

# **The Politics of the Unspoken in Max Horkheimer**

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# Declarations

## *Declaration for PhD Thesis*

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# Acknowledgments

This thesis would be unthinkable without my previous political experience of being a councillor in a small town in the outskirts of Milan, Italy. The everyday confrontation with prejudices, stereotypes, frustrations and the political impotence of the people living in a place once a flourishing industrial area now a wasteland in a deep irreversible decline; these have been the main sources of inspiration and materials for this research. I have always had a propensity to speak publicly, to denounce what I would call the meanness of power that I discovered more clearly as a councillor. This meanness is constituted in a variety of examples: from the casual corruption of the town council's contract works and public construction projects to the bigger injustice and abuses underlying the economic interests around urban planning; not to speak of the despair of the people who have had nothing more than the support of the council social services to survive. With all the denunciations and the experience gained, I could not end up stifled by the resignation and the anger of few people ruling the town as a world without redemption. In order not to let them win, I came to Goldsmiths in 2016. At that time, I understood that my greatest defeat would have been to stay there and live as a contentless subject in their paranoid world. They knew that I would have never become one of them and I knew that they would have never missed a chance to see me as an unbearable alien reduced to the *enfant terrible* or the village idiot so as to keep me silent. This doctoral research has been written to give voice to what I was experiencing.

I thank Scott Lash for believing that I could pursue and accomplish this doctoral research and for all his support. I thank Andrea Mura for helping me clarify the project and all his support in dealing with many things small and big during these last four years. Thanks also to Juliana Kei for helping me with this particular genre called academic writing. In addition, I need also to thank Mike Featherstone and all the friends of Theory, Culture and Society, which is not only an academic journal but a place of inestimable intellectual debate. Not forgetting too my thanks to friends in London: Ming-Der, Wonjoon, Ji Heyon, Jiechen and Jun.

This thesis is dedicated to my mother Ambra and my brother Gianluca.

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## **Abstract**

Max Horkheimer has a special place in German critical theory. Unlike Adorno and others who lean on Hegelian paradigm, Horkheimer draws upon Schopenhauer's metaphysics. Schopenhauer gives us a critique of representation which Horkheimer understands to be of a piece with instrumental rationality and so a critique of capitalism. This thesis argues that Horkheimer's use of critique of representation is a break with Kantian First Critique notions of time, space and causation. It presents a deep linguistic reading of such a critique of representation and its categories as predicational or propositional language. From the standpoint of this linguistic reading, the study explores a Horkheimer-inspired politics based on the Kantian conception of hope and the Judaic prohibition of the image of God. This notion of hope is for Horkheimer conceived as a longing for the totally other. We explore these thematic as a philosophy of political practice to conclude with a theoretical framework for a politics of emancipation inspired by Horkheimer's thought.

## Notes on references and abbreviations

I have divided the bibliography into two parts: works by Max Horkheimer and the secondary literature. The majority of Horkheimer's texts are not translated into English. The main source for Max Horkheimer's works is the German collection of his writings *Gesammelte Schriften*. These are published in 19 volumes and edited by Alfred Schmidt and Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1985). Where the English translation is available, I refer directly to the English text. The following abbreviations are used in the references and bibliography when I quote texts which are available in the existing collections:

GS: *Gesammelte Schriften*

BPSS: Horkheimer, M. (1993), *Between Philosophy and Social Science. Selected Early Writings*. Cambridge (MA): The MIT Press

CIR: Horkheimer, M. (1974b), *Critique of Instrumental Reason*. New York: Seabury

CT: Horkheimer, M. (1972), *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*. New York: Seabury

CTS: Bronner, S.E. & MacKay Kellner, D. (eds.) (1989), *Critical Theory and Society. A Reader*. London: Routledge

D&D: Horkheimer, M. (1978), *Dawn & Decline. Notes 1925-1931 and 1950-1969*. New York: The Seabury Press

DE: Horkheimer, M. & Adorno, T. (1997), *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso

EFSR: Arato, A. & Gebhardt, E. (eds.) (1978), *The Essential Frankfurt Reader School Reader*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell

ER: Horkheimer, M. (1974c), *Eclipse of Reason*. New York: The Seabury Press

TNM: Horkheimer, M & Adorno, T. (2019), *Towards a New Manifesto*. London: Verso

Whenever I quote a text from GS, I will refer directly to the volume and the page. If I do not specify the title of the text to which I refer directly, then I will note the year in a footnote and put the title in brackets [] ascribed to works by the editors of

GS. For example, (GS7: 363)<sup>1</sup>. In the bibliography of works by Horkheimer, I will refer to the date and the title of the German texts in the GS, and to the English translation where available. When the original German text is the only version available, then I will translate directly in the text. The acronym *tba* means *translated by the author*.

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<sup>1</sup>[1970, *Die Verwaltungte Welt*]

# Introduction

## 0.1 Research statement, contribution to knowledge and purpose

The thesis is a study of the critical theory of Max Horkheimer (1895-1973). In reviewing the literature on Horkheimer, I have found that most scholars have viewed Horkheimer's writings as quite problematic after the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1944, written with Theodor Adorno<sup>2</sup>. The main point made by the critics of these writings is that critical theory fades away in favour of a critique of instrumental reason. Indeed, during the 1950s, Horkheimer published a series of essays in the books *Eclipse of Reason* and *Critique of Instrumental Reason* in which he discusses the difficulty of critical thought to overcome the instrumental reason that he sees informing the structure of advanced capitalism.

In the view of the critics, Horkheimer's pessimistic and hyperbolic observations about the overwhelming instrumentality of thought in the structure of capitalism influence in the first place the style of his late writings (from mid-1950s until his death), which becomes more fragmentary and hermetic. In the second place, critics highlight his departure from the Marxist materialism in favour of a positive re-evaluations of the Judaic theology and the metaphysical thought of Schopenhauer. As Pascal Eitler (2008) reconstructed his book, emblematically entitled 'God is Dead, God is Red', there was an animated debate between the late 1960s and early 1970s about how it has been possible that Horkheimer, the founder of German critical theory, has turned out to be conservative.

In my view, the debate has left a sort of conservative-religious halo on the figure of Horkheimer as a scholar, especially concerning his late thought. As I will outline, it is possible to divide the existing literature on his late thought in two mains streams of criticism. The first stream considers Horkheimer's turn to theology and metaphysics as the end of his ability to investigate social relationships in a consistent materialist way. The second stream takes Horkheimer's investigations in theology and metaphysics as a contribution from whose standpoint it is possible to revive some dogmatic trends in religion.

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter 2 for literature review.

The contribution of this thesis to the study of Horkheimer's critical theory consists in removing his late thought from these two partisan factions. Taking the lead from Alfred Schmidt's argument that Horkheimer's thought is a consistent intersection between Marx's materialism and Schopenhauer's metaphysics, I will show that the interest of Horkheimer in Schopenhauer and Judaic theology is not a turn towards conservatism or religion.

I will instead argue that Horkheimer's late thought entails a reflection upon modes of experience which can help critical thought to give an impulse to a political practice able to overcome the instrumental logic of advanced capitalism. From this perspective, I will unpack the political-philosophical side of his late thought to show how Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason presents an idea of political emancipation in terms of a cultural change rather than a change in political sovereignty. I will then argue that this idea of emancipation underlies Horkheimer's late thought but remains unspoken in philosophical and political terms. I will suggest that it is his mystical-religious notion of 'the longing for the totally other' which gives expression to a wish for an emancipation involving a cultural change and not only political practices.

The overall purpose of this thesis is to investigate Horkheimer's work to think a speculative politics of emancipation without demanding an answer to the question of what we should do after the constituted order of power has been overthrown. As I will outline in my argument, Horkheimer suggests that it is the positive imagination about what we should do in the future that seems to block in the present the possibility of a liberation from oppression, or at least the possibility to reduce it.

The hypothesis here is that in Horkheimer's thought we find an idea of human emancipation which shows the condition of powerlessness of human beings as the motivation to avoid relapsing into a new order of power once the old one has been deposed. This hypothesis will be developed through these two research questions: What philosophical and theological notions does Horkheimer employ to frame his longing for a human emancipation? How can they be politically framed in antagonism with fascist culture and advanced capitalism?

In the next section 0.2 of this introduction, I will clarify the hypothesis by showing that Horkheimer sees the linguistic and philosophical use of negation in propositional language as a designated mode for a critique of injustice which may

lead to a human emancipation from power. In the light of Horkheimer's use of negation, I will outline why I call his idea of emancipation a politics of the unspoken. In the following the two next sections - 0.3 and 0.4 - then, I will then expand the two research questions by highlighting how Horkheimer employs the philosophical notions of hope in Kant and of will in Schopenhauer together with the Judaic ban of image as cultural resources for a critique of instrumental reason. Let us begin by outlining why I start from the hypothesis that Horkheimer's thought entails an idea of emancipation.

Horkheimer developed the notion of critical theory in the early 1930s to provide a theoretical framework for an immanent critique of society. Here immanent critique means a combination of theoretical modes able to bring to light contradictions in social life in order to illuminate the possibility of emancipatory social practices<sup>3</sup>. The purpose of this immanent critique is to support the abolition of social injustices and oppression caused by the constituted power dynamics in social-historical circumstances. Horkheimer's critical theory uses this immanent critique of society to highlight how conceptual representations of society can justify ideologically the preservation of the existent dynamics of power in social relationships. In sum, the task of critical theory is to make social life human; in Horkheimer's words, to achieve 'the rational state of society' (CT: 216)<sup>4</sup>. As I will argue throughout the thesis, the term 'rational' is not clearly defined in Horkheimer's thought but remains connected to a negative idea of the human. In my view, the term 'rational' points to a possibility in which human beings may actualise a social life by reducing violence and power relationships.

However, by the late 1930s with the rise to power of National Socialism in Germany and the beginning of the Second World War, Horkheimer had changed his view on how critical theory would accomplish its task. In the 1920s and 1930s, Horkheimer's critical theory presented the hope that a non-oppressive society might be established in Germany. During the years of the Second World War and after, Horkheimer urged a reconfiguration of the thought of how the task of critical theory can be accomplished. Horkheimer reached the conviction that a theory serving to unmask the dynamics of power existing in the representations of society would not be effective enough to open a pathway to a social life devoid of oppression. In his

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<sup>3</sup> For an analysis of the role of immanent critique, see Antonio (1981).

<sup>4</sup> [1937, *Traditional and Critical Theory*]

view, the abolition of injustices and oppression in the post-war Western countries might be achieved by deactivating fascist culture and instrumental thought.

