The Sociological Inheritance of the 1960s

[Šubrt] skillfully situates his work in the concerns and events of historical time, geographical space and political power. Specifically, he clarifies how US, as well as Western and Eastern European, political and economic structures shaped and legitimised specific ways of thinking. Especially informative and powerful for analysing today's historically situated social problems, Dr Šubrt's work provides the context needed to better understand the development and use of sociological theory, as well as society itself.

— *Dawn Norris*, Associate Professor,
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, USA

Understanding the 1960s as a decade of hope and a call for radical change, Šubrt masterfully makes astute observations outside of ideas already posited, using language that demonstrates that sociologists are not only dry repeaters of previous thinkers, but instead creative, thoughtful minds, reflecting on society and how it can move forward, even if there is no clear trajectory where that forward might take us. *The Sociological Inheritance of the 1960s* is a useful tool for sociologists as both a reference and as a means to better understand their field, giving credence to the value of historical sociology and placing social phenomena in its appropriate time and place along with context. This is done to the benefit of all, demonstrating that the past, present and future are all connected in a continuum, showcasing that the present state of sociology did not arise out of nowhere.

— *Haylee Behrends*, Instructor in History,
Political Science, and Sociology, Western Technical College, USA

The Sociological Inheritance of the 1960s: Historical Reflections on a Decade of Changing Thought

BY

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Acknowledgements

The author of this book was still a child during the period it considers. Despite this – or perhaps, precisely because of it – it had a significant impact, etched in his memory, and became an important stage in the formation of his personality. Not only the memories, but everything subsequently learned about the 1960s, significantly shaped his attitudes and interests over the decades which ensued. For these reasons, certain aspects of the author's personality and life experience are reflected in the content of this book, while its intention is primarily to be a professional text. Moreover, although the main goal is to convey the general characteristics of the sociological thinking of the 1960s, it was unthinkable to the author not to mention – albeit very briefly – what was happening in his homeland at the time, i.e. primarily the period of the so-called Prague spring and the subsequent invasion of Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968.

The sad truth remains that most of those who personally shared with the author their memories of the 1960s during his youth and university studies are no longer with us. To all of them, although not mentioned here by name, his thanks are due. Special thanks go to his longtime language advisor and editor, Ed Everett, whose assistance underpinned the finalisation of this work.

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Chapter 1

A Time When We Still Believed in Progress

When we think about the 1960s, we must consider that what may appear to us as a self-contained whole, a largely specific period that began and ended in some way, was undoubtedly felt differently by those who lived through and were involved in those years. People who entered this period with experience from the previous decades carried relatively fresh memories of the 1950s and, largely speaking, the World War II. They nevertheless had a future ahead of them, the outlines of which they imagined in some way – more or less concretely – with associated expectations, without of course knowing what the following years would bring and how expectations or wishes would turn out.

In our work, we mainly focus on the dominant currents of sociological thinking that emerged in Western countries, however, as a certain complement and at the same time contrast, we also mention – to a very limited extent with brief remarks – occurrences in the East European countries and the Soviet Union.[1] Our aim in this respect is not to create some kind of comparative representative survey, but to try to capture a little of what may be vaguely termed the 'spirit of the time' (Zeitgeist). To note – albeit to a limited extent – the above-mentioned contrast is particularly justified because in the 1960s there was a certain, though not very prolonged, relaxation within the framework of the ongoing Cold War, with a certain influence on the development of sociology in the countries of state socialism, intensified in that for most of these countries sociology had been suppressed and banned in the previous decade, while now, just in this decade, there was room for the revival and development of contacts with Western social science.

Our focus on this period does not aspire to any exhaustive interpretation and certainly does not seek to present a standard history of the sociology of the time. Our main concern is to detect and describe some of its basic tendencies, while recognising that all writings about past times are more or less influenced by the present; in other words, present authors turn to the past, often (though not exclusively) seeking answers to questions confronting us today.

