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**The possibility of Critical Theory in International Relations:
Habermas, Linklater and the crisis of critique**

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Summary

In the discipline of International Relations (IR), Frankfurt School Critical Theory (CT) in the Habermasian tradition is experiencing a period of difficulty with regards to its ability to inspire explanatory as well as emancipatory scholarship. This thesis seeks to clarify, explain and suggest a way of overcoming this predicament of CT in IR by relating it to the broader crisis of critique of the contemporary Frankfurt School. The thesis sets out an original hypothesis to explain the plights of Critical Theory in IR: namely, that their root causes are to be found in the intellectual history and meta-theoretical architecture of the prevailing, communicative-democratic paradigm of critique formulated by Jürgen Habermas. By developing a new reading of the history of the Frankfurt School and an in-depth appraisal of the meta- and social-theoretical parameters of the Habermasian paradigm, the thesis traces back the current crisis of critique to the Frankfurt School's surrendering of the critique of political economy and to the uncoupling of normative critique from substantive analysis. Thereafter, the thesis applies this hypothesis to the two most prominent bodies of Frankfurt School research in IR: Habermas's own writings on cosmopolitanism and Andrew Linklater's theory of international politics. Both projects, it argues, display the failings and limitations of the communicative-democratic paradigm. They rely on a reductive analysis of global political and socio-economic dynamics and express a political vision that is overly reliant on a teleology of progress. Finally, the thesis contends that a revitalisation of Critical Theory in and outside of IR must involve a reckoning with the failures of the prevailing paradigm and the embracing of an alternative, totalising strategy of critique.

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Introduction

*We are living through a capitalist crisis of great severity
without a critical theory that could adequately clarify it*

Fraser, 2014: 56

If one had to pick a word to convey the spirit of the last decade of global politics, it would probably be “crisis”. The global financial crisis of 2007/2008 - itself the product of the accumulated contradictions of the previous three decades of capitalist development - has effected, accelerated or combined with a set of social, political and geopolitical transformation the precise nature and outcome of which it is still difficult to discern. The predominant sense of the age is that of a global order caught in a set of interlocking contradictions and crisis tendencies that combine to create the total picture of an uncertain, mutating and conflicted time.

Writing during another time of change and confusion in world politics - that of the aftermath to the economic shocks of the 1970s - the international theorist Robert Cox (1981: 130) wrote that ‘historical periods’ of ‘fluidity in power relationships’, ‘uncertainty’ and ‘many-faceted crisis’ tend to favour the emergence of what he called “critical theory”, ‘as people seek to understand the opportunities and risks of change’. Indeed, in the years that followed Cox’s writing and particularly after the end of the Cold War, the study of International Relations (IR) witnessed an explosion of new, critical perspectives attempting to make sense of the ongoing global transformations and the normative possibilities they opened. Among those contributions, scholars identifying with the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory (CT) first made a foray in the study of international politics, adapting and updating the categories and tools of analysis of that tradition to explain and clarify the character and potentials of the new age.¹ Applying Cox’s prediction to the current crisis

¹ A note on the terminology that will be used in this thesis: “Critical Theory” (CT) in capital letters is used in this thesis to refer to the scholarship associated with the Frankfurt School tradition of critique, both outside and inside of the discipline of International Relations (IR). “Critical Theory in International Relations” - or CT in IR - indicates those IR scholars that

conjuncture, however, reveals a more perplexing picture: while the demand for critical perspectives capable of elucidating the present state of global affairs is arguably as strong as ever, Frankfurt School theory in international politics appears to be in a state of stagnation. There are two elements to this that are immediately striking. The first is that the prevailing form of Critical Theory in IR today - that of a series of cosmopolitan interventions inspired by Habermasian Frankfurt School theory that explore the possibility and desirability of transcending the international states system - increasingly seems to reflect the concerns and worries of a time now past: how to devise a universalist vision of Progress that counters postmodern relativism and the “end of history” complacency of a liberalism without challengers; resisting the imperial drift of the only remaining superpower while steering a unipolar world order towards the establishment of a cosmopolitan legal regime; meeting the apparent demise of the nation-state with new forms of supranational governance (Schechter, 2013: 3).² These research questions speak to the *Zeitgeist* and global conjuncture of the 1990s, more than current concerns with a multifaceted capitalist crisis and a disintegrating world order. The second facet is that CT in IR within that cosmopolitan paradigm appears to be struggling to renew itself and develop new modes of analysis and new political imaginaries that take account of the current historical conjuncture. In particular, it has seemed unable to respond to the growing demand in IR for more empirically-informed and explanation-driven engagements with concrete dynamics of international politics (see the “end of IR theory” discussions, such as Dunne et al., 2013). This double predicament is a source of concern for the tradition of CT in IR as well as the discipline as a whole. It calls into

have drawn inspiration from the Frankfurt School tradition in their research on international politics. On the other hand, “critical theory” in lowercase letters refers to the broader theoretical movement of Marxian as well as non-Marxian approaches that defines itself against the “mainstream” of value-free and positivist social scientific scholarship. This includes approaches as varied as post-structuralist, post-colonial and queer theory, feminism, critical political economy and various Marxist theories. A similar disambiguation applies for IR. I use the capital letter “International Relations” or IR to refer to the academic discipline that studies international politics. When I am referring to the actual dynamics of world politics I use the lowercase “international relations” - or, more often, “international politics”.

² This is, of course, not to say that *all* the concerns which structure prevailing Frankfurt School theories of IR are antiquated and irrelevant. For instance, the concern with the global impact of ecological degradation remains of primary importance today. The point is rather that the *framing* of these questions responds to circumstances and understandings that are substantially changed.

question their overall capacity to respond to and interpret the manifold social transformations taking place in international politics.

Interestingly, the paradox of Critical Theory's distress at a time when it is most needed appears to extend beyond the disciplinary boundaries of International Relations and to affect the Frankfurt School project as a whole. A sense is emerging across the fields of social theory and political philosophy that Critical Theory in its prevailing form - that which is modelled on Jürgen Habermas's communicative-democratic paradigm - is experiencing a generalised crisis of critique that affects its capacity to intervene in time-relevant and politically-efficacious ways (see Azmanova, 2014; Kim, 2014; Kompridis, 2006; 2011). In turn, this perception of a *broader* impasse of Frankfurt School research across the social sciences suggests the presence of *deeper* origins and causes to the predicament of CT in IR. That is, it points to the existence of shortcomings and weaknesses that are located at the level of the ontological, methodological and philosophical foundations of Critical Theory in its prevailing form.

This is significant because Habermasian Critical Theory has been, over the last three decades, more than just a branch of academic research. The work undertaken in this tradition on the topics of cosmopolitanism, civil society, deliberative democracy and European integration has contributed some of the concepts and interpretive tools through which the development of global politics after the end of the Cold War has been commonly analysed and politically interpreted within as well as outside of academia. The crisis of critique of Habermasian Critical Theory, in this sense, calls into question an entire way of explaining and thinking politically about contemporary global capitalism and international relations.

Aims

The core research question of this thesis is: what are the character and root causes of the current predicament of Habermasian Critical Theory in International Relations and how can it be overcome? The aim of the thesis is therefore to clarify, diagnose and suggest ways of moving beyond the current predicament of critical theorising in international politics by relating it to the broader and deeper crisis of the contemporary, Habermasian Frankfurt School. Specifically, the research seeks:

(i) To provide an accurate *account* of the present predicament of Critical Theory in International Relations, specifying the exact character of the impasse and how it relates to the general crisis of Habermasian Frankfurt School theory;

(ii) To historically *contextualise* the crisis in light of the Frankfurt School's overall intellectual development and particularly the trajectory of the presently dominant, Habermasian paradigm;

(iii) To put forward an *explanation* as to the *causes* of the present deadlock. In other words, to identify the conceptual blockages and the meta-theoretical characteristics that are hindering Habermasian Critical Theory from generating time-relevant analyses, critiques and political interventions.

(iv) To develop, in light of that diagnosis, a *proposal* for the overcoming of the impasse and the revitalisation of critical theorising in international politics.

Methodologically, the thesis constitutes an *immanent critique* of contemporary Frankfurt School theorising on international politics. What this means is that the standards by which Critical Theory is evaluated, found wanting and in the name of which suggestions are put forward are not arbitrary or externally defined. Rather, those standards are set by CT's own aspiration to be a demystifying and possibility-disclosing 'theory of the historical course of the present epoch' (Horkheimer, quoted in Outhwaite, 2012, vii).

In the course of this investigation, the thesis connects and bridges between two closely related but curiously estranged literatures: on the one hand, the distinctive

tradition of Frankfurt School-inspired theorising that has developed in the discipline of IR over the last four decades and the reflections being developed over its fragmentation and de-politicisation (Kurki, 2011), the limitations of its ontological and meta-theoretical setup (Fluck, 2014; Anievas, 2010a) and the growing unpopularity of theory and meta-theory more broadly (Dunne, Hansen & Wight, 2013); on the other hand, the debates unfolding among critical scholars *outside* of IR - in the fields of social theory and political philosophy - over the crisis and future of the Frankfurt School project and the inadequacies of the Habermasian paradigm of critique (Azmanova, 2014; Allen, 2008, 2014, 2016; Kompridis, 2006, 2011, 2014). The thesis is built on the idea that examining the current predicament of CT in IR in relation to the broader discussion over the crisis of critique of Frankfurt School theory - and, vice-versa, investigating that general crisis in its international political dimension - can be helpful for both perspectives: from the standpoint of the Frankfurt School project as a whole, critical interventions in international politics offer an effective “case study” on which hypotheses as to the precise character and origin of its crisis can be tested; for Critical Theory in IR, going beyond field-contingent considerations and engaging with broader questions over the possibility of critique today can provide new energies and ideas for self-reflection and renewal.³

Ultimately, the wager that this thesis is built on is that the answer to the predicament of Critical Theory in IR lies, at least in part, outside of the discipline and has to do with Critical IR's capacity to understand itself as being part of a broader critical theoretical movement that is engaged in a collaborative effort to redefine its theoretical and political identity. In that sense, the original contribution of this thesis lies in the fact that it does not treat Critical Theory in IR as a discrete, separate

³ It is also the case that the question of international politics and the theme of cosmopolitanism - which were not originally core concerns for the Frankfurt School - have become over the last three decades increasingly important for Critical Theory overall. This is evidenced by the astonishing amount of writing produced by Jürgen Habermas on questions of globalisation, European integration and post-national orders (see Habermas, 1994, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2012a, 2015) as well as by the growing prominence of these questions in contemporary discussions of Frankfurt School theory (see Benhabib, 2006; Scheuerman, 2008; Allen, 2016). To study Critical Theory in its encounter with international politics is therefore also to develop a better understanding of an area of inquiry that is becoming ever more central to the Frankfurt School project.

enterprise, but rather discusses it as an integral component of the Frankfurt School project as a whole.

In particular, this thesis seeks to build upon and connect with a range of recent contributions, both inside and outside of IR, that are starting to challenge the Habermasian canon in Frankfurt School theory, diagnose its failings and imagine novel ways of carrying out critical theoretical scholarship in the present world-historical conjuncture. Outside of IR, I am referring in particular to the social theorists and political philosophers Amy Allen (2014; 2015; 2016), Albenaz Azmanova (2014), Rocio Zambrana (2013), Nicolas Kompridis (2006) and Nancy Fraser (2008; 2009; 2014). Within IR, this research is closely associated with the work carried out by Matthew Fluck (2010; 2014), Alex Hoseason (2018), Andrew Davenport (2013) and Shannon Brincat (2011; 2014) and their endeavours to find new theoretical sources and inspirations through which to carry on the critical study of international politics.

Argument

The core argument of this thesis is that a crisis of critique afflicts the prevailing, Habermasian mode of Frankfurt School scholarship inside and outside of IR, a crisis that is manifesting as a disjuncture between the conceptual tools available to CT and the world-historical conjuncture it is supposed to clarify. More precisely, I argue that the crisis can be conceptualised as a *debilitation* both of CT's normative and strategic capacity to inform ongoing social struggles, disclose emancipatory possibilities and express politically efficacious interventions *and* of its diagnostic ability to deploy analyses and explanations that clarify the central contradictions and tendencies of the present social order. With regards to the former, I observe how the emancipatory and political task of CT is increasingly carried out in the abstract terms of ideal theory and remains removed from the substantive, determinate critique of concrete social structures of injustice and domination. CT's prevailing normative configuration is therefore that of a socially disembodied, liberal politics

that relies on speculative histories of moral development and the assertion of a strong teleology of progress but is unable to specify either the determinate content of its transformative demands or the social forces it seeks to connect with. With regards to the latter, I note how contemporary CT lacks the analytical and conceptual resources to explicate and discuss socio-economic and political developments in the current world order, referring in particular to two dimensions: the globalisation of neoliberal capitalism; and the geopolitical dimension of international politics. Lacking its own social-theoretic vocabulary, CT is increasingly reliant on the essentialist categories of traditional theory. The outcome is a generally a-critical explanation of global transformations that reduces complex economic, geopolitical and normative dynamics to linear tendencies of development and to a schematic understanding of the political and the economic as impersonal and coherent technical systems. This *debilitation* of Critical Theory's political and explanatory faculties that is at the heart of the contemporary crisis of critique I argue to have deep historical and theoretical roots.

In historical terms, I suggest that the origins of the present crisis can be traced back to the failure of the Habermasian paradigm to fully comprehend and reckon with a *previous* impasse of critical theorising: that of the so-called "first generation" or "early" Frankfurt School in the 1960s and 1970s. In particular, I argue that Habermas's communicative and democratic turn in CT failed to fully resolve - and, in fact, replicated - a problematic tendency that underlay the first generation's works and largely determined its final crisis. That is, the conceptualisation of state and market under late capitalism as totally rationalised and impersonal "systems" having resolved their contradictions and antagonisms and, consequently, no longer requiring the tools of political economic analysis to be unravelled. In critiquing the prevailing interpretation of the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School as a linear, incremental learning process, I therefore seek to understand the contemporary predicament of CT as a manifestation of the unresolved contradictions and aporias accumulated throughout its development.

In light of that historical reconstruction, I argue that the key theoretical node behind the current crisis of critique resides in Jürgen Habermas's attempt to "save"

Frankfurt School theory from the impasse of the first generation by advocating its reconstruction on the basis of a methodological and ontological dualism. Habermas's model of society as system and lifeworld - which constitutes today the basic meta-theoretical architecture for CT - I show to entail an ontological *bifurcation* of social reality into intersubjective-and-normative vis-à-vis objective-and-technical social domains as well as a methodological *separation* and *compartmentalisation* of the normative and explanatory tasks of critique. This meta-theoretical model, I contend, reproduces some of the aporias of the early Frankfurt School and ultimately generates an idealised account of civil society and the public sphere; an essentialised and depoliticised analysis of capitalism and the international system; and effects the deterioration of critique and explanation that is becoming evident in the present crisis.

That the current predicament of Critical Theory is a manifestation of the unresolved historical legacy of the early Frankfurt school and the basic meta-theoretical weakness of the Habermasian framework of analysis I then seek to demonstrate with regards to two of the most comprehensive and influential Frankfurt School theories of international politics: Jürgen Habermas's writings on globalisation, the "post-national constellation" and European integration; and Andrew Linklater's theory of cosmopolitanism and international society. In distinct ways, I argue, both of these bodies of works manifest the problematic tendencies identified before as deriving from Habermas's binary ontology and methodology: on the one hand, they rely on a simplistic account of economic and political globalisation as a neutral and univocal process of evolution, thus failing to develop more incisive investigations into either the global dynamics of the capitalist economy or the peculiarities of "the international" as a domain of political life; on the other, they promote a cosmopolitan politics that lacks a determinate social content and is instead defined either by a normative philosophy of discourse or by the assertion of a theory of history as moral progress. Ultimately, I claim that Habermas's and Linklater's cosmopolitan theories of IR *demonstrate* the link that exists between the communicative paradigm of critique as the meta-theoretical architecture of contemporary CT and the crisis of critique that is currently afflicting it in and outside of IR.

Finally, I draw the consequences from this in arguing that a revitalisation of Critical Theory in IR must involve a fundamental reckoning with the meta-theoretical and normative architecture of the communicative paradigm of critique. In particular, I argue that Habermas's misdiagnosis of the first generation's impasse and failure to overcome its aporias must be remedied and the uncoupling of normative critique from social analysis be undone. Drawing on a variety of contributions from within and outside of IR, I suggest that this can be achieved by Critical Theory adopting a "totalising strategy of critique". This I define *ontologically* as a breaking down of the separation between purely intersubjective and purely objective domains in favour of a holistic theory of society given by the interaction of structures, norms and agents across *all* social domains; *methodologically* as a re-joining of CT's political-emancipatory and explanatory-diagnostic dimensions, consisting on the one hand in the re-grounding of its normativity in social critique and on the other in the re-incorporation of the critique of political economy; *philosophically*, as the foregrounding of the negative dimension of emancipation as the determinate critique of and opposition to specific instances and relations of domination; and *politically*, as the definition of a new set of central organising questions that can orient Frankfurt School research in the study of contemporary international politics.

Thesis structure

Chapter one serves as a literature review and introduces the core issue that inspires this thesis: that is, the widespread sense that Frankfurt School research in the Habermasian tradition is facing both inside and outside of the discipline of IR an impasse that concerns its capacity to remain relevant in the present conjuncture. To begin with, I produce a general definition of the aims of Critical Theory to set a benchmark by which to evaluate the condition of contemporary Frankfurt School research within the discipline of IR and in the social sciences more broadly. This definition is based on Seyla Benhabib's (1986) identification of two core tasks of CT: the "explanatory-diagnostic" and the "anticipatory-utopian". I then start by discussing the peculiarity and origins of the tradition of Frankfurt School theorising in the

discipline of International Relations, as well as review recent contributions on its apparent stagnation and fragmentation. I then broaden the perspective to include current debates over the state of Frankfurt School theory overall that are taking place *beyond* IR, in social theory and political philosophy. Lastly, I link these two separate literatures and advance the claim that the predicament of Critical Theory in IR is part of a wider crisis of critique of Frankfurt School theory in its present, cosmopolitan and Habermasian form - a crisis defined by the debilitation of both the “explanatory-diagnostic” and the “anticipatory-utopian” aspects of critical scholarship.

Chapter two begins the diagnosis of what I have identified in the first chapter as the crisis of critique by undertaking a historical reconstruction of how the prevailing framework of CT came into being. I start by outlining the conventional interpretation in IR of the history of the Frankfurt School as an incremental learning process finding its final and highest synthesis in the current, Habermasian paradigm of critique. I then reflect on the flaws and problematic assumptions that underlie this reading and on the necessity of a more nuanced re-interpretation of the intellectual development of CT. Thereafter, I present an alternative reading of the history of the Frankfurt school and the “communicative turn” that centres on the connections and continuities between first and second generation theory and the permanence of a set of aporias and contradictions - chief amongst which is a misapprehension of the nature of post-war capitalism - throughout CT’s development. Lastly, I explain how this alternative reading opens up the view of a longer and evolving crisis of Frankfurt School that links the present predicament with the previous impasse of the first generation and the failure of Habermas’s communicative turn to recognise and expound its root cause.

Chapter three continues the diagnostic endeavour by discussing in more detail the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique introduced by Jürgen Habermas. I start by outlining the overall architecture of Habermas’s framework, focusing in particular on the meta- and social-theoretical aspects of his theory of communication. I contend that his model of society as system and lifeworld and his argument for a binary ontology and methodology constitute the bedrock of the

contemporary paradigm of critique. In the second part of the chapter, I articulate a critique of the Habermasian paradigm of critique by drawing from a number of arguments levelled against it over the years from feminism, Marxism and critical political economy. In particular, I centre on the limitations that derive from it for the theorisation of capitalism, civil society and power politics, as well as the overall implications for CT. I contend that Habermas's binary ontology and methodology of system and lifeworld effects a problematic uncoupling of normative critique from substantive social theoretical analysis. This uncoupling, I suggest, lies at the roots of the crisis of critique described in chapter one.

Chapters four and five turn again to international politics and seek to substantiate the diagnosis developed in chapters two and three as to the link between the current deadlock of CT and the meta-theoretical weaknesses of the Habermasian paradigm. In that sense, CT in IR serves as a case study of sorts on which to "test" the theoretical hypothesis outlined before.

Chapter four discusses Jürgen Habermas's own interventions on international politics after the end of the Cold War, focusing on his theory of globalisation, the case for a post-national legal regime and the defence of European integration. I contend that Habermas's concrete interventions manifest the failings anticipated in the previous chapter. In particular, I critique Habermas's analysis of globalisation as a technical and coherent process, the lack of an adequate theorisation of "the international" and the reliance of his cosmopolitan project on an ideal theory of historical progress.

Chapter five investigates the influence of Habermas's meta-theoretical framework beyond his own work by discussing Andrew Linklater's Critical Theory of IR. I argue that although it is in many ways distinctive and does not solely rely on Frankfurt School theory, Linklater's lifelong work on international politics is fundamentally shaped by the encounter with the Habermasian project and largely operates within the bounds of its paradigm of critique. In assessing Linklater's writings over more than three decades, I find that his normative theory of cosmopolitanism as well as his later sociology of global morals and civilising processes follow the general

parameters of Habermas's Critical Theory and, as a result, display many of the same failings of the latter's interventions in IR. I conclude that Linklater's case demonstrates that the impact of the binary meta-theoretical architecture discussed in chapter three extends further than Habermas's own work and is directly implicated in the crisis of critique of Critical Theory in IR.

If chapters one to five are purely diagnostic and negative - that is, they are driven by the interest in explaining the crisis of critique - chapter six seeks to draw the consequences from the preceding discussion and outlines a series of suggestions as to how the crisis of critique can be overcome and CT in international politics be revitalised. In light of the alternative history of the Frankfurt School put forward in chapter two and of the link that has been revealed between the crisis of critique and the Habermasian paradigm, I contend that a comprehensive re-evaluation of Critical Theory's meta-theoretical architecture is called for. I start by outlining the lessons that should be drawn from the current crisis and the failings of the prevailing paradigm that should be corrected. These are, I argue, the failure of the bifurcating strategy pursued by Habermas in his reconstruction of historical materialism; and the defeat of the philosophical attempt to anchor critique in the trans-historically and universally valid properties of language. Then, I build on recent contributions within and outside of IR to articulate a proposal for how these failures could be overcome and Critical Theory in IR could be revitalised. I argue for a totalising strategy of critique to be pursued that renounces all essentialisms in favour of a holistic critique of late capitalism; that centres on reacquiring the capacity for the critique of political economy; that grounds its emancipatory aspiration in the determinate negation of real instances of domination; and that takes as its goal the interrogation of the struggles, contradictions and opportunities offered by the present world-historical conjuncture. Lastly, I sketch out the outline of a possible future research agenda for Critical Theory in IR that centres on the analysis and political interpretation of the manifold crises of neoliberal capitalism as well as of their ideological manifestations.

The conclusion sums up the argument and explores some of the concrete possibilities opened up by it as well as the options for future research. In particular, it discusses the opportunity for Critical Theory in IR to enter into dialogue and

collaboration with other critical literatures in international politics such as historical sociology, Marxist IR and neo-Gramscian International Political Economy and how the Frankfurt School's focus on the disclosure of emancipatory possibilities can offer an invaluable contribution and inspiration for other critical theoretical approaches.

Chapter One: The crisis of critique

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the literature under examination, introduce the main conceptual categories that will be utilised throughout the thesis and outline the core research question: that is, what the current state of Frankfurt School research in IR is; whether that can be defined as a “crisis”; and, if so, what the origins and exact character of that crisis are. First of all, I propose a general definition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory that specifies its basic characteristics and establishes the overall normative and theoretical standards by which its various instantiations can be evaluated. This preliminary task is crucial because it lays the groundwork for an assessment of the various phases and articulations of Critical Theory that proceeds by the internal criteria of that tradition, rather than by imposing external standards of appraisal. Secondly, I introduce the specific subject area that constitutes the primary interlocutor for this research: that is, Habermasian Frankfurt School-inspired research in International Relations. In particular, I identify and discuss two sub-literatures of Critical Theory that have, from the 1980s onwards, engaged in the study and critique of international politics. These are the literature on Cosmopolitan Democracy (CD) and the project of Critical International Relations Theory (CIRT). After providing an outline of the history and peculiarities of each, I discuss the widespread feeling that both of these critical approaches to IR are today in a state of stagnation and relative inactivity. Thirdly, I broaden the scope of the discussion and relate the current predicament of critical theorising in IR to the ongoing discussions over the state of Frankfurt School theory that are taking place in the fields of political theory, sociology and philosophy. In those debates, I point to the growing sense that CT in its present guise is proving incapable of interpreting contemporary political developments and is failing by its theoretical and normative ambitions. Finally, I argue for a linking together of these two separate conversations and propose that the contemporary impasse of Critical Theory of IR be understood as an illustrative

example of the generalised “crisis of critique” of Frankfurt School theorising. In light of the standards of critique established in the first section, I define this crisis as given by the parallel debilitation of the explanatory and normative aspects of critical scholarship.

Defining Frankfurt School Critical Theory

The intellectual tradition that this thesis interrogates and situates itself in is that of the Frankfurt School. Taking its name from the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) in Frankfurt-am-Main, where its leading proponents were located, this tradition of critical thought has its origin in early Twentieth Century Europe and continues, in various forms, to this day. Over that long timespan, the Frankfurt School has witnessed a number of turns, mutations and developments and encompassed a variety of different thinkers and ideas. Because of this heterogeneity, the Frankfurt School is often defined as ‘a cluster of themes’ (Bronner, 1994: 3) and an extended family of concepts, rather than a fully coherent and ‘unified body of thought’ (Wyn Jones, 1999: 3). In the next chapter I will discuss in more detail the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School and the various ways in which its unfolding has been categorised and periodised. For now, it is sufficient to note that the development of Critical Theory is not one of linear progression, in which the problems encountered in a given stage are simply solved in the next one. Instead, many of the questions and dilemmas that concerned the very first critical scholars are still a matter of contention today. For this reason, I start by providing a minimal definition of Critical Theory that applies to the entire arc of its development and all of its different articulations.⁴ This is important both because it delineates the conceptual boundaries of the object of study and because it defines the internal parameters and standards by which the success or failure, crisis or vitality of CT’s various incarnations can be assessed.

⁴ This includes Frankfurt School-inspired works in the discipline of IR as well. As I discussed in the introduction, the intention of this thesis is to transcend rigid disciplinary barriers and discuss Frankfurt School theory as a comprehensive movement of critical thought.

Possibly the best place to start from in defining the essence of Frankfurt School thought is a piece of text that predates it - a letter written by a young Karl Marx in 1843. Marx (1975: 209) sums up the task of critical theorising as 'the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age'. This definition, as Nancy Fraser (1985: 97) has suggested, neatly captures the distinctiveness and purpose of Critical Theory. Specifically, it contains three elements which can serve as a starting point to define the Frankfurt school in its entirety: the internal relation to the Marxian tradition of social thought; the idea of analysis as critical self-reflection on a particular historical and social context; and the aim of emancipation.

Marxist analysis of social relations

With regards to the first element, Frankfurt School Critical Theory represents a form of social inquiry that is *internally related* to the Marxist tradition and seeks to reimagine its analysis and politics in light of the changing historical circumstances of Twentieth and Twenty-first Century Western capitalism (Dahms, 2011: 5). What the relation to Marxism has meant exactly and what has been its precise character has changed substantially over the course of the Frankfurt School's history. For the so-called "early" or "first generation" Frankfurt School, the Hegelian-Marxist tradition represented a theoretical starting point as well as a constant point of philosophical reference (Jay, 1973: 295). Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse and the other early members of the Institute for Social Research were part of what is now referred to as "Western Marxism" - a diverse set of critical reflections on Historical Materialism that appeared in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. This strand of Marxian thought - which includes, in Perry Anderson's (1979) formulation, thinkers such as Georg Lukács, Antonio Gramsci and Karl Korsch - sought to interrogate the defeat of socialist movements in Western Europe and the apparent refutation of classical Marxist analyses as to the imminent crisis of capitalism. The hallmarks of Western Marxism, as it was described by Perry Anderson (1979; 1983) and more recently by Razmig Keucheyan (2014) and Stuart Jeffries (2016), were the opposition to the rigid and scientific approach of Soviet Marxism; the divorce

from revolutionary practice and “acadamisation” of Marxist thought; and the orientation towards “superstructural” questions such as philosophy, culture, aesthetics and ideology. From that point onwards, the relation between the Frankfurt School and the Marxist tradition has become more complex and ambiguous. On the one hand, the work of “second generation” theorist Jürgen Habermas marked the beginning of a clear distancing of Critical Theory from the core *problematiques* and vocabulary of Marxian analysis, in favour of an increased engagement with analytical philosophy and political theory. On the other hand, the fundamental meta-theoretical coordinates of Habermas’s framework of analysis were explicitly conceived as a ‘reconstruction of Historical Materialism’, thus continuing in the Western Marxist tradition of updating and reworking the categories of Marxian thought (Habermas, 1979).⁵ Therefore, even when its focus and terminology have moved further and further away from traditional Marxist concerns with class struggle and the critique of capitalism, Habermasian and post-Habermasian scholarship has maintained a clear link to that tradition of analysis - a link that is inscribed in its very meta-theoretical identity. This remains the case for contemporary Critical Theory in IR also. There, as I will further discuss in the next chapter, reflections on the Marxian legacy of Critical Theory have featured prominently in the works of Andrew Linklater (1990), Shannon Brincat (2014) and Mark Hoffman (1988). The ambiguous relation between contemporary Critical Theory and Marxism is well captured in a phrase by Andrew Linklater, in which he describes his own approach as ‘true to the spirit but not to the letter of Marxism’ (Linklater, interviewed in Devetak et al., 2013: 486).

What that “spirit of Marxism” is exactly - that is, what the enduring Marxist kernel of Critical Theory consists of, beyond simply having a common ancestry - is harder to pin down. Indeed, as I will discuss in the next chapter, the significance of Marxism for Critical Theory has been interpreted over the years in many different ways and is still today highly contested. In general terms, however, the Marxist kernel of CT can be said to reside in the theoretical and normative interest to understand how

⁵ Habermas understood his early writings (1973; 1979), leading up to the publication of what is arguably his most important work, *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987), as an

societies secure the material and social conditions for their own reproduction and to reveal the relations of power, domination, violence and exclusion through which a given social formation is constituted and maintains itself. Traditionally, this concern was actualised in Marxian analysis in the study and critique of capitalism as a set of class relations grounded in the material reproduction of society. For the first and second generation Frankfurt School, the focus was more on the determination of culture, civil society and the individual by bureaucratic and market imperatives. Critical Theory in IR, in turn, has mostly centred on the critique of the exclusionary practices that are inherent in the constitution of particularistic communities such as the nation-state. In each of these cases, the inquiry has been oriented towards the theorising of the conflicts, exclusions and power relations that constitute the fundamental grammar of social life (Weber, 2014: 533). For the purposes of the minimal definition being presented here, then, it is possible to say that the entire arc of the Frankfurt School - from the early writings of Adorno and Horkheimer to the contemporary critical research in IR - is related to Marxist thought and shares with it the essential concern with the study and critique of the social relations - and, specifically, the relations of violence and power - that are constitutive of a specific social order.

Reflexivity

The second defining element of the Frankfurt school as an overall form of critical thinking is that of reflexivity. This term has two, interrelated dimensions: on the one hand, reflexivity serves as a fundamental *epistemic principle* of critical theorising, consisting in the recognition of the socially-mediated character of knowledge; on the other hand, it constitutes a core *theoretical aim* of critical research: that of generating analyses and interpretations that clarify and explain the contemporary situation.

attempt to take Marxist theory 'apart and [put] it back together again in a now form in order to attain more fully the goal it has set for itself' (Habermas, 1979: 95; see also 1987: 383).

With regards to the former, as Inanna Hamati-Ataya (2013: 675) has explained, reflexivity represents a 'core epistemic stance of critical theory' that consists in the 'acknowledgement of the historicity of knowledge and of the inscription of knowledge in social interests'. In this first sense, then, reflexivity stands for the notion that all knowledge-claims are mediated by historical and social circumstances and by the particular standpoint occupied by the theorist. The corollary of this is the principle according to which critical theorists commit themselves to an ongoing process of self-reflection with regards to the origins as well as the consequences of the knowledge they produce. The commitment to reflexivity as an epistemic principle of critical theorising has been a defining aspect of the Frankfurt School from the very beginning. In what is generally recognised as the first comprehensive statement of the research programme of the Frankfurt School - the text *Traditional and Critical Theory* published in 1937 - Max Horkheimer (1972: 211) identified Critical Theory's capacity to recognise itself as 'the function neither of the isolated individual nor of a sum-total of individuals', but of a 'definitive individual in his real relation to other individuals and groups, in his conflict with a particular class, and, finally, in the resultant web of relationships with the social totality and with nature' as a key factor differentiating it from 'traditional', non-critical theory. This idea of the socially-mediated nature of knowledge - and the peculiarity of critical thinking in acknowledging that mediation - was further explored by Jürgen Habermas. In the 1968 book *Knowledge and Human Interests*, he argued that human experience is organised according to different 'cognitive interests' - that is, to different 'basic orientations' to the reproduction of social life (Habermas, 1971: 196). He then proposed a three-way categorisation of knowledge-constitutive interests, each corresponding to a different form of knowledge-production. Habermas (1971: 308) distinguished first of all between two traditional forms of knowledge: the first, guided by the 'technical cognitive interest' in assuring the survival of the species through rational calculation, he identified with the 'analytical-empirical' sciences; the second, arising from the 'practical cognitive interest' in establishing functioning social arrangements, he saw as corresponding to the 'historical-hermeneutic' tradition. In contrast to both of these, he proclaimed Critical Theory to represent a third form of knowledge which arises from the 'power of self-reflection'. Critical

theorising, in other words, was understood by Habermas (1971: 310) as the capacity to comprehend the connection of experience and interest and so release 'the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers' (Habermas, 1971: 310). The epistemic principle of reflexivity, lastly, played a prominent role in the emergence and practice of Frankfurt School-inspired theorising in the discipline of IR. The project of Critical IR Theory in particular placed a central emphasis on the notion, enunciated by Robert Cox, that '[t]heory is always for someone and for some purpose. All theories have a perspective. Perspectives derive from a position in time and space, specifically social and political time and space' (Cox, 1981: 128). This maxim - arguably the most famous quotation to derive from a work in CIRT - translated concretely into a double commitment to both reveal the standpoint underlying traditional, mainstream scholarship and explicate the critical theorists' own social and normative position.

As to the latter dimension, reflexivity for the Frankfurt School indicates an active theoretical intent: that of generating an account of contemporary societal circumstances that unravels their historical origins and defining dynamics. The second, complementary aspect of reflexivity, then, refers to the critical theoretical aim of providing what Max Horkheimer (quoted in Outhwaite, 2013: vii) called a 'theory of the historical course of the present epoch' and Habermas termed a 'diagnosis of the times (*Zeitdiagnose*)' (Braaten, 1991: 588). That is, an analytical contribution that is not content with recognising its own entanglement in a particular social context (as indicated by the notion of reflexivity as an epistemic stance), but also moves beyond itself and articulates a critical reflection on the contemporary conjuncture and a theory of the real societal processes that define it. This ambition to interpret and clarify what Adorno (1974: 125) calls the 'objective tendencies of the moment' - that is, to not only acknowledge but *explain* the social context that CT arises out of - has been a defining feature of Frankfurt School theorising throughout its history. As Adorno and Horkheimer explained, it is this second dimension of reflexivity that differentiates Critical Theory from a pure "sociology of knowledge" such as the one advocated by Karl Mannheim (Jay, 1994: 186). Whereas the latter limits itself to revealing the 'social function [of knowledge] and its conditioning by

interests while refraining from a critique of that content itself', Critical Theory seeks to go beyond its particular perspective and articulate an analysis of 'the objective structure of society' (Adorno, 1973: 198). Critical Theory is reflexive, ultimately, in the sense that it seeks neither to proclaim trans-historical truths and absolute, universal laws, nor simply to rest in the recognition of its own situatedness. Instead, it aims to self-consciously represent in thought in a demystified manner the historical trends and struggles of its own time. In particular - and here the spectre of its Marxian legacy appears again - Critical Theory seeks to clarify the central contradictions, antagonisms and crisis tendencies of its time, in terms both of long-term structural dynamics and of more immediate and concrete struggles (Benhabib, 1986: 226-228).

Emancipation

The third defining element of Frankfurt School theorising is its interest in the emancipation of the human species from suffering, injustice and domination. Following directly from the element of reflexivity, the commitment to emancipation constitutes both the normative presupposition and the motivating impulse of Critical Theory. All the various phases and incarnations of Frankfurt School theory are united in the belief that, in Richard Wyn Jones's words (1999: 157), 'if all theory is for someone and for some purpose' - that is, if all knowledge-claims express a particular intent and normative position - then Critical Theory is 'for the voiceless, the unrepresented, the powerless, and its purpose is their emancipation'. Beyond this general statement of commitment, however, what emancipation means concretely and what its specific content is has remained in the history of the Frankfurt school remarkably fluid and contested. The biggest matter of contention - which, as I will discuss in chapter six, remains open and of critical importance today - is over the most appropriate *grounding* of emancipation and whether the normative interest of Critical Theory ought to be given a *positive* or *negative* content.⁶ On the

⁶ "Negative" and "positive" are used in this instance not to express a value-judgement of "good" or "bad" but to define the content of the concept in question. Saying that CT's

one hand, the first generation Frankfurt School and some contemporary critical scholars such as Amy Allen (2015; 2016) and Albenaz Azmanova (2012) see emancipation as a negative concept grounded in the social critique of existing structures of oppression and domination. In this first understanding, emancipation contains no absolute and universal principle of its own but takes determination from the opposition to concrete instances of suffering and harm. Its political content is therefore given not by trans-historical principles of freedom or justice, but by the identification of definite social circumstances that need to be abolished and of the social forces that can be mobilised to do so.⁷ On the other hand, Jürgen Habermas and the critical scholars that followed in his steps argued that the emancipatory aspiration of Frankfurt School theory had to be given a stable and unambiguous foundation and therefore be formulated as the affirmation of a set of universal valid principles or procedures. According to this position, a negative definition of emancipation that rests on the contingent unfolding of social struggles and the opposition to concrete injustices is at risk of falling into relativism and immobility since it can only be ‘delivered up to the reigning standards in any given historical epoch’ (Habermas, 1987: 382). For this reason, a number of critical theorists have sought to definitively “fix” the meaning of emancipation by philosophical and ideal theoretical means. The most prominent and influential of these attempts, which is linked to the work of Habermas, has found a normative foundation for CT in the potential for rational consensus that is intrinsic to language and dialogue. By extension, emancipatory politics has been defined in the Habermasian paradigm as

normative position is “positive” is, in other words, not the same as passing a favourable judgement over it or evaluating the benevolence or desirability of its outcomes. Instead, the term “positive” refers to concepts the content of which is defined as having value and validity on its own, affirmed independently of any external circumstance or relation. Inversely, “negative” implies here not an operation the outcome of which is necessarily undesirable and malevolent, but rather a position that has no absolute content of its own and takes determination from the negation of some other, pre-existing position or circumstance.

⁷ For the early Frankfurt school, the “oppositional” content of emancipation was initially formulated in the classical Marxist terms of a proletarian struggle against capitalist domination (See Horkheimer, 1972: 213). In the post-War period, when the working class no longer appeared to constitute a revolutionary subject, the negative character of emancipation was expressed in the more rarefied terms of an aesthetic and philosophical resistance to the totalising logics of capitalist exchange and bureaucratic rationality. More recently, critical scholars such as Amy Allen (2016: xiv) have returned to advocate for ‘a negativistic conception of emancipation, where emancipation refers to the minimisation of relations of domination’. This negativistic conception of emancipation I will myself defend in chapter six as a more promising way of articulating the political role of Critical Theory today.

the protection and expansion of the domains of social life that are ruled by the procedural rules of democratic deliberation.

I will discuss in more detail in the following chapters what exactly is at stake in these philosophical debates over the meaning of emancipation. For the present purposes of a general definition, what is important to recognise is that the question of the political significance and role of Critical Theory has concerned all the various instantiations of the Frankfurt School and continues to occupy critical scholars today. All Frankfurt School theorists agree that, as Max Horkheimer (quoted in Honneth, 2007: 64) put it, Critical Theory ought to represent ‘the intellectual side of the historical process of emancipation’. What that emancipatory process looks like today, how it can be made sense of and what concrete role CT can play in relation to it remain open questions to be explored.

A general definition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory

By a first approximation and combining the elements introduced thus far, Frankfurt School theorising can be defined as a family of approaches originating within the Marxian tradition that engage in the critical analysis of a particular time and space with the aim of disclosing the social relations of power that structure it and the emancipatory possibilities that are immanent to it. On the basis of this, it is possible to start delineating what the necessary *aspects* and *goals* of an effective Critical Theory would be. These criteria - which, it should be repeated, are derived from CT’s own understanding of itself - can then serve as a standard by which to evaluate Frankfurt School theory’s various incarnations.

A useful contribution in undertaking this task is provided by critical scholar Seyla Benhabib. In her influential book *Critique, Norm, and Utopia*, Benhabib (1986: 226) distinguishes two inter-related dimensions of critical theorising: the “explanatory-diagnostic” and the “anticipatory-utopian”. The former, which Benhabib (*Ibidem*) also terms the ‘social-critical’ dimension of CT, is the ‘aspect through which the findings and method of the social sciences are appropriated in such a way as to

develop an empirically fruitful analysis of the crisis potential of the present'. The aim of CT in this first dimension is to 'analyse the contradictions and dysfunctionalities of the present and to explicate the protest and pathologies - as the case may be - which they give rise to in the population'. The latter dimension of Critical Theory, on the other hand, 'constitutes the more properly normative aspect of critique' through which the 'crisis diagnosis' of the present is integrated by a political view of existing society that proceeds 'from the perspective of the radical transformation of its basic structure'. 'In its *anticipatory-utopian* capacity', Benhabib (Ibidem) adds, 'critical theory addresses the needs and demands expressed by social actors in the present, and interprets their potential to lead toward a better and more humane society'. Benhabib's distinction between the normative and the social-analytical aspects of critique is useful for the purposes of a specification of the general characteristics of Critical Theory because it crystallises the dialectical tension that lies at its heart: that between CT's existence as a *social science* that seeks to provide valid analyses and explanations for contemporary events, and its ambition to constitute a *political project* that links up with emancipatory processes and articulates a normative vision which inspires real social struggles. With the addition of Benhabib's distinction, then, Frankfurt School theory can be defined by a second approximation as a critical theoretical tradition that seeks both to accurately portray and analyse the central dynamics and contradictions of a historical epoch *and* to articulate a vision of emancipation that points beyond that contemporary situation. A successful CT is, ultimately, one which manages to conjoin these two aspects into a form of research which at once explains the antagonisms, struggles and potentials that compose the present time and sets forth a political position that connects with real social forces and their transformative action.

By most accounts, the history of the Frankfurt School has been a succession of *failures* to meet these stated aims of critical theorising. Nonetheless - and in keeping with Marxism's dialectical sensibility - every failure has been a *different* failure and contains useful lessons for Frankfurt school theory going forward. Failure in this sense is not an endpoint but an ongoing process of negotiating the contradictions that society holds up to critical attempts to decipher and transform it.

The study of the different ways in which Frankfurt School theory has navigated the various tensions introduced in this section - and the question of how they are to be tackled today - constitutes the core thematic of this thesis.

Frankfurt School theory in International Relations

Having delineated the conceptual boundary of the discussion and introduced some of the basic themes and elements of this thesis, it is now possible to start addressing the literature that this research is directed to, namely those contemporary critical interventions in the field of International Relations (IR) that have situated themselves in the tradition of the Frankfurt School and have deployed its theoretical armamentarium in the study of international politics.

For most of its intellectual history, Critical Theory articulated no significant intervention on international politics. Although they lived through and were profoundly impacted by the “twenty years’ crisis” in global affairs, the authors of the early Frankfurt School rarely occupied themselves directly with the international dimension of politics (Brincat, 2011: 234). When Adorno and Horkheimer discussed the horrors of the Second World War or the dangers of a nuclear holocaust, it was as manifestations of the destructive potential of technological and productive forces or as the devastating consequences of an unbound instrumental rationality, rather than as dynamics ruled by their own distinctive logic (See Adorno, 1968: 120). Certainly, there was in the writings of the first generation nothing like a systematic and coherent theory of international politics. Jürgen Habermas, the leading scholar of the Frankfurt School after the first generation, did not initially engage in any great detail with the domain of the international either. His writings in the 1960s, 70s and 80s centred either on philosophical and meta-theoretical question - such as the elaboration of his formal pragmatics of language and the debate with American pragmatism - or on the domestic transformations facing post-War European societies (Diez & Stefans, 2005: 127). Things began to change at a specific historical juncture, namely the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the so-

called “unipolar moment” in international politics (See Krauthammer, 1990). In the context of an apparent waning of national borders and traditional power politics, of wide-ranging geo-economic restructuring and expanding worldwide communications, of a victorious liberal democratic order and an emerging regime of human rights protection, that very realm of international politics which had previously appeared blocked, impervious to change and devoid of emancipatory possibilities, suddenly looked to be open for new normative theorisations (Calhoun, 2002: 887; Beardsworth, 2011).⁸ For Critical Theory, then, the 1990s marked the beginning of an age of sustained and optimistic theoretical engagement with international politics. In particular, two different clusters of critical scholarship emerged in this period that sought to apply some of the themes and concepts derived from the Frankfurt School tradition to the study of international relations: the project of Cosmopolitan Democracy and the Critical International Relations Theory approach. I will now introduce in turn the core authors, themes and ideas behind each of these two approaches.

Cosmopolitan Democracy

A first Frankfurt School-inspired literature in International Relations developed in the 1990s around the theory of Cosmopolitan Democracy (CD). Promoted by well-known scholars such as Ulrich Beck (2003; 2006), David Held (1995; 2003; 2010), Anthony McGrew, Mary Kaldor (2003), Daniele Archibugi (2000; 2002) and Jürgen Habermas (2001; 2006; 2009), the project of CD emerged as part of a wider current in post-Cold War political and social thought centred on the theme of globalisation. The core idea behind the globalisation literature was that a profound transformation was taking place in international politics that was defined by the world-wide integration of trade, finance, production and communication and the intensification of social relations across national communities. These various processes, captured by the term “globalisation”, were thought to be producing a radical reorganisation of

⁸ In a recently published interview, for instance, Habermas (2015: 64) has remarked that it ‘was only after 1989/90 that global developments directed my attention seriously to the problems of the legal and political reorganization of the world society that has been taking shape since that time. This interest was sparked during the first Iraq War by the debate over humanitarian intervention’.

economy and society as well as generating new types of competitive pressures and global threats such as mass migration, terrorism and ecological devastation. The combined effect of these dynamics - globalisation theory suggested - was to fundamentally undermine the power and autonomy of the nation-state (Beck, 2006: 74).⁹

The project of Cosmopolitan Democracy represented a theoretical and political response to the scenario raised by globalisation theory (Habermas, 2001: 107-109; Archibugi, 2002: 26).¹⁰ Its core argumentation was that globalisation was making it both *possible* and *necessary* to devise different, cosmopolitan forms of democratic organisation *beyond* the model of the modern nation-state. On the one hand, the CD literature warned that globalisation was dramatically curtailing the 'efficacy of state-based democracy' and bore the risk, if left unchecked, of exacerbating global inequalities (Beck, 2000b: 90; Archibugi, 2004: 439). The only way to prevent the 'withering away' of political self-determination and preserve the achievements of social democracy in the West, it warned, was for democracy itself to evolve and be reorganised on a global scale (Held, 2003: 524). On the other hand, the CD scholars argued that the lessening of geopolitical and ideological conflict, the undisputed victory of liberal democracy and the spread of forms of 'cosmopolitan everyday consciousness' all around the world were making it possible for the first time in human history to imagine the creation of a universal community of individuals governed by democratic procedures (Beck, 2000a: 38). The general motive of CD was to reconcile these two considerations in the form of concrete proposals for new and expanded democratic institutions. Its slogan and 'rallying cry'

⁹ I follow Justin Rosenberg (2005) in defining "globalisation theory" as that broad body of scholarly work across the social sciences that, particularly in the 1990s and 2000s, emphasised globalisation as a causative process consisting in a shift in the spatial and temporal pattern of human societies. This shift was read as explaining the global social transformations after the end of the Cold War. What defines "globalisation theory" is the explanatory primacy given to globalisation as not just a descriptive, but a causally effective factor. The main scholars associated with globalisation theory are Ulrich Beck, Manuel Castells and Anthony Giddens.

¹⁰ Around the same time, other formulations of cosmopolitanism emerged in the social sciences that emphasised the cultural or philosophical dimension of cosmopolitanism. Moreover, scholars such as Ulrich Beck explored the methodological implications of cosmopolitanism as a new sociological perspective on reality opposed to the nationalist perspective of previous theories. In this section and for the purposes of this thesis, I focus on Cosmopolitan Democracy as the strand of cosmopolitan thought that is most directly related to the Frankfurt School tradition and constitutes the most explicitly political expression of that movement.

was that the only way to 'democratise' and 'regulate' globalisation is to 'globalise democracy' (Archibugi, 2002: 36; 2004).

As a whole, the project of Cosmopolitan Democracy configured itself as an attempt to re-interpret the project of Critical Theory in light of what appeared at the time as the onset of an entirely novel historical epoch. At its heart lie the belief that, as stated by Ulrich Beck (2000b: 81), a 'new kind of capitalism, a new kind of economy, a new kind of global order, a new kind of politics and law, a new kind of society and personal life are in the making which... are clearly distinct from earlier phases of social evolution'. In a manner analogous to the Third Way programme of Anthony Giddens, CD interpreted its role as that of articulating a new political and intellectual programme that would account for that changed reality and explore the new range of possibilities it opened (Guibernau, 2001: 438-440). Concretely, this took the shape of a demotion of the traditional concerns of Critical Theory with the social and political economic theory in favour of a greater engagement with normative and political theory (Archibugi, 2012: 9). Having accepted the permanence of capitalism as a way of organising economic relations and recognising liberal democracy as the normative horizon of progressive politics, CD focused its energies on devising principles, institutional proposals and argumentations through which the forces of globalisation could be shaped and steered towards the attainment of a universal democratic order. In particular, CD channelled a politics based the idea of a 'global civil society' that could become an interpreter of the normative drive for cosmopolitan universalism and thereby serve, in Mary Kaldor's (2003: 21) words, 'as a check both on the power and arbitrariness of the contemporary state and on the power of unbridled capitalism'.

In practice, research in the CD literature straddled the line between political theory, philosophy and IR, pursuing in particular two lines of inquiry. On the one hand, scholarship sought to address the pressing question of how the abstract demand for a new cosmopolitan world order could be translated into practical political demands. As part of that effort, a variety of different proposal and blueprints were formulated - some more ambitious, others more modest - for how the international system and its institutions could be reformed to accommodate democratic cosmopolitan processes.

David Held (2004; 2006), for instance, favoured the model of a 'cosmopolitan social democracy' that would entail significant controls over the capitalist economy enshrined in a 'Charter of Rights and Obligations', as well as some measure of global wealth redistribution and a set of multi-level democratic governance structures at the local, national, regional and global level. Habermas (2009; 2012), as I will illustrate in more detail in chapter four, offered a more moderate proposal for a reform of the organisms of the United Nations and the institution of a 'transnational negotiation system' based on regional blocs on the model of the European Union. Moreover, a number of debates ensued over the correct position to take vis-à-vis humanitarian interventions and the implementation of punitive measures by the international community against authoritarian regimes (see Archibugi, 2004; Habermas, 1999). On the other hand, works on CD focused on the philosophical task of formulating universal normative principles that would be capable of sustaining a new, global political order. Since all available theories of democracy had been formulated in the context of the modern nation-state and were deemed to be inapplicable to a post-national order, efforts concentrated on articulating a new vision of democracy that could effectively be scaled up to the global level while maintaining a sensibility for socio-cultural difference (Archibugi, 2004: 439). In this context, the work of Jürgen Habermas on the philosophy of language and the universalising and integrative quality of communicative interaction established itself as a popular normative framework through which to interpret the challenges inherent to building a cosmopolitan regime of governance. As Scheuerman (2006: 87) explains, the idea soon became dominant in the CD literature that a deliberative democratic model based on an informal and horizontal "global public sphere" was best suited to provide 'persuasive resolutions of the normative and institutional quagmires of globalisation'.

