

# The Early Frankfurt School<sup>1</sup>

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The “pre-history” of the Frankfurt School can be dated back to the early twenties.<sup>2</sup> It grew out of a brave new research institute that was founded in 1923 by Marxist Felix Weil. The people behind this *Institut für Sozialforschung* was a non-partisan group with Marxist ambitions. Even though the Institute immediately established connections with the University of Frankfurt it was throughout its history an essentially free institution, a freedom fundamental for the later development.<sup>3</sup>

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1. I wrote this text during as a preparatory work for my licentiate and doctoral theses back in 1998 and 1999. It was never included in any of the books and has never been published. For general accounts on the Frankfurt School and its history see Martin Jay *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research 1923-1950* (University of California Press: Berkeley/New York/London [1973] 1996); Phil Slater *Origin and Significance of the Frankfurt School. A Marxist Perspective* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London/Boston/Henley 1977); Zoltan Tar *The Frankfurt School: The Critical Theories of Max Horkheimer and Theodor W Adorno* (John Wiley & Sons: New York/London/Sydney/Toronto 1977); Helmut Dubiel *Wissenschaftsorganisation und politische Erfahrung. Studien zur frühen kritischen Theorie* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a M 1978); Paul Connerton *The Tragedy of Enlightenment. An Essay on the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1980); George Friedman *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca/London 1981); Tom Bottomore *The Frankfurt School* (Ellis Horwood Limited: Chichester 1984); Judith Marcus, Zoltan Tar (eds) *Foundations of the Frankfurt School of Social Research* (Transaction Books: New Brunswick/London 1984); Thomas Krogh *Frankfurtskolan. En introduktion* (Daidalos: Gothenburg 1992); Rolf Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School. Its History, Theories and Political Significance* (Polity Press: Cambridge UK 1994); David M Rasmussen (ed) *Handbook of Critical Theory* (Blackwell: Oxford 1996).

2. Helmut Dubiel’s subdivision of the history of the early Frankfurt School is used as a temporal framework for this chapter The first phase in Dubiel’s scheme is (in his words) the ‘materialistic’ period, from 1930 to 1936/37. The second phase is 1937-1939/40, called the period of ‘critical theory’. The third phase is 1940-1945 which Dubiel calls the period of ‘critique of instrumental reason’. See Dubiel *Wissenschaftsorganisation*, pp 17; 47-49; 74-75; 106-107.

3. For accounts on the relations to the university and the professorship established in relation to the university see Jay *The Dialectical Imagination*, pp 8-9, and Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, pp 17-20; 30-36.

The most influential people in the process of the creation of the Institute were besides Weil and his father (who financed the project), Kurt Albert Gerlach (1886-1922; he died before the work had begun) Friedrich Pollock (1894-1970), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) and Hendryk Grossmann (1881-1950). The first director of the Institute was Carl Grünberg (1861-1940), whose Marxist approach was explicit and outspoken; but like Weil he was not a member of any political party. Grünberg rather focused on his "personal allegiance to Marxism as a scientific methodology".<sup>4</sup> Some of the other members, like for example Karl August Wittfogel, and earlier Gerlach, was from time to time involved in political activity but it is nevertheless beyond doubt – already from the earliest times and on through the history of the Institute – that a consciously non-partisan approach was one of the constituents of the scientific attitude of the Institute. "At no time (...) whether under Grünberg or under Horkheimer, was the Institut [sic] to ally itself with a specific party or faction on the left" (Martin Jay), they obviously avoided to describe their Marxist influences as anything other than a theoretical approach to societal problems.<sup>5</sup> Grünberg, who initiated his work at the Institute with a lecture in June 1924, was not a critical theorist in the sense of the later development of the Institute.

Under his directorate the work was shaped mainly by the ideas behind the journal *Archive für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik* edited by him since 1904. His general approach was a to build an "institute for research on the history of socialism and the labour movement, on economic history and on the history and criticism of political economy".<sup>6</sup> The Institute was among other things meant to improve the practical conditions for such studies, both inside and outside its walls. Grünberg was successful in several ways, he managed to tie an impressive group of scholars to his Institute and relate their work to the program; and more important, he managed to create a 'unique situation', namely the possibility for studies in Marxism on university level.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1928, however, Grünberg had to resign from his directorship following a stroke. After an interim period, with Pollock as acting director, the Grünberg era ended with

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4. Jay *The Dialectical Imagination*, p 11. Cf Phil Slater *Origin and Significance*, pp 2-3. See also Martin Jay *Marxism and Totality. The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (University of California Press: Berkeley/Los Angeles 1984), pp 196ff.

5. Jay *The Dialectical Imagination*, p 14.

6. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, p 29.

7. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, p 34.

Horkheimer's succession of him as director of the Institute in 1931. The Institute began a new era with Horkheimer's new Journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* as public mirror.

### **Materialism and Social Science (1931-1937)**

Under Horkheimer the Institute fused the Marxist heritage from the Grünberg era with a new meta-theoretical approach, constitutive for the development of the concept of social research (*Sozialforschung*) in the early Frankfurt School.<sup>8</sup> The idea of comprehensive social research was grounded in an interdisciplinary theory, partly traceable to the influences from Grünberg and partly from several other influences on Horkheimer during the twenties, especially the problems posed by positivism and the new forms of intellectual Marxism.<sup>9</sup>

It was Horkheimer's mentor, Hans Cornelius, who in the early twenties persuaded Horkheimer to attend academic philosophy in a more systematic way. After a short interlude in the field of psychology he wrote a philosophical thesis on Kant. However, he felt almost immediately drawn to experimental thought, different from the academic philosophy at the university. Horkheimer wrote to his future wife, Maidon: "The more philosophy takes hold on me, the further I find my self moving away from what they call philosophy at this university. It's not formal laws of knowledge, which are basically completely unimportant, but material evidence about our life and its meaning that we have to look for".<sup>10</sup> He was already moving towards a critical reinterpretation of the philosophical task.<sup>11</sup>

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8. The notion 'meta-theory' is not the most common in the literature dealing with Horkheimer, and it is probably not the most instructive either. However, it will be used here to grasp the whole dynamic field of Horkheimer's, and the Frankfurt Schools, theoretical approaches. In this chapter 'meta-theory' will be related to the concept *Deutung* (described below) and 'theory' as well as 'social theory' and 'critical theory' to a more concrete approach of *dialectical* conciliation of scientific facts or hypotheses and speculative philosophy.

9. Dahms *Positivismusstreit*, pp 22-28.

10. Max Horkheimer, a letter cited in Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, p 45.

11. In Horkheimer's view, Hegel did not represent the rigid epistemology university philosophy. In 1935 Horkheimer wrote about Hegel that "the dialectical method quickly led him to become aware of the stupidity of such philosophical work [the relativism in face of the truth and the absolutism in face of formal thought of for example Kant and Husserl] and to see in development and flux what presents

Generally, Horkheimer's philosophical heritage was the German idealist tradition and his most important influences were Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer. Differing, however, from the tenet of these sources he held the goal of theoretical and philosophical endeavour to be a comprehensive materialistic interpretation (*Deutung*) of the social and historical conditions of the current situation.<sup>12</sup> To avoid both the problems of Idealism and the emerging positivistic claims of unified science Horkheimer used Marx' terminology of *Darstellung* and *Forschung*.<sup>13</sup>

According to Horkheimer, a decent theoretical approach should present a philosophical comprehension (*Darstellung*) in intimate connection to social science (*Forschung*). Horkheimer's meta-theoretical notion of philosophical interpretation (*Deutung*) was thus speculative and philosophical in sense reminiscent of German Idealism but completely determined in scientific scope by the limits of the dialectical relationship between philosophical inquiry (*Darstellung*) and scientific analysis (*Forschung*).<sup>14</sup> Horkheimer distanced himself from the different forms of ontological anthropologies which had been developed in the recent philosophical discussion (Dilthey, Scheler and Heidegger), and even though he was impressed by some traits in Willhelm Dilthey's reinterpretation of humanities (with its understanding of *Verstehen* as fundamental to the humanities and *Erklärung* to natural sciences) his own scientific approach had in the end to denounce Dilthey's dualism.<sup>15</sup>

This monism, however, is not due to ignorance of qualitative aspects of social science but to the fundamental role of Horkheimer's materialism. He strictly relates his thought to the principle saying that "[d]ie Materie ist an sich selbst Sinnlos".<sup>16</sup> From this follows that history in the last instance is a blind process and Horkheimer maintained that definitions of human being detached from such a materialistic notion of history are abstract, metaphysical, theological and idealistic.<sup>17</sup>

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itself as absolute and eternal." Horkheimer "On the Problem of Truth", pp 407-443 in Arato and Gebhardt (ed) *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader* (Blackwell: Oxford 1978), p 415.

12. Dubiel *Wissenschaftsorganisation*, p 47.

13. Dubiel *Wissenschaftsorganisation*, pp 52-53.

14. Max Horkheimer "Vorwort", *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (1:1932 pp ??-??), p (sv p 31).

15. Max Horkheimer "Materialismus und Metaphysik", p 38.

16. Horkheimer "Materialismus und Metaphysik", p 40.

17. "Daß die Menschen durch 'elementare Lust- und Unlustreaktionen' bestimmt sind, ist vielleicht keine sehr treffende psychologische Beschreibung, aber doch ein guter Hinweis auf jenen Tatbestand, über den sich der Materialismus im Gegensatz zur idealistischen Geisthaltung nicht empört." Hork-

However, despite this materialism Rolf Wiggershaus has found in Horkheimer's earliest thought a praxis-oriented distance both from pure transcendental speculation and narrow scientism (which he later called vulgar materialism). "Horkheimer's tone was marked (...) by a measured hope that real discoveries as opposed to transfigurative ideology could serve humanity as a means of bringing meaning and reason into the world".<sup>18</sup> The materialistic foundation of his thought was thus intended to provide more than a philosophical or scientific theory, it was marked by several ideals of Marxism.

