

# WHY HABERMAS?

LINDA J. NICHOLSON

There exist two ways to deny an idea. One is to label it false. The other is to call it non-important, more effectively achieved by not discussing it all. Mainstream philosophy in both England and the United States has skilfully employed the art of non-discussion to deny ideas antithetical to the accepted. A similar phenomenon has existed in English radical philosophy regarding the work of Jürgen Habermas. Hegel himself is little taught or read in the country. Those who took up the dialogue he began, such as Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl or Heidegger are not widely discussed. Marx is most frequently treated as primarily an economic or political theorist, more concerned with the theories of value or of the state than theories of cognition, and thus more in dialogue with Smith than with Hegel. Whereas France may produce a theorist such as Althusser who takes pains to deny the connection of Marx with Hegel, the climate of England has been more conducive to ignoring the issue. In this context, one does not need a complex explanation to account for the fact that in 1979 Jürgen Habermas's philosophical work is still not widely read in England. The themes which Habermas explores, such as the relation of theory to practice, or of cognition to politics, continue in the tradition of issues dealt with by Hegel, which Habermas, and his earlier Frankfurt school predecessors, self-consciously acknowledge as their own.

In part the English dismissal of the Hegelian tradition has stemmed from an underlying suspicion of any theory too concerned with the 'subjective'. Thus both psychoanalysis and the women's movement have had more difficulty gaining acceptance in England's intellectual community than in the comparable community in the United States. When English philosophers do allow credence to theorists concerned with the 'inner life', it is to theorists such as Sartre or Freud too major to ignore. Moreover, the study of the 'psychological' or 'subjective' when so admitted is kept in its own compartment, not allowed interaction with the more serious subject of political philosophy. However, it is just at this juncture of psyche with politics that the work of Habermas becomes important, if not necessarily for the answers it gives, at least for the questions it raises. Moreover, the critique which Habermas levels at positivism needs also to be listened to in England. English philosophy, like other English disciplines, has been so importantly shaped by this school of thought that it may be as difficult for its critics as for its upholders to see through its dominance. English Marxists as well as philosophers of science cannot justifiably ignore a theorist who attempts this task.

## I Habermas' Critique of Positivism

The issue of the relation of theory to practice serves as an underlying threat in Habermas' work. As Thomas McCarthy describes it in his recent work on Habermas(1), this theme began its development with an examination of the transformation of the classical notion of politics to its modern form. For the Greeks, the study of politics and the study of the good life were one activity. It was only in the seventeenth century, in the work particularly of Thomas Hobbes, that the modern conception of politics arose. With Hobbes, we begin to see the early precursor of contemporary conceptions of 'political science': politics as a body of laws about human behavior which could be used to bring about a variety of ends. Thus one distinguishing difference between the classical and modern conception of politics is that the latter conceives of itself as being value-free or as needing its values supplied from other sources. This separation of theory and its uses reflects a second separation between theory and its application. For the Greeks, to study politics was to become a virtuous person. We need the contemporary example of psychoanalysis to remind us of the classical immediacy of connection between understanding and self-transformation.

If theory and its application are separate, what becomes a possibility is a further separation between the originators of the theory and those whom it is about, those who understand and those who are transformed through another's understanding. What is made possible is political science, or social science generally, as an instrument of control. Such control need not be malevolent or even, at least in theory, guided by the ends of the theorists. The above separation of theory from goal negates any necessary connection between the personal goals of the scientist and the creation or application of the theory. While theory need not necessarily reflect the goals of its creator, it also need not reflect the goals of those whom it is about. Control, meaning direction from without, becomes a theoretical possibility.

