

# Kurt Wolff's Interpretation of Mannheim's Late Political Writings

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**Abstract** This article deals with Kurt Wolff's interpretation of Karl Mannheim, with reference to his writings on social planning. Wolff's interpretation is presented and discussed in the context provided by other interpreters of Mannheim. They have, generally speaking, given scant attention to the late works by Mannheim, and rather focused on *Ideology and Utopia*, Mannheim's most celebrated work. Interpreters who have considered these writings on planning have been mostly or entirely critical of them, objecting to their vagueness and inadequacy as a project of social reform, and the unsatisfactory conceptualization of the élites. These objections have been raised by several interpreters of different ideological persuasions, from the Marxist thinkers Adorno and Lukacs to the conservative T.S. Eliot. Wolff's interpretation stands out in that it pays less attention to the social and political contents of Mannheim's reform project, but brings into light its psychological background; namely, the deep anguish Mannheim experienced because of the widespread tendencies to the formation of a mass society, prone to the forces of irrationalism and authoritarianism. A perusal of Mannheim's works on planning bears out Wolff's interpretation.

**Keywords** Mannheim · Wolff · Interpretation · Late political writings

## Preliminary Statements

One of Kurt Wolff's most noteworthy achievements has been his contribution to the scholarship concerning the sociological work of Karl Mannheim. This article does not intend to contribute directly to a presentation of Mannheim's work. Rather, it

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will focus on Wolff's interpretation of Mannheim's last writings, which appeared in the last years of his life and bear on social planning and political reforms. The accuracy or scholarly relevance of Wolff's interpretation will not be evaluated here. Rather, it will be maintained, this interpretation is in line with his late existential turn, as set forth in his philosophical and sociological notion of surrender-and-catch. Reference will be made here to Mannheim's late works, such as *On the Diagnosis of Our Time* (1937: 526–542), *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1940); but also to *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* (1947). The latter work, in comparison to *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, “is more clearly written, is addressed to a wider audience, and is better worked out” (Wolff 1993: 117), but is thematically similar to it. This article will compare Wolff's own interpretation of these late political writings of Mannheim (Wolff 1993: 86–92, 96–98) with those by other interpreters of this eminent author (see Izzo 1988: 152–179, 1994: 244–247; Kettler and Meja 2001; Kettler et al. 1984: 91–102; Remmling 1975: 89–103). These interpretations will be touched upon, irrespective of whether they are recent or not. The article does not concern the relation in Wolff's work between surrender-and-catch and the sociology of knowledge. Wolff has cast light on “the intellectual relationship between Wolff's and Mannheim's work,” and in particular between the notion of surrender and the sociology of knowledge, in one of his works that has been especially devoted to pursue this inquiry (see Wolff 1983: 256–267). In a passage therein, which Wolff has considered relevant enough to quote it again later (1994: 375), he has written as follows: “Both ideas, that of the sociology of knowledge and that of surrender, are critical, polemical, radical ... we may also say that the sociology of knowledge is an extrinsic interpretation of our time; surrender, an intrinsic one: the former is, advocates, and practices such an extrinsic (sociological) interpretation but needs the latter to overcome the relativism it encounters in its practice by its remembrance, rediscovery, reinvention, the catch of what is common to all human beings, what is universally human” (1983: 265f.). This article has a different thematic focus, as mentioned, but does not deny the presence of the existential theme in Wolff's whole work, as indicated by his notion of surrender-and-catch.

### **Mannheim's Late Political Writings and the Fate of Modern Society**

Most interpreters have merely criticized these notions, but Mannheim's central question has not been emphasized to the same extent; the question, namely, of the psychological and social problems of modern mass society. This is a question, according to Mannheim, “that every future mass society will have to solve” (1937: 535f.). This is, therefore, the fate of modern society, and also the main source of Mannheim's anguish. His pleading for social and political planning was directed to the solution of this question, but his insistence on planning reflected Mannheim's own anguish lest this solution were out of reach. To this question—the problems of mass society—we shall now turn with reference to his late works on political sociology, in which the notion of planning for democracy and freedom is expounded and debated.