In the end, the ambition of the advocates of Cosmopolitan Democracy was and still is that of constituting the progressive intellectual side of the epochal transformations brought about by globalisation. The literature developed from the onset as a project with a relatively narrow but immediately contemporary focus: that of interrogating in philosophical and political-theoretic terms what appeared at the time as a radical

new phase of global politics and, in Archibugi's (2012: 9) words, attempting 'to apply [to it] some of the principles, values and procedures of democracy.' For this reason, the link with the Frankfurt School tradition has remained often underspecified and limited to the selective reading and incorporation of elements of Habermas's philosophy of language. Although prominent figures such as David Held were well versed in and explicitly inspired by the Frankfurt School (Johnson, 2006: 163; Gagnon, 2011: 7), the project of CD itself was never meant to constitute a comprehensive Critical Theory of international politics and focused instead on the more specific goal of devising a politically plausible and philosophically sustainable proposal for a cosmopolitan world order. A significant exception to this is represented by the writings that Jürgen Habermas himself started producing in the 1990s on the emerging cosmopolitan condition of global politics. This body of work - which I will discuss in great detail in chapter four - integrated the political-theoretical reflections being developed by Held and Archibugi with Habermas's own social theory of modern society - thus giving rise to what is arguably the most sophisticated expression of the Cosmopolitan Democracy project to date.

Critical International Relations Theory

A second strand of Frankfurt School-inspired scholarship emerged on the more conventional academic terrain of IR Theory. Starting from the 1980s and reaching a crescendo in the 1990s, scholars in international politics drew from the Frankfurt School tradition to critique the prevailing theoretical practices in the discipline of IR. During that period, a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction was growing in the discipline with regards to the limited scope and variety of the forms of scholarship that were allowed under the then-dominant Neorealist and Neoliberal schools of IR. In that context, authors such as Richard Ashley (1981), Mark Hoffman (1987; 1988; 1991), Mark Neufeld (1994, 1995), Steve Smith (1996) and Andrew Linklater (1990; 1992) adopted and deployed ideas and reflections from the Frankfurt School to mount an altogether novel challenge to the "mainstream" way of doing research on

international politics.¹¹ The critical IR scholars directed their attention to the philosophical, epistemological and ontological assumptions that formed the shared and unspoken meta-theoretical bedrock for the mainstream schools of thought in IR. Specifically, Hoffman, Smith, Linklater and others pointed out that a majority of IR scholarship still relied on an empiricist-positivist understandings of science that in other fields of social research had long been the object of sustained critique. Alongside other authors that drew from French post-structuralist thought, such as James Der Derian and RBJ Walker, these first critical theorists ignited a debate in the discipline over the meta-theoretical bases of IR scholarship, the possibility of value-neutral research and the possibility of developing different forms of theorising from those permitted under the positivist canon (Smith, 1996: 37). This came to be known by some as the Third Great Debate in the discipline of IR (George, 1989: 273).

In the wealth of interventions and propositions that followed, the idea of a Critical IR Theory (CIRT) inspired by the Frankfurt School tradition asserted itself as one of the more defined reference points within the nascent universe of post-positivist approaches to the study of IR (Hoffman, 1991: 169). As noted by Price and Reus-Smit - and unlike the Cosmopolitan Democracy literature discussed above - the 'critical theory of the Third Debate' was mostly 'inward looking, concerned primarily with undermining the foundations of dominant discourses of IR' (Price & Reus, 1998: 263). In the course of the 1990s, the emphasis shifted somewhat from the critique of mainstream IR theory to the definition of an alternative approach to the study of international politics based on the principles of the Frankfurt School. In particular, the Critical IR scholars sought to clearly differentiate their own approach from the traditional schools of IR thought they were critiquing, such as Neorealism and Neoliberalism, on the one hand; and from the other emerging post-positivist

¹¹ The role of Robert Cox in the birth and development of Critical IR Theory is somewhat unique in this respect. On the one hand, his 1981 article *Social Forces, States and World Orders* and particularly the quote 'theory is always for someone and for some purpose' represented one of the defining early statements of intent of the Critical theoretical approach to international relations. On the other hand, Cox was somewhat distinct from Ashley, Hoffman and Linklater in not drawing in any way from the Frankfurt School and went on to develop a similar but distinct approach based on the ideas of Antonio Gramsci. For these reasons, I focus in this section on the critical scholars that directly identified with the Frankfurt School tradition.

theories, such as post-structuralism and constructivism, on the other. In opposition to conventional approaches to international politics and in line with the rest of the post-positivist movement, the Critical IR scholars championed the rejection of two core principles of positivist social science: the epistemic principle of the value-neutrality of knowledge, and the ontological assumption of the independent and objective existence of reality. With regards to the former, they challenged the idea that it was possible to produce impartial and factual knowledge, emphasising instead the standpoint-dependent and inherently normative character of all forms of theorising. Using Habermas's categorisation of knowledge-constitutive interests (see Ashley, 1984; Linklater: 1990a) and Horkheimer's distinction between traditional and critical theory (see Hoffman, 1987; Neufeld, 1994), Critical IR scholars asserted the uniqueness of critical theorising as a reflexive form of knowledge-production driven by the normative aim of emancipation. As to the latter, they questioned the separation of "mind and matter" and "theory and reality" mandated by positivist science and embraced a constructivist ontology based on the notion of a socially constituted reality (Hoffman, 1987: 232-233). Heavily influenced by Habermas's paradigm of critique, CIRT sought to 'collapse' the distinction between 'subject and object' and advance an 'intersubjective' understanding of social reality (Linklater, 2007b: 47). According to this reading, the structures of international politics discussed by traditional IR theory - such as anarchy, state power and sovereignty - should not be understood as objective and independent facts but as malleable and transient meanings created through ongoing processes of discursive negotiation. In contrast to the other critical approaches that emerged in the 1990s as part of the Third Great Debate, such as post-structuralism and constructivism, CIRT emphasised its interiority to the project of the Enlightenment and the embrace of a universalist normative position. The post-structuralist approach, which drew heavily from the writings of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida and advocated a deconstructive analysis of the "text" of international politics, was perceived by the Critical IR scholars as a form of 'radical interpretivism' which refused any normative or rational foundations and thus lapsed into moral relativism (Hoffman, 1991: 170; Linklater, 1998: 71). Constructivism, which embraced the notion of a socially-constructed reality while remaining

committed to traditional, value-neutral research, they saw as an a-critical form of interpretivism which was not ready to follow through with the transformative political implications of post-positivist research (Anievas, 2005: 141; Kurki, 2011, 135). In contrast to the perceived relativism of post-structuralism and the non-political stance of constructivism, Critical IR Theory understood itself as an explicitly political project guided by the universalising and emancipatory power of reason. In the words of Mark Hoffman (1991: 170), CIRT was committed to a 'minimal foundationalism' that consisted in the belief that a stable and universal basis could be found on which to ground its normative critique. In that sense - and in accord with the Habermasian paradigm of critical theorising - Critical IR Theory understood itself as operating within and as 'the most self-reflective outpost of' the tradition of Enlightenment thinking (Hoffman, 1988: 92).

In a similar way to the Cosmopolitan Democracy literature discussed before, Critical IR Theory came increasingly to rely for the specification of its normative grounding on Habermas's philosophy of language and ethics of discourse. CIRT's purpose was expressed as the widening of the 'realm of social interaction which is governed by universalisable moral principles' and by the procedural rules of discourse ethics (Linklater, 1998: 109). Its ultimate goal was the establishment of a political order approximating as much as possible a 'universal dialogic community' of free and unconstrained communication (*Ibidem*: 120). Analogous to the project of CD, CIRT emphasised the two elements of dialogism and cosmopolitanism as the core normative principles of its emancipatory outlook. On the one hand, as proclaimed by Dietz and Stefans (2005: 135), the 'distinctiveness of Critical Theory' was seen to lie in 'its desire to foster an inter-subjective "conversation" aimed at mutual understanding and communication free from ideological domination' (Dietz & Stefans, 2005: 135; Weber, 2014: 526/527); on the other hand, the *raison d'être* of Critical IR Theory and its original contribution to the wider project of Critical Theory were identified in the overcoming of the methodological nationalism of Frankfurt School critique and the expansion of its 'remit... into a cosmopolitan dimension' (Brincat, 2011: 234; see also Booth, 2007: 271; Linklater, 2007b: 98-104).

Concretely, research in the Critical IR Theory literature developed alongside three separate but complementary lines of investigation and following three different conceptions of critique. A first form of Critical IR scholarship consisted in the dissecting and undermining of traditional conceptions of international politics and 'the prevailing hegemonic security discourse' (Wyn Jones, 1999: 160). Best represented by the so-called "Welsh" or "Aberystwyth" school in Critical Security Studies (CSS) and - more recently - Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) and associated with authors such as Ken Booth (2007), Richard Wyn Jones (1999) and Richard Jackson (2009), this first segment of Critical IR scholarship picked up the epistemological critique that had been levied by the early Critical IR scholars against Realism and extended it to the security and terrorism studies literatures.¹² As explained by Ken Booth, the Welsh school approach entailed a two-fold operation: on the hand, it challenged those "traditionalist" conceptions of security and international politics in academia as well as the wider public and policy sphere that reflected and perpetuated 'statist, militarised and masculinised definitions of what should have priority in security terms'. On the other hand, it sought to re-signify and repurpose the security discourse by foregrounding the perspective of the power-less and the pursuit of emancipatory, rather than repressive, ends (Booth, 2005: 13; 2007: 111). In a similar way, Richard Jackson defined the research agenda of Critical Theory in terrorism studies as that of providing 'a general critical analysis of the broader semantic field or discourse of terrorism studies, particularly in terms of its core labels, narratives, and assumptions, or, its widely accepted 'knowledge'" (Jackson, 2009: 67). The first form of Critical IR scholarship, associated with the Welsh school, consisted therefore in developing interventions on the symbolic-discursive terrain on which the core concepts and narratives of the field were being set, with the dual goal of uncovering the conservative disposition of prevailing discourses and advancing morally-superior, alternative meanings. Concretely, this manifested in a sustained effort on the part of the Welsh school scholars to reclaim the discourse of security by re-defining it as 'the other side of the

¹² Although they operate in distinct sub-fields of IR, both Critical Security Studies and Critical Terrorism Studies have been influenced by Critical IR Theory to such a degree that, for the purposes of this outline, I will consider them as part of that same family of Frankfurt School-inspired critical approaches to IR (for a statement to that effect see Booth, 2007: 38).

coin to' and 'a process of' emancipation (Booth, 1991: 324; 2007: 2007: 114). The underlying rationale was that by substituting the narrow and militaristic understanding of security with one associated with self-determination and freedom from oppression, Critical Theory could both disrupt the operations of repressive security discourses and promote alternative meanings more conducive to emancipatory ends.

A second mode of Critical IR scholarship operated at the intersection of IR and political theory with the intent of developing alternative, normative visions of post-national citizenship and cosmopolitan community. The most notable example of this mode of critical theorising is Andrew Linklater's work in the 1980s and 90s on 'international political theory' (Linklater, 2010a: 101). Animating Linklater's early writings was a concern with specifying a set of normative parameters by which to judge the evolution of the international state-system and thus determine the grounds for further moral development in inter-societal relations. In his own words, the aim was to find out 'what it is that each member of mankind might reasonably claim from other men, and how their respective rights and duties are to be expressed in the structure of international society' (Linklater, 1982: 9). Later, the emphasis shifted towards the task of formulating a model of cosmopolitan community that would foster universal moral understanding while at the same time remaining sensitive to difference (Linklater, 1990: 140; 1998: 74). In light of concerns regarding the potential for domination inherent in 'strong' universalist claims, he advocated a model of 'soft' or 'thin' cosmopolitanism based on the procedural rules of discourse ethics (Linklater, 1998: 47-48, 92). More recently, Linklater occupied himself with the question of transnational harm and with the formulation of a 'global harm principle' that could form the minimal basis for a new cosmopolitan ethics (Linklater, 2002, 2007). Analogous to the philosophical works in the Cosmopolitan Democracy literature, the main concern of this mode of critical theorising was to formulate normative principles and visions of moral historical evolution which could then serve as regulative ideals around which to mobilise politically and construct concrete proposals for a post-Westphalian political order.

Lastly, a third type of Critical IR research consisted in the application of “immanent critique” to the study of the institutions, norms and principles of international politics. Invoked by almost all authors of CIRT (see for instance Booth, 2005: 11; 2007: 43; Linklater, 1998: 164; 2005: 146; Brincat, 2011: 223; Weber, 2011: 189), critical research as “immanent critique” consisted in the studying of the reality of international politics on the basis of the potentials and opportunities it contained for normative development. The intent of CIRT in this last mode, then, was to locate directly within existing social arrangements the ‘promise of a better world’ in the form of cultural and political resources which could be capitalised on to engender change (Wyn Jones, 1999: 56). Ken Booth (2005: 11; 2007: 180) spoke in this instance of the ‘unfulfilled potential already existing within society’ that finds expression in the daily work and cosmopolitan sensibilities of NGOs and social movements and individuals around the world. Linklater (1997: 336, 1998: 6, 2007: 81) similarly pointed to the “moral capital” that was deposited in the modern ideas of freedom and equality and citizenship as a resource that could be harnessed in order to ‘bridge “is” and “ought”’ and bring about new forms of post-national political community. The best example of this third mode of Critical IR scholarship is Linklater’s later historical and sociological work to trace the “civilisation” of inter-societal relations across various state-systems and thereby identify the normative tensions and processes that point towards a further moralisation of the conduct of international politics (see Linklater, 2011a; 2016).

Standstill

Cosmopolitan Democracy and Critical IR Theory represent two different ways - one more thematic, the other more conventionally academic - of articulating a critical theoretical intervention in international politics that is inspired by Habermasian Frankfurt School theory. Today, both of these strands of Frankfurt School-inspired research in IR appear to be in a phase of stagnation. Given their different origin, structure, and scope of intervention, the exact character of that stagnation has been somewhat distinct for each of the two projects: for Cosmopolitan Democracy, the

main difficulty manifests itself as the diminishing ability of the literature's core argument to remain relevant and central to public and academic debates amidst a changing world-political context; for Critical IR Theory, the main issue is the lessening of interest in the discipline of IR for meta-theoretical debates, the exhaustion of the anti-positivist critique of "mainstream" scholarship and the difficulty to develop a substantive research agenda on international politics.

The literature on Cosmopolitan Democracy reached its peak in vitality and influence between the second half of the 1990s and the early 2000s, when its most defining contributions were published (see Archibugi & Held, 1995; Held, 2003; Habermas, 2001). Given its time-specific, topical character - because, in other words, its purpose and ambition was to provide "progressive" answers to the new reality of post-Cold War global politics - the relevance and health of CD were heavily dependent on the plausibility of its political assumptions and on its ability to speak to the most pressing global issues and debates of the time. Concretely, then, the viability of the project of Cosmopolitan Democracy was bound up with the permanence of the social, cultural and political conditions on which its diagnosis of the necessity and possibility of a "post-national" order was based. These conditions were the decline of ideological conflict and the global acceptance of liberal democracy; the weakening of national identities to the benefit of cosmopolitan consciousness and birth of a "global civil society"; the expansion of global governance regimes to the detriment of the nation-state; and the relative stability of global capitalism. As long as the dominant frame through which to understand global developments was that of globalisation and the most important world political dilemmas could be presented as conflicts between the old nation-state logics and a burgeoning cosmopolitan order, debates on CD prospered. When those conditions mutated, however, the fortunes of CD turned.

As early as the beginning of the 2000s, sympathetic critics such as Craig Calhoun (2002) started observing that the post-9/11 tone of world politics and the growth of global resentment to neoliberal economic policies imposed a drastic rethink of the 'overoptimistic' and 'free-floating' message of the original, '1990s' cosmopolitanism. In particular, Calhoun (2002: 891) and others pointed to the laying bare of two

problematic elements of CD: its blindness towards economic and distributive questions and consequent failure to separate itself from and critique the “cosmopolitanism of capital”; and its inability to fully examine its own Western-centric and elitist standpoint and acknowledge the existence of global power dynamics. With regards to the former, critical theorists such as Seyla Benhabib (2006: 176-177) observed that by the mid-2000s it was clear that ‘the transcendence of the nation-state [was] occurring hardly in the direction of cosmopolitanism but more in the direction of the privatisation and corporatisation of sovereignty’. Since CD did not include an analysis of political economy and relied solely on the objection to nation-based politics, it was failing to provide any substantive critique or appraisal of the global dynamics of neoliberal capitalism and their effects on local communities (Patomäki, 2007: 315). With regards to the latter point, CD came under increased scrutiny from scholars such as David Chandler (2004; 2007) for its reliance on an overly idealistic notion of “global civil society” and sidestepping of questions of power and inter-state politics. Because of these shortcomings, it was noted, CD advocates were finding it arduous to move beyond the abstract enunciation of their normative aspiration and specify the actual social forces, institutional actors and collective identities which would support and realise their political programme (Roper, 2011: 265). These intrinsic limitations in the CD literature became especially evident as the Global Financial Crisis of 2007/2008 and the end of the United States’ uncontested “unipolar moment” placed questions of international political economy and geopolitical competition back at the top of the global agenda. As commented by Darrow Schechter (2013: 3-4), ‘the ongoing economic crises that have intensified since 2008 suggest that a number of the phenomena first diagnosed by Marx... and subsequently taken up by the [early] Frankfurt School... are far from being resolved or outdated.’ Ultimately, the characteristics of the project of CD and its tendency to substitute ‘ethics for politics’ in the discussion of international affairs (Calhoun, 2002: 891) translated, in an age of increased political and economic turmoil, into a lessening of the perceived relevance of its political and theoretical contribution.

Meanwhile, the wider sociology and narrative of globalisation on which CD based much of its analysis and rhetorical power was itself put under heavy scrutiny. Critics such as Justin Rosenberg pointed out that the pompous pronouncements of globalisation theory - declaring the onset of a 'second age of modernity' and a new *conditio humana* characterised by global interconnectedness and a cosmopolitan consciousness (Beck, 2000b) - were losing the 'enormous suggestive power' they held as the 'dominant intellectual and cultural motif of the 1990s' (Rosenberg, 2005: 3). It was gradually becoming evident that the phenomena that the globalisation and cosmopolitan theorists had hailed as the harbingers of a new age of post-national politics - the decline of nationalism and growth of collective regimes of governance - could more accurately be understood as the products of a highly specific world-historical conjuncture which was, by the mid-2000s, coming to an end (Lacher, 2006: 2-3). Deprived of its coincidence with the globalisation *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s and struggling to dissociate itself from the real cosmopolitanism of neoliberal capitalism, the project of CD faces today the terminal risk of being reduced to what Calhoun warned in 2002 it could become: the mere liberal wish and ideology of the 'frequent traveller, easily entering and existing polities and social relations around the world, armed with visa-friendly passports and credit cards' (Calhoun, 2002: 872).

For Critical IR Theory, the main cause for concern stems from the difficulty of Habermasian Frankfurt School-inspired scholarship on international politics in adapting to the changes and trends in the discipline of IR. In particular, the standing of CIRT is put into question by the growing unpopularity of inter-theoretic, philosophical and higher-order debates and the parallel tendency of IR scholarship towards more empirically-grounded and substantive research. This development, which was captured and given expression in a special issue of the *European Journal of International Relations* in 2013 titled "The End of IR Theory?", is driven by two factors. Firstly, the lessening of the 'intense theoretical debates' that characterised the 1980s and 1990s reflects the exhaustion of the meta-theoretical challenge mounted by critical and post-structuralist scholars against mainstream IR (Reus-Smit, 2012: 532). Having successfully been opened up to a plurality of

different theoretical approaches beyond the positivist orthodoxy of Neorealism and Neoliberalism, the discipline is widely seen to have now ‘settled into a period of “theoretical peace”’ between the different paradigms of research (Dunne et al., 2013: 406). Secondly, the current shift in IR away from “grand theorising” and towards more mid-level, practice- and policy-oriented research is the expression of a long-running weariness in parts of the discipline towards debates on ontology and epistemology and the incessant warring between different schools of thought. For a significant number of IR scholars, programmatic and meta-theoretical interventions constitute an ‘unhelpful distraction’ from the practical concerns of IR research. They are increasingly seen as modes of scholarship that ‘have exerted a pernicious effect on the discipline for decades’ and whose demise should be welcomed (Reus-Smit, 2013: 590; Lake, 2013: 572).¹³

For Critical IR Theory, this new anti-theoretical climate in IR presents a number of dilemmas and challenges. On the one hand, the abating of meta-theoretical debates constitutes a sign of the success that CIRT and the wider post-positivist movement have achieved in challenging the hegemony of positivist philosophy of science. Many of the positions initially championed by CIRT - such as the notion of the socially-constructed character of reality - are now widely accepted if not dominant in the discipline, at least as far as British and European IR is concerned (Turton, 2016: 80-91). What is more, there is today a broader understanding of questions of epistemology and ontology than there was before the Third Great Debate, the discipline having generally gained in philosophical and theoretical literacy and in the awareness of its own assumptions. In this sense, the goals that pioneering Critical IR theorists such as Linklater and Hoffman set for themselves in terms of broadening and deepening the meta-theoretical conversation in the discipline have certainly been met. On the other hand, Critical IR Theory is becoming a victim of its own success – in the sense that it is increasingly deprived of its original purpose and reason to exist. With the kind of meta-theoretical statements that made up

¹³ Of course, this view is not uncontroversial in IR and there has been a significant pushback against the ‘End of IR theory’ thesis set out in the EJIR special issue. See, for instance, Hamati-Ataya, 2013b. For the purposes of this review, however, it is interesting to note the change of general tone in IR with regards to the value and centrality of theory and meta-theory.

much of its output in the 1980s and 1990s being today decidedly out of fashion, CIRT has to find a way to remain relevant to the new perceived priorities in IR.

Connected to this shift in the trends of the discipline is a long-standing difficulty on CIRT's part to develop a concrete and politically efficacious research agenda for critical scholarship on international politics (Kurki, 2011: 130). With the exception of the work of Andrew Linklater, there are few cases in which CIRT has been successful in moving beyond the stage of issuing statements of intent and generate a vibrant body of substantive research. In the case of Linklater, which I will assess in more detail in chapter five, the development of concrete research coincided with the dilution of the influence of the Frankfurt School and the move towards "non-critical" historical and sociological scholarship (see Linklater, 2011b: 2016). Otherwise, where research in the Frankfurt School tradition is still ongoing in IR, it consists either in methodological reflections over the tools and procedures of critical scholarship (see Brincat, 2009b; 2010b; 2014; 2016; Weber, 2005; 2014) or in the redeployment of CIRT's meta-theoretical critique to the sub-disciplines of security and terrorism studies.

Ultimately, what is most acutely felt both in Critical IR Theory is the generalised difficulty of the received, Habermasian model of Frankfurt School-inspired works to translate its emancipatory, transformative aspiration and meta-theoretical commitments into concrete research agendas, substantive inquiries and political demands. As observed by Milja Kurki (2011: 136-137), the result has been that Critical IR is 'becoming increasingly fragmented' and aimless, the 'original aims of critical theorising, which called for holistic forms of theoretical inquiry that merged normative, explanatory and praxaeological inquiries,... now increasingly dissipating'. Admittedly, the situation looks less gloomy in the sub-branches of Welsh school Critical Security and Critical Terrorism Studies, where there continues to be a relatively healthy level of discussion and research output. Arguably, this is in part due to the fact that security studies and terrorism studies are newer academic fields within which inter-paradigmatic disputes equivalent to IR's Third Debate have yet to exhaust themselves completely and the sense of fatigue with regards to meta-theory has yet to fully kick in. Even in those sub-literatures, however, there is a

growing recognition that, as Nunes (2012: 348) observes: 'while critical security studies has been successful in contesting pre-dominant security arrangements, its achievements when it comes to providing a normative agenda and informing political change are arguably more modest' (see also Wibben, 2016: 1; Mandelbaum et al., 2016). Browning and McDonald (2013: 248-251), for instance, lament the fact that CSS has so far been unable to move 'beyond critique and agenda-setting and towards a contextual analysis of security dynamics and practices of global politics'. The rhetorical question they ask - whether 'the contribution of critical security studies extend[s] no further than a compelling critique of traditional approaches to security' (*Ibidem*) - is one that very much calls to mind the general predicament of CIRT.¹⁴

At the same time as the prevailing, Habermasian mode of Critical IR theorising is showing signs of exhaustion, new proposals for renewal and original contributions calling for a rethinking of CIRT are starting to appear (see Fluck, 2010; 2014; Hoseason, 2018; Levine, 2012). While these contributions have yet to coalesce into a fully coherent new paradigm of Critical IR research, they represent encouraging signs of movement on the horizon. For this reason, the diagnosis presented here as to the crisis of Habermasian CIRT should be read – as I further discuss in chapter six – as an encouragement and contribution to that germinal process of renewal, rather than a pronouncement of unavoidable decline. The standstill of the received model of CIRT, therefore, does not signify the end of the tradition of Frankfurt School-inspired research on international politics. It constitutes, however, a theoretical impasse that needs to be properly studied and expounded before a new approach to CIRT can emerge.

¹⁴ Two prominent critics, Nik Hynek and David Chandler, go as far as to proclaim that today 'the CSS project [has] exhausted itself of emancipatory potential' (Hynek & Chandler, 2013: 54).

The crisis of critique of Frankfurt School theory

Interestingly, concerns about the state of critical theorising such as those discussed in the previous section are not unique to the field of international politics. In fact, a growing number of contributions in political philosophy, sociology and social theory have in recent years raised similar questions about the continued ability of contemporary Frankfurt School theory to articulate a critique that explains the predominant tendencies of the present epoch and advances a vision of an emancipatory way forward. There is a widespread sense that CT is in some way “out of phase” with the present world-historical conjuncture of economic crisis and political disintegration - a feeling that is well captured in Nancy Fraser’s (2014: 56) caution that ‘we are living through a capitalist crisis of great severity without a critical theory that could adequately clarify it’.

In this section I provide an outline of recent interventions in the fields of philosophy and social theory on the state of Frankfurt School theory and highlight how the issues they raise resemble some of the observations made about Cosmopolitan Democratic theory and Critical IR Theory. Given that a complete charting of contemporary debates on Critical Theory across the social sciences is well beyond the scope of this chapter, I want to focus in particular on four critical issues that have been raised by prominent critical scholars such as Nancy Fraser (2009; 2014), Albenaz Azmanova (2014), Nicolas Kompridis (2006; 2011), Rocío Zambrana (2013) and Amy Allen (2008; 2016) with regards to the prevailing form of Frankfurt School critique. These issues are that: firstly, CT has become too focused on ideal theory to the detriment of social theory; secondly, it has thereby lost the capacity to develop a critique of neoliberal capitalism; thirdly, it has become too specialised and fragmented; and finally, that its vision of emancipation has consequent been reduced to little more than an expression of liberal politics.

With regards to the first point, a number of critical scholars are bemoaning what Michael Thompson (2014) has termed the ‘neo-idealist’ character of much of contemporary Frankfurt School research. Albenaz Azmanova (2014: 357), for instance, speaks of an ‘overdose of Ideal theory’ having been ‘infused... into social

critique'. What these statements refer to is a sense in which Critical Theory operates today in a way that is more akin to political philosophy and ideal theory than to the practical, social critique which supposedly constitutes its ultimate purpose. As Thompson comments, much of critical scholarship today expresses itself only in the abstract terms of 'the structure of language, forms of justification or... mutual recognition' (Thompson, 2014: 780-781). This rarefied mode of scholarship which many authors see as dominating contemporary CT is often tied to the influence of Jürgen Habermas on the Frankfurt School tradition. Rocío Zambrana (2013), for instance, has traced the "neo-idealist" character of contemporary critical scholarship back to the influence of Habermas's work on the philosophy of language and the ethics of discourse on the development of the Frankfurt School from the 1970s onwards. For Zambrana (2013: 95), CT today is overwhelmingly defined by the 'the reduction of a critique of political economy and the accompanying cultural critique distinctive of the first generation to normative critique, a reduction accomplished by Habermas' theory of communicative action and its accompanying discourse ethics.'¹⁵

This ideal-theoretical tendency of much of contemporary critical scholarship is often being linked to a second issue, that is, the deterioration of CT's capacity for political economic critique. Azmanova (2014: 352) has commented in that regard that Critical Theory 'stands guilty of a failure to develop a body of valiant critique of the political economy of neoliberal capitalism in the course of the latter's ascent in the 1980s and 1990s.' This raises today two orders of problems analogous to the ones discussed for Cosmopolitan Democracy. On the one hand, the absence of a toolset of political economic analysis means that Critical Theory loses the capacity to articulate informed interventions on a whole range of issues and debates around economic crises and distributive struggles. On the other hand, it means that CT remains unaware of the ways in which its own political demands and normative

¹⁵ As Amy Allen (2016: xv) has commented, this predilection for normative over social critique is shared not only by Habermasian critical scholars, but also by the authors of the so-called "third generation" Frankfurt School, such as Axel Honneth and Rainer Forst. Both scholars have dedicated the majority of their work to the question of Critical Theory's normative grounding, finding the answer either in a 'foundationalist conception of practical reason' - for the former - or in the reconstruction of a process of 'historical progress and sociocultural learning' - for the latter (*Ibidem*).

pronunciations are implicated in and mediated by the world of capital. In the words of Zambrana (2013: 116), 'Critical *theory* remains critical today if it thematises the strictures imposed by the reciprocal determination of critique and neoliberal capitalism in light of the latter's logic of normative ambivalence. Critical-theoretic practices must think through the mediation of the normativity of critique and its neoliberal double.' When it fails to do so, as Nancy Fraser has shown with regards to previous emancipatory critiques (see Fraser, 2009), Critical Theory risks having its normative principles and agenda co-opted and re-signified into ideological ingredients that serve to reproduce and re-organise existing orders of domination.

A third observation being made on the contemporary state of Frankfurt School research bears direct parallels to Milja Kurki's (2011) comments on the overspecialisation and fragmentation of critical scholarship in IR. Nancy Fraser in particular notes that:

At present... that ambitious totalising project [of classical Critical Theory] has been abandoned by most of the [contemporary] critical theorists in favour of a more modest disciplinary division of labour.... Most of our colleagues are doing free-standing moral philosophy or political theory or legal theory, as if it were possible to think about such matters in isolation from contemporary capitalism and culture. As I see it, many so-called Critical Theorists have unwittingly capitulated to the forms of professional specialisation that organise bourgeois academia, if I may use such a provocative term (Fraser, 2008).

More recently, Fraser (2015) has added that a 'great deal of the post-Habermasian currents of critical theory have entered into a kind of disciplinary specialisation' with 'people doing moral philosophy, philosophy of law, political theory disconnected from social theory'. Because of this fragmentation of critical scholarship into a number of self-enclosed research avenues, Critical Theory 'has lost the attempt to think about the social totality' - that is, to articulate a holistic analysis and political vision that speaks to the overall questions of its time (*Ibidem*; see also Honneth, 2017: 127).

Lastly, the concrete outgrowth of these issues has been - according to a number of critical scholars - the 'domestication of critical theory' and lapsing of its capacity to interpret, inspire and provide guidance to emancipatory social and political struggles in the contemporary world (Thompson, 2016). In the words of Kompridis (2014: 3), it is the 'failure to remain true to its possibility-disclosing task that more than anything else marks the shortcomings of contemporary critical theory'. The accusation being levelled against the prevailing form of Frankfurt School research is here that in giving 'priority... to questions of justice and the normative order of society' over real-world problems of power and domination, CT has 'remodelled [itself] in the image of liberal theories of justice' (Kompridis, 2006: 24). In its contemporary guise, CT is seen as having relinquished its original transformative and critical aims in favour of abstract normative pronouncements without any specific target or interlocutor and the defence of the liberal political order (Thompson, 2016). Maybe the most pungent of the current critics, Amy Kim has therefore declared the beginning of a 'post-Critical' phase of Frankfurt School culminating in the transformation into a form of 'socially conscientious and cosmopolitan liberalism' (Kim, 2014: 373).

These four concerns - over the reliance on ideal theory; lack of a critique of capitalism; over-specialisation; and retreat to a liberal politics - combine into an overall feeling that Critical Theory has, over the last decade, 'once again reached an impasse' (Kompridis, 2005a: 299). In the words of Azmanova (2014: 352) and Zambrana (2013: 117), the Frankfurt School finds itself today in the midst of a veritable 'crisis of critique' that 'calls for a radical rethinking of critique in practice but also in theory'. The conclusion reached by many critical theorists is therefore that the predicament of Critical Theory necessitates a comprehensive re-evaluation of its presently dominant paradigm of critique and framework of analysis. More specifically, critics such as Kompridis (2006), Kim (2014), Zambrana (2013) and Thompson (2016) are pointing to the need to investigate the link between the present plights of Frankfurt School research and the reconstruction of Critical Theory as a communicative-democratic project initiated by Jürgen Habermas almost four decades ago. The idea seems to be spreading that, in Kompridis's words, 'the model of critical theory that Habermas's paradigm change has brought about is in

need of urgent reassessment if critical theory is to have a future worthy of its past' (Kompridis, 2006: 17).

A rejoinder

The overall image that emerges when viewing concomitantly the reflections being developed in IR, social theory and political philosophy on the state of Critical Theory is that of a critical project that is experiencing – in its prevailing, Habermasian form - a generalised faltering of its capacity to theorise and connect with 'the struggles and wishes of the age' (Marx, 1975: 209). The term "crisis of critique" – which was introduced by Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) in their book 'The new spirit of capitalism' – is particularly crucial here. As it has recently been used by Rocio Zambrana (2013: 96) and Albenaz Azmanova (2014: 352), the notion of a "crisis of critique" does not necessarily indicate a quantitative reduction of scholarly contributions to the literature. Neither does it mean that the ideas of Frankfurt School theory are disappearing from public discussion and suddenly wield no influence at all. As I discuss in chapter four with regards to Habermas's theory of deliberative democracy, some of the ideas articulated by critical theorists working within the communicative-democratic paradigm continue to play a prominent role in contemporary international politics, most notably in the legitimation of European integration. The nature of the crisis of critique lies, rather, in the deeper fact that Critical Theory's relationship to its socio-historical context has stopped being one of clarification and political contestation and has become one of – conscious or unconscious, willing or unwilling - accommodation and mystification. In other words, the notion of a "crisis of critique" indicates a situation in which the perspective that is articulated by CT is either ineffectual in revealing and contesting the operations of power and the orders of domination which reign in a particular social-historical context or – even worse - has been re-signified or co-opted by them (Azmanova, 2014; Fraser 2008).

These considerations developed outside of IR and the notion of a “crisis of critique”, then, point to a sense in which critical scholars working within the Habermasian canon find themselves in a common predicament that transcends disciplinary boundaries and relates to the very core of the contemporary paradigm of critique. The upside of this is that a troubled shared is a trouble halved. The resemblance between the challenges faced by Frankfurt School research within and outside of IR creates the opportunity to examine the state of contemporary critical theorising in international politics in conversation with the wider literature and make use of the contributions and reflections being articulated there. In concrete terms, it makes it possible to interrogate the difficulties currently encountered by the Cosmopolitan Democracy and Critical IR Theory literatures in relation to the crisis of critique of contemporary Frankfurt School theory and as particular moments in the wider faltering of the prevailing, communicative-democratic and Habermasian paradigm of critique.

In light of the definition of CT provided in the first section and the critical considerations reviewed in the third, I therefore propose: firstly, that the contemporary predicament of Frankfurt School research in international politics be studied as a particular manifestation of the broader “crisis of critique” of contemporary Critical Theory; secondly, that this crisis of critique be understood as a dual deterioration of CT’s explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian faculties - that is, as a general retrogression of its ability to analyse and critique its socio-economic, political and cultural context; and thirdly, that this deterioration be investigated as an expression of the deeper, theoretical, meta-theoretical and philosophical failings of the contemporary framework of critical research. These three points will guide as well as be substantiated and tested in the next four chapters of this research. The specific questions to be answered are therefore the following: why are contemporary CT in general and CIRT and CD in particular unable to provide effective analyses and diagnoses of the present world-historical conjuncture? Why are they unable to articulate a coherent and compelling political intervention that links up with real struggles and social conflicts? The answers, as I will show in the following chapters, reside in the history and intellectual evolution of

the Frankfurt School and in the deeper meta-theoretical recesses of the Habermasian paradigm of critique.

Chapter Two: Two Histories of the Frankfurt School

In the previous chapter I set out the central aim of this thesis, namely to explain the impasse of Frankfurt School theories of international politics. By relating the predicament of Cosmopolitan Democracy (CD) and Critical IR Theory (CIRT) to discussions across the social sciences over the state of Critical Theory, I suggested that this standstill extends beyond the discipline of IR and is tied up with a generalised “crisis of critique” that afflicts contemporary Frankfurt School research. The impasse of CT in international politics, in other words, should be understood as an expression of the deeper and more long-standing *debilitation* of Frankfurt School theory today. I therefore proposed that in order to understand the predicament of the critical theories of international politics, it is necessary to interrogate the origins and meta-theoretical architecture of the research paradigm on which they and a vast majority of critical scholarship are based today - that is, the communicative-democratic framework of critique developed by Jürgen Habermas.

This and the following chapter develop the core hypothesis of this thesis, which will then be tested in chapters four and five on two prominent bodies of Frankfurt School research in international politics. That hypothesis is that the contemporary “crisis of critique” of CT has its roots in the surrendering of political economic critique in Frankfurt School research, a development which began in the post-War writings of the early critical scholars and is today directly inscribed in the meta-theory of Habermasian, communicative-democratic CT. While chapter three provides a detailed discussion of the connection between the current debilitation of CT’s explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian faculties and the Habermasian paradigm of critique, this chapter interrogates the present predicament in the broader context of the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School. The core argument of this chapter is that the present crisis of critique is not an isolated event in the history of Critical Theory but the manifestation of long-running and never resolved *aporias* at the heart of Frankfurt School theory. In particular, I argue that

the current predicament of CT in and outside of IR is a result of the failure to fully grapple with and overcome the *previous* impasse of CT: that of the “early” or “first generation” Frankfurt School. By engaging with and challenging the prevailing interpretation of the historical development of CT, I argue that the wrong diagnosis has been made of and the wrong lessons learned from the standstill of first generation Frankfurt School theory. Given the importance of this juncture to the formulation of the prevailing paradigm of critique and the self-understanding of CT today, I argue that correcting the diagnosis of the early Frankfurt School’s downfall and reckoning with the legacy it left behind is a necessary pre-requisite to understand and overcome the current crisis of critique.

Concretely, I show, by engaging with the post-war writings of Friedrich Pollock, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, that a direct line can be drawn between the present inability of CT to provide a satisfactory analysis of economic crisis and geopolitical disintegration and the early Frankfurt School’s (mis)conception of late capitalist society as a totally rationalised and coherent *system*. In particular, I point to the emerging belief in the writings of the early critical theorists that the totality of social existence was being reduced to the technical operations of an all-pervasive and effectively incontestable logic of instrumental reason. This reductionist belief, which yielded in practice the abandonment of any attempt to identify contradictions, lines of fracture and possibilities for struggle in post-War Western society, I argue to lie at the heart of the standstill of early Frankfurt School theory and yet to have outlived it. Because the first generation’s substantive misapprehension of late capitalist society and relinquishing of political economic critique were never fundamentally challenged, the crisis of mid-century CT was *suspended*, but never actually resolved. In fact, the idea of capitalist society as reducible to fixed logics or rationalities - as a closed and invulnerable order devoid of antagonisms, tensions or human agency - was *reproduced* and *formalised* in Habermas’s functionalist theory of system and lifeworld and to this day constrains and limits critical scholarship. I therefore conclude that what CT is witnessing today is, at least in part, the product of the historical failure of Habermasian theory to confront the reductionist tendencies that lie at the heart of the early Frankfurt

School's *cul-de-sac* and to redress the surrendering of the critique of political economy.

In order to illustrate this hypothesis, I start in the first section by outlining the conventional interpretation of the history of the Frankfurt School as it has been received and reproduced in the critical theories of IR. This prevailing reading, which was most comprehensively articulated in IR by Richard Wyn Jones (1999) and draws from the work of Axel Honneth (1991; 1995), has read the intellectual development of the Frankfurt School as an incremental learning-process, the culmination of which is represented by Habermas's communicative-democratic paradigm. According to this conventional history, the intellectual development of critical thinking displays an inherently progressive character, such that each successive phase of critical thinking is portrayed as an advancement over- and sublation of- the level attained by the previous one. In particular, the work of Jürgen Habermas and the "communicative turn" he initiated are interpreted as having "saved" CT from the negativistic abyss of the early Frankfurt School and as representing the crowning moment of the evolution of critical thinking. I then advance two critiques of this conventional reading in IR of the development of Critical Theory. Firstly, I point to the fact that the periodisation and assessment of the history of Frankfurt School theory is carried out on emotivist rather than substantive grounds - that is, it is based primarily on the different authors' affective and political outlook. In other words, the central criterion on which the evaluation of the different thinkers in CT's history is based is less the social-scientific validity of their analysis than the degree of optimism they express with regards to the possibility of emancipation. As a consequence, the conventional interpretation fails to give proper consideration to the social theoretical underpinnings of the various phases of Frankfurt School theory, resting instead on a relatively simplistic narrative of negativistic fall followed by hopeful redemption. Secondly, I challenge the notion that a logic of incremental progress is in operation at the heart of CT, such that every new phase in its development constitutes an evolutionary step forward that incorporates the promise of the previous stage while overcoming its limits. This assumption - according to which the contemporary Habermasian paradigm of

critique represents the culmination of the entire history of critical theorising as well as the necessary end-point in light of which every preceding step is to be interpreted - I argue to produce a distorted and reductive account of the development of CT. Most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, the conventional narrative fails to trace the fundamental continuities and discontinuities in the Frankfurt School theorisation of late capitalist modernity as well as reveal the unresolved tensions and contradictions that continue to characterise CT to the present day.

In the second section, I advance an alternative reading of the development of the Frankfurt School in the Twentieth Century as one not of linear progress but of recurring crises that reflect the permanence of deeply-grounded contradictions and aporias in its conception of late capitalist society. Drawing from the writings of Moishe Postone (1993, 2006), Claus Offe (1969, 1984), Wolfgang Streeck (2014a) and Amy Allen (2014), I develop a revisionist account of the impasse of early CT as driven by the surrendering of the dialectical study of capitalism as a social structure characterised by contradiction, unevenness and antagonism. With particular reference to the writings of Friedrich Pollock, Herbert Marcuse and Max Horkheimer, I show how in the post-war period the critique of the early Frankfurt School was reduced to an abstract critique of technical rationality as a totally pervasive and effectively incontestable social logic. I argue that it was this inability to identify the enduring social conflicts and tensions of modern society and the conceptualisation of late capitalism as a non-contradictory and hermetically closed order that ultimately determined the impasse of first generation theory.¹⁶

¹⁶ In discussing the history of the Frankfurt School, I follow the prevailing reading in IR in concentrating mainly on the scholars of the so-called “first” (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse) and “second” (Habermas) generation and the transition from one to the other. This choice is dictated by the fact that the decline of the early Frankfurt School and reconstruction of CT on the basis of the “communicative turn” represents a critical juncture in the constitution of contemporary Critical Theory in which a number of basic parameters are set about the role and character of critique that are still prevalent today. Because of this choice of focus, the authors of the so-called “third generation” Frankfurt School and the current director of the Institute for Social Research Axel Honneth, in particular, are not given the same level of attention. Here I follow Shannon Brincat (2013: 229) in interpreting Honneth’s critical theory of recognition as ‘build[ing] explicitly on the Habermasian framework by offering a refinement of Habermas’s concept of communicative action’. The same evaluation is expressed outside of IR by Nicolas Kompridis, who comments that ‘Honneth’s reformulation of critical theory remains Habermasian in its form if not in content’ (Kompridis, 2011: 1074). Because this and the next chapter focus on the fundamental philosophical and meta-theoretical coordinates of

Finally, I conclude that in light of this alternative diagnosis of the impasse of early CT, Jürgen Habermas's subsequent reconstruction of Frankfurt School theory must also be considered anew. Specifically, I argue that Habermas's "communicative turn" - which is generally merited with having conclusively "saved" CT from its negativistic impasse - now appears as a *side-stepping* rather than as a *resolution* of the crisis of early CT. The Habermasian reconstruction of CT therefore emerges as a solution which *circumvents* the debilitating conclusions of the first generation while keeping in place some of its most problematic assumptions. The alternative history of the Frankfurt School developed in this chapter opens up the possibility for a new, critical assessment of the theoretical origins of the present predicament of communicative-democratic theory in IR in terms of the intensification of the trend away from substantive social inquiry and the resurfacing of the suspended crisis of early Critical Theory.

A conventional history of the Frankfurt School

In this section I outline the way in which the Frankfurt School tradition of critical thinking has traditionally been read and operationalised in the discipline of IR. I start by looking at how the Frankfurt School has been interpreted in IR as being part of a longer tradition of "emancipation-oriented" theory in Western political thought, one which can be traced back to classical Greek philosophy, through the European Enlightenment and all the way up to modern cosmopolitanism (Devetak, 2005: 137). This conceptualisation of the intellectual origins of critical thinking has, I argue, two characteristics that fundamentally shape the reading of the Frankfurt School in IR: firstly, it affirms that a distinct intellectual tradition of critical thinking can be identified, linking thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Marx and the Frankfurt School theorists through their shared interest in emancipation and participation in the Enlightenment project. The normative concern with emancipation is thus established as the defining feature and reason of existence of critical theorising; secondly, it

critical theorising, the argument developed here with regards to the Habermasian paradigm can be generally taken to apply to the "post-Habermasian" third generation as well.

attributes to the intellectual history of critical thinking a progressive dialectical character, such that each successive thinker is portrayed as an advancement over- and sublation of- the level attained by the previous one. Crucially, this conventional narrative identifies Jürgen Habermas's work as the endpoint and crowning moment of the evolution of critical thinking. Following from that, I present the way in which the interpretation of the Frankfurt School itself was shaped by that evolutionary conception of the history of critical thinking. In particular, I discuss the categorisation of the history of the Frankfurt School into three phases, the conventional explanation of the impasse of first generation theory and the portrayal of Jürgen Habermas's "communicative turn" as a solution to that crisis.

Critical Theory in IR and the "critical theoretical tradition"

I have shown in the previous chapter how the two main literatures of Frankfurt School-inspired research on international politics were from the outset heavily reliant on the importation of theoretical concepts and ideas from outside the disciplinary boundaries of IR (Hoffman, 1998: 236-237). Particularly in the case of Critical IR Theory, the concern with attaching themselves to a broader tradition of critical thinking in political and social thought drove a number of the pioneering critical IR scholars to engage with the history of Critical Theory. What emerged in the 1980s and 1990s was therefore a canonical interpretation of the intellectual ancestry of CT in IR the basic parameters of which remain widely accepted to this day. Three examples from Critical IR's early years provide an effective illustration of this. To begin with, Mark Hoffman (1988: 92) defined CT in a series of debates in late 1980s on the precise character of the then nascent CT of IR as the 'the most self-reflective outpost of the radical traditions of the Enlightenment'. He located the origins of CT in the early Frankfurt School's critical engagement with Marxism and its end-point in the work of Jürgen Habermas (Hoffman, 1987: 234). Andrew Linklater went one step further in his 1990 book *Beyond Realism and Marxism*. In it he identified a "revolutionist" tradition running through the history of international thought, defined by the 'commitment to the emancipation of the human species' and

connecting Kant, Hegel and Marx to the Frankfurt School and ultimately to the cosmopolitan project he himself intended to develop (Linklater, 1990a: 8, 21-27). Lastly, Marc Neufeld (1995: 10-15) considered in his book *The Restructuring of International Relations Theory* an even longer time-span, tracing 'the origins and evolution of the emancipation-oriented theoretical tradition associated with critique' all the way back to Aristotle and classical Greek conceptions of the polis. Common to these and other attempts to reconstruct the intellectual lineage of critical thinking were two axioms that continue to shape the reading of the Frankfurt School in IR today. The first assumption was that the elements of continuity and commonality were to be sought primarily in the epistemological and normative stance of the thinkers in question, rather than in their substantive analysis. What Linklater, Neufeld and Hoffman emphasised as the unifying factor behind the tradition of critical thinking was not a particular theory of society or ontology of the social world, but rather the shared commitment to a universalist project of emancipation. In the words of Linklater (1990a: 9), then, 'critical theory surpasses' and is distinct from traditional forms of scholarship not primarily for the merits of its analysis, but because 'its inquiry is oriented towards the realisation of truth and freedom'. Secondly, the belief was established that a progressive, incremental dynamic could be attributed to the development of critical thinking throughout its history. Every new thinker and every new phase in the history of critical thinking – from Kant to Hegel, from Hegel to Marx and so on - could be represented as a dialectical move incorporating the promise of the previous stage while overcoming its limitations in a continuous synthetic motion (Devetak et al. 2013: 486). This way of interpreting the evolution of critique is at its most evident in Linklater's discussion of the "revolutionist" tradition in international thought. Linklater (1990a) describes an incremental learning process whereby a succession of thinkers extrapolates the useful content out of the previous formulation while discarding its problematic elements. For instance, where Kant is seen as first introducing the element of self-reflection and the concern with universal rational thinking, Hegel problematises its abstraction by emphasising the importance of historical development - an insight which Marx in turn develops by focusing on the material dimension of social reproduction (Linklater, 1982: 149-150; 1990a: 20-22). This understanding of CT as

the evolutionary development of an emancipation-oriented form of thinking is crucial to understand the conventional reading of the history of the Frankfurt School.

Critical Theory in IR and the Frankfurt school

In line with the broader reading of the history of critical thinking, the development of the Frankfurt School has typically been interpreted in IR as an incremental learning process defined by the evolving capacity for emancipatory theorising. Following this rationale, the prevailing interpretation distinguishes between three phases in the history of the Frankfurt School: firstly, an initial, fruitful phase of theoretical development in the 1920s and 1930s, when the first generation of critical theorists set the methodological and programmatic framework for an interdisciplinary, emancipatory social theory. Secondly, a period of hopelessness and despair in the 1940s, 50s and 60s which represents the exhaustion of the first generation project and during which the early critical theorists ‘abandon the emancipatory project’ (Linklater, 1990a: 26/27) and retreat to a negativistic and ‘purely philosophical enterprise’ (Wyn Jones, 1999: 34). Lastly, a third phase starting in the 1970s in which the second generation theorist Jürgen Habermas ‘finds a way out of the “pessimism” of the first generation’ by reconstructing the Frankfurt School project in the domain of communicative interaction (Weber, 2005: 198) and thus propels Critical Theory to a higher level.

To this day, the most extensive and detailed version of this interpretation in IR is represented by the work of critical security scholar Richard Wyn Jones (1999).¹⁷ While I use Wyn Jones’s work as a baseline referent, I also discuss the broader uses of this narrative in the works of contemporary Critical IR scholars such as Andrew Linklater, Martin Weber and Shannon Brincat as well as the way in which it

¹⁷ As Columba Peoples has noted, critical IR scholars such as Ken Booth are ‘for the most part, simply happy to acknowledge “the special helpfulness of the Frankfurt School” in orienting an emancipatory approach to security and to “endorse” the interpretation of the Frankfurt School in CSS terms offered by the work of Richard Wyn Jones’ (Peoples, 2011: 1117). Browning & McDonald similarly agree that ‘Richard Wyn Jones’ (1999) work provides the most sustained account of the relationship between security, ethics and (Frankfurt School) Critical Theory’ (Browning & McDonald, 2013:246)

corresponds to and draws from the dominant self-understanding of Frankfurt School theory outside of IR as expressed in the works of Seyla Benhabib (1986), Axel Honneth (1991, 1995) and Jürgen Habermas (1973, 1979, 1983) himself.