Although Horkheimer changed his view about how critical theory can accomplish its task, his aim remains the same: to make society more human, less unjust and less oppressive. From this perspective, what kind of emancipation does Horkheimer's critical theory entail? I take Horkheimer's thought of emancipation to entail the possibility of cultural change. The aim of this cultural change would be to avoid the implementation of the power dynamics generating social relationships which are based only on the will to dominate. In Horkheimer's view, language is the field where this cultural change takes place. In a 1956 discussion with Adorno about the role of theory and practice in relationship to the idea of humanity, Horkheimer makes this point clear in cultural and political terms:

Our question is, in whose interest do we write, now that there is no longer a party and the revolution has become such an unlikely prospect? My answer would be that we should measure everything against the idea that all should be well. We shall probably be unable to do anything else. It is all tied up with language. Everything intellectual [*geistig*] is connected to language. It is in language that the idea that all should be well can be articulated (TNM: 33,34)<sup>5</sup>.

In my view, the question posed at the beginning of the above citation provides us a hook to think speculatively about the possibility of language expressing a longing for injustice and oppression to be abolished. As we shall see, Horkheimer conceives of a language able to express such a longing as one presenting the possibility that language itself may not be wholly entrenched with the implementation of power. Horkheimer does not provide a clear and precise definition of language (*Sprache*). Nonetheless, when he thinks about the relationship between language and power, he mostly refers implicitly to propositional language. Propositional language is one articulated in sentences containing at least a subject and a predicate on the grammatical level and a statement on logical level.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [1956, *Diskussion über Theorie und Praxis*]

<sup>6</sup> See the 1936 lecture *Die Funktion der Rede in der Neuzeit* (GS12), the notes 1953-1955 *Sprache und Macht* (GS14), 1953-1955 *Das Ende des Sprechens* (GS6), 1967 *Die Sprache wechselt ihre Funktion* (GS14). For the purpose of the thesis, sentence is defined from a grammatical perspective as the largest unit of syntactical structure and contains at least a clause made by subject and predicate (Ballard 2013: 146). Instead, statement is understood from a logical point of view as sentence made by at least one clause with the structure subject, verb and an optional verb complementation (Ballard 2013: 146). The use of statement and proposition is then considered interchangeable as they deal with sentences made by subject, predicate and verb complementation. See the term proposition in Crystal's *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2008).

I will hence argue in this thesis that Horkheimer's critical theory entails an idea of human emancipation that emerges in his work where he attempts to entangle a philosophical critique of propositional language with a political critique of injustice. In doing so, I will take Horkheimer's '*Schopenhauerian Marxism*' - the peculiar intersection between the negative metaphysics of Schopenhauer and the historical materialism of Marx in his thought - to generate such an idea of human emancipation<sup>7</sup>. By underpinning this idea of human emancipation in Horkheimer's critical theory, this thesis questions whether the possibility of a language without violence entails the creation of a non-fascist culture. In doing so, I will demonstrate that Horkheimer lays a theoretical pathway to human emancipation able to deactivate the logic of power in the social life of human beings.

## **0.2 Human emancipation as a politics of the unspoken**

As I mentioned at the beginning of the last section, Horkheimer proposes a pathway to a politics of emancipation able to depose the constituted order of power without establishing a new order in its place. But how should this deposition of power take place? The answer can be formulated as follows: critical theory should show that language may not be a tool of power. In effect, critical theory should show how the systematisation of violence in propositional language becomes a vehicle to establish a logic of power.

As we will discuss, the idea of emancipation cannot be thought of as an act of violent liberation if it serves in the last place to abolish injustice by deactivating the systematisation of violence in propositional language. It cannot constitute a revolution in such a place because a violent act of liberation might overthrow the constituted order, but it will not give the certainty that the logic of power itself will be deposed. A newly constituted order of power might arise at the end of the old order. To move away from this paradox, Horkheimer helps us to think of an emancipation as the possibility that human beings recognise the transience of their socially constructed identities. In doing so, human beings may become conscious that propositional language has no intrinsic power to affirm their represented reality as the true reality. Instead, the relationships between logical truth and the representation of reality in the propositions of language is itself the product of the

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<sup>7</sup> *Schopenhauermarxismus* is the German term to be ascribed to Wiggerhaus (Ruggeri 2015:93)

power dynamics of flesh-and-blood human beings in certain social-historical circumstances.

In my view, what is particularly interesting in Horkheimer's thought is the idea that the deactivation of the logic of power in social life is linked to a deactivation the relations of power residing in language. From this perspective, the notion of emancipation is here conceived as human emancipation. The adjective *human* refers in a negative sense to the possibility of emancipation being achieved through a non-violent deposition of logic of power.

But to highlight philosophically this negative sense of the notion of the human, we need to submit to critique how human beings use concepts to make intelligible the cultural forms which legitimise power relationships (e.g. law, nation, family, government). Horkheimer finds this form of critique in the possibility that human beings can use negation when speaking through propositions (ER: 182). In short, human beings can say *not* and this negation will open a series of possibilities which affirmative propositions otherwise will stifle and exclude.

Let us introduce briefly how affirmative propositions may work in this direction.

On the one hand, affirmative propositions exclude a series of possibility by framing meanings within propositions through nouns and predicates asserting something. Affirmation appears here as the logical contradiction of negation. On the other hand, when the content of the affirmation makes a claim to a definitive truth corresponding to a representation of social reality, then affirmative propositions stifle a new series of possibilities. It is in this sense that affirmation is the expression of an act of violence that breaks the logical dialectic of contradictions and imposes a truth through its irrational, extra-linguistic dimension of violence. What then is the role of negation in opening possibilities which affirmation otherwise stifles and excludes? Horkheimer's critical theory displays negation in a twofold sense.

Critical theory unmasks power relationships in theoretical concepts by highlighting the cleavages between theoretical concepts and the concrete social practices to which they refer. This mode of negation is determined by the conceptual representation which negation then puts in question. Negation is thus dialectically conceived as a term of contradiction, the dialectical opposite of affirmation. As I will discuss, this dialectically conceived negation echoes Hegel's idea of determinate negation, which refers to the idea that thinking can show the contradiction of the determinate content of an abstract concept, and so to open the

possibility of a new concept enriched in content<sup>8</sup>. In this Hegelian view, negation as a determined term of a contradiction does not end in nullity.

There is another mode by which critical theory employs negation. Indeed, the unmasking of power relationships in theoretical concepts shows that propositional language can be a means to achieve domination over other human beings. But what does domination mean here? Domination is a social practice marked by human beings' pursuit of power where power is exerted by making other human beings do what they want.

It occurs when the exertion of power is no longer based on a contingent act of violence but is structured in cultural forms of life (e.g. the state, family, nation or labour), which stabilise the violence existing in power relations<sup>9</sup>. Violence is hence systematised in power logics based on the social practice of domination. This systematisation of violence makes some cultural forms of life appear as immutable reality. In their pursuit of power, human beings subsequently reduce language to an instrument able to preserve the logic of power based on social practices of domination. Propositions and concepts then become the vehicles to represent the cultural forms of life.

In the light of this notion of domination, the rationale behind negating propositions and concepts is to illuminate the violence which has initially systematised them within a logic of power. Here, negation does not only show a term of a logical contradiction. It points to the possibility that there is an irrational extra-linguistic dimension that lies within this contradiction. When propositional language is reduced to a tool useful for human being's will to dominate over other human beings and nature, it entails the irrational dimension of the initial violence, which human beings have structured in cultural forms of life. The question then becomes: where can we find the irrational dimension of this violence in propositional language?

The answer is that this irrational dimension appears as the violent censorship that human beings carry out intellectually when they claim the truth of what reality is

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<sup>8</sup> See Hegel (1969) *Science of Logic*, Section § 62 in *Introduction. General Notion of Logic*.

<sup>9</sup> Here a contingent act of violence can be better understood as brute force, impetuous violence - in German *rohe Gewalt* and *Heftigkeit*. This contingent act of violence does not give origin to a structure of power. The systematisation of violence to which I refer here echoes an idea of violence that, in the first place, structures an order and works to preserve it. Horkheimer understands this violence more as *Gewalt* rather than *Kraft* (force), *Heftigkeit* (impetuous violence) or *rohe Gewalt* (brutal force). See the 1958 note entitled *Gewalt* (GS14) and the 1942 note *Kampf und Gewaltlosigkeit* (GS12).

by pointing to the immutability of that reality<sup>10</sup>. With violence, this censorship consists in equalising the content of a proposition violently to the representation of an immutable reality. In this case, the irrational dimension of the violent censorship is manifested here as a despairing reaction to the inability of human beings to cope with the fear that they may not have power over their lives. Here, this irrational dimension is problematised as the fear to die. The reduction of language to a tool for power testifies to the way of life of human beings who are afraid of not being the sovereign over their lives and who worry about this lack of sovereignty. Their refusal to die finds concretisation in their pursuit of power; that is, in gaining control and command over their own existence and the existence of others.

However, to denounce this censorship as a violence, critical theory requires a mode of negation that is not limited to the dialectic of contradictions. Negation should lay bare the irrational dimension of human beings' pursuit of power. In a more political sense, the pursuit of power finds expression in human being's construction of practical programmes of social life whose aim is to master with violence what threatens their life. The negation that lays bare the irrationality of human beings' pursuit of power is an uncompromised critique of any practical programme. As I will discuss, this type of negation can be found in Horkheimer's late work and echoes Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the blind will to live.

What then is the relationship between human beings' refusal to die and the power of language? The answer is that human beings use language to make permanent what are otherwise the transient conceptual representations of their social life. In this way, all the violence required for them to gain power over death is systematised in propositional language. Here we can unpack the idea of emancipation underpinning Horkheimer's thought as the idea that, once liberated from the fear of death, human beings might show a genuine solidarity devoid of logic of power. This feeling of solidarity may arise if human beings become conscious that death is not the end to which they should uniquely measure the meaning of their life. They shall become conscious also that a contingent state of fear and the recollection of fear in memory trap human existence in a despairing pursuit of power. To reach this consciousness, human beings need to experience the contradictions between theoretical representations of reality and their concrete social life.

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<sup>10</sup> Examples from everyday language are 'So it was in the past and it is still today' or 'It is what it is'.

In my view, the notion of emancipation emerging from this consciousness is primarily human rather than strictly political. It refers to an emancipation from the following three processes that inform the systematisation of violence in language as a logic of power: firstly, emancipation from idealising death as the final destiny of life; secondly, from considering the pursuit of power as a mode of making such a destiny meaningful; and thirdly, from exerting domination over other human beings and nature as the way of putting into practice the pursuit of power.

If the logic of power can be described through these three processes, then, an idea of emancipation from these processes of domination might be described as a politics of the unspoken. This politics would then be one that brings to light what the logic of power attempts to exclude and stifle: the possibility of non-conformity to power, and so a language devoid of violence and a culture devoid of domination.

Two arguments are given here to elaborate the notion of the unspoken. Propositions have a dimension of indeterminacy derived from the transience of human beings' experience and the particular social-historical circumstances in which the flesh and blood human beings live. In the second place, the possibility of negation in propositional language entails those propositions may not be commensurate to a logic of power. Following this notion of the unspoken, the main argument of this thesis is the following: when violence is systematised in propositional language, then propositional language may then be taken to be a tool of power because such a systematised violence makes reality appear as already given and immutable. It is then the task of a politics of the unspoken to deactivate this systematisation of violence. This deactivation constitutes, on the one hand, a mode of emancipation from the social and historical conditions determining the systematisation of violence in propositional language. On the other hand, this notion of deactivation highlights that the systematisation of violence emerges precisely as the despairing reaction of human beings to their inability of establishing their total dominion over reality.