Yet, even though Horkheimer rightly have been labelled 'Marxist', the political pathos of the Horkheimer was always marked by pessimism. His quite odd academic roots in Idealism, Schopenhauer, neo-Kantianism, gestalt psychology and phenomenology formed an understanding of Marx and Marxist methodology which was quite different from the main stream of academic Marxism.<sup>19</sup> On the scientific level, Horkheimer's approach was closely related to a general Marxist (dialectic and materialistic) interpretation of society as an economic and historical totality. But his arguments were diffuse when it came to political Marxism and political praxis was a crucial difficulty to him from the beginning.

Still, this opaqueness connected to political praxis did not exactly imply that Horkheimer left his practical and political Marxist convictions. During most of the thirties he believed in the need for and possibility of some form of fundamental change of the

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heimer "Materialismus und Metaphysik", p 65. See further Alfred Schmidt "The Idea of Critical Theory", pp 67-78 in Marcus, Tar (eds) *Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, pp 69-70.

18. Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, p 39. Cf Rainer Forst: "The critical theory of society designated by Horkheimer (...) had at its core the idea of an interdisciplinary theory of social developments and institutions guided by the philosophical ideal of contributing to the realization of a 'reasonable social order,' in fact to the realization of reason in history – an ideal that was, despite Horkheimer's materialist version, a heritage of German idealism." Rainer Forst "Justice, Reason, and Critique: Basic Concepts of Critical Theory", pp 138-162 in Rasmussen (ed) *The Handbook of Critical Theory*, p 139.

19. This study will not discuss the exact relationship between Marx and Engels on the one hand and Horkheimer and Adorno on the other; there are several fundamental similarities as well as differences. The study presupposes a decisive Marxist influence on Horkheimer and Adorno. For an analysis of the relationship to Marx and Engels original theories see Schmit "The Idea of Critical Theory"; for an account on the Frankfurt School's relationship to different interpretations of Marx and Marxism see Slater *Origin and Significance*, p 13, 54-93; for accounts on Horkheimer and Marxism see See Conner-ton *The Tragedy of Enlightenment*, pp 35-41; Jay *Marxism and Totality*, pp 196-219; Dubiel *Wissenschaftsorganisation*, pp 25-55.

socio-economic conditions. It is exceedingly important not to hide this Marxist pathos, but it is almost equally important to underline the fact there were already in the initial phase of Horkheimer's theoretical development no unmediated, or necessary, relationship between the materialistic theory and a political revolution.<sup>20</sup> Wiggershaus, for instance, argues that Horkheimer's Marxism echoed the "Schopenhauerian consciousness of the finiteness, physicality and solidarity of creatures, rather than the activist pathos of the German Idealism" – an Idealism which is apparent also in traditional Marxism.<sup>21</sup>

In terms of Horkheimer's meta-theory a good theoretical conception (*Deutung*) of society and its problems had to include a plausible concept of praxis, expressed in terms of the totality of the material conditions. But as a consequence of his twist of the Marxist heritage this notion of praxis and change could not be thought of beyond the continuous theoretical endeavour to a proper understanding of society – and it could thus not be linked it to an objectively and historically recognisable subject.<sup>22</sup>

In terms of Horkheimer's philosophical heritage one can say that the (a)political in his pessimism was to eradicate the political in his Marxism. This can also explain the fact that Horkheimer, already from the beginning of his directorship always was very restrictive with the usual Marxist terminology in his scientific work, even though it is obvious that he defined himself as a Marxist.<sup>23</sup> And occasionally he says that the concept of radical social theory he proposes was inherent already in Hegel's Idealism.<sup>24</sup>

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20. See for example Slater *The Origin and Significance*, p 13. However, a passage from Rohrmoser indicates this argument must not be hypostatized as evidence for a specific nature of Horkheimer's theory: "Keiner der Vertreter der dialektischen Sozialphilosophie behauptet, daß das Problem einer kritischen Theorie un einer revolutionäre-emanzipatorischen Praxis durch bloße Wiederholung des Ansatzes von Karl Marx in der Gegenwart noch zu lösen sei." Günter Rohrmoser *Das Elend der kritischen Theorie* (Verlag Rombach: Freiburg 1970), p 53.

21. Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, p 51. See also Rohrmoser *Das Elend*, pp 54-56; Slater *Origin and Significance*, pp 14-15. For a further elaboration of this question, and commentaries on the thought of the young Horkheimer see Tar *The Frankfurt School*, pp 17-21; 49-61.

22. See Joseph B Maier "Contribution to a Critique of Critical Theory", pp 29-54 in Marcus, Tar (eds) *Foundations of the Frankfurt School*, p 32.

23. "At no point is Marx mentioned by name; nor is the theoretical object of the Capital, the capitalist mode of production in general, referred to directly." (In the texts dealing with the tasks of a social theory.) Connerton *The Tragedy of Enlightenment*, p 37.

24. Conerton *The Tragedy of Enlightenment*, p 36.

Ironically, Horkheimer was especially suspicious to absolute Idealism. The worst form of philosophical hypostatisation was Hegel's late system and the idea of realised (and preconceived) identity between subject and object – an idea inherent also in the Marxist idea of the proletariat and its reconciling role in the development of society.<sup>25</sup> Even though Georg Lukács' Hegelian interpretation of Marxism in a several senses was decisive in the further development of the theory of the Frankfurt School, its basically optimistic conception of the proletariat as the subject-object of history was denounced by the Frankfurt School as an idealistic simplification of the relation between subject and object as well as of theory and praxis.<sup>26</sup>

To explain these traits a bit further it is instructive to say that Horkheimer's meta-theory provided a framework for his dialectical materialism in such a way that he was able to pinpoint the *non-identity* of the subject-object relation and thus to conceive the relationship between theory and praxis as a consequence of non-identity rather than of the identity in an activist but abstract subjective consciousness.<sup>27</sup> Two especially important functions of Horkheimer's materialism become visible.

Firstly the materialistic conviction that meaningful synthesis is the result of a dialectical interpretation (*Darstellung*) of scientific "facts"; according to the principle "[d]ie Materie ist an sich selbst Sinnlos".

Secondly, the materialistic conviction that such a theoretical interpretation has to be constantly renewed as the conditions change, according to the principle of non-identity between subjective conception and objective conditions. Together, these two aspects of materialism draw the concept of praxis into the theory, but they also show that theory is praxis, namely the only adequate and responsible approach to a confusing and incomprehensible reality.<sup>28</sup>

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25. Horkheimer "On the Problem of Truth", 415ff.

26. See Slater *Origin and Significance*, pp 9, 94-95. George Friedman holds that the simplest difference from Marxism "may also be the most profound. This is the question of the proletariat. (– – –) To question the status of the proletariat (...) was to strike at the heart of Marx. This was precisely what the Frankfurt School did, both out of necessity and choice." *The Political Philosophy*, p 42

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28. Martin Jay holds the understanding of theory as praxis was typical for the later Frankfurt School. Martin Jay *Permanent Exiles. Essays on the Intellectual Migration from Germany to America* (Columbia University Press: New York 1995), s 35. However, even if the expressions are changing quite radically over the years I think it is more right to say that the aspect of interpreting theory as a form of praxis was in apparent already in the beginning of the Horkheimer era. It can be seen an origi-

However, Horkheimer's materialism is, in itself, not to be seen as an philosophical invention, it contains much of the older Marxist version of dialectical materialism, the crucial point is, as have been showed, his use of this materialism in a theory of the current condition of social reality. The Norwegian philosopher Thomas Krogh holds that Horkheimer's materialism "stands for a idea of looking upon other scientific theories in the light of *critique of ideology*; it traces these theories back to – and views them in relationship to – their concrete historical origin."<sup>29</sup>

This is of course a reiteration of the Marxist concept of dialectical critique in social theory.<sup>30</sup> However, Krogh's argument indicates also that the break with the German philosophical tradition is not total, it seems like the dream of some sort of a dialectical *aufhebung* is still apparent.<sup>31</sup> Confusing as this might be it can be argued that this tension between the pessimism (marked by non-identity) and the political hope – resembling traditional Marxism – is an incoherence which is due to his appreciation of the young Hegel. This incoherence is not to be discussed further here but the fact that Hegel was that important may be a helpful insight for a fuller characterisation of Horkheimer's way of dealing with his materialist heritage.

According to the logic of his specific twist of dialectical materialism Horkheimer's use of it as a "mould" for theory is not fully comparable to Marx' dictum of 'standing philosophy at its feet'. Horkheimer refers directly to Hegel when he embraces the

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nality of the Frankfurt School throughout its history. This can for example be seen in a passage from the foreword to the first issue of *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*: Horkheimer insists that the *Sozialforschung* (or the theory of society) differs from special disciplines such as sociology as it is more of a general understanding of the "samhället som totalitet", but it "anknyter till de enskilda disciplinernas preliminära resultat" and therefore "skiljer den sig från en filosofisk betraktelse bl a genom att den även försöker göra sådana tankar fruktbara för sina syften, som logiskt sätt kan innehålla ouppklarade problem – den är principiellt övertygad om att kunskapsprocessen inte har ett slut." Max Horkheimer "Vorwort". Another Example is from an article in 1935: "activity is not to be regarded as an appendix, as merely what comes after thought, but enters into theory at every point and is inseparable from it". Horkheimer "On the Problem of Truth", p 420. See also Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, p 151 and Wolf Heydebrand, Beverly Burris "The Limits of Praxis in Critical Theory", pp 401-417 in Tar, Marcus (eds) *Foundations*, pp 401-404.