The three phases of Frankfurt School theory

The opening phase of the history of the Frankfurt School is generally identified with the research programme outlined by Max Horkheimer in the 1937 article *Traditional and Critical Theory* (Wyn Jones, 2005: 220; Brincat, 2011: 219; Hoffman, 1987: 232). In that text, the prevailing narrative goes, Max Horkheimer as director of the Institute for Social Research develops the framework for an inter-disciplinary research programme that distils and advances the emancipatory interest of Marxism while critiquing its rigidly materialistic philosophy of history (Booth, 2007: 43; Linklater, 1990a: 25; Leysens, 2008: 74; Hoffman, 1987: 233). As an approach that is 'true to the spirit but not the letter of Marxism' (Linklater, quoted in Devetak et al., 2013: 486), the early Frankfurt School is seen at this stage as introducing three fundamental contributions to the evolution of critical thought: firstly, it articulates a critique of "traditional", positivist science on the basis of its failure to recognise the socially and historically mediated character of knowledge. In opposition to positivist theories - including the mechanistic forms of Soviet Marxism - Horkheimer is read as developing the idea of critical theorising as a reflexive and self-consciously normative exercise (Hoffman, 1987: 232). In the words of Critical IR scholar Richard Devetak (2014: 423-424), the 'critical conception of theory outlined by Horkheimer' recognises 'the unavoidable connection between knowledge and values, between theory and its context' and 'is guided by an interest in emancipation from, rather legitimisation and consolidation of, existing social forms'. In this first sense, then, Horkheimer's juxtaposition of "traditional" and "critical theory" is read as a direct precursor to Robert Cox's (1981) contrasting of "problem-solving" and "critical theory" and thus to the Critical IR scholars' own critique of positivist scholarship on international politics (Linklater, 1990a: 1; Brincat, 2011; Kemal Pasha, 2011). Secondly, the original research programme of the early Frankfurt School is credited

with devising an interdisciplinary framework of research which, as Wyn Jones (2001: 6) explains, does not repudiate 'the insights of the traditional social science disciplines' but recuperates and repurposes them 'to produce an analysis of society that aims, eventually, to facilitate and support a process of emancipatory social transformation'. The project set out by Horkheimer is thus seen as championing the need to preserve and integrate conventional, non-critical research methods by placing them under the aegis of emancipatory theory (Wyn Jones, 1999: 14; Brincat, 2011: 220). The Critical IR theorists interpret this as mirroring their own attempt to, in the words of Linklater (1992: 79), 'give direction to the field [of international studies] as a whole' by 'clarify[ing] the nature of the common scholarly enterprise to which different perspectives are related by setting out the particular strengths of different approaches and by showing how they can be drawn more closely together'. Lastly, the initial Frankfurt School project is read as refining the Marxian method of "immanent critique" and applying it to the study of society's values and norms (Neufeld, 1997: 451; Linklater, 1992: 93). The perfecting of immanent critique is thus identified as the core methodological contribution of the first generation to critical theorising (Brincat, 2011: 230). Its power, as explained by Ken Booth (2007: 144, 250), is to allow CT to search for the 'moral resources within existing social arrangements which could be harnessed for radical purposes' and identify within existing situations the 'possibilities of a better life'.

If the initial programme of the Frankfurt School still expressed, according to Brincat (2011: 219), a 'considerable hope for the eventual emancipation of humankind', the later works of the first generation are seen as expressing an increasingly 'brooding pessimism'. A second phase in the development of the Frankfurt School is therefore associated in the conventional history in IR with the war and post-war writings of the first generation, starting with the publication of Horkheimer and Adorno's jointly written book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944) and closing with Adorno's magnum opus *Negative Dialectics* (1966). This period is commonly read as a prolonged "impasse" during which the early critical scholars sink into a 'debilitating' and 'unremittingly bleak' negativism which leads them to 'abandon all hope that progressive change [is] possible in the social realm' (Wyn Jones, 1999: 34-35;

Roach, 2007: 331). CT is seen in this period as 'abdicat[ing] the political battlefield' and being 'recast' as 'a purely philosophical enterprise' that operates in the abstract realms of theology and aesthetics (Wyn Jones, 1999: 32, 46; Brincat, 2011: 219). If this description of the later work of the first generation as a negativistic dead-end is generally shared by the Critical IR scholars (see Weber, 2002: 303; Wyn Jones, 1999: 36; Linklater, 1990a: 25; Rengger, 2001: 95), different explanations are used to make sense of it. To begin with, a number of contributions focus on the influence of contingent social and historical circumstances as well as subjective factors on the work of the early Frankfurt School. Richard Wyn Jones (1999), for instance, discusses the first generation's slide towards pessimism in the 1940s as at least partly determined by historical-biographical factors and the personal trauma experienced by Adorno and Horkheimer in that period. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - for Wyn Jones (1999: 41) the emblematic text of the "second phase" - is thus presented as 'reflect[ing] the bitterness and bewilderment of a group of left-wing German Jewish intellectuals who felt they had been thoroughly betrayed in general by history, and in particular by the culture they had been brought up to venerate'. Nicholas Rengger (2002: 95) similarly suggests that the demise of the early Frankfurt School could be linked to Adorno's growing influence over Horkheimer which develops over the course of their collaboration. According to Rengger, 'at least from their joint authorship of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* during the 1940s, the intellectual relationship between the two altered to the extent that whereas prior to the war Horkheimer was the senior partner, as it were, after the war Adorno was elevated to that position' (Ibidem). According to this view, the second phase of the Frankfurt School is defined by the changing personal dynamic between its most prominent scholars and the growing prominence of Theodor Adorno in particular. Shannon Brincat (2011: 234), lastly, argues that the 'late pessimism of Horkheimer and Adorno' could be tied to the fact that their sociological outlook 'was too narrowly focused on the Western political situation' and failed to take account of the emergence of 'global emancipatory social forces' in the cosmopolitan sphere. In each of these cases, the impasse of the early CT is explained in terms of various subjective and historically-determined limitations which prevented the early Frankfurt school theorists from discerning the positive potentials of existing society.

In parallel to this historical and biographical range of explanations, a second and more theoretical form of diagnosis is also put forward. Following the interpretation and critique of the first generation that was articulated outside of IR by Jürgen Habermas (1973, 1979, 1983), Seyla Benhabib (1986) and Axel Honneth (1991, 1995), the Critical IR scholars link the impasse of early Frankfurt School theory to its theoretical reliance on an “untenable” and materialistic philosophy of history.¹⁸ More specifically, according to this reading, the ‘debilitating pessimism’ of the second phase of Frankfurt School theory was a product of the Marxist framework of analysis which lay at its heart (Linklater, 2007b: 49). Despite the fact that they distanced themselves from many aspects of Marxian thought, Adorno and Horkheimer are seen as still being beholden to a reductionist interpretation of rationality and social life as the sole expression of instrumental reason and the relations of production (Honneth, 1995: 65). For the Critical IR scholars, this tied the early Frankfurt School to a ‘narrow conception of human activity’ that let them see no further than the ‘scientific-technical domination of nature’ and the development of ever more efficient technologies of destruction (Wyn Jones, 1999: 47). Because of this singular emphasis on production and instrumental reason, Brincat (2011: 233) comments following Habermas, ‘the advancements of legal freedoms, democracy and the broadening of individual action’ on which a more optimistic account of late capitalism could be based were denied any autonomy or emancipatory content and thus ‘could appear as a “historical mis-development” [and] were recast as being pathological in themselves’ (Brincat, 2011: 233). For the conventional narrative, the ultimate cause of the first generation’s despair is thus that, in its reliance on a ‘one-sided’ and reductionist account of social development, it ‘neglected the unrealised potential in Enlightenment thought’ that lay latent in other spheres of social practice - such as that of communication (Brincat, 2011: 234). In denying that ‘there is an immanent logic to the actual that is emancipatory’, the first generation failed to account for the positive learning processes that take place outside of the realm of production, in civil society, the public sphere and the domains of moral action (Benhabib, 1986: 174). The end result of this inability to see any positive potentials

¹⁸ See Honneth’s reading of early CT being referenced by Wyn Jones, 1999: 47; and Brincat, 2011: 219/233; Habermas’s critique of Historical Materialism is extensively

in existing society was, for Critical IR scholar Martin Weber (2002: 303), the 'aporia of a critical theory without any prospect for social emancipation'.

If the second period in the history of the Frankfurt School is portrayed as one of despondency and standstill, the third and final phase, which coincides with the rise and affirmation of the second generation scholar Jürgen Habermas, is widely seen as one of redemption and rejuvenation. As explained by Chris Brown, in the 1970s and 80s, after Adorno and Horkheimer have passed, Habermas was able to find a way out of the impasse of the first generation by reconstructing the Frankfurt School 'project of liberation... *without* the Marxism that the original Critical Theorists took to be at its heart' (Brown, 1994: 218; emphasis added). Having identified the first generation's Marxism as the root cause of the decline of early CT, Habermas strived to establish a new normative and theoretical foundation for CT that avoided the pitfalls of the "paradigm of production". He achieved that, Linklater (2007b: 46) explains, by denying that 'class power is the fundamental form of social exclusion or that production is the key determinant of society and history' and relocating emancipatory critique to a wholly new terrain: that of language and communicative interaction. The shift from the second to the third phase of Frankfurt School theory is therefore understood to coincide with a dramatic "turn" in the development of CT, as part of which the Frankfurt School abandons the "paradigm of production" of the first generation and transitions to a "paradigm of communication" (Linklater, 2007b: 48). This new paradigm of critique is based on the notion that the possibility of emancipation can be positively grounded in the everyday linguistic interactions that take place in civil society and the public sphere. This is because, as asserted in Habermas's philosophy of language and explained by Wyn Jones (1999: 58), 'language contains the intention of a universal and unconstrained understanding'. As a result of this discovery, a wholly new terrain of research and normative theorisation is opened for CT, such that the negativistic critique of late capitalist society favoured by the first generation can be replaced by the positive investigation of the societal processes of moral learning and by the affirmative promotion of deliberative democratic spaces and practices (Weber, 2005: 197).

discussed in Linklater, 1990a.

For the prevailing reading of Frankfurt School theory in IR, then, the “communicative turn” initiated by Habermas was successful in ‘overcom[ing] the impasse which led Horkheimer and Adorno to abandon the emancipatory project’ and in restoring CT on firm normative and theoretical grounds (Linklater, 1990a: 26/27). The establishment of the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique is thus commonly understood as the redemptive conclusion to the arc of Frankfurt School history and the last great innovation in the development of CT (Brincat, 2013). This narrative, however, is open to substantial critique and requires today a comprehensive revision.

Critique

The prevailing interpretation in IR of the history of the Frankfurt School can be summarised in three key points: firstly, it is based on the assumption that the development of critical thinking should be read and evaluated as a theory of emancipation. Emancipation – understood as the capacity to articulate a positive normative vision for critical scholarship and political activity - is identified in the conventional reading both as the common *theme* giving unity to this intellectual tradition and as the *critical standard* by which to judge the success or failure of the various authors associated with it. Secondly, it asserts that on the basis of this criterion three phases can be distinguished in the history of Frankfurt School theory, each of which coincides with a different affective state and estimation of the possibility of emancipation. These are an initial, vibrant and hopeful period of conceptual and methodological development; a subsequent phase of despair defined by the negativistic critique of reason; and a final rescue of the Frankfurt School project at the hands of Jürgen Habermas as part of which CT reacquires the capacity for universal and affirmative thinking. Thirdly, the conventional interpretation establishes that the history of critical thinking as a whole can thus be understood as an incremental learning-process culminating in the formulation of the current communicative-democratic paradigm of critique. The overall *meaning* of the history of Frankfurt School theory is therefore given by its end-point in the

Habermasian framework as the final synthetic movement which contains in itself all the advances of the previous phases.

This reading of the development of Critical Theory, I argue, has two major and related weaknesses which undermine its validity and usefulness. These acquire particular significance in the context of the current crisis of critique of CT. The first limitation is that the prevailing interpretation places too much emphasis on the emotive outlook expressed in the various phases in Frankfurt School history and not enough on the analysis and social theory that underlies it. In other words, the conventional reading tends to evaluate the different perspectives expressed in the history of the Frankfurt School on the basis of the optimism or pessimism of their political viewpoint, rather than on the rigour or weakness of their social scientific analysis. This habit of interpreting the various articulations of CT in terms of the political sentiment they express is a direct consequence of the idea - first set out by Habermas (1971) in *Knowledge and Human Interest* and introduced in IR by Richard Ashley (1981) and Linklater (1990a) - that critical thinking is defined not primarily by a particular conception or ontology of society, but rather by its epistemic orientation towards emancipation. As was noted by Beate Jahn (1998: 625), this leads the Critical IR scholars to base their appraisal of other theoretical approaches on a 'judgement of [their] political agendas' and an estimation of the relative proximity of the theories in question to Critical IR's own cosmopolitan ethics. Mark Neufeld (1993: 68) makes this practice explicit by suggesting that 'the question of "which paradigm is superior" can be restated as "which general social agenda/concrete political project is most appropriate to the global *polis*?" [and] the question of "what is reliable knowledge?" can be reformulated as "how should we live?"'. In the case of the history of the Frankfurt School, this tendency informs the repudiation of the entire post-War production of the first generation as defined by gloominess and despair - a disavowal which is driven more by the unease with Adorno and Horkheimer's political conclusions than the substantive refutation of their analysis.¹⁹ The problem with an emotive interpretation of CT, however, is that it

¹⁹ In a letter exchange with Walter Benjamin on history's redemptive nature Max Horkheimer rhetorically asks his interlocutor: 'is atrocity ever a cogent argument against the assertion or denial of a state of affairs? Does logic contain a law to the effect that a judgement is false

allows only for a superficial engagement with the theorists in question and fails to fully clarify and trace the mutations in the ontological, methodological and theoretical architecture of Frankfurt School theory.

The second weakness of the prevailing interpretation relates to its understanding of the development of critical thought as what Linklater (1990a: 10) termed a 'dialectical sequence of approaches' characterised by a logic of gradual progression (see also Neufeld, 1995: 19). Here the Critical IR narrative has been inspired by Axel Honneth's proposal to 'reconstruct the history of critical theory as a specific process of learning', the 'standard', 'direction' and 'measure' of which is constituted by 'Habermas's theory' (Honneth, 1991: xvi; see this referenced by Wyn Jones, 1999: 47 and Brincat, 2011: 219/233). According to this principle of interpretation - which is made explicit by Honneth but defines much of Critical IR's reading - the historiography of the Frankfurt School is to be conducted so to speak backwards, tracing all the incremental steps through which the contemporary cosmopolitan-democratic paradigm of critique has come into being. The problem with this kind of Whiggish reading of the history of critical thought, however, is that it returns only an impoverished and highly selective account of CT's past, one in which every previous articulation of the Frankfurt School project is interpreted in light of the final and necessary advent of Habermasian theory.²⁰ From this perspective, the ideas and theories articulated in earlier periods of critical theorising can be presented only in one of two ways: either as *proto*-Habermasian - that is as anticipating themes which will be fully explicated in Habermasian theory; or as archaic formulations, mistakes and hurdles that had to be overcome and discarded in the course of Critical Theory's evolution. As a consequence, the early Frankfurt School theory as well as Marxism more broadly are examined not on their own terms - as organic, unitary projects defined by a determinate theory, politics and philosophy of society - but as

when its consequence would be despair?' (Horkheimer, quoted in Habermas, 1982: 238). This question captures well the chief weakness in Critical IR's prevalent interpretation of the early Frankfurt school in IR. That is, its repudiation of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of capitalism not as the result of a substantial refutation but rather out of discomfort with its perceived normative implications.

²⁰ A Whig history, as explained by Collini, Winch & Burrow (1983: 4), 'consists in writing history backwards,' so that the 'present theoretical consensus... is in effect taken as definitive, and the past is then reconstituted as a teleology leading up to and fully manifested in it'.

loose collections of concepts and ideas to be assessed separately and a-historically in terms of their significance to contemporary CT.²¹ The categorisation of the works of the first generation into an early - optimistic and useful - and a later - pessimistic and disabling - phase of critical scholarship is a clear instantiation of this logic. The need that it responds to is less that of conveying an accurate rendition of the works of the first generation and more that of disentangling the elements which seem to anticipate the future direction of CT from those that do not. Thus, on the one hand, all the elements of Adorno and Horkheimer's work which appear incompatible with contemporary critical scholarship - such as their negative critique and substantive conception of late capitalism - are attributed to the first generation's later output and swiftly dismissed as the expression of a project in terminal decline. On the other hand, the aspects which 'anticipated the basic themes' of contemporary CT (Linklater, 1990a: 1), such as Horkheimer's critique of positivism and remarks about Frankfurt School theory's normative interest in emancipation, are hailed as defining elements of the first generation's initial, promising works. The result is an antinomic reading of the early Frankfurt School which is never able to fully reconcile the two sides into which it has artificially partitioned it: on the one hand, the future-looking, optimistic face, setting the stage for the coming of cosmopolitan-democratic theory; on the other, the backwards-looking and despondent one which marks the exhaustion of the classical form of critical theorising.²²

The combined effect of the conventional IR narrative's overvaluing of emancipatory optimism and teleological conception of the history of critical thinking is that neither the early Frankfurt School nor Habermas's "communicative turn" are given a fully satisfactory account. To begin with, the filtering of the works of Adorno, Horkheimer and the other scholars of the first generation through the conceptual and normative vocabulary of contemporary CT leads to a situation where, as shown by Beate Jahn

²¹ In perhaps the most explicit version of this "cherry-picking" approach, the critical security scholar Ken Booth (2007: 39) advocates an "informal" and undogmatic reading of CT inspired by Hannah Arendt's idea of "perlenfisherei". That is, a 'pragmatic' reading which draws from 'the history of ideas, but [is] not concerned with the history of ideas as such'.

²² An example of the contradictory reading of the early Frankfurt School is that it is both praised, in its first phase, for 'reject[ing] the claim that Marxism provided unique insight into the nature of historical change' (Linklater, 1990a: 24) and reprehended in the second for still being beholden to a Marxian philosophy of history (See Wyn Jones, 1999: 47; Linklater, 2007: 48).

(1998: 620), 'the older Frankfurt School... can be accepted as a link in the chain of [CT's] theoretical development' - and therefore as relevant for present purposes - only on one significant condition. That is, insofar as it is stripped of all substantive content and reduced to a set of methodological principles and normative orientations that can be integrated within the contemporary framework of critique.²³ The result is that the prevailing IR reading largely fails to assess first generation scholarship comprehensively and on its own historical and theoretical terms, without reducing it either to abstract methodological pronouncements or to the morose expression of a 'brooding pessimism'. Furthermore, the conventional IR narrative falls short of producing a comprehensive account of the supposed end-point of the development of critical thinking, namely Habermas's "reconstructed" critical project. In another instance of the emphasising of emancipation over explanation, Critical Theory in IR as well as the Cosmopolitan Democracy literature have typically engaged in a selective reading of Habermas that centres on his normative theoretical writings at the expense of his substantive social analysis. In the words of Alexander Anievas (2005: 135), the situation is such that 'the majority of critical international theorists drawing from the Habermasian perspective have done so on purely philosophical grounds'. As part of this, Martin Weber (2005: 195) has commented, that there has been in IR a 'near omission of the social-theoretic aspect' of the Habermasian paradigm and his meta-theory of system and lifeworld in particular.

Most crucially for the purposes of this thesis, then, the conventional IR narrative yields an unconvincing diagnosis of the crisis of early Frankfurt School theory and an inadequate account of the emergence of Habermasian, communicative-democratic paradigm. With regards to the former, the prevailing interpretation's assumption as to the evolutionary character of CT's history hampers the elaboration

²³ Thus even when the first generation is referred to as the more inspiring and useful period of Frankfurt School history - as it often is in Critical Security Studies (see Booth, 2007: 41; Wyn Jones, 2011: 88) - it is in a form which has already been filtered through a particular, Habermasian understanding of CT. Carolin Kaltofen (2015: 41), for instance, notes how Critical Security Studies' appeal to the legacy of the first generation 'filters the Marxian origins of the Frankfurt School notion of emancipation' through a 'Kantian idealism' that is closer to Habermas than to Adorno and Horkheimer. In another instance of this reading of the early Frankfurt School through the lens of the contemporary paradigm, Shannon Brincat (2016: 8-9) praises Max Horkheimer with placing 'intersubjectivity' - a term never used by

of a satisfactory theoretical explanation of first generation theory's decline. Because the perspective is one of retrospective reconstruction, the diagnosis contained in the conventional history can be reduced to one observation: that the early Frankfurt School project collapsed because it was not Habermasian or cosmopolitan enough. Thus, for instance, the 'debilitating pessimism' of Horkheimer and Adorno is attributed by Brincat (2011: 233, 238; 2016: 13) to their failure to appreciate and 'include global emancipatory forces' - that is, to their not-yet benefiting from the 'expans[ion of] the initial remit of Critical Theory into a cosmopolitan dimension'. Or, following Honneth's (1995: 75) reading, the crisis is simply imputed on the first generation's lack of a (Habermasian) understanding of the normative potential arising from the 'sphere of communicative everyday practice' (See Wyn Jones, 1999: 47; Weber, 2002: 303). Once the assumption as to the necessity and superiority of Habermasian theory is removed - as it must be today in light of the crisis of critique - no further diagnosis remains available to explain the post-War breakdown of early Frankfurt School theory. As to the latter point, the portrayal of the contemporary cosmopolitan-democratic paradigm as resulting from a radical break and "jump forward" in the development of critical thinking obfuscates the degree to which Habermas's reconstruction of the critical project involves a complex set of continuities *and* discontinuities with first generation and Marxist thought, reconfiguring and reproducing many of its themes and tendencies. In particular - and as I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter - the prevailing narrative overstates Habermas's success in overcoming the early Frankfurt School's standstill and conceals the fact that many of the problematic orientations that underlie the first generation's decline continue to operate at the heart of Critical Theory today. For these reasons, a new interpretation of the development of the Frankfurt School that corrects the weaknesses of the conventional history by providing a more robust diagnosis of the decline of first generation theory in the 1960s and 70s and a thorough examination of the terms of Habermas's "communicative" and "democratic" turn is crucial to make sense of the present crisis of critique.

the early Frankfurt School but central to Habermasian theory - 'at the centre of the

An alternative history of the Frankfurt School

In light of the weaknesses identified in the previous section, it is necessary to advance an alternative reading of the history of the Frankfurt School that corrects the conventional interpretation's teleological and emotive focus by centring on the concrete analyses and social theories that underlie the intellectual development of Critical Theory. This alternative reading shows how the conventional history: (i) overlooks the defining contribution of the early Frankfurt school, which lies in its theorising of the changing patterns of domination under late capitalism; (ii) mischaracterises the "impasse" reached by early Frankfurt School theory and misdiagnoses its causes, neglecting in particular the importance of the abandonment of the critique of political economy; and (iii) overstates the success of Jürgen Habermas's "rescue" of the critical project and fails to detect the important ways in which his paradigm of critique remains trapped in the deadlock of late first generation Critical Theory - most crucially in reproducing the dismissal of the critique of political economy. In this section, I set out this revisionist history by first setting out the different principle of interpretation on which it is based, namely that of the theory of domination; then discussing what emerges as the defining theme of first generation scholarship, that is the theory of late capitalist society as total administration; and finally providing an alternative diagnosis of the impasse of early Frankfurt School theory as determined by the abandonment of political economic critique. I do this both aided by recent theoretical reinterpretations of the Frankfurt School (Allen, 2014; Brink, 2015; Gangl, 2016) and by re-engaging with longstanding Marxian critiques of the early Frankfurt School such as those levelled by Moishe Postone (1993) and Claus Offe (1969; 1984).

The Frankfurt School as a theory of domination

I have shown in the previous section how the prevailing interpretation in IR of the development of the Frankfurt School proceeds by measure of the capacity

emancipatory project⁷.

expressed by its different phases to provide an affirmative vision of emancipation. I have characterised this as a reading of CT as a theory of emancipation and argued that its over-reliance on a normative standard of judgement tends to reduce the various theorists of this tradition to the optimistic or pessimistic outlook that is expressed in their works. To correct this tendency, I propose a reading of the intellectual history of the Critical Theory that starts from a different premise: that of the Frankfurt School as a theory of *domination*.²⁴ Reading Critical Theory as a theory of domination is not to dispute the importance of being normative or the centrality of the theme of emancipation in the project of the Frankfurt school. It is, rather, to foreground and make explicit the negative and oppositional side of emancipation. In this sense, I use the concept of domination to call attention to the specific aspects and features of existing society which a particular definition of emancipation considers to be harmful and in need of undoing. Focusing on what theory of domination animates the Frankfurt School in its different phases is therefore to ask: firstly, what the exact societal circumstances are that the critical theorists thought humanity had to emancipate itself from; and secondly, what contradictions and dynamics and opportunities they identified in the present injustice which hinted at the possibility of its transcendence. The change from a reading based on emancipation to one based on domination therefore implies a shift from a perspective which centres on the affirmative normative qualities (or lack thereof) expressed by the works of Frankfurt School theory to one which gives primacy to the critical-analytical content they express as substantive engagements with their own time. Unlike the positive and abstract definition of emancipation relied upon by the conventional interpretation, then, the category of domination is not *just* normative, but expresses a precise theoretical content that situates it within the Marxist tradition of critique: it indicates on the one hand that, in Herbert Marcuse's

²⁴ I borrow the juxtaposition between a theory of emancipation and one of domination from Helmut Dubiel (1992). Dubiel describes them as different aspects of critical theorising, in a way that is reminiscent of Benhabib's distinction between the "explanatory-diagnostic" and "anticipatory-utopian" dimensions of CT. CT as a theory of emancipation tends for Dubiel to emphasise the theorising of the moral resources and emancipatory potentials that arise from civil society and drive forward the normative development of society (*Ibidem*, 9-13). As to the latter: 'A critical theory oriented towards a theory of domination is primarily interested in the mechanisms by which individuals reproduce their condition of submission.... It analyses ideologies that conceal the particular nature of an applied form of domination, as well as the forces that manipulate and homogenise the collective consciousness to fit that domination, behind a veil of feigned universal interests' (*Ibidem*: 12).

(1998: 48) words, 'all civilisation has been organised domination' - in the sense that every historical formation is defined by some form of social control; and on the other, that the precise pattern or mode of domination - the particular constellation of power relations that constitutes it - is not immutable and natural but determinate and historical. It follows from this that Critical Theory as a theory of domination consists first and foremost in the study of the relations of power and violence expressed by a definite social and historical moment and of the fault lines, contradictions and opportunities for transformation which it presents. For the purposes of this thesis, this means that reading the authors of the Frankfurt School as theorists of domination is to centre on their analysis of the fundamental relations of power structuring their own society. That is, it is to focus their account of the mode of domination proper to advanced, Western capitalist society.

Applying the interpretive category of the theory of domination to the development of the Frankfurt School reveals a different story from the one conveyed by the conventional narrative. To begin with, it disrupts the two core elements on which the prevailing reading of first generation theory is built: the idea that the early Frankfurt School can be divided into a pre-war and a post-war phase, each of which is marked by a significantly different research agenda; and the notion that the only relevant contribution of the first generation to CT today resides in the methodological prescriptions and commitments expressed in its early texts. Instead, reading the early Frankfurt School as a theory of domination returns a view of the first generation as being relevant today because their substantive theory of late capitalism - and, as I will soon discuss, the aporias contained within it - fundamentally shaped the development of Critical Theory.

The early Frankfurt School theory of late capitalism

At the heart of first generation Critical Theory lies the idea that Western society had undergone in the first half of the Twentieth Century a profound transformation, the precise, objective nature of which had to be investigated and deciphered. For the

early Frankfurt theorists, the most tangible sign of the beginning of a new era in the development of capitalist societies was the appearance of new *kinds* of social phenomena which could no longer be fully understood by means of classical Marxian theory (Jeffries, 2016: 137-140). The remarkable advances in technology and science, the standardisation and mechanisation of industrial production, the expansion of rational-bureaucratic planning and the rise of a “mass culture” through radio, television and cinema were generating new social forms that were clearly novel in contrast to nineteenth-century bourgeois society, yet did not conform to the Marxian image of a liberated society (Adorno, 2003). The social order that was emerging in the West after the Second World War was clearly not one that was free of domination, and yet domination could less and less be adequately understood solely in terms of the rule of a particular class or social group (Adorno, 1968). Instead, a *restructuring* of domination seemed to the Frankfurt School theorists to be taking place, such that the social pattern of bourgeois rule that had characterised the “liberal”, Nineteenth Century phase of European capitalism was giving way to something altogether different: the sublimation of the capitalist class’s interest in profit and rational control into a functional imperative of the social system as a whole (Petrucciani, 2009: 13). The works of the first generation Frankfurt School can therefore be understood as a series of attempts to make sense of the new, generalised and systemic form of domination which characterises what they termed “late” capitalist society.²⁵

According to the first generation scholars, the new pattern of domination that characterises late or advanced Western capitalism is defined by three elements: it is *systemic*; it is *total*; and it is *closed*. First of all, domination under late capitalism does not coincide with the interest and rule of a specific social group, but represents an impersonal, *systemic* logic of administration operating at the heart of society itself. This marks, according to Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, a significant

²⁵ That of condensing the various works and authors of the so-called first generation into a unitary and coherent “theory” is, by necessity, an exercise of crude approximation. There remains, amongst the different ideas and perspectives expressed by the various scholars of the Frankfurt School, a complexity and variety that this chapter cannot properly do justice to. For the sake of simplicity and to make the argumentation manageable, however, I present here a summary view that applies to the core of the scholarship produced by the Institute for Social Research at any given time and specifies the prevailing theoretical and political outlook expressed by it.

transformation compared to what they called the “liberal” or “classical” phase of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Western capitalism (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002: 68). Under liberal capitalism, they contended, domination could still be understood in classical Marxist terms as class rule. That is, as Petrucciani (2009: 10) explains, as ‘the material and symbolic privilege of a minority, based on the appropriation of surplus labour of the vast majority of the population’. In the Twentieth Century, however, Herbert Marcuse (1998: 98) wrote in 1955, ‘domination no longer merely or primarily sustains specific privileges but also sustains society as a whole on an expanding scale’. ‘The capitalist bosses and owners’, Marcuse (2002: 35) added in 1964, ‘are losing their identity as responsible agents; they are assuming the function of bureaucrats in a corporate machine.’ Domination as the oppression of one social group by another was therefore being replaced by an altogether different form - one in which it is society itself that dominates individuals and subject them to its functional and organisational requirements (Bernstein, 1995: 22; Azmanova, 2014: 353). To describe this new, emerging pattern of domination, the early critical scholars substituted the Marxian analysis of class rule with a Weberian account of impersonal, administrative authority. That is, they conceptualised domination under late capitalism as a *systemic* and *generalised* form of social control at the heart of which lie a *technical* and *bureaucratic* rationality (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002: 69, 95; Marcuse, 1998: 103). The second defining element of domination under late capitalism was for the first generation its *total* character. By this the early critical scholars meant that domination was no longer restricted to a specific area of social life, or differentiated into political and economic forms of domination, but tended rather to exert its influence uniformly over the totality of social existence. Thus, for instance, Horkheimer, Adorno as well as Walter Benjamin dedicated a substantial amount of energy and time to studying the way in which technical rationality and the logic of exchange were penetrating into and shaping the domains of culture as well as academic knowledge (see Adorno, 1975; Benjamin, 1992; Horkheimer, 2012). With regards to the former, Adorno (1975: 14) noted how the media, culture and the arts were increasingly incorporating ‘industrial forms of organisation’ and were being reshaped into ideological extensions of the administrative system; as to the latter,

Marcuse (2002: 18) observed how the ascendancy of positivist and rationalist science in Western universities formed 'the academic counterpart of the socially required behaviour' and thus reproduced in thought the same coercive logic of society at large. Even further than that, the first generation became interested in exploring how consciousness, personality and individuality were being conditioned by the new logic of domination, such that, in Adorno's (2003: 109; 1998: 248) words, 'domination becomes an integral part of human beings' and individuals are 'turned into appendages of the social machinery' (see also Marcuse, 1998: 100). Thirdly, the first generation theorists held that in addition to its systemic and total character, domination under late capitalism was defined by the almost complete *neutralisation* of social antagonism and *closure* of the possibility of contestation and opposition. As explained by Marcuse (2002: 35), the shift from the class-based domination of the liberal era to the systemic one of late capitalism meant that 'the tangible source of exploitation disappears behind the facade of objective rationality. Hatred and frustration are deprived of their specific target, and the technological veil conceals the reproduction of inequality and enslavement'. The 'immeasurable pressure of domination', Adorno (2003: 97) added, 'has so fragmented the masses that it has even dissipated the negative unity of being oppressed that forged them into a class in the nineteenth century'. The result was that under the new mode of domination 'the overwhelming majority of mankind are unable to experience themselves as a class', such that traditional socialist politics based on a proletarian subject were increasingly impracticable (*Ibidem*). What is more, the closure effected by late capitalism was for the early critical scholars so overwhelming that not only was collective action and identification obstructed, but it was even difficult for *individuals* to escape the total manipulation of consciousness and critically ascertain their own condition (Adorno, 1998: 230-231).

Within this general understanding of domination under late capitalism, the first generation scholars employed different theoretical concepts and disciplinary perspectives to interrogate systemic domination under late capitalism from a variety

of angles.²⁶ Herbert Marcuse (1998), for instance, studied domination as on 'order of repression' of instinctual libidinal energies, that is as the repression and deflection of humanity's basic instincts necessary to the perpetuation of civilisation. Using Freud and the instruments of psychoanalysis, he developed in *One-Dimensional Man* an account of late capitalist society as characterised by the creation of 'false needs' which then required particular modes of 'repressive satisfaction', such as was provided by consumerist culture (Marcuse, 2002). In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, on the other hand, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) traced the connection between domination and the epochal unfolding of the Enlightenment. Through what Bronner (1994: 81) calls a philosophical 'anthropology of domination', they reconstructed the process through which instrumental reason - which at its outset was meant to secure the self-preservation of humanity through the rational control of "external nature" - grew into an 'organ of calculation, of planning' and resulted in the domination of society and "internal nature" as well. Adorno and Horkheimer thus conceived of the totally integrated, administrative society as an outcome that was immanent to the history of the Enlightenment and could be countered only by taking stock of the dialectical entanglement of 'enslavement' and 'liberation' that was at the heart of societal rationalisation (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2002: xvi-xvii).

Most interestingly for the purposes of this thesis, Marcuse's *psychoanalytical* and Horkheimer and Adorno's *philosophical* accounts of systemic domination also hinged on a particular *political economic* analysis of late capitalism. In other words, they rested on the idea that the mutation in the mode of domination reflected a more profound transformation which was taking place at the level of capitalism's basic organisation of production (Brick & Postone, 1976: 9). This political economic dimension of first generation theory, which was first developed in a series of essays written by Friedrich Pollock between 1932 and 1941, has so far attracted very minimal attention in IR and is rarely mentioned in the conventional history. In fact, it

²⁶ The interdisciplinary element that the conventional interpretation ascribes to the first generation's early phase is therefore not separate and detachable from its substantive theoretical interest. On the contrary, interdisciplinary inquiry constitutes for the early Frankfurt School *the means by which* the new pattern of domination under late capitalism could be deciphered.

constitutes one of the most consequential aspects of early Frankfurt School theory and a key element in its analysis of post-war Western society. To begin with, as Tobias Brinck (2015: 333) has recently noted, Pollock's theory of political economy 'influenced the central assumptions of Horkheimer and Adorno's theory of the totally administered society and... provided them with a material basis for their analysis'.²⁷ Moreover, as commented by Moishe Postone (1993: 96), 'Pollock's work in the 1930s' supplied 'the implicit political economic presuppositions of the pessimistic turn' in the first generation and thus played an important role in the early Frankfurt School's decline and eventual standstill in the 1960s and 70s. Lastly, the social-theoretic aspects of the early Frankfurt School and Pollock's study of state and economy under late capitalism fundamentally shaped Habermas's own theory of society and are therefore of direct interest today in light of the contemporary crisis of critique.

The political economic dimension of early Frankfurt School theory

The core of the first generation's political economic theory was the idea that the rise of systemic, administrative domination was linked to a structural development at the level of the capitalist mode of production. Friedrich Pollock - the Institute for Social Research's resident political economist - characterised this transition as a shift from what he termed liberal or *laissez-faire* capitalism to a new form of economic organisation he termed "state capitalism" (Pollock, 1982). State capitalism, which emerged for Pollock after the Great Depression in the 1930s, was defined for him by the fact that the coordination of economic production and distribution - which has previously been fulfilled by the market in a context of free enterprise - was increasingly being brought under the control of the state bureaucracy (Brick & Postone, 1982: 619). Where 'freedom of trade, enterprise and labor' once ruled, he argued, centralised state planning and intervention were now taking over, guided not by a market logic but by the 'principles of scientific management' (Pollock, 1982:

²⁷ Gangl (2016: 34) adds that Pollock's 'theory of state capitalism was both theoretical basis of and catalyst for the development of deeper historical and anthropological analysis in

73, 77).²⁸ As Postone (1993: 94) explains, Pollock believed the state to have become ‘the determinant of all spheres of social life’, such that ‘the hierarchy of bureaucratic political structure occupies the centre of social existence’. Most famously, Pollock (1941: 441) described this transformation as the establishment of the ‘primacy of the political over the economic’. By this he meant two things: firstly, as mentioned above, that the task of economic regulation was now functionally performed by state planning rather than the market. Secondly, Pollock argued that the ‘autonomous market’ had been undermined to such a degree that the ‘economic laws’ guiding it had effectively “disappear[ed]” (Pollock, 1982: 73). In other words, Pollock claimed that the tendencies towards overproduction, the fall of the rate of profit or the pauperisation of the working class – that is, the crisis dynamics that classical Marxism had ascribed to the capitalist mode of production – no longer necessarily applied once state management was in place. For Pollock, economic crises could now be reliably defused by displacing the intrinsic instability of the capitalist economy on to the political system (*Ibidem*). The primacy of the political over the economic ultimately meant that the contradictions of capitalism would henceforth surface in the political rather than in the economic realm: as pressures on the bureaucratic state to provide full employment and maintain its legitimacy, rather than as crises of production and class struggle in the traditional Marxian sense (Pollock, 1989: 95-100).

Concretely, Pollock’s argument on state capitalism influenced first generation theory in two ways. Firstly, it reinforced the idea that the main principle of organisation in late capitalist society was that of rational calculation and scientific planning. This sustained the idea that the predominant pattern of power relations under late capitalism - that is, its mode of domination - was a Weberian one of bureaucratic control and management of individuals and society by the administrative logic of the system. Marcuse’s (1998: 103) pronouncements about ‘domination congeal[ing] into a system of objective administration’ and Horkheimer’s (1981: 145) idea of post-war

Dialectic of Enlightenment’.

²⁸ Interestingly, for Pollock, this new state of affairs was equally characteristic of the Soviet Union as it was of the Western world. The ‘East’ and the ‘West’ merely represented for him two different “forms” of the same model of state capitalism: one totalitarian, power being concentrated in the hands of a ruling group, the other democratic.

Western society as a “techno-structure” defined by anonymous, statistical rule were both influenced by Pollock’s writings (Postone, 1993: 96). Secondly, Pollock’s (1982: 73) thesis on the ‘primacy of the political’ and ‘decline of the market system’ supported the view that the sphere of the economy and the struggles taking place within it were decreasing in importance and therefore no longer constituted a research priority. ‘Under state capitalism’, Pollock (1989: 109) has commented, ‘economics as a social science has lost its object.... Where the economist formerly racked his brain to solve the puzzle of the exchange process, he meets, under state capitalism, with mere problems of administration.’ On the one hand, Pollock maintained that the supplanting of market mechanisms with direct rational planning had suppressed or at least displaced the structural crisis tendencies of the capitalist economy, rendering obsolete not only classical economics, but Marxian analyses of the laws of motion of capitalist production as well (Postone, 1993: 98). On the other, he suggested that class struggle as a social antagonism rooted in the economic structure of society was in the process of being neutralised, the defining conflict of the age now juxtaposing individuals and the total bureaucratic system. The final result was, in Brink’s (2015: 333) words, that Pollock’s political economic theory ‘provided a carte blanche for Frankfurt critical theory to neglect engaging in economic analyses thereafter’ and a justification for the first generation to shift its attention towards culture, aesthetics and the critique of ideology.

The impasse of early Frankfurt School theory

What becomes, in this alternative history of the Frankfurt School, of the widely noted impasse of first generation theory in the 1960s and 1970s? It does not go away but appears in a new light. In the conventional narrative, the decline of first generation theory is described in terms of the replacement of the optimistic interdisciplinary program of the 1930s with an increasingly despairing worldview and an attitude of philosophical self-enclosure. In the alternative history, on the other hand, the stark separation between a first and a second phase of first generation scholarship breaks down and the impasse appears as a gradual development that

is wholly internal to the early Frankfurt School's core theoretical preoccupation, namely that of systemic domination in late capitalist societies. Specifically, the crisis of first generation critique represents the moment when its theory of late capitalism loses all sense of tension, contradiction and possibility and becomes a static, undialectical theory of society at standstill. More than *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - a work which, as its name suggests, maintains an interest in theorising the incomplete and unstable character of domination (see Allen, 2014b) - it is a speech pronounced by Horkheimer in 1970, shortly after Adorno's death, that epitomises the end-point of the early Frankfurt School. Horkheimer (1981: 165) says that:

We have arrived at the understanding that society will develop into a totally administered world. That everything will be regulated, everything! Just when the point has been reached, when mankind dominates nature, that everybody has enough to eat, that no one has to live better or worse than anybody else, because everyone can live well and in comfort, then it no longer makes any difference, whether one is a Minister or just a secretary, then everything is the same. Everything can then be regulated automatically, whether it is the administration of the State, or the management of traffic or the regulation of consumption. This is an immanent tendency in the development of mankind, one that can only be interrupted through catastrophe (Horkheimer, 1981: 165).

What defines the early Frankfurt School's final impasse is therefore something more peculiar than just total despair. It is a curious blend of socio-economic optimism and moralistic pessimism, congealed in the image of a social order that is both unfree and non-contradictory (Postone, 1993: 98). This is given, on the one side, by the belief that, thanks to the expansion of rational planning, not only are economic crises a thing of the past, but wealth inequality as well as class, racial and gender distinctions are bound to vanish and all of humanity's material needs will soon be met (see Marcuse, 2002: 10-12; Horkheimer, 1981: 171; 2012: 158). On the other side, it is the expression of the fear that this levelling of social inequalities will coincide with the 'technological abolition of the individual' (Marcuse, 2002: 102) and the 'transformation of society into a totally administered world' (Horkheimer, 1981:

166). These two suppositions combine in the image of a static, one-dimensional society, leaving room neither for an organic crisis of the System - as Neumann (quoted in Horkheimer, 1996: 107) noted, 'state capitalism, as conceived by Pollock, could last a millennium' - nor for any organised political opposition. For the first generation, human history had, quite simply, come to a halt. In contrast to the conventional narrative's emphasis on despondency and resignation, then, the most striking feature of the first generation's ebbing is less the negativity of its philosophy than the fallacy of its belief that all other power relations were on the wane and all conflicts muted. The true name of the impasse of the early Frankfurt School - particularly as far as Horkheimer is concerned - is therefore not pessimism but conservatism.²⁹ It is the belief that because the road to emancipatory social change is foreclosed - or can only bring further catastrophe - Critical Theory must now fight to 'preserve what once was called liberalism, namely the autonomy and importance of the individual, its differentiated psychology and certain moments of culture' (Horkheimer, 1981: 166/175).

If the description of the first generation's impasse changes, then so does its diagnosis. First of all, in light of the alternative reading of the history of the Frankfurt School as a theory of domination, the mistakes of first generation theory are now revealed as being substantive and analytical, rather than just normative or affective. The core problem with first generation theory, in other words, is not primarily that it was shrouded by despair, or unwilling to speak of the "good" in society. It is not even that it was constrained by its subscription to a Marxian paradigm of production. Rather, the issue is that the early Frankfurt School became dependent on an oversimplified and misleading reading of late capitalism as a perfect, rational and impersonal *system* and lost the ability to recognise and interpret the conflicts and struggles running through it. The deadlock of the early Frankfurt School is thus a

²⁹ Horkheimer (1981: 175) comments in 1970 that the 'true revolutionary' is, in terms of the defence of individuality, 'closer to the true conservative than to what today is called communism'. As Habermas (1986: 166) has noted, Horkheimer's position is crucial in reconstructing the general makeup of the early Frankfurt School - and in that sense most representative of it - because he was, among the first generation scholars, the one who was 'most influenced by the collective work undertaken by the group'. Because of this, Habermas (*Ibidem*) continues, 'Horkheimer remains more attached to the collective-singular that would later become known as "Frankfurt School", than the other participants', such as Adorno or Marcuse.

direct reflection of the standstill it attributed to society at large. That misconception was made plausible at the time by a series of historical developments following World War Two which seemed at the time to be irrevocable but appear in hindsight to have been highly contingent. The expansion of centralised planning in both the West and the East, the post-war “economic miracle” in Europe and the rise of the welfare state all pointed towards stable economic growth, decreasing inequality and low social conflict becoming permanent features of the new social order. Today, they appear as the outcome of the coincidence of historically specific conditions and the expression of a social compromise between labour and capital that was soon to break down. In that sense, as Wolfgang Streeck comments, the early Frankfurt School’s analysis was part of a broader but ephemeral *zeitgeist* defined by:

The idea of the capitalist economy having been turned into a prosperity machine which, with the help of the Keynesian toolkit, could be kept stable and crisis-free through orderly cooperation between governments and large corporations. The material reproduction of capitalist industrial society thus seemed assured, crisis tendencies overcome, and the “pauperisation” of the working class predicted by orthodoxy was no longer visible even on the more distant horizon (Streeck, 2014a: 11).

As scholars such as Postone (2005: 165) have added, however, the first generation’s impasse was not just a product of ‘its immediate historical context’. On a deeper level, it ‘resulted from the fundamental assumptions according to which that context was analysed’ (*Ibidem*). Specifically, the decline of early Frankfurt School theory is linked to the relinquishing of the social and political economic analysis of capitalist society in favour of the abstract critique of technological rationality *per se* (Bergman, 1969: 89). It is the theoretical and political usage of an essentialist conception of state, economy and society as purely reducible to a technical logic of operation that led the first generation to misinterpret the historical dynamic of post-war capitalism and ultimately precipitated its final demise.

This is true of the early Frankfurt School’s explanatory-diagnostic as well as anticipatory-utopian dimension. With regards to the former, the capacity of the first

generation scholars to clarify and make sense of the post-war conjuncture was severely hindered by the fact that their studies became over the years increasingly disembodied from determinate social analysis and reliant on static and ahistorical formulations. In particular, the early Frankfurt School critics became increasingly reliant on a Weberian understanding of rationalisation as a uniforming and impersonal process that precluded it from specifying the determinate relations, particular interests and social forces that composed the post-war conjuncture (Offe, 1969: 74)³⁰. The first generation, in the words of Brink (2015: 337), ‘lacked a historically grounded understanding of societal and institutional change and of the interplay of structure and agency’. In fact, it lacked a satisfactory account of either structure *or* agency. On the one hand, as Brick and Postone (1976; 1982) noted with regards to Pollock, the theory of state capitalism as the social-theoretic foundation of the early Frankfurt School was constructed as an ideal-typical and static description without any internal dynamic or historical dimension. In particular, it was based on a reductionist understanding of “the political” and “the economic” as simply coinciding with state-logic and market-logic respectively and the hypostatisation of the two domains ‘not merely as differentiated from one another, as non-identical spheres, but rather as no longer possessing an intrinsic relation to one another’ (Brick & Postone, 1976: 13). In an analogous way, Horkheimer’s (1981: 145) analysis of post-War Western society as a “techno-structure” provided no indication of the mechanisms, tendencies and conflicts that defined it, other than conveying the image of an inert, uniform and technicised world. The end-result is not only that the first generation was unable to articulate the structural contradictions and tensions of post-War, planned-economy societies. It also means that its conception of late capitalism lost any clear sense of what makes it *capitalist* at all, and not simply an administrative, planned society (Postone, 2005: 177-178).³¹ On the other hand, as Claus Offe (1969: 88) noted with regards to Marcuse, the first generation critique of systemic domination consistently ‘underestimated the

³⁰ In Bidet’s words, ‘the notion of domination’ becomes ‘interchangeable with that of the state: Marx revised in line with Weber’ (Bidet, 2008: 688).

³¹ As Postone (1993; 2005) argues, this is tied in Pollock to a problematic identification of liberal capitalism with the primacy of the market in the circulation of commodities. Because of that identification, which fails to articulate the peculiarity of capitalism as a social relation

historical role of practical intentions' and effectively denied the possibility of purposeful, strategic agency (see also Streeck, 2014a: 18). As a consequence, it was unable to 'trace back the technical universe to the antagonism of interest which sustains it' and thus failed to account for the ways in which concrete social forces positioned themselves in that particular conjuncture (Offe, 1969: 88; see also Bergman, 1969: 95).

As to the latter, "anticipatory-utopian" aspect, the relinquishing of social critique and political economic analysis meant that early Critical Theory deprived itself of the conceptual tools by which it could identify fractures and weak-points and opportunities for resistance in the social fabric of post-War Western society. In theorising late capitalism as a perfect and non-contradictory system of domination, the first generation denied the possibility of emancipation not only as a *positive* potential, but as a *negative* one as well. In other words, it is not just, as the conventional narrative claims, that the first generation was unable to identify any affirmative potentialities - be it the idea of reason and justice or the agency of the proletariat - which anticipated the advent of a liberated society. After all, it was precisely the starting point of the first generation's analysis that rationality, the working class and the history of the Enlightenment could no longer be assumed to unambiguously point towards emancipation (Bernstein, 1995: 23-24). Rather, the most damning fact is that the first generation was unable to specify the negative conditions which made a world after late capitalism conceivable at all. They were, in other words, incapable of defining either the internal dynamics which could bring late capitalism to an end, or the societal conditions which made it possible for it to be contested. Ultimately, they constructed the image of an unjust and false totality without explaining how that "wrongness" materialises in concrete social relations or how it could be experienced and challenged by the people living under it. The outcome, as noted by Offe (1984: 255), was that early Critical Theory became 'a species of victimisation theory' which portrayed the entire population as a uniform object of total administration and obscured all other power and social cleavages and struggles. Without a social content it could be anchored to, Adorno and

of commodity-production, Pollock is at pains to explain what makes state/late capitalism a

Horkheimer's initial commitment to theorising reason as an ambiguous process - at once liberating and dominating - gave way to an increasingly undialectical account of bureaucratic domination (Greisman & Ritzer, 1981). The only politics that could be articulated from such a position was either a conservative defence of the achievements of classical liberalism - as was the case for Horkheimer - or the individual escape into an aesthetic or philosophical resistance, as it was for Adorno.

The Habermasian turn reconsidered

As I discussed in the previous section, the end of early CT and start of what, in its general structure, constitutes contemporary CT is generally characterised as a fundamental "turn" in the history of the Frankfurt School. As far as the conventional narrative goes, Habermas took stock in the 1970s of the crisis of the first generation and proceeded, in response to it, to fundamentally reorganise CT around a new conceptual vocabulary and a new core thematic. By engaging with a sphere of action and a form of rationality - that of communication - that had been overlooked by the early Frankfurt School, Habermas (1987: 397) was able to establish the 'normative foundations of a critical theory of society', overcome the pessimism of the first generation and set Critical Theory on a new path which is still followed today.

