreover, their precedent paid off. By the year 1971, some five hundred Black and Ethnic Studies programs had been institutionalized at American universities, many the result of student-led strikes and

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62 Biondi, *The Black Revolution on Campus*, 38-64.
occupations of their own. As the historian Charisse Burden-Stelly observes, these programs often reflected a desire to “fundamentally challenge the statist, imperialist, racist, and Eurocentric underpinnings of the traditional disciplines in westernized universities by centering community development, African and African descendant struggles for liberation and self-determination, and the importance of internationalism to the larger project of Black freedom.”

Sharing all of these impulses, the Lumumba-Zapata coalition also glossed its project in the language of the “critical university,” thus recalling another attempt at dual power even farther afield in West Germany. The minutes to one meeting with faculty read: “BSC/MAYA indicated in very strong terms that they object to the impression that L-Z is to be a black and brown college with black and brown studies as its core. This is not their idea. They want what has come to be called a ‘critical’ university. They want a framework for a criticism of traditional course structure and content.” The statement is striking for its vigorous critique of cultural nationalism and early anticipation of administrative capture in this same form. Yet it is also notable for its direct citation of the critical university project as the coalition’s desired alternative, pointing to the relevance of reading the West German and San Diegan initiatives together. Though articulated in different terms, these projects remained in many ways complementary in their critique and in their intended dialectic of theoretical content and organizational form.

In still another document, for example, members of the Lumumba-Zapata coalition outlined the curricular aims of the proposed College in language that recollected the critique of “traditional theory” once advanced by Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School. It read: “the college proposes to depart radically from the derivations of the Renaissance concept of humanism that

64 Burden-Stelly, “Black Studies in the Westernized University,” 73.
65 “Third College Planning Committee. Minutes to Meeting No. 1,” (12 May 1969), UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 0001, Box 28, Folder 4, 4.
have led in our time to a dehumanizing academic and formal isolation of the ‘humanities’ from the sciences and the ‘social sciences,’ an isolation resulting particularly from the refusal to commit knowledge to the critical understanding of social reality. Broadly speaking, what is at stake is the alienation of contemporary man.”

If the statement was reminiscent of Critical Theory’s original impetus, its transformation of this theoretical project into antiauthoritarian pedagogical practice housed in a radically reimagined institution of education for the local working poor suggested greater resolve in placing theory in the service of proletarian struggle. By imagining how future students of the College would “proceed in their work from the particular to the general by studying themselves as members of their communities and by relating the experience thus analyzed to society as a whole and to the function and purpose of knowledge and its application in that society,” coalition members sought a collaborative, non-hierarchical, autonomous form to study would serve as a means for demystifying a racialized social reality in order to radically overhaul it.

Perhaps the Lumumba-Zapata campaign’s most persuasive evidence that organization held the key to combatting the simultaneous assimilationist and divisive projects of the late capitalist

66 “Report of the Third College Planning Committee. SUBCOMMITTEE ON CURRICULUM,” (May 19, 1969), UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 0001, Box 106, Folder 1, 1. As with the original Demands, it is difficult to say who authored the final draft of the report, though some combination of Carlos Blanco and Angela Davis seems likely. The full list for the Subcommittee on Curriculum, included in the May 12 minutes, reads: “[Carlos] Blanco / [Angela] Davis / [Thomas] Dunseath* / [Joseph] Gusfield (?) / [Fredric] Jameson / [Jim] Miner / [Maria-Elena or Raquel] Salazar / [Melvin] Simon / [Silvio] Varon / [Joe] Watson (?)” (“Third College Planning Committee. Minutes to Meeting No. 1, [May 12, 1969],” UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 0001, Box 28, Folder 4, 1. Brackets mine, subsequent punctuation in the original). Thomas Dunseath and Fredric Jameson were professors of English literature; the Asterix by Dunseath’s name indicated that he was also an Academic Senate committee advisor. Joseph Gusfield was a professor of sociology. Jim Miner was a student representative of the Associated Students of ASUCSD. Marie-Elena and Raquel Salazar were both students and MAYA members. Melvin Simon and Silvio Varon were both biology professors. The subcommittee report is dated May 19. Those on the subcommittee who consistently attended both the May 12 meeting and the meetings on May 16 and May 19 were Blanco, Davis, Simon, and Varon. For additional meeting minutes, see UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 0001, Box 106, Folder 1; RSS0001, Box 28, Folder 4.