29. "betecknar (...) en uppfattning som förhåller sig ideologikritiskt till alla andra vetenskapliga teorier, som återför dem till och betraktar dem i förhållande till deras konkreta historiska upprinnelse." Krogh *Frankfurtskolan*, p 81 (italics mine).

30. See Connerton *The Tragedy of Enlightenment*, pp 45-48.

31. See for example Slater *Origin and Significance*, pp 31-33.



usefulness and relevance of philosophy: "The individual sciences only provide the elements for the theoretical construction of the historical process, and these elements, once subsumed under the latter construction, do not remain what they were in the individual sciences, but receive new meanings, of which previously there was no mention. Thus, all genuine thought can only be understood as continuing critique of abstract determinations; such thought contains a critical, or, as Hegel puts it, a sceptical moment."<sup>32</sup>

The crucial point, thus, is that Horkheimer turns this mainly Hegelian version of dialectical materialism into a severe critique of Hegel's mature thought. "In materialism, the dialectics is not regarded as a closed system. Understanding that the prevalent circumstances are conditioned and transitory is not immediately equated with transcending them and cancelling them out. (...) Materialism (...) insists that objective reality is not identical with man's thought and can never be merged into it. As much as thought in its own element seeks to copy the life of the object and adapt itself to it, the thought is nevertheless never simultaneously the object thought about, unless in self-observation and reflection – and not even there".<sup>33</sup> Horkheimer's meta-theory made something new out of the old Marxist materialism. It became the framework for a double critique. On the one hand, it was a critique of scientific abstraction and, on the other hand, a critique of political abstraction. It is thus in the name of radical materialistic non-identity Horkheimer denounces both the innate idealism of traditional dialectics (Idealist as well as Marxist) and the subjectivism (and romanticism) of vulgar materialism and scientism. In practice this critical materialism was to be realised as a conscious interdisciplinary social science.

Beside those members of the institute already mentioned the first issue of *Zeitschrift für Socialforschung* (1932) contained articles by the pen of Erich Fromm and Leo Löwenthal, official members of the Institute. Another important person who in the beginning of 1933 became a member of the Institute was Herbert Marcuse, a former pupil of Heidegger. Looser connections were also established with scholars who at a later stage were to be more closely tied to the Institute, such as Franz Neumann and Otto Kirchheimer. Adorno – a young eccentric musician and philosopher

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32. Horkheimer "Zum Rationalismusstreit" p 22 (et Slater pp 30-31.)

33. Horkheimer "On the Problem of Truth", pp 418-419. See also Slater *Origin and Significance*, p 33-34.

who had a common history with Horkheimer and Löwenthal as a pupil of Cornelius – was also related to the work of the Institute at that time but he did not really become a member. An article by Adorno about music and its relation to social reality appeared in the first issue of the *Zeitschrift*.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, as a consequence of the collaboration with Adorno, his friend Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) was also loosely tied to the Institute. Even though it is too much to say that Benjamin ever became a regular member, his influence on Adorno renders him central part in the general history of the Frankfurt school.

In the beginning of 1933 the Institute put up an impressive competence in several relevant areas: philosophy (Horkheimer and Marcuse), psychology (Fromm and Löwenthal), economy and economic history (Pollock, Wittfogel and Grossmann), aesthetics and literature (Marcuse and Löwenthal) and statistics (Grossmann). With these resources Horkheimer could easily have been able to fulfil his vision of interdisciplinary social research, and had it not been for the unstable political conditions the work would have continued. However, there was one huge problem – all of them were Jews.

When Hitler was declared Chancellor in January 1933 Horkheimer had already made up plans for a flight. Pollock and Wittfogel were already safe in Switzerland at the time, and the other members were soon able to leave the country. Horkheimer had thought about several alternative locations for a new Institute in Europe, and branches had in fact been established both in Switzerland, Holland and France. However, the only realistic alternative was in the end to move to the United States. The Institute was offered an office building in New York City and a quite good contract which tied them loosely to Columbia University. The work could slowly restart in the summer of 1934. In the autumn (the same year) almost the whole circle was gathered in the New World. Adorno who stayed a bit longer in Germany did not join the Institute before 1938. At the time of flight he went to Oxford, England.

During the first years in America the Institute worked on the projects initiated in Germany. The most important of these were an empirical socio-psychological project which material was collected before the flight. The result was published as an under

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34. "Zur gesellschaftlichen Lage der Musik" *Zeitschrift Für Sozialforschung* (1:1932, pp 103-124).

the title *Studien über Autorität und Familie*.<sup>35</sup> This was the first, and surprisingly also last, large-scale empirical study of the Institute embodying the original scientific visions of the Horkheimer-circle.<sup>36</sup> A runner up to this study was almost completed by Fromm but never published. This fact together with other difficulties in the internal development of the Institute leads to a break with Fromm in 1939.

Fromm's importance at the Institute had been increasing since the early thirties. His social-philosophical reading of the Freudian psychoanalysis and meta-psychology, together with Horkheimer's high esteem of psychological explanations was crucial for *Studien*. Already from the beginning of the Horkheimer era psychoanalysis was an essential ingredient in the dialectical materialism of the Frankfurt School.<sup>37</sup> Horkheimer's hesitation towards the reductionist element in the orthodox Marxist economics can be said to emanate from an interpretation of the social totality as more dynamic than it appears in Marx version of it.<sup>38</sup>

Horkheimer, influenced by Schopenhauer, was sensible to the problem of the individual in the explanatory framework of objective economic conditions. Schopenhauer's radical critique of Hegel is paradigmatic in this sense and Horkheimer transformed this insight into a critique of Marx economic reductionism. According to this critique Marx' materialism did not successfully cover the problems originating in the relationship between subjective and objective factors in the development of history. Therefore, it was held to be of less use for an analysis of the individual in the social totality.

The reason for the interest in Freud's work, rather than other psychological theories, was the evident thematic affinity between Marxism and Freudianism on one de-

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35. Max Horkheimer (ed) *Studien über die Autorität und Familie. Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (Alcan: Paris 1936). This study pointed to the disappointing fact that the resistance to Nazism in the German working class was more than weak. This indicated once again what has already been mentioned: the proletariat was not the subject of history and not the social force to count on. *Studien* may be one explanation among others to the increasing doubt on the interdisciplinary vision and thus on the first version of Horkheimer's theory of society.

36. Thomas Krogh *Frankfurtskolan*, 104.

37. The high appreciation of psychoanalysis was manifested already in 1929, when the Frankfurt Psychoanalytic Institute was established as a guest-institute within the Institute for Social Research. Joel Whitebook "Fantasy and Critique. Some Thoughts on Freud and the Frankfurt School", pp 287-304 in Rasmussen (ed) *Handbook of Critical Theory*, p 287.

38. See further Jay *Marxism and Totality*, p 204.

cisive level. Common to both Marxism and Freudianism is the basically materialistic strive to eliminate a false objectivity and reveal unconscious causes. The unconscious structures within the subject, highlighted by Freud, can under certain conditions be understood as the subjective (or mental) parallel to the objective coercive structures of the historical and social totality.<sup>39</sup>

However, it was at the same time obvious to Horkheimer and his friends that the 'humanistic' traits of psychology – in its understanding of individuals as free psychological entities, detached from social totality – is even more reductionist than Marxist materialism, seen from the perspective of Horkheimer's meta-theory. It is therefore obvious that Freud's psychoanalysis only partly can handle the evident problems. Thomas Krogh holds that the use of psychoanalysis in the early Frankfurt School had to be restricted to one area, namely the specific question about the individual agent in the social totality.

By this restriction Krogh interprets Horkheimer's use of psychoanalysis on the individual level: "A positive use of psychology in the context of history is *only* possible if one clings to the fact that psychology is a theory on the *individual* level. (...) A materialistic view of history is incomplete, from a methodological perspective, if it not also includes independent explanations on the individual level. But the individuals concerned, will always be imprinted by the (...) given economic situation".<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Fromm's special task in face of the Institute's theory was to carry out a *synthesis* of the perspectives of the social totality and the individual in this totality.<sup>41</sup> In a programmatic and quite optimistic article he defines this synthesis in terms of social psychology and economics. "[A]nalytical social psychology seeks to understand the instinctual apparatus of a group, its libidinous and largely unconscious behaviour, in terms of its socio-economic structure".<sup>42</sup> The understanding of psychology as a com-

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39. Slater *Origin and Significance*, p 97.

40. "En positiv användning av psykologi i samband med historien är bara möjlig om man håller fast vid att psykologin är en teori på individplanet. (...) [E]n materialistisk historieuppfattning [är] metodologiskt sett (...) ofullständig om den inte också omfattar självständiga förklaringar på individplanet. Men de individer som det handlar om kommer alltid att vara präglade av den (...) givna ekonomiska situationen." Krogh *Frankfurtskolan*, p 98.