Mannheim was in no doubt that in a society in which the masses tend to dominate, irrationalities which have not been integrated into the social structure may force their way into political life. Mannheim designated this societal condition as maladjustment (1950: 111); and described it as a predicament currently affecting both thought and human existence (1950: 290, 301). As he argued, this condition makes “rational direction,” co-ordination of governmental techniques, and therefore social and political planning, inevitable. It should see to it, however, that parliamentary control be “not seriously diminished” (Mannheim 1940: 343). The ideal form of planning should also allow “a maximum of freedom and self-determination” (Mannheim 1940: 4, 6f., 63), and “the growth of personality” would be encouraged as a consequence (Mannheim 1950: 29).

Accordingly, this form of planning would involve a minimum of “regimentation and paternalism”; for they would “curtail the opportunities of the citizens to make relevant decisions,” and to exert control on a number of institutions such as the armed forces, the civil service, the press and radio (Mannheim 1950: 127–138). Ultimately, regimentation and paternalism would spell the end of liberalism and promote totalitarian planning, whether in its Fascist or Communist forms (Mannheim 1940: 111; 1950: 23–28). By way of contrast, democratic planning encourages spontaneous discussions, “bargaining and compromise,” and the intellectual interpretations of views coming from a number of different sources. The formation of a public opinion would be thereby promoted, and democratic agreement reached, even in contemporary mass societies (Mannheim 1940: 112f., 343; 1950: 140–143). Mannheim partakes of this stance, which is both ideological and political, with the philosophy of Liberalism, but also with Habermas.

For, Mannheim shares with this author, and with Weber and twentieth-century liberalism in general, the desire of reconciling the values of substantive rationality, freedom, and democratic representation with the reality of modern mass society (as for Mannheim, on this particular issue, see Kettler et al. 1984: 91–102). Mannheim would have therefore probably not objected to Habermas' assertion that “the only regulations and ways of acting that can claim legitimacy are those to which all who are possibly affected could assent as participants in rational discourses” (1996: 458; see also 1992: 452–457). Nor did Mannheim take issue with Weber's political stance. As Weber argued, political maturity and democratic traditions are preconditions for an effective parliamentary democracy, of which British Parliamentary democracy has provided the model (1984: 338, 450; 1992: 551, 593–596).

Mannheim's plea for public opinion and democracy may account for his reluctance to provide consistent and precise conceptions of substantive rationality, *principia media*, planning, élites, and social control, as the meanings of these concepts fluctuate with public opinion. Detailed accounts of the institutions and functioning of a planned democratic society, not yet existing at Mannheim's time (which are still ours, as Wolff maintains), would not accord with his insistence that there must be an ongoing interaction between the planning authority and civil society. The vagueness of the conceptual apparatus—far from being objectionable—would be then mandated by the recommendation that planning in a liberal democratic society should not be rigid; rather, it should be flexible, and open to suggestions and reforms. Kurt Wolff in discussing Mannheim's late political

writings has not dwelt to the same extent as other interpreters have done on critical evaluations of these writings. Nonetheless, Wolff too has pointed to the inadequate description of what are the distinguishing traits of a planned society, and of how it should work.

### **Kurt Wolff's Notion of Surrender-and-Catch as Applied to His Interpretation of Karl Mannheim**

Surrender-and-catch has been a key notion in Kurt Wolff's thought since the 1970's. Wolff has expounded this notion in several occasions (see for instance 1974: 549; 1983: 256–267; 1991: 25f.). He has thereby meant, in his own words, “the maximum bearable suspension of one's socialization,” and therefore of one's received notions, “in a maximal effort to understand something or someone”. Understanding, both in a cognitive and existential sense, is the result, or catch, of this effort (Wolff 1974: 452; see also 1976: 20). Existential understanding involves “the most rigorously imaginable intrasubjective examination of [one's] most important experiences” (Wolff 1974: 45, 648). Wolff has applied this notion to Karl Mannheim, who had been his teacher and mentor and to whom he has remained closely related during Mannheim's “life, and afterwards” (1988: 715; see also 1991: 64–66).