### **0.3 The unspoken: the longing for a non-fascist culture**

After having briefly introduced the main argument, we might now enquire how precisely Horkheimer's thought suggests a politics of emancipation within a politics of the unspoken.

This idea of a human emancipation as a cultural change emerges in Horkheimer's writing of the 1940s. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno read Western thought in terms of the dialectical tension between emancipation and domination, starting from a philosophical interrogation which, in their view, becomes very urgent during the period of the Second World War. This interrogation resides in the following question: If, as they assume, the task of Enlightenment (i.e. the progressive thought) is to liberate human beings from fear and to disenchant the world, how is it possible that blind domination has won over such emancipatory potential?

As Horkheimer and Adorno explain, the object of this philosophical interrogation was 'the discovery why mankind, instead of entering a truly human condition is sinking into a new kind of barbarism' (DE: XI). In philosophical terms, they emphasised that a critique, which is imprisoned within instrumental thought and the social practice of domination, needs to interrogate its own theoretical premises. The philosophical impasse of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* hence lies in interrogating the theoretical premises of critique through the philosophical-dialectical tools which critique gainfully employs. This is the impasse faced by Horkheimer in his intellectual development after the Second World War.

Thereafter, critical theory adopted a critique of instrumental reason as a critical mode of denouncing the injustices of domination and oppression but failed to propose any political alternative to the state of oppression. The political change that Horkheimer had in mind in the mid-1940s was the possibility of fostering the emancipatory potential of what, in the foreword to *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, he calls 'the cultural gains of the bourgeois era - the free development of human power, a spiritual productivity - but stripped now of all elements of force and exploitation' (CIR: IX).

The political change he wished for was cultural. This cultural change implied the deactivation of the logic of power within the cultural forms of life inherited from the bourgeois tradition of governing society. For Horkheimer, the political aspect of this change was still identifiable in the possibility that reforms and revolutions in Western countries would bring about what he called 'the beginning of an authentically human history'; that is to say, the possibility of a social life oriented towards the reduction and the removal of injustices and oppression (CIR: IX).

However, the level of technological progress of post-war Western societies, the authoritarianism of Soviet Union, the Cold War and the exhausting social pressure placed by advanced capitalist society on the social life of individuals are, for Horkheimer, all evidence of the dangers of a revolution. Within the historical social context of the 1950s and 1960s, the actualisation of a revolution threatened to increase oppression and suffering rather than removing them. Hence, from the 1950s onwards, we see a radicalisation of Horkheimer's thought towards the idea that the denunciation of injustice and oppression through the means of theory is already a sign of the possibility of reducing them in practice.

The upshot is that Horkheimer does not take his immanent critique of society to be enough and seeks a cultural change which could mobilise the irrational dimension of human social life. In seeking this cultural change, Horkheimer does not discard the possibility of removing from the life of society the pressure exerted by the pursuit of power. As he states in *Eclipse of Reason* in 1952, 'the emancipation of the individual is not an emancipation from society but the deliverance of society from atomization, an atomization that may reach its peak in periods of collectivisation and mass culture' (ER: 135). Here, Horkheimer frames the notion of emancipation as the possibility of a cultural change that makes the social life of the individual more human and less atomised; that is, less ruled by a logic of power able to reduce the individual to a meaningless object of domination.

Subsequently, Horkheimer expresses a longing for a political change in post-War Western countries as the possibility of a cultural change where language and culture deactivate the logic of power. Horkheimer represents this longing in his notion of 'longing for the totally other [*Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*]', a phrase that appears frequently in interviews and texts of the 1960s. In my view, the notion of the unspoken, as I described it in the last section, may be found in Horkheimer's conception of the longing for the totally other.

By analysing how Horkheimer formulates this notion, we can understand why his thought entails the longing for a human emancipation. Here, the term *human* connotes both the liberation from an order that subjugates some human beings to others, and the emergence of a solidarity among human beings that refuses domination and the pursuit of power as a way of life. How then can we think about this human emancipation in political terms?

The answer is that politics is a human activity fully integrated and entangled with social life. Yet politics involves a series of actions -including the act of speaking- that may systematise the social life of individuals within an order of power, such as that of modern nation-states and their juridical systems, or indeed in social institutions ranging from business corporations to family units.

In the context of post-war Western countries, Horkheimer understands that a politics meant to be called *human* requires that the organisation of life in social structures should serve to reduce sufferings rather than to seek an unceasing domination over human life. A human politics consists in what Horkheimer called 'a negative politics' where the term 'negative' refers to a politics engaged in denouncing and abolishing injustice instead of imagining what a good society should be and then preparing practical plans to implement such an idea of good society (GS6: 260)<sup>11</sup>.

Therefore, the notion of human emancipation in this thesis should be understood as a deposition of the social practices of domination which render human relationships instrumental to the pursuit of power. As I will discuss in Chapter 5, a longing for human emancipation emerges in the texts in which Horkheimer describes fascist culture as a bourgeois culture that destroys any possibility of a life freed from power relations. In Horkheimer's view, fascist culture is fully immersed in the pursuit of ruining those human beings who do not conform to the existing logic of power. Here, the political contention of Horkheimer against fascism is displayed on a cultural level. In Horkheimer's view, the theoretical mark of fascist culture is to leave aside any emancipatory goal, to strengthen the will to power in social relationships and to implement cultural forms of life based on relationships of domination. Keeping this notion of fascism in mind, examples of a non-fascist culture as the deactivation of the logic of power then emerge in Horkheimer's texts concerning the life of Jews in capitalist society, the incidence of anti-Semitism in bourgeois ideology and the analysis of the social and psychological mechanism of bourgeois form of life.

To give more details of Horkheimer's investigation into a non-fascist culture capable of deactivating any logics of power, we can cite a brief passage from the fragment entitled *Elements of Antisemitism* in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic*

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<sup>11</sup> [1956-1958, *Negative Politik*]

*of Enlightenment*. I regard the following quoted text as illuminating in terms of presenting the theoretical connection between a non-fascist culture and the deactivation of the logic of power:

No matter what the Jews as such may be like, their image, as that of the defeated people, has the features to which totalitarian domination must be completely hostile: happiness without power, wages without work, a home without frontiers, religion without myth [...] If thought is liberated from domination and if violence is abolished, the long absent idea is liable to develop that Jews too are human beings. This development would represent the step out of an anti-Semitic society, which drives Jews and other to madness, and into the human society (DE: 199).

The aspirations contained in these theoretical claims - e.g. happiness without power, wages without work etc.- provided an imaginary trajectory to a non-fascist culture. The possibility of a non-fascist culture is here manifested in the negative role of the preposition '*without*'. This preposition has the function of expressing a deactivation of the logic of power in reference to the initial concepts of each phrase (happiness, wage, a home and religion). The adjective 'human' in the above citation helps to retain the negation of power and transposes it on political level. Indeed, the way in which a society can be called *human* is in Horkheimer's view determined by the liberation of thought from domination and violence.

I would therefore suggest that, to provide a theoretical framework to Horkheimer's longing for a human emancipation, it is necessary to highlight the way in which for Horkheimer a human society may be achievable. The theoretical framework is the following: a critique of propositional language has been joined to a critique of injustice in the form of the deactivation of the systematisation of violence within language. The upshot of this combined critique would be the possibility for critical theory to think of a negative politics as a network of human relationships devoid of domination and relations of power. I would thus highlight a notion of the *human* that remains incommensurate the logic of power and so emerges as the possibility of a non-fascist culture.

#### **0.4 The philosophical pathway to the politics of the unspoken**

Horkheimer displays this longing of human emancipation in the texts of 1950s and 1960s where he establishes significant philosophical connections between Kant's notion of hope, Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will and the Judaic prohibition of any graven image of God. The analysis of those texts is vital to understand the

political-philosophical project of his late thought, which Horkheimer left incomplete. In my view, his late thought shows indeed Horkheimer's intellectual effort to combine theoretically the Kantian-Schopenhauerian division between the world as representation (phenomena) and the world as it is in itself (noumena) with the dialectical apparatus of Hegel's and Marx's philosophy - specifically, the notion of negation (Hegel) and that of practice (Marx). The kernel of this complicated combination of systems of thought lies in Horkheimer's manner of informing both his notions of longing for the totally other and of theology. Our task will be to unpack how these concepts overlap each other.

As I will discuss, this overlapping can be traced back to Horkheimer's critique of Fascist authoritarian states and the conformism of post-war societies that he calls *administered world*. From this critique, he concludes that thinking of a positive image of society leads to the formation of a social collective that perpetrates the ruin of those who do not conform to it. To think rationally about an idea of a good society is for Horkheimer possible only as a denunciation of injustice where theory should bring to light the practices of domination and oppression causing injustice. But who should carry out this denunciation of injustice?

Horkheimer does not point, in Marxian fashion, to an historical subject able to subvert the existing social conditions. In his view, capitalism in the Fascist regimes of 1930s and in the post-war Western European countries of 1950s reduce the conditions of human beings to amorphous objects of domination. Here, no human being appears to be spared from the totalitarian domination of human life by advanced capitalism. Horkheimer then turns to theology to frame the possibility of a critique of the existent order on a level that conceives negation more as a matter of faith than reason. What is the role of theology in critical theory?

Here we might answer that Horkheimer seeks a negative theology to give something of a normative foundation to a rational theory of society. As he states in the 1970 interview *Was wir Sinn nennen, wird verschwinden*, 'What moves me is the theological idea applied to a rational theory of society [...] for me this idea is that God cannot be representable' (GS7: 352)<sup>12</sup>. Horkheimer frames theology here in the Judaic immanent tradition of the unrepresentability of the image of God. To transform this negative theology into an idea for a rational theory of society,

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<sup>12</sup> [1970, *Was wir Sinn nennen, wird verschwinden*]

Horkheimer seeks a parallelism between the unrepresentability of the image of the Judaic God and Kant's and Schopenhauer's philosophy.

To define this negative theology in philosophical terms, Horkheimer then leans on Kant's and Schopenhauer's philosophical assertions that our reality is representation, which means that human experience of reality can only involve the realm of phenomena because human beings cannot know reality in itself.

Horkheimer proposes to transfer this Kantian and Schopenhauer's teaching about the limit of human knowledge here into a theological realm in order to provide rational-philosophical meaning to his longing for human emancipation. He clarifies this philosophical move in a 1970 statement where he asserts that 'Theology is the awareness that the world is only representation, it is not absolute truth, the last' (GS7: 389)<sup>13</sup>. As we have noted, the use of the term 'theology' recalls an idea of faith, so by defining theology as the awareness that the world is representation, Horkheimer takes the philosophical teaching of the world as representation similarly as an matter of faith. However, rather than the content of a religious commandment, this philosophical teaching becomes the expression of a longing for an emancipation from injustice. As he recalls in the same interview, 'theology as an expression of a longing: a longing for this, that the murder might not triumph over the innocent victim' (GS7: 389)<sup>14</sup>. Where these notions of theology and longing for the totally other overlap, Horkheimer strives to combine a critique of propositional language with a critique of injustice.