university was its own coalitional form. The idea for the College had originated with Keith Lowe’s proposal for a “Patrice Lumumba College,” but, with the addition of MAYA, the name had gained a hyphenated addition, too. “Lumumba-Zapata College” cited not only the revolutionary Congolese leader but also the Mexican revolutionary, Emiliano Zapata. As the Demands also indicate, BSC and MAYA recognized that Black and Chicanx workers occupied historically different roles in capital accumulation: “Black slave labor laid the basis of the American economy. Mexican-Americans in the Southwest and Black people in the industrial cities and the agrarian South continue to perform the dirty but necessary tasks of building a society of abundance, while systematically being denied the benefits of that society.” Thus, while recognizing that they were structurally similar in their lack of access to the “society of abundance,” the coalition nevertheless refused to collapse the differences in Black and Chicanx experiences of domination and exploitation. Finally, while there were members in both groups that subscribed to cultural nationalism and sought to undermine the coalitional form, in its formative period, the coalition persisted above these separatist impulses, and at times even envisioned further additions. Davis, who has spoken about Lumumba-Zapata College on a number of occasions, describes the College’s proposed student body in this way: “we envisioned it as a college that would admit one-third Chicano students, one-third black students, and one-third working-class white students.”

Though poor whites were not explicitly included in the Demands, Davis’s phrasing suggests that this idea was held in common amongst coalition members, who sought to bridge differentiated exploitation and domination through organizational form.

68 Dorn, Third College Twentieth Anniversary, 8.
70 Mariscal, Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun, 212; 224; 238; Ferguson, The Reorder of Things, 43; 74.
71 Davis and Lowe, “Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 317. See also Davis, Angela Davis, 196. The same account is given in the film Herbert’s Hippopotamus. A Story about Revolution in Paradise.
A Successful Campaign?

The UCSD administration proved no match for the Lumumba-Zapata coalition. Between March and May 1969, the coalition strategically escalated its campaign until aspects of it at last received faculty and administrative sanction. This final section recovers key moments in the campaign and grapples with the longer legacy of Lumumba-Zapata College, which was less an indication of the viability of institutionalizing the revolution than of the pervasive power of administrative capture. Against any defeatist reading, however, this section underscores the enduring promise of the form-content dialectic that was realized in the actions of this student campaign and others.

Already in March 1969, BSC-MAYA had strategically cornered the UCSD administration by unveiling the Demands in the presence of Chancellor William McGill, thus sidelining Armin Rappaport’s planning committee and rendering the Chancellor the principal respondent to their actions.72 In the weeks that followed, McGill made several false steps that fueled the momentum of the coalition. In late March, he offered up an alternative proposal for an “experimental college” that would enable local community college students to take UCSD courses and eventually transfer. Dubbed the “Back of the Bus College” by BSC-MAYA and its supporters, McGill’s alternative was quickly ridiculed into oblivion. When he next tried to drive a wedge between “Angela Davis and her fellow radicals” and the “moderates” within the group, whom McGill hoped to appease with a single Ethnic Studies program, the group held firm to their desire for the whole college.73 They had little interest in cultural nationalism; they wanted revolutionary internationalism. Facing mounting pressure, McGill ceded his authority over the future of the third college to the Faculty

72 Dorn, Third College Twentieth Anniversary, 15.
73 McGill, The Year of the Monkey, 134-5.
Senate.

Four Faculty Senate meetings took place between April 23 and May 7 with BSC-MAYA members in attendance, though lacking voting power. A repeated sticking point was the coalition’s demand that the majority-student governing board of the new College would exercise the power to appoint faculty. This demand required that the Faculty Senate change its bylaws in order to cede its own power of appointment, which many members were reticent to do. Fed up with what biology professor Silvio Varon remembered as “three hours of whether or not we should use the word ‘college’ or ‘colleges’” in a proposed motion, some fifty students belonging to BSC-MAYA walked out of the Faculty Senate meeting on the afternoon of May 7.