This essay is not the proper context to assess the merits of Wolff's surrender-and-catch theory (see Gordon 2007). Rather, this theory is here relevant insofar as it applies to “the phenomenon of Karl Mannheim” (Wolff 1988), with particular reference—as stated—to his late political writings. Wolff had a strong and complex intellectual relationship with Mannheim since his student years (Kettler et al. 2008: 175–185). What attracted Wolff to Mannheim was not merely his capacity as a sociologist and philosopher. Mannheim was also an admirer of the poet Rilke, and was himself a poet. This feature of Mannheim's biography has been quite relevant to Wolff: “The intimate relationship between poetry and philosophy ... has stayed with me and is, I now realize, a central element in the idea of surrender-and-catch” (1991: 67). Mannheim has been in fact constantly quoted in Wolff's oeuvre. Wolff, and with him most of the secondary literature on Mannheim, have referred in this regard especially to Mannheim's sociology of knowledge (see, for a recent example, Kettler, Loader, and Meja 2008). They have however paid less attention to his late political writings, in which the theme of labilization takes central place.

In *Ideology and Utopia*, originally published in 1929, Mannheim conducted—as Wolff has stated—a “sociological analysis of his time”; but this work by Mannheim, in Wolff's own words, “has also anticipated the development of the sociology of knowledge ... to a sociological perspective, which it has been ever since ... The perspective focused on our time also characterizes my own efforts in the sociology of knowledge as well as in the study of surrender-and-catch” (1994: 375). The idea of surrender-and-catch has become relevant to Wolff as a response to the problem of relativism, which haunted Mannheim, and which he could never overcome. Kettler and Meja have spoken in this connection of Mannheim's “ultimately ‘tragic’ struggle with relativism, his recognition of the crisis of reason in the world” (1995: 104). The idea of surrender-and-catch, while revealing “a

perspective of his time,” may apply to our times, too, according to Wolff. For our times are—as he has put it elsewhere—“the age of anxiety” (1983: 8); an anxiety, he has argued, which originates from catastrophic events such as Auschwitz, and from humanity’s “unprecedented crisis” which its knowledge, now available, “to obliterate itself” has made possible (Wolff 1991: ix, 4f.). In this sense, Wolff has spoken elsewhere of mankind’s “mortal dangers” which pertain to “a diagnosis of our time” (1976: 18).

Wolff’s diagnosis is pessimistic, for our times as he sees them are connoted by “the administered nature of our lives, the world as underdeveloped; and one-world-and-cultural-relativism” (1974: 560). Wolff has introduced in the context of his interpretation of Mannheim and diagnosis of our times the related notion of “labilization,” which he says to have been inspired by Mannheim himself. This notion “refers to the disappearance or weakening of any stable order of norms, principles, guidelines, traditions which have instead become ‘labile’” (Wolff 1988: 726; see also 1991: 70f.). “Labilization,” in this sense, would properly apply to our times, as Mannheim saw them, and which he attempted to diagnose in his late writings. Surrender-and-catch, Wolff argues, is “a response to relativism,” for “at this juncture in history” the capacity to surrender-and-catch is universal among human beings,” and therefore this idea “bears this mark of its universal provenience and thus can be translated into every other” (1983: 264).

The idea of surrender-and-catch is endowed with particular significance in this age, which is also Mannheim’s, as Wolff maintains. For, “the effort to diagnose our time, unending analysis and unending mystery, and surrender-and-catch are inextricably related” when traditional, received notions are no longer reliable (Wolff 1994: 374). Wolff expounded on this point in a 1984 interview with Peter Ludes. Surrender, he declared, “is a response to the more comprehensive [rather than cognitive] crisis in which humanity finds itself”. The time in which we live is “one of unprecedented crisis,” one of “overarching importance,” which is due to “technological developments that endanger the species and the planet”. Recourse to traditional beliefs and principles would be of no avail: “The traditions ... which have not prevented us from getting there thus have proved to be, at least potentially, suicidal” (Ludes 2007: 174, 180). Wolff was giving voice to a concern he deemed of utmost general importance to all those living in the present age. Though expressed a few decades ago, this concern is still shared by contemporary sociologists, as we shall now briefly recall.