This modern conception of politics, and of social science, reflected the rise of the dominance of natural science conceived in a particular manner. That social theory could bring about the kind of control in the social world, comparable with that which natural science was accomplishing in the natural world, was an understandable desire. Its fulfilment seemed only a question of following the

model which natural science had established. While Comte led the way in first articulating the equation of knowledge with science, it became the task of later positivists to explicate what science was about. What appeared central was the construction of laws capable of prediction which were generated and tested through empirical observation. Such features seemed clearly to differentiate the method of science from, for example, the method of religion. What was less obviously noticed was that it was not only religion that was being dismissed from the category of knowledge. What also did not conform were the deliberation procedures by which the model itself was created. This point of blindness was exemplified in the irony of Ayer's dictum that statements were either in principle verifiable or nonsense, as itself being nonsense. It manifested itself more seriously in a lack of discussion within positivism on the justifiability of its own presuppositions. Its own methodology entailed the impossibility of such self-justification. Not only did its commitment to empirical confirmation negate the possibility of any confirmation of itself, but its claim of the fundamental irrationality of value commitments equally negated any reasoned defence of its own commitment to the methods of science. Such contradictions as these were lost in positivism's growing replacement of epistemology with philosophy of science. The explication of the procedures of natural science replaced reflection on the knowing subject which did not presuppose science but sought to explain it.

What was exciting to many in Habermas' early book *Knowledge and Human Interests* (2) was that it not only articulated the above critique but also took up as its own aim this lost process of reflection. As Habermas made clear in the first paragraph of the preface, this renewal of the activity of reflection had to be historical. That positivism eliminated history in its intent to construct nomological laws was itself the process by which it abandoned reflection:

I am undertaking a historically oriented attempt to reconstruct the history of modern positivism with the systematic intention of analyzing the connections between knowledge and human interests. In following the process of the dissolution of epistemology, which has left the philosophy of science in its place, one makes one's way over abandoned stages of reflection. Retreading this path from a perspective that looks back toward the point of departure may help to recover the forgotten experience of reflection. That we disavow reflection is positivism (3).

Positivism, with its emphasis on nomological laws, or that which repeats itself through time, has always had difficulty with history with the latter's emphasis on change through time. Positivism's lack of concern with the generation of knowledge has also resulted in the dismissal of the importance of the history of a discipline in comparison with the present results of that discipline. Thus history of science is viewed in most English and American universities as an interesting but not very serious component of science itself. Habermas, in his attempt to break through the hold of positivism, recognized that more was required than arguing its incoherence or constructing an alternative framework. While *Knowledge and Human Interests* does attempt both of these latter tasks, it does so through

intellectual history. Habermas constructs his arguments against positivism and creates his alternative model by elaborating the strengths and weaknesses of certain major nineteenth and twentieth century philosophers who both indicated ways out of positivism's hold and were trapped within it. For the sake of brevity I would like to separate this process in my own exposition, giving a simple sketch of his model and then examining certain of his remarks on Marx and Freud.

If any single phrase could serve to define positivism, it might be 'the equation of knowledge with science'. Thus Habermas in *Knowledge and Human Interests* attempts to uncouple this equation. He does so by differentiating three different forms of knowledge, only one of which corresponds to the scientific. This form of knowledge Habermas labels 'empirical-analytic' and differentiates it from 'historical-hermeneutic understanding' on the one hand and 'critical theory' on the other. These three types of knowledge are the products of three different orientations to the world motivated by three different fundamental human interests. Empirical-analytic knowledge is ultimately motivated by the interest in technical control which underlies the human activity of work or 'purposive-rational action'. Historical-hermeneutic understanding is motivated by the interest in successful communication which underlies all forms of human interaction. Finally, critical theory is an expression of the human interest in autonomy or freedom from unnecessary forms of domination, and underlies the human activity of reflection.