41. Whitebook "Fantasy and Critique", p 288.

42. Erich Fromm "Method and Function of Analytic Social Psychology. Notes on Psychoanalysis and Historical Materialism", pp 477-496 in Arato, Gebhardt *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, p 483 (in the original this passage is in italics).

plement to the sociological analysis was primarily dedicated to the drives. "The realm of human drives is a natural force which, like other natural forces (...) is an immediate part of the substructure of the social process. Knowledge of this force, then, is necessary for a complete understanding of the social process. (— — —) Thus, the use of psychoanalysis within historical materialism will provide a refinement of method, a broader knowledge of the forces at work in the social process, and greater certainty in understanding the course of history and in predicting future historical events. In particular it will provide a complete understanding of how ideologies are produced".<sup>43</sup> Fromm's synthesis became decisive for scientific work of the early Frankfurt School, and even if Fromm's specific interpretation was denounced after 1939 Freud's theory was important for the members of the institute throughout its whole history.

The affirmation of the incompleteness of economic theories in view of social explanation had other consequences for the theory of the institute. One example is the lines of thought which led to the unorthodox Marxism of Pollock's controversial theory of state capitalism and the development of capitalism into fascism (1940). Pollock turned the scheme of base and superstructure upside down, and hence the economic theory of the capitalistic system as a system in permanent economic crisis becomes useless in the analysis of fascism.<sup>44</sup> Thus, economic theories had become unable to guide an analysis of fascism and late capitalism. This can be seen as a direct consequence of the relativisation of explanatory power of the socio-economic categories even if it only became fully visible at a later stage.<sup>45</sup>

To summarise Horkheimer's dialectical approach decisive for the early Frankfurt School two traits will be mentioned. Firstly, Horkheimer hesitated to give his theoretical perspective (which he develops out of basically Schopenhauerian, Hegelian and Marxist categories) a definitive status. The theory is characterised by materialistic notions of non-identity and change. However, in lack of a better term the notion 'meta-theory' will have to cover the fact that despite Horkheimer's anti-idealism two decisive theses founded on dialectical materialism can be said to underlie his theory. Horkheimer's meta-theory consisted of: (a) the thesis that only a subjective dialectical

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43. Fromm "Method and Function", p 492.

44. Friedrich Pollock "State Capitalism" *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* [English continuation of *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*] (9:1941, pp 200-225).

45. For an explanation and interpretation of the Marxist ground for this deviation from Marx's original theory see Postone, Brick "Critical Pessimism", pp 619ff.

interpretation of facts may order the results of scientific inquiries in a meaningful way and, (b) that such a subjective dialectical interpretation must be open and submitted to constant revision. Within the framework of these two theses the specific version of interdisciplinary theory was developed, and it is against these theses the integration of psychoanalysis has to be seen. The refinement of the explanatory theory of society by e.g. psychological explanations falls completely within the frames of the 'meta-theory' even though the content of the theory changes.

Secondly in the early period the members of the Frankfurt School were continuously trying to realise the theory of an interdisciplinary social research by their own empirical studies. Thus, it can be argued that the early theory of society was understood as a scientific theory also in a more specific sense; a fact that also makes understandable the different attempts to establish a dialogue with other scientists (such as the Vienna circle's) even though these attempts could have been rejected *a priori*, with reference to the 'meta-theory'. This conclusion indicates that the 'meta-theory' was not yet comprehended as a direct antithesis to science in general. Although it was critical to many of the results of scientific efforts it was not yet fully grasped by the members of the Institute in terms as distinctive as corresponding to the notions 'theory' and 'meta-theory' as these are used here.

### **Critical Theory and Determinate Negation (1937-1940)**

Horkheimer's interest in practical empirical science gradually changed over the years in the United States. It may be a bit inexact, but not wrong, to say that his materialistic vision of a successful social science slowly turned into a more negative and comprehensive philosophical meta-theory and, consequently into a conscious negation of other meta-theories. From 1937 and on a minor, but decisive, deviation from the earlier understanding of the reach of his dialectical materialism can be detected.

Adorno (in Oxford at that time) was, as will be shown below, to a very large extent involved in the new formulation of the theory.<sup>46</sup> During the same period Fromm's influence on Horkheimer decreased. In an essay on praxis in the critical theory of the Frankfurt School the two scholars Wolf Heydebrand and Beverly Burris hold that in

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46. Hans-Joachim Dahms *Positivismusstreit. Die Auseinandersetzung der Frankfurter Schule mit dem logischen Positivismus, dem amerikanischen Pragmatismus und dem kritischen Rationalismus* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a M 1994), pp 86-87.

the continuing reformulation of the theory ”praxis moved from ‘critical awareness’ of the contradictions of capitalist society to the ‘theoretical negation’ of that society as a totality”.<sup>47</sup> This distinction proves to be helpful in the further discussion. However, Heydebrand and Burris do not separate as clearly between the second and the third phases as does Dubiel. In this context (where Dubiel’s periodization is applied) this means that the change from critical awareness to critical negation cannot without be used *ad notam* to characterise and comprehend the transition from Dubiel’s first to second phase, but it can be used *mutatis mutandis* to highlight some important issues at stake in the essential texts from the important year 1937.

Application of the terminology of Burris and Heydebrand in this context would mean that the changed version of the theory of society (which from now on is to be called ‘critical theory’) is not so much a change in meta-theory as an awareness of the implications of the meta-theory already constitutive for the earlier version of the theory. The critical theory was presented by Horkheimer in two articles in the 6<sup>th</sup> issue of the *Zeitschrift*: ”Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik”, and ”Traditionelle und kritische Theorie” (1937). The latter of these articles have later been called the manifesto of the Frankfurt School, but this is only a fitting characterisation in retrospect.

From the point of view of the Institute’s work up to that time the articles from 1937 becomes a kind of denunciation of the earlier hopes for a fruitful social science, or at least a modification of this hope, including a severe critique of the present scientific situation. This negativity may partly have been occasioned by the Institute’s confrontation with the pragmatic ideals of the American scientific tradition, but apart from that it was also a logical continuation of important aspects of the earlier theory.<sup>48</sup>

This, however, does not mean that Horkheimer called off the empirical projects. On the contrary it is a historical fact that the empirical interest was still very much alive.

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47. Heydebrand, Burris ”The Limits of Praxis in Critical Theory”, p 414.

48. The logic behind this modification becomes clear in Dahms investigation of the definitive break with, and severe critique of, the logical empiricism in Horkheimer’s essay ”Der neuesten angriff auf die Metaphysik”. Dahms *Positivismusstreit*, pp 98ff. Dahms holds that it is the concept of the new (das Neue) which becomes radically problematic in science, and particularly in empiricism. The exclusion of the new in positivism implied the exclusion of the concept of revolution and real change from its theory. ”Horkheimer kritisiert nun am Empirismus, daß er schon deshalb, weil er ‘den Begriff des Neuen mit dem einer Unzulänglichkeit von Prognosen verwechselt’, im Grunde stets der Gegenwart verhaftet bleibe” (p 101). Thus, a continuing insistence on praxis needs a critical negation of the moment of repetition (or the exclusion of the new) which is inherent in empirical theory.

Adorno's story testifies to this, when he was invited to America in 1937 (he arrived in 1938 and became a member of the Institute for the first time) his task was to collaborate with Paul Lazarsfeld (an European scholar loosely tied to the Institute) on an empirical radio research project sponsored by the Institute. There were also other projects going on, such as studies on American families.<sup>49</sup> The explanatory power of the proposed change from critical awareness to theoretical negation of science may therefore not be sufficient for a characterisation of the whole situation at the Institute, even though it is relevant in the case of Horkheimer's *theoretical* development.<sup>50</sup>

In the articles from 1937 the critical perspective was outlined as an intensification of some of the critical perspectives of the original theory. To extend the argument of Heydebrand and Burris one can say that the basic principle in the new approach is to direct a devastating criticism of the basis of social science and, making a critical negation of its flawed logic urgent for the sake of the acute problems of the current situation (the outer conditions at the time was most certainly a decisive factor). In "Traditional and Critical Theory" Horkheimer detects in the general approach to science an adherence to a traditional and conservative perspective. This traditional perspective is related directly to the reactionary interests of the bourgeoisie.

Philosophically speaking, traditional theory is for Horkheimer founded on abstract principles, such as abstract division of spirit from matter, or the understanding of empirical data as 'given', beyond theory. In traditional theory deduction, classification and mathematics are always fundamental. For Horkheimer this means that the problems in sciences guided by traditional theory cannot be done away with without a rejection of the traditional theory itself. He argues for the negation of the theory in totalizing terms. Elements of traditional theory run through the whole range of modern thinking and they are due to a false understanding of the identity of science and its relation to society. Horkheimer is especially critical to a cognitive claim: "In der Gesellschaftlichen Arbeitsteilung hat der Gelehrte die Auffassung und Einordnung von Tatsachen in begriffliche Ordnungen zu besorgen und diese so instandzuhalten, dass

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49. For a quantitative summary of the empirical projects of that time see Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, p 165.

50. E.g. Fromm's work was continuing without any fundamental reorientations, see Jay *Dialectical Imagination*, pp 100-105.



er selbst und alle, die davon Gebrauch zu machen haben, ein möglichst weites Tatsachengebiet beherrschen können.”<sup>51</sup>

This tendency is criticised as reactionary precisely at the point where it claims to be progressive. In the moment of absolute discrimination between wider interests and the scientific interest of truth the traditional theory makes suspect every move towards a theoretical internalisation of the values and principles that guides the scientific work. This means that science developed in the framework of traditional theory is blind to its own radical dependence on society and therefore also incapable of an adequate critique of society. Traditional theory supports the existing condition of society.