Thus, Bell and Legan (2015: 369) have recently called attention to the importance of adopting a very broad viewpoint in facing the environmental problems characteristic of this age, such as those caused by the perverse effects of modern technology such as radiation and nuclear waste; for their long-term effects, whether they are economic, social, or cultural, pose a threat to the human species as a whole. Environmental problems are therefore social problems that can be faced only by using “a global perspective” (Bell and Legan 2015: 370, 377–379). Wolff’s concern has been, moreover, object of sociological interest also on the part of such prominent contemporary sociologists as Beck and Giddens (see especially Giddens 2009). Giddens (2002: 34f.) has pointed out in this connection that today’s world is connoted by global ecological risks. The global age, accordingly, entails “coping

with a diversity of new situations of risk”. Although Wolff focused on the risk of nuclear war more than on ecological problems, he dealt with both as alternative roads to humanity’s self-destruction (1991: ix).

### **Kurt Wolff’s Interpretation of Mannheim’s Late Political Writings**

Wolff’s diagnosis of our time parallels in some respects, but not coincides, with Mannheim’s; especially insofar as the latter’s late political writings are concerned. There is continuity, it has been observed, between Mannheim’s sociology of knowledge and Wolff’s notion of surrender-and-catch, as “both proceed on the basis of a diagnosis of our time and both are committed to social change for the improvement of humankind” (Backhaus 2008). In Mannheim’s essay *On the Diagnosis of our Time* (1937), and in subsequent works by this author (1940, 1950), stress has been laid on what he perceived as a severe crisis of liberalism and democracy in modern age. Its causes are manifold and mutually related, such as technological achievements without social progress; the dissolution of traditional forms of society and collective controls; the waning hold of ethical norms, social controls, and social and religious bonds; class antagonism; monopolies and business bureaucracy instead of entrepreneur and independent economic enterprises; the decomposition of a unifying picture of the world, and consequently, widespread lack of principles, cultural disintegration, the formation of a mass society devoid of guidance, and democratic control.

Furthermore, Mannheim has emphasized in his late works the transition from unorganized to organized security, and the disjunction between the élite who holds key positions in society and direct the process of rationalization, on the one hand; on the other hand, the masses, which are composed of individuals who are “increasingly accustomed to being led by others,” and who give up their own interpretation of events. They are therefore capable neither of intelligent independent judgment (substantial rationality), nor of providing rational direction for the attainment of societal goals (functional rationality) (Mannheim 1937; 1940: 117–143; 1950: 3–21). Aside from a passing reference to “a more decidedly empirical attitude, which is said to be especially evident” in Mannheim’s *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1940), Wolff has viewed these writings by Mannheim not quite differently from this author’s antecedent work on the sociology of knowledge; namely, as the consequence of the impact on this author of contemporary social processes such as “the atomization of society and the instrumentalization of reason” (1979: 535; see also 1974: 462).<sup>1</sup>

However, the thematic continuity between these two authors should not be overemphasized, as they differ in important respects. Insofar as Mannheim’s late political works are concerned Wolff has laid greater stress on what he has viewed as their “central concern,” namely, “the fate of rationality in contemporary society”. Mannheim’s fundamental interest in such works has therefore been to discover in

<sup>1</sup> Reference will be made here to Kurt Wolff’s 1993 English introduction to Karl Mannheim, rather than to the one Wolff had previously published in German (see 1978).

contemporary society the social causes “of irrationality and the irrational elements in morality”. Accordingly, on the one hand Mannheim endeavors to examine the relationship between functional, goal-oriented rationality, and substantive rationality, which aims to obtain insight into the interrelation of events in any given situation; on the other hand, Mannheim argues that the former type of rationality, far from promoting the latter, is detrimental to it (Wolff 1993: 88f.). The crisis of modern culture—in keeping with Wolff's interpretation of Mannheim—is then indicated by the crisis of substantive rationality. This crisis is viewed as the consequence of its lack of connection and co-ordination with functional rationality. Modern society is characterized by an “increasingly chaotic development”; for this is a mass society, in which functional rationality is not coordinated with substantive rationality.