The relation that Habermas constructs between the above three interests and human knowledge goes beyond an understanding of interest as representing that which is idiosyncratic and a possible source of distortion for understanding. Rather for Habermas in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, these interests partially constitute that which they are about. Thus the domain of science, objects and their interaction, are constituted as objects by humans who have arisen through a particular natural history. This history has resulted in a certain 'bodily organization' which results in the necessity of objectification of the basis of such characteristics as space and time. Thus while Habermas' theory of scientific knowledge possesses certain similarities to Kant's, unlike Kant he roots his description of the conditions of scientific knowledge in natural history. A dilemma which arises for Habermas is how we can escape from these conditions in accounting for this history. A circle appears inevitable: how can we describe nature as both the ground of human knowledge, and that which is constituted in human knowledge? There here appears to be a tension between the Hegelian conception of nature as a social construct, and a materialist grounding of society in natural history.

Rather than discussing Habermas' success or failure in resolving this issue, I refer the reader to McCarthy's excellent discussion of this (4). Whether or not Habermas provides us with an exit from the enclosure of our forms of knowledge, he at least provides us with diverse forms of knowledge in which to move, corresponding to the different interests. As our interest in control underlies the necessary characteristics of our world of objects (or as Habermas expresses it 'of things and happenings'), so our interest in communication underlies the necessary characteristics for us of

'persons and utterances'. In other words, as Habermas grounded the necessary characteristics of objects qua objects in our specific evolutionarily derived 'bodily organization' oriented to technical control, so he grounds our grasp of 'persons and utterances' in our equally evolutionarily derived characteristic of being participants in communicative interaction. In contrast, the emancipatory interest is not thus grounded in such 'deeply rooted (invariant?) structures of action and experience'(5). Rather he labels it 'derivative', 'having as an object domain the socially contingent fact of systematically distorted communication. This contingency of its object domain explains the contingency of the activity in which it manifests itself, reflection.

## II Habermas and Revolution

The above account of the tripartite nature of knowledge had for Habermas political implications. As noted, positivism's equation of knowledge with science enabled an explication of theory as an instrument of prediction and control. It was not only positivist philosophers of science who came to view theory in such a manner. Policy makers, politicians and social bureaucrats have also come to believe in the possibility of social science as a tool for social governance. Moreover, a large section of the radical critics of capitalism have shared this perception of the nature of theory, even if perceived as necessary for the accomplishment of alternative ends. A distorted conception of theory has entailed a distorted notion of the revolutionary process. These distortions have their genesis, for Habermas, in Marx's understanding of theory.

Habermas makes a distinction between Marx's historical and descriptive accounts of capitalism and his self-understanding of his theory. In Marx's investigation of capitalist and pre-capitalist society, social transformation is viewed, according to Habermas, as both the result of technological development and struggles concerning human interaction. It is for this reason that Marx includes under the category 'mode of production' both the 'forces' and 'relations' of production. If Marx had not incorporated both technical and communicative practice in his actual historical work, he would have been forced, according to Habermas, to view history as the development of a unified subject. In actuality, for Marx, history is the unfolding of class struggle. In other words, a technological account of history could not incorporate or explain class struggle, which is clearly central to Marx's historical work. Unfortunately for Habermas, Marx was not sufficiently aware of the methodological implications of his own social theory. Rather his self-understanding of his work expressed itself in a philosophy of history which saw the self-constitution of the human species as the result of labour alone. What became lost in this understanding was the role of reflection as a motive force of history not reducible to the act of technical appropriation.

The two versions that we have examined make visible an indecision that has its foundation in Marx's theoretical approach itself. . . . Self-constitution through social labor is conceived at the categorial level as a process of production, and instrumental action, labor in the sense of material activity, or work designates the dimension in which natural history moves. At the level of his material investigations, on the

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other hand, Marx always takes account of social practice that encompasses both work and interaction. The processes of natural history are mediated by the productive activity of individuals and the organization of their interrelations. These relations are subject to norms that decide with the force of institutions, how responsibilities and rewards, obligations and charges to the social budget are distributed among members. The medium in which these relations of subjects and of groups are normatively regulated is cultural tradition. It forms the linguistic communication structure on the basis of which subjects interpret both nature and themselves in their environment (6).