When analysed from the point of view of its substantive social analysis, however, a picture emerges of Habermas's "communicative turn" that is more complex and ambiguous than the conventional narrative of radical break and successful redemption would suggest. In this alternative interpretation, the paradigmatic change initiated by Habermas appears as a theoretical and meta-theoretical *recomposition* of Critical Theory that develops the core of the first generations' critique of late capitalism - its protestation against the determination of culture, individuality and sociability by bureaucratic administration - while seeking to avoid its negativistic conclusions and re-establish the normative grounds for

capitalist system in the first place.

emancipation. In the next chapter, I will discuss in greater detail what the exact parameters of this reconstruction of CT were and what the social-theoretic underpinnings of the “communicative turn” - and, therefore, of the contemporary paradigm - consist in. What is important to emphasise for the purposes of this chapter, however, is that Habermas’s reconstruction of Critical Theory did not entirely leave behind and did not challenge what I have identified above as the substantive aporias and analytical fallacies that underlie the first generation’s final decline. Habermas did not correct or overturn the early Frankfurt School’s essentialist analysis of economy, politics and society as a uniforming “techno-structure” without tensions and contradictions, reducible to the impersonal unfolding of instrumental reason. Instead he theorised the existence of another social sphere - that of communication - that was outside of its reach and in which the possibility of emancipation, and the perspective of CT, could be positively grounded. In other words, the first generation’s critique of modern society as an order of bureaucratic administration was challenged not in its substance but only in its scope of application. Habermas’s theory of communicative rationality did not *upturn* the early Frankfurt School pessimistic assessment of the closure of late capitalism. It relativised it so as to moderate its immobilising consequences. Horkheimer’s idea of society as a “techno-structure” was recast not as wrong in itself, but as telling only half of the story. Reformulated as the “system”, it was juxtaposed to an independent communicative and deliberative realm on which it was trying to encroach - and from which resistance could be mounted.

The problem with this strategy of reconstruction, however, is that in *side-stepping* rather than *resolving* the failings of the first generation’s analysis, it kept in place many of the root causes of the standstill of the early Frankfurt School. Substantively, Habermas’s reconstructed Critical Theory remained married to the idea - first outlined in Pollock’s state capitalism thesis - that the political and the economic in advanced Western societies were no longer sites of structural contradiction and social antagonism, but had congealed into a highly sophisticated and crisis-free “system” of administration (Brink, 2015: 336). As Streeck (2014a: 12) has noted, this analysis congealed in the ‘belief that the economy had become essentially a

technical matter' - a mere mechanism of technocratic administration devoid of class or particularistic contents. As I will discuss in the coming chapters, the inscription of this idea in the theory of society as system and lifeworld severely restricted the ability of Habermasian CT to theorise and critique capitalism and continues to constrain critical theoretical attempts in IR to address global economic and political questions. Methodologically, the new paradigm of critique continued and in fact intensified the use of essentialist, ahistorical categories and explicitly formalised the abandonment of political economic critique. The result - as I will show in more detail in the next chapter - is therefore that Habermas's reconstruction of Critical Theory did not undo but actually incorporated many of the misconceptions and problematic tendencies that had precipitated the first generation's decline. The fact that the contemporary crisis of critique displays many of the same symptom as that earlier impasse - the loss of the capacity to interpret socio-economic and political dynamics and the deterioration of the ability to connect with political struggles - suggests that those unresolved tensions might today be surfacing again.

Conclusion

The alternative history of the Frankfurt School that was set out in this chapter refutes and destabilises some of the truisms about the development of contemporary Critical Theory and shows under a new light the present crisis of critique. First of all, the interpretation I have outlined here proposes that the limit of first generation CT was not that it was blind to the existence of positive moral resources in society, or held back by its subscription to a "productivist" ontology. The decline of early Critical Theory was not simply due to the fact that it was too negativistic and not Habermasian enough. Rather, the fundamental fallacy of early Frankfurt School theory was that it misread post-war Western society as a totally closed and coherent system, free both of internal tensions and the possibility of contestation. It was the failings of its substantive analysis and the abandonment of any attempt to identify lines of fracture and possibilities for struggle in the existing social order that determined the crisis of first generation theory. Consequently, the

reading developed here makes it clear that the decline of early Critical Theory needs to be explained by reference to its theoretical and methodological inadequacies and, in particular, to the abandonment of the critique of political economy. The impasse of first generation theory in the post-war period is linked directly to the discontinuation of the analysis of the structural contradictions and social antagonisms of modern society and the increasing reliance on static and abstract, ideal-typical formulations. Lastly, the alternative interpretation suggests that the “communicative turn” that marks - on most accounts - the beginning of contemporary Critical Theory did not break completely with the first generation’s (mis)diagnosis of late capitalism as a “techno-structure”, but instead integrated that analysis with a parallel account of communicative - and therefore potentially emancipatory - action. I concluded that the disjuncture between the first generation’s decline and Habermas’s reconstruction of CT on the basis of the paradigm of communication conceals a number of continuities that relate both to the substantive theory of late capitalism as a technical system and to the methodological reliance on essentialist and hypostatized formulations.

All of this is important, from the perspective of today’s Frankfurt School research in and outside of IR, because the impasse of early Critical Theory and the way in which that impasse was interpreted and addressed by Habermas constitute a crucial juncture in the constitution of the contemporary paradigm of Critical Theory. Reinterpreting the character and root causes of the first generation’s decline offers a fresh perspective on the origins of the present, communicative-democratic framework of critique and provide a new key to understanding its current predicament. More specifically, the alternative history developed here opens up a longer and deeper view of the present crisis of critique that points to the existence of unresolved tensions and contradiction that go to the heart of the Frankfurt School’s conception of and approach to capitalist society. Before it is shaped into a fully formed hypothesis, this point needs to be substantiated further with regards to the Habermasian, communicative-democratic paradigm of critique. For this reason, I proceed in the next chapter to employ the historical understanding gained here to investigate and critique the currently prevailing, Habermasian paradigm of critique.

Chapter Three: the Habermasian paradigm

In the previous chapter I outlined an alternative history of the intellectual development of the Frankfurt School that problematises many of the conventional understandings held by critical scholars in IR. In particular, I have reinterpreted the historical juncture from which contemporary Critical Theory originated, namely the impasse of the “early” or “first generation” Frankfurt School and Habermas’s reconstruction of CT in the realm of communicative interaction. The conventional history of CT in IR has read the standstill of the early Frankfurt School as deriving from its pessimistic outlook on society as well as the exhaustion of the Marxist paradigm on which it was based. It has also interpreted Habermas’s “communicative turn” as successfully resolving the first generation’s impasse and restoring CT on stable normative and theoretical grounds. Against this prevailing interpretation I advanced two arguments: firstly, that the origins of the first generation’s crisis reside in the substantive limitations of its theory of late capitalist society and abandonment of the critique of political economy. Specifically, I contended that the first generation scholars were held back by their theorisation of post-war Western society as a closed and totally administered system, which prevented them from recognising and interpreting its struggles and structural contradictions. Secondly, I argued that Habermas did not fundamentally break with this conception of late capitalism as a technically administered order, but rather tried to circumvent the first generation’s pessimism by positing the existence of a separate domain of communicative interaction within which Critical Theory could be normatively anchored. In so doing, however, Habermas retained and in fact extended and formalised the first generation’s substantive misapprehensions of late capitalist society as well as the methodological orientation towards essentialist and reductionist thinking. The end-result, I suggested, is that some of the root causes of the early Frankfurt School’s decline remain active within contemporary CT. This alternative interpretation is significant for the purposes of this thesis because it challenges the notion that the history of Critical Theory up to this point can be understood as a process of incremental, evolutionary development. Instead, it

opens up the view of a longer crisis of Frankfurt School critique that relates to the permanence of certain limitations and unresolved contradictions at the heart of its theory of late capitalist society. In turn, this allows for a fresh perspective on what I have described in the first chapter as the “crisis of critique” of contemporary Critical Theory in IR and could provide an indication as to its theoretical origin.

In this chapter, I substantiate this point by providing a detailed reading and critique of the communicative-democratic paradigm developed by Jürgen Habermas in response to the impasse of early Critical Theory. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, because the Habermasian paradigm and the ontological, methodological and normative principles that compose it have had a profound influence on the development of Critical Theory and constitute the foundations on which most of contemporary Frankfurt School research is still based today (Scheuerman, 2006: 86; Allen, 2016). In particular, as I will discuss in the next two chapters, the communicative framework of critique has informed the two most significant bodies of Frankfurt School research on international politics: Habermas’s own work on the post-national condition and Andrew Linklater’s scholarship on cosmopolitanism and civilisation. Secondly, discussing the terms of Habermas’s reconstruction of Critical Theory is crucial because it is to there - to the level of the basic ontological and methodological architecture of the communicative paradigm - that the sources of the current “crisis of critique” can be traced.

The core argument of this chapter, then, is that the framework of analysis and critique developed by Habermas presents a number of theoretical and political shortcomings that derive from its failure to fully overcome the impasse of the first generation and lie behind the current predicament of Frankfurt School theory in and outside of IR. In particular, I argue that Habermas’s theory of society as system and lifeworld and the reconstruction of CT on the basis of a methodological and ontological dualism have produced a disjoining of Critical Theory’s analytic and normative components, to the detriment of both. I show how, on the one hand, the Habermasian paradigm replicates the early Frankfurt School’s problematic theorisation of capitalism as a perfectly rationalised and technical system and devolves all political economic and social enquiry to functionalist, non-critical theory;

and, on the other hand, it confines critique to the interpretation of society's norms and values, to be carried out in the abstract terms of normative philosophy. I conclude by suggesting that these theoretical and political shortcomings that are inherent to the Habermasian framework are directly linked to the debilitation of the explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian faculties of contemporary CT I discussed in the first chapter. This hypothesis - according to which the crisis of contemporary Frankfurt School research in IR is linked to the intrinsic limitations of Habermas's communicative-democratic paradigm - I go on to "test" in the next two chapters on Habermas's and Linklater's theories of international politics and cosmopolitanism.

This chapter is organised into two sections. In the first, I present the meta-theoretical and philosophical parameters of the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique as well as explain the rationale behind Habermas's "reconstruction" of Critical Theory. In particular, I focus on Habermas's social-theoretical writings and the central role played by the theory of society as system and lifeworld in redefining the ontology and methodology of Frankfurt School research. In line with the alternative reading of the early Frankfurt School developed in the previous chapter, this section presents a perspective on Habermas's theory that is somewhat distinct from the one that is generally presented in IR. Rather than focusing on the normative and philosophical components of his work, I foreground the social- and meta-theoretical elements of his work as they were developed in the 1970s and codified in Habermas's magnum opus *The Theory of Communicative Action*. In the second section, I explore the main issues that arise from the Habermasian paradigm by restating a number of critiques made against it over the years by Marxist (Postone, 1993; Anderson, 1998; Bidet, 2008), feminist (Fraser, 1985; Landes, 1988; Hutchings, 2005) and critical political economy (Streeck, 2014a; 2015; 2016) scholars. In particular, I discuss the various ways in which the ontological and methodological dualism of system and lifeworld occasions a romanticised reading of the public sphere and civil society; a depoliticised account of capitalism and the state; and ultimately informs a weak critique of contemporary society.

The meta-theoretical foundations of Habermasian Critical Theory

The influence of the work of Jürgen Habermas on the development of Critical Theory in and outside of IR is hard to overstate. It is not unusual for him to be described as ‘far and away the most influential critical theorist as far as critical theory in international relations is concerned’ (Rengger, 2001: 96; see also Diez & Stefans, 2005: 127). In line with the conventional interpretation of the Frankfurt School outlined in the previous chapter, however, the prevailing reading of Habermas’s work has been defined by two questionable assumptions. Firstly, Habermas’s Critical Theory has generally been discussed in IR as entailing a clean break with and a dialectical overcoming of both first generation theory and Marxist thought as a whole (see Hoffman, 1987: 234; Booth, 2007: 270; Linklater, 2007b: 46). According to Brown (1994: 218), for instance, the ‘work of Habermas... is explicitly designed to recover [the first generation] project of liberation, albeit without the Marxism that the original Critical Theorists took to be at its heart’. As a consequence, critical scholars in IR have tended to focus on the elements of *discontinuity* between Habermas and the first generation while disregarding some of the important lines of continuity that exist between them. Moreover, they have often failed to acknowledge the complex ways in which Habermas’s new paradigm of critique was originally set up as a “reconstruction” of Historical Materialism, rather than a radical break with it. Secondly, as Alexander Anievas (2005: 135) has observed, the ‘majority of critical international theorists drawing from the Habermasian perspective have done so on purely philosophical grounds’. The reading of Habermas in IR, in other words, has generally privileged his normative and philosophical writings, focusing in particular on the viability of his influential theory of language as a normative foundation for a universalist emancipatory project (see Linklater, 1998: 120-123). In the process, the important social-theoretic elements of Habermas’s work and his theory of system and lifeworld in particular have been devoted little attention to and only rarely been the topic of discussion in IR (Weber, 2005: 195). As a consequence, many of the meta-theoretical principles

of critique as well as the substantive conception of capitalist society which underlie Habermas's philosophy of language remain to this day largely unacknowledged.³² In this section, I present an account of Habermasian theory which corrects these weaknesses by engaging in a detailed account of Habermas's reconstruction of Historical Materialism, investigating the exact terms of his break with the first generation and outlining the meta-and social-theoretical principles of his new paradigm of critique.

Habermas's reconstruction of Historical Materialism

The paradigm of critique that underlies contemporary Frankfurt School theorising, which I refer to as the "communicative-democratic" paradigm, was originally developed by Jürgen Habermas in a series of writings in the 1960s and 1970s, culminating in the two-volume, 1981 book *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Habermas's intent throughout this phase was to "rescue" Frankfurt School theory from the impasse reached by Adorno and Horkheimer by interrogating and reconstructing their 'hidden or tacit Marxist orthodoxy' (Habermas, 1973: 201; 1979). Habermas held that, by the 1960s, Critical Theory had been brought to a complete standstill that in turn represented the exhaustion of a particular version of Historical Materialism. In particular, Habermas (1982: 232) argued that the 'classical form of critical theory' had '[fallen] apart' because of its subscription to an *ontology of production* and a form of *totalising critique*. He argued that the early Frankfurt School had inherited from Marxism the untenable notion that the totality of historical development could be reduced to a singular logic of evolution, namely that of the expansion of 'technical and organisational knowledge, of instrumental and strategic action, in short, of productive forces' (Habermas, 1979: 98). Under different historical conditions and in other strands of Marxian thought, such as the mechanistic doctrines of 1920s Soviet Marxism, this economically reductionist

³² While since the 1990s a number of scholars have taken note of the omission of Habermas's social theory from IR discussions, interventions on the topic have to this day remained sporadic and isolated (see Weber, 2002, 2005; Diez & Stefans, 2005; Anievas, 2005, 2010).

reading of history had elicited an optimistic determinism asserting the necessary arrival of a socialist society. In Adorno and Horkheimer's post-War writings, however, it inspired the hellish vision of a "totally administered society" in which all individual autonomy would be lost and the entirety of social life subjected to bureaucratic planning (Habermas, 1982: 232). According to Habermas, it was ultimately this identification of societal development with the expansion of instrumental reason that had led the early Frankfurt School into a standstill. Adorno and Horkheimer, he commented, have 'surrendered themselves to an inhibited scepticism regarding reason' (Habermas, 2007: 111). Because they could no longer identify any positive ground on which the practice of critique could be predicated upon, the early Frankfurt School found itself in the self-contradictory situation of being unable to specify its own critical standpoint, and ultimately came to a complete standstill (Heller, 1982: 22; Dubiel, 1992: 6).

According to Habermas's diagnosis, Critical Theory could only be saved on the basis of a reconstruction of its theoretical and philosophical architecture. For him, the fatal flaw of the early Frankfurt School's conception of history was that it lacked a satisfactory account of the 'learning processes' that take place 'in the dimension of moral insight, practical knowledge, communicative action, and the consensual regulation of action conflicts' (Habermas, 1979: 97-98). Habermas argued that because they were still beholden to a Marxian model of base and superstructure, the first generation scholars tended to reduce cultural, political and normative developments to their determination by the material structure of society. For Habermas (Habermas, 1979: 117), this led the early Frankfurt scholars to overlook the fact that the 'normative structures' of society 'do not simply follow the path of development of reproductive processes and do not simply respond to the pattern of system problems, but... have instead an *internal history*'. In so doing, the first generation had disregarded the existence of a different sphere of rationality and social action - that of communicative interaction - that was not only *distinct* from the objectifying logic of technical reason, but also potentially *opposed* to it. Habermas believed that recognising the existence and autonomy of this other side of societal evolution that relates to humanity's moral and communicative capabilities made it

possible to avoid the immobilising conclusions of the first generation and restore the Frankfurt School project onto solid philosophical ground (Habermas, 1987: 397). Concretely, this meant for Habermas (1992: 443) that the Frankfurt School had to rectify the first generation's omission and develop a new paradigm of critique able to account both for the material-systemic and the normative-communicative patterns of societal development. The way he sought to achieve that was by substituting the first generation's unitary, totalised theory and critique of late capitalism with a *binary* ontology and methodology of society as system and lifeworld (*Ibidem*).

Habermas's theory of system and lifeworld

The theory of society as system and lifeworld is a fundamental component of Habermas's critical project and sets the social-theoretical and meta-theoretical parameters on which the entire communicative-democratic paradigm of critique is built upon. It and the prescriptions contained in it are also, as I will argue in the second half of this chapter, a root cause of the "crisis of critique" of contemporary CT. The categories of system and lifeworld are first introduced in 1973's *Legitimation Crisis*, a book which recapitulates the studies undertaken by Habermas as co-director of the Max Planck Institute, when he was directly engaged with questions of sociology and political economy (Habermas, 1991: 251).³³ The idea is then presented in its definitive form in the two volumes of the 1981 book *The Theory of Communicative Action* (TCA). From the 1980s onwards, Habermas dedicated himself increasingly to other aspects of his project, such as revising his ethics of discourse, exploring its significance for legal and constitutional studies, and engaging with questions of cosmopolitanism and international politics. During that time, he rarely returned to questions of social theory and never fundamentally altered the basic architecture he set out in TCA (Owen, 2002: 31; Edgar, 2005: 245-

³³ Of particular importance during these years is the collaboration with Claus Offe on the analysis of legitimation crisis and the debate with Niklas Luhmann on the role of functionalist theory (Habermas, 1991: 251, 293).

247).³⁴ In TCA, Habermas discusses the system - lifeworld distinction in two ways: firstly, in epistemological and methodological terms, namely as different perspectives from which society can be observed; secondly, in ontological terms, as different social spheres into which society is structured. In this section, I present both of these dimensions of the system - lifeworld model, as well as discuss their implications for the practice of critique in the Habermasian paradigm.

System and lifeworld as perspectives on society

At first, the distinction between system and lifeworld is introduced by Habermas in relation to two different perspectives on society, each of which returns a different view of the object under examination.³⁵ On the one hand, Habermas (1987: 117-119) argues that from the perspective of the participants to a social group, society appears as a *lifeworld*. The lifeworld is the ensemble of the cultural resources, values and traditions that the members of a community rely on in their everyday interactions and the 'horizon within which communicative actions are "always already" moving' (*Ibidem*, 119). A perspective on society as lifeworld, in other words, reveals the shared meanings and codes of interpretation that participants in dialogue access in order to make each other's utterances intelligible and the symbolic context within their interaction takes place (*Ibidem*). On the other hand, Habermas states that from the standpoint of an external observer, society appears as an impersonal and objective *system*. That is, as a complex and self-maintaining

³⁴ In 'Between Norms and Facts', published in 1992, Habermas does go back to discussing the system and lifeworld model. In that book, he expands on the role of legality in operating as a 'transmission belt' between system and lifeworld. However, the social-theoretic discussion is not central but peripheral and only introduces limited corrections to the basic architecture set out in TCA. The following discussion will therefore be based chiefly on the argument presented in TCA, while referencing any subsequent modifications where appropriate. In that sense, the clear trajectory of Habermas's work away from social theory and towards a greater engagement with normative and legal theory should not be read as a demonstration to the former's irrelevance. I will show in this section that the theory of system and lifeworld provides the analytical and diagnostic framework on which the entirety of his CT rests.

³⁵ Here Habermas is expanding on an epistemological position he had first developed in *Knowledge and Human Interests* (Habermas, 1971): namely, that various forms of knowledge about the world correspond and are valid in relation to different cognitive interests and perspectives on society. Whereas in *Knowledge and Human Interests* Habermas had identified three different forms of knowledge-production (the empirical-

machinery within which different parts fulfil particular functions and interact with each other in controlled and coordinated ways. A system perspective, then, views society as a set of autonomous social spheres - the political, the economic, the socio-cultural - each of which operates according to a specific logic of operation and is responsible for a particular aspect of the reproduction of society (*Ibidem*, 116-117). To each of these perspectives, according to Habermas, corresponds a different form of sociological enquiry. On the one hand, the lifeworld perspective aligns with the hermeneutic tradition of Husserl and Gadamer, the aim of which is to study the symbolic and normative structure of society as it is constituted intersubjectively through linguistic interaction (*Ibidem*, 204-206). Studying society as a lifeworld is therefore to interpret its meaning patterns, shared understandings and norms. In other words, it consists in deciphering the “text” which makes up its symbolic structure. The system perspective, on the other hand, coincides for Habermas with functionalist sociology and the systems-theoretical approach of Talcot Parsons and Niklas Luhmann in particular. Systems-theory is a form of social theory that draws inspiration from cybernetics and biology to conceptualise society as a set of boundary-maintaining and functionally differentiated subsystems (Habermas, 1987: 185-186; 1991: 255). A subsystem is understood as a distinct domain of society within which social interactions are “steered” or mediated by a particular “medium” or mechanism. Hence, the sphere of the economy - with all the individual behaviours and interactions that fall under it - is understood as a subsystem that is steered through the medium of money; the domain of the state is seen as a subsystem steered through the medium of power; and civil society is read as a subsystem steered through the medium of language. Each subsystem performs a certain function in the overall life of the social organism and interacts with the other parts through the exchange of inputs and outputs. Thus, for instance, the economic subsystem performs through the institution of the market the function of organising the production and distribution of commodities, while the political subsystem *via* the institution of the state ‘specialises in attaining collective goals’ through binding, administrative decisions (Habermas, 1987: 171). The study of

analytic, historical-hermeneutic and emancipatory), however, in TCA he narrows it down to two.

society as a system therefore consists in the specification of the internal logic of operation of each subsystem, as well as the analysis of the complex web of exchanges and possible imbalances between them.

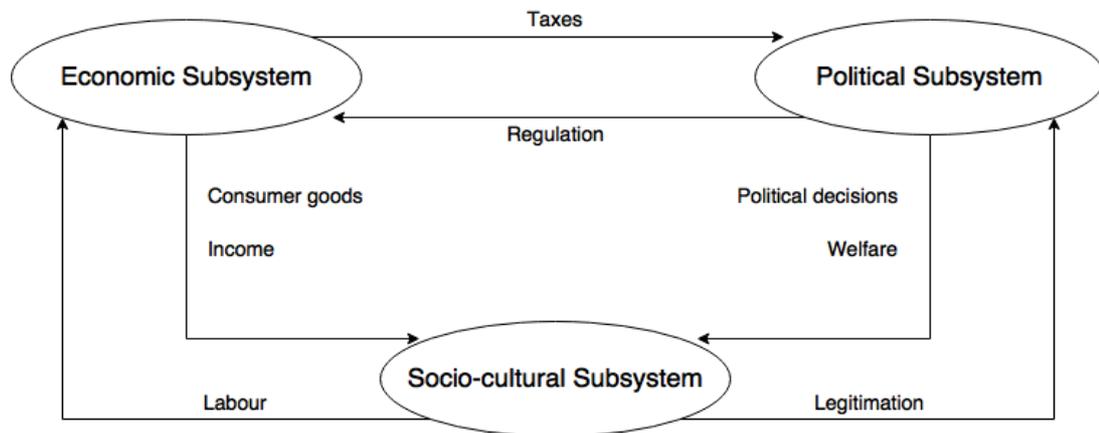


Table 1. The systems-theoretical model of society as presented by Habermas (1975) in *Legitimation Crisis*.

According to Habermas, the hermeneutic and the functionalist perspectives on society each offer important insights regarding the character and functioning of the modern world. Each, however, provides only a partial view of reality (Habermas, 1987: 153). On the one hand, Habermas notes that the lifeworld perspective and hermeneutical sociology are restricted to the study of the *symbolic* reproduction of society. That is, to the interpretation of the shared meanings, values and norms that pertain to a particular social group. Because of its unique focus on intersubjective, linguistic interactions, the lifeworld perspective is limited in its ability to grasp the overall structural workings of society and to comprehend those social domains that are integrated by other, non-communicative means, such as the economy and the state (Habermas, 1975: 4-5). In other words, the study of society as lifeworld is incapable of accounting for the *material* reproduction of society, namely the relations of power and production through which it is organised (*Ibidem*). Inversely, the system perspective of functionalist theory is incomplete for Habermas in that it reduces the lifeworld to the rank of one subsystem among many others, thereby neglecting its unique features. This means, firstly, that the study of society as a

system reduces the entire symbolic and normative universe of a community to the socio-cultural function of providing motivations for action and legitimacy to the other subsystems (Habermas, 1987: 139). As a consequence of its mechanistic view of society, systems-theory is incapable of providing a full account of the disparate meanings, narrations, values and ideas through which the participants of a social group make sense of their social and physical surroundings. In other words, the system perspective lacks a proper account of the *symbolic* reproduction of society (*Ibidem*). Secondly, the restriction of the lifeworld to the role of a “social-cultural” subsystem means for Habermas that the system perspective misses the distinctive character of communication as a medium of social integration, namely its emancipatory quality as a form of interaction aimed at universal rational agreement (*Ibidem*, 186). Communication is for Habermas a medium of social integration that is quite unlike money and power, because its content is not instrumental, norm-free rationality but the achievement of mutual understanding through consensus. Because ‘systems theory treats the accomplishments of [communicative] and system integration as functionally equivalent’, it ‘deprives itself of the [normative] standard of communicative rationality’ and thus renounces the possibility of articulating a critical-emancipatory, rather than purely positivist, analysis of society (*Ibidem*: 186). To summarise, then, Habermas maintains that both the lifeworld-perspective of hermeneutics and the system-perspective of functionalist sociology provide important insights for the understanding of modern society. At the same time they are, when taken in isolation, insufficient as a basis for a critical social theory. In his own words, ‘if we comprehend a social system as a lifeworld, then the steering aspect is screened out. If we understand a society as a system, then the fact that social reality consists in the facticity of recognised, often counterfactual, validity claims is not taken into consideration’ (Habermas, 1975: 5)³⁶. Habermas’s conclusion is that critical social theory should incorporate *both* perspectives and

³⁶ In TCA, Habermas (1987: 153) explains further that ‘from the participant perspective of members of a lifeworld it looks as if sociology with a systems-theoretical orientation considers only one of the three components of the lifeworld, namely, the institutional system, for which culture and personality merely constitute complementary environments. From the perspective of systems theory, on the other hand, it looks as if lifeworld analysis confines itself to one societal subsystem specialized in maintaining structural patterns; in this view, the components of the lifeworld are merely internal differentiations of this subsystem which specifies the parameters of societal self-maintenance’ (Habermas, 1987: 153).

both methodologies at the same time, so as to supplement the weakness of each approach with the strength of the other. Where a lifeworld perspective is unable to fully comprehend those social domains - such as the market economy and the state - that are integrated through non-communicative forms of interaction, a system analysis provides a rigorous diagnosis of their inner logic; and inversely, where systems-theory's objectivating gaze neglects the primacy and distinctiveness of communicative interaction, the lifeworld standpoint reasserts the promise for universal rational consensus inherent to language and on that basis restores the possibility for a normative, rather than purely functionalist, study of society.

System and lifeworld as distinct realms of society

To this first, *methodological* binary Habermas (1991: 255) then adds a second and *ontological* one: system and lifeworld, 'which are initially introduced merely as different perspectives adopted in observing the same phenomena, also acquire essentialist connotations for modern societies and open up a view of differently structured domains of social reality itself'. According to Habermas, the fact that two different epistemologies and methodologies are necessary to capture the entirety of social reality is mandated by the evolution of society itself and specifically by its differentiation into two distinct planes which possess different ontological properties and are integrated on different bases (Habermas, 1987: 138). The dualism of system and lifeworld therefore reflects for Habermas the real division of the modern world into two separate realms which oversee the material and symbolic reproduction of social life respectively. On the one hand, the lifeworld represents for Habermas an intersubjective space within which the members of a community continuously renegotiate the meanings and values of their social group through communicative interaction. The lifeworld, moreover, is ordered by *communicative reason*, namely by a form of rationality that is oriented towards the achievement of mutual understanding and universal consensus. In its modern form, this realm coincides for Habermas with the institutions of civil society, such as the family, voluntary associations and the media, as well as the liberal public sphere

(Habermas, 1987: 310). More broadly, the lifeworld contains all those ideational, normative and cultural resources as well as the secular or religious worldviews through which individuals make sense of their social and physical environment. On the other hand, Habermas claims that over the course of societal evolution the functions of material reproduction have ‘detached [themselves] from normative contexts’ and ‘congeal[ed] into the “second nature” of a norm-free sociality that can appear as something in the objective world, as an *objectified* context of life’ (*Ibidem*: 173 [emphasis in the original]).³⁷ The system, in other words, materialises for Habermas as a social domain that ‘bursts out of the horizon of the lifeworld’ and ‘escapes from the intuitive knowledge of everyday communicative practice’ (*Ibidem*). Concretely, the system encompasses those practices and areas of social life that do not rely on communicative interaction and are instead integrated through the non-linguistic media of money and power. As such, the system operates on the basis of instrumental reason - a form of “means-ends” rationality aimed at the attainment of defined goals by efficient means.³⁸ In modern society, the system coincides with the spheres of the market economy and the bureaucratic state, both of which assume the ontological form of objective, technical subsystems which function autonomously from the normative structure of the lifeworld.

| | System | Lifeworld |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Ontology | Objective | Intersubjective |
| Institutions | Market economy; administrative state | Civil society; family; public sphere |
| Medium of integration | Money; Power | Language |
| Form of rationality | Instrumental (value-free) | Communicative (normative) |
| Role | Material reproduction | Symbolic reproduction |

Table 2. A summary of Habermas dual ontology of society as set out in *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1987).

³⁷ The term “objective” means in this instance that, in contrast to the lifeworld’s intersubjective ontology, the system operates and exists *independently* from the way in which it is interpreted by the members of society.

³⁸ Analogous to the early Frankfurt School, Habermas relies on Max Weber’s definition of instrumental reason.

On the basis of this binary ontology and methodology of society, Habermas set out to reconstruct the critique of late capitalism articulated by the first generation Frankfurt School.

Habermas's theory of capitalism and historical development

According to Habermas, the model of system and lifeworld outlined above provides a new conceptual framework by means of which Critical Theory could escape the deadlock of the early Frankfurt School. I have shown in the previous chapter that at the heart of the first generation's work lay the critique of late capitalist society as a totally administered system. Following a Weberian understanding of rationalisation, the first generation scholars had argued that capitalist modernisation had entailed the total subjection of social life to the logic of instrumental reason. This they denounced as engendering a new form of generalised, total domination under which the individual and all aspects of society were made into objects of technical and bureaucratic calculation. For Habermas, the early Frankfurt School's analysis contained an important critical sting in its denunciation of bureaucratic-administrative domination and the effects of instrumental reason. By identifying the historical process and the project of the Enlightenment *exclusively* with the advance of instrumental reason and productive forces, however, the first generation had ignored the emancipatory potential of communicative action and thus denied itself an affirmative normative grounding. Habermas believed that by reformulating the early Frankfurt School's critique of total administration in the binary terms of instrumental (system-) and communicative (lifeworld-) rationality, he could retain the critical core of the first generation's analysis while avoiding its immobilising conclusions. Concretely, he sought to do this by reconstructing the first generation's theory of historical development in terms of the parallel development of system and lifeworld and the "colonisation" of the latter by the former.

Habermas's theory of historical development consists of two theses. The first thesis is that social evolution - which Adorno and Horkheimer had understood as a monological process driven by the advance of instrumental reason - should be reframed as a 'second-order process of differentiation' whereby system and lifeworld become increasingly rationalised in their own right. In other words, according to Habermas, the development of society follows not one but *two* logics of evolution, corresponding to the development of the system as well as the lifeworld (*Ibidem*, 153-154). On the one hand, in its systemic dimension, society follows for Habermas the developmental path described by Max Weber's account of modernisation and Marx's notion of productive forces. That is, society evolves through a succession of ever more advanced modes of production and forms of political regulation. The system, then, is defined much in the same way as Adorno and Horkheimer had argued by the progressive assertion of instrumental reason. Its direction of development is given by the growth of its internal complexity, namely by the increasing differentiation of its various factions and the sophistication of its processes (*Ibidem*).³⁹ On the other hand, society also evolves for Habermas on a normative dimension, namely that of the lifeworld. Unlike the system, the lifeworld is rationalised according to the logic not of instrumental but of communicative reason. In Habermas's (1987: 155) words, the evolution of the lifeworld 'can be understood in terms of successive releases of the potential for rationality in communicative action'. The second path of societal development is therefore given by the attainment of higher levels of moral consciousness and the maturation of the collective capacity for critical and universal thinking. Concretely, this manifests in the 'development of morality and law', namely in the institutionalisation of rational procedures for the 'consensual regulation of conflicts' (*Ibidem*: 173). Borrowing from the cognitive developmental psychology of Lawrence Kohlberg and Jean Piaget, Habermas conceptualises the evolution of the lifeworld as a process of 'moral-practical learning' as part of which the collective 'moral consciousness' of a community advances through three formative stages: 'the pre-conventional level, on

³⁹ An example of an increase in systemic complexity is, for Habermas, the increasing division of labour and class stratification in tribal and traditional societies. Another example is the differentiation between the state and the economy which marks the transition between feudalism and capitalism (Habermas, 1987: 165-168).

which only the consequences of actions are judged, the conventional level, on which the orientation to norms and the intentional violation of them are already judged, and finally the postconventional level, on which norms themselves are judged in the light of principles' (*Ibidem*: 174). According to Habermas (2012a: 113), it is the 'periodic interplay' between the developmental logics of system and lifeworld, rather than just the development of productive forces, that constitutes the *movement* of historical change. 'European history', he comments, has 'since the Middle Ages... been marked by the specific process of mutual encounter between these two forms of integration, with a characteristic result of opening- and closure-effects' (Habermas, 2001: 82).⁴⁰ What Habermas means by this is that the evolution of society follows a distinctive "rhythm" defined by a particular kind of double movement: at every stage of evolution, the heightening of social complexity at the level of material reproduction creates new 'system problems' which 'overload the adaptive capacity of a society' and thus threaten its identity and stability (Habermas, 1979: 122, 1987: 168).⁴¹ Thus, for example, the expansion of market exchange in the 17th century "explodes" and disorganises the feudal social order, creating the conditions for an evolutionary advance. This 'functionally driven opening' of society is then followed 'in each case by a socially integrative closure at a higher level', namely by the reorganisation of the lifeworld on more advanced moral, legal and cultural grounds (Habermas, 2012a: 113). 'Lifeworlds that have disintegrated under the pressure of opening', he comments, 'have to close themselves anew - now, of course, with *expanded* horizons' (Habermas, 2001: 83). For Habermas, the overall *content* of historical development is therefore given by the matching of the system problems generated at any given stage of evolution by the achievement of higher levels of rationality and universality in the lifeworld (Habermas, 1987: 174).⁴²

⁴⁰ The Eurocentric character of Habermas's historical discussion is an element I will return to in the next section.

⁴¹ Habermas discusses this process by explicit reference to Karl Polanyi's notion of "double movement" (see Habermas, 2001: 85-86, Jeffries, 2010).

⁴² Habermas integrates this theory of historical development with a simplified, speculative model of societal evolution through a series of ideal-typical stages. In its first, "archaic" form, human societies appear as a pure lifeworlds wherein social action is coordinated entirely through communicative interaction (*Ibidem*, 158). At this initial level, Habermas (1987: 155) comments, 'system integration and social integration are still tightly interwoven', meaning that the material and symbolic reproduction of society is secured by the same familial unit. As society becomes more differentiated and enters the tribal and then agricultural stage,

The second thesis of Habermas's theory of history applies the dualistic model of societal development to capitalist modernity and thereby seeks to escape the cul-de-sac of the first generation's critique of late capitalism as total administration. He does so by presenting a reformulated version of Weber's paradox of modernisation, constituted this time by the conflict between the rationalisation of the lifeworld and its colonisation by the system (Habermas, 1987: 186; Allen, 2016: 60). According to Habermas (1987: 186), the "double movement" of historical evolution described above reaches with the rise of capitalism a 'paradoxical' state. That is because not only have the market economy and the state become completely disconnected from the normative structures of the lifeworld and become 'self-sufficient'; more than that, the 'independent imperatives' which they embody now 'turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself' (*Ibidem*: 283). The paradox of modernity thus resides in the fact that the 'rationalisation of the lifeworld' - which reaches under capitalism its most advanced level in terms of moral maturity and the institutionalisation of democratic procedures - 'makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively upon the lifeworld itself' (Habermas, 1987: 186). 'Capitalist modernisation', he goes on to explain, 'follows a pattern such that cognitive-instrumental rationality surges beyond the bounds of the economy and state into other, communicatively structured areas of life and achieves dominance there at the expense of moral-practical and aesthetic-practical rationality' (*Ibidem*: 304). Concretely, this pattern means for Habermas that civil

however, the lifeworld's capacity to coordinate action through communication becomes increasingly overburdened. The need therefore arises for more efficient and standardised means of social regulation. It is in this context that non-communicative steering media such as money and power emerge and become institutionalised across society. As the organisation of society's material reproduction is increasingly switched over from linguistic to non-linguistic media of interaction, systemic integration starts to differentiate itself from the social integration of the lifeworld. On the one hand, society continues to grow in complexity and experiences the succession of ever more sophisticated modes of production and administration. On the other hand, the normative structure of the lifeworld is also evolving, leading to important advances in the institutionalisation of law and morality. It is at this point that the subsystems of the economy and the state begin to take on an objective, systemic life of their own as 'a block of more or less norm-free sociality' (*Ibidem*, 171). At the stage of traditional, pre-capitalist societies, the media of power and money have not yet separated into distinct subsystems, both being fused in the form of the feudal state. At the same time, the system has not yet completely detached from the lifeworld and is still "anchored" in religion and traditional worldviews (*Ibidem*, 188). The process of differentiation comes to a head as humanity enters the modern era. At the capitalist stage of development, the process of differentiation is completed and the 'system definitively bursts out of the horizon of the lifeworld' and 'escapes from the intuitive knowledge of everyday communicative practice' (*Ibidem*, 173). In other words, the system as the domain of instantiation of instrumental reason becomes uncoupled from communicative interaction. System and lifeworld now

society domains and areas of public and private life such as health care, the family, culture or education are increasingly subtracted from communicative deliberation and either bureaucratized or subjected to market mechanisms. Because money and power lack the socially integrative and normative power of language, however, the ‘*mediatisation* of the lifeworld by system imperatives’ assumes for Habermas (1987: 306) ‘the sociopathological form of an *internal colonisation*’. The colonisation of the lifeworld - which is manifested in the privatisation of public domains and the commodification of art and culture - in turn produces ‘disturbances in the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld’ in the form of “subjectively” experienced, identity-threatening crises or pathologies’ (*Ibidem*).⁴³

For Habermas, the thesis of the colonisation of the lifeworld makes it possible to preserve the early Frankfurt School’s denunciation of bureaucratic domination while maintaining the possibility of emancipatory action. On the one hand, the first generation’s critique of the determination of culture and individuality by the logic of economic exchange and instrumental reason is reformulated and thus preserved as the incursion of system imperatives into the communicative domain of the lifeworld. On the other hand, this process of colonisation is now understood as pushing against a lifeworld realm which possesses its own internal structure and has the capacity to fight back. Because Horkheimer and Adorno ‘failed to recognise the communicative rationality of the lifeworld’, Habermas (*Ibidem*: 333) argues, ‘they could locate the spontaneity that was not yet in the grips of the reifying force of systemic rationalisation only in irrational powers’, such as the ‘mimetic power of art and love’. By acknowledging the autonomy and emancipatory quality of communicative rationality, however, Critical Theory could give ‘an inner logic... to resistance against the colonisation of the lifeworld by the inner dynamics of autonomous systems’ (*Ibidem*).⁴⁴ The theory of modern society is therefore

make their historical appearance as ontologically distinct spheres of social life and take on the definitive form I outlined above.

⁴³ Elsewhere, Habermas (1982: 280) defines the pathological consequences of the colonisation of the lifeworld as the ‘phenomena of loss of meaning, anomie and personality disorders’.

⁴⁴ As Axel Honneth (1995: 90) explains, the difference with the first generation’s critique is that ‘it is not now the existence of purposive-rational organizational forms as such in social life that appears as a crisis-ridden tendency of the present, but just their incursion into that

reconfigured as a tale of two opposite forms of rationality that become institutionalised into fundamentally antithetical social structures: 'between capitalism and democracy', Habermas (*Ibidem*: 345) comments, 'there is an *indissoluble tension*; in them two opposed principles of societal integration compete for primacy'. This tension, according to Habermas, cannot entirely be resolved in either direction. On the one hand, the colonisation of the lifeworld can never be complete, since systemic steering cannot entirely replace the symbolic and socially integrative function of communicative interaction. On the other hand, however, Habermas (1982: 223) also contends that the idea of redressing the uncoupling of the system by bringing the spheres of the economic and the political under democratic control should also be abandoned as potentially 'catastrophic'.⁴⁵ This carries important consequences with regards to the scope of Critical Theory's emancipatory-utopian project. For Habermas (1982: 372), democratic steering 'must... leave intact the modes of operation internal to functional systems and other highly organized spheres of action. As a result, democratic movements emerging from civil society must give up holistic aspirations to a self-organizing society, aspirations that also undergirded Marxist ideas of social revolution' (*Ibidem*: 372). Instead, he argues:

radical democratisation now aims for a shifting of forces within a "separation of powers" that itself is to be maintained in principle.... The goal is no longer to supersede an economic system having a capitalist life of its own and a system of domination having a bureaucratic life of its own but to erect a democratic dam against the colonialising *encroachment* of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld.... A radical-democratic change... aims at a new balance between the forces of societal integration so that the social-integrative power of solidarity - the "communicative force of production" - can prevail over the power of the other two control resources,

inner domain of society that is constitutively dependent on processes of communicative understanding' (Honneth, 1995: 90).

⁴⁵ Habermas explains the impossibility of a fully democratic society in the following terms: 'If deliberative politics is supposed to be inflated into a structure shaping the totality of society, then the discursive mode of sociation expected in the legal system would have to expand into a self-organization of society and penetrate the latter's complexity as a whole. This is impossible, for the simple reason that democratic procedure must be embedded in contexts it cannot itself regulate' (Habermas, 1996: 305). Habermas also contends that the recouping

i.e., money and administrative power, and therewith successfully assert the practically oriented demands of the lifeworld (Habermas, 1992: 444 [emphasis in the original]).

Protecting the autonomy of the lifeworld as the real domain of instantiation of the emancipatory power of communication becomes as a consequence the core political imperative of Habermas's critical social theory. The Habermasian paradigm of critique is thus configured on the basis of an altogether more restricted political imaginary than that of classical CT (Raulet, 2008: 160). Its emancipatory horizon no longer extends to the total critique of society, but is rather centred on bolstering the institutional and legal frameworks, such as the modern constitution and the liberal public sphere, through which capitalism's 'destructive side effects' can be controlled and the lifeworld's demands voiced (Habermas, 1987: 321).

Critique: the antinomies of Habermasian theory

Despite being often neglected in discussions around the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique, the theory of society as system and lifeworld represents the social-theoretical and meta-theoretical "anchor" by which Habermas's philosophy of language is linked to real social dynamics and concretised into a substantive political and theoretical programme of research (Anievas, 2005: 135). As I have discussed in the last section, the model of system and lifeworld as the methodology and ontology of modernity constitutes for Habermas a way out of the impasse of the early Frankfurt School and a foundation on which Critical Theory can be reconstructed as a viable emancipatory project. Contrary to that aspiration, however, I argue in this section that Habermas's reconstruction of CT on the basis of the theory of system and lifeworld is only partially successful in overcoming the standstill of the first generation and in fact reproduces and formalises many of their most problematic assumptions. Concretely, then, I contend that the dual ontology and methodology of society proposed by Habermas represents the theoretical locus

of system and lifeworld runs counter to the direction of historical evolution, which he had

where the most significant deficiencies and weaknesses of his reconstructed CT emerge. These shortcomings, which relate both to CT's explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian dimensions, are directly related to the widespread "crisis of critique" of contemporary Frankfurt School scholarship I described in the first chapter.

Problems of analysis

I contend that the theory of modern society as system and lifeworld is limited in two main ways: firstly, it advances an essentialist conception of capitalism and civil society; secondly, it relies on a teleological theory of historical development.

The first problem concerns the theorisation of system and lifeworld as ontologically separate realms, the former possessing objective-material properties and the latter intersubjective-normative ones. This element is crucial to the Habermasian project in that it makes it possible for him to identify in the lifeworld a space within existing society that is *already* integrated through democratic deliberation and therefore embodies an unambiguous interest in emancipation. In turn, this allows Habermasian CT, as Honneth (2007: 66) explains, to 'give the standard of critique an objective foothold in pre-theoretical praxis', that is, to ground itself normatively in the aspiration for universal rational consensus that is contained in everyday lifeworld interactions. Ultimately, however, the ontological bisection of reality binds Habermas's entire paradigm to an impoverished and heavily reductionist model of social life. As the Marxist author Moishe Postone (1993: 253) has noted, 'inasmuch as Habermas grounds the systemic and lifeworld dimensions of modern society in two very different ontological principles, it is difficult to see how his theory can explain interrelated historical developments in economy, politics, culture, science, and the structure of everyday social life'. In particular, the model of system and lifeworld leaves Critical Theory with, on the one hand, a reified and *depoliticised*

defined as one of increasing differentiation.

account of capitalism and the state; on the other, a *romanticised* understanding of the liberal public sphere and civil society institutions.

With regards to the former point, the conceptualisation of the system as a technical, norm-free domain reproduces many of the weaknesses I discussed in the previous chapter as affecting the first generation's social-theoretical analysis. Reduced to the form of autonomous and objective subsystems, the realms of the economic and the political are now defined solely by two things: their systemic function in the organisation of society's material reproduction; and their integration through the steering media of money and power respectively. The effect is that the Habermasian paradigm is locked into a very minimal and crude conception of the market and the state, one which is, firstly, incapable of grasping more determinate features of capitalism as a social formation, or differentiating between different varieties of capitalism (Postone, 1993: 251-252); and secondly, takes at face value the separation of the political and economic realms and thus re-naturalises capitalism as a neutral and necessary social order (Callinicos, 2006: 34; Bidet, 2008: 690-692; Kim, 2014: 378). As Wolfgang Streeck (2015: 10) observes, this signifies a major *regression* for Critical Theory, such that:

the fundamental insight of political economy is forgotten: that the natural laws of the economy, which appear to exist by virtue of their own efficiency, are in reality nothing but projections of social-power relations which present themselves ideologically as technical necessities. The consequence is that it ceases to be understood as a capitalist economy and becomes "the economy", pure and simple (Streeck, 2015: 10).

Similar to Pollock's formulation discussed in the previous chapter, then, the static modelling of "state" and "market" as externally related entities defined by their own systemic logic makes Habermas's theory unable to comprehend their mutual historical constitution and implication in the wider web of social relations of property, production and reproduction. The result is that capitalism loses all distinctiveness as a social formation *in motion* and is reduced to its own self-understanding as a neutral mechanism of market exchange. As was the case with the first generation's

theory of state capitalism, then, Habermas's conception of the market and the state as autonomous technical mechanisms produces a static model which screens out both structural and agential dynamics: with regards to the former, the rendition of "the political" and "the economic" as externally related spheres obfuscates their dialectical constitution within the historical structure of capitalism. Because of this, it blocks off the possibility of talking about the contradictions, tensions and tendencies that characterise capitalism *as a whole*, as a historically developing set of relations organising the production and reproduction of society (Bidet, 2008: 692). What is more, the depiction of the state and the market as technical subsystem makes invisible the various and intersecting antagonisms and power relations that structure capitalist society at any given time. When Habermas does refer to the hierarchical character of traditional society, or to the class distinctions of capitalist society, it is merely as indicators of the level of complexity achieved by the system at a given stage, but never as causally-effective and structure-forming relations themselves. Because, as Nancy Fraser notes, Habermas 'restrict[s] the use of the term "power" to bureaucratic contexts' alone, his social theory lacks the very conceptual vocabulary through which to analyse the gendered, class and racial structures that constitute contemporary society (Fraser, 1985: 109; see also Jörke, 2010: 443). As to the latter point, the theory of capitalism *qua* system depicts individual and collective actors as passive carriers of the anonymous functional logics under which they operate. As such, it conceals the active strategic agency of institutional bodies, state apparatuses as well as broader social forces that is involved in maintaining and reproducing a particular social formation, as well as erasing the experiences of resistance and opposition that take place in the economic and political domains (Streeck, 2014a: 13/18). The few occasions in which Habermas does talk about the agency of specific social groups, it is therefore as symptomatic expressions of the various social pathologies produced by the colonising influence of the system upon the lifeworld, such as the 'aimless, self-destructive revolts' produced by a rabble 'underclass' (Habermas, 1998: 123; Kim, 2014: 372).⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The essentialism that characterises Habermas's conception of capitalism emerges most clearly in his theorisation of crisis. Since state and economy are stripped in his model of any historical dynamic or contradiction and recast as coherent, self-maintaining units (Habermas,

Conversely, casting the lifeworld as a purely symbolic and normative space produces a sanitised view of the civil society and the public sphere. The point has been articulated most clearly by feminist scholars such as Nancy Fraser (1985, 1989), Tony Couture (1995), Marie Fleming (1997) and Joan Landes (1988, 1995). Fraser (1985: 106, 111) in particular has shown how separating material from symbolic reproduction, 'assigning structural properties to one set of institutions (the official economy and the state) and interpretive ones to another set (the family and the "public sphere")', risks reproducing an 'androcentric and ideological' conception of civil society. Fraser (1985: 107) used the example of childrearing to illustrate how understanding the private sphere as a purely symbolic domain conceals the fact that the household is at the same time a 'site of labour, exchange, calculation, distribution and exploitation'. By regarding 'the family solely as an institution of the lifeworld', McNay (2003: 17) added, Habermas misses the fact 'that the family perpetuates systemic relations of oppression as much as it reproduces values and cultural norms'. In a similar way, the historians Joan Landes (1988: 7) and Geoff Eley (1992: 306) showed that portraying civil society as a realm that is ordered purely by rational deliberation, democracy and solidarity 'misses the extent to which the public sphere was always constituted by conflict' and by a set of class, racial and gendered exclusions.⁴⁷ This is emblematic of a broader failure of Habermas's framework to account for the fact that power, oppression and social antagonism have always been *constitutive* elements of civil society, rather than external intrusions upon an otherwise pure and unblemished space (Eley, 1990; Wood, 1990: 74).