The coalition regrouped at Revelle Plaza, unsure what to do about their wavering faculty support. It was here that, according to BSC member Azzan Davis, Angela Davis suggested that they occupy the Registrar’s Office in order to demonstrate to the faculty that they were not going to give up on the project of Lumumba-Zapata College. Angela Davis, meanwhile, has recalled soliciting Marcuse for support out of fear that the students might be expelled for their actions. As Davis later said, “Our work acquired a legitimacy that would have been impossible without his participation.” Elsewhere she recounts that, “When we took over the building, we had to kick in the door, break the glass, and the first person to occupy the building—the first person to set foot in the building—was Herbert Marcuse.” Milan Molina, a member of MAYA, admitted twenty years later to having been the one to kick down the door.

After word got out that the students had occupied the Registrar’s Office, a crowd of some

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74 Dorn, *Third College Twentieth Anniversary*, 20.
75 Dorn, *Third College Twentieth Anniversary*, 19.
76 Davis and Lowe, “Reflections on Race, Class, and Gender in the USA,” 317.
77 As told in the documentary film, *Herbert’s Hippopotamus*.
78 “Interview with Milan Molina,” UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 1132, Box 4, Folder 5.
four hundred people rallied outside in support, prompting visits from local newspapers and camera crews.\textsuperscript{79} To those both inside and out, it was unclear how long the occupation would last. One camera crew from KOGO-TV caught footage of Marcuse’s wife, Inge Marcuse, passing water, food, and sleeping bags through the window of the building.\textsuperscript{80} At the ongoing Faculty Senate meeting, however, word of the occupation provided a needed sense of urgency. A resolution was proposed to appoint BSC-MAYA members and their faculty allies to the College’s planning committee, which was tasked with drafting a new master plan and identifying the Senate bylaws in need of rewriting. The resolution passed overwhelmingly, and less than two hours after the occupation had begun, the occupying students voted to disband. All were promised amnesty, with the exception of the student who broke the door. In a show of solidarity, the group refused to name Molina. When the broken door was later paid for with an anonymous money order, various anecdotal sources pointed to Marcuse as having footed the bill.\textsuperscript{81} As one of his philosophy advisees, Andrew Feenberg, later explained, “[Marcuse] recognized the principle that the university’s property should be respected. It was necessary to break the door, and it was necessary to repair it.”\textsuperscript{82} In fact, without mentioning the Lumumba-Zapata campaign explicitly, Marcuse had supplied a similar rationale in his ongoing correspondence with Adorno just a few weeks after the occupation. While insisting to his old colleague that “in certain situations, occupation of buildings and disruption of lectures are legitimate forms of political protest,” Marcuse also conceded that he too deplored “the destruction of material and facilities serving the education function of the

\textsuperscript{79} Dorn, \textit{Third College Twentieth Anniversary}, 20.
\textsuperscript{80} William McGill, “Letter to John Sempel Gailbraith [July 14, 1969],” UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 0001, Box 249, Folder 4.
\textsuperscript{81} Both Davis and Blanco confirmed this in the documentary film \textit{Herbert’s Hippopotamus}. See also “Interview with Vince de Baca,” UCSD Special Collections & Archives, RSS 1132, Box 4, Folder 5.
university.”83 In Marcuse’s reasoning, too, there was an insistence on critical curricular content and infrastructural form.