In other words, the subjective ends are not evaluated according to criteria provided by objective reason; these ends are therefore uncertain, and society itself may become totalitarian as a consequence. Wolff has then dwelt on Mannheim's proposed solution to this problem; namely, a planned society in which liberal democracy and freedom would be preserved, but the different purposes and views would be integrated by means of a common political framework and project. The irrationality of modern society would be thus brought under control (Wolff 1980: 246–248; 1993: 89–91, 96–102, 115–120). In addition to presenting in a condensed form the contents of the late writings by Mannheim, Wolff has produced an evaluation of, and comments on, some issues and points which they have raised. Here attention will be paid to the following remarks on Wolff's part, as they have a general import on his interpretation of these works. Reference is made in this connection to Mannheim's concepts of *principia media*—defined as “regularly recurring... special relationships of a certain historical phase in a particular social setting” (Mannheim 1940: 177)—and substantive rationality.

Mannheim, according to Wolff (1993: 89–92), fails to define clearly these concepts, although his diagnosis of modernity rests on them. The vagueness of Mannheim's formulation of these concepts may reflect, as Wolff maintains, “the vagueness and implicitness of... [Mannheim's] conception of the philosophy of history,” insofar as the *principia media* are concerned; and, insofar as substantial rationality is concerned, his “unease in front of the phenomena formulated,” namely, “the growth in functional and the decline in substantial rationality” (1993: 90). As for the notion of planning, which plays a pivotal role in Mannheim's late political works (1940; 1950), Wolff underlines, along with Mannheim himself, the proximity of this notion with that of totalitarianism, as in Soviet Russia; and, therefore, the difficulty inherent in making social planning compatible with a liberal democratic society. According to Mannheim, there is in principle no incompatibility at all. This conclusion, as Wolff points out, rests however on Mannheim's “trusting hope,” rather than on “conceptual clarification”. It stems, ultimately, from his “unresolved anguish over the fate of both society and spirit” in an epoch connoted by “rising dictatorships” (Wolff 1993: 102f.).

Wolff, then, shares Mannheim's existential anguish; he also agrees with him on the relevance of the contrast, in contemporary societies, between substantive and functional rationality; and—like Mannheim—recommends suspension of tradition as a way out of the current impasse, on whose undesirability and pernicious effects

they agree. However, Wolff is apparently less interested than Mannheim in specifying the variety of heterogeneous causes—whether they are technological, cultural, social, or political—that Mannheim was at pains to indicate; for the ecological problem and the looming threat of nuclear extermination are of greater concern to him. Wolff, moreover, does not concur with Mannheim on how to remedy the root causes of modern age's predicament. Wolff's disagreement with Mannheim bears on Wolff's own notion of surrender-and-catch, which has no equivalent in Mannheim's thought.

Social planning for freedom, or planning in general, is not considered by Wolff as a viable solution, for it neglects “to answer the question who plans the planners of his planned society, and how can they be prevented from abusing their power” (1991: 74). The idea and practice of surrender-and-catch, which Wolff has applied to Mannheim himself as a person and thinker, is a “the response to the feasibility of our suicide and the destruction of our habitat”; since by suspending, or surrendering, received notions one may be enabled (this would be the catch) to overcome Mannheim's epistemological problem of relativism. Wolff has argued elsewhere that the interpretation of our time, as provided by the sociology of knowledge (Wolff calls it, in keeping with Karl Mannheim, “extrinsic interpretation”), should be complemented by an “intrinsic interpretation,” which overcomes the relativism of the former. This would be accomplished, as Mannheim contends, if and to the extent that the catch would cast light “by its remembrance, rediscovery, reinvention” on what is common to all human beings, and in this sense is “universally human” (Wolff 1974: 550f.; see also 1983: 265f.; 1991: 91).

