

Before exploring these consequences, it should be pointed out that it is remarkable that White, despite projections to the contrary (1988: 86), nowhere attempts to go into Habermas's theory of social evolution and thus to develop an understanding of what he refers to as the latter's general theory of society. In fact, he explicitly declines to attend to the theory of evolution. Two reasons are given for this strategy, the first of which is as curious as the second is unconvincing. The assertion that Habermas's neglect thus far to provide detailed historical and anthropological backing renders an evaluation of the theory of social evolution unfruitful (White 1988: 170) immediately prompts the question whether the same does not apply then also to the theory of rationality or communicative action since, according to critics, backing is equally lacking in this regard. The second line of defence to the effect that the debate about the theory of social evolution 'yields more heat than light at this most broad and abstract level of analysis' (White 1988: 170), apart from revealing a lack of familiarity with the relevant literature, only confirms the earlier expressed suspicion that White does not bring a sufficiently penetrating theoretical vision to his analysis of Habermas's work. This is all the more noteworthy since the essential core of the theory of social evolution which Habermas developed in the 1970s has almost verbally and, to be sure, theoretically importantly, been incorporated into *The Theory of Communicative Action* (1984, 1987), the work to which White devotes most of his attention.

Since Thomas McCarthy's *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (1978) and the remarks of the editors of *Telos* (39, 1979: 3) on the publication of Habermas's essay on 'History and Evolution' in that journal in the late 1970s, for instance, a critique of Habermas's ontogenetically based developmental-logical theory of social evolution has been developed by younger generation critical theorists such as Johann Arnason (1979), Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (1980, 1988), Ginter Frankenberg and Ulrich Rödel (1981), and Klaus Eder (1985).¹ At this stage, in fact, a drastically reformulated version is well under way (e.g. Eder 1988; Strydom 1992, 1993). It is significant that the major thrust of this critique and reformulation consists precisely of a demonstration that Habermas's theory of society does not allow an adequate treatment of social movements and thus, quite expectedly, of a determined effort to correct this defect by placing social movements at the very centre of the social theoretical stage. This critique clearly contradicts White's (1988: 111) assumption that Habermas's research programme does not marginalise social movements, although he is of course correct that it does not demote social movements to the status of marginal events to the same extent as rational choice theory or functionalist systems theory.

2 The Immanent Critique of Habermas's Theory of Social Movements

Having provided analyses of the immanent critique of Habermas's ontogenetically based developmental-logical theory of social evolution elsewhere (Strydom 1992, 1993), I propose to present a sample of arguments to illustrate the conclusions reached in the debate. On the whole, they underline the debilitating limitations Habermas imposes on the study of social movements by way of his general theory of society or, more particularly, his theory of social evolution.

an attempt to replace bourgeois with petit-bourgeois culture. Eder (1989: 543) interprets the new obscurity as a bourgeois reaction to precisely this late 20th-century development. This explains why Habermas (1987: 393) locates feminism in the tradition of the classical emancipation movements, and further shows the inadequacy of his typology. In fact, the dialectic of movement and counter-movement applies also to the feminist movement – a movement consisting of various branches, the most important of which are not necessarily the ones fighting for equal rights.

This brings us to the second critical point, namely Habermas's single-minded focus on normative, particularly moral-political, orientations. This normative overemphasis, to be sure, makes it virtually impossible for Habermas to deal adequately with the new social movements. In his interpretation, White tends to further exaggerate this emphasis. According to him, Habermas approaches the new social movements from the viewpoint of what he refers to as 'the enhancement of the new moral-political orientation: a communicative-ethical one associated...with distinctive understandings of universality, equality and tolerance' (1988: 139). The continued urgency of this long-standing issue does not take away from the fact, however, that recent developments concern a different issue, namely, the aesthetic-expressive one.⁸ Like Habermas, White (1988: 138-9) refers to the 'aesthetic-expressive dimension of everyday life' and to the 'necessity for more flexible need interpretations', but they both do so from a restrictive viewpoint that remains stuck in the problem of normatively regulated participation belonging to an earlier level of development. It is for this reason that they cannot come to terms with the problem of the aesthetic-expressive foundations of society (Eder 1988: 275; Münch 1984: 119-26; Frank 1988: 63-4; 1989: 590-607). By focusing on the theory of forms of understanding, that is, the centrepiece of the theory of communicative action which mediates between universal pragmatics and the theory of evolution, something which White reflects – Arnason (1989: 266-81) demonstrated that Habermas overemphasises consensual principles and obligations to such an extent that he restricts the potentialities of modernity to one particular interpretation. As a result, alternative projects are automatically screened out. It is a matter of creating space not just for communicative action beyond the economic-administrative system, but also for expressivity beyond communicative action in the particular Habermasian sense. As long as this is ignored, it remains impossible to deal with today's most challenging problem and with the most radical of the new social movements. Over and above the institutionalisation of science and the business enterprise, on the one hand, and law and the political public sphere, on the other, these movements are concerned with the institutional possibilities of an expressive form of life and their implications for the rationalisation of society.

Considering this one-sided emphasis, it is pretentious to claim, as do White and many of Habermas's followers, that Habermas's position is 'a significant advance over the views of Foucault...[in so far as]...Habermas's model identifies common elements in new social movements which at least offer the promise of grounds for dialogue and collective action between them...beyond...particularistic and local resistance to normalization' (White 1988: 142). Not without justification, Foucault could be regarded as being equally able to isolate shared elements in the new social movements, yet very different ones than Habermas. It is not a matter of Foucault ineptly fumbling towards the normative foundations of society. Far from being concerned with this Parsonian residue

Strydom, 'Habermas and New Social Movements', *Telos* No 85 (23/3), Fall 1990, pp. 156-64 (here presented in the original version which was longer than the published one)

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