

nor the “colonization of the lifeworld” theory of the two volumes of *Theory of Communicative Action* find room in this account. Harcourt seems to view any form of neo-Marxist social theory, including Habermas’s, as a form of “scientism,” and he distances social theory from social science.

- <sup>5</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense,” (1873) in *On Truth and Untruth: Selected Writings*, ed. and trans Taylor Carman (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), p. 30. Quote has been slightly modified by Harcourt.
- <sup>6</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce, “The Fixation of Belief” and “How to Make our Ideas Clear” in: *Selected Writings. Values in a Universe of Chance*, ed. and with an Introduction by Philip P. Wiener (1958 edition), reproduced Dover Books on Western Philosophy on line (1966), [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=J7bCAGAAQB AJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=charles+sanders+peirce+and+the+fixation+of+beliefs&ots=IG0PhVaVyO&sig=mhF8rlfa33kj\\_z9YrEggoBQ5IXI#v=onepage&q=charles%20sanders%20peirce%20and%20the%20fixation%20of%20beliefs&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=J7bCAGAAQB AJ&oi=fnd&pg=PT7&dq=charles+sanders+peirce+and+the+fixation+of+beliefs&ots=IG0PhVaVyO&sig=mhF8rlfa33kj_z9YrEggoBQ5IXI#v=onepage&q=charles%20sanders%20peirce%20and%20the%20fixation%20of%20beliefs&f=false). Last accessed January 17, 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> For John Dewey, see *The Quest for Certainty. A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action* (1929) in: *The Later Works of John Dewey*, vol. 4, 1925–1953, ed. by JoAnn Boydston, (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1984), pp. 1–251.
- <sup>8</sup> See Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979); Karl-Otto Apel, *Toward a Transformation of Philosophy*, Glyn Adey and David Frisby, trans. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980); Karl-Otto Apel, *Charles S. Peirce: From Pragmatism to Pragmaticism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). The literature tracing the evolution of Habermas’s theories of truth, language and ethics is too extensive to be summarized here, but see T.A. McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1978) for one of the early and best accounts of the development of a non-foundationalist communicative conception of reason in his work. Kenneth Baynes gives a good account of Habermas’s “Kantian Pragmatism,” in: *Habermas* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016). My own work over the years has attempted to develop the project of “communicative ethics” in dialogue with feminist, hermeneuticist, and post-modernist theory. See Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self. Gender, Community and Post-Modernism in Contemporary Ethics* (London: Polity Press, 1992); Benhabib, Seyla, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, Nancy Fraser, and Lindo Nicholson, ed. *Feminism as Critique: A Philosophical Exchange* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
- <sup>9</sup> For an account see Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World* (2003) in: Jonathan Schell, *The Library of America*, ed by Martin J. Sherwin (Penguin Random House Inc, 2020), pp. 463–577.

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DOI: 10.1111/1468-4446.12860

# An “illuminati” and its acolytes: Critical theory in the text and in the world

## Being a commentary on Bernard Harcourt’s *Critique and Praxis*

As I mentioned earlier, critical theorists have been bogged down now for decades in an epistemological detour that has now given rise to clannish politics between its various branches—Frankfurt School, Foucaultian, deconstructive, Lacanian, feminist, postcolonial, queer—or worse, has descended to mere gossip about its illuminati.

Critique and Praxis (44)

Where one thing stands, another thing will stand beside it.

Chinua Achebe

For those familiar with the famous online platform of seminars that Bernard Harcourt directs at Columbia University, I reveal nothing secret when I state that *Critique and Praxis* probably had either its origins or an earlier

fragmentary incarnation in that platform, particularly the 6<sup>th</sup> issue or number of the platform, *Critique* 6/13, on Michel Foucault. Additionally, we might also look to the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of the platform, *Critique* 10/13, on Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, as a sort of supplemental "prequel" to the production of *Critique and Praxis*. But indisputably, of all the great figures in the long genealogy of critical theory that we encounter in the book, no one is more central, more determinative for Harcourt's project in this book than Michel Foucault. Indeed, without being exactly "Foucaultian", throughout the entirety of the book, Harcourt returns to Foucault again and again as a kind of touchstone, not in adulation, but as an incredibly rich source of productive provocations.