1987: 155), any diagnosis must fall back on the two explanatory variables that remain: on the one hand, the possibility of deficiencies emerging in the exchange of inputs and outputs between the subsystems (in the form, for instance, of democratic deficits); on the other, the occurrence of boundary conflicts between them (as in the case of the colonisation thesis). Such a minimal schema possesses only limited explanatory power and compels Habermas to reduce complex and multifaceted political economic dynamics to a simplified diagnostic matrix (Habermas, 1992: 470). Developments ranging from the crisis of the welfare state in the 1970s and 1980s (Habermas, 1998: 117) to the European debt crisis of 2010-2011 (Habermas, 2012: 5) are therefore all explained by recourse to the same explanatory device: namely, to the emergence of an 'imbalance between the imperatives of the markets and the regulatory power of politics' (Habermas, 2012: 5).

⁴⁷ In Joan Landes' (1988: 7) words, 'the bourgeois public sphere is essentially, not contingently, masculinist'.

Ultimately, all of this means that with the theory of system and lifeworld the monological and productivist reductionism that Habermas imputed to the early Frankfurt School is replaced by a *dual* reductionism that retains many of the same basic analytical weaknesses (Postone, 1993: 253). On the one hand, Habermas does not challenge but *incorporates* Pollock and Horkheimer's static modelling of the capitalist political-economy as a fully rationalised and impersonal "techno-structure", only now recasting it in the more sophisticated vocabulary of systems-theory. On the other hand, he creates in the lifeworld an optimistic counter-image to the system that is however no less essentialist in nature. The result is that Habermas brings to completion a trend that had already defined the first generation's late works: namely, the tendency to replace the study of determinate social relations with an essentialist account of rationalisation processes. In the process, as Jacques Bidet (2008: 687) observed, all 'social antagonisms [are] retranslated into the cleavage between two modes of integration' and the Frankfurt School's critical social theory is increasingly debased into the socially disembodied analysis of deterministic logics of development.

The second core issue with Habermas's two-level model of society has to do precisely with the deterministic and teleological theory of social progress that underlies it. Habermas's social theory relies heavily on the identification of fixed 'developmental logics' which guide both system and lifeworld and define, via their interaction, the evolutionary stages through which human society goes (Owen, 2002: 64-65; Habermas, 1979: 144). Ultimately, this amounts to a revised and more sophisticated version of modernisation theory (Weber, 2005: 207; Bidet, 2008: 685), which nonetheless reproduces its basic flaws. Most significantly, Habermas restores to the heart of Critical Theory a teleology of historical progress that is not unlike the orthodox Marxist one he sought to distance himself from in the first place. As noted by Habermas (1987: 167) himself, the theory of societal development as system and lifeworld represents 'a parallel to the Marxist notions of base and superstructure', the only difference being that the order of dependency is now reversed. Where orthodox Marxism located in the productive forces and the economic base the motor of the historical process, Habermas now sees the

'development of... normative structures' and the rationalisation of 'law and morality' as playing the role of 'pacemaker of social evolution' (Habermas, 1979: 129; 1987: 155).⁴⁸ What is most pernicious here for the purposes of critical analysis is the notion that human history can be construed as an inherently ordinal and progressive development - one which can be reconstructed *retrospectively* as a process of moral-practical learning leading up to European modernity; and *prospectively* as the advancing fulfilment of the promise of universal rational agreement. The problem with this, is on the one hand, that it tends to support a triumphalist reading of history - and, specifically, European history - that celebrates its achievements while removing its ambivalences and horrors (Owen, 2002: 179; Fine & Smith, 2003: 484; Allen, 2014: 12). On the other hand, it sustains the view that the future course of history can be *speculatively predicted* by the means of normative theory and ideal philosophy (Streeck, 2016: 11). As I will demonstrate in the next two chapters with regards to Critical Theory's engagements with international politics, the idea of moral-rational progress is raised to the level of an absolute, meta-normative principle that *overrules* the need for substantive critical analysis (Allen, 2016, 38-39). As observed by Nikolas Kompridis, the end-result is that the progressive teleology of history which forms the normative bedrock of the Habermasian paradigm of critique becomes 'an impermeable "rocking hull" that cannot be penetrated by history, by contingency, by experience - capable of intervening in history without being deformed by it' (Kompridis, 2006: 257).

Problems of critique

These analytical shortcomings of Habermas's social theory, crucially, are not merely issues of abstract meta-theoretical concern, but translate directly into a self-

⁴⁸ In so doing, Habermas's theory of history effectively generalises a particular interpretive model of the evolution of Western societies into a universally valid philosophy of history (Gunaratne, 2006: 113-115). As Kimberly Hutchings notes, this signifies a 'return to an assimilative universalism in which the plurality of women's [and non-Western] identities and experiences' are either 'subsumed under a Western liberal model of what it means to be a human being' or delegitimised as unreasonable (Hutchings, 2005: 162; see also Kohn, 2000: 419). What is thereby asserted, without any empirical study to support it, is a Eurocentric conception of historical development which designates any alternative social

debilitating form of critique. The main issue is that the dual ontology and methodology of society as system and lifeworld occasions a veritable division of Critical Theory into two separate halves: one functionalist and analytical, the other interpretive and normative. This generates a paradoxical situation in which, as Jonathan Joseph (2002) observes, 'the more emphasis that hermeneutics places on the conceptual and intersubjective nature of social life, the more a positivistic view is embraced in conceiving of the non-social other' (Joseph, 2002: 155). The turn towards communicative interaction - which promised to restore Frankfurt School theory on safe theoretical and political footing (Weber, 2014: 534—535; Honneth, 1995: xiv) - is therefore revealed to entail an important condition: that all social and political economic inquiry be delegated to functionalist theory while emancipatory critique is made ever more abstract and rarefied. Because, furthermore, the analytic and normative halves now operate on ontologically distinct planes (intersubjective the former, objective the latter) and on the basis of completely different epistemologies (the first interpretive, the second positivist), their findings are by necessity incommensurable. In the words of Moishe Postone (1993), 'because [Habermas's] theory combines two one-sided approaches, it has difficulty relating the two dimensions purportedly grasped by these approaches' (Postone, 1993: 253). This means that a *division of labour* is instituted at the core of Critical Theory, such that the dimensions of emancipatory critique and social analysis are definitively sundered apart. In chapter one, I followed Seyla Benhabib in defining Critical Theory as a perspective on contemporary society which contains an explanatory-diagnostic as well as an anticipatory-utopian dimension (Benhabib, 1986: 226). In light of Benhabib's definition and of the critiques discussed in this section, I propose that Habermas's communicative-democratic paradigm be understood as a framework of critique that *separates* and *compartmentalises* the two tasks to the eventual detriment of both. On the one hand, the social-analytic aspect of CT is deprived of its critical intent and reframed according to the a-political categories of functionalist theory. Habermasian theory's attempt to explain and clarify the defining tendencies of its time, in other words, can never go any further

order that strays from the set path of social evolution as inevitably regressive and irrational (Anderson, 1998: 39).

than the conceptual vocabulary of systems-theory will allow. Concretely - as I will show in the next chapter with regards to its theory of globalisation - this means that Critical Theory abandons the aspiration to produce its own critical analyses of social reality and limits itself to reproducing the prevailing understandings generated by traditional inquiry. What is lost in the process, then, is not only the orientation towards critique, but the very ability to theorise the social forces, struggles and contradictions that define a particular social formation.⁴⁹ The only analysis of capitalism that it is possible to articulate is now an external, neutral assessment of the systemic imbalances between its component units; the only possible critique is that of capitalism's 'dysfunctional side effects' and encroachment upon other subsystems (Habermas, 1987: 347; Bidet, 2008: 682/692).⁵⁰ On the other hand, the normative and emancipatory dimension of Critical Theory is uncoupled from substantive political economic and social analysis and carried out by the analytical means of political philosophy and through the construction of speculative theories of moral evolution (Azmanova, 2014: 356). The anticipatory-utopian task of CT is now fulfilled either by specifying, in neo-Kantian fashion, the normative foundations of a future emancipated social order, or, alternatively, by interpreting society's symbolic structure in terms of its moral evolution. In either of those forms, the Habermasian paradigm is precluded from indicating either the specific structures and circumstances it aims to transform, or the concrete social forces and movements it wants to interact with to do so. The result, in Perry Anderson's words, 'is a theory that answers to the responsibility neither of an accurate destruction of the real

⁴⁹ The way the concept of "power" is deployed is particularly emblematic. As Nancy Fraser (1985: 109) observed, power now appears in the Habermasian analysis as nothing more than a "steering mechanism" - an impersonal logic of integration that organises bureaucratic contexts (see also Allen, 2008: 123). This restrictive and functionalist definition means that all other forms of power - power as historical, structure-forming relations of class, race and gender - are either obscured from view or appear as mere pathological effects of systemic developments.

⁵⁰ Followers of Habermasian Critical Theory are not unaware of the limitations of the framework, particularly as it concerns its systems-theoretical dimension. There were numerous protestations against the role that systems-theory plays in the Habermasian paradigm (see (McCarthy, 1985). As Raulet (2008: 158) notes, Honneth and others frequently acknowledged 'the lacunae, even aporias, of critical theory as regards social analysis'. The solution that was suggested - that is, to side-line the systems-theoretical moment of Habermasian CT and focus on its supposed strengths, namely the normative theory of democratic deliberation and the hermeneutics of the lifeworld - is however unsatisfactory. As I will show in the next chapters with regards to Critical Theory in IR, the functionalist analysis of the system is an integral element of the Habermasian project and the lacunae and aporias generated by the system/lifeworld model cannot easily be covered up.

world, nor of a critical proposal for a better one. It operates instead in a no man's land between the two' (Anderson, 2007: 127-128). That no-man's land, as William Scheuerman has added, is given by the fact that CT oscillates between two equally unsatisfactory poles: on the one hand is the empty radicalism of its procedural utopia, which secures a positive normative footing only at the cost of disembedding itself from society (Scheuerman, 2006: 94; Kompridis, 2006: 250); on the other is what Bidet (2008: 688) calls a 'critical functionalism' concerned solely with securing the stability of the social order and finding remedies to its technical problems. The antinomy that this gives rise to, I claim, represents the key to understanding Critical Theory's crisis of critique.

Conclusion

I have outlined in this chapter the strategy pursued by Habermas to "reconstruct" Critical Theory after the impasse of the early Frankfurt School. As summarised by Postone (1993: 253), the Habermasian turn consists in the idea that 'the pessimism of [first generation] Critical Theory is to be overcome theoretically by positing a social realm (in this case, one constituted by communicative action) that both exists alongside, but purportedly is not intrinsically part of, capitalism, and also grounds theoretically the possibility of a social critique'. The binary ontology and methodology of society that is articulated in the theory of system and lifeworld I therefore argued to constitute an essential component of the new, communicative-democratic paradigm. In contrast with the conventional understanding, however, I showed how Habermas's reformulation of the project of Critical Theory also reproduced and *exacerbated* some of the first generation's most debilitating tendencies. Most importantly, Habermas formalised the abandonment of the critique of political economy and brought to completion the transition from a Marxian critical social theory centred on struggle, social antagonisms and contradictions to a traditional inquiry based on rationalisation processes and ideal-typical, systemic categories. At the same time, the supposedly redemptive core of Habermas's reconstruction - the discovery in the lifeworld of an unblemished, normatively fecund

social domain - has generated an optimism and an emancipatory vision that is fraught with ideological distortions and incapable of connecting with real world societal developments.

The argument made in this chapter is important for the purposes of the overall argument because it offers a possible explanation for what I have described in the first chapter as a “crisis of critique” of contemporary Critical Theory. The hypothesis that it generates is that the predicament of contemporary critical scholarship - and, more specifically, of Frankfurt School research in IR - is tied to the theoretical and political limitations of the communicative-democratic paradigm set out by Jürgen Habermas and discussed in this chapter. In the next two chapters, I go on to test this hypothesis on the two most comprehensive attempts to articulate a CT of IR: Habermas’s own work on the post-national constellation and Andrew Linklater’s theory of cosmopolitanism.

Chapter Four: Habermas and the theory of Cosmopolitan Democracy

At the end of the previous chapter, I set out the core hypothesis guiding this research. That is, that the crisis of critique of the contemporary Critical Theory in as well as outside of IR can be traced back to two related sources: firstly, to the historical failure of CT to fully reckon with and overcome the underlying causes of the standstill of the early Frankfurt School, chief amongst which is the abandonment of social and political-economic critique; secondly, to the binary ontology and methodology that constitutes the meta-theoretical foundation of the prevailing, communicative-democratic and Habermasian paradigm of critique. In this and the following chapter, I “test” this explanation on the two literatures in International Relations (IR) I identified in the first chapter as the main referents and objects of study for this research. Namely, the literatures on Cosmopolitan Democracy (CD) and Critical IR Theory (CIRT). For each of these literatures, I select a scholar whose work represents a good distillation of the essential aspects of the respective strand of research as well as arguably their most sophisticated articulation. These are Jürgen Habermas for the CD literature and Andrew Linklater for CIRT. By engaging in a detailed discussion and critique of their work, I show that both Habermas and Linklater’s projects on international politics operate within the meta-theoretical confines of the communicative-democratic framework of critique discussed in the previous chapter and manifest the failings I argued to arise from it. In distinct ways, both projects remove the study of social and political-economic dynamics from the purview of critique and consign it to traditional, functionalist analysis. Meanwhile, they develop a hermeneutic interpretation and normative theory of international society that is detached from actual political and social processes and therefore informs a weakened form of critique.

In this chapter, I focus on Jürgen Habermas’s work on globalisation, the “cosmopolitan condition” and the European Union as representative of the project of

Cosmopolitan Democracy.⁵¹ In the first section, I present Habermas's theory of international politics as it developed from the early 1990s until today. I start by outlining the two core pillars of his research, namely his systems-theoretical analysis of globalisation and his hermeneutic interpretation of the evolving normative structure of international society. Next, I discuss the way in which these two arguments coalesce into a call for a re-organisation of the international order and the creation of supranational political institutions, highlighting in particular the importance of the European Union in Habermas's design. In the second section, I critique this theory of international politics both in terms of its explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian strength. By applying the critique of system and lifeworld articulated in the last chapter, I contend that the cosmopolitan-democratic project suffers from the separation between the theoretical and normative dimensions of critique, resulting on the one hand in a perfunctory analysis which a-critically reproduces the dominant understanding of the time; and on the other hand, in a socially disembedded vision of cosmopolitanism as moral evolution with dangerous political implications. For the assessment of the analytical dimension of Habermas's theory of international politics, I draw from the critique of globalisation theory articulated by Justin Rosenberg (2002; 2005) and Hannes Lacher (2006); for the critique of its political and emancipatory dimension, I take inspiration from the discussions by Perry Anderson (2005; 2009; 2012), Alexander Anievas (2010a) and William Scheuerman (2006; 2008).

⁵¹ The decision to focus on Habermas's work on international politics as illustrative of the CD literature is dictated by the fact that it contains the most complete articulation of that project as a normative project *as well as* a critical social theory. Habermas, in other words, discusses Cosmopolitan Democracy not just as a political ideal for humanity to strive for or an institutional blueprint for the future - as many scholars in the literature have tended to do. Instead, he developed a comprehensive theory of contemporary international politics that contains an analysis of its material as well as symbolic patterns of development. It is also notable that Habermas remains today arguably the most prominent and prolific advocate of cosmopolitanism in political science, other voices in the literature such as David Held and Daniele Archibugi having either fallen in disrepute or moved on to other subject areas (Anderson, 2012: 50).

Habermas and the “postnational constellation”

In the first chapter, I discussed how the literature on Cosmopolitan Democracy emerged out of a particular global historical juncture, namely the end of the Cold War, and understood itself as a time-sensitive intervention seeking to explore the new political and emancipatory possibilities that had opened at the level of international politics. Amongst the scholars that defined this literature, such as David Held, Daniele Archibugi and Mary Kaldor, Jürgen Habermas emerged both as a vital source of inspiration and philosophical reference and as a direct contributor. On the one hand, the communicative-democratic paradigm I discussed in the previous chapter and the ethics of discourse that formed its philosophical anchorage provided the normative resources and the philosophical bedrock upon which many CD scholars built their proposals for a transformation of the international order (Scheuerman, 2006: 90-93); on the other hand, Habermas himself became involved with matters of global politics and dedicated an increasing amount of time to writing on questions ranging from humanitarian intervention to European integration and the reform of the United Nations.⁵² To date, Habermas’s engagement with international politics spans across six books and a plethora of journal and newspaper articles, interviews and speeches. The impact of these writings has been felt far beyond the realm of academia and has reached into the domains of policy as well as broader public discussions on globalisation, civil society and democracy (Scheuerman, 2017).

In this section, I outline the key elements of this substantial body of work and draw out the core theoretical and political claims which constitute its *Leitmotiv*. Habermas’s work on international politics is built directly on the framework of analysis and critique discussed in the previous chapter. His argumentation therefore proceeds along two parallel tracks, one diagnosing in functionalist terms the political and economic transformations brought about by globalisation; the other interpreting

⁵² In a recently published interview, Habermas recalls that ‘It was only after 1989/90 that global developments directed my attention seriously to the problems of the legal and political reorganization of the world society that has been taking shape since that time. This interest was sparked during the first Iraq War by the debate over humanitarian intervention’ (Habermas, 2015: 64).

the normative and legal evolution of international society and assessing the possibilities for further moral development in the global arena.

Functionalist side: the theory of globalisation

The analytical and social-diagnostic side of Habermas's IR theory was first set out in the 1996 book *The Inclusion of the Other* and developed further in the essay collection *The Postnational Constellation* published in the year 2000. The core of the argument has remained essentially unchanged ever since and continues to be deployed by Habermas to this day (see Habermas 2012; 2015). Its basic structure consists of three steps:

Firstly, Habermas begins by observing that Western societies had achieved in the post-war period a situation of systemic *balance* between the competing imperatives of capitalism and democracy (Habermas, 2000: 51). Following from Pollock's argument on state capitalism, he understands this compromise to be premised upon an increased role of the state in mediating between the logics of system and lifeworld: that is, the market's requirement for continued capital accumulation on the one hand, and the lifeworld's demands for distributive justice, on the other (Habermas, 2011: 15). The reaching of a compromise between these two logics in the form the welfare state accomplished for Habermas two things: it stabilised the market, thus reducing the risk of economic crises; and it succeeded 'in substantially offsetting the socially undesirable consequences of a highly productive economic system in Europe and other OECD states' through the provision of public goods and services (Habermas, 2000: 51). Crucially, Habermas emphasises that the accomplishments of the welfare state compromise took place '*within the framework of the nation-state*' (Habermas, 2011: 15 [emphasis in the original]).

Secondly, Habermas notes that in the 1980s and 1990s this situation of systemic balance was complicated by the unfolding of a 'structural transformation of the world economic system [that is] characterised by the term "globalisation"' (Habermas, 2001: 52). In line with the other main scholars of globalisation such as David Held

and Ulrich Beck, he understands this transformation as given by the intensification of world-wide economic and informational flows as well as the dismantling of trade and regulatory barriers (Habermas, 2006a: 175). According to Habermas (2000: 52), globalisation can be understood as a process of “disenclavement” of society, culture and the economy’, such that these realms of social life are no longer ‘co-extensive with the... boundaries’ of the nation-state. As part of this development, however, a dangerous systemic *imbalance* is created between the increasingly global scale at which culture, society and the market operate and the still nationally-bound political state (Habermas, 2001: 51; 2009: 92). In particular, globalisation creates for Habermas two orders of problems: on the one hand, it ‘destroys a historical constellation that made the welfare state compromise temporarily possible’, by reducing the capacity of the state to regulate the economy, levy taxes and secure the provision of social goods (Habermas, 2001: 52). For Habermas (*Ibidem*: 51), globalisation ‘so radically reduces nation-states’ capacity for action that the options remaining open to them are not sufficient to shield their populations from the undesired social and political consequences of a transnational economy’. The retreat of the welfare state, then, generates ‘emerging social costs [that] threaten to overburden the integration capacities of liberal societies’, leading to the appearance of a series of social pathologies in the lifeworld (Habermas, 2001: 50/83). On the other hand, globalisation generates a new range of financial, environmental and technological risks - ranging from climate change to terrorism and organised crime - that exceed the available political capacities for crisis management (Habermas, 2001: 78; 2006a: 175; 2012a: 55).⁵³

Thirdly, Habermas concludes that a rebalancing of the social system under conditions of globalisation can only take place if politics ‘catch[es] up with runaway markets’ and reconstitutes itself at a supranational level (Habermas, 1998: 156;

⁵³ In Habermas’s own words: ‘To the extent that the functional subsystems of the emerging world society reach through national borders, external costs are being generated on an unprecedented scale, and as a result a need for regulation which overtaxes existing political capacities for concerted action. This holds not only for the imbalances of the economic subsystem and the speculation which has been accelerating unchecked since the 2008 financial crisis. Environmental imbalances and risks generated by large-scale technology have given rise to a similar global need for regulation. Today it is not individual states or coalitions of states which are confronted with such problems of the world society but politics in the singular’ (Habermas, 2012a: 55).

2000: 54; 2012: 106-9). 'The welfare-state functions', he argues, 'can be maintained at their previous level only if they are transferred from the nation-state to larger political entities which could manage to keep pace with a transnational economy' (Habermas, 2001: 52). The system-theoretic side of Habermas's argument, then, comes together in a clear diagnosis: namely, that the 'enduring political fragmentation in the world and in Europe is at variance with the systemic integration of a multicultural world society' and with the global integration of the market economy (Habermas, 2012a: 5). Only a new form of political organisation that matches the global scale of operation of the economy and mass culture - what Habermas calls a "postnational constellation" - can stabilise the social system and match the challenges created by the new stage of human development (Habermas, 2001: 88; 2003: 96).

Lifeworld side: evolution of international norms

Habermas proceeds to integrate this explanatory-diagnostic model of the structural transformation of the global economy with a parallel hermeneutic interpretation of the legal and normative development of international society. According to Habermas, the history of international law in the twentieth century speaks to the existence of an evolutionary dynamic pointing towards the institutionalisation of more advanced regimes of cosmopolitan governance (Habermas, 2001: 69-71; 2006a: 176-177; 2009: 97). This progressive dynamic, which Habermas understands as starting at the end of World War Two and intensifying with the fall of the Soviet Union, he understands as taking the form of a progressive '*juridification* of international relations' whereby the conduct of global affairs is gradually subtracted from the logic of power politics and subjected to the rule of law (Habermas, 2006a: 116; 2015: 52). Habermas finds evidence for this tendency in 'the foundation of the United Nations, of the three major global economic organisations (the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation), and of informal negotiation systems such as the G8 and the G20', as well as in the birth of the European Union and the constitutionalisation of

universal human rights in the UN Charter (Habermas, 2006a: 160; 2015: 52). While acknowledging that there have been also been 'set-backs in the field of international human rights and security policy' - such as the unauthorised NATO bombings in Kosovo (Habermas, 1998: 126; 2001: 56) and later the unilateral military campaigns conducted by the United States during the "War on Terror" (Habermas, 2006a: 115-117, 148) - Habermas concludes that for the first time in human history the prospect has opened up for an evolutionary step forward of international politics in the direction of a post-national, cosmopolitan order.

In order to make sense of these developments in the normative and legal structure of international society, Habermas turns to Immanuel Kant's theory of cosmopolitanism (see Habermas, 2006a: 183; 2009: 110; 2012a: 62). The normative evolution of world politics after the end of World War Two, he argues, can be interpreted in terms of the transition from the old institutions of "classical international law" to what Kant foresaw as a "cosmopolitan condition" (Habermas, 2006a: 19-20). That of "classical international law" represents for Habermas (2006a: 118) the conventional model of international relations that 'reflects the contours of the European state system which took shape following the Peace of Westphalia and remained in place roughly until 1914'. Classical international law, then, 'lays down the rules of the game' that guided the interaction between nation-states from the seventeenth to the beginning of the twentieth century. Under this model, sovereign states are accorded equal status and encounter each other in a political order without any higher authority (*Ibidem*: 120). Outside of the minimal customary restrictions encoded in the *jus ad bellum*, international relations are determined by an 'anarchistic balance of power' in the manner described by classical realist theories of IR (Habermas, 1998: 126; 2015: 55). Over the course of the twentieth century, however, classical international law has started to give way for Habermas to what Kant envisaged as a burgeoning "cosmopolitan legal regime". In his words, 'following the two World Wars, the constitutionalisation of international law has evolved along the lines prefigured by Kant towards cosmopolitan law and has assumed institutional form in international constitutions, organisations, and procedures' (Habermas, 2006a: 115). According to Habermas, this constitutes a

major evolutionary advance over the Westphalian model on at least two fronts. Firstly, the ‘constitutionalisation of international law’ represents a significant, ‘civilising’ step forward in the ‘*rationalisation* of the exercise of political power in the international arena’ (Habermas, 2012a: 10; 2015: 56). In particular, the subordination of the sovereign state to superior juridical norms contributes to the ‘*dissolution of the decisionistic substance of the power involved in the exercise of political authority*’ (Habermas, 2015: 52 [emphasis in the original]). That is, it substitutes the self-interested and competitive reason prescribed under classical international law with new, collaborative and consensual patterns of behaviour and thereby contributes to the ‘domestication of international violence’ (Habermas, 2012a: 10). Secondly, the emergence of a cosmopolitan legal regime constitutes a moral advancement because for the first time it is not only states that are the referents of international law, but also individuals in their right of world citizens (Habermas, 2006a: 124). A ‘core innovation’ in the cosmopolitan condition therefore consists in the fact that individuals ‘are no longer legal subjects merely as citizens of their respective states, but also as members of a “cosmopolitan commonwealth under a single head”’ (*Ibidem*: 124). This in turn opens the possibility for a ‘change in perspective from “international relations” to a world domestic policy’ within which security concerns as well as broader social, environmental and distributional matters are regulated politically at the supranational level (Habermas, 2001: 56).⁵⁴

The possibility of cosmopolitanism

At this point, the two strands of the argument - the systems-theoretical and the hermeneutic - are rejoined. According to Habermas, the ‘postnational constellation’ that is created by the pressures of globalisation ‘meets the constitutionalisation of international law halfway’, because both patterns of development point in the same evolutionary direction: the overcoming of the *international* framework of global politics and the creation of a *cosmopolitan* political order (Habermas, 2006a: 117).

⁵⁴ According to Habermas (2006: 177), the ‘best indicator for the transformation of international relations is the blurring of boundaries between domestic and foreign policy’.

Habermas thus finds a synthesis between the system-functionalist and lifeworld-normative sides of his inquiry in the form of a restatement of his theory of modernisation as 'a periodic interplay between a functionally driven opening followed in each case by a socially integrative closure at a higher level' (Habermas, 2012a: 113). Globalisation appears now as a systemic force which breaks apart the traditional model of inter-state relations by 'shrinking the scope of action for national governments' while compelling the 'nation-state to open itself up... to the multiplicity of foreign, or new, forms of cultural life' (Habermas, 2001: 84). At the same time, 'globalisation also provides a supportive context for the aspiration to a cosmopolitan condition' by creating the conditions for a reorganisation - or, in his terms, a "closure" - of the lifeworld 'with *expanded horizons*' (*Ibidem*: 83). This scenario, for Habermas, contains the potential for an epochal civilisational advance in the institutionalisation of universal moral norms and the transnationalisation of democracy (Habermas, 2012a: x; 2015: 52).

Having identified the overall trajectory of historical development, Habermas dedicates much of his energies to working out the various issues raised by the post-national scenario and to determining the concrete institutional steps needed for the realisation of a cosmopolitan world order. The main outstanding problem is for him that of the future of democracy (Habermas, 2001: 61-62; 2012a: 16). Habermas notes that as long as a broader basis of democratic legitimation is not established, the solution of "shifting upwards" the responsibilities of the nation-state remains normatively as well as functionally fraught (Habermas, 2015, 52). In functionalist terms, the problem is that imbalances may arise between the increased regulatory and legislative capacity of supranational institution and their indirect, weak legitimation (Habermas, 2001: 84). In the case of the EU, for instance, this issue is commonly discussed in terms of the "democratic deficit" of European institutions (Habermas, 1998: 156; 2012b: 485). In normative terms, the risk is that "technocratic" forms of governance become established that are detached from democratic will-formation and are therefore unresponsive to the demands of the lifeworld (Habermas, 2015: 57-58). At the same time, however, Habermas is also aware of the fact that the existing model of democratic legitimation - that of a

sovereign, self-legislating community organised through the formal procedures of representative democracy - is difficult to “scale up” beyond the national or at most regional level (Habermas, 2001: 56; Fine & Smith, 2003, 474).⁵⁵ The conundrum that results from this is that a ‘transnationalisation of democracy’ is both crucial to secure the stability and benevolence of a post-national world order *and* eminently difficult to establish within the conventional model of democratic legitimation.

Habermas’s strategy to respond to this challenge entails two moves. Firstly, he contends that Kant’s ambitious plan for a cosmopolitan world order needs to be significantly revised so as to reduce the legitimation requirements that need to be met. Specifically, Habermas suggests replacing Kant’s ideal of a state-like “world republic” with a more modest plan for a ‘decentred world society as a multilevel system’ that integrates and reforms existing international institutions (Habermas, 2006a, 135-136). ‘Rather than a [world] state’, he argues, cosmopolitanism ‘has to find a less demanding basis of legitimacy in the organisational forms of an international negotiation system, which already exists today in other political arenas’ (Habermas, 2001: 109). According to Habermas’s vision, then, the nascent cosmopolitan order is to be organised on two different planes: on the *supranational* level, a reformed and democratised United Nations would ‘be restricted to the core tasks of peacekeeping and of the global implementation of human rights’. By restricting its functions to “juridical” tasks that ‘have a moral content and are legal in nature’, the General Assembly could be ‘composed of representatives of the cosmopolitan citizens on the one side, and of delegates from the democratically elected parliaments of the member states on the other’ and ‘assume permanent form as a World Parliament’ (Habermas, 2009, 115-124; 2012a, 57-66). The operation of this refurbished United Nations would be facilitated by the fact that its competencies would only include matters ‘of *a fortiori* “general” interests which are “depoliticised” to such an extent that they are “shared” by the world population

⁵⁵ For Habermas, this is the case because representative democracy requires strong ties of civic solidarity and self-identification of its participations as members of the same community. The ‘political culture of a world society’, however, lacks at the moment ‘the common ethical-political dimension that would be necessary for a corresponding global community - and its identity formation’ (Habermas, 2001: 108). For this reason, ‘a cosmopolitan community of world citizens can... offer no adequate basis for a global domestic policy’ (*Ibidem*, 109).

beyond all political-cultural divisions' and around which, according to Habermas, there is likely to be little disagreement (Habermas, 2012a: 63-64). Meanwhile, at the *transnational* level, nation-states would form into regional blocs on the model of the European Union and as such participate in a 'transnational negotiation system' which decides on properly political questions (Habermas, 2009: 125). This transnational system of negotiation composed of regional clusters would legislate on issues of 'world domestic politics' ranging from the global distribution of wealth to social and ecological problems, 'within the framework of permanent conferences and negotiating forums' (Habermas, 2006a: 109/136; 2012a: 68). For Habermas, the advantage of this two-level model of global governance is that by confining the role of the UN to what he considers non-political matters while leaving political decisions to an intermediate level of transnational negotiation, the overall legitimation requirement of the cosmopolitan order is greatly reduced (Habermas, 2001, 109; 2006a, 174; 2009, 125). On the one hand, a reformed United Nations that is restricted to 'human rights and the prohibition of violence' does not require extensive democratic legitimations, as its decisions 'can be justified exclusively in moral terms' and are therefore already '*presumptively shared*' by the entire world population (Habermas, 2012a: 64-66). On the other hand, the transnational negotiating network would rest on the 'legitimacy of the negotiating partners', which in turn would largely rely on the existing national democratic institutions (Habermas, 2001: 111; 2009: 126).

(1) Regional/continental level

Nation-states form regional blocs on the model of the European Union so as to pool their resources and create a balanced international playing field with a 'manageable number' of roughly equivalent 'global players' (Habermas, 2009: 115).

(2) Transnational level

These regional regimes engage in a transnational system of negotiation which deals with matters of "global domestic policy", such as: 'the environment and climate change, the worldwide risks of large-scale technology, regulating financial market-driven capitalism, and especially the distributional problems that arise in the trade, labour, health and transportation regimes of a highly stratified world society'. (Habermas, 2012a: 57).

(3) Supranational level

A reformed United Nations is given exclusive and binding powers over a restricted range of matters, principally regarding the 'global enforcement of human rights and the prohibition of violence' (Habermas, 2012a: 60). Meanwhile, 'humanitarian law [is] developed into a *police law*' (Habermas, 2012a: 61).

Table 3. Habermas's model for a 'decentralised, multi-level' political system as set out in Habermas, 2001; 2006a; 2009; 2012a.

Habermas's second strategy to fill the legitimation gap of supranational institutions is to apply a concept he had originally devised in the context of national societies: the idea of deliberative democracy (Fine & Smith, 2003: 476; Habermas, 2015: 48). According to Habermas, the 'discourse-theoretical understanding of democracy changes the theoretical demands placed on the legitimacy conditions for democratic politics' and thus makes it possible to develop a different model for the legitimation of supranational institutions (Habermas, 2001: 110). Habermas's argument is that the formal democratic institutions that have historically appeared at the national level - based on parliaments, parties and elections - are not the *only* possible mode of democratic legitimation. According to his theory of discourse, the epistemic exercise of "opinion-formation" - that is, the informal process through which citizens deliberate over matters of political significance and form judgements about them - *itself* possesses a certain legitimising force (Habermas, 2015: 48). In other words, the possibility for citizens to freely engage in rational debate in the public sphere constitutes for Habermas a vital aspect of democratic practice, one which has a legitimising effect whether it has a direct impact on the political decisions being implemented or not (Scheuerman, 2006: 100). The implications of this for cosmopolitanism are far-reaching. The idea of deliberative democracy means for Habermas that the legitimation of supranational institutions does not necessarily have to follow the onerous national model of democratic sovereignty - for instance with worldwide elections and global parliaments. What is sufficient is the establishment of a "global public sphere" - that is, a horizontal network of global deliberation within which 'vigilant civil society actors who are sensitive to relevant issues... lend the corresponding issues and decisions world-wide transparency' and 'cosmopolitan citizens... develop informed opinions and take stances on these issues' (Habermas, 2009: 124). This, Habermas argues, can provide a degree of

“weak” legitimation to supranational institutions even in the absence of formal democratic structures (Habermas, 2009: 124).⁵⁶

Habermas’s conclusion is thus that the combination of a reworked, more modest plan for a multi-level world order and a democratic deliberative model of legitimation makes it possible to envisage a cosmopolitan order ‘even in the absence of a world government’ (Habermas, 2003b: 96). In the vision of a global ‘governance without government’, sustained by the communicative circuits of a global public sphere, he therefore finds the solution to both the normative and functionalist problems raised by the age of globalisation (Habermas, 2001: 54; 2012a: 62)

The European Union

Within Habermas’s vision of a post-national world order, the experience of the European Union (EU) assumes a central position. The EU represents for Habermas a first, ‘suitable example’ of politics following ‘the lead of the market by constructing supranational political agencies’ (Habermas, 1998: 123). As such, the ‘historically unprecedented construct of the EU’ not only ‘fits seamlessly into the contours of a politically constituted world society’ (Habermas, 2012a; 57). More than that, it is a model to be followed and a ‘point of departure’ for the constitution of a cosmopolitan world system (Habermas, 2003b, 96). The idea of other parts of the world following the lead of Europe in establishing ‘*regional or continental regimes* equipped with a sufficiently representative mandate to negotiate for whole continents and to field the necessary powers of implementation for large territories’ becomes, then, a fundamental component of Habermas’s model of multi-level cosmopolitan governance (Habermas, 2001; 53; 2009: 115).⁵⁷ In light of what he sees as the

⁵⁶ Habermas (2001: 111) acknowledges the fact that ‘a functioning public sphere, the quality of discussion, accessibility, and the discursive structure of opinion and will-formation... could never entirely replace conventional procedures for decision-making and political representations’. Nonetheless, he maintains that they ‘do tip the balance’, providing a new mode of democratic engagement that ‘loosens the conceptual tie between democratic legitimacy and the familiar forms of state organisation’ (*Ibidem*).

⁵⁷ So central is the experience of the EU to that design that he identifies in the idea of ‘nation-states in the various world regions [coming] together to form continental regimes on the model of the European Union’, and ‘not in the reform of the UN, the genuinely utopian moment of a “cosmopolitan condition”’ (Habermas, 2006: 109).

evolutionary trajectory of modern society towards ‘a more far-reaching cosmopolitanism’, then, European integration assumes for Habermas (2012a: 11) a veritable ‘civilising role’: that of providing a “test” of the ‘will and capability of citizens, of political elites and the mass media, to conclude the next stage of integration at least within the euro zone - and in the process to take the civilisation of the exercise of political authority one step further’ (*Ibidem*: 20). Because the success of European unification is so central to his cosmopolitan project, Habermas has dedicated an increasing amount of time and energy to discussing its issues and challenges and become over the years one of the most prominent public defendants of the European project (Scheuerman, 2017). Since the global financial crisis of 2007/2008, Habermas has dedicated three books as well as a plethora of papers, interviews and journal articles to discussing the multiple crises of the Eurozone (see Habermas, 2009; 2010; 2012a; 2012b; 2015). The main theme that runs through this body of work is that the European people ought to turn down the ‘nostalgic’ and ‘defensive option of winding down the euro’ in favour of ‘the offensive option of extending the monetary union into a supranational democracy’ (Habermas, 2015: 88-89). Mobilising both the functionalist and normative arguments outlined above, he therefore calls for the overcoming of any hesitation on the part of political elites, media and citizens and a further acceleration of European integration (Habermas, 2012a: 46).

Critique

Habermas’s theory of global politics, I claim, presents serious weaknesses in both its explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian aspect. These failings follow the pattern I outlined in the previous chapter as emanating from the underlying meta-theoretical architecture of contemporary Critical Theory. Namely, they materialise as a removal of the analysis of social and political-economic processes from the purview of critique and their delegation to non-critical, functionalist analysis and as the relocation of normative critique to an abstract teleology of moral evolution. These shortcomings, I conclude, severely weaken the capacity of Cosmopolitan

Democratic theory to both diagnose the tensions and dynamics of the age and produce possibility-disclosing critiques and political interventions for its emancipatory transformation. Concretely, they translate into a set of diagnoses that obfuscate rather than clarify the struggles and contradictions of the contemporary world and a political programme which lends an a-critical support to ongoing processes of supra-national integration.

In this section I address in sequence both of these aspects. First, I discuss Habermas's diagnosis of the structural transformation of the world economy through the prism of globalisation. Using Justin Rosenberg's (2002; 2005) and Hannes Lacher's (2006) critiques of globalisation theory, I show how his analysis rests on a reductive account of global political and economic dynamics as technical and linear evolutionary processes. This in turn generates an impoverished account of both the operations of global capitalism and the power political dimension of international relations. Second, I assess Habermas's political project of cosmopolitanism as a form of emancipatory critique. I argue that the normative content of his work on international politics consists in the assertion of a strong teleology of moral progress. This is not only ineffective in clarifying and linking up with contemporary emancipatory struggles. It also leads Habermas to worrisome political conclusions, most notably a singular concern with the correct implementation of the speculatively predetermined course of history. I conclude that Habermas's research on cosmopolitanism and the post-national constellation provides a first confirmation of the thesis's main claim: namely, that the inability of contemporary Critical Theory to remain theoretically and politically relevant to the present world-historical conjuncture is tied to the meta-theoretical limitations of the prevailing, communicative-democratic paradigm of critique.

Explanatory-diagnostic failings

In keeping with the prescriptions of the two-level theory of society discussed in the previous chapter, the explanatory-diagnostic aspect of Habermas's theory of IR is

organised around the parallel examination of the developmental trajectories of system and lifeworld. The former is carried out through the means of functionalist theory and consists in the identification of the systemic logic of development of global society as well as the study of the imbalances and system-problems that characterise its present stage of evolution. For Habermas, the post-Cold War conjuncture in world politics can be explained in the systemic terms of a transition to a new phase of development characterised by the global integration of markets, culture and media and the increasing obsolescence of the nation-state (Habermas, 2001: 50-52; 2009: 92). Meanwhile, the interpretation of the normative and legal structure of the lifeworld consists in an account of the progressive moralisation and constitutionalisation of international practice and the emergence of a cosmopolitan legal regime (Habermas, 2006a: 116; 2009: 97). On both sides of the argument, Habermas follows the prevailing intellectual *Zeitgeist* of the 1990s in identifying the direction of historical development with the *globalisation* of all domains of societal existence (Habermas, 2001: 65). This framework of analysis, based around the notion of the exhaustion of the *international* system of states and onset of a globalised, cosmopolitan world order, is however extremely limited in its explanatory value. On the one hand, a number of historical studies indicate that the global integration of national economies is by no means a novel or unique phenomenon. Scholars have shown that the world economy in the nineteenth century was in many respects more tightly connected than it is now (see Bairloch & Kozul-Wright, 1998; Sutcliffe & Glyn, 1999). For this reason, the notion that globalisation represents a unique and defining feature the present age appears historically questionable. On the other hand, authors such as Justin Rosenberg (2002; 2005) and Hannes Lacher (2006) have shown that the category of “globalisation” is itself problematic when used as an explanatory device, as it tends to attribute causal powers to what is an essentially descriptive, spatial term.⁵⁸ In terms of its use by Habermas as a critical-

⁵⁸ Rosenberg’s argument is that all of “globalisation theory” - a literature he identified primary with Ulrich Beck, David Held, Anthony Giddens, Tony McGrew, Zygmund Bauman and Manuel Castells - is built on a basic category mistake: that of inverting the *explanandum* - namely, the outcome that has to be explained - with the *explanans* that accounts for it. For this reason, globalisation theory is guilty for Rosenberg of missing the fact that the ‘undeniably dramatic spatio-temporal phenomena of the 1990s were overwhelmingly produced by a process of social change - and not vice versa’. As a consequence, globalisation as an explanatory category is always at the risk of remaining caught in a form

explanatory model for the development of international politics, the theory of globalisation is problematic because it offers a weak account of both the economic dynamics of global capitalism and the “international” and power-political dimension of IR.

With regards to the former, Habermas’s analysis of the global economy through the prism of globalisation displays all the failings of the essentialist account of capitalism I critiqued in the previous chapter. Because in his model of the market economy “money is money” and nothing else needs to be established than its functional requirements, Habermas’s analysis is left to rely on only two explanatory variables: first, the stage of complexity achieved by the economic subsystem; and second, its territorial domain of instantiation (Streeck, 2016: 8). The result is that his discussion of phenomena as wide ranging as climate change, the global financial crisis, the decline of the welfare state and mass migration can never go beyond the repetition of two simplistic assertions: that all of these are “system-problems” and “challenges” generated by the present stage of systemic evolution (Habermas, 2000: 52-53; 2001: 88; 2015: 57); and that their resolutions necessitates the removal of ‘the imbalance between the imperatives of the markets and the regulatory power of politics’ by means of a supranational reconstitution of the latter (Habermas, 2012a: 5). What gets lost in the process is any sense of the substantive dynamics, contradictions and social forces that compose the contemporary “globalising” conjuncture. In particular, Habermas’s account of globalisation leaves out two crucial aspects. Firstly, his model of the global economy as a flat and undifferentiated space does not allow for the specification of any of the more determinate features of contemporary capitalism, such as its finance-led growth model and uneven spatial organisation of production. Because of this, he is incapable of identifying any of the internal crisis tendencies and contradictory dynamics of neoliberal capitalism and therefore to explain its current instabilities. Secondly, Habermas’s rendition of the economic and the political as autonomous subsystems obfuscates the extent to which globalisation is not a pure market phenomenon but a product of the interaction between particular state strategies,

of circular thinking, according to which globalisation is both the outcome to be explained and

transnational economic forces and the competition between national economies. In particular, the rendition of globalisation as a systemic dynamic that weighs upon the nation-state like an external pressure belies its reliance on domestic class forces as well as global institutional frameworks such as that of the *Pax Americana* (Wood, 1999; Lacher, 2006: 115, 154). The result of these omissions is not just that Habermas is left to rely on a crude and impoverished account of the past; it also means that his theory of globalisation is ill suited to comprehend and clarify the ongoing crisis-dynamics and instabilities of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

As to the latter point, Habermas's analysis of IR as undergoing a normative evolution driven by the moralisation and legalisation of inter-state relations lacks an adequate account of power and hampers the development of deeper theoretical reflections on the distinctiveness of 'the international' as a domain of social life (Anievas, 2010a: 153). The main issue here has to do with Habermas taking the viewpoint of an already emerging cosmopolitan constellation within which national sovereignty and power politics are being civilised and supplanted by post-national conventions and supranational regimes of governance. This argument rests on the juxtaposition between two distinct and successive modes of global organisation: on the one hand, the Westphalian international states-system. On the other, a post-national, globalised and cosmopolitan order. Analogous to the "Globalisation Theorists" critiqued by Justin Rosenberg, then, Habermas finds in the reductive idea of a Westphalian System defined by territoriality, sovereignty and violence a 'vision of the past against which [his] image of a "globalising" present [can] be dramatically contrasted' (Rosenberg, 2005: 17). The problem with the dichotomy between the old world of international politics and the new one of cosmopolitanism, however, is that it ends up reifying both. On the one hand, as commented by Scheuerman, 'Habermas's... stance presupposes, to a greater extent than he perhaps wants to admit, a rather traditional view of statehood' (Scheuerman, 2008: 164). By extension, the analysis of international relations and the entire *problematique* of power politics are reduced to the traditional conceptions of 'classical international law' and the 'Westphalian system of sovereignty' (Habermas, 2006: 119-120; 2012:

the process that leads to that outcome (Rosenberg, 2002: 2-3).

55). That is, they are consigned to the realist theorisation of an anarchic political system organised around the principle of territorial national sovereignty (see Habermas, 1998: 126; 2012: 10). In so doing, Habermas's analysis of international politics not only fails to go any further than the conventional understandings of political realism and its simplistic dichotomies of inside/outside, domestic/international, order/anarchy (see Habermas, 2015: 55). It also lags behind the crucial work being undertaken in other strands of critical inquiry to question and complicate the ahistorical categories that underlie the classical conceptions of the modern states-system (see Osiander, 2001; Teschke, 2003; Lacher, 2006).⁵⁹ The paradoxical outcome, then, is again similar to the one observed by Rosenberg with regards to the globalisation theorists: Habermas's theory of IR, which 'prides itself of its intellectual transcendence' of the "territorial trap" of past international theory (see Habermas, 2001: 70-71), 'is compelled by the claims it wishes to make about the present to buy into a quite unsustainably "territorialist" reading of the past' (Rosenberg, 2002: 40).⁶⁰ The surrendering of the analysis of inter-state relations to classical realist theory, then, means that Habermas has to accept an impoverished understanding of IR that fails to account for any social relation, dynamic or process that takes place *among, between or across* the ideal-typical levels of the national and the international (Lacher, 2006: 153).⁶¹ On the other hand, the depiction of the "cosmopolitanism condition" as an *alternative* global regime under which relations of power and violence are supplanted by moral conventions and supranational legal frameworks is idealistic and uncritical (see Habermas, 2012a: 2; 2006: 115). The

⁵⁹ In particular, I am thinking here of the work done by Marxist historical sociologists to study the particular configurations of social relations at the national level that underlie the origins of the modern states-system.

⁶⁰ This is most evident in Habermas's discussions of the transformative effects of globalisation on the nation-state. Here the argument is repeatedly constructed on the notion that 'nation-states can *no longer* secure the boundaries of their own territories' (Habermas, 2006a:176 [emphasis added]) - the implication being that their past sovereignty and territorial unity is being eroded. Elsewhere, Habermas similarly discusses how 'the post-national constellation *is putting an end*' to the 'European states system, which was erected on a territorial basis beginning in the Seventeenth century' (Habermas, 2000: 52 [emphasis added]).

⁶¹ The analogies with the failures of globalisation theory are again striking here: as Hannes Lacher comments: 'Globalization theory has... failed to develop an adequate conceptualization of the role of the state (and of the US in particular) and of interstate competition in the processes of socio-spatial restructuring that have taken place over the past quarter century or so. It has, as a result, generated mostly evolutionistic accounts of historical transformation informed by a simplistic narrative that rests on the notion of an epochal movement from 'the (inter)national' to 'the global'. (Lacher, 2006: 4)

main problem, as Fine and Smith (2003: 484) have noted, is that conceiving cosmopolitanism as ‘a stage of social or political life coming *after* nationalism... neglects the fact that it has coexisted with the modern nation-state ever since it was born’. Setting up cosmopolitanism as an alternative organising principle to national sovereignty, in other words, ignores the fact that territorial and global forces have historically existed side-by-side with each other in various configurations across a range of different social formations (Lacher, 2006: 153). In juxtaposing the two dynamics in ideal-typical fashion, rather than exploring their historical inter-relation, Habermas denies himself the possibility of uncovering the concrete configuration of global *and* national forces that supported the “globalising” conjuncture of the 1990s and 2000s. His discussion of the United States is a case in point of this. Because the logic of power politics constitutes for him a property of the previous, *international* stage of human development - and, in any case, can be understood only through the categories of realist theory - Habermas is unable to offer a satisfactory account of the role that the United States have played in driving forward the “constitutionalisation” of international politics as well as the one they are supposed to play in the constitution of the new cosmopolitan legal regime. On the one hand, this means that the birth of the United Nations and the establishment of the institutions of the post-War global order such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and World Trade Organization are rendered as developments of a purely legal and normative nature and thus entirely divorced from the relations of economic as well as political power that sustained them and the particular hegemonic project they expressed (see Habermas, 2006a: 160; 2015: 52). On the other hand, it means that beyond conceding that the reform of the UN he proposes ‘has a chance of being realised only if the superpower takes a leading role in this reform movement’, Habermas can offer no explanation for how the strategic agency and historical interests of the United States could be accommodated (and, at the same time, restrained) within a cosmopolitan framework (Scheuerman, 2006: 95). All that one is left with is the dubious assurance that the United States could count ‘for half a century... as the pacemaker for progress on [the] cosmopolitan path’ and ‘has embraced the spirit of eighteenth-century universalism more than any other

nation' in history (Habermas, 2003a: 365; 2009: 100).⁶² The end-result, then, is a speculative account of the cosmopolitan era within which disparities of power and the strategic agency of particular nation-states enter into consideration only as archaic remnants of a past, international age that need to be done away with or constrained, but never as active and causally-effective relations.

A good illustration of the analytical frailty of Habermas's account of cosmopolitanism is his discussion of the idea of a 'transnational negotiation system' - a world forum within which all regions of the world would come together to decide over questions of 'global domestic policy' (Habermas, 2012a: 68). Here Habermas does acknowledge that power asymmetries between various parts of the world - for instance, between the West and the non-West - will play a role in the negotiation of trade and economic agreements. He recognises, in his words, that 'the *fairness* of the results [of the transnational negotiations] could not be guaranteed completely independently of the mechanisms of the balance of power' (Habermas, 2009: 125). However, instead of exploring these power dynamics *substantively* as social relations which structure the very terrain of transnational practice, he denies them any specificity and reduces them to the uniform role of external pressures that threaten to distort the rational process of deliberation (see Habermas, 2009: 125). The outcome is that any analysis of the configuration of political interests that would sustain this institutional framework is supplanted by the assertion that under a cosmopolitan world order, negotiations would have to be conducted '*within the normative framework of the international community*' and '*under the proviso of compliance with the parameters of justice*' set by the United Nations (Habermas, 2009: 125; 2012a: 68-69 [emphasis in the original]).