The result of this combined critique is the following: since human beings can only know reality as representation and not in itself, then the injustice derived from claims of absolute knowledge about reality should be challenged.

Horkheimer's intellectual move seems to lean on the religious dimension of Judaism as a means of locating a non-logical cultural resource of negation. This non-logical dimension of negation is then employed as theoretical motivation for the critical theorist to pursue his project of abolishing injustice without determining the good.

The double definition of theology as the consciousness that the world is representation and as the expression of a longing for the removal of injustice gives Horkheimer the possibility of considering the negative thought of Schopenhauer's

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<sup>13</sup> [1970, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*]

<sup>14</sup> [1970, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*]

*World as Will and Representation* as an ally of his critical theory. Horkheimer then uses Schopenhauer's negative thought as a theoretical mode of resistance against the authoritarian thought of fascist culture and the instrumental reason of advanced capitalism. But why does Horkheimer turn to Schopenhauer to seek a mode of critique able to deny the possibility of an absolute knowledge of reality and the systematisation of violence in concepts?

Although there is no final and univocal response to this question, I will advance the following conclusion. The dialectical thought that characterises Hegel's philosophy of history and Marx's idea of history of class struggle is enclosed in a concept of history that finds in its dialectical development the sublation of its own contradictions. For Hegel, this sublation works as a re-composition of the contradictions that reconcile the particularity of German social large-scale interests (*Stände*) with the general ethical substance of the State. For Marx, this sublation is instead a moment of revolutionary change that will move class struggle towards the actualisation of a classless society (the 'realm of freedom', as Marx calls it).

We might then pose the three following questions. Firstly, how is critical theory able to lean on such a dialectical thought to locate a moment of negation? Then, how can it do so when totalitarian states and the development of post-War advanced capitalism have shown that the moment of negation in social-historical development cannot be identified with a single social class or with the reconciliation of large-scale interests in the social whole? Finally, how can we be sure that the moment of negation in social-historical development leads to human emancipation from the logic of power and not to the barbarism of the concentration camps and fascist violence?

In my view, Horkheimer finds in Schopenhauer's notion of the will a type of negation that is not framed logically as a contradiction of an affirmation. Instead, Schopenhauer's concept of the will opens a dimension of irrationality and unconsciousness that seems incommensurate to any logical scheme. Then, with the help of Schopenhauer's philosophy, Horkheimer breaks the teleological horizon implicit in the dialectically conceived movement of history. Nonetheless, he does not reject an idea of negation that continues to make possible a human identification and solidarity. On the basis of the Judaic theological teaching of the unrepresentability of God's name, Horkheimer allots a clear task to the irrational dimension derived from Schopenhauer's notion of the will; namely, that human

beings can improve the existing social order by defeating injustice without implementing in practice an idea of a good society.

The upshot of this thought process is that *Schopenhauer's metaphysics plus Judaic negative theology* can serve as a framework for a negative idea of identification, where 'negative' means incommensurate to logic of power and expresses the longing for an end of domination. In a note from the early 1950s, Horkheimer gives a perfect sense of this idea of the negative by framing negation as a type of character, 'What do the negative, the negativist spirits [*Geister*] want? The negativist spirits who only see and say what dread is, what should not be, the spirits who shy away from calling the name of God, what do they want? [They want] to make the good' (GS6: 240)<sup>15</sup>.

In this sense, Horkheimer first looks at Schopenhauer's teaching that the world as representation is a manifestation of the will. He then combines this principle with the Judaic prohibition against any graven image of God in order to stage both a critique of propositional language and a critique of injustice. Firstly, his critique of propositional language demonstrates that language has no intrinsic power to determine reality. Language becomes useful as a tool to implement an order of power when the intervention of human violence makes the content of propositions valid in practice. Secondly, his critique of injustice challenges the idea that injustices can only be defeated with the positive image of a good society because the Judaic teaching of the unrepresentability of God's name shows that a reduction of suffering and oppression is possible only by denouncing the injustices causing them.

From this conclusion, we can deduce that the project of Horkheimer's late critical theory is a pursuit of a political emancipation only in terms of human emancipation. Instead of being a moment in an historical trajectory, human emancipation is the possibility that once the logic of power is deposed, a non-violent culture could be widespread in social life. But the hesitation in providing once for all a positive image of a non-violent culture indicates that human emancipation can only be actualised as a politics of the unspoken. The polemical target of this thesis is hence the idea that to close the concept of the human in a final definition gives rise only to a road to thralldom, rather than a road to a freedom from the logic of power.

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<sup>15</sup> [1953-1955, *Die Negativen*]

## 0.5 Methodology

This research presents a series of reflections upon Horkheimer's critical theory that can help us think of an idea of human emancipation. The hypothesis presented is that this idea of human emancipation is a subterranean *fil rouge* that traverses Horkheimer's thought and becomes manifest in the notion of the longing for the totally other. As the wish for human emancipation, this notion of longing entails Horkheimer's interest for Schopenhauer's philosophy and Judaic theology. How should we set out to prove this hypothesis?

I will approach Horkheimer's texts by mobilising the cultural resources in the form of philosophical ideas that are explicitly or implicitly in the texts. This method is what François Jullien calls an *écart* (the gap between). As Jullien claims, 'Doing an *écart* means going out of the norm, proceeding in an unusual-incongruous way, taking the distance from what is expected and from what is conventional' (Jullien 2012: 35)<sup>16</sup>. In this vein, I will bring to light some of the reflective and subsuming thoughts of Horkheimer about the possibility of a human emancipation, then 'rewind' them to determine the philosophical pathways taken by Horkheimer to arrive to them. This method of proceeding does not present any genealogical or historiographical claim to truth. My research does not propose, so to say, *the other Horkheimer* to the public. These are indeed some of the reasons why I have adopted Jullien's method of *écart*, underlining his observation that 'exteriority is noticed, otherness is constructed' (Jullien 2012: 17).

My objective is instead to develop an inquiry that identifies the points of departure in Horkheimer's texts from which we can mobilise cultural resources speculatively as those which have already been the object of study in the secondary literature. The aim of performing an *écart* is to disturb some calcified stereotypes surrounding Horkheimer's thought, exploring the texts where his thought can be interrogated in the light of gaps in the literature. Indeed, Jullien describes *écart* as a figure of disturbance ('*derangement*') whose aim is to explore; in contrast, difference is a figure of order ('*rangement*') whose aim is to identify and to bog down concepts in closed worldviews (Jullien 2012: 31).

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<sup>16</sup> 'Faire un *écart*, c'est sortir de la norme, procéder de façon incongrue, opérer quelque déplacement vis-à-vis de l'attendu et du convenu' (tba).

With this methodology in mind, I have divided this thesis into three parts. In the first part, I argue that if we take the notion of the unspoken as the reading key to Horkheimer's intellectual biography, then we can present his late thought as a fecund moment in which his critical theory is reconfigured. The second part of this study will analyse Kant's and Schopenhauer's philosophy as two cultural resources that remained unexplored in relationship to the political implications of Horkheimer's late thought. In the third part of this thesis, I will show how the philosophy of Kant and Schopenhauer may be used as 'optical lens' helpful to read Horkheimer's contrast between the notions of administered word and the longing for the totally other. Here we will explore how Horkheimer thinks emancipation as human, where the term human indicates the possibility of an identification among human beings that remains incommensurate to the logic of power.

## **0.6 Chapter outline**

The first part of the thesis, entitled 'A new interpretation of Max Horkheimer' consists of two chapters in which I discuss the existing literature on Horkheimer's late thought and my contribution to it. In Chapter 1, I will show how the unspoken - i.e. the possibility of deactivating the systematisation of violence in propositional language - is not just a paradigm emerging Horkheimer's late thought but one traversing his entire thought. I will draw upon his idea of being-by-each-other (*Beieinandersein*) presented in the poetic texts of the 1910s collected in the book *Aus der Pubertät* and to his idea of critical theory in his work of the 1930s. I will take these two ideas as a demonstration of how the search for a social life not overwhelmed by relationships of power is present in Horkheimer's thought before the conceptualisation of the longing for the totally other of the 1960s.

In Chapter 2, I will assess the existing literature on the late thought of Max Horkheimer. I will discuss how his late thought has been mainly understood as an exhaustion of the philosophy of consciousness and why Horkheimer draws on theology in re-conceptualising his critical theory. I will also explore the studies which demonstrate how his late thought tries to move out of philosophy of consciousness by paying attention to corporeal materiality and not just to theoretical reason. In the light of this research, I want to clarify the role of Schopenhauer's philosophy in re-thinking critical theory. Indeed, we will see how Horkheimer reads

Schopenhauer's philosophy as an attempt to imagine an identification that does not systematise violence in the formation of a collective identity.

The second part of the thesis entitled 'Critique and incommensurability' consists of two chapters concerning Kant's notion of hope and Schopenhauer's notion of the will. Both notions are unpacked in their unspoken dimension. In Chapter 3, I will argue that Horkheimer considers the notion of hope as a central theme in Kant's philosophy. From Horkheimer's argument about the Kantian hope, I will show that the notion of hope seems surreptitiously to conjoin a critique of propositional language with a critique of injustice. Such a conjunction lies in the unspoken dimension the notion of hope; that is, the wish for a world without injustice. In the light of this investigation Kant's notion of hope can be hence considered as a forerunner of the longing for the totally other because both notions entail a wish for a reduction of injustice as an idea of the good which cannot be represented.

In Chapter 4, I will show that Horkheimer sees in Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will the expression of a possible solidarity for the human beings who might identify each other as abandoned and powerless beings. Here, the notion of the will is a conjunction between the impossibility to define the origin of knowledge and the possibility of knowledge. This conjunction emerges in the unspoken dimension of Schopenhauer's metaphorical way of thinking. The notion of the will can be considered as a forerunner of the longing for the totally other because it makes references to the impossibility to know the things in their essence and so the possibility to consider knowledge only as representation.

In the third part entitled 'The politics of the unspoken', I will discuss how Kant's and Schopenhauer's philosophies are condensed in Horkheimer's contrast between the administered world and the longing for the totally other. In Chapter 5, I will argue that the concept of administered world shows how the Kantian notion of hope has been twisted by two features of advanced capitalism: social conformism and fascist anti-Semitism. Here, I will draw upon Horkheimer's work where the notion of hope - as Kant's philosophy imagined it - has become vain and perverted in the fascist practice of levelling. Besides levelling, we will also refer to how the increased automation of the labour process twists the Kantian idealism of hope. Fascist violence and automation totalise human life to destroy any possibility of negation and thus any possibility of initiating a world devoid of injustices. What is

destroyed is the possibility that, through progressive thought, bourgeois culture could generate a non-violent culture within itself.