The constraints placed on human beings by the natural world are dealt with through labour or instrumental action. However, the results of the labour process are not necessarily equitably shared, as exhibited in class societies, which justify such inequality through ideology. Whereas freedom from natural domination is achieved through technological innovation, freedom from social domination can only be achieved through processes of reflection not reducible to technological appropriation:

The course of the social self-formative process, on the other hand, is marked not by new technologies but by stages of reflection through which the dogmatic character of surpassed forms of domination and ideologies are dispelled, the pressure of the institutional framework is sublimated, and communicative action is set free as communicative action. The goal of this development is thereby anticipated: the organization of society linked to decision-making processes on the bases of discussion free from domination. Raising the productivity of technically exploitable knowledge, which in the sphere of socially necessary labor leads to the complete substitution of machinery for men, has its counterpart here in the self-reflection of consciousness in its manifestations to the point where the self-consciousness of the species has attained the level of critique and freed itself from all ideological delusion. The two developments do not converge. Yet they are interdependent; Marx tried in vain to capture this in the dialectic of forces of production and relations of production. In vain - for the meaning of this 'dialectic' must remain unclarified as long as the materialist concept of the synthesis of man and nature is restricted to

the categorial framework of production (7).

Freedom from natural and social domination, while interdependent, are not identical. Scarcity demands the repression of needs which forms a motive force for class rule. Technological development may remove this motive force but by so doing it need not remove those forms of repression which are specific to a society organized by class. In other words, there is always a question of the difference between the degree of repression that is necessary at any given stage of production and that which is a function of social domination. Technological development, while making possible the elimination of the latter, need not on its own effect it. For that, what is required is the critique of ideology.

In Knowledge and Human Interests Habermas uses psychoanalysis, with qualifications, as a model for elaborating the method of such a critique. In both cases the goal is the recovery of repressed needs and desires which have through repression become ex-communicated from language. In both cases what is required is a recovery of a past that has been blocked from consciousness. The revolution thus sets as a model communication free from domination where such history can be recovered and where all needs can be verbalized. Some have therefore interpreted Habermas in his early writings as describing the revolution as a mass psychoanalytic encounter. It therefore should be noted that Habermas does differentiate between the development of theory, the process of enlightenment and the conduct of political struggle:

The mediation of theory and practice can be clarified if to begin with we distinguish three functions, which are measured in terms of different criteria: the formation and extension of critical theorems, which can stand up to scientific discourse; the organization of processes of enlightenment, in which such theorems are applied and can be tested in a unique manner by the initiation of processes of reflection carried on within certain groups towards which these processes have been directed; and the selection of appropriate strategies, the solution of tactical questions and the conduct of the political struggle (8).

Thus if Habermas was innovative in introducing the model of psychoanalysis in an understanding of revolution, it was only as a component part.

### III Habermas and Critical Theory

The intent of Habermas' early work was to recover social theory from positivism. Habermas was not the first to attempt this task. Beginning with such nineteenth-century German philosophers as Dilthey, continuing in the twentieth century with Husserl and phenomenology and even surfacing in British and American philosophy as in Winch, many have come to uncover crucial weaknesses in positivism's conception of social theory. One often recognized difficulty with positivism has been its inability to comprehend how the fact that human speech and behaviour have social meaning in turn affects the nature of any theory designed to describe or comprehend such speech and behaviour. To put the matter simply: human beings unlike rocks have

