Wheatland intends in this work to demythologize the “Frankfurt school” and answer a lacuna by providing a detailed social history of its American exile and reception. He undertakes the first task by distinguishing the “Horkheimer circle” from later portrayals of the continuity and homogeneity of their thought, the mystique of theorizing in the “splendid isolation” of alienated exile, and their significance for the radical politics of the 1960s. Although it is doubtful that many philosophers and theorists believe these myths, and the book can be unsatisfying due to its overly generalizing and partial treatment of philosophical positions and arguments, it is helpful to understanding the Frankfurt exiles’ social contexts and the impact of their connections with colleagues, critics, and interpreters in American academic, Jewish, and leftist circles.

Part 1 portrays the complicated efforts to re-establish the Institute for Social Research in New York and Columbia University’s interest in Horkheimer and his associates. Since they offered expertise in and a model for interdisciplinary empirical research integrating sociology, psychology, and theory, they were a solution to the decline of Columbia’s sociology program, which was interested in expanding empirical social research in a situation of intense competition for funding. While fears of their Marxist connections persisted, the exiles’ ever more precarious quest for funding and positions produced tensions that eventually divided them and informed their emerging critique of knowledge as part of the culture industry.

In part 2, Wheatland describes their relations with New York intellectuals, with whom they shared a common orientation in the 1930s toward cosmopolitanism, modernism, and democratic socialism. After early meetings with figures including Sydney Hook and even Otto Neurath, the Frankfurt exiles intensified their critique of positivism and pragmatism, especially the unity and progressive social function of science, which somewhat resembled earlier formulations of critical theory as interdisciplinary materialism.

Wheatland underestimates the competing influence of the Vienna circle and how European positivism complicates his contrast between a European tradition of critical reason and American positivistic pragmatism. In the “positivist dispute” of the 1940s, Hook defended the progressive function of positivism and instrumental rationality vis-à-vis Hegelian dialectic in his review of Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution* and—with Dewey—justified the progressive domination of nature against critics of modernity in *Partisan Review*. Differing over whether the empirical corrects ideology or is already ideologically shaped and reconfirms existing relations, the Horkheimer group responded by articulating the ideological character of instrumental rationality and the complicity of the domination of nature with inter-human domination. These arguments culminate in *Eclipse of Reason* and *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

In an atmosphere of suspicion, the Horkheimer group and American intellectuals diverged over the Cold War, as critical theory advanced East-West convergence theory. The analysis of how popular culture and its appearance of freedom were constituted by the
culture industry, commodity fetishism, and consumerism led to charges of undemocratic elitism, even as progressive journals, such as Politics, adopted it. Part 3 looks at the investigations of prejudice, anti-Semitism, and the authoritarian personality in the 1940s. This research was supported by the American Jewish Committee and publicized in Commentary, which sought to promote tolerance, pluralism, and a progressive, secular Jewish identity. While American conditions and sociological research strategies transformed the circle’s earlier interdisciplinary model, their authoritarian personality studies presented an intriguing synthesis of empirical research and social theory for postwar sociology.

Wheatland examines in part 4 the (now mostly dispersed) Horkheimer circle’s ambivalence as a source of inspiration for and critique of leftist politics, and their uneasy relations with the orthodox and new left. Adorno and Horkheimer were critical of, and opposed by, the German student movement, and more sympathetic to western democracies than the romantic authoritarian images of the new left. Wheatland contrasts Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s prioritizing of theory and critical reason, their critique of authoritarianism and support for democratic socialist humanism, with what he depicts as the new left’s anti-intellectualist belief in pure revolutionary practice, authoritarian tendencies, and revolutionary romanticism that fueled apocalyptic fantasies and terrorism. Another tendency and legacy of the new left, however, is the democratization of self-experimentation and self-formation with which Marcuse is associated. Wheatland emphasizes the lateness and limits of Marcuse’s influence on the American student movement, and that the image of “revolutionary guru” was primarily a media construction. Until 1968, Marcuse is infrequently mentioned in sources in comparison with C. Wright Mills and American traditions of participatory democracy. Unlike Adorno and Horkheimer, Marcuse moved from cautious to active support. Yet, even as his significance grew among the theoretically inclined, he remained a participant influenced by developments.

Despite its philosophical limitations, this work is commendable for correcting popular myths about the Frankfurt school and as a rich social history of the Frankfurt school during a crucial phase of its development, illuminating the political and institutional dynamics of their work and its reception among American academics, literati, and leftists.

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