In accordance with the Faculty Senate resolution, a series of planning committee meetings took place that summer in which BSC-MAYA students played an active role in shaping the vision of the College. The minutes from these meetings show coalition members fleshing out their own rendition of a “critical university,” one that truly sought to place knowledge in the service of the material well-being and political struggle of the working poor. They imagined, for instance, a pedagogical practice that would center participatory learning and community building. Pre-med requirements would include “public service and community medicine,”84 while philosophy courses would enable “students [to] express their own needs and attitudes [and] from this basis a thorough study of traditional philosophy would take place.”85 Such a student-centered and community-oriented pedagogical practice, BSC-MAYA members argued that summer, would in turn be integral to the college’s recruitment process. They proposed that, as an accredited part of their curriculum, enrolled students could mentor local Black and Chicanx middle and high school students in order to grow the incoming class’s student body. By tutoring local students, the coalition also hoped that the College’s students would be able to “retain communication with [their own] community” and thus guard against becoming alienated in the “cultural transition” inherent to becoming first-generation university students, who, outside of the College, would continue to occupy a minority position on campus.86 In direct opposition to the contemporary university’s role in fostering a Black and Chicanx bourgeoisie therefore, Lumumba-Zapata College sought to knit working-class community ties into its very structure.

83 Adorno and Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement (1969),” 129.
84 “Third College Planning Committee. Minutes to Meeting No. 1,” 3.
86 “Third College Planning Committee. Minutes to Meeting No. 1,” 5-6.
In many historical accounts, the occupation and the summer meetings that followed marked the beginning of the end of the Lumumba-Zapata campaign’s success. In the fall of 1970, Third College—as it would be called for some twenty years, after the administration refused to accept the Lumumba-Zapata name but failed to provide an adequate alternative—enrolled an inaugural class of 31.7% Black and 25.1% Mexican-American students. Yet those numbers subsequently plummeted, dropping to 12.2% and 12.4%, respectively, by 1978, ten years after the BSC-MAYA coalition had been formed.87 Chicano historian George Mariscal lays much of the blame with Joe Watson, the chemistry professor and BSC advisor who was appointed as provost to the College in 1970. According to Mariscal, Watson reneged on the College’s radical commitments by ignoring the student-representatives on the College’s governing body and prioritizing Black appointments over Mexican-American ones.88 Still more devastating to the College’s future were the conservative politicians and pundits who publicly decried the college’s existence; the racist UCSD faculty who successfully blocked Third College’s efforts to appoint faculty of color to their departments; and FBI informants and undercover agents who, in accord with the FBI’s nationwide campaign that began in 1970 to infiltrate all Black Student Unions, succeeded in provoking and maligning both the college and its founding coalition.89 One palpable example of the College’s thwarted ability to live up to its radical vision was that, of the revolutionary curriculum that the original coalition proposed, only a Communications Department was formed.90

Building on Mariscal’s account, American Studies scholar Roderick Ferguson has placed the College’s evolution within the broader context of (neo)liberalism’s embrace of a politics of

87 Estrada and Harris, An Historical Overview of the Third College at the University of California at San Diego, attachment 2.
88 Mariscal, Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun, 235-238; 244.
90 Mariscal, Brown-Eyed Children of the Sun, 245.
representation. Ferguson thus puts forward the Lumumba-Zapata project as a microcosm of the initial success and eventual retrenchment of appeals to the democratic values of American institutions issued by racial minorities in the 1960s. Rather than outright rejection, the campaign met with an institutional response willing to hear out demands for racial equity. Yet this institutional affirmation, Ferguson argues, proved a double-edged sword: by embracing representation, UCSD and other universities like it succeeded in displacing demands for reparations with demands for recognition. UCSD was in this way able to expand its hegemonic reach into non-white communities all while disempowering the institutional self-critique inherent to the original Demands.\(^91\) For Ferguson, Lumumba-Zapata offers a poignant example of the broader historical phenomenon of administrative capture because it anticipated this outcome. BSC-MAYA’s Demands had already attested to the tokenization of students of color and their rapid recruitment—via the university—into the project of racial capitalism.