Perhaps the ultimate mark of this *tactical* immanence of Foucault in the text of *Critique and Praxis* is the fact that of the dozens of past and present, dead and living critical theorists that we encounter in the book, only two figures are profiled and interrogated as much for their *critique* as for their *praxis*, that is to say for their theoretical works *and* their practical engagements. These two figures are Michel Foucault and Bernard Harcourt. What accounts for this remarkable and decisive textual and discursive move of our author? This will be the focal point in the main body of my commentary on the book. In that section, I will argue that Foucault is so important for Harcourt because he seems to provide for our author the only way out of the central dilemma that we confront in the book. In this dilemma, Harcourt confronts a contradiction that ultimately proves too intractable for him to resolve: the impossibility of connecting two related propositions that logically and historically arise from the book. What are these two propositions?

On the one hand, there is, first, Harcourt's powerful argument that in the postwar period from the 1940s to the 1960s and 1970s and even beyond, critical theory became increasingly either unwilling or unable to fulfill the mandate not only to interpret the world but also to change it. But on the other hand, there is the historic fact that in that same period of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the closing decades of the century that critical theory was, according to Harcourt, missing in action, thanks to other traditions of theory and praxis, revolutionary developments that would forever change the state of affairs in the world broke out nearly everywhere on the planet. This is the central argument in my commentary on the book. In it, I shall explore Harcourt's forgetfulness that change and transformation in the world did not cease when critical theory was missing in action, suggesting that this forgetfulness, being neither willful nor amnesiac, was discursively strategic. But before getting to that section, a few words are necessary on the unrestrained *jouissance* of my response to *Critique and Praxis*, together with my sense of this book's importance for all of us and not just for "critical theorists" who locate the genealogical roots of their intellectual identities in Frankfurt School critical theory and its offshoots, especially as they seem to be the collective and individual addressees of this new book.

*Critique and Praxis* is the work of a visionary revolutionary intellectual. I had great delight in reading the book, even though I was at first slightly exasperated by the book's many repetitions, indeed its *constitutive* repetitiveness. As in *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy's great novel which reveals what will happen at the end of the novel right at the beginning of the narrative, in Harcourt's new book, the reader knows almost completely what the book is about very early in the discussion. Again as in Roy's novel in which, even with its horrifying tragedy, a tale that could be told in nothing longer than the length of a relatively short novella is told in a very lengthy, meandering narrative, *Critique and Praxis* also takes up a vast discursive space in which to reflect on a *problematique* that Harcourt completely outlines in the first 50 pages of the book. Roy embeds the short, quickly told tale of her novel in an endless series of temporal and spatial detours. As a storyteller, she brings into the narrative space of the novel texts and discourses that both stand alone and at the same time add depth and color to the main tale. And she draws liberally on mini-narratives of incidents, misadventures and struggles in the lives of a vast cast of characters that are so fascinating in their own right that they threaten to compete successfully with the centrality of the three tragic protagonists in the main plot of the novel.

In the same grandiosely reflexive manner, instead of focusing on his reformulation of the originating question of the book after he has presented it to us, Harcourt mobilizes the voices and "testimonies" of dozens of thinkers