[1]Let us leave aside what was happening in other parts of the world.

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One of the features of the 1960s – compared to today – was the still widespread and lively belief that the human societies were on an upward line of development and that progress was manifest in history. Sociology too participated in the formation of grand, emancipatory narratives (meta-narratives), in which human collective actors, through their actions, jointly set in motion processes that ensured the arrival of happy tomorrows.

However, the idea of progress is not some self-evident part of human consciousness, but rather a relatively late product of it. It was the Enlightenment that brought the idea of the linear process of historical time corresponding to the realisation of social development with an upward character, characterised as progress. This idea accompanied the notion that history had a certain direction and meaning. Tendencies were perceived across epochs towards a certain goal in which the plan of history was to be fulfilled. The future was a kind of promised land that humans would probably soon arrive at after a long journey. Among the important products of this ideological disposition was Marxism in the nineteenth century, where the eschatological expectation of the historical finale took the form of a classless society. The idea of progress predominated in the social science thinking of the nineteenth century and for the large part of the twentieth century in spite of appalling human experiences during those times. Only with postmodern philosophy and culture, reacting to the great traumas of the twentieth century, was a fundamental distrust and scepticism of the 'grand narratives' of the past (theories of history, theories of progress) and future (emancipatory projects, ideologies) expressed, relegating the category of progress to the storehouse of discarded concepts. We can now ask whether this has happened definitively, once and for all.

Ideas about growth and rise developed in both West and East, and became a subject of theoretical discussions, and, furthermore, ideological competition; at the same time – on both sides –growth was primarily associated with economic development and increasing economic potential and productivity. In the United States at that time, the formation of the idea of modern society was dominated by industrialism. It was assumed that the development achieved by North America and Western Europe could be achieved only by following and imitating the path that advanced countries had gone through. Countries that had not achieved this were considered in the lower reaches of development, from which they could only advance by travelling this unique path.

American economist and political theorist Walt Whitman Rostow meaningfully expressed these thoughts in *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1965 [1960]).[2] Rostow's explanatory model, based on trust in the effi-

[2]Rostow's book on the stages of economic growth was subtitled 'A Non-Communist Manifesto', highlighting the author's ideological position. This corresponded to America's foreign policy interest in orienting and influencing the future of the newly independent states during the period of decolonisation, to avert their becoming part of the Soviet bloc. A staff member in the administration of President John F. Kennedy, Rostow promoted his development model as part of US foreign policy.

ciency of capitalism, free enterprise and liberal democracy, influenced not only economics, but also other contemporary social sciences. His model assumed that economic growth took a linear form and proceeded gradually through stages that all developing societies must pass through. Rostow (1965 [1960], p. 4 ff.) talked about five basic phases, each of different duration: (1) *traditional society* (agriculture dominates); (2) *preconditions to take-off* (non-agricultural sectors of the economy begin to develop); (3) *take-off* (a short period of intensive growth, the onset of industrialisation); (4) *drive to maturity* (a long phase associated with technological development and economic diversification); (5) *age of high mass consumption* (the United States was the first to reach this stage). According to Rostow, all countries were at some phase of this linear spectrum, which they could gradually move along.

Another American economist, John Kenneth Galbraith,[3] wrote on *The Affluent Society* and *The New Industrial State*. In the first of these, he pointed out that nations' experience with prosperity was not of long duration, and most had been poor throughout their histories. What had happened in recent generations of the small part of the world inhabited by Europeans was an exception, in his view. The abundance achieved there and in the United States was something completely new and unprecedented (Galbraith, 1998 [1958], pp. 1–5); for economists and social scientists; therefore, it was necessary to learn to think in a new way, to consider things and tasks which had not occurred to people of earlier times but were now emerging. Galbraith emphasised the need for investment in education, science and infrastructure. In the second text, (Galbraith, 1985 [1967]) he outlined, among other things, the possibility of a gradual convergence between the centrally planned economies of the Eastern bloc and Western market economies.