These sobering analyses recall an argument that Adorno wrote to Marcuse amidst student organizing on their respective campuses: “I do not doubt for a moment that the student movement in its current form is heading towards that technocratization of the university that it claims it wants to prevent, indeed quite directly.”\(^92\) Adorno seems to have predicted how students’ demands for infrastructural and curricular reforms could pave the way for greater administrative overreach into the autonomous workings of academic departments.

Still, Adorno’s clairvoyance about this possibility shouldn’t negate the possibility of radical change that motivated the student campaigns in the first place. As a riposte, one might instead call up the evaluative assessment of his own former student, Angela Davis: “Those of us

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\(^91\) Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things*, 75.

\(^92\) Adorno and Marcuse, “Correspondence on the German Student Movement (1969),” 128.
leading the movement knew that despite our victory—of which all of us were proud—Lumumba-Zapata College would never become the revolutionary institution we had originally projected,” she admitted. Still, she added, “the most important responsibility resting with us was to ensure that whoever became involved in the college—students and faculty alike, carried on the legacy of struggle out of which the idea of Lumumba-Zapata was born.”93 As this chapter has demonstrated, that idea operated on multiple critical and practical levels, some of which had been articulated in a complementary fashion by Adorno’s own students in Frankfurt. Read together, they advance the incisive critique of the university’s role in facilitating capital accumulation along new vectors while perpetuating racial stratification in late capitalist society. Yet they also underline a commitment to creating organizational and institutional forms that could facilitate both autonomous study and political organizing. If this dialectic of theory and praxis remained fragile, for members of the Spartacus Seminar and Lumumba-Zapata College it nevertheless offered a viable means of placing critical theory in the service of collective emancipatory struggle.

93 Davis, Angela Davis, 198.
Coda
Concluding Reflections

In September 1971, Angela Davis received a letter from Detlev Claussen while behind bars at the San Jose County Jail.¹ It was one in a series of letters from friends in Frankfurt encouraging her to keep her head up.² The letter detailed some of the recent activities of the West German Angela Davis Solidarity Committee, which Claussen had helped found together with Davis’s long-time friend Manfred Clemenz, her former professor Oskar Negt, her former roommates Lothar Menne and Claudio Pozzoli, and another peer named Klaus Vaak.³ Specifically, Claussen told Davis about the information campaign they were running about her case, the recent murder of George Jackson, and the massacre at Attica. He acknowledged that, as possibly the only country in the West whose solidarity actions were not being led by the Communist Party, which had been banned in the Federal Republic in 1956, the Committee had thus far met with “abstract opposition” to Davis’s case based on her Communist Party affiliation. Additionally, he wrote, critical thinking about racism and incarceration was limited, and made more difficult by the fact that the translation rights for Jackson’s Soledad Brother had been recently obtained by an “arch bourgeois” publishing house. Still, Claussen said, the Committee had a plan. He told Davis that Menne was planning to translate If They Come in the Morning, the collection which Davis had edited and contributed to during her incarceration. In conclusion, he promised to send her a transcript of a recent discussion about Georg Lukács and the posthumous collection of Hans-Jürgen Krahl’s writings.⁴

