ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND MARXISM: Their Use for Critical Theorizing

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1. Introduction

"Critical theorizing" may refer to the works of the Frankfurt School, particularly the works of Habermas, or to the critiques of neo-Marxists. However, in this essay we use the term in its most *general* sense: to step back and see the everyday world as strange; to understand and question the material-social-psychological-political-historical-"scientific"-etc. *status quo*; to theorize in order to *change* the world; to advocate a new humanism. We will try to show that the claim of some ethnomethodologists that their theorizing is characterized by uncommitment should not be taken literally; moreover, to take ethnomethodology metaphorically is to engage in critique. Indeed, both ethnomethodology and Marxism can be used to provide a critique of ideology and the production and dissemination of social information. Ethnomethodology addresses itself to the activity of theorizing and the evidence upon which theorizing is grounded. An ethnomethodology which includes a commitment to a form of human liberation can find kinship with a humanist Marxism–a Marxism that is similarly read "metaphorically." Our primary theme, then, is not the status of ethnomethodology as a *science*–a status challenged intelligently by Attewell[1] but, familiarly, from a positivist perspective– rather, we will focus on the *critical* potential of both ethnomethodology and Marxism.

2. Marx and Marxism

What does it mean to declare that one is a Marxist? What ideas and ways of thinking is one then committed to? What "reading" of Marx is implied? We

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contend that of all the theorists currently read, Marx is the most difficult to understand. The question of understanding comes up not only because no one "knows" what Marx "really" meant, but also because the transformation of economic and non-economic materials into something we can make "sense" of is a formidable project. In the academic world there is an unspoken picture of Marx, a Marx based largely on terms and definitions. An "understanding" of Marx in this context is the ability to define "key" concepts such as surplus value, alienation, superstructure, commodity, and of course, Marx's "determinism." This view of Marx is taken for granted; discussion starts from this point on and never goes backward: it is uncritical of itself. The only use this kind of analysis has is to enable students to pass academic exams and to enable professors to teach the same course over and over without learning anything. The academic view of Marx is a *literal* view. The analysis of Marx presupposes a commitment to traditional (positivistic) academic analysis. In this way, Marxist analysis is treated the same way as, say, positivistic survey analysis. Theorizing about Marx is not the same as Marx's theorizing. The classroom situation duplicates the alienating work situation Marx describes, yet few teachers of Marx draw attention to this or attempt deep changes. While Marx saw the world in a new way, the university rarely produces people who develop new world views for themselves.

The potential of Marxism in bringing about social change is widely recognized.[1a] However, we are speaking of a Marxism that is not "faithfull" to Marx's theorizing and method. "Faithfulness" can often make theorizing rigid and dogmatic (as in academia); indeed, the most inspired followers of Marx saw *beyond* his theorizing and were in no sense "faithful" to him. The following passages reflect the interpretation (that we share) of a Marx who favored social change in order to bring about freedom and justice for each individual:

> . . . human emancipation remains Marx's basic concern.[2]

> The true object of Marxism, Horkheimer argued, was not the uncovering of immutable truths, but the fostering of social change.[3]

> Written in simple language without the obscurity that cursed (and even now curses) the style of almost all German philosophers, Engels' essay "Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy" *appeals to the sense of justice* [our emphasis] and satisfies the need for clarity.[4]

While orthodox Marxism presupposes scientific aspirations, a faith or belief in progress, and a radical criticism of reality as the point of departure,[5] the

Marxism we speak of is not scientific, but critical Marxism. The distinction is crucial:

> As systems of analysis, Critical and Scientific Marxism are partly complementary and partly divergent. They are divergent paradigms because (as Marx acknowledged) the object of science is to discover laws independent of human will and determinative of it, while a "critique" aims at establishing the manner in which human history is an outcome of the hidden potency of men. The basic conclusion of the Left Hegelian critique of *religion* was to show that God's being was entirely a postulation of *man* and an expression of man's own alienated being. A critique, then, aims at making men's potency more fully manifest so that men might then make their own history consciously rather than blindly. A natural science, in contrast, will, by ascertaining the laws that presumably determine human will, allow those having technical knowledge of these laws to apply their knowledge in a technological way and to formulate the problem of social change as a *technical* problem.[6]

One important concept for a critical Marxism is historical specificity (many neo-Marxists, unfortunately, eternalize Marxist concepts):