Among the authors to attract attention at this time was the French economist, sociologist and futurologist Jean Fourastié, author of *40,000 Hours* (in French *Les 40 000 heures*; Fourastié, 1972 [1965]). The number of hours stated in the title of his book represented the total length of time he estimated the average person would work, spending 30 hours a week for 40 weeks a year during a 35–40 year working life. Fourastié believed that his vision would be realised by the end of the twentieth century, and that humanity was undergoing development that would bring about prosperity on a mass scale, and with it the prerequisites would arise for the cultivation of new and nobler human needs, to which a greater amount of leisure time would contribute.

Notions of progress that emerged on the other side of the 'Iron Curtain', especially in the Soviet Union, were not as elaborate and colourful as those of the West, but nevertheless shared a certain specific feature: the high self-confidence

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From 1964 to 1968, as a special national security adviser to US President Lyndon B. Johnson, he was influential in shaping US policy in Southeast Asia and supported US involvement in the Vietnam War.

[3]Galbraith, even though standing on a different position on the opinion spectrum than Rostow, he also served as a presidential advisor to John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson in the 1960s.

of their formulators, and the pride of belonging to the part of the world which had progress and the future – so to speak – on their side,[4] based on the common theory of progress founded on understanding laws of social development. Soviet academics at that time claimed the right to speak on behalf of all progressive humanity, and many of their Western sympathisers supported them in this.

As we began by saying, to understand the specificity of the 1960s, we must note how they differed from the preceding and following decades. The 1950s was a period of post-war reconstruction and rebuilding on the European continent which required a certain amount of discomfort, renunciation and sacrifice. In Western Europe, a consumer society was born, the fruits of which people began to enjoy to the full in the following decade. In the United States, the situation was somewhat different, but even there the 1960s brought many important changes compared to the previous decade. Developments in the fields of politics, economics, science, technology, culture and lifestyle raised many hopes, but also many illusions. Compared to this dynamic, the 1970s saw a certain slowing down and pragmatic sobering up. This also manifested somewhat in the East Bloc, because while in the 1960s there was still a decisive prospect of transformation to a future higher than the limited present, the 1970s largely nullified this perspective with the adoption of real socialism, declared by communist ideologues not only as a fait accompli, but also the best of all possible worlds, right there in the present moment. Even though the people of the Eastern Bloc were kept as isolated as possible at this time, the little that reached them from the West condemned this ideology of deception and distortion and taught the people of these countries to live a double life – private and public.

[4]A concise illustrative sample is provided by a slim publication *Where Is Humanity Going?* (Srovnal, 1962), which provides an overview of the main papers and discussions at the international conference 'What the Future Holds for Mankind', which took place in May 1961 in Royamount (France) and Paris. The initiator of this conference was the journal of the international communist movement based in Prague, Problems of Peace and Socialism, and the Centre for Marxist Studies and Research (CERM) of the French Communist Party.

Chapter 2

Societies of the 1960s, Sociologically Speaking

The effort to get a general view of the tendencies in the post-war social-scientific thinking that influenced the sociology of the 1960s can perhaps lead to the idea of a unity of opinion in this period, or to the sense of dominant stream of opinion. But this would not correspond to reality. The intellectual output of that time actually made for a rather diverse picture, with a varied range of differently oriented opinions. What partially worked as a unifying and integrating factor in sociology was a considerable interest in certain problems and thematic orientations.

One of the dominant topics post World War II was the specific character of the advanced societies of that time, or rather, how these societies – in the sociological output of their representatives – saw themselves. In the discussions dominating Western sociology, three main perspectives arose, and in certain cases intermingled.

The first was offered by the Frankfurt School, following stimuli from Western Marxism, characterising contemporary Western society as 'late capitalism'. The second stream, whose key representative was Raymond Aron, was associated with the term 'industrial society'. The third orientation was brought by Talcott Parsons and the American sociologists who started working with the term 'modern society' after the World War II.