things to say about what they do. At some level social theory has to take into account this self-understanding of social actors if it is merely to live up to one criterion of theory positivism itself judges important; the ability to provide successful prediction (9). The comprehension of social meaning seems however to entail activities not adequately comprehended in positivism's conception of sensory observation. The hermeneutic tradition, reactivated by Dilthey, amongst others, appeared to many to provide at least the beginnings of a more adequate account. Thus when Habermas in Knowledge and Human Interests differentiated 'empirical-analytic' from 'historical-hermeneutic' knowledge, he was not introducing an unknown distinction. What was more novel in Habermas' account of the structure of knowledge was his differentiation of critical theory from historical-hermeneutic knowledge. There existed at least one strong reason for making such a differentiation. Hermeneutics recognizes that social theory takes as its subject matter that which is meaningful. It equally recognizes that the specific meanings which humans assign to their speech and behavior can only be comprehended through an understanding which relates such meanings to the larger symbolic context in which such meanings are generated. Thus hermeneutics recognizes the necessary historicity of its subject matter. It equally recognizes the historicity of the language in which such subject matter can be described and explained. As noted, the ideal of positivism is the creation of nomological laws whose only relation to history concerns the time of their instantiation. The components of such laws must of themselves be non-historical, otherwise invalidating the conception of law itself. Thus for example, a behaviourist such as B. F. Skinner would prefer to translate ordinary language description of behaviour to the language of physical movement, not only because of its greater 'precision', but also because it represents a language which can be employed to describe any human society. The response to this position by hermeneutics is that we cannot avoid being historical. To attempt otherwise is either to limit ourselves to a language too thin to be interesting or else to employ a language covertly our own. If hermeneutics insists on the historical situatedness of both the subject and language of study, the danger it encounters is the possibility of relativism. How can we use the historically specific symbolic framework of our language to describe the equally historically specific framework of another? Moreover, if we need to attend to the specific meanings which humans give to their speech and behaviour, or take into account the subjects' own interpretation of what they say and do, how do we allow for the possibility that agents themselves are not necessarily the best describers or explainers of their own actions?

There lay a possible road out of this impasse for Habermas in his description of psychoanalysis. Habermas criticizes Freud for the latter's tendency to interpret his own work according to a model of natural science, manifesting itself for example in Freud's conception of id, ego and superego as elements in an energy distribution model. Rather, for Habermas, what psychoanalysis illustrates is a mode of social understanding where hermeneutics is central. Freud himself recognized the analogy between dream interpretation and the understanding of a text. What is distinctive however about psycho-

analysis is that while hermeneutics is employed, many of the meanings it describes are not accessible to the subject. In Lukacsian language, they have become alienated from the subject, operating in the manner of a 'second nature'. Thus psychoanalysis 'unites linguistic analysis with the psychological investigation of causal connections'(10). Secondly, psychoanalysis distinguishes itself from hermeneutics in its requirement of being theoretically grounded. To account for the distortions in communication which mark this alienation, psychoanalysis must have available a model of non-distorted communication. It also requires a theory of socialization which would account for the acquisition of communicative competence as well as its deformation. In short, what psychoanalysis as opposed to hermeneutics reveals is the need for theory which can ground the process of critique.

One can view Habermas' later work as the attempt to provide this theoretical grounding. Notable amongst the projects of his later writings are a theory of communicative competence, that is, a theory which makes explicit those species-wide rules which underlie and make possible successful communication. Also important are his attempts to develop a theory of socialization, and, most recently, a reconstructed theory of historical materialism which takes the form of a theory of social evolution. All of these projects intend to fulfil the aim of grounding what is necessarily historical in social inquiry. Rather than attempt to summarize these theories, I would prefer to examine in the remainder of this article a problem which McCarthy cogently discusses in his summarization of Habermas' later writings and their relation to the early work.

In a paper published some years after Knowledge and Human Interests, Habermas put forward the following criticism of his position there:

It occurred to me only after completing the book that the traditional use of the term 'reflexion', which goes back to German Idealism, covers (and confuses) two things: on the one hand, it denotes the reflexion upon the conditions of potential abilities of a knowing, speaking and acting subject as such; on the other hand, it denotes the reflexion upon unconsciously produced constraints to which a determinate subject (or a determinate group of subjects, or a determinate species subject) succumbs in its process of self-formation. In Kant and his successors, the first type of reflexion took the form of a search for the transcendental ground of possible theoretical knowledge (and moral conduct). What does it mean for a theory, or for theoretical knowledge as such, to ground itself transcendently? It means that the theory becomes familiar with the range of inevitable subjective conditions which both make the theory possible and place limits on it, for this kind of transcendental corroboration tends always to criticize an overly confident self-understanding the theory may have of itself. In the meantime, this mode of reflexion has also taken the shape of a rational reconstruction of generative rules and cognitive schemata. Particularly, the paradigm of language has led to a reframing of the transcendental model in a way which makes it unnecessary to add a transcendental subject to the system of conditions, categories or rules established by linguistic theory. While language philosophy used to be transcendental philosophy in the days of Humboldt, it suffices now to grasp the generative