In Chapter 6, I will show how Horkheimer posits the notion longing for the totally other in contrast to the administered world. In doing so, he combines a critique of propositional language with a critique of injustice. As for the critique of propositional language, I will draw upon the texts in which Horkheimer investigates the ontological function of the copula. As for the critique of injustice then, I will show how Judaic negative theology helps Horkheimer think of an idea of identification which remains incommensurate to power logic. This combination of a critique of propositional language and a critique of injustice will enable us to speculate about a possible unspoken political dimension through which human beings identify each other in the possibility of deposing power instead of pursuing it.

Finally, in the conclusive chapter of the thesis, I will sum up the main arguments of the study. In doing so, I will demonstrate how my arguments proposes a politics of the unspoken from an investigation in Horkheimer's thought.

### **0.7 Critical remarks on key concepts**

I would like to add some critical remarks on Horkheimer's concepts of reason, domination and justice in the conclusion of this introductory chapter. This last section can thus be considered as a critical glossary of these three concepts. My hope is that this section will help us understand how these concepts are used throughout the thesis as they recur from the first chapter onwards.

#### *Reason (Vernunft)*

Reason is a concept referring both to the capacity of human beings to represent the world and to their already established representation of the world. From an ontological perspective, reason is the capacity of human beings to introduce intelligibility into their way of knowing the world. At the same time, it represents the intelligible structure of the existing world. In its dialectical relation to the social

historical developments, reason is a concept that entails both domination (dogmatism) and emancipation (critique) (EFSR: 26,27)<sup>17</sup>.

In *Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer makes a distinction between objective reason and subjective reason. Horkheimer does not consider objective and subjective reason as absolute opposites but as the means by which the same idea of reason has been transformed in the history of Western thought (ER: 6). Objective and subjective reason both deal with the capacity to create a common world and with the constitution of the existing world. Objective reason creates a world in which human existence is reconciled in an all-embracing conception of the world. Hence, human life finds its meaning in the ideas of the good and the truth that society represent. Objective reason thus gives a substantive meaning to human existence in accordance with the demands of society. In Horkheimer's view, objective reason conceives of a world in terms of an 'entity, a spiritual power living in each man [...] the creative force behind the ideas and things to which we should devote our lives' (ER: 9). In such an idea of the world, human beings can determine how reasonable their life is according to the harmony of its totality. Human beings hence give intelligibility to the world by defining the harmonious totality that constitutes the idea of perfection and to which human life shall be oriented. Here, Horkheimer points to Plato and Aristotle's philosophy, scholasticism and German idealism as examples of the philosophy of objective reason (ER: 4).

In contrast, subjective reason creates a world whose intelligibility is the regulative function by which human beings adapt their life to a logic of means and ends. The question here is no longer one of achieving harmony with its totality, but the calculation of the probability that human beings can reach a given end by determining how rational an action is. Like objective reason, subjective reason is a human being's capacity to represent the world.

However, subjective reason does not employ a harmonious metaphysical totality to endow human existence with intelligibility. It leans instead on modern scientific calculations and formulae to establish rationality according to the probable effectiveness of a quantitative and qualitative improvement in the self-preservation of humanity. Humanity is conceived here as a biological genus, a species. Considered in terms of the human capacity to create a world, Horkheimer claims that subjective reason is identical to an 'adjustive faculty', or a mode of behaviour

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<sup>17</sup> [1942, *The End of Reason*]

that adheres to everything so long as it implements the self-preservation of individuals (ER: 97). In considering reason to be an adjustive faculty, Horkheimer also claims that modern society 'is not far from having realized the technocratic dream' (ER: 155).

Subjective reason can be thus understood as conformity to the principle of self-preservation. For Horkheimer, subjective reason represents 'the ideal of productivity' (ER: 154). With regard then to the link between subjective reason and productivity, Horkheimer explains that 'economic significance today [in post-war society] is measured in terms of usefulness with respect to the structure of power, not with respect to the need of all' (ER: 154). From this perspective, subjective reason is represented by Western advanced capitalism and its positivist mentality. Here, the self-preservation of human beings is linked to their capacity for adaptation.

#### *Domination (Herrschaft)*

Domination is a concept referring to the subjugation of human beings both by brute force and social coercion. In the case of social coercion, this subjugation takes human beings to be part of a repressive system of social relations, where domination means both objectification and instrumentality. Objectification and instrumentality are thus interwoven in each other.

Objectification is the reduction of nature and human beings to objects over which other human beings can gain control. It occurs when human beings think of reality abstractly and place it within concepts in order to identify it through difference, that is to say, by reducing indeterminate reality to determinate objects. In the light of objectification, identification is the name given to the process by which what is unknown becomes known because its abstraction into a concept is performed on the basis of what it is not. When we give a definition to something, we do not indicate its true relation with the world which remains unknown to us. Instead, we shape its existence in the verbal sense by giving it a meaningful definition with a recognisable sound. In this sense, the heterogeneity of the unknown *something* becomes the fixed identity of the known *thing*.

The relationship between signification and domination, which is articulated by fixing the unknown something into any defined concept, derives from the failure of

human thinking to know it and take control over it. Only the fear of succumbing to the overwhelming power of a world which cannot be mastered seems to make human beings develop a means of knowing nature which aims at the domination of man's fear of nature. As Horkheimer and Adorno explain,

The gasp of surprise which accompanies the experience of the unusual becomes its name. It fixes the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the known, and therefore terror as sacredness. The dualization of nature as appearance and sequence, effort and power, which first makes possible both myth and science, originates in human fear, the expression of which becomes explanation (DE: 15).

In Horkheimer's view, as a way of knowing the world, domination originates from the fear of death. This fear does not disappear in the human process of signification. On the contrary, fear of death grows through the process of signification and subjugates human existence in its entirety to aimless violence. In the transition from the status of something to the status of thing, the concept bears the mark of the master's creation of the world (GS13: 560)<sup>18</sup>. For Horkheimer, the mark of the master is already present in the symbolic unit of sign and image, which is a characteristic of the rituals of magicians and priests' rituals in animistic society and ancient religions (DE: 17). Magicians and priests may attempt to dominate nature with imitation and figurative symbols, but they fail to reduce nature to an object because they still see an overwhelming power in nature. In constituting the disenchantment of the world, the Enlightenment - i.e. progressive thought - then copes with this failure by taking it to the extreme point where the modern scientific thought reduces speech to a combination of signs e.g. modern mathematics. Nonetheless, fear of death is not eliminated by modern science but works on human conscience through internalisation. As the sensuous cognition of reality standing alongside symbolic signification, the synaesthesia constituting the symbolic unity of the imitative and ritual practices of primitive man and ancient priests is substituted for the process of signification based on the unity of concept and sound patterns (DE: 17, 18). In Horkheimer's view, the distance between the master and the mastered - i.e. subject and object - reaches such a high level of development that it is reflected in modern society in the increasing division of labour, first, and second, in the separation between scientific language and poetic language, second (DE: 18).

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<sup>18</sup> [1949, *Magie des Begriffs*]

However, objectification does not only reside uniquely in the estrangement of human beings from the dominated objects, but in the construction of human relations instrumental to self-preservation. In Horkheimer's view, modern society makes domination the permanent condition of human existence, whose aim is mere self-preservation. As Horkheimer states, 'Animism has spiritualized the object, whereas industrialism objectifies the spirit of men' (DE: 28). In Europe's post-war societies, objectification refers to the instrumental character of human relations in a world which elevates to truth mere self-preservation and domination. Horkheimer points out that the high level of domination over nature achieved by human beings in twentieth century is only illusory and turns against human beings via a process of internalising terror. In a note from the early 1950s, he characterises the situation of 20<sup>th</sup> century Western society as the 'reign of terror ruled by impotent [beings]' (GS14: 69)<sup>19</sup>. Positivism then constitutes a system of thought that assures otherwise impotent human beings of their total domination on Earth by claiming that the real truth is only the power to dominate. When economic business becomes the only aim of human life, objectification no longer requires myth and metaphysics to signify things as objects. Instead, it transforms into instrumentality and supplies the cognitive instruments of domination.

In fact, domination in the post-war society is merely an instrument used by human beings to make themselves conform to a world, whose intelligible structure is given aprioristically by self-preservation. As Horkheimer and Adorno clarify, 'Thinking objectifies itself to become automatic, self-activating process; [...] for positivism, which represents the court of judgement of enlightened reason, to digress into intelligible worlds is no longer merely forbidden, but meaningless prattle' (DE: 25). To conclude in Horkheimer's view, domination is one of the ways of knowing the world but certainly not the only one possible. Domination starts with the negative identity of human thinking, meaning the impossibility of human thinking to know the last truth of the world aprioristically<sup>20</sup>. However, domination reacts to that negative identity by internalising the fear of death inwards and implementing it outwards. Hence, domination aims to subjugate some human beings by others through the social coercion taking place from the time of the magic rituals of primitive man to the rational calculations of contemporary society.

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<sup>19</sup> [1953-1955, *Schreckensherrschaft der Ohnmächtigen*]

<sup>20</sup> See the 1949-1952 note *Myth and Enlightenment* (D&D: 124)

### *Justice (Gerechtigkeit)*

Justice has two principal meanings in Horkheimer's thought. In referring to the development of Western thought, justice is conceived as the order established by domination. In the second place, justice is also conceived as a way of approaching the world that is not marked by domination. Horkheimer's criticism of justice in the development of Western thought is strictly bound to the dialectic of Enlightenment. From this perspective, justice is, on the one hand, the world that human beings create in order to prevent themselves from succumbing to the objectified power of nature. On the other hand, justice is accepted as the way of life that guarantees self-preservation in a world marked by the domination of human beings over nature. In simpler words, justice is both the action that creates an order of domination and the action that enables the preservation of such an order. In Horkheimer's view, fear of death and domination both characterise justice as a system of laws from which punishment and reward can be established in order to preserve the existing social world.

For Horkheimer, the original impotence of human beings before the objectified power of nature is internalised in the system of equivalence that characterises justice. From this perspective, a system of justice does not set human beings free from their fear of death. As Adorno and Horkheimer state, '[...] justice, which is wrested from fatality, bears the mark of fatality: it corresponds to the look which men - primitives, Greeks, barbarians alike - cast from a society of pressure and misery on the circumambient world' (DE: 17). Here, Horkheimer and Adorno do not say that justice becomes a system of equivalence, symbolically represented by the image of the scales, which regulates punishment and reward when human beings organise themselves to live in groups or society. They instead clarify that 'the step from chaos to civilization, in which natural conditions exert their power no longer directly but through the medium of human consciousness, has not changed the principle of equivalence' (DE: 17).