¹ Detlev Claussen, “Letter to Angela Davis,” (28 September 1971), Papers of Angela Y. Davis, Folder 60.12.
² See also Hans Glauber, “Letter to Angela Davis,” (14 March 1971), Papers of Angela Y. Davis, Folder 60.12. Additionally, Claussen’s letter mentions a previous letter from him and Lothar Menne.
³ For this list, see the front matter in Angela Davis Solidaritätskomitee, Am Beispiel Angela Davis.
One thing that is notable about Claussen’s letter is how seamlessly critical theory and political practice run together. Not only did Claussen seem to sense that what might bring Davis solace amidst her political incarceration was a discussion about Lukács and the philosophical writings of a dead comrade. Additionally, his letter attested to a reciprocity between the content of Davis’s and the Committee’s theoretical critique and the form of their political activism. This commitment would have been familiar to Davis, who, together with Menne, had spearheaded the making of a pirate edition of Max Horkheimer’s essay on “The Authoritarian State” while in Frankfurt. One of their aims had been to insist that Critical Theory would have to converge on anti-imperialist practice in order to maintain its truth content. Now Davis’s own writings and those of her incarcerated Black comrades were poised to be circulated on Frankfurt’s revolutionary underground to a similar end.

This dissertation has attempted to sketch the broader contours of a transatlantic generation of Frankfurt School Critical Theorists, who in the 1960s and 1970s were committed to thinking critically about the contradictions of late capitalist society and also to contesting them in political struggle. Sometimes their ideas were developed collaboratively, via a critical appropriation of the Frankfurt School’s corpus against the backdrop of changing political contexts. At other times, they were advanced independently, yet they remained in conversation through a mutual reception and appropriation of the same global historical events and political-theoretical sources. Claussen’s letter to Davis offers one poignant example of how these different forms of generational collaboration generated at once a concrete and aspirational practice of international solidarity.

Still, there is work to be done. By way of conclusion, this coda therefore outlines three areas of revision and research. First, the discussion of Theodor Adorno’s theory of non-identity in

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5 See chapter 2.
chapter 1 as having a revolutionary correlate in the historical nexus of anticolonial liberation struggles and international solidarity movements deserves further expansion. Concretely, it would be enhanced by a more thorough engagement with Adorno’s seminars and lectures as a site of political critique and exchange in that decade, currently glossed in chapter 2.6 Additionally, as the lone member of the established Frankfurt School to articulate a revolutionary politics of marginalized groups [Randgruppen] acting in coalition and solidarity, Herbert Marcuse’s distinct refashioning of Critical Theory within the context of the American New Left and its resulting impact on the West German student movement deserves to be accorded as much weight as the legacies of Adorno and Horkheimer. In fact, as Jürgen Habermas once recalled of Marcuse’s visits to Frankfurt, already in the 1950s, students and assistants alike experienced him as the “embodiment and living expression of the political spirit of the Frankfurt School,” which had then only persisted as a rumor.7 In recentering Marcuse, however, it is incumbent not only to observe that Marcuse was perceived as the most authentic representative of Critical Theory’s first generation, but also to stress the two-way relationship between his own iteration of Critical Theory and that of the radical student generation. While Marcuse’s theory was certainly embraced by many members of that generation, including Davis, Krahl, and Rudi Dutschke, it was also formulated in direct response to their theory and politics8 and to emergent Black, Third World, and

6 Dirk Braunstein’s 2021 publication of the complete seminar protocols from 1949 to 1969 offer a starting point for this research. See Braunstein, *Die Frankfurt Seminare Theodor W. Adornos*.
7 Habermas, *Philosophisch-politische Profile*, 322.
8 I mean this quite literally. Of Davis’s influence on him, Marcuse once wrote: “The abstract philosophical concept of a freedom which can never be taken away suddenly comes to life and reveals its very concrete truth: freedom is not only a goal of liberation, it *begins* with liberation; it is there to be ‘practiced.’ This, I confess, I learned from you! Strange? I don’t think so,” (“Dear Angela,” 49). Krahl’s spearheaded occupation of the Institute, meanwhile, prompted Marcuse’s most explicit differentiation of his own theoretical and political positions from those of his colleagues in the Institute. See Adorno and Marcuse, “Adorno/Marcuse Correspondence on the German Student Movement (1969).” Finally, Dutschke’s and Marcuse’s close affinity and parallel reception of one another’s work is evidenced in their lengthy correspondence, some of which has been reproduced in Kraushaar, *Frankfurtschule und Studentenbewegung*, vol. 2, and in Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt*, 55.
student led social movements on the ground. Finally, the aim in substantiating a more political reading of the theory of non-identity through Marcuse’s and other student contributions remains this: it promises a framework for conceptualizing universal material freedom without curtailing the legitimacy of particularist liberation movements and, as such, is capable of withstanding the reductively totalizing logic of Hegelian universal history.9