> This example of labour shows strikingly how even the most abstract categories, despite their validity—precisely because of their abstractness—for all epochs, are nevertheless, in the specific character of this abstraction, themselves a product of historic relations, and possess their full validity only for and within these relations.[7]

Marx's emphasis on the social settings in which the concept is used is similar to the concern of ethnomethodologists to re-create contexts. Both reject the fixed concept: it is an end product which hides the context in which the abstraction took place. The flow of time is placed back into critical theorizing: positivists freeze time via rigid concepts (as do many neo-Marxists); Marx (and some ethnomethodologists) restore the changes of time.[8] Marx's concern about process is reflected in the following:

> Consumption produces production in a double way, (1) because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed. For example, a garment

> becomes a real garment only in the act of being worn; . . . (2) because consumption creates the need for *new* production, that is it creates the ideal, internally compelling cause for production, which is its presupposition.[9]

Not only does Marx have a processual framework, but he sees the beginning and end as essential moments of a whole, moments which may contradict each other and complement each other at the same time. We quote the lengthy passage on the process of purchase and sale because it is a brilliant illustration of dialectics:

> At first sight, circulation appears as a simply *infinite* process. The commodity is exchanged for money, money is exchanged for the commodity, and this is repeated endlessly. This constant renewal of the same process does indeed form an important moment of circulation. But, viewed more precisely, it reveals other phenomena as well; the phenomena of completion, or, the return of the point of departure into itself. The commodity is exchanged for money; money is exchanged for the commodity. In this way, commodity is exchanged for commodity, except that this exchange is a mediated one. The purchaser is a seller again and the seller becomes purchaser again. In this way, each is posited in the double and the antithetical aspect, and hence in the living unity of both aspects. It is entirely wrong, therefore, to do as the economists do, namely, as seen as the contradictions in the monetary system emerge into view, *to focus only on the end results without the process which mediates them; only on the unity without the distinction, the affirmation without the negation* [our emphasis]. The commodity is exchanged in circulation for a commodity: at the same time, and equally, it is not exchanged for a commodity, in as much as it is exchanged for money. *The acts of purchase and sale, in other words, appear as two mutually indifferent acts, separated in time and place* [our emphasis] . . . In so far as purchase and sale, the two essential moments of circulation, are indifferent to one another and separated in place and time, they by no means need to coincide. Their indifference can develop into the fortification and apparent independence of the one against the other. *But in so far as they are both essential moments of a single whole* [our emphasis], there must come a moment when the independent form is violently broken and when the inner unity is established externally through a violent explosion.[10]

Another example of Marx's use of dialectic in rejecting dichotomies was his linking of the material and mental:

> This *material*, immediately perceptible private property is the material perceptible expression of *estranged human* life.[11]

The preceding should not be taken as an exhaustive description or inventory of Marx's critical potential. Rather, it is a sketch of some of Marx's ideas which best suit a humanistic or "metaphorical" Marxism. To take Marx literally, we maintain, is to adopt an uncritical attitude toward Marxism and to cling to some outdated or "false" ways of thinking. A metaphorical focus links Marx's thought to everyday experience and begins from the "bottom upwards,"[12] to cite what was meant as a description of ethnomethodology.[13] A Marxism taken metaphorically provides a corrective to ethnomethodology in that it limits the ethnomethodological tendency to lose itself in the subject, or detail, or interactional and social syntax, thus forgetting broader sources of "coerciveness," "falsification," and "oppression." Let us more clearly delineate what it means to take Marxism "metaphorically."

Blum reads Marx as a metaphor for the problems of speech. For Blum, one must first understand speech in order to understand everything else.[14] Some questions he asks are (paraphrased): How is speech possible? How is science possible? How is sociology possible? He takes as his topic not the topics of science and sociology, but the achievement of dealing with a topic. He rejects the "Scientific" way of describing topics or "problems," and advocates a selfquestioning:

> Science does not take the hint that its subject matter is subjecthood and, instead, silences this concern by treating its subject as secure and by starting from the security of its subject. Science submits itself to its subjected matter and not to that by which it (science) is subjected.[15]

He continually asks the question "how?" rather than the more common "what?".