and activists on that question, "What is to be done"? that Lenin famously and succinctly posed in a small pamphlet in 1901. He begins the book by returning to Lenin's and classical Marxism's formulation of the issue, rapidly reviews the Frankfurt School's initial embrace and subsequent repudiation of the question, then states his own position, based on critiques of the positions of both the Marxist and the Frankfurt School, all within the first two of the 19 chapters of a 684-page book. Additionally, before he finally comes to a full-fledged account of his own position in the last chapters of the book, Harcourt anticipates and discusses all possible objections to his position, disagreeing with most of them and noting all positions he neither disagrees with nor, for that matter, accepts. Courageously but also a bit tediously, he states and restates the incredible number and range of his practical, activist engagements, thereby indicating the fact that he is as much the object of his critiques as are the main "culprits" of his grand critique in the overall scheme of the book, classical Marxist and Frankfurt School positions on that ordinary question, "What is to be done." When I noticed how persistent this was, I began making a mental note of how many times he would insert an iteration of his numerous practical engagements into the discussion. But I gave up the exercise when it became clear to me that this is a deliberate discursive strategy and would be a recurring phenomenon in the book. [To his credit, I discovered only one inconsistency in this particular detail in the defining recursiveness of the book, this being the contradiction between the claim that our author had been rather aloof from the protests and demonstrations of the Yellow Vest Movement in Paris in 2018 (28), and the counter-claim that he had participated in the same protests as an ideologically sympathetic American outsider (42)]

As with Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things*, there is a reason why reflexivity, repetition and recursivity are so widely and irrepressibly deployed in *Critique and Praxis* and it is this: in both books, what appears or is at first presented as a "short" tale or a "small" problem really pertains to oppression, suffering and injustice of such epic proportions that they can only be narrated or discussed through an elaborately reflexive stance toward the means through which the story can be told (Roy) or the book written (Harcourt). In *The God of Small Things*, this big thing that is presented as a "small" tale is present-day caste oppression that is so monumental that it recalls and stands for all the caste oppressions of the past, together with all past and present oppression of women and the poor. In *Critique and Praxis*, the "small" question that provides the point of departure for the book actually subsumes class, racial and gender oppression, and social inequality from all the yet to be resolved crises of the past of our modern capitalist civilization, surmounted on the crises and challenges of the present period of, among other catastrophes, the rise of violently fascist and authoritarian regimes and movements in many parts of the world including Europe and the United States, and a looming global environmental holocaust. Moreover, the big takeaway in Harcourt's book is his immensely startling contention that precisely at the very moment in which critical theory should rise to the challenges that the present period poses to us, it has withdrawn to the age-old philosophical habit of merely contemplating or "knowing" the world instead of acting to change it. Thus, reflexivity in both books both represents and presents a means through which the great intellectual and emotional weight of what is to be told, indeed what *must* be told, is cut down to size by and through endless detours, revisions, and repetitions.

As I did when I first read *The God of Small Things*, once I found out that this is a definitive feature of Harcourt's book, I discovered that I could "swing" with it. I could read the book out of order, moving back and forth and going back or forward to chapters or sections that I wanted to read first or read again. I confess that on reading the book's Table of Contents, I couldn't wait to read Part Three of the book, a section in which, in about a hundred pages, the author reviews more than a dozen and half of the most notable of contemporary movements and interventions of progressive, radical or revolutionary politics around the world. I confess also that this is my favorite section of *Critique and Praxis*, together with the last few chapters of the book in which Harcourt, in a poetics of his own revolutionary subjectivity, lays out the horizons of both limits and possibility in the local and global contexts of the terrifying, endgame crises and challenges that our species faces now and will continue to face in the *longue durée* of the future ahead of us.

So much, then, for the great delight and surprise of my encounter with the book, an encounter that I know will not cease with the production of this commentary. I move now to the main body of my commentary on *Critique*

*and Praxis* which, earlier in this discussion, I described as the impossibility of connecting two related propositions that logically and historically arise from the book: for much of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critical theory became increasingly “missing in action” in the need to connect theory and practice to change the world for the better; however, in the same period, revolutionary developments that would forever change the state of affairs in the world broke out nearly everywhere on the planet. What do I have in mind in making this claim?