Second, the excavation of the student generation’s contributions to Critical Theory remains incomplete without a critical engagement with emergent feminisms in its ranks. One opportunity for such engagement is on the question of organization in chapter 2. Famously, the West German feminist movement was launched when a pregnant Sigrid Damm-Rüger, a member of the SDS Action Council on Women’s Liberation, threw a tomato at Krahl at the 23rd annual SDS conference in September 1968. Damm-Rüger was frustrated with the predominantly male leadership’s refusal to engage with the demands of women in the organization concerning their gendered exploitation in its political activities as well as the paucity of childcare for women enrolled in the university. The incident made possible a speech by Helke Sander, another member of the Action Council, in which Sander argued that “we cannot solve the oppression of women throughout society at an individual level, so we cannot wait for a time after the revolution. […] We want to try, already within the existing society, to develop models for a utopian society. Yet in this counter-society there finally has to be space for our own needs.”10 One noteworthy aspect of Sander’s remarks is

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9 In this context, Horkheimer’s comments on the U.S. war in Vietnam, currently discussed in chapter 2, would serve as an exemplar of how this totalizing logic reinstates itself in a “bad” reading of negative dialectics, namely, one that instrumentalizes the continuum of violence in history as a defense of the status quo. By comparison, Adorno’s own comments on the Congo begin to reconceptualize liberation from the vantage of the particular, but they too fail to sever ties with the totalizing logic of universal history on account of their continued reliance on a one-dimensional concept of violence, as documented in chapter 1. Ultimately, then, what enables the theory of non-identity to conclusively move beyond Hegel while maintain a commitment to universal material freedom is its rerouting through the historical confluence of particularist liberation movements in the 1960s, as conceived by Angela Davis, Rudi Dutschke, Frantz Fanon, Che Guevara, Herbert Marcuse, and others.

10 Qted. in von Redecker, Praxis and Revolution, 17. Punctuation modified.
their proximity to Krahl’s own theorization of the necessity of organizing “concrete utopias” within the present capitalist organization of society. In fact, as the historian and former SDS member Tilman Fichter later recalled, Damm-Rüger and Krahl convened after the meeting, since Krahl, who was gay, aspired to be receptive to the feminist critique.\textsuperscript{11} Krahl’s writings on organization have not yet been engaged from a queer or feminist perspective, but the tomato throwing incident points to a concrete connection that may open up further lines of affinity.\textsuperscript{12}

Additionally, Davis’s early writings on the concrete feminist alternatives posited by Black familial life deserve attention in this context. While in prison in 1971, Davis wrote two essays in which she documented how Black communities in the United States had been compelled to forge alternative kin and communal networks under slavery, many of which endured into the present under conditions of continued racial subjugation. One important characteristic of these alternative forms in Davis’s analysis was that the gendered division of labor in them was both more transparent and more egalitarian than in the traditional middle-class white family, where the historical relegation of women’s labor to domestic and reproductive tasks had become naturalized. Davis thus pointed to the alternative social structures posited by working-class Black familial and communal networks as both a concrete base for political struggle and a prefigurative model of a more democratic and more liberated form of social organization.\textsuperscript{13} In bringing these ideas to bear on the West German conversation, one can consider how Davis’s utopian and feminist thinking about existent forms of Black familial life posits an even more conclusive antiauthoritarian answer.