Ultimately, then, Habermas's Critical Theory of IR fails at the first task that it aims to fulfil, namely that of articulating a critical diagnosis that can clarify the contradictions and struggles of the current international conjuncture. Most notably, its reliance on

⁶² Even when the United States' foreign policy runs counter to his cosmopolitan vision, such as under the Bush administration in the early 2000s, Habermas is quick to note that its justifications 'still reflect, in a perverted form, the core of a genuinely American self-understanding, a normative core which was instrumentalist for irresponsible purpose' (Habermas, 2009: 100). In any case, no account is offered of the political motives, strategic calculations and structural conditions that underlie these different phases.

ideal-typical dichotomies - the political and the economic, the international and the cosmopolitan - as well as on fixed logics of evolution obstructs the study of the various structures of economic, political and social power that compose the current international conjuncture as well as of the agents involved in reproducing and challenging it. The limitations of this static and essentialist diagnostic framework become particularly notable in a global context like the one of the present - characterised by a number of contradictory and intersecting dynamics across the political, economic and social realms. Concretely, the explanatory failings of CT *qua* CD manifest in the fact that it does not possess the conceptual vocabulary and theoretical tools of interpretation to make sense of and discuss any of the defining questions of the contemporary conjuncture. Whether it be the instability of neoliberal capitalism after the Global Financial Crisis; the apparent waning of US global hegemony; or the restructuring of the liberal world order, any phenomenon that cannot easily be situated on the two vectors of growing systemic complexity and growing moral maturity falls outside of the scope of analysis. The outcome is what I discussed in the first chapter as a crisis of critique, namely the emergence of a sense of disconnection between Critical Theory itself and the historical and social context it is supposed to explain. The other effect, as I will now go on to show, is the undermining of CT's project of emancipation.

Anticipatory-utopian limits

The critical and emancipatory aspect of Habermas's theory of international politics resides in the idea that the achievement of a substantial forward step in 'the civilisation of the exercise of political authority' and universalisation of moral norms in global society is now within reach (Habermas, 2012a: 20). Concretely, the political message expressed by the project of Cosmopolitan Democracy is that systemic and normative processes converge today in making the transcendence of the nation-state and the establishment of a cosmopolitan world order both a *functional necessity* and a *normative imperative*. As he states in 2003, 'there is no sensible alternative to the ongoing development of international law into a cosmopolitan

order that offers an equal and reciprocal hearing for the voices of all those affected' (Habermas, 2003a: 370). The anticipatory-utopian aspect of Habermas's work on IR, then, centres on what Wolfgang Streeck (2016: 7) has recently defined as the 'unconditional partisanship for the non-national and supranational'. That this is the cynosure of Habermas's CT of IR becomes clear whenever the discussion touches on concrete issues and events. Every global political matter that he addresses - from the humanitarian interventions of the 1990s to the current crisis of the Eurozone - becomes refracted through the prism of what progress in world politics *must* be like, emerging either as an encouraging foretaste of the world to come or a frustrating diversion. Thus, for Habermas, the First Gulf War in 1991 'actually augurs well for the future' inasmuch as it sees the 'United Nations... carrying out a global domestic policy' by authorising military deployments in the role of global 'police forces' (Habermas, 1994: 9, 12; 2006, 169). The invasion of Iraq in 2003, on the other hand, is met with significant unease, because the Bush administration's unilateral approach dishonours the role of the United States as the 'guarantor of international rights' and 'the pacemaker for progress on [the] cosmopolitan path' (Habermas, 2003a: 365). In recent times, the formula according to which any political question is reduced to its significance for the prospect of the post-national future has been applied by Habermas to the European Union. Here Habermas has consistently maintained that European integration has to be supported regardless of any other political economic or social consideration, because of its 'civilising role' in showing the way forward to 'a more far-reaching cosmopolitanism' (Habermas, 2012a: 11) and because 'renounc[ing it] would also be to turn one's back on world history' (Habermas, 2015: 17).

A political project such as Habermas's, where no other reflection is allowed to supervene than the concern over the fulfilment of the predetermined course of human history, is problematic for one main reason. Namely, it has a tendency to turn into the *opposite* of a critical theory: a *theodicy* according to which everything that occurs can in some way be rationalised by reference to the necessary unfolding of progress (Anderson, 2012: 52). The critical project of emancipation is thereby transformed into an imperturbable doctrine for which every crisis, conflict or disaster

is a mere test or challenge paving the way for the eventual realisation of humankind's collective destiny (Anievas, 2010a: 154; Heins, 2016: 10). This kind of justificatory logic is evident throughout Habermas's IR writings. Thus, for example: the NATO bombings in Kosovo in 1999 are justified in light of the constitutionalisation of human rights they 'anticipate' and 'promote', as well as by the need 'to act as though there were already a fully institutionalised global civil society' (Habermas, 1999: 269-271; Anderson, 2005: 27-28); the debt crisis in Greece and the instability of the Euro are reinterpreted as a 'cunning of economic reason' that delivers the 'welcome political side-effect' of pushing previously recalcitrant governments and national populations to accept further supranational integration (Habermas, 2012a: 49-50; 2015: 68/76; Jeffries, 2010); and the entire arc of Western modernity, with its legacy of 'class struggle, imperialistic conquest and colonial atrocities, of world wars and crimes against humanity, postcolonial destruction and cultural uprooting' is redeemed in light of the 'remarkable innovations' it precipitated in the evolution of law and morality (Habermas, 2012a: 10-11; Anderson, 2012: 52).⁶³ The reliance of a strong teleology of Progress, then, carries with it two concrete dangers for cosmopolitanism as an emancipatory project. The first danger is that any political matter which *does not* immediately fit within the vision of the future that is being promoted becomes marginalised or ignored. In Habermas's case, this means that, once the goal of pushing forward with the accomplishment of a supranational world order has been established as the principal imperative of the age, other struggles and injustices tend to appear as matters of secondary importance that will be resolved organically as progress is made on the cosmopolitan path. As a result, questions that cannot be easily subsumed under the antagonism of national vs. supranational - such as those of

⁶³ As Volker Heins has recently noted, this form of argument was often employed by Kant in his works on cosmopolitanism. Heins (2016: 10) writes: 'On a number of occasions in his writings Kant argues that the harsh experiences which people inevitably go through as a result of their natural selfishness pave the way for the perpetual peace that will characterize the international federation of the future. Reason offers a path to this future, but humankind will make its own way there on the well-worn track of experience'. In the more clear example of this, Kant argues that: 'Wars, tense and unremitting military preparations, and the resultant distress which every state must eventually feel within itself, even in the midst of peace – these are the means by which nature drives nations to make initially imperfect attempts, but finally, after many devastations, upheavals and even complete inner exhaustion of their powers, to take the step which reason could have suggested to them even without so many sad experiences – that of abandoning a lawless state of savagery and entering a federation of peoples' (Kant, quoted in Heins, 2016: 10).

wealth inequality, global economic exploitation and racialised power relations between West and non-West - are denied political articulation or treated as matters of technical concern. For example, the push for a global redistribution of wealth is dismissed as something that 'cannot be fulfilled for the time being' and, in any case, would be accomplished '*in the medium term*' once the new cosmopolitan regime comes into existence (Habermas, 2012a: 69). The history of Western colonialism and the uneven power dynamics of global capitalism, meanwhile, are translated in the sanitised, technical terms of a 'historical asynchronicity of regional developments' (*Ibidem*). The second danger is that compliance with the speculatively predetermined path of evolution becomes a goal in itself - one that has to be secured even at the cost of compromising on the normative beliefs on which it was originally premised. In other words, once supranational integration is established as the be-all and end-all of human evolution, all other things may have to be sacrificed on its altar: even the principles of democracy itself. The risk in this is that the energies of Critical Theory are channeled no longer into uncovering and challenging the relations of power and domination in society, but instead go towards sustaining and justifying their further reproduction - on the only condition that it is 'with *expanded horizons*' (Habermas, 2001: 83 [emphasis in the original]). As Perry Anderson (2005; 2012), Dirk Jörke (2010) and William Scheuerman (2006; 2008) have all noted, this is what happens with the theory of deliberative democracy - arguably the most significant contribution of the CD literature. Initially set up as a progressive solution to the normative dilemmas of globalisation, the concept of deliberative democracy is ultimately deployed as a rationalisation for the hollowing out of representative democracy at the national level and a justification for the expansion of technocratic rule at the supranational one. It consists, in the end, in little more than a normative "fix" which grants global governance the semblance of legitimacy without involving any actual democratic power of control (Scheuerman, 2006: 101-102; 2008: 89).⁶⁴ As noted by Dirk Jörke, then:

⁶⁴ The reduction in the standards of democracy that is implicit in the theory of deliberative democracy is clear when Habermas (2001: 110) explains that: 'the democratic procedure no longer draws its legitimizing force only, indeed not even predominantly, from political participation and the expression of political will, but rather from the general accessibility of a deliberative process whose structure grounds an expectation of rationally acceptable results'.

the concept of deliberative democracy becomes ideological, justifying a world where, on the one hand, all democratic institutions and policy practices remain formally intact and are supplemented with new forms of citizen involvement; and on the other hand, these old and new democratic institutions have only a limited relevance and are bypassed by new forms of national and global governance where powerful elites dictate the rules of the game. (Jörke, 2010: 445).

The willingness to devise all manner of accommodating solutions in the name of the supposed “greater good” becomes evident in all those instances in which Habermas finds himself defending supranational integration in the face of opposition from national populations (see Habermas, 2012b: 485-488; 2015: 79). In a passage from his latest book on the crisis of the European Union, for instance, he proposes a striking solution to the lack of support among European citizens for a fully federalised EU: namely, that the “Ever Closer Union” be legitimated on hypothetical terms - ‘as if it were the result of a process of democratic opinion- and will-formation’ and ‘as if [the European citizens] *had* participated in the constitution-building process from the outset’ (Habermas, 2015: 44 [emphasis in the original]). From there, it is not too hard to see, as Perry Anderson does, Habermas’s project turning into ‘a metaphysical justification... tailor-made for the further dissolution of popular sovereignty at the European level, and its vaporisation altogether at a putative global level’ - the cosmopolitan order he envisages ‘end[ing] in a political wraith: democracy without democracy, shorn even of elections or voters’ (Anderson, 2005: 18-19).

These anticipatory-utopian shortcomings, I argue, signal the failure of Cosmopolitan Democracy as an emancipatory intervention on contemporary global politics. If the fault of CD’s social-theoretic dimension lies in its inability to explain the defining tendencies and processes of its time, the limit of its political perspective is given by the incapacity to identify and confront the relations of domination and power in society. In the end, the solution that CD finds to the antinomy of radicalism and resignation I noted in the previous chapter is to sublimate them in a utopianism without utopia that becomes a conservative call for the preservation of what already

exists. The crisis of Cosmopolitan Democracy as a Critical Theory, then, is wholly contained in one of Habermas's more candid statements of intent, in which he explains that:

the challenge is less to invent something new than to conserve the great achievements of the European nation-state beyond its frontiers in a new form. What is new is only the entity which will arise through these endeavors. What must be conserved are the standards of living, the opportunities for education and leisure, and the social space for personal self-realization which are necessary to ensure the fair value of individual liberty, and thereby make democratic participation possible (Habermas, 2006b: 90).⁶⁵

Conclusion

In this chapter I have assessed Habermas's theory of international politics as illustrative of the project of Cosmopolitan Democracy. I have shown that his diagnosis of the development of global politics through the prism of globalisation and normative appeal for cosmopolitanism suffers from the limitations I anticipated in the previous chapter. In its explanatory-diagnostic dimension, Habermas's theory of globalisation relies on an essentialist and a-critical account of capitalism and the international states-system and hinders the development of more nuanced inquiries into the social and power dynamics of contemporary society. In its anticipatory-utopian aspect, it outlines a rigid and defensive project that subordinates emancipatory politics to the compliance with the necessary course of history. These weaknesses of both analysis and emancipatory politics are made more serious by the impact that Habermas's writings have had in and outside of academia and are indicative of what I called in chapter one the "crisis of critique" of Critical Theory in

⁶⁵ As Scheuerman notes, Habermas has abandoned, at this point, even the critique of the colonisation of the lifeworld by the system (Scheuerman, 2008: 153). Instead, the political content of CT is given by 'a defensive model of deliberative democracy in which democratic institutions exercise at best an attenuated check on market and administrative processes, and where deliberative publics most of the time tend to remain, as Habermas himself describes it, at rest' (*Ibidem*: 89).

IR. Most significantly for the purposes of this research, they illustrate the link that exists between that predicament of Frankfurt School research on international politics, on the one hand, and the meta-theoretical architecture of the communicative-democratic paradigm, on the other.⁶⁶ In the next chapter, I go on to test this hypothesis further by interrogating another strands of Critical Theory in IR and another attempt to analyse and provide a political vision for the realm of international politics: that is, the tradition of Critical IR Theory and the work of Andrew Linklater.

⁶⁶ Some of the flaws and failings discussed in this chapter - and particularly those related to Habermas's political pronouncements - could be argued to specific the Frankfurt School theory's conception of Cosmopolitan Democracy and therefore not apply as cleanly to other scholars of the literature. It is certainly the case that other versions of the CD project, such as the one promoted by David Held, have sought to develop a more ambitious and far-reaching vision of cosmopolitanism that entails significant economic and social reforms. Nonetheless, given the prominent position occupied by Habermas's work and the influence it has had on shaping the underlying theory and methodology of the literature as a whole, I contend that the remarks developed above do give an indication as to the broader limits and weaknesses of that project as a Critical Theory of International Relations.

Chapter Five: Linklater and the Critical Theory of International Relations

I illustrated in the previous chapter how Habermas's work on international politics manifests the limitations of the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique. In discussing his writings on globalisation and the cosmopolitan condition, I showed how the model of society as system and lifeworld and the separation between the diagnostic and normative tasks of CT result in a concrete impoverishment of critical research. On the one hand, the explanation of geo-political and economic dynamics is left to the reified categories of traditional theory; on the other, cosmopolitan democracy as a politics of moral progress offers little guidance to concrete emancipatory struggles and risks lapsing into a justification of established global structures. In this chapter, I go one step further and show how the shortcomings that derive from Habermas's meta-theoretical framework affect not only his work, but other strands of Frankfurt School IR research as well. Specifically, I argue that insofar as it has grounded itself normatively in Habermas's philosophy of language and subscribed to the communicative paradigm of critique, the approach of Critical IR Theory has been subject to the same kind of limitations and issues I discussed as arising in his cosmopolitan writings. I contend, therefore, that the diagnosis and critique of the framework of system and lifeworld articulated in Chapter three can be employed to elucidate the weaknesses of contemporary Critical IR scholarship. To prove that point, I focus in this chapter on one of the most comprehensive and significant bodies of Frankfurt School-inspired research to emerge in the discipline of IR: that is, the work of Andrew Linklater on cosmopolitanism and the civilising process in international politics (Brincat, 2013).

At first sight, Linklater might appear like an odd choice to centre a discussion on the impact of the Habermasian paradigm around. After all, he has over the past fifteen years increasingly moved away from the typical self-understanding of Critical Theory, supplementing the conceptual resources and normative vocabulary of the

Frankfurt School with non-partisan forms of inquiry, such as the English School and Norbert Elias's process sociology (see Linklater, 2004; 2011a; 2016). Furthermore, even when he was most closely associated with the Frankfurt School approach, Linklater has been very selective in his reading of Habermas and has drawn mostly from the philosophical and normative aspects of his work (Anievas, 2005: 135). Most significantly, Linklater has only briefly discussed and never explicitly adopted the binary ontology and methodology of society I focused my critique of Habermasian CT on. These very factors which make Linklater a *sui generis* exponent of Critical IR Theory, however, also make him the most interesting "test" for the central argument of this thesis: namely, that the crisis of contemporary CT in IR can be understood at least in part as deriving from the ontological and methodological failings of the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique. In this sense, Linklater's work constitutes precisely *because* of its peculiarities a crucial limit-case to establish whether the present predicament of critical scholarship in IR can indeed be traced back to the shortcomings of Habermas's meta-theoretical framework. In the course of this chapter, I therefore have to demonstrate: firstly, that the entirety of Linklater's project, up to his most recently published works, possesses a unifying purpose and can be conceived, as a whole, as a body of *critical theoretical work*; and secondly, that as a work of CT, Linklater's project falls within the bounds of the Habermasian paradigm and is constrained by the same basic meta-theoretical principles of critique. In order to do that, I proceed in two steps. In the first section, I discuss Linklater's work from his doctoral research in 1982 to his latest book in 2016. I trace the core junctures in the development of his approach to the study of IR and identify its *Leitmotif* in the interpretation of the evolving normative structure of international society. I find that even in his most recent works, where the influence of Frankfurt School theory is at its weakest, a normative kernel and emancipatory aspiration remains clearly identifiable. In the second section, I assess the efficacy of Linklater's critical project as a theory and politics of international relations. I find that his research presents similar explanatory-diagnostic shortcomings to Habermas's theory of IR, most notably in its reduction of structural global dynamics to a linear process of systemic evolution. Even though he does not follow Habermas in explicitly theorising the transformation

of world politics in systems-theoretic and functionalist terms, Linklater's explanation of IR as defined by the 'lengthening and deepening' of the 'chains of global interconnectedness' presents the same basic content and analytical inadequacy (Linklater, 2012: 69; 2016: 351). Furthermore, I find that as an emancipatory vision of change in international politics his project is similarly unequipped to identify or inform concrete social struggles and amounts to a comforting celebration of past progress in the moral regulation of inter-societal relations. I conclude that even though Linklater's critique of international politics is not explicitly built on the framework of system and lifeworld and takes a different form from Habermas's cosmopolitan project, it is inspired by his conception of critique, follows the same meta-theoretical orientations and displays similar weaknesses and shortfalls. This, I argue, shows that the current predicament of Frankfurt School research in IR can indeed be traced back to the methodological and ontological precepts of the dominant, communicative-democratic paradigm of critique and can only be solved by a fundamental rethinking of those meta-theoretical parameters.

Linklater's theory of international politics

If Habermas's engagement with international relations constitutes a direct application of his communicative-democratic framework of critique and can effectively be summarised as the assertion of the functional necessity and normative desirability of a cosmopolitan political order, Linklater's work on IR follows a more complex route. Andrew Linklater emerged in the late 1980s as a leading figure in a broader critical theoretical movement in the discipline of IR, the chief aim of which was to contest the predominance of traditional realist scholarship and advance more philosophically nuanced and explicitly normative readings of international politics (see Linklater, 1992; Hoffman, 1991). Together with scholars such as Richard Ashley (1981), Mark Hoffman (1987; 1988; 1991) and Mark Neufeld (1993; 1994), he was among the first to employ the philosophical and theoretical resources of Frankfurt School theory to challenge the positivist underpinnings of "mainstream" IR research. Linklater has remained an important

presence in the critical study of international politics ever since. His work, which now spans across more than three decades, constitutes arguably the most extensive and cogent attempt to articulate an alternative, critical research project in the discipline of IR that is inspired by the emancipatory principles of the Frankfurt School (Brincat, 2013). During that time, his scholarship has transformed significantly. Starting from international political theory and what he defines as ‘an essentially Kantian standpoint’ (Linklater, 2011c: 35), he ‘developed through the Habermasian discourse ethics’ to a more sociologically-informed account of ‘long-term patterns of change’ in humanity’s response to vulnerability and harm (Linklater, 2007a: 145). In the process, Linklater has increasingly sought to complement the normative framework of Habermasian theory with elements from “non-partisan” forms of inquiry, such as the English School tradition of IR and Norbert Elias’s conception of the “civilising process” (Linklater, 2011, 22/193; Devetak et al, 2013, 489). All along this journey, I claim, his project maintains a unifying identity and sense of purpose which is shaped by Habermasian theory and is animated by the emancipatory interest in understanding and advancing the normative development of human societies.

Linklater’s early works: from international political theory to Critical IR Theory

Linklater’s early works are located in the sub-discipline of international political theory, a field he defines as providing ‘a philosophical account of the experience of living in and among a world of separate, sovereign states’ (Linklater, 1982: 3). His concern, in particular, is to trace the advancement of human freedom throughout the history of inter-societal relations (Ibidem, xi-xii). In *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* (1982) - his first book, written before the encounter with the Frankfurt School - Linklater pursues this goal through the means of neo-Kantian philosophy. Linklater’s argument is that freedom and reason are not fixed or absolute ideals but rather possess their own developmental history. ‘If human reason has a history’, he continues, ‘the prospect arises of distinguishing several stages in its evolution. Different social formations may be placed on a scale of

forms, a hierarchy of types, in accordance with the precise level of rationality embodied within them' (*Ibidem*, 140). Applying this idea to the study of IR, Linklater seeks to construct a hypothetical 'scale of types of international relations', namely a hierarchy of forms of intersocietal relations ranked 'in accordance to the extent to which each approximates the conditions of realised human freedom' (*Ibidem*: xi, 167).⁶⁷ Concretely, Linklater contends that it is possible to identify three general stages of normative evolution in international relations: the first stage refers to a state-of-nature condition within which different tribal groupings exist in complete estrangement from and conflict with one another (*Ibidem*: 169-170). The second stage is that of the modern states-system, in which individuals 'have rights in their states by virtue of their citizenship' and the relations between societies start to be regulated through rules and codified frameworks of interaction (*Ibidem*: 189-194). The third stage is that of a prospective cosmopolitan order wherein the principle of state sovereignty is overcome and 'men identify with, and have rights in, a properly universal society' (*Ibidem*: 198). Linklater describes this last step using Kant's notion of 'a universal kingdom of ends' and characterises it as the most normatively advanced possible way of organising human interactions at the global level (*Ibidem*: xii, 100, 189).

Linklater's next book, *Beyond Realism and Marxism* (1990), articulates his encounter with Frankfurt School Critical Theory. This time, rather than dealing directly with the evolution of international relations, he engages in a discussion of the history and development of IR theory. Linklater (1990: 8) starts from Martin Wight's proposition that there are 'three main traditions of international theory - the realist, rationalist and revolutionist perspectives'. Each of these traditions, Linklater argues, is associated with a particular 'primary concern' or with what Habermas (1971) called a 'knowledge-constitutive interest': realism is associated for Linklater with the study of power through the means of positivist science; rationalism is concerned with order and the hermeneutic interpretation of legal and cultural phenomena; revolutionism, lastly, is driven by an interest in human emancipation

⁶⁷ Linklater (1982: 168) explicitly states that he is dealing with 'hypothetical rather than empirical forms of international relations'. He adds that each 'type' of international relation 'is

and consists in the normative critique of existing social arrangements (Linklater 1990: 8-9). According to Linklater, these three traditions form a 'dialectical sequence' of 'progressively more adequate approaches to world politics' (*Ibidem*, 9/10). Substituting Wight's notion of revolutionism with Critical Theory, he argues that this last approach 'surpasses both [realist and rationalist] perspectives because its inquiry is oriented towards the realisation of truth and freedom' (*Ibidem*: 9). Linklater then proceeds to trace the historical development of this critical theoretical tradition, passing through Kant, Hegel, Marx and finally Habermas. As I have outlined in chapter two, he argues that each of these thinkers represents a dialectical sublation of the previous stage, culminating in Habermas's 'emancipatory project... to extend the realm of social interaction which is governed by universalisable moral principles' (*Ibidem*: 26). Linklater's conclusion is to call for a 'post-Marxist critical theory of international relations' that integrates the contribution of Marxism and realism but follows Habermas in subordinating them to the 'normative interest in defending the extension of moral community' (*Ibidem*: 171).

In the years that follow the publication of *Beyond Realism and Marxism*, Linklater establishes himself as a leading advocate for the establishment of a Frankfurt School-inspired, critical theoretical approach to the study of IR. Over a series of articles written throughout the 1990s (see Linklater, 1992; 1996; 1997), he articulates the vision for a distinctive Critical IR project that deploys the meta-theoretical and philosophical ideas of Habermasian theory in the discipline of International Relations (Hoffman, 1991: 173; Rengger & Thirkell-White, 2007: 6-7). Linklater's vision of Critical IR Theory revolves around four core points. First is the challenge to the positivist philosophy of science that underlies "mainstream" forms of IR scholarship (Linklater, 2007b: 45). In particular, CIRT takes issue with the epistemic principle of value-neutral research and asserts in its place the social situatedness and inherent normativity of all knowledge claims (*Ibidem*). Second is the notion of CIRT being a *post-Marxist* approach that embraces the emancipatory aspiration of the Marxist tradition but leaves behind its concrete analysis of capitalist society (Linklater, 1990: 4-7; 2007b: 46). Linklater's argument is that 'a critical

principally a construct' that 'does not correspond with anything that has ever happened'

theory of international relations... ought to supersede Marxist political economy... since its emphasis on class, property relations and production cannot provide an adequate explanation of the constraints upon, and prospects for, the extension of moral and political community' (Linklater, 1990: 33). Following Habermas's project of reconstructing historical materialism, Linklater finds the core flaw in the Marxian approach to reside in the failure to 'include political and cultural relations between independent communities in its account of the moral and political development of the human race' and in the 'overestim[ation] of the importance of class and production' (Linklater, 1990: 4, 163-164). CIRT, Linklater contends, 'learns from and overcomes' these 'weaknesses inherent in Marxism' and follows Habermas in transitioning from the "paradigm of production" to a new "paradigm of communication" that centres on the development of humanity's linguistic and moral competences (Linklater, 2007b: 46-50). As a result, CIRT now focuses its attention on 'the origins and development of universal moral norms in the sphere of intersocietal relations' (Linklater, 1990: 163-164). Third is the anchoring of CIRT's emancipatory vision in Habermas's discourse ethics and the 'endorse[ment of] the commitment to modes of cosmopolitan democracy that extend the boundaries of political community' (Linklater, 2007b: 98). This means that CIRT is guided for Linklater by the normative aspiration to remove all structures and beliefs that 'obstruct open dialogue' between individuals in and across societies (*Ibidem*: 57). As part of this, Critical IR Theory endorses the ideal of cosmopolitan democracy as a community 'in which insiders and outsiders can participate on equal terms' (*Ibidem*). Fourth is the adoption of the 'method of immanent critique' as CIRT's main instrument of critical intervention. Immanent critique - which he also refers to as "praxeology" (see Linklater, 2001: 24) - represents for Linklater the practice of identifying the latent potentialities as well as the moral resources which 'political actors can harness for radical purposes' and that point to the attainment of more advanced political arrangements (Linklater, 1992: 93; 1998: 5, 164). It consists, in other words, in 'revealing that new forms of political community are immanent within existing forms of life and anticipated by their moral reserves' (Linklater, 1998: 5).

(*Ibidem*: 167).

In *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998), Linklater puts these programmatic statements into practice by returning to the question of the normative evolution of international relations. Drawing from Habermas's philosophy of language and in light of the reflections on Critical IR Theory developed over the previous decade, he updates and reworks the three-stage model of moral progress set out in his first book. First of all, Linklater integrates the notion of 'moral-practical learning' as the social mechanism that carries forward the normative evolution of international relations (Linklater, 1998: 91, 121).⁶⁸ The progression from the tribal through the Westphalian and finally to the cosmopolitan level he now understands as driven not by the abstract unfolding of human reason, but by the collective development of more advanced capacities for critical reflection and mutual understanding (*Ibidem*: 91-92).⁶⁹ Secondly, Linklater goes further in specifying the normative basis of the last, cosmopolitan stage of development. Responding in particular to post-structuralist concerns over the 'the potential for domination... inherent in all universalising perspectives', he supplants the Kantian rationalism that was at the heart of his first book with a more difference-sensitive and inclusive perspective based on Habermas's theory of communicative reason (*Ibidem*: 47). Linklater now contends that 'a thin conception of cosmopolitanism with no fixed and final vision of the future', grounded in the procedural rules of discourse ethics, 'can replace a thick conception of cosmopolitanism which believes in determining the precise content of a single universalisable conception of the good life' (*Ibidem*: 48). This 'dialogic' model of cosmopolitanism does not rely on the implementation of a predetermined set of absolute principles, but rather is based on the 'widening of the circle of those who have rights to participate in dialogue and the commitment that norms cannot be regarded as universally valid unless they have, or could

⁶⁸ Following Habermas, Linklater (1982: 120) defines moral-practical learning as the 'the process of recognising the injustice of many of the social and political barriers to involvement in open dialogue, and to the practice of questioning the rituals of exclusion which prevent the features of communicative action from being more widely accepted as principles of IR'.

⁶⁹ In particular, he follows Habermas in linking humanity's normative development to the progression through the three stages of moral understanding theorised by Kohlberg's developmental psychology: the "pre-conventional", in which 'subjects obey norms fearing that non-compliance will lead to sanctions imposed by a higher authority'; the "conventional", where 'they obey norms from a sense of loyalty to existing social groups or peers'; and lastly the "post-conventional", in which 'subjects stand back from authority structures and group loyalties and ask whether they are complying with principles which have universal validity'. A cosmopolitan world order would coincide for Linklater with the collective attainment of the post-conventional stage of moral development.

command, the consent of all those who stand to be affected by them' (*Ibidem*: 96). The third change is that Linklater now locates his research in the tradition of Frankfurt School critique and makes explicit the emancipatory aspiration underlying it (Linklater, 1997; 1998: 109, 181). The aim of his work is now that of constructing a 'critical international theory' which 'defends the normative ideal of forms of political community which release societal potentials for achieving levels of universality and difference' and reflects 'on how modern societies can use the moral and political resources which were accumulated in the struggle against exclusion to secure these objectives' (*Ibidem*: 181). To fulfil this latter task, Linklater concludes that the normative theory he developed thus far will have to be complemented by more sociological forms of inquiry which can identify 'within existing forms of life' the 'moral reserves' and 'immanent potentials' that can be mobilised to bring about a cosmopolitan future (*Ibidem*: 5, 10, 181).⁷⁰

Linklater's later works: from the study of harm to process sociology

Around the turn of the millennium, the focus of Linklater's research starts shifting away from international political theory and towards a greater engagement with sociology. Underlying this transition are two major developments. Firstly, as was already emerging in *The Transformation of Political Community*, Linklater becomes interested in supplementing the hypothetical history of moral evolution he relied on thus far with a more empirically-minded investigation of real-world patterns of change in international relations (Devetak et al, 2013: 489). Secondly, he becomes increasingly dissatisfied with Habermas's 'decorporealised' and 'excessively rationalistic' normative theory and starts to question whether the ethics of discourse and philosophy of language provide a robust enough foundation to build a cosmopolitan world order on (Linklater, 2005; 2007a: 144-146). In particular, Linklater finds Habermas's theory to be 'generally lacking... any recognition of the significance of emotional responses to vulnerability, pain and suffering' and

⁷⁰ Linklater (1998: 10) comments that 'normative arguments are incomplete... without a parallel sociological account of how they can be realised in practice... and normative and

therefore to miss the important role that the aversion to harm and injury could play in the definition of a universal moral framework (*Ibidem*: 146). In his own words, 'there are more direct routes to cosmopolitanism than the Habermasian claim that the first "speech act" already contained the promise of a universal association', and one of those routes is the definition of a 'cosmopolitan harm convention' that regulates the conduct of inter-societal relations and 'protects all people from unjustifiable forms of violent and non-violent harm' (Linklater, 2010a: 106; 2011: 13, 265). These two developments converge in the belief that, for the time being, 'questions about the normative content of critical theory must be set aside because the priority is to extend the conception of a sociological project... with the purpose of investigating how far the potentialities for global solidarity which can be derived from basic human concerns about vulnerability and injurability have been realised in different states-systems'.

The shift in the priorities guiding Linklater's research is accompanied by a change in theoretical references. Linklater is increasingly interested in two schools of sociological thought that originate outside the critical theoretical tradition: Norbert Elias's process sociology and the English School of IR. With regards to the former, he becomes interested in the sociological study of European society as undergoing a "civilising process" characterised by the pacification of intra-societal relations and the development of more stringent standards and rules on harmful behaviour (Linklater, 2004: 9).⁷¹ Linklater takes from this the orientation towards studying long-term trends in the collective development of social rules of self-restraint and the self-regulation of violent behaviour as well as in the emotional identification between the members of a community (Linklater, 2004: 4; Linklater & Mennell, 2010: 398). As to the latter, Linklater is drawn to the English School's study of the norms and conventions that order the international society of states and the interaction between political actors (Linklater, 2004: 5-7; Linklater & Suganami, 2006). What is

sociological advances are incomplete without some reflection on practical possibilities.

⁷¹ As explained by Linklater, the concept of "civilising process" refers in Elias's work to: 'the development over approximately five centuries of the modern European belief in having left behind the savagery of earlier times and having moved beyond the barbarism of neighbouring places.... The "civilizing process" was the core concept around which Elias organized the analysis of changing social attitudes to violence and suffering and associated

particularly interesting to him is the English School's focus on international society - understood as the ensemble of rules and principles that structure a particular states-system - as the object of analysis (Linklater, 2007b: 131), as well as the idea of developing a 'comparative sociology of systems-states' that assesses the changes in the regulation of political interactions across different international systems (Linklater, 2002: 320; 2011: ix). According to Linklater, 'Elias's explanation of the civilizing process and the English School analysis of international society can be combined in a "higher level synthesis" that strengthens the former's account of how specific patterns of social and political change between the fifteenth and twentieth centuries transformed not just the European continent but the entire world' (Linklater, 2016: 5). Combining the longer-term, developmental perspective of the former with the latter's focus on international society, Linklater now seeks to write a 'sociology of global civilising processes' that is animated by two concrete research questions: firstly, how far 'efforts to prevent physical cruelty... have developed in different states-systems'; and secondly, 'whether or not a global conscience or cosmopolitan moral emotions have greater influence in the modern states-system than in earlier epochs' (Linklater, 2004: 21).

As part of this sociological turn, the role that the Frankfurt School plays in Linklater's research changes considerably. Habermas's cosmopolitan-democratic framework no longer serves as the main theoretical reference for analysis, but takes on the auxiliary function of adding normative meaning and an emancipatory purpose to the otherwise "non-partisan" sociology of global civilising processes (Linklater, 2011a: 77). Linklater's goal is now to combine the 'Frankfurt School influenced critical international theory' he delineated in his earlier works with the sociological perspectives of Elias and the English School, so as to produce 'a more comprehensive standpoint that provides an explicit defence of ethical commitments' while also leveraging the latter's 'belief in the detached quest for vital "reality-congruent" knowledge' (Linklater, 2011a: 154, 193). The 'central objective', then, is to 'incorporate [the] main strengths [of process sociology and the English School] in a higher synthesis that includes - contrary to the dominant positions in both areas of

shifts in the operation of such basic emotions as embarrassment, shame and disgust over

inquiry - the emancipatory ideals of Frankfurt School social theory' (Linklater, 2016: 17). The outcome of this "double integration" - 'between the Eliasian analysis of civilising processes and the English School inquiry into international society', on the one hand, and 'those combined realms of inquiry and Frankfurt School critical theory', on the other (Linklater, 2016: 15) - is a new research agenda that has resulted so far in a vast number of articles (among others, Linklater 2002; 2004; 2007a; 2009a; 2010c; 2012) and two major books (Linklater, 2011a; 2016).

In *The Problem of Harm in World Politics* (2011a) - the first in a planned trilogy of books on the topic - Linklater sets out the research framework through which he intends to interrogate the normative development of international relations. The core question to be answered, he argues, is 'whether, or how far, the modern world has made progress in making harm a key moral and political question for humanity as a whole' (Linklater, 2011a: 5). In order to address this, he draws up a taxonomy of different forms of harm, from 'violent harm through to the harm of indifference to suffering, and forms of humiliation, forms of exploitation and structural harm' and seeks to find out whether the emotional response and moral sensitivity to them has changed historically in different states-systems (Devetak et al, 2013: 490). By synthesising process sociology, the English School approach and Frankfurt School Critical Theory, he seeks to trace through the long history of international politics the development and institutionalisation of 'cosmopolitan harm conventions' that protect the vulnerable from injury and place moral and legal constraints on the exercise of political authority (Linklater, 2011a: 7-10). Linklater suggests that this pattern of moral progress in inter-societal affairs lays witness to the existence of a "global civilising process" akin to the one observed by Norbert Elias with regards to European societies (Linklater, 2011a: 256-257). This, he concludes, will have to be demonstrated empirically by means of a 'comparative analysis of different historical epochs' (*Ibidem*: 7).

In *Violence and Civilisation in the Western States-system* (2016), Linklater undertakes that historiographical task by engaging in a comparative study of different Western states-systems, from the Hellenic city-states system, through the centuries in question' (Linklater, 2007b: 10).

Renaissance and up to the contemporary international order. Across these different systems, he finds evidence of the unfolding of a civilising process that consists in the development of more advanced and peaceful frameworks of conflict resolution as well as more stringent moral norms on permissible violence (Linklater, 2016: 438). This, he comments, represents ‘an overall social trend that connects the taming... of the warriors [in Medieval courts] with the taming of great power rivalries through the political initiatives that were taken at the end of the Second World War to eliminate militarism’ and leads up to the present day (*Ibidem*, 438). Linklater’s conclusion is that it is indeed possible to say that ‘the tolerance of violence in everyday life and in relations between peoples was much higher in classical antiquity and in the medieval world than it is in “civilised” societies today’ and that there ‘were lower levels of restraint on the physical exploitation of other people’ (Linklater, 2016: 469). Most importantly, Linklater identifies a recurring *pattern* in the civilising process of European societies - one which carries important lessons for the comprehension of the contemporary international order. Following similar observations by Norbert Elias and analogous to Habermas’s own binary theory of social development, Linklater suggests that the historical evolution of Western states-systems follows a particular rhythm that is given by the interaction between two parallel processes: firstly, the development of European civilisation is characterised by ‘rising levels of interconnectedness’ - by which he means the ‘lengthening’ and ‘deepening’ of the chains of “material” and “human” social relations between individuals and societies (*Ibidem*, 387, 465-466). Concretely, this first process materialises for Linklater in the emergence of more sophisticated, extensive and coordinated social formations that bind together individuals or communities that were previously disconnected.⁷² Each advance in social interconnectedness, Linklater argues, unleashes destructive potentials and creates new sources of danger and harm that exceeded the available norms of moral

⁷² Examples of this are the consolidation in the eleventh and twelfth centuries of ‘power monopolies’ that imposed order over their respective communities and would over the following centuries engage in ‘elimination contests over larger areas’ or the world (Linklater, 2016: 18-19; 153); the ‘rise of the nation-in-arms and “total warfare” in the aftermath of the French Revolution’, that for the first time involved national populations all over Europe in the conduct of warfare (*Ibidem*, 308-309); or the emergence in the Twentieth century of a ‘global market civilisation’ that connects individuals and societies all over the world through networks of economic exchange (*Ibidem*, 411; 453).

restraint and practices of conflict resolution (*Ibidem*: 9, 305). In his own words, ‘advances towards higher levels of human interconnectedness have often outpaced measures to control the relevant processes so that harm to people and the natural environment is reduced if not eliminated’ (*Ibidem*: 15). As a result, pressures and incentives are created for the development of new moral outlooks, new standards of self-restraint and new legal and customary frameworks for the regulation of violence. The ‘civilising process’ describes for Linklater the second pattern of historical evolution, through which societies respond to the pressures created by increases in interconnectedness by developing more advanced collective moral and cultural arrangements (*Ibidem*: 339).⁷³ Every civilising progress, in turn, makes possible a further advance in the level of interconnectedness, thus beginning the cycle anew (*Ibidem*: 454-456).⁷⁴ This double movement of societal development wherein peoples are ‘forced... together and confronted... with the challenge of learning how to coexist peacefully in longer chains’ Linklater sees as repeating itself again and again in the history of European civilisation (*Ibidem*: 420, 450-451).⁷⁵ At the same time, Linklater is weary of ascribing any law-like regularity, automatism or historical necessity to the civilising process and stresses the elements of contingency and historical indeterminacy. He notes, for instance, that the Hellenic states-system did not succeed in regulating the destructive forces of inter-societal conflict and ultimately collapsed because of it (*Ibidem*: 58, 105). Moreover, he notes in relation to the Holocaust that “‘civilising” and “decivilising” processes always

⁷³ Thus, for example, the rules and practices of diplomacy emerged to pacify relations between warring city-states in Renaissance Italy (Linklater, 2016: 19); the ‘process of state formation’ in early modern Europe is ‘accompan[ed]’ by ‘the “civilising” of conduct... in “court society”’ that tames the struggle for power between warring factions (*Ibidem*: 134); and ‘the industrialisation of war and the Nazi genocides were followed by concerted efforts to rework the relationship between sovereign rights and international and humanitarian legal and moral responsibilities’ (*Ibidem*: 385).

⁷⁴ For instance, Linklater (2012: 63) notes that the ‘substantial internal pacification and achievements in stabilising the international states-system’ in the aftermath of WW2 ‘created the conditions in which higher levels of economic interconnectedness could appear within (and in relations between) national communities’.

⁷⁵ For instance, he observes that there are ‘broad similarities between the conditions in which state formation took place and the process of civilisation developed [in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth century] and the contemporary phase of human interconnectedness in which societies are obliged to consider whether they can agree on transcultural standards of self-restraint that enable people to become attuned to the interests of others over great distances’ (*Ibidem*, 387). Linklater (2016: 454-456) comments that in both cases, the ‘taming of the great powers’ and the ‘major advances in territorial pacification’ made possible and ‘facilitated the development of longer social and economic webs’.

develop in tandem' and that the 'important questions are which have the upper hand at any juncture' (*Ibidem*: 343).

For the present, all of this means for Linklater that humanity and its civilising process are in an 'ambiguous' situation: on the one hand, global interconnectedness has dramatically increased the level of harm that states can inflict upon each other, as well as 'expos[ing] them to vulnerabilities of a different sort that include the unpredictable consequences of climate change' (*Ibidem*: 405). With the ongoing threat of nuclear war combining with the 'challenges of global economic interdependence', it is clear for Linklater that today the 'capacity to cause harm has run ahead of global restraints on that facet of human ingenuity' (Linklater, 2012: 66). On the other hand, the lengthening of the chains of global interaction is also making it possible for individuals to see themselves as members of the same global community and to develop empathy and emotional connections to people all over the globe (*Ibidem*: 69). In this context, 'transformations of psychological orientation' are taking place that point to the lowering of tolerance towards cruelty and suffering and lay witness to the 'unprecedented influence of the idea of human equality on international relations' (Linklater, 2016: 450). This contradiction is compounded for Linklater by a second ambiguity that is of a concrete political nature: on the one hand, 'rising levels of interconnectedness have created pressures to exercise greater self-regulation and self-restraint' and 'have introduced incentives to acquire more realistic understandings of other people' and move forward in the development of some form of 'solidarist' cosmopolitan community. On the other hand, 'ancient rivalries and animosities have not... disappeared' and there remains a 'strong emotional attachment to the nation-state' as the 'indispensable "survival unit"' (*Ibidem*: 12).⁷⁶ The combination of these ambiguities creates for Linklater the possibility of "counterthrusts" and "decivilising processes" interrupting the progress towards a cosmopolitan legal order (*Ibidem*: 12). In this context, the task of Critical Theory is for Linklater 'to alter the balance of power between those interrelated

⁷⁶ He also observes that there exists in the non-Western world a view that 'national sovereignty is central to resisting political strategies that may only ensure the continuing domination of Western conceptions of civilization that are unwelcome reminders of the imperial era' (*Ibidem*, 388).

phenomena' and shift it towards the continuation of the global civilising process (Linklater, 2012: 67-68; 2016: 352).

It is at this point that Linklater sees the critical and normative outlook of CIRT coming into play. For him, the contribution that his sociological research on global civilising processes can bring to the emancipatory project of cosmopolitanism is to provide intellectual support in the ongoing political struggle over the future of the international order. Linklater seeks to do that, concretely, by constructing new "grand narratives" of historical progress that convey a sense of how humanity as a universal subject has undergone a civilising process and, over a few thousand years, has been able to secure limited but important steps forward in the pacification of social life (Linklater, 2011: 259-260; 2016: 465-466). This, Linklater (2016: 465-466) argues, performs two useful functions: firstly, 'grand narratives that locate the contemporary era in very long-time patterns of biological evolution and cultural development have a valuable role to play in promoting identification with the species as a whole' (*Ibidem*: 465-466). Documenting 'the struggles of the species, celebrat[ing] its achievements, and explain[ing] threats to its survival and to its ability to live decently', he argues, can produce a 'broadening of temporal and geographical horizons' and a 'higher level of detachment' from particularistic communities and thereby 'encourage cosmopolitan identification' (Linklater, 2011, 259; 2016: 465-466). On the other hand, 'studies of long-term processes of social development can complement the efforts by transnational advocacy networks to promote appropriate conceptions of global moral and political responsibility' (Linklater, 2011, 263). Grand narratives of progress, in other words, represent an antidote to hopelessness and fatalism and 'provide national and transnational actors with crucial resources that can be harnessed in struggles to reduce or eradicate pointless and relievable harm' (*Ibidem*: 264). In so doing, they contribute to 'political efforts to promote new forms of cosmopolitan "conscience formation"' and help to 'counteract the "drag effect" that national loyalties continue to exert on efforts to enlarge sovereign responsibilities' (Linklater, 2016: 463, 466).

Critique

Linklater's theory of international politics - from its beginnings in the 1980s as a series of reflections on international political theory to the current study of global civilising processes - possess a clear unifying logic and purpose that makes it possible to discuss the entirety of his project as a work of Critical Theory. Even in his later works - where Linklater frames his writings in the more modest terms of a 'sociology of global morals with an emancipatory intent' (Linklater, 2007a: 2011) - there is a normative and critical aspiration at work that is extraneous to either process sociology or the English School and refers back to his earlier subscription to Frankfurt School theory (Linklater, 2012: 65-66). As he confirmed in 2013, 'the critical element [in his later, sociological writings] is still drawn to a large degree from Habermas. Discourse ethics remains important but also Habermas's reflections on the reconstruction of historical materialism' (Linklater, interviewed in Devetak et al., 2013: 487). The sociological writings of the post-2000 period, in that sense, do not disavow but actualise and work within the programme for a Critical Theory of IR he set out in the 1990s. The precise way in which the different components of his scholarship relate to each other and to the overall project of critical international theory is explained by Linklater himself in an interview from 2010. There, he states that there are three elements to his critical approach to international politics:

- (i) it is important to consider the principles that might underpin an alternative world order;
- (ii) it is necessary to develop a sociology – indeed an approach to world history – that explains how societies have developed to this point;
- (iii) it is crucial to have a praxeology - that is, an account of the cultural and other resources that people can harness to bridge "is" and "ought" (Linklater, interviewed in Brincat, 2010: 7).

In another article from the same year, he developed this point further by stating that 'critical international theory' contains a 'normative, sociological and praxeological' dimension. He described them as consisting, respectively, in (i) 'the quest for ethical principles that can lead to a better life'; (ii) 'the search for an explanation of the long-term processes that have led to particular "civilizing" processes and to tensions with

“decivilizing” processes’; and (iii) ‘reflections on moral and political resources that lie to hand and can enable people to make some progress in living together in conditions that are acceptable to all’ (Linklater, 2010a: 106). In light of this definition, it becomes clear that the different phases in Linklater’s intellectual journey are the product of a “division of labour” within the same overall project, such that the early works - from *Men and Citizens in the Theory of International Relations* to *The Transformation of Political Community* - occupy themselves with tasks (i) and (iii), while the later ones - from the sociological turn onwards - focus primarily on task (ii).⁷⁷

What this means for the purposes of this thesis is that it is possible to assess Linklater’s scholarship as a *unitary project* that seeks to analyse and engage politically with the present international conjuncture and continues to be shaped until today by the encounter with Habermasian theory. In this section, I therefore evaluate Linklater’s project in its explanatory-diagnostic as well as anticipatory-utopian dimensions and discuss its relation to the Habermasian framework of critique. I contend that the limitations of Linklater’s critical approach to IR are analogous to those of Habermas’s cosmopolitanism and can be traced back to his subscription to the same paradigmatic understanding of the ontology and methodology of Critical Theory.

Explanatory-diagnostic failings

I have shown in the previous chapter how Habermas’s analysis of international politics relies on a distinction between systemic and normative global processes; on their interrogation through the means of functionalist and hermeneutic inquiry

⁷⁷ Linklater explicitly mentions the idea of a “division of labour” in *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998). There he comments that: ‘critical theories... need to develop philosophical, sociological and praxeological inquiries into how some human beings are included in, while others are excluded from, communities of discourse. Within this division of labour, philosophical inquiry has the task of defending the dialogic imperative and criticising the practice of unjustly excluding others from open dialogue. Sociological inquiry has the purpose of considering the forces which have shaped the origins, reproduction and transformation of dialogic communities. Praxeological inquiry has the function of commenting on the possibility of enlarging the boundaries of communities of discourse and institutionalising loyalties to the ideal of a universal communication community.’

respectively; and ultimately consists in the identification of the evolutionary logic that guides each of the two domains. Because of this methodological bisection, which is justified on the basis of the model of system and lifeworld, Habermas is left with an a-critical and highly reductive reading of global political and economic dynamics, on the one hand, and a sanitised and socially-disembedded account of moral progress in international politics on the other. In Linklater's case, the reliance on a two-level approach to social analysis is not immediately apparent. Because he does not formally employ the framework of system and lifeworld, the bisection of explanatory theory into a technical-functionalist and symbolic-interpretive dimension is never explicitly endorsed or advocated. Nonetheless, I argue that Linklater leans in his substantive research on an analogous framework of analysis - one that consists, on the one hand, in the marginalisation of political-economic analysis and in its delegation to traditional theory; and, on the other, in the focusing on the interpretation of 'the origins and development of universal moral norms in the sphere of intersocietal relations' (Linklater, 1990: 163-164). The end-result, as was the case with Habermas, is an over-reliance on the positing of stadial models of historical progress to the detriment of the determinate study of power relations, structural contradictions and strategic agency. This applies, in different ways, both to his early and later scholarship.

In what I have discussed in the previous section as Linklater's early works - up to and including *The Transformation of Political Community* (1998) - the explanatory-diagnostic dimension of critique remains relatively underdeveloped, the focus of research being on normative and ideal-theoretical questions. To the extent that he is interested at this stage in analysing the development of international politics, Linklater does so by tracing the 'moral-practical learning' process through which more advanced understandings of community have become institutionalised in different political orders (Linklater, 1998: 120-121). He argues that the evolution of international politics is marked by the succession of distinct and increasingly extensive 'systems of inclusion and exclusion' - going from tribal societies, via the nation-state to a universal cosmopolitan order (Linklater, 1992: 83; 1998). Within this account, all those political and socio-economic domains that correspond to

Habermas's notion of the "system" fall outside of the scope of analysis and largely disappear from view. Social, political and economic relations, then, enter into consideration in Linklater's early works in only one of two ways: firstly, in *moral* terms as 'exclusionary regimes' wherein the participation to the dialogic community is granted to some individuals and groups but not to others (Linklater, 1998: 112-114). Asymmetries in power and wealth as well as the discrimination of 'subordinate classes, women, minority nations, migrants, gypsies, gays, lesbians and indigenous peoples' are all subsumed under the moral category of 'unjust forms of exclusion' which restrict the enjoyment of the same rights by all (*Ibidem*: 117). As a result, relations of political and socio-economic power play no independent explanatory role, but are merely evoked as manifestations of exclusionary and 'provincial forms of life' (*Ibidem*: 96). For the purposes of critique, then, 'patriarchy, racism and aggressive nationalism' as well as 'class exclusion' are important insofar as they constitute 'violations of the normative ideals of the Kantian and Marxian perspectives' (Linklater, 1999: 174). They serve, therefore, not as a starting point from which to acquire a deeper understanding of society's reproduction, but rather as indicators of the 'moral deficits' which characterise different social systems (Linklater, 1998: 6). Secondly, political and socio-economic relations appear in Linklater's early works as external conditions that threaten to distort democratic deliberation and interfere with the achievement of rational universal agreement (Linklater, 1998: 106). Linklater recognises in several instances that certain 'social and economic preconditions' must be met before a truly 'effective' and 'meaningful' cosmopolitan dialogue can take place (*Ibidem*, 205-206). That is because existing asymmetries in wealth and power pose a problem for the creation of a cosmopolitan deliberative community, insofar as they 'obstruct equal participation in dialogue' and thus undermine the 'unforced force of the better argument' (*Ibidem*: 106, 120). In this second understanding, power relations and socio-economic conditions appear as exogenous factors that could potentially intrude upon the deliberative space and therefore need to be either controlled or removed (Anievas, 2010a: 154; Fluck, 2014: 64).