Prior to the constitution of society, fear of death already marks the mode of thought through which human beings come to know the world. Such knowledge consists of the take-or-leave alternative of either domination of nature or emancipation from it. The two alternatives constitute the two terms of the equivalence reflected in society,

where subjugation to the law entails reward while infringement of law means punishment. Finally, in denoting the disenchantment of the world, Enlightenment does not liberate the world from fear of death. Instead, it increases both man's fear of death and the condition of injustice by exerting more domination over both nature and human beings via the continuous dialectical reproduction of new systems of punishment and reward. As Adorno and Horkheimer state,

Just as the myths already realize enlightenment, so enlightenment with every step becomes more engulfed in mythology. It receives all its matter from the myths, in order to destroy them; and even as a judge it comes under the mythic curse. It wishes to extricate itself from the process of fate and retribution, while exercising retribution on that process. (DE: 11, 12)

Justice gradually loses its metaphysical spirit which was able to sanction a priori what is right and wrong. It ends up becoming a mere instrument of self-preservation. In Horkheimer's view, justice becomes the fetish of a contentless and meaningless world in the post-war Western society within which self-preservation is considered the ultimate truth (ER: 23, 24). Hence, justice still bears the mark of the primordial fear of death and shows its instrumental character of equivalence. It pays tribute to self-preservation by rewarding every attempt to strengthen domination and by punishing every attempt to oppose to power. This is the reason why, Adorno and Horkheimer state that 'Before [in ancient societies] the fetishes were subject to the law of equivalence. Now equivalence itself has become a fetish. The blindfold over Justitia's eyes does not only mean that there should be no assault upon justice, but that justice does not originate in freedom' (DE: 17).

In addition to his criticism of justice in the development of Western civilisation, Horkheimer conceives of justice as an approach to a world that is unmarked by domination. Horkheimer clarifies this meaning of justice when he refers to the longing for the totally other in terms of desiring that 'the injustices of the world should not remain; that injustice may not have the last word' (GS7: 350)<sup>21</sup>. Horkheimer does not state that what he longs for is a world of perfect justice. In the note *Absolute Justice* of the late 1920s, he indeed suggests that a concept of absolute justice implies the abstraction of individuals as subjects void of any real quality. In his view, it is only as abstract subjects that human beings may comply with the idea of perfect justice, which then becomes an absolute truth (D&D: 32)<sup>22</sup>. What

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<sup>21</sup> [1970, *Was wir Sinn nennen, wird verschwinden*]

<sup>22</sup> [1926-1931, *Absolute Gerechtigkeit*]

Horkheimer calls justice is the negation of the current world marked by domination. Justice is the negation of injustice without the appeal to any idea of what a just world could be. Since any idea of perfect justice is thinkable only as self-deception, justice is understood negatively as a longing for a way of approaching the world that is unmoved by fear of death and is void of domination.

In conclusion, Horkheimer's concept of justice inheres within a twofold meaning. Regarding the development of Western thought, justice is eminently possible so long as injustice, or domination, exists. Indeed, Horkheimer highlights this inextricable relation between justice and injustice by referring paradigmatically to a maxim of Ancient Rome: 'The greatest right, the greatest injustice' (GS14: 235)<sup>23</sup>. Nonetheless, his negative idea of justice is ultimately expressed in the longing for the elimination of injustice.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Summum Ius Summa Iniuria' (*tba*), [1955-56 *Die Idee der Gerechtigkeit*]

# **PART ONE**

**A NEW INTERPRETATION OF MAX HORKHEIMER**

# Chapter 1

## Max Horkheimer and the unspoken

### 1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce Horkheimer's thought in the light of his intellectual trajectory while giving important biographical details. I will draw on the existing literature on Horkheimer's intellectual and personal biography as its background sources<sup>24</sup>. The overall objective of the argument presented here is to take the notion of the unspoken as the paradigm through which Horkheimer's idea of emancipation can be read with more clarity. Using this figure of the unspoken as paradigmatic, we will show that from his youth until the old age, Horkheimer expressed a longing to abolish violence and injustice. In fact, the unspoken is a useful concept for approaching both the critique of propositional language and the critique of injustice presented in Horkheimer's thought. What then does this notion of unspoken mean? The unspoken means, on the one hand, that propositional language has no intrinsic power to determine reality as such. Instead, the dynamics of power operating in a specific historical and social context influence the convictions and the motivations with which human beings inform their representation of reality. On the other hand, the unspoken refers to the possibility of deactivating the logic of power that makes reality appear to human beings as immutable.

My plan is thus to highlight the three main concepts, by which the unspoken appears as paradigmatic, within the context of the different stages of Horkheimer's life: first, the idea of being-by-each-other (*Beieinandersein*) in his youth; second, the idea of critical theory in adulthood; and last, the longing for the totally other in his old age. Since the concept of the longing for the totally other will be the object of discussion throughout the thesis, we will focus on the first two concepts, arguing that both concepts are entangled in Horkheimer's lived experience of social reality. In the analysis of these concepts, dialectical thought and a loving approach to the

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<sup>24</sup> See Wiggerhaus (2013) for a complete biography of Horkheimer. For the study of Horkheimer's biography connected with the foundation of Frankfurt School see Jay (1996) and Abromeit (2011). For a study of Horkheimer's thought in connection with his biography see Gumnior & Ringguth (1973).

world emerge as the unspoken dimension of Horkheimer's experience of social reality.

Later in the chapter, we will put forward two arguments to demonstrate the relationship of the unspoken to politics. Firstly, Horkheimer does not take human beings to be singular individuals but holds that they always entangled with each other in their lived experience of the world. Secondly, such an entanglement cannot leave aside the dynamics of power that influence human relationships in society. From these two points, we demonstrate that the motif underlying Horkheimer's critical theory is the longing for a practice that places itself in a position critical of power relations.

In summary, the main argument exposed in the chapter is that Horkheimer shows how the human beings capable of critical thought are those who have become conscious of the relationships of power in their social life. With this new consciousness, they can see the injustice inherent to the violent domination of people's life in advanced capitalist society. In viewing this injustice as both a cause of suffering and the motivation to reduce it, Horkheimer's thought unfolds the political horizon of emancipation within critical theory.

## **1.2 Being-by-each-other**

The idea of being-by-each-other emerges in the poetic texts of Horkheimer's youth, which were collected in the 1974 volume *Aus der Pubertät*. In fact, the idea of being-by-each-other is related to a particular episode from his youth narrated in the writing *L'île heureuse*. By drawing upon that text and some other biographical notes from Horkheimer's youth, I will show how this idea of being-by-each-other hints at a loving approach to the world, encompassing both a love of enjoyment and an unconditional maternal love. The lived experience of this loving approach then accompanies Horkheimer's longing to change the future that his upper-class bourgeois family has planned for him.

Max Horkheimer was born in 1895 to a Jewish family in south-west Germany. His father was an entrepreneur in the textile industry and Horkheimer had a fairly unremarkable childhood in Stuttgart. As Abromeit (2011: 21) describes it, 'His mother's solicitude and his early interest in expressing his internal emotional conflicts in the forms of dramas and novellas indicated that Horkheimer was an

exceptionally sensitive child from the beginning'. The role of the mother as a protective, religious woman had a great influence on Horkheimer's childhood. The figure of his mother represents indeed the unconditional love. In his old age, he paid tribute to the unconditional love of his mother in a note in which he also describes his own character:

Decisive trait of character: the hatred against oppression and, therewith, against its apparatus and agents (laws, prohibitions, bureaucrats, judges...). Formulated positively: compassion towards those who are oppressed and suffer. [...] Another decisive trait of my character: love of enjoyment [*Genuss*]. I learnt from my mother: the hope that something ultimately completed [*Vollendetes*] will come about (the messianic hope). It does not depend on loving but on the love of loving [*Liebe zu lieben*]. (GS14: 546)<sup>25</sup>

In this late note of 1963, we see how the elderly Horkheimer recognised the first two decisive qualities of his character in the memory of the mother and her loving attitude. These qualities were his sensitivity to oppression and suffering and the love of enjoyment, both to be understood in a dimension that is incomplete and indeterminate. The hope of completing this dimension, which Horkheimer understands as the expectation for a moment of fulfilment in life, then takes on this messianic form. Hence, the two qualities of his character given here might be said to be involved with a dimension that appears divine. This divine-like dimension is the messianic hope to expect a moment of fulfilment in life. What does the fulfilment consist of?

In Horkheimer's thought, fulfilment is the possibility that both the abolition of oppression and the love of enjoyment can be actualised in social life. This actualisation then depends on the human beings' attitude to love unconditionally or as Horkheimer refers to it in the above cited quotation, 'the love of loving'. For Horkheimer, this attitude towards loving unconditionally unfolds an approach to the world that seems to bear more relation to the character of a person rather than to an ability to be acquired.

In this sense, it would seem important to define 'unconditional love'. In Horkheimer, this notion appears to refer to an attitude embodied in how the individual encounters other human beings with sincerity and sympathy. We need now to draw on other biographical areas to understand the multi-faceted complexity of unconditional love as one of the key qualities of his character.

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<sup>25</sup> [1963, *Selbstanalyse*]

In the early 1910s, Horkheimer began a long-life friendship with Friedrich Pollock, which characterised his life both on intellectual and affective level<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, the friendship with Pollock helped Horkheimer to express his internal affective world through his loving approach to the world<sup>27</sup>. As Abromeit explains, Horkheimer's desire to have a friend with whom to share his internal world finds witness in the friendship with Pollock. This friendship can be regarded as a 'symbiosis' because it is unfolded not on the level of bourgeois social conventions, but on an internal and indeterminate affective level (Abromeit 2011: 23,24). Accompanied by Pollock, Horkheimer undertook an internship abroad in Brussels and England over 1913-1914 after starting to work in his father's factory. This period spent abroad was characterised by his involvement in a 'coterie' with Pollock and Suzanne Neumeier, a distant cousin of Horkheimer (Abromeit 2011: 25, 26). Between the spring and the summer of 1913, all three of them lived together in London and wanted to transform their internal sentiments into an intense emotional, loving and intellectual experience (Abromeit 2011: 26).

In the novel *L'île heureuse* published in 1914, Horkheimer describes the intellectual and affective relationship among them three as a way of knowing the world that does not conform to the existing bourgeois societal values and practices - a happy island, as the French title of the novel suggests. As he puts it, 'Our easy wisdom of life [*Lebensweisheit*] consisted in despising all that is material, in standing up in cold attitude against all changes that the destiny brings about, in striving for the *île heureuse* and in living to become acquainted with the beauty of the world and to love each other' (GS11: 300)<sup>28</sup>. Through the intensity of this experience, Horkheimer understands that bourgeois social values - i.e. a patriarchal family structure, work and loyalty to nation - were the vehicles for a signification that is insufficient to expressing his loving approach to the world. As he writes in *L'île heureuse*, 'Oh sorry species of words, you are incapable of bringing to life even a shadow of the *sensations (Empfindungen)* which burned within us at that time. The most complete (*Vollkommenstes*) consciousness of our life and world bound itself with blissful feeling of the purest blitheness (*Sorglosigkeit*)' (GS11: 314)<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> See Emery (2015) as a recent study on the topic.

<sup>27</sup> '[...] I was raised to love and long for sincerity and community, and to do the good' (Horkheimer in Abromeit 2011: 22).

<sup>28</sup> [1914, *L'île heureuse*]

<sup>29</sup> The first sentence of the quotation is a translation taken from Abromeit (2001: 26) and in italics the part of the translation that I modified.