nature of rules themselves, whereas the mastery of these rules, i. e. the emergence of competence and hence the formation of a competent subject, becomes a second, analytically and empirically independent, issue. It was Wittgenstein's analysis of the notion of 'following a rule' and, in the Humboldtian tradition, Chomsky's concepts of 'generative rules' and 'linguistic competence' which contributed most directly to this specific variant of a rational reconstruction of the conditions which make language, cognition and action possible.

In his Phenomenology, Hegel combined the self-critical delimitation of consciousness, effected by a transcendental analysis of the conditional nature of something we know naively and intuitively, with reflexion in another sense of the term which denotes the critical dissolution of subjectively constituted pseudo-objectivity. In other words, he embraced a concept of reflexion which contains the idea of an analytical emancipation from objective illusions. Later, Freud removed this self-critical notion of reflexion from its epistemological context by relating it to the reflexive experience of an empirical subject which, under the compulsive sway of restricted patterns of perception and behaviour, deludes itself about its own being. By understanding these illusions the subject emancipates itself from itself (11).

If however Habermas comes to differentiate, as he does, between 'critical self-reflection' and 'rational reconstruction', between reflection on the particular, historically specific conditions of knowledge and those that are universal, then he is left with a problem which seems to haunt his later writings: a possible reemergence of positivism's separation of theory from practice. For, in the attempt to provide grounding for critique, Habermas has come to emphasize a form of theory - rational reconstruction - whose relationship to the particular and practical is problematic. Moreover, his reliance in his later writings on many developmental theorists, such as Kohlberg, raises the issue of whether or not he remains sufficiently sensitive to hermeneutics' insistence on the necessary historicity of much of social theory. While Habermas is correct in recognizing the necessity of theoretical grounding, is he still sufficiently cognizant of the hazards inherent in providing this grounding? McCarthy treats these problems as unresolvable, by describing both rational reconstruction and critical self-reflection as interconnected aspects of critical social theory:

It should be evident that the aims of a critical social theory are not exhausted in the construction of a theory of social evolution. Primary among these aims is the analysis of contemporary society; and this analysis requires both a practical and a historical orientation. It requires, that is, a critical, historical account of how we came to be what we are, a reflection on the particulars of our self-formative processes. . . . My point here is that the theory of social evolution does not replace the earlier conception of critical social theory as historically situated, practically interested reflection on a formative process. Rather it represents a further enrichment of its theoretical basis. In addition to a horizontal account of the structure of non-distorted communicative interaction, critical self-reflection

can also draw on a vertical account of the development of structures of interaction. Despite this enrichment, however, critical theory - in so far as it is a theory of contemporary society - retains its essentially historical and practical nature (12).

The question whether McCarthy is correct in believing that Habermas' later writings do represent an adequate integration of that which is historical and that which is general cannot be answered on the basis of the above depiction of Habermas' later writings. Rather what I hope to have illustrated in the above is merely the nature of the issues with which Habermas is dealing. The reason I have proceeded along this path is because I believe that whatever the validity of Habermas' specific claims, in his later as in his earlier works, the issues are crucial. To paraphrase Sartre on Marx: Habermas is dealing with problems we have not yet gone beyond. Whether Habermas has adequately provided

us with a critical social theory, he has at least provided us with an important description of its necessary components. Most importantly, he has helped elaborate the conception of social inquiry as fundamentally a process in which 'all are participants' and whose object is the transformation of our lives.