Mathematical (bourgeois) speaking is "false speaking" in that it covers up what it should be showing. Mathematical thinking is derived from Aristotle[16] and continues to prevail.[17] "False speaking" (the same in "grammar" as the inauthentic speech that is Blum's concern) is speaking which does not examine its own basis, speaking which forgets it itself is a work of art.[18] The proletariat, seen metaphorically, are the possibility of youth for "re-assessing the source of their alienation and in such a re-assessment for transforming themselves into authentic speakers."[19] Bourgeois man is seen as a metaphor for the speaker who has arrived at some result and uses this information as a

starting point, rather than going back to see how this result was arrived at.[20] What Blum is saying (we think), in very difficult to understand language (for us), is that our very speech, a fundamental aspect of human relationships in general as well as the basis for theorizing, is unacceptable, presupposes what it should be examining, is an alienated activity, and limits how we think and what we can find out. As speech is thought, we must change our ways of thinking. Blum's reading is grounded in the project of showing the relationship of speaker-writers to *Logos, the Good*, etc. *Our* reading of Marx or our views of theorizing, for that matter, would not be shared by Blum—moreover, we would have to count ourselves among the radical critics of whom Blum speaks:

> The most radical critics of Durkheim fail to see their togetherness because the criticism of Durkheim as a concrete thinker (as the objectivistic positivist) is grounded in the regret that he is not radically concrete.[21]

While we do not "read" Marx in the same way as Blum,[22] we do find his ideas unique and fruitful for further investigation. We tend to read Marx not as a metaphor for speech, but as a metaphor for human suffering, struggle, and harm inflicted by people. Here we come closer to sharing Gouldner's position on the metaphoricality of Marxism:[23]

> Indeed, it is precisely Marxism's metaphoricality that signals the presence of its very rationality; that signals that its fundamental commitments are not to some historically limited social segment but primarily to certain values and ideas: the struggle against unnecessary suffering, exploitation, irrational scarcity, and any "surplus" inequality interpretable as unnecessary in the light of modern productivity—a struggle that was now no longer limited to capitalist societies with proletariats; a struggle whose universalism was primarily persuasive and meaningful to intellectuals.[24]

Oppression and the syntax of interaction that sustain it are the key metaphors that Gouldner finds in his reading of Marx. Blum, on the other hand, is concerned with Truth and thus reads in Marx Marx's recognition of forgetfulness which is the hallmark of reified knowledge and unreflexive theorizing. Blum's reading, like the works of more "concrete" ethnomethodologists, reveals a critique of rationalised monopoly capitalism which expresses itself not only in social structure but also in theorizing.

> The metaphor of history shines through Marx's writings: the capitalist society of free and autonomous men [*people*] who convert their thoughts into commodities by treating their speaking as a beginning rather than as

> an end. The capitalist society is a splendid metaphor for the positive spirit; the turning away from origin, resonance, and Reason in order to begin concertedly creates a collection of speakers without depth or breadth: a collection of men [*people*] who organize their routines by segregating them from origin, whose practices of externalized speaking mask the achieved character of the speaking itself. Men congratulate themselves on their freedom from authority, while each congratulation only affirms the very authority they claim to be free of, an authority which pervades and opresses the entire society.[25]

Let us now examine some of the works of these "concrete" ethnomethodological studies.

3. Ethnomethodology

Harold Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* was published in 1967. The reaction to the book is as fascinating as the book's contents. Objections raised deal with the incomprehensibility of the book (we have no conventional written works to cite here; the reader must rely on our own personal experience instead of the usual "proof") and/or theoretical norms violated.[26] Marxists would prefer ethnomethodology to be more like Marxism and positivists would stress their own way of theorizing as the "right" way. There is a certain irony, at least to us, that a work that describes the taken-for-granted, the *assumed* shared meanings, and which uncovers the problematic nature of everyday life, that this work should be called unintelligible. This criticism "proves" Garfinkel's point. The language employed is different from positivistic language and also dissimilar to Marxist language. Garfinkel tries to explain what ethnomethodology is about, but his explanation is clear only to those who already have a good idea of what he's talking about. In an "experiment," Garfinkel asked his students

> to report common conversations by writing on the left side of a sheet what the parties actually said, and on the right side what they and their partners understood they were talking about.[27]

The following conversation was cited:

HUSBAND:	Dana succeeded in putting a penny in a parking meter today without being picked up.	This afternoon as I was bringing Dana, our four-year-old son, home from the nursery school, he succeeded in reaching high enough to put a penny in a parking meter

	when we parked in a meter zone, whereas before he had always had to be picked up to reach that high.
WIFE: Did you take him to the record store?	Since he put a penny in a meter that means you stopped while he was with you. I know that you stopped at the record store either on the way to get him or on the way back. Was it on the way back, so that he was with you or did you stop there on the way to get him and somewhere else on the way back?
HUSBAND: No, to the shoe repair shop.	No, I stopped at the record store on the way to get him and stopped at the shoe repair shop on the way home when he was with me.
WIFE: What for?	I know of one reason why you might have stopped at the shoe repair shop. Why did you in fact?
HUSBAND: I got some new shoe laces for my shoes.	As you will remember I broke a shoe lace on one of my brown oxfords the other day so I stopped to get some new laces.
WIFE: Your loafers need new heels badly.	Something else you could have gotten that I was thinking of. You could have taken in your black loafers which need heels badly. You'd better get them taken care of pretty soon.[28]

The "mundane" contents of ethnomethodology, compared to, say, Marxism, which deals with abstractions in terms other than those we use in everyday life (such as the concept "surplus value") is frequently taken as a sign of lack of theory. This is not so at all. Garfinkel's interpretation of this conversation, for example, is far from "mundane." He does not suggest (despite his instructions to do so) that we read the right hand column as corresponding to

the contents of the left; the right hand column could never, however long and detailed it was, convey all the background information as well as the way of speaking of the left hand column. What is missing is a description of the "shared agreement" of husband and wife about how they will converse.[29] There are the same sorts of "shared agreements" among ethnomethodologists, among Marxists, among sociologists in general, among psychologists in general, among prisoners, among homosexuals, among businesspersons, etc. The words and phrases, although recognizable as English, either make no *sense* or make the "wrong" sense unless one knows the "agreement." Because members of society generally prefer to make sense of everything, something that does not make sense is criticized, is viewed at fault, and the standardization of everything is approved. Therefore, a physician's handwriting is "bad," Marx's theory of a future society is "incomplete," and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology is "unintelligible." The "real" fault lies in the person's ignorance of the code. Teaching the positivistic sociological code is, therefore, the principal concern and achievement of the field of sociology; the code requires a *literal* view of each mode of theorizing and therefore inhibits a *metaphorical* interpretation.

In examining the contents of ethnomethodological works, we looked for ideas which challenged, in whatever way, basic structural conditions in society. This necessitated discarding many interesting ideas which did not fit our purpose; do not look for a *survey*[30] of ethnomethodology, then.

Coulter's recent ethnomethodological critique of Taylor, Walton, and Young's *The New Criminology*[31] ironically echoes the familiar polemical arguments against *ethnomethodology*, whose critical potential often goes unnoticed! Coulter found the tragic flaw in *The New Criminology* to be the speculative, "even moralizing character." He concludes:

> We are no longer taking sides, either with the prisoner, the schizophrenic patient, the aide, the screws, the prison governors, the victims, or whomsoever is involved in the world of routinized social deviance. Instead, we are freeing moral debate from the shackles of a phoney scientism, a scientism supposed to undergird a moral version of deviance, of deviant and deviant controller. By freeing our moral version in this way we are also able to undercut most effectively the equally phoney scientism that is cited by our moral opponents.[32]

To treat "side taking" as a moral commitment is itself a commitment–one peculiar to the most vulgar of "bourgeois liberalism." The existentialist-phenomenological traditions both, at least in their early history, rejected

positivist detachment. These traditions accomplished this rejection either through a search for essences, the validation of human experience, or their emphasis in various ways on engaging the world in its immediacy. These traditions are ancestors of ethnomethodology (though ethnomethodology, contrary to what Bauman seems to think,[32a] need not be "totally" faithful to this lineage). Ethnomethodology has been used as a way of validating, for instance, "deviant experiences" and at least implicitly to criticize the "falsified" versions of such groups that pass for objective assessments. Finally, it is a curiously idealistic position to suggest that attitudes towards the social world (*and* what one hopes will become a new world) emerge *solely* out of some abstract moral stance. It can be effectively argued that moral commitment and some of the affinity one may feel toward a particular paradigm may be grounded in an experience of the world—an experience capable of being documented in terms of all the "proof"[33] that social scientists employ. Furthermore, ethnomethodological indifference is preached more than practiced.