Wolff's response to the problem of relativism builds on Mannheim's own suggestions. As Wolff writes, Mannheim's sociology of knowledge “calls into question, relativizes, particularizes, and transcends”. “I call surrender”—Wolff goes on to write—this act or state which comes out of our time and in which whatever emerges is questions as thoroughly as a person engaged in such inquiry can bear, and the structure that emerges from it I call catch. ... The idea of surrender and catch itself comes out of our time; it is diagnostic” (1974: 549). Surrender involves then not only suspending as much as possible received notions concerning the social world or anything else, even “at the risk of being hurt,” for surrender involves losing himself or herself in order to find himself or herself (Wolff 2002: 11f.); but it also involves pursuing “what is truly and universally humans as is possible within the unalterable limits of man's historicity”.

These are limits to attain universal truth, Wolff holds. By surrender, however, persons may widen these limits, as the individual “is thrown back on what ... really is, which is what [this particular person] shares with mankind” (Wolff 1974: 550). Wolff then calls for a radical change in the individuals in order to face modern age's predicament. Individuals should modify their existential attitude toward their social and natural world if they wish to come to grips with it. By contrast, Mannheim envisaged encompassing social, economic, and political reforms, in order to promote the formation of a democratic personality in a quite differently organized society. Apparently, Wolff's personal and theoretical differences with his former teacher and mentor became insurmountable following the end of World War II.



## Kurt Wolff's Interpretation of the Late Mannheim's Works in the Context of Some Secondary Literature

There is a substantial secondary literature on Mannheim, including his late works (on Mannheim's reception, with particular attention to his late works, see Borkland 2006: 64–66). Wolff's interpretation of Mannheim's last writings has emphasized a number of sociological weaknesses (such as the fuzziness in the definition of basic concepts, and the unresolved tension between democracy and planning), but also the anguished spirit that inspired his last works. The secondary literature on Mannheim has dwelt on his most celebrated work, *Ideology and Utopia*, especially its enlarged English edition (1936); less so, however, on his sociological works of the subsequent decade. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge and the ensuing debate on ideology, relativism, "relationism," and gnoseology have, accordingly, received greater attention than his later political sociology (see McCarthy 1996: 2f., 9, 64f.; Kettler and Meja 2001; Loader 1985: 113–121; Merton 1968: 785–815; Stark 1967: 130–133, 198–200, 418–421; Timasheff and Theodorsen 1976: 308–311). Moreover, Mannheim's late writings have indeed stimulated some scholarly interest, but this interest has concerned elite theory and the conceptual relations between elite and social class, rather than the question of whether democracy and freedom are compatible with social and political planning (Bottomore 1964: 87f., 97, 100).

Eliot (1948: 35–49) formulated in the late 1940's a critical appraisal of Mannheim's democratic project along these lines. Some of Eliot's strictures are worthy of particular attention here. As Eliot first remarked, Mannheim neglects to consider "the increasing isolation élites from each other," and the ensuing problems for their "formation, preservation and development" (1948: 38). Second, culture is for Eliot "not merely the sum of several activities, but a way of life" (1948: 41). Culture cannot be therefore the exclusive property of any particular class, but rather of an elite which is able to preserve and transmit culture at all its different levels; an elite, furthermore, which is composed of pre-eminent individuals who are able to preserve and communicate it through their family standards of good manners. For good manners are not peculiar to any given class (Eliot 1948: 42). Democracy depends on culture at all its levels—total culture, as Eliot calls it—which are levels of power. Mannheim—Eliot contended—has been unaware of the dangers that beset a society, in which elites have assumed the functions of class (1948: 44), since elites have the function of their own to ensure the transmission of culture at all its levels.