There is one discursive sleight of hand at the beginning of *Critique and Praxis* that initially intrigued me a lot: in making Lenin’s “What is to be done” the point of departure for all that the reader will encounter in his book, Harcourt makes absolutely no reference, none at all, to either the contents of the booklet, or its impact in its day and beyond. All that Harcourt finds of interest in Lenin’s question is its place in the history of ideas. In other words, in the history of ideas, Harcourt argues persuasively, until Marx and Lenin, the tension between the two modalities of mind and body, thinking and doing, had rarely been resolved on the side of acting and doing, though he concedes that there had been significant exceptions to the normativity of contemplation and its many cognate forms—meditation, reflection, thought, cogitation. This is why Harcourt is not particularly interested in the actual contents of Lenin’s famous question; it is enough for him that, following and building on Marx, Lenin tilted the balance decisively toward *acting* and *doing* in order to change the world.

Moreover, it is important for our author that some of the most influential moral philosophers and political thinkers who came after Lenin were quite eager and happy to follow in his wake. That is until the profound disillusionment caused by catastrophes of the early to middle decades of the century forced leading thinkers and philosophers—the “illuminati” of critical theory—to move the pendulum back to the farthest edge of retreat from the world to the life of the mind. These social and moral calamities include, among other political and humanitarian horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the monstrosities, cruelties and hardships of Stalinist communist rule in Russia, the rise of brutal, warmongering fascist and authoritarian states in Western Europe and, especially, the Holocaust. Thereafter, some of the illustrious philosophers and thinkers who had fully embraced, in Harcourt’s words, “the action imperative”, took positions in which they expressed the uselessness, the danger even of believing in, and acting on the assumption that theory can and should change the world. The list of figures in this turnaround includes thinkers like Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Hannah Arendt.

Harcourt is not only an immensely erudite scholar; he is also a subtle thinker and nimble debater. If it is quite a straightforward affair for him to discern the turnaround of the Frankfurt School from ever again posing the question of “What is to be done,” it is another matter entirely for him to then trace, in about the next 80 years, how critical theorists moved through various expressions of disablement of critical theory praxis that were far more complex. Without ever reducing them to a common denominator, he goes over the works of a long line that includes, among many others, figures like Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Jacques Lacan, Cornelius Castoriadis and Axel Honneth. And then at the tail end of the line and rather haltingly, he deals with the emergence of a line of insurgent contemporary thinker-activists who are beginning to provide a way back again to linking theorizing with doing, critique with praxis. The list here includes but is not limited to the following: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Angela Davis, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Chantal Mouffe, Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, Jack Halberstam, Sarah Ahmed and Ruth Wilson Gilmore. And, finally himself, Bernard E. Harcourt. But even with this horizon in which our author perceives new beginnings for critical theory, his final word is on the pervasiveness of a crippling crisis among critical theorists:

The global crises could not be greater, and yet critical theory is missing in action. Having disdained the question “What is to be done” critical theory has little to offer by way of critical theory praxis. Critique is failing at the time that it is needed most—producing a real crisis in critical theory itself. This has given rise to an unexpected quiescence, even a low-grade paralysis, among critical thinkers, at least in contrast to the more vocal resistance of liberal critics and organizations such as the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Human Rights Watch, or the Center for Constitutional

Rights in the United States. The critical response, by contrast, sounds muffled. The critical Left, as opposed to the liberal Left, appears disarmed. [11]

It is doubtful if anyone can refute the account that Harcourt gives in his book of the long decline, over the course of more than half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, of critical theory's willingness to fulfill the obligation to help in changing the world and not merely reflecting pessimistically on it. But consider the following astonishing historical fact: in the very decade of the 1940s when Horkheimer, Adorno, and Arendt were theorizing the uselessness, indeed the danger of philosophers getting involved in changing the world, the following extraordinary developments took place, every single one of them based on the unity of theory and practice, of critique and praxis: India became independent (1947); China declared its independence from centuries of a foreign domination that had flourished on weaknesses caused by internal Chinese divisions (1949); the state of Israel was created (1948). The Indian and Chinese Independence revolutions affected nearly one-third of the peoples of the planet; the creation of Israel constituted the first successful world-historical response to millennia of Jewish expulsion from its homeland among the other peoples of the Middle East and, equally important, the Holocaust. I repeat: this all happened in the same decade in which the greatest "illuminati" of critical theory decided to turn their backs on the mandate to change the world for the better. Indeed, because this was a decisive historical development that was *theorized*, it is helpful to briefly explore that theorization against the backdrop of Harcourt's irrefutable claim that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, critical theory progressively went into slumber.