In addition to these approaches, other conceptions appeared during the 1960s, but were not as distinctive. In the countries of the Soviet bloc, in which social-scientific thinking was to one degree or another subjected to the dictates of communist ideology, the present was postulated as a time in which the foundations of a communist society were under construction, to reach completion in the near or more distant future. For this reason, sociological thinking attempting to capture the shape of contemporary society in its wholeness did not develop significantly.

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2.1. Late Capitalism

While in the 1960s, the population of Eastern countries was perpetually dealing with economic deficiencies, in the West, from a generation that grew up in relative prosperity, the criticism of 'consumer terror', or consumerism, as a new totalitarianism, began to be heard.

Leading representatives of the Frankfurt School, Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2017 [1947]) formulated the starting points for their critical approach to capitalist society in their joint work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written in exile from Nazi Germany in the United States at the end of World War II. They showed that the result of rationalisation, with the associated notion of 'instrumental reason' brought by the Enlightenment, was not only the rise of labour productivity and the growth of economic production, but above all alienation, exploitation and negative tendencies, the result of which was the pathology (in the Freudian sense of the word) of bourgeois culture and the related madness and suffering wrought in the 20th century.

In the late 1960s, T. W. Adorno (1969) during *the 16th German Sociological Days (16. Deutschen Soziologentages*),[1] via the *German Sociological Association* (*Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie – DGS*), initiated a debate on the topic of *Late Capitalism or Industrial Society* (*Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft*), where he formulated the question of whether it was possible – as a result of the changes brought about by industrialism – to consider Marx's analysis of capitalism as outdated. Unlike other representatives of the then West German sociology, he emphasised that the development and transformations of advanced societies had not changed anything about the nature of production relations, and therefore it was still a capitalist society, or namely 'late capitalism'.

A more thorough idea of Adorno's view of late-capitalist society is presented in *Negative Dialectics* (in German: *Negative Dialektik*; Adorno, 1992 [1966], pp. 139–207). This shows its author was inspired by Marx and his historical perspective of the functioning of the capitalist economy, where all social relations are mediated by the regulating agents of the exchange principle. The primary goal of this economy is the accumulation of capital and the maximisation of profit; satisfaction of human needs is secondary.

Adorno understood a social reality resting on these foundations as an antagonistic totality, whose contradictions suffused all areas of life and caused conflict between society and the human individual. A situation where individuals must act against the interests of others was characterised by social coldness and isolation, leading to the formation of pseudo-personalities marred by conformity and weakness of the human self. Late-capitalist society and its culture individualised human beings primarily to more perfectly break them in isolation. The culture industry produced a substitute world to give individuals the illusion that they are personalities. But instead of real individuality, these were merely

[1]This event took place on 8–11 April 1968 in Frankfurt am Main.

stereotyped personality patterns cut from prefabricated schemes disseminated through the mass media.

The critical theory of the Frankfurt School was influenced not only by Marx, but also by other influences, among which Hegel's dialectics played a key role. Regarding the title of Adorno's book *Negative Dialectics*, this emphasises the second stage of G. W. Hegel's triad –negation – but lacks the positive outcome represented by Hegel's third stage – 'negation-negation'. In this sense, G. Hegel still – as was common in the nineteenth century – believed in progress, but with Adorno this belief was being questioned and lost; the potential of human freedom for him remained merely potentiality.

2.2. On the Issue of Industrial Society

In the 1960s, the term *capitalism* was largely replaced by the notion of *industrial* society in the vocabulary of Western social sciences. Although the concept had appeared in sociological writings as early as the nineteenth century,[2] after the World War II it took on a new and attractive sense, developed not only by Raymond Aron (1970 [1963]), but also by other scholars – for example Clarence E. Ayers who worked with him (1961), Talcott Parsons (1971, pp. 74–79; 124–136), or the economist John K. Gallbraith (1985 [1967]). The message conveyed was that industrial society was the most successful way of life which humanity had encountered, because never before had people lived so well.