The ultimate goals of planning, as Mannheim has envisaged it, are to meet the threats of totalitarianism and laissez-faire, and to educate individuals to the values and practices of democracy and substantive rationality. The fundamental purpose of Mannheim's project is realizing a just society, and educating citizens to face the problems of a mass society (see Corradini 1967: 348–363; Kettler 2001: 127f.; Loader 1985: 172, 188f.; Remmling 1975: 116–119). The compatibility of planning with freedom and democracy was, therefore, the question which Mannheim considered most pressing. Kurt Wolff, as mentioned, in emphasizing this point has stressed Mannheim's "unresolved anguish" lest irrationality and authoritarianism would prevail. A perusal of the secondary literature on Mannheim should therefore

focus on the presentations and discussions of this particular question.<sup>2</sup> A few names of interpreters of Mannheim may be relevant here. The Italian Mannheim scholar Alberto Izzo should be mentioned as an author who not only has considered Mannheim's themes of social planning and democracy in some detail (see 1988: 191–196; 1994: 246; 1995: 85–88); but has also presented and evaluated some literature on these themes. Reference has been made in this connection to the highly critical appraisals, which Lukacs and Adorno (1967: 37–49) conducted from a rigid Marxist viewpoint. Lukacs (1980)—as Izzo recalls—criticized Mannheim's notion of social planning on the grounds that it fails to provide information on the economic and social character of a planned society. As for Adorno, Izzo mentions his criticism, similar to the one addressed by Lukacs, that Mannheim does not tell his readers what economic organization a planned society should possess, and how these new élites should be characterized from a social and political viewpoint. In Adorno's own words, Mannheim's project of social planning involves “recommending social planning without ever penetrating to the foundations of society” (1967: 48).

Izzo presents these criticisms of Mannheim's idea of social planning; he himself is also—like Lukacs and Adorno—critical of this idea. As Izzo and others (see Ryan 2005: 471) have remarked, Mannheim did supply some information as to how conduct democratic planning, and to this extent Lukacs' and Mannheim's criticisms are not justified; but Mannheim's hope of safeguarding democracy in a planned society cannot be fulfilled as long as the societal members do not agree on the ultimate goals pursued by means of social planning (Izzo 1994: 246; 1995: 86–88). Mannheim was aware of this lack of consensus, as other interpreters have pointed out (Kettler et al. 1984: 102); but this awareness was not apparently conducive to a re-formulation of Mannheim's project of political and social reforms. On the contrary, as he pointed out to Eliot, who was a fellow member of the Moot group, “democracy was not just for the people, but also by the people,” and the goal of education should be “the shaping of the individual to be an enlightened, responsible citizen, on whose active participation in the affairs of the nation he placed a premium” (Loader 1985: 173; on the Moot group, and on Mannheim's participation in it, see Kettler and Meja 1995: 251–268).

The objection that planning and freedom are mutually incompatible has been reiterated by other students of Mannheim, whose critical position is reminiscent of Adorno's. Gunter Remmling, in particular, has maintained that the planning function should not be entrusted to élites, as Mannheim had proposed, since these

<sup>2</sup> We do not dwell on appraisals of Mannheim's oeuvre as a whole. However, we can provide some hints here, in this connection, at Kettler and Meja's ambivalent evaluation of Mannheim's writings (1995: 249): “Mannheim's writings are best characterized as a congeries of intellectual experiments centered on a basic theme that undergoes several striking modulations during his career. The goal is a rationality that comprehends and masters irrationalities ... his thinking underwent discontinuities and reorientations”. Even regarding Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, these authors point to “the ambivalence and drift of Mannheim's thinking” (1995: 194). In England, Mannheim met with criticisms on the part of the influential sociologist Morris Ginsberg, who maintained that Mannheim “failed to distinguish between sociology and social philosophy” (Kettler and Meja 1995: 191); while in the United States his major work on ideology and utopia “failed to bring Mannheim the American opportunities he expected” (Kettler and Meja 1995: 200).