Against the background of successful wars of independence in South America and the Caribbean in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Marx had been writing in the 1850s about colonialism in India, Ireland, and North Africa; and he had also been *theorizing* about where colonialism stood in relation to prospects for the supersession of capitalism. In this period when capitalism was still solidly in its mercantilist phase, anticolonial wars in the colonies went hand in hand with political disputes among the European nations that sometimes led to war. That is until after the infamous Berlin Conference of 1885 brought peace among the colonizers to the detriment of the colonized throughout the world to the extent that they could no longer advance their anticolonial struggles by exploiting disputes among the colonizers.

But peace began to unravel among the colonizers when capitalism moved into its industrial phase and the search for land, raw materials, and markets threw colonizers and colonized into a period of "hot" wars across the whole world, most notably the First and Second World Wars. But even so, between and within the two "world" wars, the theory and practice of revolutionary anticolonialism never completely stopped; it just went into a period that we know as a hiatus. To cite only the case of Marxism, the debates between leading theorists and activists concerning which accumulation—in the center in Europe, America and Japan or in the periphery in the colonies—would lead to the supersession of capitalism that began before the First World War later redounded throughout the world up to the 1940s and 1950s. It was begun by Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913), Lenin, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) and Rudolf Hilferding, *Finance Capital* (1919). It would be taken up in uncountable writings by Third World anticolonial revolutionaries in their anticolonial and antiimperialist struggles. The leading figures included, among others, Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Aime Cesaire, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral and Kwame Nkrumah. In particular, with the end of the Second World War, writing, theorizing became praxis and the wars of independence picked up again, with the fiercest theatres of operation in French colonies in North Africa and Southeast Asia, especially in Indochina.

Revolutionary movements of liberation were not restricted to Marxist or Marxist-inspired struggles. Due to consideration of space, out of the large number of such movements around the world, I will comment very briefly here about only one such movement: the postwar struggles of African Americans. As is well-known, starting with the Brown v Board of Education decision of the Supreme Court in 1954, the greatest and largest movement of revolutionary protests, demonstrations and marches of the African American people, together with the most dedicated of their White supporters, would shake the country to its foundations for much

of the next three decades. These are some of the highlights of this extraordinary movement of history: the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955); the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (1963); “Bloody Sunday,” Selma, Alabama (1965). Side by side with these social and political movements, there is the cultural movement in the arts, theatre, literature and criticism that would crest with Black women writers, critics and theorists that astonished not only America but the whole world with their rewriting of all the established rules and hierarchies of the dominant culture.

As I indicated earlier in this commentary, I think Harcourt’s complete “forgetfulness” of these many and diverse movements of the most notable of 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary ruptures is *discursively* strategic. I imagine that to him, what is the point of acknowledging revolutionary ruptures that once seemed like manifestations of theory and praxis combining to change the world for the better only to have brought more injustice, inequality and suffering to the world? With only a few exceptions, most of the nations that came into being in the wake of revolutionary anticolonialism have gone through terrible reversals in which rulers and emergent elites have imposed poverty, suffering and hopelessness on the vast majority of their peoples. In the worst cases of the totally failed states, periodic genocide has become a dishearteningly commonplace event. But having acknowledged this historic fact, I think Harcourt is wrong not to acknowledge the fact that the most notable of 20<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary ruptures did change the world as we knew it and did produce outstanding thinker-activists and philosophers. Of a very long list, the following names stand out in no particular order of the significance of the movements they led or their continued relevance today: Mahatma Gandhi; Mao Zedong; Jose Carlos Mariategui; Fidel Castro; Frantz Fanon; C.L.R. James; Martin Luther King, Jr.; Audre Lorde; Angela Davis; Amilcar Cabral; James Baldwin; Walter Rodney; Nelson Mandela; Malcolm X. Only two figures—Frantz Fanon and Angela Davis—get notable discussion in Harcourt’s book. Here’s my point in drawing attention to this seemingly querulous commentary on *Critique and Praxis*: if the central argument of Harcourt’s book is a rousing reaffirmation of the mandate to make theory change the world for the better, which group is better qualified to make this happen, the “illuminati” of critical theory in Harcourt’s book or the list of activist thinkers and “worldly” philosophers that I have drawn up in this commentary?