For instance, part of the ethnomethodological posture is to deny any intent or irony or a tendency to debunk members' methods. Yet, as Gellner suggests,[33a] linguistic philosophy (a philosophical relative of ethnomothodology), for example, while claiming to make no "un-commensensical" assumptions or statements about the nature of reality, in fact, insinuates many. Garfinkel, in a like fashion, argues that it is not the purpose of ethnomethodology to do "irony" (that is, to assess the social world in a manner that contradicts the actor's experience of that world).[34] Despite this disclaimer, the insinuation still remains. Thus in bringing to the fore background expectancies, explicating and formulating members' methods, etc., a new level of explanation is generated which may no longer be recognizable or acceptable to the member being analyzed. The works of ethnomethodology particularly reveal a thrust towards rendering the world "subjective," situational—but with the irony that members, in documenting this essentially ambiguous world, create a sense of objectivity. This is particularly *visible* in the attention given by ethnomethodologists to "common sense" decision making and the production of "accounts" in institutional settings.[35] Perhaps the most fruitful contribution of ethnomethodology is in information theory, or the creation of documents and statistics, and news. Ethnomethodology provides a critique of ideology by showing that social perception and information produced by existing (Marxists would use the term "bourgeois" to refer to the same institutions) institutions are questionable or false.[36] This is done by treating such information and perception as subjective, situated, and linked to the practical interests of those *producing* such perceptions and social information. Many ethnomethodological studies have described the

practical considerations that influence a person's work. What is true of non-theorists can be applied to theorists themselves. Garfinkel's articles on suicide and clinic records stress pressures of time, and the need to assemble records and to account for deaths in such a way that they will not be questioned at a later date. Zimmerman[36a] describes a caseworker's obligation to conform to the practises and points of view that underlie these practises of her co-workers and supervisors.

Ethnomethodologists (as well as Marxists) see social knowledge as inextricably linked to the contexts in which they are produced as well as their methods of production. As Garfinkel in his study of clinic records indicates, inaccuracies in record keeping are not a function of "normal" or "correctible" or organizational troubles, but are built into the structure of the organization. We feel this study confirms our belief (and the belief of others) that in order to change society one must begin with drastic, sweeping changes in the structure of the work situation. The affinity of this idea with Marxist thought is readily apparent, although many Marxists take it for granted that a socialist revolution would automatically change these structures; we question this presuppostion. Garfinkel, while critiquing existing structures, does not propose any alternatives, nor is he (we think) concerned with this. However, his critique can nevertheless be *used*[37] as a tool for social change.

In a study of plea bargaining, Sudnow[38] shows that it is not the court's concern to find out "what happened" (their stated objective in conducting an "investigation") and to separate the innocent from the guilty. To save time and money for the courts, bargaining, which often works to the disadvantage of the accused, is a routine practice. The criminal "justice" system, then, is a sham; the result is the incarceration of a predominantly lower class Black population. Ironically, a "practical" solution would be to sentence people as usual and then instead of incarcerating them to give them the money that would have been spent by the state if the prisoner had served his or her (most prisoners are men) full term!

Nowhere is the question "what happened" more irrelevant than in the news media, which provides daily "entertainment" for the masses. News is treated as correctibly biased information by most laypersons and social theorists. Though limited, news is considered a source of information about social events/happenings and a basis for social analysis and political decisions. This uncritical use of news, like the uncritical acceptance of other social information (e.g., crime or suicide statistics in particular and all statistics and information in files in general) inhibits innovative theorizing.

> The power of the media to create experience rests on what we'll term the "objectivity assumption," to which almost everyone pledges allegiance. This assumption has it that there is indeed a world "out there" and that an account of a given event reflects that world, or a piece of it, with some degree of accuracy. The "objectivity assumption" states not that the media are objective, but that there is a world out there to be objective about. Operating on the "objectivity assumption," lay people read a newspaper or listen to a news broadcast with the aim in mind of finding out about the world which is described in the produced account. People, in other words, read newspapers to find out about an assumed objective state of the world. Sociologists in their work on power, on the media, and in their methods of content analysis, usually do much the same thing.[39]

Molotch and Lester focus on three types of news events–routine events, accidents, and scandals. Routine events, which dominate in the news, are carved out of the infinite number of occurrences which the news maker might choose to treat as a news event.

> During the Santa Barbara oil spill in late January, 1969, President Nixon made an inspection tour of certain beaches and subsequently announced to the nation that the damage caused by the blow-out had been repaired. He did not announce that the stretch of beach he inspected had been especially cleaned for his arrival, while miles north and south of him remained hopelessly blackened.[40]

The authors refer to events about which elites differ as routine public issues. Such issues may be pseudo-issues or ones that are irrelevant to the interests of most of the population. Concerns with ex-President Nixon's character, for example, detract from concerns with the "real" problem of which Watergate is merely "symptomatic." Similarly, one can characterize news reporting during the early part of President Ford's administration as describing Ford's "happy" home life on the one hand and Mrs. Ford's "terrible calamity," breast cancer necessitating major surgery, and her "bravery" (when we know she is receiving much better care than the poor do for *any* kind of illness). This homey focus serves to hide the fact that a recession/depression is taking place and the President is doing nothing to combat it.