Basically, the distinction between traditional and critical theory has its roots in the different motivations behind strives for economical profit and strives for social improvement. ”Die bürgerliche Wirtschaftsweise ist bei allem Scharfsinn der konkurrierenden Individuen von keinem Plan beherrscht, nicht bewusst auf ein allgemeines Ziel gerichtet.”<sup>52</sup>

Or, put in another way: ”Unter der bürgerlichen Produktionsweise, deren Wissenschaft mehr auf die Resultate der Abstraktion als auf die theoretische Rekonstruktion des Ganzen abzielt, gelten Tiere, Menschen und Gesellschaft gleicherweise als Summen von Dingen und Ereignissen; der Prozess, wie diese Abstrakta im Zusammenhang der gesellschaftlichen Praxis zustandkommen, fällt nicht ins Bewusstsein”.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, according to Horkheimer’s traditional theory can be understood as the *self-reflective* theory of a society in *unconscious* crisis. In terms of scientific practice this means, firstly, that traditional theory by abstraction keeps the subject from the object, as if the relationship between them were a lucid and comprehensible one and, secondly (as a consequence of this posited, but not objectively valid distinction between subject and object), that science within the traditional theory has to deal with reality in terms of objectively and testable hypotheses. It deals continuously with ‘the unreal’ instead of with the objective conditions.

Horkheimer interprets this further as the traditional theorists silent and necessary recognition of his or her own lack of contact with reality. ”Subjekt und Objekt sind

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51. Horkheimer ”Traditionelle und kritische Theorie”, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (4:1937, pp 245-294), p 252.

52. Horkheimer ”Traditionelle und kritische Theorie”, p 258.

53. Horkheimer ”Der neueste angriff auf die Metaphysik”, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (4:1937, pp 4-53), p 23.

streng getrennt, auch wenn es ziegen sollte, dass in einem späteren Zeitpunkt das Objektive Geschehen durch menschlichen Zugriff beeinflusst wird; dieser ist in der Wissenschaft ebenso als Faktum zu betrachten. Das gegenständliche Geschehens ist der Theorie transcendent, und die Unabhängigkeit von ihr gehört zu seiner Notwendigkeit; der Betrachter als solcher kann nichts daran ändern.”<sup>54</sup>

Critical theory on the contrary (the determinate negation of traditional theory) brings with it several definite characteristics to the situation of research, usually ignored in the specific disciplines. It is first and foremost related to an understanding of conscious action. Secondly, like the original version of Horkheimer’s theory, it pinpoints theoretical construction and depiction (*Darstellung*) of the existing conditions.

Für das wirkliche, bewusst handelnde Individuum bedeutet Theorie etwas anderes als für den empiristischen Gelehrten. Dieser übernimmt ihre Formen als Konvention aus dem herrschenden Wissenschaftsbetrieb. Reicht jedoch ein Denken über die Fortsetzung des gesellschaftlichen Lebens in seiner gegebenen Gestalt hinaus, so sind auch die Formen der Darstellung nicht vorgegeben, in der Theorie werden vielmehr die empirischen Elemente zu einem Gesamtbild konstruiert, das die Wirklichkeit bewusst sub specie der eigenen weitergreifenden Interessen spiegelt. Konstruktion und Darstellung sind in Zusammenhang mit der Forschung eigene Momente der Erkenntnis.<sup>55</sup>

Consequently, according to this approach, the critical moment from science to social relevance is not transparent, or possible to specify as such. A critical theoretical perspective has, in the last instance, to focus permanently on the category of society and it is by that focus is can be understood as critical.

To make such a conception trustworthy, Horkheimer once again has to underline the importance of a theoretical break with idealism and idealistic conceptions of critical social theory. He holds that the earlier critical theories – for instance Engels’ and Lukács’ and perhaps his own – became ‘metaphysical’ by way of its close collaboration with idealism in preconceiving a synthesis. Horkheimer maintains that the insis-

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54. Horkheimer ”Traditionelle und kritische Theorie”, p 281.

55. Horkheimer ”Der neueste Angriff auf die Metaphysik”, p 31.

tence on a reconciling subject of history, whether proletarian or not, is idealistic rather than materialistic, and thus traditional rather than critical.

[D]ie Situation des Proletariats bildet in dieser Gesellschaft keine Garantie der richtigen Erkenntnis. Wie sehr es die Sinnlosigkeit als Fortbestehen und Vergrößerung der Not in des Urechts an sich selbst erfährt, so verhindert doch die von oben noch geförderte Differenzierung seiner socialen Struktur und die nur in ausgezeichneten Augenblicken durchbrochene Gegensätzlichkeit von persönlichem und klassenmässigem Interesse, dass dieses Bewusstsein sich unmittelbar Geltung verschaffe. An der Oberfläche sieht vielmehr die Welt auch für das Proletariat anders aus.<sup>56</sup>

If critical theory had to rely on a specific class-consciousness its theoretical paradigm would not, in the end, be very different from the traditional paradigm. According to Horkheimer its content would in that case be a kind of ‘social psychology of the proletariat’ which really can be construed as ”eine traditionelle Theorie mit besonderer Problemstellung, nicht die intellektuelle Seite des historischen Prozesses seiner Emanzipation”.<sup>57</sup>

It is primarily dialectical philosophy that can provide social science with means for a conscious interpretation of society as a whole. Thus, dialectical, rather than formal, logic becomes the instrument of the critical theory. This means also that theory initially has priority over the scientific activity. Facts can only be grasped by reference to the dialectical construction (*Darstellung*). At the other level, that of emancipative praxis this means that there can be no formulation of responsible action beyond the historically changing theoretical perspective.

Jedenfalls ist mit der kritischen Theorie der idealistische Glaube nicht vereinbar, dass sie selbst etwas die Menschen übergreifendes darstelle und etwa gar ein Wachstum habe. Die dokumente haben eine Geschichte, aber nicht Theorie ein Schicksal. Die Aussage, dass bestimmte Momente zu ihr hinzutretens seien, dass sie sich nicht in Zukunft neuen Situationen anzupassen habe, ohne dass ihr we-

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56. Horkheimer ”Traditionelle und kritische Theorie”, p 267.

57. Horkheimer ”Traditionelle und kritische Theorie”, p 268.

sentlicher Lehrgestalt verändert würde, all dies gehört mit zur Theorie, wie sie heute existiert und die Praxis zu bestimmen sucht. (– – –) Die möglichste strenge Tradierung der kritischen Theorie ist freilich eine Bedingung ihres geschichtliche Erfolgs; aber sie vollzieht sich nicht auf dem festen Grund einer eigenschliffenen Praxis und fixierter Verhaltensweisen.<sup>58</sup>

For the understanding of the theory of the second phase of the Frankfurt School this means that the crucial point has been moved away from the attempt, in the first phase, to dissolve a coercive and idealistic philosophy by a specified version of dialectical materialism, and by that step make the antagonistic tendencies in society into a pre-supposition for scientific work, to a profound establishment of an alternative, critical theory of the antagonistic tendencies, sceptical about traditional science *in se*.

The broader discussion of this re-establishment of a comprehensive dialectical philosophy and its impact on the work of the Institute in general has to be excluded here. However, there is one point in this development that is unavoidable in this context, namely the influence of Adorno on Horkheimer in his turn to dialectical philosophy. As have been said above, the shift in theoretical perspective was not a radical break. Already in 1935 Horkheimer wrote: "What is the characteristics of dialectical thought? (...) Instead of accepting the legitimate analyses and abstractions of professional science but turning to metaphysics and religion for an understanding of concrete reality, it tries to place the analytically achieved concepts in relation to one another and reconstruct reality through them. These and all the other characteristics of dialectical reason correspond to the form of complicated reality, constantly changing in all its details".<sup>59</sup> This interpretation of dialectics corresponds to crucial argument in "Traditional and Critical Theory".

Already in his *Antrittsvorlesung* "Die Aktualität der Philosophie" (1931) Adorno put forward a serious attempt to regain the explanatory power of a comprehensive dialectical philosophy after the decline of the absolute systems and the failure in bringing totality on a transcendental formula. The outcome of the young Adorno's understanding of reality was in a sense similar to the young Wittgenstein's; he saw the

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58. Horkheimer "Traditionelle und kritische Theorie", pp 290-291.

59. Horkheimer "On the Problem of Truth", p 433.

world as meaningless in terms of a conclusive theory of the subjective and objective totality.<sup>60</sup>

But Adorno moved beyond Wittgenstein towards a understanding of *speculative philosophy* which in a specific sense can be characterised as producer of meaning (understood as a *rational content*) in a otherwise meaningless and contentless world. This can be explained by the following reconstruction: if one holds that rationalism and idealism grasps the intention of the world as a pre-established inscription on thought, and positivism (scientism) grasps the intention of the world as inscribed on the sensations (or on the material entities), then it can be said that Adorno understands the only possible way of speaking about the meaning of the world as a fruit of thought's unfounded collaboration with 'intentionless' matter.

This constitutes his version of critical theory. Discursive reason (seen as radically crippled in terms of meaning) and facts (a meaningless juxtaposition of abstractions) brought together dialectically can eventually bring forth meaningful interpretations of the world. Thus, Adorno's earliest philosophical understanding of the hierarchy of scientific activity and philosophical reflection resembles Horkheimer's thought of 1937.<sup>61</sup>

Adorno wrote: "philosophy has to bring its elements, which it receives from the sciences, into changing constellations, or, to say it with less astrological and scientifically more current expression [*sic*], into changing trial combinations, until they fall into a figure which can be read as an answer, while at the same time the question disappears".<sup>62</sup>

If Horkheimer started with a quite optimistic understanding of the various sciences ability to reach a adequate understanding of society and reality, his further involvement with Adorno most certainly lead to the development of the more negative statements about science and the ability of scientific thought to provide society with a relevant selfunderstanding. The suspicion towards idealism, however, was a moment in their theories which they shared already from the beginning.

