

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

opposition to all the other terms', Saussure, p88), there is 'an incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier' (Lacan, p154). However, Saussure distinguishes the syntagmatic axis of language from the paradigmatic or associative. Syntagmatic is the linear dimension of language most apparent in the sentence, the 'horizontal' chain in which meaning is sequentially differentiated so that 'I like Ike' means something different from 'I like honey' or 'I like Benn'; paradigmatic is the 'vertical' dimension of possible substitutions and associations dependent on a term in the syntagmatic chain (instead of 'like' there are 'hate'/'smite'/'fight' and 'dislike'/'will like'/'liked'/'have liked' and 'strike'/'bike'/'tike' etc etc). Meaning inheres in the syntagmatic chain ('it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning "insists"', Lacan, p153) but only becomes intended there as meaning through exclusion of the paradigmatic associations. The coherence of the subject, its ability to intend meaning, is constituted along the syntagmatic chain as a 'single voice' sustaining meaning and so itself sustained in this 'linearity' (p154 again). The Freudian ego is developed as a split in the subject, Cs/Uos: the Lacanian ego is developed as this split between meaning intended in the syntagmatic chain and the whole resonating mass of associated and associating signifiers which are excluded for meaning to take place in and for the subject. The whole difficulty of trying to say this is that our language and culture would commit us to description either of an objective and subjectless process (it happens this way - abstract nouns and passive verbs) or how people originate meanings (we do this - personal pronouns and active verbs). For Lacan as for Caudwell 'object and subject ... come into being simultaneous' and the attempt to force this on our language accounts for some seemingly baroque circumlocutions.

Language Entry. In Beyond the Pleasure Principle Freud describes a child (his grandson) who at 18 months repeats the game of lost and found with a cotton reel, each time saying 'fort' ('gone') and 'da' ('there'). Freud interprets the repetition as the child mastering the absence of his mother by speak-

ing of it. Lacan persistently comes back to this, the Fort/Da game, as exemplum of language entry. It is not that the absence, the meaning 'mummy gone', was always there for the child who suddenly recognises it (and who was there to recognise it); it is rather that entering language the infant enters a presence/absence system in which the lack of the mother is brought into being as such - 'the child's whole universe is divided whereas previously it was wholly and without mediation, satiety or void' (see Coward and Ellis, p96). On the one hand absence because signifiers relate only to each other in a system of differences with no 'positive' content (the 'O' of fort and the 'A' of da define each other as opposing phonemes); on the other hand presence since meaning 'insists' in the syntagmatic chain, is the coherent progression from 'fort' ('gone!') to 'da' ('there!'). Language brings into being for the subject a gap, a ditch on the frontier of its domain, which it tries to fill with the kind of meaning language also makes possible.

None of this is so far away from our common or garden experience of how babies grow. For example Spock (Baby and Child Care, para 348) describes how a 3 month old who smiles at everyone becomes a 5 month old who cries when a stranger approaches. He adds, not surprisingly, 'Probably the main cause of this behavior is that he is now smart enough to distinguish between friend and stranger'. As the distinction between friend and stranger, mummy and not mummy, opens up for the infant, so it enters language; and vice versa.

For Lacan the consciousness of the subject depends upon its being (in language) and cannot exist apart from this. This is, at the least, not incompatible with historical materialism and contrary to Reé gives Lacan an interest and importance well beyond the clinical.



REVIEWS

BAHRO'S ALTERNATIVE

Rudolph Bahro, The Alternative in Eastern Europe, New Left Books, 1978, £9.50 hc

Bahro's book is the most significant normative work yet to emerge from the experience of post-1945 Eastern Europe. It is, in addition, probably the most important Marxist discussion in decades of the relation of the ultimate goals of socialism to the interlocking hierarchies of scientific knowledge, political power, and economic advantage which dominate what Bahro calls 'actually existing socialism'. The Alternative is also a book which, by the very breadth of its enquiry, necessarily contains a number of contradictions and inadequacies. As it has been fairly widely reviewed, I will

try to concentrate on those areas which have not been the subject of much attention elsewhere.

What does merit reiteration, however, is that Bahro's critique of Soviet-style socialism is written from the inside of the system, with a view to rendering it more Marxist rather than simply less authoritarian. Bahro's education in philosophy, and experience as a party member, economist, journalist, and trade-union functionary in East Germany have given him a much richer perspective than that often found in dissenting criticism. Though he now resides in exile in West Germany, following his recent release from prison, Bahro's writing was done over a period of four years while he was still an employee of the state, and he is