This question is absolutely unnecessary and I withdraw it without any hesitation. It is completely unhelpful to have to choose between a Theodor Adorno and a Mahatma Gandhi; or between Hannah Arendt and Mao Zedong; or between Michel Foucault and James Baldwin. To put the matter in the most defetishized manner possible, it is like comparing one field of valuation or plane of observation against a totally different one. Neither Adorno nor Arendt could have spent their lifetimes waging the sort of struggles that Gandhi and Mao waged. Likewise, can anybody think of Mao or Gandhi spending the entire period of their biological and intellectual adulthood in academic institutions as professional philosophers? That this question arises at all is due to the fact that while Harcourt presents critical theory and critical theorists as being located in an excessively *textualist* tradition, he probably thinks the tradition of Mao and Gandhi and Fidel passé and not particularly relevant to the needs of the present. This he demonstrates with his complete silence on the latter while on the former, we have the scathing observation that we confront in the following quote:

These critiques of critical theory could have generated productive debate over praxis, as they have done in the past. But instead, they led to a further withdrawal of critical philosophy into the academy and a form of entrenchment. As Didier Fassin shows, critical theory withdrew to a handful of academic departments in higher education. The space of critique, previously more public, narrowed to the critical professoriate at effete universities and colleges, even there to the margins of power in rhetoric and English departments, or at the fringes of professional schools. [9]

This bracing critique of the same tradition in which Harcourt not only locates himself but also seeks new beginnings for critical theory leads me to the final section of this commentary which, as earlier indicated, is on what we might call the Foucault-Harcourt dyad at the center of *Critique and Praxis*. To do this, I wish to explore a passage in the book that I am calling the “Foucault moment.”

This passage is to be found in a profoundly stirring section titled “Colliding Theory and Praxis: A Model.” It is in Part Three of the book, pages 439–443. It is a luminous passage that is presented as an illustration of the fifth, last and highest of “models” of the interpenetration of *critique* and *praxis* that Harcourt identifies and discusses in the book. Indeed, so celebratory of this model of theory and practical engagements combining fully and productively is our author that he likens it to the total fusion of disparate elements that takes place in a supercomputing supercollider like the Large Hadron Collider, the world’s largest and highest-energy particle colliding machine. I think the choice of a technological machine for his best model of the “fusion” of theory and praxis in revolutionary activism is too mechanistic, but we should let it pass. We know that what Harcourt has in mind is anything but mechanistic and reified because the situation narrated in the passage marks a break in Foucault’s experience as a thinker and an activist, a moment when, together with his students, he decides that he will no longer speak for the subaltern but let subalterns speak for themselves. The “subalterns” in this case were prisoners with whom Foucault’s students had bonded since it was their radical and disruptive demonstrations for total prison reform that had led to the incarceration of the students in the first place. When the students asked Foucault to join them, he accepted the invitation only on the condition that they would depart from the model of popular tribunals which, at the time, was closely associated with Sartre. It is useful here to quote directly from the book:

The form that Foucault’s political action took was the direct product of his confronting his critical praxis with critical theory. At the same time, his critical praxis would fundamentally confront and reshape his philosophical work. The confrontation of theory and practice was utterly remarkable—and extremely instructive as a critical model. (439)