Raymond Aron, a French journalist, sociologist, political scientist and historian, contributed greatly to this approach. During the World War II, in exile in London, he worked as an assistant to General Charles de Gaulle and publisher of the exile magazine *Free France* (in French: *La France Libre*). After the war, he returned to France and engaged in journalism. From 1955, he worked at the University Sorbonne in Paris, later *College de France (The Collége de France)*.

After the World War II, Aron gave attention to the international situation, especially to the Cold War. The first results of this professional orientation were two books: *The Great Schism* (Aron, 1948) and *The Chain Wars* (Aron, 1951). In the immediate post-war decades, when most French intellectuals were Marxist-oriented, Aron represented something of an exception: he was alone in defending liberal positions and criticism of Marxism as a totalitarian ideology. Two books provide evidence of this isolated but nevertheless firm stance: *Opium of intellectuals* (Aron, 1955) and *Democracy and totalitarianism* (Aron, 1968). Aron characterised Marxist ideology as a secular religion and concluded that Marxist intellectuals had replaced the idea of the Kingdom of God with the idea of communism, casting themselves as prophets of this religion (Aron, 1955, pp. 78–105). He saw the Soviet Union as a totalitarian regime that cynically trampled down declared ethical and political goals in practice, while he viewed the

[2]In the dichotomous conception of Herbert Spencer (1966 [1880], pp. 486–536), the industrial society was that what replaced in evolutionary development the previous type of militant (military) society.

United States as a democratic, free-spirited civilisation. Aron rejected Jean-Paul Sartre's idea that the Soviet Union was the only guarantor of humanity's future.

Aron believed (1970 [1963], pp. 85–107) that the United States and the Soviet Union represented respectively two distinct social types in which contemporary industrial society found expression. The western type of industrial society was characterised by the market economy and a pluralistic democratic system, while in the eastern type, a centrally planned economy and rule of one political party prevailed. Although his *Eighteen Lectures on Industrial Society* expressed the opinion that pluralistic democratic systems with market economies had better prospects than systems with planned economies, he did not assume that centrally controlled economies might not be able to function and survive in the future, and while he considered a certain approximation of both these social types as possible, he never accorded with convergence theory's position that the two social systems could merge in the future.

Convergence theory had been formulated in 1960 by Clark Kerr, Professor of Economics (Kerr, Dunlop, Harbison, & Myers, 1973) from the University of California, Berkeley, and then followed up by other scholars. It assumed that as a result of ongoing industrialisation, the Western and Eastern countries would become more and more similar,[3] not only when it came to technology, but also in terms of social organisation. This conception took root mainly during the relaxation of relations between the East and the West, but after the intervention of the Warsaw Pact troops in Czechoslovakia in 1968, it became clear that the supposed rapprochement had ended, and thus the development of convergence theory ceased.

2.3. Heralding a Knowledge Society

At the end of the 1960s, it began to dawn on people that advanced Western societies had entered a new phase of development. The American sociologist Daniel Bell was among the first to draw attention to this, gaining a world-wide reputation in three books: *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Bell, 1988 [1960]), *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting* (1999 [1973]), and *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (1976), all of which reflected an interest in ongoing social change.

In *The End of Ideology*, Bell (1988 [1960], p. 393 ff.) comprehended the transition from one historical phase to another primarily through the prism of a change in thinking style. He observed that the era of ideologies was coming to an end with a new epoch in which they would lose influence and importance. Bell drew a parallel between ideologies and religion. Ideologies are a set of ideas that show how not only to interpret the world but also to behave in it and change it.

[3]The concept of Pitirim A. Sorokin (1960), who in the book *Mutual Convergence of the United States and the U.S.S.R.* is sometimes referred to as the predecessor of this theory to the Mixed Sociocultural Type engaged in the comparison of that what the both countries are similar geographically, culturally and powerfully.