élites exert power and influence to their own benefit (Remmling 1975: 98–103). Other interpreters of Mannheim have praised Mannheim's "rare gift of assimilating and co-coordinating diverse trends of thought" (Bramstedt and Gerth 1950: XV), and the ability of his political sociology to stimulate progressive thinking in a number of fields of inquiry and practice. This was a goal Mannheim consistently pursued (Loader 1985: 189). They have also pointed to the persistence in Mannheim's work of his worry of bureaucratic domination, even before the publication of his late political writings (Kettler et al. 2008: 115).

But they have also pointed to some "major flaws," to which in their opinion Mannheim's late political writings give evidence. There is, first, Mannheim's failure "to deal forthrightly with force and violence as aspects of political life or with coercion as an aspect of social control," and second, the "one-sided, ambiguous and undeveloped" character of his conception of social control. Mannheim, they have concluded, "did not produce a new political theory," even though he "stimulated new thinking in such fields as education, social work, and economic planning" (Kettler, Meja and Stehr 1984: 149; see also Kettler and Meja 1995: 273f.). In different contexts, Kettler, Loader, and Meja also have pointed to Mannheim's "speculative and over-ambitious advocacy of 'planning'" (2008: 193). Kettler and Meja have also directed attention to his attempt to formulate a sociology of knowledge that could "foster a sense of crisis" (1995: 6f.), which intellectuals had the task, and were entrusted, to diagnose and overcome.

We shall, finally, touch upon the assessment provided by the Dutch scholar Blokland. As Blokland (2006: 64–66) remarks, the secondary literature on Mannheim's late political writings has been ambivalent in its assessment. Critics have observed that Mannheim is an obscure but fascinating thinker. His writings have been a source of inspiration to prominent left-wing politicians and sociologists in Continental Europe, England, and the United States. Blokland himself apparently shares their ambivalence.

We have so far presented a number of commentaries and objections regarding the Mannheim's notion of social planning. While they do not fully coincide, they all seem to lay stress on the conceptually undeveloped and theoretically inadequate character both of this notion, and the related notion of élites. Wolff's own assessment is also critical in this regard, as we shall see. As for Kurt Wolff's interpretation of Mannheim, the assessment of Kettler, Loader, and Meja seems appropriate: "While Wolff was perhaps the most loyal to Mannheim, in the sense of his widest philosophical hopes, he was also among those who were further removed from the research program of the Mannheim group in Frankfurt". This distance was particularly apparent in Mannheim's "framing preoccupation" and "dissatisfaction," which he never abandoned, and which concerned "the increasingly rationalized sphere of modern capitalism," and the tie which binds the bureaucratic State to rationalization (Kettler et al. 2008: 14f., 30, 185). Wolff's critical appraisal of Mannheim's late political writings differs, however, from other, also critical, appraisals in that Wolff—differently from other interpreters of Mannheim—has pursued in his interpretation of these writings what he calls "the existential knowledge attainable through surrender," which is "nothing less than the situation of humanity" (2002: 72).

## Conclusion

Wolff has shared Mannheim's anguish, whose source both authors have attributed to some undesirable features of the modern age. Wolff, however, is distressed by the severe threat posed to mankind by environmental problems and nuclear weaponry. He has therefore been worried not only, as Mannheim, by tendencies toward irrationalism and authoritarianism that may prevail over those of substantial rationality and democracy; nor does he believe that social and political planning could effectively check and counteract these tendencies. Wolff, moreover, has refrained from reiterating Lukacs or Adorno's harsh appraisals of Mannheim, and of his late works on planning in particular. Wolff's more balanced evaluation of Mannheim's late political writings may have stemmed from his recognition that Mannheim's project of a planned society was meant to uphold democracy and freedom, and was therefore consonant with a mature public opinion and developed civil society. Wolff was more interested, however, in finding in these writings the same fundamental themes—such as the predicament of humanity in the present age—with which he was himself most concerned, and which were for him a source of constant and great anguish.

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