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60. Interesting passages which in different ways points to this are the following: Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (???), §§ 1, 2.0124, 2.063, 2.1-2.225, 4.022, 4.03, 4.05-4.06, 4.12, 5.53, 5.6, 5.632, 6.371, 6.41, 6.421, 6.53.

61. See the quotation above.

62. Adorno "The Actuality of Philosophy", *Telos. A Quarterly Journal of Radical Thought* (? :1977, pp 120-133), p 127.

This discussion of the second period of the theory of the Frankfurt school can now be summarised. In terms of meta-theory the differences compared to the former phase is limited. The most substantial change is rather to be related to the degree of conscious understanding of the full implication of the meta-theory developed in the first phase, a change that has several implications. Most important is the outspoken attempt to negate the traditional theoretical paradigm of science, which also implies the more ambitious project aiming at a total denunciation of the traditional understanding of social research and social praxis.

If the meta-theory in the first period worked as a stabilising source for the development of coherent dialectical and materialistic research, it turned out to be the premise for a normative rejection of the results gained from other premises in the second period. This critical consciousness is however to be seen as a consciousness in becoming, there are traces of it earlier than 1937. In 1935 Horkheimer wrote about dialectical materialistic theory that "[f]reed from the idealistic illusion, the dialectic transcends the contradiction between relativism and dogmatism. While it does not understand its own point of view as an endpoint or hypostatisation of the proceeding critique and definition, it does in no way surrender the conviction that in the whole context to which its judgements and concepts refer, its cognition is valid not only for particular individuals and groups, but in general – that is, that the opposing theory is wrong".<sup>63</sup> This early witness of intended normativity bespeaks a fine tuned relationship between a normative meta-perspective and a dialectical *Darstellung* which has to be taken into consideration in characterising the second phase.

The presented characterisation of the second phase is dependent upon the argument of Heydebrant and Burris, and it is clarified by the distinction made between meta-theory and the theory dialectical depiction of society. That distinction is of course disputable (especially the quite harsh notion 'meta-theory'), but it has also repeatedly been showed that the specific character of the approach of the early Frankfurt School cannot be grasped by a simpler structure. The fact that Horkheimer develops both a more narrow theoretical method dependent upon dialectical integration of scientific facts and reflection cannot fully explain the fact that he also aims at a more comprehensive theory – of the dialectics between the social situation and the narrow dialectical theory – with normative implications.

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63. Horkheimer "On the problem of Truth", p 422.

### **Critique of Instrumental Reason (1940-1941)**

Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno was born in Frankfurt am Main, 11 September 1903.<sup>64</sup> His Father, Oscar Wiesengrund, was a Jewish wine merchant and his Catholic mother, Maria Calvelli-Adorno, was a professional singer. In a quite wealthy and musical home Adorno gained his genuine interest and skill in music, a characteristic that was to become decisive for his intellectual identity.

As a child he studied piano, and as a precocious teenager he was spending his Sunday afternoons together with Siegfried Kracauer, reading Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. "From Kracauer (...) he learned to decode philosophical texts as documents of historical and social truth. He also became sensitive to the subtle expressions of material, human suffering submerged in such writings, those irreducible cries of pain that idealist systems vainly sought, theodicy-like, to transfigure. (...) [H]is early debt to his mentor's anti-idealist, micrological culture criticism would remain potent throughout his life."<sup>65</sup>

Adorno achieved his doctorate in philosophy as early as 1921 (by a dissertation on Husserl). In 1925 he went to Vienna and was caught up in the expressionistic circle of composers around Arnold Schönberg (he studied composition under Alban Berg). However, despite a successful career as essayist in avant-gardist journals (he even edited one called *Anbruch*), he returned to Frankfurt as an unsuccessful composer in 1927 to continue his academic career.

In 1931 Adorno earned his right to teach at the university (*venia legendi*) by an dissertation on Kierkegaard. During the twenties he had already met most of the persons which would be of decisive importance for his own philosophical achievements: Karl Kraus and all the composers in Vienna, but also Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, Berthold Brecht, Georg Lukács – and of course Max Horkheimer, Friedrich Pollock and Leo Löwenthal. Quite naturally thus, in that context, he had also obtained Hegelian, Marxist and Freudian sympathies, which were to be crucial for the further development of his thought.

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64. For general accounts on Adorno, his life and theory see Kurt Oppens et al *Über Adorno* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a M 1968); Martin Jay *Adorno* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Mass 1984); Rolf Wiggershaus *Theodor W Adorno* (Oscar Beck: München 1987); (...)

65. Jay *Adorno*, pp 25-26.

Against this background, influenced by radicals and avant-gardists, it becomes intelligible why the best general characterisation of Adorno's philosophy is a fundamental aversion to totalizing systems and conservative division of labour between speculative thought and theory of science.

The introductory lines of "Die Aktualität der Philosophie" is programmatic for his specific understanding of philosophy, rejecting the vision of total knowledge. "Whoever chooses philosophy as a profession today must first reject the illusion that earlier philosophical enterprises began with: that the power of thought is sufficient to grasp the totality of the real. No justifying reason could rediscover itself in a reality whose order suppresses every claim of reason; only polemically does reason present itself to the knower as total reality, while only in traces and ruins is it prepared to hope that it will ever come across correct and just reality".<sup>66</sup>

This negative preconception runs through the whole history of Adorno's thought and he has stated himself that there is a tangible continuity in his thought; from the earliest texts to the last manuscripts there is a clear and obvious focus on the disintegration of rationality.<sup>67</sup> However, there is also another more positive trait running through his whole opus, connected to the first, namely the hope to some more or less 'indefinite redefinition' of a better rationality in the midst of the 'ruins' of totalizing and dysfunctional rationality.

The negative starting point of his figures of thought thus becomes decisive, but not – as some critics has said – nihilistic.<sup>68</sup> Rather, one can say that they reflect one of the most brilliant 'phenomenologies' of the inherent problems of reason which all responsible thinkers had to face before, during the after war. This conclusion (of a non-nihilistic outcome of Adorno's thought) is important for the intended understanding of

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66. Adorno "The Actuality of Philosophy", p 120.

67. Jay Adorno, p 31. The astonishing continuity can, for example, be seen if the quoted introductory passage from "Die Aktualität der Philosophie" is read together with this passage from the newly published fragments of Adorno's planned but unfinished work of Beethoven: "Gesellschaft wird in Beethoven begriffslos erkannt, nicht abgepinselt. (– – –) die Totalität, das Ganze, das den Chemismus seines Werks beherrscht, ist kein Oberbegriff, der Momente schematisch subsumiert, sondern der Inbegriff jener thematischen Arbeit und deren Resultat, das Komponierte, in eins." Adorno *Beethoven* (NS: I.1), pp 74-75.

68. Cf Tar *The Frankfurt School*, p 10.



the third phase of the theory of the Frankfurt School as a fruitful approach also to the problems of the contemporary situation.

The fact that Adorno became a leading member had consequences for the further development of the theory of the Frankfurt School. Adorno's entrance into the inner circle of the Institute meant that Horkheimer turned his attention to him and his enormous working capacity. In Adorno Horkheimer saw a possibility to realise the project which he was dreaming of; a project on dialectical philosophy.<sup>69</sup>

Marcuse had up to this time been the natural partner for Horkheimer in philosophical subjects, but now when Adorno entered into the theoretical work of the Institute he, rather than Marcuse, became the ally of Horkheimer. The idea behind the critique of positivistic science – as we have seen strongly influenced by Adorno – introduced by the articles in the 1937 issue of the *Zeitschrift*, was in the following years of close collaboration with Adorno developed into a more inclusive criticism.<sup>70</sup> The critical theory of the third phase of the Frankfurt School was doubtless a continuation of the arguments from the second phase, but took a form which transcends the arena of science and is extended to total critique of civilised reason as such.

### **Dialectics and Enlightenment (1941-1950)**

In Adorno's view the special branch of popular music is, as it were, a concrete indication of the bad condition of reason in itself, the same holds for Horkheimer's historical survey of rationalism – this is the critical result of their essays, read together. However, to make such a radical and determinate critique intelligible one has (almost with necessity) to assume a constructive counterpart to the critique. That a hope for a better or more sound concept of reason is widely recognised as one of the basic themes of critical theory. The problem is therefore how to establish a coherent relationship between their devastating and almost totalising critique and a constructive approach. This problem is related to a classic difficulty in the discussion of Adorno and Horkheimer which may be called the 'self-reference problem' of their critical theory.<sup>71</sup> As have been concluded above the critique of the particular phenomenon in the framework of total reason is thoroughly dialectic, in a double sense. But how can

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69. See Wiggershaus *The Frankfurt School*, pp

70. See for example Hoy, MacCarthy *Critical Theory* (Blackwell: Oxford/Cambridge Mass. 1994), p 114.

71. Habermas has discussed this in a famous text.

such a dialectical critique ever coincide with the consciousness of a *rational* subject? Is not the critique of reason a dead end, does it not *a priori* exclude reasonable approaches? In the light of the pessimism of the later Horkheimer and the esoteric mazes of the later Adorno this question is surely appropriate but in the context of the former discussion of dialectic between meta-theory and theoretical analysis it need not be held as destructive as some scholars have claimed.