If this seems so recognizable—and unremarkable—now, if indeed, it sounds too close to, and rather imitative of Spivak’s famous query as to whether the subaltern can ever be allowed to speak for herself, we must remember that Harcourt is writing here of events that took place in France in 1968 following the world-famous workers’ and students’ uprisings of that year. Thus, Harcourt is writing here of events that simultaneously marked a momentous turning point both for revolutionary praxis in society at large and in the experience of Foucault and his students as “critical theorists.” Again, it is useful to listen to Harcourt’s own summative comments on what we can learn, what *he* learned, from “the Foucault moment” in the book:

In helping the prisoners to be heard, and in paving the way for them to create their own prisoners’ action organization, the CAP, Foucault’s praxis had at its center a mode of life geared toward independence, simplicity, and autarky. This resonates distinctly with the Cynics, who Foucault would study and approximate in his final years. Throughout all these periods, it was the confrontation between critical theory and praxis that pushed both Foucault’s critical theory and the critical praxis. This is the model of contradiction—of the Large Hadron Collider.

My goal, too, is to collide critical theory and critical praxis as if by the Large Hadron Collider. For me, the only way to do that is to stop asking the question “What is to be done?” and to ask instead “What more am I to do?” and “How does what I am doing work?” I must confront my own critical theory with my own critical praxis. Let me now turn to that final task. (445)

As we can see, this indicates a unique moment of “annunciation” in *Critique and Praxis*, a moment in which, for Harcourt, moving from “What is to be done?” to “What more am I to do?” is indeed a monumental step to take, like Kierkegaard’s leap of faith. It is a radical and honorable rejection of all forms of vanguardism and myths of the inevitability of the triumph of revolutions in critique and praxis. But what if this is a monumental step only in the enunciative and textual universe of “critical theory”? What if in the real lives of generations of uncountable revolutionaries and activists all over the world the questions “What is to be done” and “What more am I to do” have been asked again and

again in an uncountable number of times? What if these two questions that follow each other like a kind of synergy have often been followed by another question, "What more are we to do?" What if indeed, it is impossible in all ages, indeed in any age of human communities, of the human race as a global community, not to ask, "What more are we to do?"

Does this mean that having previously unreservedly praised this book, in the closing section of my commentary, I am turning my back on that praise? Not in the least! The truth is that even if Harcourt ignores the countless number of revolutionary individuals and organizations around the world whose struggles, defeats, and triumphs have never been hobbled by critical theory's obfuscation, indeed repudiation of the obligation to change the world, the truth is that in his relentless engagement of critical theory's many strengths and weaknesses, Harcourt has produced a magnificent book that is sure to make us all, Critical Theorists, Marxists, Social Democrats, Democratic Socialists, the Left and the Center-Left, take up again the obligation to ask of ourselves "What more am I to do" and "What more are we to do," ? this time informed by the many insights in *Critique and Praxis*.

An author who singles out Foucault among dozens of other major critical theorists and praises him for his "independence, simplicity and autarky" cannot be said to think much of an illuminati. As a matter of fact, the quote in which these affairs are enunciated is not intended to mark a high point of eloquence or insight in *Critique and Praxis*. For this reason, for my last words in this commentary, and drawing inspiration from the subtitle of *Critique and Praxis—A Critical Philosophy of Illusions, Values, and Action*—I shall turn to one of the last paragraphs in the book's Epilogue that reflects the unflagging tone of eloquence and visionary acuity that we encounter throughout the book:

Entangled in the snare of the present, blinded by the apparent necessity of our existing institutions and political arrangements, it is hard to even imagine the extraordinary political transformations that lie ahead. But they undoubtedly will be great—some even unimaginable—just as democratic elections must have appeared unimaginable in feudal times or during the *ancien regime*. It is, today, practically impossible to imagine, in North America, something different from a liberal democracy, but surely, that time will come. (538)

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