The clues to other political realities become available then only through accidents and scandals.

> Only by the accident and the scandal is that political work transcended, allowing access to "other" information and thus to a basis for practical

> action which is directly hostile to those groups who typically manage the public political stage.[41]

Thus only through "critical readings" of social documents can other information be gleaned. Molotch and Lester conclude:[42]

> We see media as reflecting not a world out there, but the practices of those having the power to determine the experience of others . . . We think that mass media should similarly be viewed as bad clinical records . . . We advocate examining media for the event needs and the methods through which those with access come to determine the experience of publics. We can look for the methods through which ideological hegemony is accomplished by examining the records which are produced.[43]

This article was one of the most political ethnomethodological articles we have come across. Marxists, of course, have long been extremely critical of the production—or suppression—of ideas in society.[44] While the Marxist paradigm taken literally describes material relationships in the production of ideas, it is worth pointing out that this is not the only possible Marxist "reading." Aronowitz describes the *existential damage* mass art does to each individual; he sees mass art as a

> one-way communication and thus takes on the character of domination. The social impact of its production consists not only in its ideological content (a property it shares with high culture), but in its pervasive intervention into the existential time and consequently the psychic space of the person. Thus television, movies, and popular music, like sports, must be understood in the dimension of their significance as forms of life activity as well as ideological apparatuses.[45]

Surprisingly enough, the differences between a *literal* and a *metaphorical* "reading" of Marx are perhaps greater than the differences between a metaphorical "reading" of Marx and an ethnomethodological approach. While we see a literal "reading" of Marx as often grounded in the view of the future, both metaphorical interpretations of Marx and ethnomethodology are grounded in the *present* (not merely in future faith and *not* in "faithfulness" to the past or tradition), in the here and now and in the activity of *individuals*.

4. Conclusion

Each theory and, ultimately, "school" of theorizing exposes and criticizes the theorizing of others, and at the same time contains false or misleading statements. Theory as it is must rest on some presuppositions. Thus, Marxism exposes the flaws and lies of capitalism while positing another world view–Marxism–which it does not treat critically. Marxism also provides a critique of positivistic thinking. In *The Grundrisse,*[46] Marx engages in a dialogue with economists and philosophers of his day. His theory emerges out of the rejection of their theory. Ethnomethodology can be seen as critique of positivism, too. It can also tell us something about Marxism, as some of its concerns are similar, although the methods are dissimilar. At the same time, ethnomethodology denies us certain information about itself. Theorists, then, question others and not themselves. Theory can be seen as a product of inquiry; the theorist shows only the product and hides what made the product. Indeed, just as the statistician reveals a correlation between two variables and omits all the common sense reasoning that went into the process (a method of theorizing ethnomethodologists criticize), so does the ethnomethodologist or Marxist omit, to a great extent, the process of theorizing involved.

Thus, while neither form of theorizing, taken literally, can be critical (for to be critical, one must sometimes suspend belief in one's own theory, bracket it, or see it as strange), either form, if taken *metaphorically* (and in a way that is "unfaithful" to Marxism and ethnomethodology), can be used for critique.

The ethnomethodological and Marxist critiques of social information, as in their processual framework and their emphasis on the thinking individual, provide critiques of contemporary society and an impetus to try to change it. Links between the two "schools" of theorizing would perhaps help overcome the deficiencies of each mode of theorizing. Taylor, Walton, and Young advocated (although they never carried it out) building a bridge in criminology so to speak, between ethnomethodology and Marxism. The advantage would be to

> enable us to escape from the straitjacket of an economic determinism and the relativism of some subjective approaches to a theory of contradiction in a social structure which recognizes in "deviance" the acts of men (men and women) in the process of actively making, rather than passively taking, the external world.[47]

NOTES

1. Paul Attewell, "Ethnomethodology since Garfinkel," *Theory and Society* 1, 2 (1974), pp. 179–210.

1a. "No serious observer supposes that the materialist conception of history is free from difficulties or that it solves all the problems involved in historical interpretation. But no serious observer either can doubt that it has done more in the last hundred years to provide a major clue to the causes of social change than any other hypothesis that has been put forward." (H. J. Laski, *Communist Manifesto,* as quoted in T. B. Bottomore, *Karl Marx; Selected Writings in Sociology and Social*