In both cases, political-economic relations appear in Linklater's early writings as external conditions from what in Habermasian terms can be defined as the lifeworld perspective of the participant to dialogue. They are invoked either as markers of how much progress has been made in the moralisation of societal and inter-societal relations, or as undue interferences upon the dialogic process that need to be done away with. But they are never analysed in their own right as social structures and relations in need of explanation. The result is that other than to comment on their moral significance to the normative evolution of international society, Linklater's early works have little to contribute to the explanation of international politics and the contradictions and antagonisms that define it. Ultimately, it is the case that all those structural dynamics, social relations and institutional orders that exceed the realm of moral understanding and in Habermas's social theory were openly consigned to the remit of functionalist analysis in Linklater's early scholarship largely vanish as objects in need of explanation. With the focus of the inquiry lying squarely on moral-practical learning processes, capitalism and power-political dynamics now do not even appear as explicitly naturalised domains, but rather fade to a background that is beyond the concern of analysis (Elshtain, 1999: 144).

In his later sociological works, Linklater enriches his analysis of the past and present development of international politics through his reading of Norbert Elias and the English School. In particular, he expands on the explanatory-diagnostic model provided in his early writings in two ways: firstly, he reframes his account of the moral evolution of international society in the Eliasian terms of a "global civilising process"; secondly, he seeks to integrate an account of material social processes that was missing in his early works (Brincat, 2010). Linklater tackles this second task by introducing the concept of "growing interconnectedness" to account for the political-economic transformations that run through humanity's historical development (see Linklater, 2009b; 2010b). Various coupled with adjectives such as 'human' (2007b: 2; 2010b: 161), 'economic' (2009a: 16; 2012: 61), 'material' (2010b: 156; 2016: 465) or 'global' (2011a: 10; 2016: 15), the term "interconnectedness" is now deployed by Linklater to capture all those social-structural processes that attend and push forward the "civilisation" of society's moral

self-understanding and conduct. The result is that in Linklater's later works the development of international politics takes on the familiar Habermasian form of a dualistic process wherein material and normative processes interact and propel each other forward. This dualism is rarely reflected on by Linklater, and yet surfaces throughout his sociological scholarship. In the most explicit instance of this binary approach, he argues that: 'the investigation of material structures and forces has to be coupled with an examination of the ideational movements and ideological changes that enabled humans from different communities to orientate themselves to the demands of growing interconnectedness, and to become more adept at interacting with strangers and outsiders' (Linklater, 2009b: 487).⁷⁸

The problem with this move towards a greater recognition of material social structures in his later works, however, is that it is not accompanied by a deeper interrogation of those relations and the historical dynamics that attend them. Instead, it consists in the bracketing of all those newly discovered processes in a new catch-all category - that of 'advances in the levels of interconnectedness' (Linklater, 2010b: 161) - that itself remains largely unquestioned (Lawson, 2017: 6683-684).⁷⁹ Because of this, Linklater's sociological explanation of the development of IR displays the same debilitating tendency as Habermas's account of the "post-national constellation": it asserts the existence of ordinal processes of societal development that the complexities and contradictions of real world

⁷⁸ Linklater (2009b: 487) argues in the same text that the point of critical sociological inquiry is to examine 'how changes in social and political structures were accompanied by the reconfiguration of personality systems'. Linklater's own binary methodology is based on Norbert Elias's distinction between "sociogenetic" and "psychogenetic" processes (Linklater & Mannell, 2010). Even though Elias does not explicitly adopt a systems-theoretic terminology, his definition of sociogenetic processes as changes in the levels of 'human integration, increased differentiation of social functions... and the formation of ever-larger units of integration' (Elias, quoted in Linklater and Mannell, 2010: 401-402) is remarkably similar to Habermas's functionalist definition of the "system" as guided by a logic of "rising complexity".

⁷⁹ In certain passages of his last book, Linklater goes as far as to suggest that it is the material process towards greater interconnectedness, and not the 'normative shifts' in moral attitudes, that constitutes the driving force of the historical process. For instance, he notes that: 'Moral concerns about how "civilized" societies should conduct their foreign policy are an *outgrowth* of the processes that forced peoples together and confronted them with the challenge of learning how to coexist peacefully in longer chains that came to include the dangerous interconnections of the era of 'total warfare' (Linklater, 2016: 451; [emphasis added]). Elsewhere, he comments that 'the global interdependencies that distinguished the modern era *required* a revolution in moral and political thinking as well as parallel changes in the relative power of national, international and cosmopolitan legal and moral responsibilities' (Linklater, 2016: 296 [emphasis added]). The absence of any in depth discussion of what exactly characterises the 'advance in interconnectedness' and what its inner dynamics are is all the more striking for it.

international politics can simply be subsumed under. Analogous to the analysis contained in the Cosmopolitan Democracy literature, Linklater's theory of IR tends towards a depoliticised account of economic and political processes that filters out social antagonisms and strategic agency in favour of the schematic juxtaposition between the technical pressures and 'compulsions of modern interdependencies', on the one hand, and the moral development of higher standards of self-restraint and emotional identification, on the other (Linklater, 2016: 450).⁸⁰ The result is a diagnostic model which fails to deliver a satisfactory account of either the *structural* transformations of international society, or the various *agencies* involved in shaping it. With regards to the former, the concepts of 'expanding interdependence' and 'advancing global civility' do little to clarify and explain the monumental socio-economic and political developments that have shaped Western society in the two-thousand years that set the timeframe of Linklater's investigation. What is most striking, as George Lawson has observed in a recent review, is the absence of any engagement with the rise and development of capitalism - a word which 'appears twice in the main body' of his most recent, 500-plus pages book, 'neither time in an analytical or explanatory sense' (Lawson, 2017: 683-684).⁸¹ As to the latter, Linklater's analysis gives little sense of the particular social forces and struggles - whether it be those between slaves and slave-owners in Hellenic city-states; colonisers and colonised in the Age of Empire, or between the working class and bourgeoisie under in the Nineteenth century - though the interaction and agency of which the development of society has been shaped. The only sense of historical agency that is consistently relayed, as a number of critics have noted, is that of the 'handful of elite, white, European men who exemplify a "cosmopolitan ethos"' of the sort that Linklater is interested in tracing (Lawson, 2017: 684; see also Chong, 2017: 642; Go, 2017: 618; Ling, 2017: 623).

⁸⁰ Even where he acknowledges that the civilising process is 'inextricably linked with... political struggles' and that the 'changes that have taken place in weakening pernicious distinctions between peoples... were brought about by global "emancipatory struggles"', Linklater is unable to discuss what the basis for those struggles was and what social forces and antagonisms were involved in shaping them (Linklater, 2016: 381, 445). Most often, he therefore reverts to notions of 'collective endeavours' (Ibidem, 381) and 'collective learning processes' (Linklater, 2007a: 144) which lose any political specificity and social substance.

⁸¹ 'Related terms, such as commerce or market', Lawson (2017: 683-684) adds, 'appear more often, but again, without forming part of the books causal apparatus or analytical schema'.

Because of these failings, moreover, Linklater's sociological project is left dangerously exposed to the charges of teleologism and Whig historiography that were raised against both his earlier, political theoretical works (Jahn, 1998; Anievas, 2010a) and Elias's process sociology (Linklater & Mennell, 2010: 404; Linklater, 2016: 345). His defence - that there are no guarantees of the continuation of moral progress and that, in fact, 'violent or "decivilising processes"... *always* attend the civilising process' (Linklater, 2004: 11 [emphasis in the original]) - is only partly successful. That is because, first, Linklater remains unable to specify the generative mechanisms and social forces that underlie these "decivilising tendencies", other than by alluding to the fact that the potential for a return to barbarism is ever present and can be unleashed in times of insecurity by political or economic crisis (see Linklater, 2004: 10; 2016: 382, 444). Secondly, because these potential counter-movements to moral progress still unfold along the same, linear track of development and simply represent a setback to an earlier phase of civilisation. Even decivilising processes, then, do not constitute a *deviation* from the speculatively predetermined path of civilisation, but merely an *interruption* of progress or a *regression* to a previous level (see Linklater, 2016: 355).⁸² As was aptly put by George Lawson (2017: 681), this means that Linklater's theory of history ultimately 'reads like a game of snakes and ladders in which the game is rigged: the ladders (the climb towards global civility) are always more powerful, and more pronounced, than the snakes (the slide to decivility)'.

Ultimately, these failings signal that even in his later, more sociologically-inclined writings, Linklater's project falls short of setting out an explanatory-diagnostic framework that can be used to analyse and critique the social, political and economic dynamics of the current global conjuncture. Although the terminology and conceptual vocabulary that Linklater deploys are different from Habermas's - they are process sociological rather than systems-theoretic - the framework of analysis remains essentially analogous and rests on the same reduction of historical development to the unfolding of linear trajectories of material and normative evolution (Anievas, 2010a: 153). In this sense, Linklater's research still reflects in its

⁸² For instance, Linklater (2016: 355) discusses the "decivilisation" of German society in the

overall structure the programmatic guidelines contained in his earlier writings on critical international theory and continues to be shaped by the subscription to Habermas's "reconstruction of historical materialism" that is expressed therein (see Linklater, interviewed in Devetak et al, 2013: 487). For all of its theoretical syntheses and conceptual discoveries, Linklater's project of sociological analysis displays all of that paradigm's familiar trappings and frailties. Most significantly, his theory of history as moral-practical learning, in his early writings, and as civilising process, in his later ones, fails to provide any critical instruments through which to decipher geopolitical and socio-economic processes and explore their interrelation with seemingly impersonal normative developments. Having relinquished, in the turn to a 'communicative' and 'post-Marxist' Critical Theory (Linklater, 2007b: 46), the tools of political economic critique, Linklater's theory of IR does not go any further than the Cosmopolitan Democracy project in revealing the trends and crisis-potentials of the present. Linklater's CT is ultimately as ill-equipped as Habermas's to explain the dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, the fate of U.S. global hegemony or to explicate the social forces that compose them.

Anticipatory-utopian limits

Linklater's prescriptive statements - his pronouncements as to the political task and purpose of a Critical Theory of IR - are clearly more cautious and guarded, less self-assured than Habermas's calls for a new cosmopolitan world order. Especially in his later scholarship, where the influence of non-partisan approaches such as Elias's gains more weight, Linklater eschews openly normative statements and exhortations and confines the discussion of the political significance of his works to a few concluding remarks (see Linklater, 2011a; 2016). Nonetheless, his work continues to express until today a very clear image of what the emancipatory task of a Critical Theory of IR consists in - an image that shares many of the trappings of Habermas's theodicy of cosmopolitan progress. In the end, the vision of

inter-war period in terms of a 'regression to the ethos of the military-aristocratic code'.

emancipation articulated in Linklater's theory of IR is, from the point of view of Critical Theory, no less problematic.

For Linklater, the 'goal of critical theory is to release the progressive side of modernity from stifling constraints' (Linklater, 2001: 24). For the present, this means that the defining political struggle is that between 'collective efforts to respond to the inescapable challenges of global interconnectedness' by extending cosmopolitan standards of self-restraint, on the one hand, and the 'emotional ties to particularistic communities' and 'national loyalties' that 'hold back "post-national" political associations', on the other (Linklater, 2007b: 2; 2016: 15, 461, 465-466). In this conflict between the forward-looking thrust of cosmopolitanism and the holdovers of old parochialisms, the emancipatory goal is that of 'shifting the balance of power' in favour of the continuation of the global civilising process (Linklater, 2012: 64, 68). Concretely, this means for Linklater that the task of Critical Theory in IR is to provide the agents that are pushing the cosmopolitan cause - that is, NGOs and 'progressive transnational advocacy networks' - with the normative resources they need to launch new "civilising" offensives that take forward recent achievements in acquiring detachment from provincial perspectives' (Linklater, 2009a: 16; 2016: 465-466). Over the arc of his scholarship, he has sought to do this in two ways. In his early works on international political theory, Linklater focused on 'articulating visions of the future' that could serve as normative guidelines for further progress (Linklater, 1998: 164; Linklater & Suganami, 2006: 9). By discussing the possible configuration of a "post-Westphalian" international society, he sought to outline 'images of alternative forms of political community that could not be dismissed as utopian or facile' (Linklater, 2007b: 90-91). He therefore focused on defining the normative parameters and procedures on the basis of which a future cosmopolitan dialogic community could be established while avoiding the dangers of exclusion and domination (Linklater, 1998: 47-48). In his more recent scholarship, Linklater has aimed at generating 'grand narratives' of progress in inter-societal relations that could replace the orthodox realist accounts of an immutable international states-system (Linklater, 2011: 265-266). These new grand narratives of civilisation, he argued, could help to 'orientate people to the realities of global interdependencies'

and thereby serve as 'a vital accompaniment to an envisaged planned global civilising process that would represent a new stage in the history of the Western states-system' (Linklater, 2016: 466). In either form, Linklater's emancipatory perspective on international politics presents some serious weaknesses. With regards to the former, his vision of a post-Westphalian world order anchored in the principles of cosmopolitan democracy is still exposed to the charge brought against it by Beate Jahn in 1998: namely, that while being "normative" - in the sense of conveying an image of what international relations ought to be like - it is not necessarily "critical" (Jahn, 1998: 615). This is, following Jahn, because as 'an alternative to the existing international order it has not been derived from an analysis of the contradictions of the latter and it is not even formulated as a negation of the existing injustices' (*Ibidem*: 622). In an analogous manner to Habermas's own designs for a post-national world order, then, the uncoupling of critique from social and political-economic analysis results in the formulation of speculative plans and ideal models that lack any determinate social content in terms of historically specific power relation, material interests and political subjectivities. What this means concretely is that cosmopolitanism as a category of critique remains a blunt instrument. It is a normative hypothesis that only recognises 'internally defined problems' (Kim, 2014: 377) - such as how to control the influence of power and wealth on communicative processes, or how to devise procedural rules of deliberation that guarantee inclusivity and diversity - but has little to say about the present context of capitalist crisis and social antagonism. As to the latter, the reconstruction of a global civilising process running through human history, taming violence within and amongst communities and institutionalising more advanced ethical standards, can certainly serve a *consolatory* function. It can, in other words, counter fatalistic and tragic representations of international politics by showing that some advances in the regulation of violence *have* been achieved compared to earlier states-systems (Linklater, 2011: 242). Grand narratives of civilisation, however, have equally little to contribute to the *critique* of the present conjuncture and the clarification of the struggles taking place within it. Beyond repeating the warning that counterthrusts and decivilising processes '*always* attend the civilising process' and 'may well acquire the upper hand as a result of

integration-disintegration tensions in world politics', Linklater can offer no further clue as to the social forces and interests that underlie this tension and will determine the future development of international politics (Linklater, 2004: 9; 2016: 11). The issue with a consolatory theory, then, is that when it becomes isolated from the substantive critique of the present it is easily debased into an *apologia* of existing conditions. That is, it is reduced to the superficially comforting message that "things have never been this good" (Anievas, 2010a: 154-155).

In the end, the only politics that Linklater's Critical Theory is able to express is one that consists in the celebration of past civilising advances and the call for the removal of all 'barriers', 'obstacles' and 'drag effects' that might get in the way of its future, cosmopolitan continuation (Linklater, 2012: 64; 2016: 406). As was the case with Habermas's own politics of progress, this too has troubling ramifications. On the one hand, it occasions a somewhat self-congratulatory narrative of European history which downplays the ambivalences and dark underbelly of the Western "civilising process" and tends to exonerate it for the implication in the reproduction of colonial violence and domination (Chong, 2017: 642; Ling, 2017: 633). On the other hand, Linklater's normative vision of civilisation leads him to identify the emancipatory struggle to which Critical Theory is to contribute as one of a *moral*, rather than properly *political* or *socio-economic*, character. Rather than understanding emancipatory politics as an ensemble of social interests, subjectivities, concrete demands and ideological projects that become articulated by determinate political agents within given historical contexts, his Critical Theory of IR comes to depend on the opposition between more advanced moral principles and standards of identification, on the one hand, and retrograde beliefs, particularist social bonds and nostalgic resentments, on the other. The prescription that follows from it encapsulates the powerlessness of its emancipatory imaginary: 'only a global moral code that places new principles of responsibility at the "centre of the ethical stage" in both the private and public domains can meet the contemporary challenge' (Linklater, 2016: 417). The conclusion, meanwhile, is as unyielding as Habermas's: the 'overall trends towards higher levels of interconnectedness' and the epochal arc of the European civilising process have already determined that dialogic

cosmopolitanism is the next destination of human history (see Linklater, 2010c: 26-27; 2012: 65); Whatever does not conform to the moralised image of the future can only be a 'cultural liability' and 'drag effect' holding back the cosmopolitan future to come (Linklater, 2016: 465-466).

Conclusion

Linklater's theory of IR represents one of the most sophisticated and systematic attempts to articulate a critical theoretical perspective on international politics. Throughout its development over more than three decades, it has maintained a unifying purpose and identity, consisting in the theorisation of the development of the norms and principles regulating intra- and inter-societal relations (Linklater, 2011b: 35). As an approach to the study of international politics, Linklater's research is clearly distinct from the Critical Theory of IR discussed in the previous chapter on at least two fronts. Firstly, whereas Habermas focuses on the Twentieth and Twenty-first century, Linklater takes a longer view of the development of international politics, tracing its history over more than two thousand years. Secondly, where Habermas gives equal weight to the analysis of material and normative processes and studies them through the means of systems-theory and hermeneutics, Linklater focuses overwhelmingly on the latter and couches the discussion in the terms of Elision process-sociology. Despite these differences, I have argued in this chapter that Linklater's project shares many of the same underlying assumptions about the role of critique and displays many of the same limitations. In particular, I have found Linklater's explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian account of international politics to also rest on the distinction and separation between ideational-symbolic and material processes; on the positing of linear and autonomous logics of evolution which guide each of them; and on the methodological disjuncture between non-critical social analysis and ideal-theoretical normativity. Similar to Habermas, these meta-theoretical orientations to research and critique ultimately inform a critical approach to international politics that fails both to generate convincing diagnoses of the contemporary geopolitical and

capitalist context and to inform emancipatory struggles. The discussion and critique developed in this chapter, then, provides an ulterior confirmation of the hypothesis set out in chapters two and three: that the current predicament of Critical Theory in IR is related to the wider crisis of critique of contemporary Frankfurt School research and to the meta-theoretical failings of its prevailing, communicative-democratic framework of critique. In the next chapter, I draw the consequences from the argument thus far and advance a proposal for how CT in IR can learn from the shortcomings of Habermasian Critical Theory and develop a new agenda for research and critique in international politics.

Chapter Six: The way ahead

'To say no to something is simple. But to say what the no is is difficult'

(Bonefeld, 2009: 143)

Before I proceed with outlining the positive contribution of this research, it is useful to summarise the argument thus far. The aim of this thesis has been to elucidate and explain what I have described in chapter one as the crisis of critique of the prevailing mode of Critical Theory in International Relations. In that chapter, I contended that both of the main literatures of Frankfurt School-inspired research on international politics - the project of Cosmopolitan Democracy and the Critical IR Theory approach - are experiencing a deterioration of their ability to interpret and make themselves relevant to the present world-historical conjuncture. In relating this to broader discussions in social philosophy and political theory over the state of contemporary, Habermasian Frankfurt School theory, I proposed that the predicament of the Critical Theories of IR be analysed as a dual debilitation of their social-scientific and emancipatory-political capacities and be interrogated in relation to their underlying meta-theoretical framework of critique. In chapters two and three, I sought to historicise and find the theoretical origins of the contemporary crisis of critique by looking back at the major paradigmatic turning points in the history of the Frankfurt School - namely, the origins and crisis of "first generation" or "early" Frankfurt School theory; and Habermas's subsequent "reconstruction" of the project of CT. As part of this discussion, I set out a hypothesis which might help to explain the current issues of CT in IR: the first element of that hypothesis is that the current crisis of critique is a legacy of the inability to fully reckon with and overcome the standstill of first generation theory. In particular, it is a result of the failure to recognise the abandonment of the critique of political economic as a core element in the demise of early CT. The second element of the hypothesis is that the crisis of critique and the debilitation of CT's explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian dimensions can be traced back to the fundamental meta-theoretical principles which

constitute the now dominant, Habermasian and communicative-democratic, paradigm of critical scholarship. Specifically, I claimed that the ontological and methodological parameters set out in the theory of system and lifeworld formalise the early Frankfurt School's surrendering of the critique of political economy and effect a bisection of CT into two distinct components: one, which analyses the systemic reproduction of society in a-critical, functionalist terms; the other, which engages in normative speculations through the abstract means of ideal-theory and the philosophy of language. This separation and disjuncture between the social-scientific and normative-emancipatory components of critique I argued to be at the heart of the contemporary "crisis of critique". In chapters four and five, I put these hypotheses to the test by applying them to the substantive works of Jürgen Habermas and Andrew Linklater on cosmopolitanism and the transformation of international politics. I found that, in their distinctive ways, both of their works operate within the parameters of analysis and critique identified above and manifest the limitations and failings I argued to derive from the communicative-democratic paradigm. I therefore concluded that the predicament of Frankfurt School-inspired approaches to IR can indeed be traced back to their subscription to the Habermasian framework of critique and that their revitalisation will require a reconsideration of the meta-theoretical principles and commitments that compose it.

In this last chapter, I draw out the consequences of the negative critique developed in the preceding chapters and set out some considerations of how Critical Theory in IR can find its way out of the crisis of critique. I start by arguing that the Frankfurt School needs to take stock of the two failures that have characterised the communicative-democratic paradigm of critique and continue to hamper critical theoretical research today. The first is the failure of the Habermasian strategy to overcome the standstill of the early Frankfurt School by reconstructing CT on the basis of the binary ontology and methodology of system and lifeworld. This, I contend, has not resolved but rather replicated and *compounded* the analytical and social-theoretical shortcomings that were at the heart of the first generation's final impasse. In particular, it has meant that Critical Theory remains unable to reveal society's contradictions, struggles and agencies and is now more than ever reliant

on reductionist interpretations of history as proceeding along fixed and unilinear tracks of development. The second is the failure of the attempt to resolve the normative ambiguities of Critical Theory by abstract, ideal-theoretical means. Initially intended to restore CT on safe and stable philosophical grounds, the search for fixed normative foundations initiated by Habermas has resulted in a social disembedding of emancipatory politics and its definitive uncoupling from the substantive critique of existing conditions. In anchoring its normative standpoint to the universal and transhistorical pragmatics of language, I argue that the communicative-democratic paradigm has drastically contracted the scope of emancipatory politics, lost the capacity to interpret social struggles and become over-reliant on speculative teleologies of progress.

The revitalisation of Critical Theory inside and outside of IR requires the redressing of these two failures of the communicative-democratic paradigm. With regards to the first, what is required is a *retraction* from teleological and essentialist thinking and *reincorporation* of the tools of political economic and ideological analysis. As to the latter, it necessitates the *reemphasising* of the socially-determinate dimension of critique and the negative side of emancipation. That is, it calls for a focusing of the critical theoretical project on the clarification and transformation to the structures of domination in society. In order to achieve this, I argue that Critical Theory in IR ought to pursue a strategy of “totalising critique”. This I define in three ways: *ontologically*, as the breaking down of the rigid separation between objective and intersubjective, material and symbolic domains in favour of a holistic theory of society oriented towards the study of the interaction between structures, agents and discourses across all social domains; *methodologically*, as the undoing of the separation between analysis and normativity and their re-joining through the critique of political economy; *normatively*, as the redefinition of the project of cosmopolitanism as the determinate negation of existing social structures of domination; and *politically*, as the identification of a new problematique of inquiry that critical scholarship can be organised around. I conclude the chapter by setting out a tentative research agenda for Critical Theory in IR to follow, one that is based on the political economic and ideological critique of contemporary neoliberal

capitalism. In formulating this proposal, I draw from and establish connections with a number of recent interventions in Critical Theory in IR (Koddenbrock, 2015; Fluck 2010; 2014; Anievas, 2010b; Hoseason, 2018); in Frankfurt School research more broadly (Fraser, 2014; 2016; Allen, 2016; Azmanova, 2014); as well as in other strands of critical theoretical thought (Jessop, 2016; Sum & Jessop, 2013; Saull, 2012; Bulmer & Joseph, 2016).

The two failures of the communicative-democratic paradigm

If the critique and diagnosis developed over the past five chapters is correct, then the way out of the “crisis of critique” of Frankfurt School-inspired IR theories goes through a fundamental reconsideration of the core meta-theoretical and normative commitments of the prevailing framework of critique. In particular, Critical Theory has to address and rectify two failures that have marked the Habermasian critical project.

The first failure regards the social-theoretic attempt, articulated in the meta-theory of system and lifeworld, to correct the analytical shortcomings of the early Frankfurt School and develop a stronger framework of explanatory research. In particular, it concerns the Habermasian strategy to overcome the *monological* reductionism at the heart of early Critical Theory - that is, its explanation of the totality of social life as an expression of instrumental reason - by means of a dual, economic *and* normative reductionism. As I have discussed in chapters two and three, this reconstruction of CT on the basis of a dualistic ontology and methodology was a product of the misreading of the impasse of the early Frankfurt School theory. The deadlock of the first generation was read as deriving not from the essentialist and a-historical character of its conception of late capitalism, but simply from the neglect of the parallel lifeworld pattern of moral progress (see Habermas, 1979: 97-98; also Linklater, 1990: 26/27; 2007b: 49). Habermas, therefore, did not challenge the first generation’s essentialist reading of society as reducible to a technical logic of instrumental reason. Instead, he incorporated it within his own framework, only now

coupling it with an equally reductionist inquiry into the normative structure of society. The result was that instead of redressing the early Frankfurt School's retreat from substantive social critique and move towards a hypostatized understanding of rationalisation, Habermasian Critical Theory formalised and intensified those trends, inscribing them within its very meta-theoretical identity. The first failure of the communicative paradigm, then, is that the "reconstruction of historical materialism" that lie at its heart went both *too far* and *not far enough*. It did not go far enough, because it consolidated rather than contested the idea of history as reducible to abstract and predetermined paths of evolution. Critical Theory thus ended up replicating within itself the same essentialist traits of Marxism's most deterministic formulations. It went too far, because it neglected that tradition's greater insight: the realisation that behind apparently natural political and economic facts and seemingly unchangeable laws of history lie 'specific social relations, constituted by human agency and subject to change' (Wood, 2002: 34).

The second failure concerns the philosophical attempt of Habermasian theory to "rescue" the Frankfurt School project from pessimism, ambiguity and immobilism by 'clarifying' and 'secur[ing] its normative foundations' (Habermas, 1982: 232; 1987: 397). This endeavour entailed the search for a definitive, 'objective foothold' to which, in Honneth's words, 'the interest in emancipation [could] be anchored *pre-theoretically*' (Honneth, 2007: 66 [emphasis added]). Concretely, this translated in the grounding of Critical Theory in the universal and transhistorical rational properties of dialogue, as well as in the belief in the ordinal evolution of the collective capacities for moral thought and mutual understanding. The Habermasian gamble, in Kompridis's (2005b: 336) words, was that by formulating the normative foundations of CT in abstract, procedural terms, they could 'be laid so deep as to be undisturbed by history', and thus be made, at least in principle, irrefutable. This pre-theoretical anchoring of critique, however, has come at a significant price: in the effort to "fix" the source of CT's normativity once and for all, the question of emancipation was severed from social critique and displaced to a more abstract and speculative level of ideal-theoretical reflection. As Azmanova (2014: 357) has noted, 'Critical Theory did effectively secure the emancipatory point of view, but this came

at the cost of its capacity to engage with a specific socio-historical critique of capitalism and discern the emancipatory dynamics of conflicts. Thus, the communicative turn strengthened the democratic credentials of the tradition at the expense of its political relevance'. The result is that 'Critical Theory has moved too far in the direction of an ahistorical, felicitous moral anthropology' this is concerned not with the critique and transformation of existing conditions, but in 'the provision of regulatory ideals of society, ideals of social forms to which society can aspire' (Azmanova, 2014: 357). In turn, as Kompridis (2006: 25) has noted, 'the priority given to questions of justice and the normative order of society has remodelled critical theory in the image of liberal theories of justice'. The second failure of the contemporary paradigm, then, is that in the search for moral certainty and positive universal foundations, it has drastically restricted the scope and poignancy of its emancipatory imagination, thus rendering 'the practice of critique... inanimate, dissolute' (Kompridis, 2005b: 340). Critique is now effectively reduced to one of two tasks: on the one hand, it is what Vogelmann (2017) has termed a "measuring activity", as part of which different societal formations are assessed against to a set of ideal normative standards (see also Wolff & Zimmermann, 2016: 20-21).⁸³ On the other hand, critique is turned into the monitoring of the correct implementation of the speculatively predetermined path of history. That is, it becomes an exercise in verifying that humanity is indeed developing along the moral trajectory that CT had laid down for it, as well as in the censure of all the hindrances and obstacles that stand in the way.

These two failures - that of the bifurcating strategy of analysis and the ideal-theoretical approach to normativity - I argue to constitute the core meta-theoretical aporias of the prevailing paradigm of critique. As I have shown in the previous two chapters, their effect has not simply been to weaken Critical Theory as an academic literature. More than that, they have informed and legitimised a range of reductive diagnoses and dangerous political imaginaries. The revitalisation of Frankfurt School research, in general, and Critical Theory in IR, in particular, should therefore

⁸³ For instance, this is the case with Habermas's evaluation of EU institutions 'against the standards of a democratic juridification of governance' (Habermas, 2012a: 41) and with

be oriented primarily towards the redressing of these two failures. This, however, cannot simply take the form of a reversal to the paradigm of critique that preceded Habermas's "communicative turn"; or of yet another "return to Marx". With regards to the former option, I have shown in chapter two that the current crisis of critique is in many ways a progeny of the early Frankfurt School's misdiagnoses of the dynamics of late capitalism and of its distancing from political-economic critique. What is more, even in their earlier, more dialectical works, the scholars of the first generation were never entirely successful in deploying a programme of research and critique that was adequate to the times. The "impasse" of early CT that Habermas sought to overcome was, in that sense, a real one. A return to the original research programme of the Frankfurt School would, on its own, do little to solve the antinomies and contradictions that gave rise to the communicative turn in the first place. As to the latter point, the question to be dealt with is less whether Critical Theory *is or is not* to be a Marxist approach, but rather about *what kind of* Marxism it ought to be. As I have shown with regards to both Habermas's and Linklater's works, the prevailing framework of critique is *already*, when stripped down to its essential features, a "reconstructed" version of historical materialism. In that sense, the history of Critical Theory has always been internal to the Marxist tradition - a series of attempts to re-imagine and re-invent Marxism in light of the perceived conditions and necessities of the time. The more pertinent question, then, is what *variant* or *type* of Marxism Critical Theory wants to model itself on: whether a deterministic one which reduces history to the mechanical developments of "base" and "superstructure"; or instead one that prioritises the defetishising of seemingly technical, neutral processes and the disclosure of the contradictory social relations that underlie them. Ultimately, this means that the endeavour of regenerating Critical Theory needs to look both *ahead* - in the sense of not just reverting to a prior state or paradigm - and *outwards* - in the sense of entering into dialogue with other Marxian traditions. In the next section, I sketch the possible shape that such an attempt could take, by drawing from recent contributions both within and outside of IR.

Linklater's assessment of different states-systems 'in accordance with the extent to which each approximates the conditions of realised human freedom' (Linklater, 1982: xi).

A totalising strategy of critique

In order to correct the two failures of the prevailing paradigm of critique, I argue that Critical Theory should embrace a new, totalising strategy of critique. This term, which was recently proposed in IR by Kai Koddenbrock (2015), I take up to indicate the overall *ontological, methodological, philosophical* and *political* orientations which could guide the study and critique of international politics going forwards. The notion of a “totalising” strategy of critique, then, implies: first, an ontology of critique that does not juxtapose the symbolic and the material as distinct, independent spheres, but rather studies them as dialectically related levels of the same social reality; second, a methodological position according to which the comprehension of a given object of analysis starts by confronting it with the conditions of its own emergence and with the social and historical totality of which it is part. This requires the undoing of the uncoupling of analysis from normative critique and the reintegration of the tools of political economic and ideology critique; fourthly, a philosophy that does not attempt to settle normative questions in the ideal, but understands emancipation as deriving its content from the engagement with real historical structures of domination; and lastly, a politics which resists the trend towards the specialisation and fragmentation of knowledge and sets out a new set of organising questions which address the present crisis of neoliberal capitalism. This proposal, it should be noted, does not constitute a comprehensive programme of research, nor is it a fully-formed meta-theoretical framework to be followed. Instead, it represents a sketch of a potential way ahead, a contribution which seeks to draw from and connect recent contributions in and outside of IR over the future of critical theorising and investigates how these can be mobilised and amalgamated to tackle and go beyond the crisis of critique.

Ontology

In order to escape the crisis of critique, the Frankfurt School project in IR must chart a way between two equally problematic ontological positions. On the one hand is the view, espoused by Linklater in his earlier writings, that 'Critical theory collapses the subject-object distinction' and orients itself towards the study of the collectively-negotiated norms and meanings that regulate social life in and between communities (Linklater, 2007b: 47). This position, as I have discussed in the previous chapter with regards to Linklater's early works, inevitably leads to the disappearance of social-structural relations of political and economic power and to the focusing of critique on a thin layer of intersubjective meanings and principles. On the other hand is the view - taken by Habermas and later followed in his sociological writings by Linklater himself - that symbolic and material, intersubjective and objective domains need to be treated as ontologically separate and externally related realms with distinct properties and limited interconnections. This stance, as I have shown in chapters three and four with regards to the system/lifeworld model and its application to IR, produces an impoverished and essentialised account of capitalism, the state and civil society and a neglect of the strategic dimension of human agency. Between the Scylla of a narrow intersubjectivism and the Charybdis of rigid dualisms, Critical Theory needs to find a better way to account for the social structures that compose the contemporary global conjuncture, the social forces involved in reproducing or challenging them, and the mediation between them. A promising option, which has been advocated, among others, by Matthew Fluck (2014), Milja Kurki (2011), Alexander Anievas (2010b), Jonathan Joseph (2007; 2011) and Alex Hoseason (2018), is for CT to explicitly adopt the philosophy of science of Critical Realism. This meta-theoretical stance eschews the rigid dichotomies of "material" and "ideational" in favour of a dialectical ontology that emphasises the real existence and causal efficacy of social structures; their dynamic, historical reproduction through human agency; and their mediation of subjective cognition. Concretely, embracing a Critical Realist ontology would mean for CT to reject the fixed binaries of the Habermasian paradigm in favour of a view of society as *an open and stratified totality*. Whereas the former position relies on the partition

of society into separate domains with their own internal logic of operation, the latter conceptualises reality as an open and interrelated whole that is constituted by the accumulation of manifold, open-ended and contradictory relations that pertain between concrete social actors within particular historical contexts. By replacing an *ontology of distinct domains* with an *ontology of depth*, Critical Theory could construct a richer picture of contemporary society that does not cordon off geopolitics, capitalism, and the liberal norms of democratic deliberation as autonomous, independent spheres, but studies their mutual and often uneven and contradictory determination within the same historical totality. This ontology of totality is *stratified*, then, because it is constituted by the mediation between different levels of reality - from subjective consciousness and empirical facts, through ideological structures, to the deeper relations of social reproduction (Joseph, 2007: 352-353); it is *open*, because its development is not deterministically set but contingent and contradictory, thus allowing for the possibility of transformative praxis (Bhaskar & Lawson, 1998: 5).

A totalising strategy of critique, then, need not signify a return to the economically reductionist ontology that Habermas critiqued and sought to distance himself from in the first place. On the contrary, a new ontology of totality should be based on the rejection of *all reductionism and essentialisms* - be it the binary one of system and lifeworld or the monological one of the first generation's "totally administered society". In the place of fixed and predetermined logics of development, it must construct a richer picture of the multiple and intersecting relations of power and domination that structure the present time. This necessitates, as I will argue shortly, a meticulous account of the global dynamics of neoliberal capitalism but can by no means be reduced to it. As feminist scholars such as Fischer and Tepe (2011: 370) have argued, the totality should not be reduced to a narrow definition of capitalism as pertaining to the relations of production alone, but ought to include a variety of other structures that relate to society's wider reproduction. Patriarchy can therefore also be conceived 'as a relation of domination in charge of social reproduction [that] has a relatively independent structure analogous to the structure of the capital relation' (Fisher & Tepe, 2011: 370; see also Fraser, 2009; 2014). Similarly, as

Anievas and Nişancıoğlu (2015: 278-279) have argued, the ontology of CT can and must account for the constitutive role played by structures of racism and colonialism in the reproduction of the capitalist totality.

Methodology

Together with its ontology, Critical Theory should also reconsider its approach to research and critique. First of all, CT must strive to undo the separation between the explanatory-diagnostic and anticipatory-utopian aspects of critical scholarship. This bisection between analysis, on the one hand, and emancipatory critique, on the other, I had already identified in chapter one as representing the most visible mark of the present crisis of Frankfurt School research. At its most damaging, this distinction has occasioned a veritable division of labour, wherein the task of producing social science is wholly delegated to a-critical, traditional theory while critique is redefined as a purely philosophical and ideal-theoretical exercise. A totalising strategy for Critical Theory in IR, then, calls for a *recoupling* of analysis and critique, to be achieved by means of a *concretisation* of normative theory and a *politicisation* of explanatory research. I will discuss what is entailed in the former more, and its implications for CT's philosophical foundations, in the next subsection. The latter point, meanwhile, means that Frankfurt School research in IR should reconsider its reliance on traditional sociology and re-engage with the critique of ideology and political economy. The starting point here is for CT to problematise its use of ideal-types and ahistorical heuristics; its analytical partition of society into autonomous domains; and its dependence on speculative theories of evolution and progress. These theoretical practices and the diagnoses they have produced - such as Habermas's functionalist account of globalisation or Linklater's stadial model of international politics - have impoverished CT's analysis and weakened its ability to analyse the tensions and contradictions of the present epoch. A totalising strategy of critique, then, entails the adoption of two methodological principles of analysis noted by Alexander Anievas (2010b: 2-3): first, the commitment to "de-reify" the seemingly "natural" or supra-historical structures of world politics' by uncovering 'the historical

and sociological foundations of world politics and traditional IR categories, such as the “international system”, “anarchy”, “balance of power”, or “the international” itself’. This applies, more broadly, to Critical Theory’s conception of rationality - whether instrumental or communicative. A commitment to de-reifying critique requires CT to renounce the formalistic understanding of rationality as a free-floating pattern of action and study instead the way in which it is embedded in and mediated by concrete social relations and the historical totality it is part of. Here Critical Theory should heed the warning - issued by Adorno but on which the first generation did not, in the end, follow through - that:

There is no category, no valid concept that might not be rendered invalid at the moment when it is cut off from the concrete context to which it really belongs. This applies with particular force to the concept of *ratio*. ...it is important not to split reason off from the things reason is useful for, that it is there for, and in which it is embedded. ...the concept of reason only has meaning if there exists outside of it material on which it can act - by abstracting, arranging, or summarising. ...reason is *entwined* with very real social conditions (Adorno, 2006: 61-62).

The second methodological principles noted by Anievas (2010b: 2-3) is the rejection of ‘the analytical slicing of the social world into seemingly discrete spheres to be studied in isolation’, in favour of the ‘commitment to a holistic methodology in understanding and explaining world politics’. In other words, Critical Theory must surrender the notion - introduced by Pollock and formalised by Habermas - that different spheres of social life - the political, the socio-cultural, the economic - function independently from one another and can be studied separately as to their autonomous order of operation. Instead, it must embrace a methodological stance that looks at the mutual constitution of these various realms and the manifold and often contradictory interrelations that pertain between them.

In practice, then, a totalising approach to research means that CT in IR must engage in a substantial review of its categories of analysis, with an eye towards replacing hypostatized concepts such as “globalisation”, the “civilising process” or

“growing interconnectedness” with more historically and socially determinate accounts of the structures and social forces that compose a particular global conjuncture. This effort ultimately consists in what Albena Azmanova (2012; 2014: 359) and Nancy Fraser (2009; 2014) have recently been calling for: that is, ‘to bring political economy back into Critical Theory’. Ultimately, it means that Frankfurt School research needs to reacquaint itself with the concepts and tools of analysis - some of which I will discuss in the next section - by which it can ‘dissolve the dogmatic appearance of society as a natural thing’ and decode the conflicts and power relations that are constitutive of contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Bonefeld, 2016: 234). The methodological dimension of the totalising strategy of critique, then, calls concretely for a transformation of Critical Theory’s analysis of both material *and* symbolic social relations with an emphasis on their mutual mediation. With regards to the former, it is necessary for CT to develop more dialectical accounts of the market, state and civil society that emphasise their socially constructed character, historical specificity as well as their ‘embedded[ness] in broader networks of social relations and institutional ensembles’ (Jessop, 2010: 343-344). In this effort, as I will discuss shortly, CT can find powerful companions in the work carried out by the Regulation Approach (Jessop, 2013a; 2016) and neo-Gramscian (Van Apeldoorn & Overbook, 2012; Saull, 2012) scholars to uncover the wider structural dynamics as well as the particular condensations of class and social forces that make up the present capitalist totality. As to the latter element, Critical Theory must integrate its interpretation of meanings, values and cultural norms - in Habermasian terms, its hermeneutic of the lifeworld - with an inquiry into their implication in the social totality as well as possible ideological character. In other words, CT needs to be able to trace the ideational patterns and cultural imaginaries of national and international society back to the socio-historical context they emerged from and confront them with the material interests as well as relations of class, gendered or racial power they express, sustain or oppose.⁸⁴ The Frankfurt

⁸⁴ This does not mean that *all* meanings, understandings and values are ideological - in the sense that they obfuscate and sustain structures of domination and power. In the words of Sum and Jessop, the critique of ideology ‘does not presuppose that any given sense- and meaning-making system is necessarily and always ideological nor that every social relation or social practice is necessarily and always entails domination’ (Sum & Jessop, 2013: 479-480). To link back the symbolic universe to the extra-discursive social relations with which it

School can draw, here, from its own long tradition of ideology critique and as well as the more recent Cultural Political Economy (CPE) approach to the to study and critique 'the connections among language, ideology and power' (Sum & Jessop, 2013: 479; see also Jessop, 2010). The literature on Cultural Political Economy - particularly in the formulation developed by Ngail-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop (2013) - has produced a broad range of interpretive instruments through which 'to explore the semiotic and extra-semiotic mechanisms involved in selecting and consolidating the dominance and/or hegemony of some meaning systems and ideologies over others' (Jessop, 2010: 343-344). As such, it can provide Critical Theory with important resources through which to study the 'contextuality and historicity' of norms of democracy and justice, narratives of global progress and ideas of universal cosmopolitan futures (*Ibidem*).

Philosophy

With regards to the normative or anticipatory-utopian side of critical theorising, the "recoupling" with explanatory analysis takes the form of a *concretisation* of emancipatory critique and emphasising of its *negative* dimension. In this regard, the key lesson to be drawn from the crisis of critique is that the question of Critical Theory's normative standing cannot be resolved by ideal-theoretical and abstract philosophical means alone. As I have argued earlier in this chapter, any attempt to settle CT's foundations by reference to trans-historically and universally valid principles or procedures is bound to engender a detachment from concrete political struggles - or, worse, a dependence on exclusionary narratives of linear moral progress. In the end, the effect is that the obstinate pessimism of the early Frankfurt School is replaced by an equally baseless - and often apologetic - optimism. A more fruitful approach, I contend, is to ground Critical Theory's emancipatory perspective in the determinate critique of and opposition to existing structures of domination and violence. This alternative conception of the normativity of critique has recently been

is implicated, however, is crucial to determine *what the social content of a norm or idea is* and what position it expresses with regards to the specific historical totality it is part of.

articulated by the Frankfurt School theorists Albenaz Azmanova (2012; 2014) and Amy Allen (2015a; 2016). As explained by the former:

the kernel of the critical agenda... is not so much the pursuit of a just social order, but rather the uncovering by means of critique, and the elimination by means of political action, of historically specific socio-structural sources of injustice. The normative goal of critique, therefore, is not so much the production of a societal consensus over principles of justice codified as rights, but the unveiling and elimination of socio-historical patterns of injustice. Emancipation, not justice, is the urgent job of critique (Azmanova, 2014: 359).

This conception of Critical Theory's philosophical grounding is "negative" because it calls not for the implementation of any positive ideal or principle, but for the 'eliminat[ion of] the socio-structural sources of suffering' (Azmanova, 2012: 450). In Allen's (2015a: 515) words, this is 'a conception of emancipation that is negativistic in two senses - that defines emancipation negatively as the transformation of a state of domination into a mobile, reversible field of power relations, and thus that does not rest on a positive vision of a power-free utopia'.

In this effort to rethink its philosophical anchoring, Critical Theory would do well to re-engage with the work of Theodor Adorno and his understanding of the negativity of critique. As the resurgence in interest in his work both in and outside of IR testifies (see, for instance, Brincat, 2011, 2014; Fluck, 2010, 2014; Kaltofen, 2015; Allen, 2014; Bonefeld, 2014; 2016), there is in Adorno's writings the promise - if not the realisation - of a critical theoretical project that does not displace emancipation to a philosophical space beyond history and power, but grounds it directly in the contradictions and antagonisms of capitalist society. What could be particularly useful to a CT of IR is Adorno's understanding of "determinate negation" as the cardinal procedure of normative critique. This is a method built on the notion that, as Adorno expresses it, 'we may not know what people are and what the correct arrangement of human affairs should be, but we do know what they should not be and what arrangement of human affairs is false. Only in this particular and concrete

knowledge is the other positive one open to us' (Adorno, 2005: 288). The negation is "determinate", furthermore, because it does not simply dismiss, sweepingly and out of abstract scepticism, the experience or state of affair it is confronted with (Finleyson, 2014). It is not, in other words, an act of pure nihilism. Rather, it engages deeply with the object of critique and concretely specifies the circumstances, concepts or arguments it seeks to oppose. In essence, then, the notion of determinate negation constitutes a negativistic reformulation of a philosophical concept that critical scholars in IR are already familiar with: that of "immanent critique" as a critical method that searches for emancipatory potentials within existing societal arrangements. Unlike in Linklater's (1998: 5) use of it, however, the emancipatory resources that Critical Theory has to reveal are not the positive 'moral reserves' that 'anticipate... new forms of political community', but the negative potentials for struggle and opposition that arise from society's contradictions and antagonisms.⁸⁵

For this reason, the move from a "positive" to a "negative" conception of emancipatory critique should not be understood as a *retreat* - that is, as a withdrawal from a confident dedication to radical transformation to a sombre and pessimistic assessment of the possibility of meaningful political action. It is, rather, a process of taking account of the dangers that are intrinsic to universalistic and teleological normative theories and realising that the value of emancipation lays less in the abstract definition of its ideal content, and more in its capacity to clarify and inform social struggles against real structures of oppression and domination. In that sense, a crucial intellectual task that lies ahead is that of *disentangling* the idea of negative critique from its association with the impasse of the early Frankfurt School and from the image of an elitist, detached and fatalistic philosophical perspective. This requires two, parallel operations: on the one hand, it is necessary to highlight

⁸⁵ The operation suggested here bears some resemblance to Linklater's own attempt, in his later work on harm, to integrate the rationalistic and 'decorporalised' conception of emancipation found in Habermas with an account of bodily and emotional experiences of injury and pain (Linklater, 2007: 146). The negative critique recommended here, however, is distinct from Linklater's philosophy of harm reduction in that it does not centre on the abstract categorisation of different types of suffering and injury, and on their normative regulation through legal and customary means. Instead, it focuses on the critique of domination as a set of historically specific relations of power that structure a given social order and through which that order reproduces itself. In that sense, the focus is not on harm

that, as I have argued in chapter two, the deadlock of first generation theorists was not a consequence of their negativistic attitude *per se*, but rather a product of the concrete failings of their analysis of post-War capitalism and inability to identify its enduring tensions and conflicts. On the other hand it is important, as Amy Allen and others have recently done (see Allen, 2014; Kim, 2014; Baez, 2015; Holloway et al, 2009), to re-engage with the philosophical reflections of classical Critical Theory and Theodor Adorno, in particular, and retrieve within them the promise - in large part unrealised - of a negative and yet dialectical and politically efficacious emancipatory perspective.

In sum, then, a totalising strategy of critique signifies, as far as its philosophical grounding goes, that the foundation for Critical Theory's emancipatory critique shifts from the immaterial plane of communicative reason and moral evolution to the analysis, critique and transformation of existing social conditions. As Amy Allen has commented, this means that Benhabib's notion of an "anticipatory-utopian" task of critique may have to be translated into something slightly different: a 'model of emancipation without utopia, where emancipation is understood as freedom or liberation from a state of domination' (Allen, 2015a: 518). The advantage of this formulation over CT's prevailing normative framework is that 'it offers an account of emancipation that neither relies upon nor reinforces the kind of progressive readings of history that lead some versions of critical theory to consort with informal imperialism' (*Ibidem*: 525). More specifically for Critical Theory in IR, it offers the opportunity to "thicken" and substantiate a cosmopolitan vision that has often tended towards an excessive rationalism and therefore failed to substantiate its relation to the real world around it. The normative outlook that will result from this will certainly be less self-assured and grandiloquent, more contingent and conflicted, than the one expressed in Habermas's and Linklater's theories of IR. At the same time, however, it will be one that is better able to serve Critical Theory aspiration to reflect on itself and the determinate socio-historical conjuncture it is a part of. While it may not be able to rely on the guarantee of any moral plan inscribed in history's development, it can find reassurance in the knowledge that 'as long as

as an abstract violation of the individual's wellbeing, but on *historically determinate* and

the world remains antagonistic and itself perpetuates contradictions, the possibility of changing it will be a legacy' (Adorno, quoted in Wildin, 2009: 34).⁸⁶

Politics

Lastly, these endeavours of theoretical, meta-theoretical and philosophical reconstruction can only be successful if Critical Theory in and outside of IR can find a new sense of purpose and a unifying political project to organise its research around. This point was recently articulated in an interview by the current director of the Institute for Social Research, Axel Honneth. There, he argued that:

in order to conduct [a critical] analysis, you need organising questions. Because when you are doing Critical Theory you're not doing ordinary social theory. There has to be a constitutive question in which you are interested. Foucault would say you need a problematic, that is, you need an issue around which to organise your research. For the early Frankfurt theorists [the question was] to understand what was happening within Germany and within the Western capitalist countries in the '30s. They had one main question, which organised their whole perspective, namely, why didn't the proletariat become a revolutionary class? (Honneth, interviewed in Marcelo, 2013: 212).

The central organising question, as per Critical Theory's emancipatory and reflexive aspiration, should clarify the objective historical trends and challenges of its time and seek to orient political struggles within a concrete constellation of power relations and structures. In the absence of such an organising question - or when that question no longer speaks to the 'struggles and wishes of the age' (Marx, 1992: 209) - CT inevitably drifts towards the fragmentation, depoliticisation and hyper-specialisation of research that Milja Kurki (2011) has observed within IR and Nancy Fraser (2008; 2015) outside of it. In a sense, as I have noted at the start of this

socially necessary relations of domination.

thesis, the current predicament of Frankfurt School research in IR starts precisely from the impression that it is out of phase with its time and inadequate to the reality it is meant to clarify. Other than for its theoretical and meta-theoretical failings, which I have discussed at length in the previous chapters, contemporary CT in IR is in crisis because the political and theoretical ambition that animated it no longer seems able to perform its galvanising function. In Habermas's case, that political motivation was to establish, in a world where the triumph and stability of capitalism seemed indisputable, the possibility of meaningful action and democratic self-determination (see Habermas, 1991: 259-261). For Linklater, it was to break through the last remaining barrier to the establishment of a universal moral community and extend the normative advances secured on the level of the nation-state to humanity as a whole (see Linklater, 1990: 171; 1997: 334; 2005: 141-142). For both, the most immediate concern was to resist the liberal complacency of "end of history" narratives, on the one hand, and what they saw as the dangers of postmodern relativism, on the other, and to re-establish, within the Enlightenment tradition, the possibility of universal emancipatory progress (Freundlieb, 2000: 3). The answer resided, for them, in the articulation of a cosmopolitan democratic ideal and in the definition of the trajectory of normative development that would lead to it. Today, in a context of manifold capitalist crises and geopolitical disintegration, CT needs a new set of questions, priorities and aims.