\textsuperscript{11} Ute Scheu, “Die Frau, die die Tomate warf,” \textit{TAZ} (12 January 1996), accessed online at https://taz.de/!3208213/. As it happened, Damm-Rüger’s tomato had not even been meant for Krahl, but for Helmut Schauer, president of the SDS at the time.

\textsuperscript{12} One might also consider how Krahl’s reception of Bloch’s “concrete utopias” converges on Jose Muñoz’s reception of Bloch and Marcuse in \textit{Cruising Utopias}.

\textsuperscript{13} See Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves,” and Davis, “Women and Capitalism: Dialectics of Oppression and Liberation.”
to the Institute’s *Studies on Authority and the Family* (1936), which had famously located in the patriarchal family structure a hothouse for authoritarianism.¹⁴

Finally, I propose a fifth chapter on Davis’s critical contributions to Frankfurt School aesthetic theory in her 1998 work *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. There, Davis drew on her mentors’ aesthetic theory in arguing that the blues tradition had articulated a radical Black feminist consciousness in the early twentieth century.¹⁵ Importantly, however, Davis’s reading sketched the emancipatory promise of a popular art form, which both Adorno and Marcuse would have rejected as compromised by its standardization and commodification.¹⁶ Reading Davis’s writings on the blues within and against Frankfurt School aesthetic theory offers an opportunity to think through the relationship between emancipatory historical memory and the coercive force of commodification and racial appropriation in art as a dialectic. Here one might even reengage the critical argument in Adorno’s essays on jazz—their attentiveness to the reification of Blackness for white audiences’ consumerist enjoyment—together with Davis’s utopian account of the subversive potential of popular Black art forms. Specifically, Adorno’s writings on jazz anticipated that, as this genre of Black music became integrated into the culture industry, the radical possibility of its aesthetic form would be diluted and turned into entertainment for a white bourgeoisie who fetishized its expression of “primitive” experience. He saw this to be reflected in how the rhythmic “work” of jazz was forever being forced back into a rigid metrical schema. What audiences heard

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¹⁴ Also on the subject of feminism, it would be worth considering the significance of Marcuse’s late work on the intersections of Marxism and feminism in the context of his mentorship of women’s groups in Frankfurt and Munich in the 1970s, who were specifically trying to grapple with the possibilities of feminist movement after the collapse of the SDS. The basis for research would have to be archival. See, for example, Barbara Brick and Barbara Riedmüller, “Protokoll zur Diskussion mit Herbert Marcuse und Münchner Frauengruppen” (July 1974), Herbert Marcuse Nachlass, Na 3, 506. For Marcuse’s engagement with the Frankfurt women’s group, see also Marcuse, “Marxismus und Feminismus,” (29 June 1974), rpt. in Kraushaar, *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, II: 780-4.

¹⁵ Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 163-5.

when they heard jazz, he argued, was thus never the thing itself, but always its non-identity: “[Jazz] is not what it ‘is’ . . . Rather, it is what it is used for.” Nevertheless, Adorno’s critique of jazz as a utilitarian form of music and product of white cultural appropriation led him to a memorable impasse: he proved unable to read it on its own historical terms as a specific expression of Black American suffering.

Davis’s own aesthetic theorizing of a different Black music form can serve as a corrective here. In *Blues Legacies*, she reads Billie Holiday’s performance of “Strange Fruit” as indicative of a “silent dialectic […] between pain and pleasure, love and death, destruction and the vision of a new order.” Notably, in place of elaborating on this “silent dialectic,” which concludes the argumentative part of the book, Davis cites in an endnote a passage from Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, in which Marcuse speculated that because the ultimate aim of the death drive is “not the termination of life but of pain,” it dialectically leads to Eros’s strengthening through its “absorb[tion] [of] the objective of the death instinct.” Implied in Davis’s reading is that blues music becomes a site for the aesthetic absorption of historical, racial, and sexual violence, and, as such, a basis for liberation struggle.

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18 Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 195.
19 Marcuse qtd. in Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 392.
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