The implication that every total rejection of reason has to pose illegitimately the rationality of its own critical conscience is logically right. To criticise something which is fundamental for the own perspective leads to inconsistency. But what is happening to the inconsistency if the conclusive 'rejection' of reason is closely tied to a prefigured interpretation of the situation? From the dialectical structure between meta-theory and theoretical analysis followed that the totalising aspect of the theory depended on the analysis of the present situation. This means, furthermore, that the total critique of reason, viewed as a consequence of a dialectical relationship between meta-theory and theoretical analysis, is a critique wholly determined by a specific understanding of reason in a specific situation. The presupposition for such a total critique is therefore that it is secondary and that it *has* to cling to results gained from a preceding rational interpretation. Thus, already from the beginning the critique of reason is to be interpreted as a rational construction, not as a logical deduction from some fundamental principles of reason.

The problem of self-reference is therefore not necessarily a logical problem in the context of critical theory. It becomes a logical problem only if the constructive consciousness (on which it relies) is made impossible by the claims of the theory, and this is certainly not the case in Horkheimer's essay. Horkheimer's construction implies that reason in history tends to develop into its opposite. From this, however, does not follow that reason is always the same thing. Within Horkheimer's construction reason's development is discussed as a unity, the argument relies on a constructed ideal-type, but that construction does not exhaust reason *extra rationem*. To say that Horkheimer's argument inevitably leads to an inconsistency and found this argument on the supposition that Horkheimer claims that reason at every stage and in every case has turned into unreason would thus be as wrong as holding that an every-day use of, e.g., the concept 'broken' is flawed unless the thing which is found broken is completely and absolutely useless, or that the use of 'dark' is erroneous if the darkness at hand is not absolutely 'light-free', which is of course not the case. However, it is im-

portant to notice that the dialectical relationships between consciousness of the situation, theoretical analysis and meta-theoretical perspectives is the sole basis for this rejection of the critique of self-reference. Total critique within an undialectical structure cannot be maintained without falling into contradictions. It would exclude both a consistent understanding of the critical discourse in itself and a constructive continuation of its results.

By rejecting the problem of self-reference we have now returned to the point where this section started, namely in the question of how to handle the hope for a constructive approach within the frames of the critical theory of the third phase of the Frankfurt School. As has already been touched upon, several texts only make sense when related to a specific constructive perspective, this holds for Horkheimer as well as in Adorno, even though this is not always obvious to the unacquainted reader. Horkheimer says for example in an essay called "Art and Mass Culture" that the despair of reason is revealed in modern art, "[t]oday art is not communicative".<sup>72</sup>

This means at least two things: firstly it means literally that art is radically problematic in its present form but, secondly, it means that art, viewed as a problematic, merges with the acute problems of the situation in which the artwork was produced. However, from this second interpretation follows that the notion 'problematic art' needs a notion of an unproblematic art to make sense. Provided this the theory may state that the lack of communicative rationality in the artwork reflects the bad conditions of the situation because its own identity as art is confused. As artwork it points ahead of the present conditions towards another rationality. Real art (or good, autonomous art), therefore, depicts the condition of reason by referring to itself as art, which also means that it contains another rationality, different from the condition it depicts – namely its own identity as art.

In this case, the negative and critical notion of art also has positive connotations. If this positive aspect of the critique of art is linked to Adorno's critical analysis of popular music it becomes obvious that the positive connotations are at work even there. However, in Adorno's essay popular music, which according to the concept of good art is flawed, hides rather than shows the decline of reason by its recognisable structures and it is therefore unable to point beyond the present. This does not mean that the critical analysis in Adorno's essay are less constructive, it is precisely as con-

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72. Horkheimer "Art and Mass Culture", p 294.

structive as Horkheimer's, but it uses the notion of rationality, underlying the notion of unproblematic art, as a *critical measure* rather than as *immanent momentum*. This shows once again how the critical analysis of popular music *together* with the meta-theoretical perspective which, in this case, establishes a notion of good art constitutes the critical theory dialectically. The ideal type of good art (analogous with the ideal-type of reason in "The End of Reason") is not a transcendental category but a dialectical construction. To describe the first instance of the dialectical reciprocity in a simplified way one can say that the notion of an unproblematic artwork is only possible to envision *a posteriori*, by reference to an empirical analysis of actual artworks – such analysis is what Adorno is providing by his analysis of popular music.

In terms of critical theory as a whole Horkheimer's notion of problematic art in the last instance is a consequence of the analysis of cultural phenomena, while Adorno's notion of popular music in the last instance is a consequence of the meta-theoretical construction. The negative outcome of the critical analysis (exemplified by Adorno's essay) provides critical theory with implicit guidelines for constructive approaches; and the positive outcome of Horkheimer's notion of art provides the theory with a critical measure. Horkheimer touches upon this dialectical basis in the following reflection: "The despair is (...) revealed outside the field of pure art, in so-called entertainment and the world of 'cultural goods', but this can only be inferred from without, through the means of psychological or sociological theory. The work of art is the only adequate objectification of the individual's deserted state and despair."<sup>73</sup> Thus the dialectical structure of meta-theory and theory can be understood as implying *instantly* both critique and hope. This can, furthermore, be interpreted linked to the relationship between theory and praxis in the third phase of the Frankfurt School. Theory and praxis are in this perspective two sides of a coin; praxis cannot and must not be understood beyond theory and that theory is forced to cling to praxis if it is not to run into inconsistency. When seen as closely related to cultural phenomena such as artworks critical theory contains, at once, both the moments of critical deconstruction and critical reconstruction, even though it does not provide an independent noetic structure for the hope.

After these remarks it is suitable to discuss the most important work from the pen of Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This book, which is the most

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73. Horkheimer "Art and Mass Culture", p 295.

well known of the social-philosophical works of the Frankfurt School, was an immediate continuation of the problems discussed by the earlier essays from the 1941 issue of the *Zeitschrift*. It contains a broad theoretical framework concerning enlightened reason as such, but also more specialised discussions of phenomena such as the culture industry and anti-Semitism. This method of connecting in a non-systematic way more or less self-contained studies to a meta-theoretical framework is a continuation of the interdisciplinary vision from the earlier versions of the theory of the Institute. In *Dialectic* the method can be said to enable the authors to realise their philosophical ambition. "Philosophie ist nicht Synthese, Grundwissenschaft oder Dachwissenschaft, sondern die Anstrengung, der Suggestion zu widerstehen, die Entschlossenheit zur intellektuellen und wirklichen Freiheit."<sup>74</sup> The ambition is to reveal unconscious structures beyond the division of labour between different disciplines. In this sense *Dialectic* is a philosophical work but precisely this makes it multidisciplinary.

To characterise *Dialectic* more precisely is not easy. As its German subtitle says it is to some extent a collection of fragments.<sup>75</sup> The two hypotheses of the meta-theoretical (or critical theoretical) aspects of the work is: "schon der Mythos ist Aufklärung, und: Aufklärung schlägt in Mythologie zurück".<sup>76</sup> The theoretical frame is the history of reason's attempt to break free from the compulsion of nature. In this context Horkheimer and Adorno understands myth, magic and enlightenment as united in being different forms of reason's attempt in gaining freedom from nature and to be able to control it.<sup>77</sup> Enlightenment is viewed as demythologisation but the success of this demythologisation is radically questioned; "die Mythen, die der Aufklärung zum

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74. Max Horkheimer, Theodor W Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente* (GS:3), p 280.

75. The work is a collection of essays on reason and rationality in the late capitalist era. The first essay deals with the concept of enlightenment and draws the contours of the critical theory; it is primarily these forty pages which will be treated here. The next two essays are more particular treatments of the thesis which was developed in the first essay. The fourth part is an essay on mass culture, and the fifth some theses on anti-semitism. The work ends with a collection of fragments which have not been worked into the previous chapters.

76. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p 16, see also pp 25; 28.

77. For a detailed analyses of myth and magic in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* see Stefano Cochetti *Mythos und 'Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Verlag Anton Hain: Meisenheim 1985), and Karl-Heinrich Birzele *Mythos und Aufklärung. Adornos Philosophie gelesen als Mythos – Versuch einer kritischen Rekonstruktion* (diss, Würzburg 1977).

Opfer fallen, waren selbst schon deren eigenes Produkt. In der wissenschaftlichen Kalkulation des Geschehens wird die Rechenschaft annulliert, die der Gedanke in den Mythen einmal vom Geschehen gegeben hatte. Der Mythos wollte berichten, nennen, den Ursprung sagen: damit aber darstellen, festhalten, erklären. Mit der Aufzeichnung und Sammlung der Mythen hat sich das verstärkt. Sie wurden früh aus dem Bericht zur Lehre. (– – –) Der Mythos geht in die Aufklärung über und die Natur in bloße Objektivität”.<sup>78</sup> However, the opposite movement is also inherent in enlightenment. Precisely because power over nature becomes fundamental to enlightenment, it has to fall back into nature, and thus into myth. To be able to complete the detachment from nature the subject needs to gain rational control over nature. This is accomplished by universal and scientifically valid conceptualisation. But already this moment in enlightenment is deeply mythological. ”Die Mythologie selbst hat den endlosen Prozeß der Aufklärung ins Spiel gesetzt, in dem mit unausweichlicher Notwendigkeit immer wieder jede bestimmte theoretische Ansicht der vernichtenden Kritik verfällt, nur ein Glaube zu sein, bis selbst noch die Begriffe des Geistes, der Wahrheit, ja der Aufklärung zum animistischen Zauber geworden sind.”<sup>79</sup>

Rational domination thus becomes a radical problem. The individual cannot be secure of its domination, if not the social totality, i e society, accepts the domination as its form of domination too. In other words the individual needs intersubjective criteria. This implies that the status of individual freedom from the initial coercion of nature is relativised. Subjectivity, with its dream of capability to handle nature by its own standards, seems to evaporate in a new state of coercion, which can be called collective coercion. Thus, subjective reason, as instrumental reason, seems to fall back into crude nature because when the development from nature-slavery and impersonal belonging to nature into domination is fulfilled, the constitutive fragments of freedom are more or less turned into social unfreedom (a second nature slavery).<sup>80</sup>

By introducing the concept *mana* (originally from the history of religions) the authors try to capture the principle behind this flawed logic of enlightenment. *Mana* means basically ”alles Unbekannte, Fremde: das was den Erfahrungsumkreis transzendiert, was an den Dingen mehr ist als ihr vorweg bekanntes Dasein”.<sup>81</sup> As such it is

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78. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, pp 24-25.

79. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, pp 27

80. See e g Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, pp 48; 54; 56.

81. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p, 31.

the ‘other’ in nature, the ‘more’ which is missed by usual conceptualisation and therefore it is also the fearful and forbidden. For Horkheimer and Adorno, *mana* as it was understood in the primitive preanimistic religion, stands for the tabooed, that which is not possible to enter. Thus, in a world in which *mana* is the limit there exists no emergency exits, the world of taboo is a world where nothing radically new can enter.

The decisive point in this is that the authors hold that preanimistic *mana* in the form presented here can be seen as a the model for later differentiation of the living from the lifeless, and more important a differentiation of guarding gods and spiritual beings who occupies the tabooed areas. An from this follows that the logic of this mythical world view can be compared directly with the enlightenment. The mythological ”Götter können die Furcht nicht vom Menschen nehmen, deren versteinerte Laute sie als ihre Namen tragen. Der Furcht wähnt er ledig zu sein, wenn es nicht Unbekanntes mehr gibt. Das bestimmt die Bahn der Entmythologisierung, der Aufklärung, die das Lebendige mit dem Unlebendigen ineinsetzt wie der Mythos das Unlebendige mit dem Lebendigen. Aufklärung ist die radikal gewordene, mythische Angst”.<sup>82</sup> Enlightenment has, so to speak, not abandoned the logic of the taboo, instead it has unconsciously reached for its fundamental implications while it has striven for pure concepts and functional manipulations. After the enlightenment it has become prohibited to go beyond the sphere universal abstractions, to capture nature means to cling to the subjective transformation of it into concepts. Thus the authors can maintain that ”[d]ie reine Immanenz des Positivismus, ihr [enlightenment’s] letztes Produkt, ist nichts anderes als einem gleichsam universales Tabu.”<sup>83</sup>

In the early times *mana* was the limit to the fearful and the completely unbent nature. Today this interpretation of *mana*, by reflection, also may indicate that there is something about nature to reckon with even though reason in its development from preanimism to late capitalism has excluded systematically. Thus *mana*, by being the momentum of the critique, also becomes the negative indication that the present circumstances might become something else. Therefore, in Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s theoretical outline, the only hope for a breaking out of the ‘spell’ which seems to be inherent in enlightened reason has to be related to the critique, in this case to the inner dynamics of *mana*. Critical thought, which has left the belief in the *a priori* of Kant

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82. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p 32.

83. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p 32.

therefore has to consciously to 'lend its voice' to that which is systematically excluded within the present understanding of rationality. Such a line of thought, however, can only be maintained if the critical conception of the problematic situation already is understood to contain a constructive vision. Praxis thus becomes crucial – it comes into the foreground as an opposition against formalising and calculating thought which according to the critical theorists only confirms the present state of mind.

Yet, the authors hold that in a phase where also action most easily becomes an empty and impotent confirmation of the social standards (the taboos, so to say) radical opposition has to be understood in a more complex way. "Umwälzende wahre Praxis aber hängt ab von der Unnabhängigkeit der Theorie gegen die Bewußtlosigkeit, mit der die Gesellschaft das Denken sich verhärtet läßt. (– – –) Sie [der Aufklärung] lernen an der Macht der Dinge, der Macht endlich zu entraten."<sup>84</sup> To establish a freedom from nature thus means to establish a more just situation by theoretical imagination. This means furthermore that Horkheimer and Adorno in a certain sense want to continue to cling to the tradition of enlightenment and especially to the hope of an increasing rationality, but on another level their lines of thought cast radical and fundamental doubt on the ability of reason to realise this vision. In the preface the authors proclaims: "Wir hegen keine Zweifel (...) daß die Freiheit in der Gesellschaft vom aufklärenden Denken unabtrennbar ist."<sup>85</sup> This is an return to enlightened reason which must be corrected by another insight holding that "die Aufklärung muß sich auf sich selbst besinnen, wenn die Menschen nicht vollends verraten sollen. Nicht die Konservierung der Vergangenheit, sondern um die einlösung der vergangenen Hoffnung ist es zu tun".<sup>86</sup> And this may very well cost more than what can be paid, with the consequence that society moves on into a more total darkness.

Even though the radical perspective of *Dialectic* sometimes comes close to the opinion that instrumental rationality has an innate necessity forcing it to decline, this is not the argument. Any such thought can only be applied to the argument in retrospective. This means also that in this context the opposite line of thought – the historicist hope that it is rational to count on a necessary positive evolution if some essential

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84. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, pp 60-61

85. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p 13.

86. Horkheimer, Adorno *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, p 15.



changes are made – is falling outside any frame of fruitful discussion of the *Dialectic*. About twenty years later Adorno writes: "After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifest in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history – the unity of the control of nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is *one* leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb".<sup>87</sup> In other words, there are no concept of necessary evolution, leading from a bad state to a better and no necessary development from a good state to a bad either, but there is at least one example that shows that things might easily turn bad, and thus history has deprived us of our innocence.

As a consequence of the argument in *Dialectic* it is possible to say that the identity of thought in every-day experience which automatically leads people to view the truth about the world as a function of rational conceptualisation of the world is questioned by the fundamental non-identity between concept and the conceptualised, which at least can be imagined through theoretical reflection. However, such theoretical reflection is not to be equated with, or dealt with as a better conceptualisation. Instead can be seen as an advanced theoretical use of concepts for the sake of breaking through the limits of the 'magic circle' (break the taboo). In the context of Horkheimer's and Adorno's criticism, therefore, theory as radical praxis cannot stretch beyond its initial theoretical attempt which was grounded in the negative assumption that there are no fixed systems from which one can deduce practical guidelines. This assumption implies that theory as destructive and reconstructive attempt always has to be criticised and completed and that it has to continue without a discursive presentation of the truth. Theory as a praxis of the non-identical is in that sense nothing more (or nothing less) than critical interpretation of the actual circumstances.

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87. "Die Behauptung eines in der Geschichte sich manifestierenden und sie zusammenfassenden Weltplan zum Besseren wäre nach den Katastrophen und im Angesicht der künftigen zynisch. Nicht aber ist darum die Einheit zu verleugnen, welche die diskontinuierlichen, chaotisch zersplittern Momente und Phasen der Geschichte zusammenschweißt, die von Naturbeherrschung, fortschreitend in die Herrschaft über Menschen und schließlich die über inwendige Natur. Keine Universalgeschichte führt vom Wilden zur Humanität, sehr wohl eine von der Steinschleuder zur Megabombe." Adorno *Negative Dialektik* (GS:6), p 314 (Et p 320; italics in the English text is mine).

Critics, holding that this theory of the third phase of the Frankfurt School is elitist and esoteric, can be questioned as the presented understanding of critical theory outlines it as a *tentative* critical interpretation. It is not claiming for itself a higher insight, but it proposes an advanced dialectical structure for the sake of progressive interpretation of an advanced and utterly complicated cultural situation. It may be hard to follow and hard to accept but it is not incomprehensible. Modern physics is not elitist but its theoretical framework is advanced as a consequence reality's objective physical character. Elitism tends to take the form of sectarianism and Gnosticism while the critical theory of for example *Dialectic* tends to underline the objective difficulties inherent in the task of interpretation of reality and thus abstains from stating what is true and untrue. Lastly, as have already been mentioned, accusations of nostalgia or longing for a lost world are inadequate seen from the presented perspective of critical dialectical interpretation. Critical theory is as such not a longing backwards but a longing for reconciliation – for a state in which the relationship between nature and freedom is not understood by reference to power. Such a state has never 'been there' or cannot be imagined by recalling the past. In *Dialectic* it becomes especially clear that the past functions as explanatory force for the interpretation of the present, and thus the substantial continuity from past to present is the most apparent trait of its argument.

## **Conclusions**

Some years after the war, the Institute was re-established in Frankfurt. The theory was now settled, Adorno and Horkheimer were the two undisputed leaders. In the course of time Horkheimer's productivity declined while Adorno had his most productive days in the fifties and sixties. Therefore, without giving up his influence, in 1955 Horkheimer decided to share his directorship of the Institute with Adorno in a cooperative directorship.

The story of Horkheimer's theoretical development is fascinating; in the sixties and the early seventies it turned into a quite strange and quasi-religious 'longing for the other'. However, the story told in this paper is enough to show how many-sided his approaches were. The development from critical interdisciplinary theory of society into a critical meta-theory of traditional theory meant that an actual and manifold experience of working interdisciplinary with social science was transformed into a severe and relevant critique of the condition of scientific consciousness. The further development of that critical theory into a total critique of reason shows that the inter-

disciplinary vision did, in the end, develop into a explaining framework, with ability to make the outcome of social science meaningful in a more profound sense. But this movement into total critique did also bring with it several conditions, which are not fully obvious from the start. To transform critical perspectives into a critical theory, means that the claims becomes more fundamental. Thus, the critical theory runs the risk of trespassing its own initial conditions, namely its identity as anti-foundational, speculative reflection. This means that an interpretation that aims at reiterating the third phase of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School has to re-establish it as legitimate theoretical approach.