2. K. Struik, ed., *Karl Marx: Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (New York, 1969), Introduction, p. 25.
3. Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination* (Boston, 1973), p. 46.
4. Struik, *op.cit.*, p. 24.
5. A. G. Meyer, *Marxism: The Unity of Theory and Practice,* (Ann Arbor, 1969), pp. 45–6.
6. A. W. Gouldner, "Marxism and Mao," *Partisan Review,* vol. XL (2), (1973), pp. 243–4.
7. K. Marx, *The Grundrisse* (New York, 1973), p. 105.
8. This is not to suggest that ethnomethodology links its investigations to macro-historical time.
9. Marx, 1973, *op.cit.*, p. 91.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–8. Here we differ from Marx and agree with Rothbard, who maintains that economics cannot predict an "economic future."
11. Struik, *op.cit.*, p. 136.
12. J. Douglas, *The Social Meanings of Suicide* (Princeton, 1967), p. 256.
13. "A social revolution has thus a *universal* aspect, because, though it may occur in only *one* manufacturing district, it is a human protest against an inhuman life, because it begins from the *single real individual*, and because the *social life,* against his exclusion from which the individual reacts, is the *real* social life of man, a really human life." (in Bottomore, *op.cit.*, pp. 237–38).
14. A. Blum, "Positive Thinking," *Theory and Society,* 1, 3 (1974), pp. 245–269.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 247.
16. Marxism also ruptures the logic of Aristotle by unifying theory and method. To Marx, logic is not neutral: the dialectic is not merely a better set of *Rules,* but a better "reflection" of reality. We share Marx's views here.
17. Blum, *op.cit.*, p. 243.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 260.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 249.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 246.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Though Gouldner's use of Chomsky's notion of "deep structure" or of concepts such as "paleo symbolic" level appear strained in places, and the metaphor of sexuality for class relations far fetched, his essay does point to the universal project that underlays Marx's work and which explains Marx's appeal as perhaps the parent of Western critical-radical theory.
24. Gouldner, "The Metaphoricality of Marxism and the Context-Freeing Grammar of Socialism," *Theory and Society,* 1, 4 (1974), p. 393.
25. A. Blum, *Theorizing* (London, 1974), p. 256.
26. R. Lichtman, "Symbolic Interactionism and Social Reality: Some Marxist Queries," Berkeley *Journal of Sociology,* XV (1970), pp. 75–94, and others.
27. H. Garfinkel, *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1967), p. 25
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–6.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
30. Though we don't mean to undertake a survey here, a review of the literature might reveal that the studies with the greatest emphasis on institutional contexts and the most explicit critical thrust, appeared in the early history of ethnomethodology. Later investigations appear, on the whole, to concern themselves with the clarification and elaboration of the paradigm and the more esoteric forms of puzzle solving (Kuhn suggests a similar tendency in the "natural sciences"). This movement away from critique to elaboration of theory, from context to syntax of interaction, is also illustrated in Molotch and Lester's article. The first version of this analysis was explicitly political ("Accidents, Scandals and Routines: Resources for Insurgent Methodology," 1973), whereas the second version, which appeared in *The American Sociological Review* (1974), was more muted in its political tone. Though similar examples were used (e.g., nerve gas leaks) and the political character of news was still stressed, many of the critical implications seem to have been played down in favor of theoretical consistency and "purity." Similarly, in the uses of Marx's works as a basis of critique, "literal" Marxists (e.g., Althusser) find their sources and method in the late or "mature" Marx, whereas those with "looser," more flexible, or metaphorical readings of Marx would focus on the early Marx. In the history of Marx's own theorizing, then, theoretical consistency and detailed puzzle solving increasingly predominated over exploration, wider applicability, and flexibility. It would seem that it is in this sense that Gouldner views *Das Kapital* as an example of the "most technical political economics" and argues that critique need not be grounded in technical precision. Could the tendency in both the history of Marx's theorizing and the history of ethnomethodology to take itself too seriously–to think of itself as a "science"–be their mutual tragic flaw?
31. I. Taylor, P. Walton, and J. Young, *The New Criminology: For a Social Theory of Deviance* (New York and London, 1974).
32. J. Coulter, "What's Wrong with the New Criminology," *Sociological Review,* vol. 22 , 1 (1974) p. 132.
32a. Z. Bauman, "On the Philosophical Status of Ethnomethodology," *Sociological Review* 21, 1 (February, 1973), pp. 5–23.
33. Consider the statements we make and the "proof" we give to support these statements. "Proof" often consists of one or more of the following:
    1) "reason" or "logic," as in philosophical theorizing (also used in Marx).
    2) "measurable" or "scientific" evidence, such as statistics or laws of physics, economics, mathematics. Psychology, the natural sciences, and economics use this form of "proof" routinely.
    3) "consensus," which includes the citation of other works, the belief ("faith") in an authority, such as Marx, and the quoting of common sense views. Most theorizing relies on "consensus."
    4) "field notes," which are seen as "accurate" descriptions and hanging together; as in anthropological or sociological participant-observation studies.
33a. E. Gellner, *Words and Things* (Harmondsworth, 1968).
34. R. J. Hill and K. S. Crittenden, eds., "Proceedings of the Purdue Symposium on Ethnomethodology," *Institute Monograph Series Number 1,* Purdue, I11., Institute for the Study of Social Change, Department of Sociology (1968).
35. Contrary to the charges made against both ethnomethodology and the "new," "critical" criminology that they are too idealistic and not concrete enough, we would suggest that this is a misinterpretation. For example, Taylor, Walton, and Young (445–6) give a fairly detailed picture of what they feel theorizing in criminology should look like. The emphasis is on the materialistic in everyday settings in which "real" people act. Ethnomethodology, similarly, treats the production of information as subject to such clearly materialistic contingencies as keeping one's job.