Two suggestions from outside of IR provide a starting point for this endeavour. First, Axel Honneth concluded his reflection on the need for a new *problematique* for Frankfurt School research by suggesting that:

Today one leading question would be: why is the crisis we're having today in Western capitalist societies not leading to higher forms or higher degrees of social protests?... So the question would be: how is social integration possible today? The answer would have to be sought after in what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) call "the new spirit of capitalism". Obviously, this new kind of neoliberal capitalism is able to generate ethical

⁸⁶ To paraphrase Adorno, this is to be 'enemies of Utopia for the sake of its realisation' (Adorno, 1973: 322).

ideals by which it motivates people to cooperate. This is the problematic, I think, which would have to be explained and to be solved by Critical Theory today (Honneth, interviewed in Marcelo, 2013: 212).⁸⁷

Second, Amy Kim (2014: 377) has argued that:

Where the tradition of critical theory remains relevant today is in the identification of the conjunctural possibilities of the present and its focus on the problem of the non-emergence of oppositional forces in the face of the manifest failures of the so-called market system to secure continued growth, stability and employment. Adorno feared that contemporary capitalism was foreclosing the ability to consciously articulate the experience of such contradictions within capitalism. This remains a pressing problem today. (Kim, 2014: 377).

In essence, both these interventions point to the opportunity for Frankfurt School theory to renew its traditional concern with the way in which the ideological and social structures of late capitalism weigh upon subjective consciousness and block or mediate the capacity of individuals to experience themselves collectively as objects of oppression and exploitation (Adorno, 2003: 97). That would mean, in other words, for CT to re-engage, in a contemporary perspective, with what the first generation Frankfurt School understood as the thematic of domination and, in Azmanova's (2014: 354) words, the 'theorising of the relations between forms of consciousness and the larger socio-structural dynamics that shape them'. Where, however, the priority for early Critical Theory was to demonstrate just how stifling and absolute the determination of consciousness, culture, academia and art was becoming, CT today needs to focus on a different task. That is, it has to identify and emphasise the rift lines, failure points and the enduring sense of antagonism within the fabric of domination, as well as the spaces - discursive and extra-discursive - where the possibility exists to articulate oppositional political subjectivities. In the words of Stoezter, critical theory today 'must... emphasise not domination but the

⁸⁷ Honneth is referring here to Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello's 2005 book '*The New Spirit of Capitalism*', in which the authors seek to describe the new sets of ideological self-understandings, beliefs and justifications that legitimate and sustain Western capitalism from the 1970s onwards.

vulnerability of domination and its dependence on the dominated.... Despite the increasing closure of the capitalist totality (a totality based on an antagonism), the totality is never complete' (Stoetzer, 2005: 214).⁸⁸

Disambiguation: on Levine's 'Recovering International Relations'

The reflections developed above as to the necessary renewal of Critical Theory in IR share some similarities with the proposal put forward by Daniel Levine in the 2012 book *'Recovering International Relations'*. Like to this research, Levine reaches beyond the Habermasian canon of Frankfurt School theory to develop a meta-theoretically informed challenge to contemporary IR Theory and advance an alternative proposal for how to conduct critical research on international politics. Beyond this common aspiration, however, significant differences emerge with regards to the aims and content of our projects. In order to further clarify the proposal being developed in this thesis, it is useful to briefly reflect on those differences.

For Levine (2012: 33-34; 64; 74), the problem facing IR research today is one which 'cannot be confined to any one paradigm or fact-value tradition' but rather concerns 'all conceptual thought', be it of a critical or traditional variety. This overarching danger he defines using the Adornian concept of reification – namely the 'forgetting of the distinction between theoretical concepts and the real-world things they mean to describe or to which they refer' (Ibidem: 16-17). According to Levine (Ibidem: 73), the assumption that one can ascertain reality in a scientifically and normatively objective manner 'distort[s] the world in potentially dangerous and unaccountable ways'. In order to check for this danger, he argues for a reflexive and pluralist practice of IR scholarship which arranges:

⁸⁸ Nancy Fraser (2015) makes a similar comment: 'No domination is ever complete - there is always dissent, opposition. But in so far as this remains dispersed and marginalised and isn't able to force itself onto the agenda - into public discussion - then you don't have anything like a counter-hegemonic bloc, or project'.

'multiple perspectives around a particular event or cluster of events in world politics for the specific purpose of managing reification. The various paradigms of IR [...] would be juxtaposed in hybrid and overlapping fashions around complex, uncertain events. The aim is to construct polyvocal and highly pluralist narratives. Individual paradigms [...] are nothing more than fixed perspectives or worldview derived from both consciously and unconsciously formed ontological assumptions about the world, giving the observer a stable point of theoretical leverage over a world that resists reductive knowledge. While no single one - nor any collection of them - can ever reproduce the whole, the conjoint use of multiple such worldviews can immeasurably enrich theoretical understanding. [...] *The existence of many such worldviews helps remind the theorist of the limits of any single one*' (Ibidem: 101-102 [emphasis in the original])

Levine's proposal – which builds on Adorno's notion of "constellation" - differs from the one being developed in this thesis on at least two main points.

Firstly, Levine's project is not, strictly speaking, a critical theoretical one. His aim is to articulate a set of epistemological and methodological principles, chief of which is that of reflexivity and "chastened reason", through which *all* schools of IR - from neorealism to constructivism and neoliberalism - can attain a level of "sustainable critique". This attempt is carried out in the name of IR's supposedly shared "historical vocation" to 'build a cumulative reservoir of knowledge for stewarding an increasingly dense, heavily armed, and persistently diverse world, whether by the creation of new capabilities, institutions, or procedures' (Ibidem: 3). The project undertaken in this thesis, on the other hand, has explicitly understood itself as a critical theoretical one and proceeded by the immanent standards and emancipatory aspirations of that tradition. The reason for this is that I am not convinced that there is a strong enough sense of shared "historical vocation" for the discipline of IR to be invoked as a unitary epistemic endeavour to which general meta-theoretical recommendation can be directed. I fear that an ecumenical endeavour such as Levine's – which addresses itself undifferentiatedly to all schools of IR - ends up tying itself to a lowest common denominator with little political or critical substance

left. Most importantly, such a proposal risks having to surrender in the name of its universal applicability the emancipatory aim and critical intent that animated Adorno and the Frankfurt School's writings. Ultimately, I believe that if one is to seriously hold on to the aspiration to critique and transform existing structures of domination, then it is necessary to specify certain basic commitments and principles – such as the minimal ones I discussed in chapter one - which delimit one's analytical and political space of theoretical engagement.

Secondly and relating to the substance of Levine's project, I am sceptical of the idea that the promise of sustainable critique in IR can be recovered purely by articulating a 'hermeneutic or curatorial [...] disposition that takes up a variety of affects as it weaves together stories of world politics' (Ibidem, 228). An approach of this kind, I fear, would struggle to go beyond the subjectivist point that '*different things are true for different people*' (Ibidem, 108-109 [emphasis in the original]) and be capable of ordering, appraising or amalgamating the infinite different perspectives under its purview. Even less, I suspect, would it be able to generate diagnoses and political interventions that can clarify the present dynamics of capitalist development and geopolitical conflict. In line with the Critical Realist scholars discussed above, I hold that knowledge-claims - even though they can never perfectly and fully represent the social reality they interpret - can and should be evaluated in terms of their truth-content. That is, they should be appraised as to the clarificatory or mystificatory relation they hold vis-à-vis the social reality they seek to describe (Fluck, 2010). Recognising the incompleteness of all knowledge, in other words, need not lead one to accept all knowledge-claims as equal, or to surrender every scientific standard by which their validity can be assessed. In the end, I therefore maintain that a CT of IR should aim not just to accumulate 'mutually balancing narratives that chasten one another', as Levine is calling for it to, but to advance substantive analyses and political interventions that attempt to explain and clarify as precisely as possible the objective developments of contemporary capitalist society.

A new research agenda for Critical Theory

The elements introduced in the previous section need to coalesce into a new research agenda for Frankfurt School theory. Finally, then, a totalising strategy of critique means for CT to organise its scholarship around two urgent and concrete tasks. The first follows from what I have referred to in this chapter as the re-emphasising of explanatory and political economic critique. Over the last decades, Frankfurt School research, in general, and CT in IR, in particular, have largely taken the objective development of society to be self-evident in its linearity and coherence. Therefore, CT focused its energies on resolving the normative dilemmas raised by society's current stage of development. For Linklater and Habermas, incremental concepts such as "globalisation" and "rising interconnectedness" seemed sufficient to explain the objective tendencies of the time. That is - if it ever was - no longer the case today. Since the Global Financial Crisis of 2007, the demand has substantially increased for socio-structural diagnoses that can improve and assist the understanding of the functioning and contradictions of the social totality. There is a great need for critical analysis that can discern and make sense of - behind the thick fog of confusion, crisis and immediate events - the deeper integrative and disintegrative processes that are currently playing out throughout all levels and social domains, from the highest planes of geopolitics to the most intimate domains of social reproduction. Firstly, then, Frankfurt School research should focus on constructing what Fraser (2008) calls 'a large-scale working picture of its time' that brings into relief the central contradictions and dynamics of the age. Secondly, and as suggested by Amy Kim and Axel Honneth and building on the tools of ideology critique discussed before, Critical Theory should pay attention to the new ideological phenomena and mutations that are emerging in this context of manifold crisis and to the ways in which social tensions and antagonisms are finding expression in the contemporary context. In other words, the task here is to explore the relation between the objective reorganisation of neoliberal capitalism and global politics, on the one hand, and the emergence of new political subjectivities, ideas and cultural understandings, on the other. In this last section, I provide a sketch of what research of this kind could look like and provide a number of suggestions on

what the critique of political economy and the critique of ideology should focus on today.

Critique of political economy

The concrete task of Critical Theory as a critique of political economy is that of diagnosing the current state and crisis of neoliberal capitalism as a historically specific form of social (and natural) life. Such an inquiry should always be oriented - based on the ontology and methodology discussed above - towards two things: in *structural* terms, it aims at identifying the objective social relations through which neoliberal capitalism reproduces itself, as well as the crisis tendencies and the vulnerabilities which accompany them and may cause them to become destabilised; in *agential* terms, it seeks to specify the way in which concrete social forces are implicated in and mobilised for that order's reproduction, as well as locate the sites and possibilities for struggle and the articulation of emancipatory political practices. Inspired from a recent proposal made by Nancy Fraser (2014), I suggest that this research be organised around five main sites of inquiry, each of which refers to a particular 'background condition of possibility' of the contemporary capitalist order (see also Streeck, 2014b). These sites - which represents different *entry-points* to the study of neoliberal capitalism - are: production; social reproduction; ecology; the political; and the international.⁸⁹

Economic production

The site of inquiry refers to an area of study that has long been core to Marxist analysis: that of the relations of economic production that underlie and constitute

⁸⁹ Nancy Fraser (2008) discusses in her proposal three of these 'back-stories of capitalism': social reproduction, the ecology, and the political. I add to this the sites of production and the international to provide a more complete overview of the necessary scope of critique today. It should also be added that these sites of inquiry represent an analytical rather than ontological distinction. They are meant as heuristics that help organise research in strands of scholarship that should nonetheless always be interrelated.

contemporary capitalism. Contrary to Habermas and Pollock's expectation that in post-liberal capitalism 'economic crisis can be permanently averted' and 'the continuing tendency towards disturbance of capitalist growth can be administratively processed' (Habermas, 1975: 41), the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 has demonstrated that global capitalism still contains crisis potentials and internal contradictions that can burst in highly disruptive manner. *Pace* Horkheimer's fears of total homogenisation, the last three decades have also shown that inequality and class distinctions are yet to reside or disappear. For these reasons, it is vital for Critical Theory to acquire an understanding of the economic dynamics and tensions that underlie contemporary, neoliberal capitalism (Azmanova, 2014: 357). The focus of inquiry in this first modality, then, should be on what are arguably the two defining features of neoliberal capitalism as an economic system: the *globalisation of production* and *financialisation* (Apeldoorn, 2012; Van der Zwan, 2014: 104).

With regards to the former, Critical Theory ought to re-examine its understanding of globalisation as a uniform and technical process of "growing interconnectedness" and study it instead as a historically determinate process of capitalist development with highly uneven spatial and socio-economic effects. In terms of this first site of inquiry, critical scholarship should focus on examining the new geographies of global production that were constituted in the course of the globalisation process - with a particular emphasis on the outsourcing of manufacturing from the advanced industrial North to the developing South (Smith, 2016: 46). This ought to be conceived first of all as a massive reconfiguration of capital - labour relations in a variety of sites, corresponding with new forms of class exploitation and struggle in both the core and periphery of the capitalist economy. The globalisation of production, then, can be studied both in terms of a new set of structural imbalances threatening the stability of world trade (Van der Zwan, 2014: 105); and as producing a new set of social antagonisms, linked with the emergence of forms of super-exploitation (and forced labour) in the Global South and problems of systemic unemployment in the West (Smith, 2016: 101-105; on unfree labour, see LeBaron, 2015).

As to the latter, Frankfurt School research should investigate the processes of financialisation that accompany contemporary capitalism. Here, again, the inquiry can go in two directions. On the one hand, financialisation can be conceptualised as a structural pattern of neoliberalism and studied as a regime of growth that is characterised by a series of tensions and crisis tendencies. This first aspect - which has been developed extensively by the Regulation Approach (Jessop, 2009; 2013a; 2013b) - researches financialisation as a regime that arose in response to the productivity and profitability crisis of the 1960s and 70s and sought to restore growth by redirecting capital from industrial production to the financial economy (Lapavitsas, 2011: 612-613; Van der Zwan, 2014: 101). What critical scholarship can focus on here is the contradictions and crisis potentials that underlie this new regime, such as the enduring problems of wage stagnation and the increasing danger of asset-price bubbles (Lapavitsas, 2013: 802; Streeck, 2014b: 57-58). On the other hand, financialisation can be studied as a new form of social relations of debt that percolates to everyday life (Van der Zwan, 2014: 111). Here the focus of critical research is on debt as a new mechanism of domination and a form of coercion “at a distance” (Lazzarato, 2012: 7; 20). In Silvia Federici’s words, it is an inquiry into debt as a ‘new class relation... where the exploiters are more hidden, more removed, and the mechanisms of exploitation are far more individualised and guilt producing.... In this way, workers’ resistance is diffused, economic disasters acquire a moralistic dimension, and the function of debt as an instrument of labour extraction is masked... under the illusion of self-investment’ (Federici, 2014: 235-236). Here Critical Theory can study both the different ways in which this power relation is manifesting all over the world - from student debt in the U.S. to the experiences of micro-credit in South Asia - and the new subjectivities and possibilities for struggle that are created in the process (*Ibidem*, 240; Lazzarato, 2014: 32).

Social reproduction

The second site of inquiry for a critique of political economy is the extended realm of social reproduction. This includes, as explained by Nancy Fraser:

the forms of provisioning, caregiving and interaction that produce and maintain social bonds.... Central here is the work of socialising the young, building communities, producing and reproducing the shared meanings, affective dispositions and horizons of value that underpin social cooperation. In capitalist societies much, though not all, of this activity goes on outside the market, in households, neighbourhoods and a host of public institutions, including schools and childcare centres; and much of it, though not all, does not take the form of wage labour (Fraser, 2014: 61).

The focus of research is placed here on a whole range of economic as well as extra-economic activities - many of the gendered and racialised - on which the reproduction of capitalist society is predicated, as well as the particular conflicts and tensions that characterise this domain in the neoliberal epoch (Federici, 2012). Here Critical Theory can apply its traditional concern with the boundaries between social and systemic integration to a more nuanced study of the changing confines between- and increasing superimposition of- productive and unwaged reproductive work, as well as the mediating influence of the welfare state. Instead of reducing this dynamic to a rigid dichotomy of technical system and normative lifeworld, Critical Theory should follow the lead of feminist studies in viewing it as an ever-shifting relation and site of struggle that is directly constitutive of contemporary society. In particular, critical theoretical energies should focus on theorising the emerging “crisis of care” in advanced capitalist societies that is given by the retrenchment of public provision, the advance of marketisation and the resulting “squeezing” of social reproductive capacities (Fraser, 2016: 99). This can be interrogated in structural terms as the expression of a fundamental contradiction of neoliberal capitalism, caught between two incompatible pressures: on the one hand, the profit-seeking drive to further the commodification and marketisation of all areas of private and communal life and dismantle the social protections guaranteed by the

welfare state; on the other, capitalism's reliance for its long term sustenance on a set of social reproductive capacities that it is progressively destroying (*Ibidem*, 103). In more concrete and agential terms, inquiry into the crisis of care can inspire a wide range of empirical studies into the effects of austerity politics and the assault on health care and education, as well as the possible space for new politics of care and solidarity (Rechner & Rübner, 2015).

Ecology

Another site of inquiry refers to an even longer historical horizon, an even broader understanding of the totality, and an even deeper crisis: that of capitalism as a particular way of 'organising *nature as a whole*' (Moore, 2016: 7 [emphasis in the original]). This area of study, then, invites one to think of capitalism as not just a *social* relation, but as a particular world-ecological order wherein nature and society are both constituted in a way which is conducive to the accumulation of capital. In other words, it is a form of inquiry that investigates the *socio-ecological* relations that underpin and form the conditions of possibility of contemporary society (Craig, 2017: 4). In this configuration, the critique of political economy (or, as Martin Craig suggests, the critique of *ecological* political economy) can investigate contemporary phenomena of environmental degradation, climate change and resource exhaustion from a point of view that does not depoliticise and technicise them - reducing them to issues of policy-making or global governance - but studies them as manifestations of the deeper contradictions of the *Capitalocene* - the Age of Capital (Chandler et al., 2017: 10-11). The ecological crisis can be understood, then, as a *socio-ecological* crisis that it is not *external* to capitalist society - something that touches on a material context that is "outside" from it. Instead, in Craig's words, 'it implies that the causes and perilous consequences of this crisis are simultaneously located in the dynamics of a given form of human social organisation and the biosphere from which its ecological conditions of possibility arise. Insofar as capitalist societies are developing in a way that undermines their ecological

conditions of possibility, socio-ecological crisis obtains.’ (Craig, 2017: 6)⁹⁰. From this perspective, which has been developed most notably by Jason Moore (2015; 2016a; 2016b; 2017), the history of capitalism appears as a sequence of ‘world ecological regimes’, each of which is defined by the deployment of a particular set of strategies and technologies to procure cheap resources - such as raw materials, food and energy - for capitalist production. These regimes are, in other words, historically specific ways of organising *capitalism-in-nature* and *nature-in-capitalism* (Moore, 2011: 6-7). The core question for the present is whether the present socio-ecological crisis of neoliberal capitalist ‘is limited to the presence of metabolic rifts’ in its current regime, ‘or whether it instead encompasses capitalism’s broader ecological conditions of possibility’. (Craig, 2017: 116). In other words, the question to ask is whether the present rise of food prices and apparent exhaustion of cheap resources merely anticipates the end of the present cycle of socio-ecological development, or rather points to a more fundamental crisis of capitalism. The former option leaves open the possibility of a new ‘world ecological revolution’ establishing, through technological innovation and increases in productivity, a new supply of cheap resources. Alternatively, it counts on the implementation of particular institutional or socio-political “fixes” - such as the adoption of a “green growth” or “post-growth” regime - to reduce contemporary capitalism’s dependence on expanding scales of production (Craig, 2017: 20-21); the latter answer points to an epochal crisis that involves not only *neoliberal* capitalism, but capitalism itself as a way of organising the human and non-human world (Moore, 2016b: 114).

For Critical Theory, this site of inquiry presents numerous possibilities, both in terms of revisiting the first generation’s concern with the connection between the domination of “external” and “internal” nature, and of exploring how the idea of emancipation can be extended beyond human relations to include other biological forms of life. Interesting links can be drawn here between discussions in world-ecology about the need to break down the ‘Cartesian separation of Society and Nature’ (Moore, 2017b: 605) and the early Frankfurt School reflections on the

⁹⁰ Again in the words of Craig (2017: 15), ‘A socio-ecological crisis occurs when the socio-ecological relations underpinning a particular form of social organisation become exhausted and are no longer able to sustain the social relations that constitute it’.

origins of the Enlightenment as the process of “making nature” as an external object of technical and mathematical control (see Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002: xvii, 6).⁹¹ Additionally, as others have noted (see Morton, 2007: 7-8; Cook, 2014), Adorno’s reflections on “identity thinking” as the logic that is at the heart of instrumental reason and the exchange principle can become a helpful companion to current discussions on post-humanism and the need to develop broader understandings of human and non-human life (Haraway, 2016).

The political

A fourth and crucial site of political economic critique refers to the realm of the political and the institutions of the state. This is an area of research where Frankfurt School theory as often succumbed to essentialist theorisations and to the juxtaposition of state and market as autonomous and externally-related domains. Pollock, for example, understood “the economic” and “the political” as two antithetical principles of social regulation, the latter of which was, under late capitalism, progressively replacing the former (see Pollock, 1982; 1989). Similarly, according to Habermas and the Cosmopolitan Democracy literature, globalisation could be understood as a shift in the systemic balance between the two spheres, such that the now globally integrated market reduces the capacity of the territorial state (Habermas, 2001: 50; 2012a: 55). This dichotomous model has often been accompanied by a reductionist understanding of the state as a mere *mechanism of administration* - a bureaucratic context defined by nothing more than the instantiation of an instrumental form of rationality (Fraser, 1985: 109; Allen, 2008: 123). A political economic critique of contemporary society, on the other hand, has to understand the relation between the political and the economic as being constitutive of capitalism as a historical formation and study the state as a crucial institutional site where the stability and reproduction of the neoliberal order is

⁹¹ Adorno’s comments on ‘the distinction between nature and history [being] an unthinking expression of the division of labour that has directly projected the inevitable differences between scientific methods onto the objects of their study’ seem particularly fitting here (Adorno, 2006: 122).

secured. Two elements are important to consider here, both of which have been extensively developed by the Regulation Approach (see Jessop, 1983; 1997; 2016). The first is that the state - in an analogous way to the realm of social reproduction discussed above - is an extra-economic formation which plays a fundamental role in *stabilising* capitalist development and securing the background conditions of possibility for further accumulation (Jessop, 1997: 288). The state, in other words, cannot be conceived as a bureaucratic domain that is external from a self-sufficient market economy, but has to be studied as an crucial institutional complex which secures the social and political requirements for the market to successfully operate in, as well as deploys temporary “fixes” to its problems and crisis tendencies (Jessop, 2013a).⁹² The second element is that the state itself is not a unitary machine expressing a singular and coherent bureaucratic logic, but rather an ‘institutionally mediated condensation of a changing balance of forces’ (Jessop, 2013b: 67; 2016: 53). What this means is that the state is itself a terrain of struggle between different social forces and an institutional site where particular material interests and ideological projects coalesce. In order to make sense of this social and political content of the state, Critical Theory would do well to engage with the concept of hegemony that was introduced by Antonio Gramsci and is today employed by a wide range of Marxist approaches. This category of analysis is useful to conceptualise the way in which different antagonisms in society become ordered in particular historical formations and lead to the establishment of the rule of a specific “historic bloc”.⁹³ The concept of hegemony, then, indicates the combination of coercive and consensual measures through which a particular group or alliance of groups achieves a position of leadership in society in a given time and space: on the one hand, through the deployment of the coercive means of the state, such as the justice system, the police and the army; on the other, by gaining the

⁹² “The state” is understood here in an extensive way as including the executive and legislative branches of government, the judiciary, civil service and military-police apparatus but also ancillary institutions such as the public education system and the mass media (Jessop, 2016: 24)

⁹³ These antagonisms include the conflict between capital and labour, but also the differences that emerge in a particular time and space between different fractions of capital (such as financial or industrial capital), different groups of workers and a variety of other groupings.

consent of subordinate groups through the distribution of limited concessions and the articulation of a “general interest” (Jessop, 1983).

These categories of political economic analysis can be used by Critical Theory to clarify a number of crisis dynamics of contemporary capitalism. On the one hand, the understanding of the state as a site of regulation can be applied to study neoliberalisation as a ‘contradictory process of regulatory restructuring wherein state power is deployed to entrench and extend market liberal rule’ (Green & Lavery, 2017: 2-3; Peck, 2010: 7). This allows for a better understanding of the ways in which neoliberalism does not simply signify a *retrenchment* of the state at the expense of the market, but rather entails a substantive reorganisation of state institutions and the elaboration of new modes of intervention aimed at increasing competitiveness, removing obstacles to market rule and mitigating the social problems that are generated in the process. Today, this mode of analysis can be utilised to discern the contours of neoliberalism’s restructuring after the Global Financial Crisis of 2008; determine the particular state strategies that are being rolled out at the national, subnational and urban level to entrench and stabilise capitalist development; and identify the limits and fissures that emerge as part of those processes (Peck et al, 2012: 278; Green & Lavery, 2015). On the other hand, the conception of the political as a site of social and political struggle for hegemony opens up the possibility of investigating contemporary neoliberalism as a historically specific configuration of particular social forces, material interests and ideological components that is trying - by consensual as well as coercive means - to secure its own legitimacy and survival. Here Critical Theory can engage with current discussions over the increasingly *authoritarian* character that neoliberalism is assuming both in the Global North and the Global South. As Ian Bruff and the burgeoning literature on authoritarian neoliberalism is pointing out (see Tansel, 2017), there are signs that in the period after the Global Financial Crisis neoliberal capitalism is becoming increasingly reliant on *coercive measures* to shield itself from social pressures. These coercive measures include the growing use of ‘brute coercive force (for instance, policing of demonstrations, racist political rhetoric, etc.)’ but also the ‘reconfiguring of state and institutional power in an attempt to insulate

certain policies and institutional practices from social and political dissent' (Bruff, 2014: 115-116). In that sense, authoritarian neoliberalism appears to mark a shift 'away from seeking consent for hegemonic projects' and towards the 'explicit exclusion and marginalisation of subordinate social groups through the constitutionally and legally engineered self-disempowerment of nominally democratic institutions, governments, and parliaments' (*Ibidem*, 116). For Critical Theory, this raises the question whether this authoritarian tendency - which is variously visible in the imposition of fiscal austerity in Southern Europe and of punitive bailout conditions to Greece as well as the rise of authoritarian rule in Turkey, Indonesia and Cambodia - is a sign of *weakness* or a sign of *strength* of neoliberalism and the implications that this shift has from the prospects of constructing an emancipatory social project.

The international

The fifth condition of possibility of neoliberal capitalism and site of political economic inquiry is that of the international system. As I have discussed in the last two chapters, this is a subject area that Frankfurt School theory has over the past three decades dedicated a great amount of energy to studying. Despite this - and for the various theoretical and meta-theoretical failings discussed before - it has failed to articulate either a comprehensive theory of the international as a domain of social life, or a compelling analysis of the institutional structures and social forces that make up its present configuration. A critical political economic inquiry, conversely, studies the international as a global infrastructure of institutions, norms and rules and a particular condensation of social forces and state powers within which capitalist development is embedded at any given time. Once again, the analysis must be oriented towards clarifying both the structural and the agential moments in the (international) reproduction of the social totality, as well as the mediation between the two. In this instance, the structural context is given by the particular growth model of capitalist development and the spatial organisation of global production and circulation, as well as their coupling with a particular international

distribution of geopolitical power. As exemplified by the work of Giovanni Arrighi, this modality of critical research is directed towards studying the relation between historical cycles of capitalist accumulation, on the one hand, and particular concentrations of geopolitical power and world systems, on the other (see Arrighi, 2010).⁹⁴ Concretely, this means to investigate what Panitch and Konings (2008: 2) call the ‘organic institutional linkages’ that exist between: first, a specific mode of capitalist accumulation - for instance, the present finance-led regime; second, the global leadership of a particular state - such as the United States; and third, the complex web of institutions, governance mechanisms and rules that mediate between them. The agential moment, meanwhile, refers to the active, strategic initiative that is required on the part of particular social forces and state elites to maintain and reproduce the correspondence between those three elements and thus secure the stability of the geopolitical and capitalist order as a whole. A valuable contribution here is that of the neo-Gramscian approach in International Political Economy, which has sought to apply Gramsci’s concept of hegemony discussed above to the international realm itself (Gill, 1998; Morton, 2007). Hegemony refers, in this instance, to the construction and maintenance of a “historic bloc” that extends beyond an individual state and achieves dominance *at the global level* (Bieler & Morton, 2004: 90-91).⁹⁵ This understanding of global hegemony allows Critical Theory to add yet another dimension to its understanding of the “era of globalisation”: not as a technical and linear process - as Habermas and Linklater would have it - and not even just as a global geography of production - as I discussed it above - but a definite *political project* articulated by particular transnational social forces and organised through the geopolitical power of the United States (Van Apeldoorn & De Graaf, 2012: 213-215).

⁹⁴ Structural analyses of the linkages between capitalist development and geopolitical power have been further enriched in recent years by accounts which problematise the inherent Eurocentrism of accounts such as Arrighi’s and investigate further the extra-European origins of contemporary capitalism (see Anievas & Nisancioglu, 2015).

⁹⁵ In Richard Saull’s definition, the historic bloc ‘refers to the constellation of social, economic, and political connections—organized nationally and internationally—between the administrative and coercive machinery of the state and social groupings within civil society whereby leading qua capitalist social forces establish ascendancy over other social groupings but do so by incorporating them into the structures of state and governance as subaltern partners’ (Saull, 2012: 328-329)

Critical Theory can employ these political economic categories to interrogate the crisis and future prospects of the current international system - understood now not in the ideal-typical terms of a “Westphalian states-system” but as a neoliberal hegemonic order that embeds internationally the current phase of capitalist development is constructed under the leadership of the United States around a set of global institutions and norms. This requires, on the one hand, for Critical Theory to interrogate the *uneven* patterns of development that have characterised neoliberal globalisation and the social tensions, structural imbalances and destabilising dynamics that were generated in the process (Saul, 2012: 334-335). These are, for example, the growing frictions between the United States and China that result from their integration in global production chains and from the latter’s trade surplus; domestic tensions in Europe and North America related to the loss of manufacturing; the effects of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in South East Asia and growing inequality between city and countryside; as well as the emergence of other centres of accumulation outside the West (*Ibidem*). On the other hand, a political economic critique of the international system investigates how these destabilising dynamics will be addressed and managed - or failed to be addressed and managed - by the social forces behind U.S. neoliberal hegemony. The main question here is whether the phenomena of geopolitical disintegration and the decentralising tendencies that are starting to emerge signal the end of the present international system and possible commencement of a non-hegemonic phase, or whether a restoration of the neoliberal order is possible that integrates new powers and new interests into the hegemonic bloc and thus secures, for the moment, its own survival (Saul, 2012: 335-336; Van Apeldoorn & Overbeek, 2012: 10-15; Arrighi, 2010: 381-386).

In this context, the study of the European Union constitutes another vital avenue of political economic inquiry. In particular, the framework of research outlined above can be deployed to strengthen the binary - normative and functionalist - theory developed by Habermas by integrating it with a more nuanced, multilevel account of the institutional and structural dynamics as well as the different transnational, national and subnational interests involved in shaping the process of European

integration (see Van Apeldoorn, 2012; Bulmer & Joseph, 2016). With regards to the latter factors in particular, an analysis of the various hegemonic projects that are involved in the development of European politics as well as of the different interests, ideas and normative justifications that underlie them offers a promising avenue of explanatory as well as emancipatory inquiry (Bulmer & Joseph, 2016: 740). Rather than culminating in the simplistic opposition between progressive Europeanism, on the one hand, and nostalgic nationalism, on the other, it raises the prospects of alternative projects and political coalitions taking shape that can challenge the predominant neoliberal consensus and articulate a different vision of Europe's future.

Critique of ideology

The critique of political economy - the possible targets of which I have identified in the *productive, social reproductive, ecological, political* and *international* domains of contemporary capitalism - does not exhaust the possibilities for critical theoretical inquiry. The interrogation of these objective societal dynamics in the capitalist totality has to be accompanied by the interpretation of the forms of consciousness and intersubjective meanings which mediate the way that individuals as well as collectives experience them (Azmanova, 2014: 354; Chari, 2015). In particular, as suggested by Amy Kim, Critical Theory's research should be oriented, in this second configuration, towards uncovering the ideological forms and beliefs through which neoliberalism capitalism justifies itself and which obstruct the emergence and neutralise the potency of oppositional and emancipatory projects (Kim, 2014). The main target of critique here, then, is neoliberalism as a set of discourses, cultural phenomena, ethical motivations, social imaginaries, affective dispositions and incentives which sustain and distort the experience of the contemporary society (Jessop, 2010). Unlike in the procedures of hermeneutics and political theory, these ideational constructs are neither just evaluated by an external standard of normative justification nor simply interpreted as to their internal, semiotic structure. Rather, as is the case in Cultural Political Economy, they are studied in their organic relation to

the social and historical order that they emerge out of and as symbolic orders that are directly related to the various extra-discursive social relations discussed above (Sum and Jessop, 2013). This means that the exercise of semiotic interpretation is directly integrated with political economic analysis and seeks to uncover the connection between dominant ideas and normative understandings, on the one hand, and the prevailing relations of power and domination, on the other (*Ibidem*: 140-141).⁹⁶

In that regard, a promising avenue for critical theoretical research lies in the investigation of how capitalism's ideological façade periodically rejuvenates itself in times of crisis by co-opting elements from the critiques and conducts that are levelled against it. For the present time, this means to study the ways in which the ideological *armamentarium* of neoliberal capitalism - what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) called, in their landmark study, 'the new spirit of capitalism' - took shape in large part through the assimilation and repackaging of the demands and challenges articulated by previous emancipatory movements. Two examples of how this kind of ideology critique can be deployed today are provided by Frankfurt School theorists Rocío Zambrana and Nancy Fraser. The first has discussed how 'neoliberalism resignifies norms of social justice in an "uncanny" way' and thereby 'implicates in neoliberal ideology... purportedly unambiguous emancipatory norms' (Zambrana, 2013: 95). Using the example of the 'ideal of individual freedom', she showed how this 'central normative achievement of modernity has been transformed in ways that compromise the very possibility of autonomy, turning an unprecedented opportunity for self-creation into new forms of domination' (*Ibidem*). In a similar manner, Nancy Fraser has discussed the ways in which some of the demands and imaginaries articulated by second-wage feminism against the 'state-

⁹⁶ Ideology, in this sense, is more than a mere subterfuge, or a lie. This point is well explained by Slavoj Žižek: 'An ideology is... not necessarily "false": as to its positive content, it can be "true", quite accurate, since what really matters is not the asserted content as such but *the way this content is related to the subjective position implied by its own process of enunciation*. We are within ideological space proper the moment this content - "true" or "false" (if true, so much the better for the ideological effect) - is functional with regard to some relation of social domination ("power", "exploitation") in an inherently non-transparent way' (Žižek, 2012: 8). In that sense, the distinction made here between the critique of political economy and the critique of ideology is, again, one of analytical convenience rather than ontological distinction. The domains of political economy and ideology are understood not as independent realms, on the model of system and lifeworld, but as interrelated levels of the same social reality that must always be studied in their mutual determination.

organised capitalism' of the post-war period have 'unwittingly supplied a key ingredient to' and 'served to legitimate' the neoliberal restructuring of capitalist society (Fraser, 2009: 98-99). What is especially valuable about these investigations from the point of view of Critical Theory is that they offer real insights into the perils, constraints and opportunities facing emancipatory politics today. The exploration - in Jessop's (2010: 343-344) words - of 'the semiotic and extra-semiotic mechanisms involved in selecting and consolidating the dominance and/or hegemony of some meaning systems and ideologies over others' can deliver important practical lessons on how Critical Theory can escape or at least manage what Zambrana calls the "paradox of emancipation" (Zambrana, 2013: 106). That is, how CT can formulate a political perspective and a substantive critique that do not harmlessly bounce off the ideological armour of neoliberalism and do not contribute to another one of its symbolic re-articulation, but instead lay bare its underlying power structures and provide an expression to oppositional social and political forces.

There is ample scope for Critical Theory in IR to extend this kind of inquiry to the realm of international politics. A critique of ideology in IR must look today at how the normative self-understandings of the previous decades of world politics - from liberal interventionism, through nationalism to the anti-globalisation critiques - relate to the present configuration of U.S. neoliberal hegemony and how they are being unsettled by its crisis and reassembled in response to it. For instance, CT in IR could direct its attention to the emerging cultural and political divide, in Western society and public discourse, between so-called "anti-globalisation", nationalistic populisms, on the one hand, and a free-market and elite cosmopolitanism, on the other (Streeck, 2017: 10-13). This political narrative - which has gained particular prominence with events such as Brexit and the election of Donald Trump in 2016 - is a good example of the kind of ideological formation that the Frankfurt School could apply its critical faculties to analyse. Instead of reproducing the dichotomy between progressive cosmopolitanism and regressive nationalism or "anywheres" and "somewheres" in its own works - or rendering it into an abstract battle of ideas (see Linklater, 2010c: 26—27; 2016: 465-466; Habermas, 2015: 79) - CT could

develop a critique of the frame itself as a discursive representation of the contemporary conjuncture that is promoted by specific economic and social interests in support of particular political outcomes. Taking up Kim's (2014: 377) point about needing to explain the 'non-emergence' - or, one might add three years later, *distorted emergence* - 'of opposition forces in the face of the manifest failures' of neoliberal capitalism, CT in IR should ask today why socio-economic tensions are finding expression in a dichotomy of globalism against nativism; what class, gender and racial dynamics are being obfuscated or reproduced in the process; and whether the possibility exists to articulate a different political narrative of the present conjuncture that better expresses the struggle for emancipation.

In this effort of ideology critique, the work that Critical Theory in IR has to undertake is, at least to some extent, one of self-critique. That is, it has to study how ideals like cosmopolitanism, global civil society and deliberative democracy - no less than but in different ways from the nationalisms of old - are implicated in the world of capital and Western power and can be deployed to legitimate existing structures of power (Hynek & Chandler, 2013: 50). Particularly given the influence that Habermasian Critical Theory still exercises in areas of civil society and politics, it is increasingly necessary to study, in Anita Chari's (2015: 64) words, 'the ways in which the normative perspectives from which we purport to critique society, such as that of intersubjectivity and autonomy, have become fetishized' (Chari, 2015: 64). For instance, CT in IR could take up the work initiated more than a decade ago by Craig Calhoun (2002) to investigate the ambiguities of cosmopolitanism as a set of ideals and political imaginary. In particular, it should verify whether or to what degree Calhoun's anxieties over cosmopolitanism becoming 'largely the project of capitalism,... flourish[ing] in the top management of multinational corporations' and 'join[ing] elites across national borders while ordinary people live in local communities', have been realised and what that means for its critical content (Calhoun, 2002: 889). Similarly, CT in IR should investigate further the critiques of deliberative democracy discussed at the end of chapter four. Critical Theory should, in other words, reflect on the ways in which the ideal of deliberative democracy it has advocating could be used to legitimate the reduction of democratic standards

and the entrenchment of technocratic rule in Europe and beyond (see Scheuerman, 2006; 2008; Anderson, 2007). In all of these cases, the goal is neither self-flagellation nor to repudiate everything that CT has done in the past two decades. Instead, it is to investigate: firstly, what these ideational developments reveal about the overall unfolding of the crisis of neoliberal capitalism; secondly, how Critical Theory can orient itself in this complex and shifting terrain, become aware of its entanglement in the world of capital and express, within it, an emancipatory perspective. The fact that some of these questions are uncomfortable to ask from Critical Theory's perspective makes them all the more pressing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn the consequences from the preceding diagnosis of the Frankfurt School's crisis of critique, discussed the failures that the contemporary Frankfurt School needs to acknowledge and overcome, and outlined a proposal for how it could do so. I have concluded that the future of Critical Theory in as well as outside of IR lies, meta-theoretically, in the embracing of a totalising strategy of critique; and substantively, in the political economic analysis of the different dimensions of the contemporary crisis of neoliberal capitalism as well as the interrogation and critique of its ideological manifestations. The monumental size of this task is made more manageable by the recognition that Frankfurt School theory does not have to do everything alone. As I have highlighted over the course of this chapter, there is a wealth of resources in feminist, post-colonial, Marxist and neo-Gramscian studies that Critical Theory can interact with and draw inspiration from in reconstructing its analytical and political faculties. This exercise of inter-theoretical dialogue, moreover, does not have to be one way. The Frankfurt School has much to give to other critical approaches, such that the potential exists for engaging in a genuinely collaborative theoretical endeavour. In particular, what the Frankfurt School can contribute to other critical theories of the present time is unique focus on the question of emancipation and the distinctive sets of theoretical as well as praxical problems that are associated with it. In that sense, the commitment to

combine explanatory-diagnostic *and* anticipatory-utopian critique, as well as to clarify the relation between them, gives CT the disposition to address a set of issues that are oft evoked but hardly ever unpacked and fully explored in other critical literatures. As the neo-Gramscian scholar Owen Worth has recently noted, Marxian approaches to IR and IPE have typically been quite ‘successful in providing richer accounts of the historical evolution and contemporary workings of the global order and, as a result, have managed to criticise its norms and functions’ (Worth, 2011: 360). Where they have been ‘less rigorous’ and effective, however, is in grappling with the question of how to express an emancipatory political vision and connect that analysis with real world movements and struggles (*Ibidem*). In this ‘neglected’ and ‘often either underplayed or underdeveloped’ area of inquiry (*Ibidem*: 360, 363), CT can articulate a series of ideas and proposals that are of interests and use to wide swaths of contemporary critical scholarship. For all of its failings and limitations, Frankfurt School theory in and outside of IR has produced over the years a wealth of reflections over how the opposition to domination and oppression can be expressed and vocalised. Whether it be by warning against repeating past mistakes or as an inspiration for future critique, it still has a vital role to play today.

Conclusion

In 1979, Perry Anderson noted in his assessment of the post-war generation of critical theorists of which the early Frankfurt School was part that ‘the hidden hallmark of Western Marxism as a whole is... that it is a product of *defeat*.’ (Anderson, 1979: 42 [emphasis in the original]). The blow that the first generation theorists responded to was twofold: in concrete terms, it is the historic defeat of socialism in Europe and the rise of fascism, as well as the totalitarian drift of the Soviet Union under Stalinism (Brick & Postone, 1982: 618). On the theoretical level, it was the crisis of a classic Marxism that expected the development of the forces of production - nowhere as advanced as in the industrialised Western world – to lead to or at least open up the possibility for a liberated social order. The crisis, in that regard, concerned the early Frankfurt School’s own belief in the working class as an agent of emancipation. In a way, the second and third generation Frankfurt School also responded to an experience of defeat, or at least one of radical transformation. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the apparently unquestionable victory of capitalism and liberal democracy seemed to have definitively closed a chapter of world history and marked the beginning of a new one. In the words of Schecter (2013: 3), as they saw it, ‘the dangers in a postcolonial global world [were] more likely to be postmodern relativism, “end of history” complacency, “clash of civilisations” bigotry, ecological disaster and terrorism, such that what [was] really required [was] a new kind of postmodern cosmopolitanism, rather than a renewal of modernism or critical theory as such’ (Schecter, 2013: 3). Today, Frankfurt School Critical Theory is once again confronted with a period of generalised crisis as well as the frustration of its beliefs and aspirations. Its past confidence about the shape of the future to come and tacit acceptance of the Fukuyamaist prophecy about the end of great societal upheavals have left it in a place of uncertainty and confusion. Nowhere is this clearer than in the Cosmopolitan Democracy and Critical IR Theory literatures interrogated in this thesis. There, a chasm appears to have opened up

between Critical Theory's own methodologies, concepts and aspirations, on the one hand, and the 'struggles and wishes of the age' it is supposed to interpret, on the other. Today, then, it is this crisis of critique, as well as the question of where the critical energies of CT should be directed next - that the Frankfurt School is asked to interrogate. What is at stake at this juncture is not just the survival or reputation of Critical Theory as an academic tradition. It is, rather, the ability of Critical Theory as a repository of ideas, critiques and analysis to be a valuable instrument in the critical unravelling of the present time.

Rather than as a moment of dejection, however, Critical Theory should see this crisis of critique as a challenge to go forward and renew itself. As Nicolas Kompridis commented over a decade ago:

This is not the first (nor the last) time that critical theory must face the problem of how to renew itself, for the problem of renewal, the problem of integrating discontinuity and continuity, is internal to critical theory's self-understanding. Any tradition of inquiry that defines itself by its capacity to reflexively incorporate the sociohistorical conditions and contexts of its own emergence will be one that demands a heightened awareness of its own time. Critical theory's reflective attunement to its own time is not only a source of its theoretical reflexivity; it is also the source of its power to intervene in social life as an agency of positive normative and social change (Kompridis, 2006: 18).

As a tradition of critical thought, the Frankfurt School has always given priority to the world-historical developments it was witness to and aimed to constitute the self-reflective and emancipatory counterpart of the real unfolding of the present. To do so it has to reflect on its past failings and adapt itself as a consequence. In this thesis, I have outlined some of the ways in which Critical Theory - and, specifically, Critical Theory in IR - can think about that renewal and pointed to the resources it can draw from in doing so.

The procedure of this thesis has been to start in chapter one from the superficial observation that, across a range of academic disciplines, Frankfurt School research

appears today to be out of phase with the present conjuncture and incapable of making itself relevant to the theoretical and political questions of its time. From there, I have sought in chapters two and three to trace the deeper intellectual, historical and theoretical origins of this crisis of critique. That is, I have asked why the conceptual, philosophical and normative categories utilised by contemporary Critical Theory are unable to explain and provide an emancipatory perspective on current political and socio-economic transformations. The answer to that question I have found to reside in the deeper recesses of the contemporary Frankfurt School's framework of critique - namely in its still unfinished reckoning with the impasse of first generation theory and the meta-theoretical commitments enshrined in the communicative-democratic paradigm. Specifically, I have pointed to the surrendering of the critique of political economy, the uncoupling of normative critique from social theory and the over-reliance on linear narratives of human progress as representing the theoretical and meta-theoretical sources of the Frankfurt School's crisis of critique. In chapters four and five, I have "tested" this possible explanation of CT's predicament on the two most prominent bodies of critical research on international politics: Cosmopolitan Democracy, which I evaluated through Habermas's writings on the post-national constellation; and Critical IR Theory, which I appraised by discussing Linklater's normative theory and sociology of international society. In assessing those works, I showed that a link can indeed be traced between the meta-theoretical shortcomings of the communicative-democratic paradigm and the concrete failings of the critical theoretical interventions on international politics. Those links take the concrete form of a reductive and a-critical analysis of globalisation and its attendant political and socio-economic dynamics, on the one hand, and a deterministic and potentially ideological conception of cosmopolitanism, on the other. In the previous chapter, lastly, I have outlined a proposal for Critical Theory in and outside of IR to act on this diagnosis by embracing a totalising strategy of critique and orienting itself towards the political economic and ideological critique of contemporary neoliberal capitalism.

From the start, this inquiry has been guided by two main principles of inquiry: the first was for the critique of the various strands and epochs of Frankfurt School

research to always be *immanent rather than external*. That is, I have sought to assess the achievements and failings of the authors of the first generation as well as Jürgen Habermas and Andrew Linklater against the standards and aims of the critical theoretical project of which they are all part. The second principle was to always foreground the *substantive contribution* made by each of these scholars as a series of concrete attempts to explain and interpret politically the real-world transformations of the Twentieth and Twenty-first century. In so doing, the thesis has contributed to contemporary debates on Frankfurt School theory both inside and outside IR. It represents, in fact, an exhortation for them to be brought together. On the one hand, discussing the difficulties of Habermas's and Linklater's theories of IR can serve an important clarificatory function for the Frankfurt School tradition as a whole and provides a tangible starting point from which to articulate a comprehensive assessment of the prevailing framework of critique. On the other hand, Critical Theory in IR has much to gain from taking notice of and participating in the discussions that are taking place in sociology, philosophy and political theory over the challenges and future of CT. In order to do so, CT in IR has to overcome its tacit complex of inferiority in relation to the wider Frankfurt School literature and begin to understand itself as fully-fledged member of that intellectual and political tradition. Inevitably, attempts in that direction will have to confront the institutional constraints of academic specialisation and disciplinary boundary-making that everywhere mediate intellectual work. Nonetheless, opportunities are there for Frankfurt School theorists in IR to stretch those boundaries and break out of their self-imposed exile.

A similar effort of reaching out should be directed towards other Marxian strands of international thought. As I have repeatedly noted in chapters four and five, many of the substantive shortcomings of CT in IR - in either its Cosmopolitan Democratic or CIRT configurations - derive from its lagging behind and having isolated itself from the research, debates and insights developed in Marxist historical sociology and IR theory, neo-Gramscian International Political Economy as well as feminist and post-colonial studies. Habermas's writings on international politics, for instance, notably include few references to scholars or literatures outside of the narrow cosmopolitan

camp of which he is part (Anderson, 2012: 50).⁹⁷ While Andrew Linklater has certainly been more outwards-looking in this regard, his recent interactions have mostly been with literatures of a traditional ilk such as Process Sociology and the English School - much to the detriment of his work (Lawson, 2017: 683-684). An immediate priority for future Critical Theoretical research in IR is therefore to rebuild those linkages and draw new connections through which the emancipatory project in international politics can be revitalised and relaunched.

In the end, then, the thesis constitutes an instigation for Critical Theory in IR to take stock of the manifold critiques, reflections and debates that have been developed in the past decade over the crisis of critique of Habermasian theory; to enrich them by engaging in an extended conversation with other strands of Marxian critical theory over the shape and challenges of the present phase of capitalist development; and to embark, based on these, on a process of renewal. The hope is that the ideas developed here, in conjuncture with other similar works being carried out in and outside of IR, can become resources in a collective project of rediscovery of the character and aims of Critical Theory in International Relations. Without presuming to already chart the path of that process or to dictate a fully formed programme of research, the research developed here should be taken as yielding two things: firstly, a warning for CT to learn from past mistakes and free itself of some of the reified assumptions and trans-historical categories that have blinded Habermasian scholarship. Secondly, a positive invitation for CT to approach the study of the present time with a new critical disposition: one which looks beyond settled disciplinary boundaries and establishes connections with other critical literatures; one which foregrounds the analysis of the concrete contradictions and antagonisms of contemporary global capitalism over the identification of epochal or evolutionary trajectories of development; and one whose emancipatory orientation is given more

⁹⁷ Anderson (2012: 51) notes, reviewing Habermas's 2012 book *The Crisis of the European Union*, how: 'Some sixty pages in length, [the book] contains around a hundred references. Three quarters of them are to German authors. Nearly half of these, in turn, are to three associates whom he thanks for assistance, or to himself. The residue is exclusively Anglo-American, dominated—a third of the entries—by a single British admirer, David Held of recent Gaddafi fame. No other European culture figures in this ingenuous exhibition of provincialism'.

by the attunement to existing political struggles than by the devotion to abstract and universal notions of progress.

There is no guarantee that, even when equipped with such a renewed critical disposition, Critical Theory will not be fooled again by historical events into believing to be permanent and unassailable what is in fact contingent and contestable, or into dismissing as accidental and unimportant what are in reality profound structural transformations. These are, after all, occupational hazards for any theory whose ambition is to gain a holistic understanding of a social totality in constant motion. What Critical Theory *can do*, however, is find ways of guarding itself against the trickeries of the present by engaging in a continuous process of self-reflection and by recovering a sensibility for social and political economic research that has atrophied in recent decades. The ambition of this research was to contribute some elements towards the development of these capabilities. In any case, much more remains to be done.

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