What is essential to note in the quotation given above is how the references to *a complete consciousness of life* and *a blissful feeling of the purest blitheness* bear the meaning of a fulfilment that, in Horkheimer's view, cannot be understood and signified with the vocabulary of bourgeois society. We can see how the two qualities of his character come into play when Horkheimer tries to make sense of a loving approach to the world and the divine-like dimension of fulfilment moved by it. The *L'île heureuse* becomes a metaphor for an identification that cannot be commensurate to the language of bourgeois social values because it departs from the power dynamics of patriarchal family structures, work and loyalty to nation. But why is this 'happy island' central to Horkheimer's experience of an identification that remains incommensurate to bourgeois language and its instrumental logic?

Firstly, the presence of two others (Pollock and Neumeier) enabled Horkheimer to experience fulfilment in sharing his internal world on an emotional and intellectual level. The friendly-loving way in which those others are identified causes the fulfilment.

Secondly, the presence of these two others continues to be entangled with the values bourgeois social world because Horkheimer, Pollock and Neumeier do not shed their middle-class cultural backgrounds during their affective and intellectual relations. Nonetheless, the loving approach by which this identification with the others (Pollock and Neumeier) is experienced does not fit the bourgeois social world. Therefore, in his 'happy island', Horkheimer is able to enact an identification incommensurate with this conventional social world. The next question would then be: How does Horkheimer give voice to such an incommensurability?

In *L'île heureuse*, Horkheimer describes how the happy island among himself, Suzanne and Friedrich was a 'being-by-each-other (*Beieinandersein*)', characterised substantively by 'quietness of spirit, joy and love' (GS11: 323). The suffix *Beieinander* (by-each-other) clarifies a way of living in which the plural dimension (we) and the singular one (I) meld into an experience in which no single identity is established. As a consequence, the plural and the singular become blurred and identification here escapes the logic of bourgeois values by being represented in this experience of the 'quietness of spirit, joy and love'.

Moreover, this notion of being-by-each-other not only refers to the private world of Horkheimer on his happy island with Pollock and Neumeier, it also has a political

meaning. For the loving approach to the world that marks Horkheimer's sensitive character became itself a target for the violent domination of bourgeois society when the happy island came to an end thanks to an intervention by the police who were sent by the Neumeier family to bring their daughter back home. This abrupt interruption was a traumatic episode for Horkheimer. Almost ten years later, in a letter of 1922 sent by Suzanne Neumeier to Horkheimer responding to his first letter, Horkheimer states his belief that Suzanne betrayed her affective and intellectual commitment to Pollock and himself by having accepted to obey to the order of her family to go back home. Nonetheless, this letter and the editor's note that following the publication can help us to understand how Horkheimer's experience of his happy island in London marked his attitude towards bourgeois social life.

In the first place, although the happy island was an experience of indeterminacy in which each of the three people's identity collapses, this indeterminacy was not disconnected from a confrontation with the existing social world. As Suzanne writes, speaking about herself in third person in a letter of 1922, 'No, Max, Suze did not betray her ideal, she acted as she had to do; you will one day understand - trust me- that is more difficult to live when you sacrifice your true I than if you follow your inclinations and ideas [...] I have never allowed anyone to call me Suze because it is the true name of my true I' (Neumeier in GS15: 87)<sup>30</sup>. In this letter, we see that the exertion of bourgeois social demands over the individual consists in making Suzanne Neumeier renounce to her 'true I', here referring to the Suzanne that Horkheimer knew at the time of the happy island.

In the second instance, the happy island with Pollock and Neumeier in London appears not only as an experience of physical and intellectual pleasure for Horkheimer. It is also described as the divine-like fulfilment that he describes as an experience enabling him to live by following his inclinations and character. In an editorial note added after Neumeier's letter to Horkheimer, the editor Schmid Noerr refers to the following comment made by Pollock in 1965 about the end of happy island: 'At that time, Horkheimer lost the faith in religion' (Pollock in GS15: 88). In my view, this comment of Pollock is of primary importance to understand how Horkheimer intended religion. In fact the religion to which his friend Pollock refers lay in the hope that he could actualise concretely his erotic approach to the world

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<sup>30</sup> [1922, *Suzanne Lucien an Max Horkheimer*]

concretely in everyday social life. In other words, Horkheimer hoped to live substantively with other in the world without any social constraint smashing his own internal world. This hope came from the hope that Horkheimer inherited from his mother which itself lay in the belief that it was possible and desirable to love unconditionally. Thus, for Horkheimer to lose his religion indicates his loss of faith that a fulfilment could be actualised in social life.

Horkheimer conceived of religion not as a faith but as the possibility of living with others in a way that does not merely satisfy the individual's private wishes. Instead, the vision of religion is one that introduces a sense of joy and love to social life, as if there were a divine touch to relieve the social life of the power dynamics causing all sufferings and oppression.

In his youth, Horkheimer had already understood religion as the impetus to transform reality by breaking the enchantment that the logic of power held over social relationships. Horkheimer clarifies it in a later note of 1959, where he states that, 'Religion [is] the not yet stifled impulse against reality that should become something other, that the enchantment [*Bann*] gets broken and that is turned to that which just is' (GS6: 288)<sup>31</sup>. Hence, the religious aspect of the unconditional love gives the loving approach to the world a political significance. Indeed, it reveals in Horkheimer's belief that his own character could embody the impetus necessary to transform bourgeois social reality for the better or move it towards the good.

But how should we understand 'the good' here? As it will become clearer later when we focus on Horkheimer's mature use of philosophical concepts, this idea of the good is conceived negatively as the possibility of deactivating the dynamics of power in social relations. In the text *L'île heureuse*, the conflict between Horkheimer's loving approach to the world and the demands of the social world had already found a public expression, so carrying a political significance. Again, Horkheimer described the experience of the happy island as unconditional love in contrast to societal conformism - this time using the metaphor of a barbed-wire fence:

Do you know indeed what love is? I am going to explain it to you, my smart judges: love means to break the barbed-wire fence that you built between me and every other human being. Love is to destroy this obstacle and to make friendship. But what is this barbed-wire fence? I have already said it many times, but I will repeat it again: it is greed for honour and money, for glory; it is comfort, your habits, duties and care (GS11: 310).

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<sup>31</sup> [1959, *Was ist Religion?*]

The confrontation between Horkheimer's sensitive character and the oppressiveness of bourgeois social values might be said to peak in this quotation from *L'île heureuse*. The conflict here lies between the openness of the experience of love and the narrowness of bourgeois social values. For what is at stake in this conflict is the possibility of actualising this experience of love through the existing social world without being overwhelmed by its logics of power.

Horkheimer had a difficult experience of social life and love in those years. Moreover, the memory of how he lost his happy island with Pollock and Neumeier at the beginning of World War I only accentuated his disgust for social bourgeois values. Nonetheless, it is the experience of the war which proves most crucial for understanding Horkheimer's attitude towards society. As Abromeit (2011:27) suggests, the return to work in his father's industry and the subsequent call-up for military service, followed by his political disillusionment with party politics and the increasing hatred of the war all explain Horkheimer's approaches the study of society which he embarked upon when he later moved to Frankfurt. Both the period spent in the industry of his father and World War I itself reveal how Horkheimer's loving approach to the world came to face a bourgeois social world in which he cannot find any identification. In an unpublished diary of 1914, Horkheimer shows disgust for war and unhappiness about his future in his father's factory, against which he struggled, 'The flame of a burning longing [*Sehnsucht*]... I cannot master my longing and I will let myself be led by it all my life long' (Horkheimer in Gumnior & Ringguth 1973:17). It was indeed Horkheimer's internal world that became a cultural resource driving his university studies and subsequent academic career in the 1920s and 1930s.

In conclusion, we can say that although the concept of being-by-each-other is a concept that is connected to a particular episode from Horkheimer's youth, it is paradigmatic of the way Horkheimer came to understand society. From the experience of the happy island with Pollock and Neumeier, Horkheimer's approach to the world could be said to be loving because the tendency of his younger self was not to make a division between his rich internal world and the way in which he experiences the world external to him. For Horkheimer, private and public were interconnected, entangling each other in an experience that turns down the logics of power.

### 1.3 Critical Theory

Although the notion of being-by-each-other does not present any philosophical justification by itself, it reveals poetically Horkheimer's loving approach to the world and its maternal legacy as part of his personality. In the 1930s, the idea of critical theory conveyed on a philosophical level a denounce of injustice and oppression. In this sense, the objective of critical theory was to shed light on the cleavages between theoretical claims about life in human society and how such claims concretise in social-historical practices. As I will discuss, the task of critical theory is to grasp in theory what I call an *interpenetrative moment* occurring between the individual and the external world through the concretisations of social life.

The task of critical theory is to show that reality is not immutable. Instead, human beings make reality actual through the unfolding of their relationships with other human beings and nature. As we shall see, the concept of *Durchdringung*, (interpenetration) is foremost to understanding the objectives of this project of critical theory. Here, two main points should be highlighted. First, the interpenetrative moment between the individual and his external world cannot be conceived as a totality able to establish a univocal identity. Second, the correct way to think about this interpenetrative moment philosophically is to consider it as a materialism which is void of any theoretical dialectical reconciliation.

After the First World War, Horkheimer began his studies first at the University of Munich and then at the University of Frankfurt with the neo-Kantian philosopher, Hans Cornelius. He completed his Doctorate of Philosophy and his *Habilitation* with two dissertations about Kant's antinomy of teleological judgment and Kant's *Critique of Judgment* (GS2)<sup>32</sup>. After that, he started to work as a lecturer in Frankfurt. In 1930, Horkheimer became Professor of Social Philosophy and then director of the Institute of Social Research after the directorship of Carl Grünberg, which had started in 1924<sup>33</sup>.

In his inaugural lecture for the directorship of the Institute in 1931, entitled *The Present Situation of Philosophy and The Tasks of an Institute for Social Research*

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<sup>32</sup> [1922, *Zur Antinomie der teleologischen Urteilskraft*; 1925, *Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie*]

<sup>33</sup> For the overview of the birth of the Institute between 1922 and 1924 before Grünberg's directorship, see Jay (1996: 9-12).

(BPSS), Horkheimer clarified his critical attitude towards the mainstream academic knowledge about society. He then proceeded to design an interdisciplinary research method for the Institute. Horkheimer's modus operandi was to critique the separation between philosophy and empirical research when investigating social phenomena.