- 1 Thomas McCarthy, The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, Cambridge, Mass., 1978. The book is reviewed in the Reviews section of this issue of Radical Philosophy.
- 2 Jurgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests, Boston, 1971.
- 3 *ibid*, p. vii.
- 4 Jurgen Habermas, Theory and Practice, London, 1974, p285 n38. See also McCarthy's discussion of this issue in *op. cit.* pp110-25.
- 5 Jurgen Habermas, 'A Postscript to Knowledge and Human Interests', Philosophy of the Social Sciences, vol. 3, no. 2, p176.
- 6 Knowledge and Human Interests, pp52-53.
- 7 *ibid*, p55.
- 8 Theory and Practice, p32.
- 9 A good discussion of this point is in Charles Taylor, The Explanation of Behavior, New York, 1964, Chapters VI and VII.
- 10 Knowledge and Human Interests, p217.
- 11 The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas, pp94-95.
- 12 *ibid*, p270. Note McCarthy's more extended discussion of this issue on pp261-71.

# LACAN: A REPLY TO REE

ANTONY EASTHOPE

I won't comment on Jonathan Ree's harsh and over-personalised attack on Coward and Ellis (Radical Philosophy 23) except to say it was at the least unfraternal - whatever the inadequacies of Coward and Ellis' position it is not one that offers much comfort to Sir Keith Joseph and his like. But it was a pity that Lacan, about whom we are sure to hear a lot more, should first surface in Radical Philosophy in this context. He deserves better. It may be that people trained in modes of representation (e.g. literary criticism) find Lacan easier meat than those trained in philosophy. Ree honestly confesses his difficulties; he finds Lacan's relation of signifier and unconscious 'particularly obscure' and cannot tell whether his theory of ego formation is superior to Freud's. Rather than run through an irritating list of disagreements with Ree it would be more constructive to attempt a positive if simplified and abbreviated summary of two main areas in Lacan's projected integration of Saussurian linguistics and Freudian psychoanalysis, the construction of the subject in language, the entry of the subject into language ('subject' because 'thrown under' and into a pre-existing process rather than 'individual', the self-sufficient subject from Latin individuus, 'undivided').

That the ego is in and for itself ('I think therefore I am'), owing nothing to anyone, dependent upon nothing but itself and thus freely owning commodities, freely exchanging labour power for wages, acting freely according to or against the law, freely choosing its political representatives - all this is the central support in bourgeois ideology, as Althusser (under the influence of Lacan) tries to argue in the ISA's essay. Lacan offers to explain how the ego comes to conceive itself in an autonomy, to think itself as a source of meaning. It really is

very hard to root out the idea (it saturates our language) that there is somehow an 'I' already there prior to or back from its 'expression' (expression means to make outward what was inward without altering its nature). For example, M. A. K. Halliday in Language as Social Semiotic says

In essence, what seems to happen is this. The child first constructs a language in the form of a range of meanings that relate directly to certain of his basic needs. As time goes on the meanings become more complex, and he replaces this by a symbolic system - a semantic system with structural realizations - based on the language he hears around him; this is what we call his 'mother tongue'.

(p27)

Here we are shown a little man at work - he has needs, replaces them, he hears language. The subject is already there prior to language. And sexed. On Lacan's showing I don't speak since the 'I' which speaks only exists within language; I don't learn to talk since this 'I' we persist in referring to only comes into existence in learning to talk. In other words you can't step over your own feet.

The Subject in Language. Saussure demonstrated the relation of signifier ('sound image') and signified ('concept') as arbitrary not inherent. Obviously the meaning holding together signifier and signified is social, a semantic organisation ideologically constituted. Yet there must be a process by which language is internalised in and for the subject, how the signifier is lined up with the signified for the subject to intend meaning. Because signifiers relate only to each other in a system of differences ('each linguistic term derives its value from its