36. It is here that ethnomethodology, in its own way, fuses theory and praxis (a fundamental characteristic of Marxism) by showing that the techniques of assembling information cannot be viewed as separate from the information itself. At the same time, a *process* is described, although ethnomethodology, unlike Marx, does not locate the setting historically, nor is the larger social structure dealt with in a systematic way.

36a. D. Zimmerman, "Fact as a Practical Accomplishment," in R. Turner, ed., *Ethnomethodology* (Harmondsworth, 1974), pp. 128–143.

37. Again, we do not view "faithfulness" as necessary.

38. D. Sudnow, "Normal Crimes: Sociological Features of the Penal Code in a Public Defender's Office," *Social Problems,* 12 (Winter, 1965), pp. 255–76.

39. H. Molotch and M. Lester, "Accidents, Scandals and Routines: Resources for Insurgent Methodology," *The Insurgent Sociologist,* Vol. III, 4 (1973), pp. 1.

40. *Ibid.,* p. 3.

41. *Ibid.,* p. 10.

42. On the rare occasions that the "powerless" are on the news, such as during demonstrations, the news makers do not analyze the *reasons* for the protest but rather focus on the *behavior* ("good"-nonviolent) of the protestors.

43. Molotch and Lester, "News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents and Scandals," *American Sociological Review,* Vol. 39 (February, 1974), p. 111.

44. Note the often quoted line from the *German Ideology*, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas . . ." However, we find Molotch and Lester much more concrete than Marx.

45. S. Aronowitz, *False Promises* (New York, 1973), p. 100.

46. Marx, *op.cit.*.

47. Although Taylor, Walton, and Young do not seem to understand ethnomethodology very well, and also read Marx less metaphorically than we do, their critical criminology is one example of an area to which ethnomethodology contributes and an application of critical theorizing that we find congenial (Cf. *op.cit.*, pp. 220–1).

Theory and Society, 3 (1976) 377–393

Notes

[1] **Ethnomethodology since Garfinkel**
Paul Attewell
Theory and Society, Vol. 1, No. 2. (Summer, 1974), pp. 179-210.
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[14] **Positive Thinking**
Alan F. Blum
Theory and Society, Vol. 1, No. 3. (Autumn, 1974), pp. 245-269.
Stable URL:
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[15] **Positive Thinking**
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[17] **Positive Thinking**
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[19] **Positive Thinking**
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[20] **Positive Thinking**
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[21] **Positive Thinking**
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[22] **Positive Thinking**
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[24] **The Metaphoricality of Marxism and the Context-Freeing Grammar of Socialism**
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[38] **Normal Crimes: Sociological Features of the Penal Code in a Public Defender Office**
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[43] **News as Purposive Behavior: On the Strategic Use of Routine Events, Accidents, and Scandals**
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