He explained this separation in terms of the increasing differentiation and specialisation of disciplines and then staged a critical discussion of the division between social philosophy and material sociology. For Horkheimer, when philosophy investigates social phenomena, it provides foundations for a social philosophy then able to frame the understanding of social phenomena into a worldview. Empirical research instead becomes a material sociology investigating forms of socialisation by focusing on the actual ways in which human beings live together. However, in Horkheimer's view, social philosophy focuses more on theoretical assumptions and misses 'the cultural life of humanity'; that is, how a society's life exists in cultural-empirical forms (BPSS: 7)<sup>34</sup>. The problem then of material sociology is that by examining social life objectively as a concrete phenomenon, it still remains silent about 'the degree of reality or about the value of these phenomena', as the principal question posed by social philosophy (BPSS:8). Horkheimer characterised this methodological impasse as a situation of 'chaotic specialisation', but then claimed that 'it can be overcome to the extent that philosophy- as theoretical undertaking, oriented to the general, *the essential* - is capable of giving particular studies animating impulses, and at the same time remains open enough to let itself be influenced and changed by these concrete studies' (BPSS: 9). The problem of this chaotic specialisation is rooted in the need of material sociology and social philosophy to propose a closed and univocal identity for the social life of human beings. In short, both social philosophy and material sociology strive mistakenly to provide a closed definition of the term 'social'.

The critical theory of Horkheimer points instead towards the possibility of combining empirical studies and theoretical claims oriented towards what he calls the *essential* in the citation given above. In Horkheimer's view, critical theory should provide both an impulse to practice and guide the scope and the mode of

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<sup>34</sup> Horkheimer critically refers to the social philosophy of Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Max Scheler.

practice. Referring to Feuerbach's materialist philosophy, Horkheimer's use of the terms *the essential* and *essence* points to the idea that theoretical statements about particular social phenomena are not to be considered as universal truths<sup>35</sup>. For Horkheimer, theoretical statements are an attempt to grasp the social relationships in concepts, but they are also the products of human beings of flesh and blood in a determined historical context.

Horkheimer's use of the concept of *essential* helps us understand how critical theory is to be finalised to prevent any absolute judgement about social reality being established. How then does Horkheimer imagine this notion of *the essential* as the moment able to grasp the concretisations of social relationships without eternalising them into a final closed definition? To avoid any simplistic or equivocal view of the notion of the essential, Horkheimer then uses the term 'interpenetration' to elucidate it. The term interpenetration highlights the difficulty of making sense of the relationship between the individual experience and the translation of this experience into a conceptual apparatus without closing off this relationship in a final definition. As Horkheimer concludes at the end of his inaugural lecture of 1931, 'This lecture has thus become symbolic of the peculiar difficulty concerning the interpenetration [*durchdringen*] of the general and particular, of theoretical design and individual experience' (BPSS: 14). Horkheimer's main philosophical problem was hence how to frame the experience of human beings and their social mediation critically through a conceptual apparatus that does not necessitate that it closes itself off in a definitive claim about society. Here we might frame the problems as a question: How can individuals translate their experience of the world into a verbal expression that does not establish closed or definitive meanings by fixing human experience in general univocal concepts?

In the 1934 essay *The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy* (BPSS), Horkheimer seems to clarify this philosophical problem in a discussion of the antagonism between rationalism and irrationalism in modern Western thought. Rationalism is a mode of thinking that employs a conceptual apparatus as the means of knowing reality. Horkheimer traces this approach to critical thinking back to Descartes's philosophy and its division between a spiritual-thinking substance (*res cogitans*) and a spatial-corporeal dimension (*res extensa*). In contrast, irrationalism

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<sup>35</sup> By drawing directly on Feuerbach's work, Horkheimer clarifies this point in his 1934 text *The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy* (BPSS: 240).

is a mode of thinking that devalues conceptual thought in favour of an abandonment to the individual experience of life. Horkheimer thus conceives of irrationalism as a combination of theories serving to enhance the idea of life, placing them under the label of a ‘philosophy of life’<sup>36</sup>. Finally, in criticising both rationalism and irrationalism, Horkheimer concludes that the debate between the two staged in modern Western thought highlights the role of propositional language and the dynamics of power in deciding whether a statement is true or false.

The conclusions presented in Horkheimer’s essay here seem to respond implicitly to the question of the role that abstraction and propositional language play in the attempt of human beings to grasp the interpenetrative moment between experience and thought. In the first place, showing a claim of truth to be false does not determine an immediate change in social reality. The claim of falsehood negates only the claim of truth expressed in a proposition. If this objection of the proposition of truth triggers a change in social life depends on the existent power dynamics in the social life of human beings. As Horkheimer states,

In reality, reason is capable only of destroying the falsehood [...] The groundless convictions of an epoch are not destroyed by thought alone; as long as they are maintained by powerful social forces, knowledge may run riot over them, but the fetish stands while witnesses against it meet their demise (BPSS: 232).

In sum, Horkheimer suggests here that propositional language and its conceptual logic does not have any intrinsic power to command and dominate the life of human beings. Instead, domination entangles with power relationships, whose violence can then be systematised through propositional language by making the propositions in question a vehicle for the pursuit of power. The fact that this systematisation of violence takes place is down to the power dynamics operating in specific historical and social circumstances.

Second, the fact that propositional language involves the use of concepts does not mean that concepts establish a relationship of truth in the signification between the name and the signified object. As Horkheimer remarks,

As *Lebensphilosophie* correctly emphasises, abstract features of the object are characterized with concepts [...] concepts refer -to the extent that they are more than *proper names* [Eigennamen]- not to the object in its full concretion, but to individual traits that it shares with other objects. Science depends largely upon distinguishing and grasping such traits, in order then to discern connections between them (BPSS 232, 233)<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> In the essay, Horkheimer refers mainly to the philosophies of Bergson, Simmel and Dilthey.

<sup>37</sup> The phrase ‘proper names’ in italics is my translation of *Eigennamen* substituting the ‘mere names’ in the cited text.

Horkheimer suggests here that any claim about reality does not establish in practice a relationship of truth between the concept and the object signified. We should emphasise with him again here that claims of truth are a matter of logic. Furthermore, the acceptance of a claim of truth in social life depends on the relationships of power that are present in the historical-social circumstances in which the claim is made.

We could sum up the hypothesis in this way: for Horkheimer propositional language has no power per se to determine social reality, which is entangled with the dynamics of power of flesh and blood individuals. From this perspective, critical theory shall highlight the consciousness that both the power dynamics of social reality and the conceptual representations of social reality are transient. For Horkheimer, the notion of transience shows that the givenness and immutability of reality are ideas acceptable to human beings only because the dynamics of power sustain them. And in bringing to light this transience, critical theory attempts to grasp the interpenetrative moment between the concrete experience of social life and its conceptual representation. In order then to provide a theoretical framework to his critical theory, Horkheimer considers materialist thought as a mode of thinking able to identify this transience against its closure in an abstract totality:

Dialectical theory itself has, of course, an abstract character. [...] Knowledge of the totality is a self-contradictory concept. Consciousness of one's own conditionedness, which distinguishes materialist thought, is identical in the current state of theory with an understanding of the social conditionedness of individuals [...] Subject and object never entirely coincide here [in materialism]; rather, they find themselves in a variable tension according to the role which theory plays in society and to the level of domination of human beings over each other and nonhuman nature. (BPSS: 244)

The consciousness that the representation of reality by human beings is socially conditioned echoes the tradition to be ascribed to Feuerbach and Marx. But Horkheimer moves beyond those philosophers by integrating in his concept of materialism the awareness that death is not the final destiny of human beings from which they can make sense of their life. As he states,

Materialism knows no second reality, whether above as or below us [...] Love of one's fellow human being, as materialism understands it, has nothing to do with beings that find eternal security after their death but with individuals that are quite literally *transient* [vergänglich] (BPSS: 259).<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The adjective 'transient' in italics is my translation of *vergänglich*, which substitutes the 'ephemeral' in the cited text.

Horkheimer understands that human beings may think of death only abstractly. They turn death from the transient moment when they cease to live into the theoretical measure by which they give meaning to their life. Such an abstraction may take place when human beings accept their social-historical conditions passively even as they bring about oppression and sufferings in their life. Therefore, the deactivation of the idea of death as a measure of life opens the possibility that theory can change social life in its practical concretisations. To translate this theoretical deactivation into practice then, human beings should seek to disrupt the systematised violence that perpetrates this oppression both through cultural practices and conceptual representations. This disruption is conceived by Horkheimer as an unmasking strategy that highlights how concepts justify domination and oppression. In simpler word, the disruption of the systematisation of violence operates through a denunciation of injustice.

Here we see how materialist thought helps Horkheimer inform the unmasking strategy of critical theory with two negations: the powerlessness of propositional language and the consciousness that social reality is in continuous change. On the one hand, this unmasking strategy negates any theory according to which propositions as such embed the power to determine in practice what is true and false. On the other hand, it negates the theories fixed on the immutability of social relationships and power dynamics. It is the task of the critical theorist then to make clear the cleavages between how reality is represented in concepts and how it unfolds in its concretisation.

Critical theorists should then approach and accomplish this task by placing themselves in critical confrontation with the existing representations of the dynamics of social power. As Horkheimer writes in the 1937 essay *Traditional and Critical Theory*, 'The identification of men of critical mind with their society is marked by tension, and the tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking' (CT: 208). Horkheimer considers the subjects of critical theory not just as hypothetical abstractions, but individuals of flesh and blood present in the unfolding of historical social practices (CT: 211). Critical theory is thus defined here as the interpenetration of thought and experience that emerges from the tension brought about by human beings' recognition of the logics of societal power and their own will to resist these dynamics. In his notion of critical theory, the liberation from that tension and the hope of establishing a society able to entangle human

needs -that is, less injustice and domination- comes together with the political struggle against the social practices of domination. In this sense, Horkheimer confirms that,

The goal [of critical thought], namely the rational state of society, is forced upon him by present distress. The theory, which projects such a solution to the distress, does not labour in the service of an existing reality but only gives voice to the mystery of reality (CT: 216, 217).

Critical theory does not aim in any utilitarian way to satisfy the desires of singular individuals. Instead, as the above quotation clarifies, it gives voice to *the mystery of reality*. Critical theory seeks to express why human beings represent reality in a specific way and how this given representation is entangled with the logic of power. In the light of this goal, critical theory appears in my view to be a transposition, within philosophy, of Horkheimer's loving approach to the world found in the non-philosophical idea of being-by-each-other. In other words, the hypothetical achievement of fulfilment in life as it was described in the story of the happy island is translated into the critical theory. Such a fulfilment is then conceived by critical theory as the possibility of a social life in which social relationships and the dynamics of power are not oppressive but might serve the reduction of suffering and injustice. The being-by-each-other as a mode of life without power is philosophically structured in the possibility for critical theory to serve the actualisation of a rational state of society.

Owing to this hope of actualising a rational state of society, critical theory is then presented as partisan in spirit. As Horkheimer affirms in *Traditional and Critical Theory*, 'Since critical theory runs counter to prevailing habits of thought, which contributes to the persistence of the past and carry on the business of an out-dated order of things (both past and out-dated order of things guaranteeing a faction-ridden world), it appears to be biased and unjust' (CT: 218). References to terms such as *prevailing habits*, *outdated order* and *faction-ridden world* point to Horkheimer's idea that the preservation of the existent social dynamics of power precludes the human fulfilment and solidifies human life within social relationships carved out by the logics of power. In this sense, Horkheimer understands society as a 'totality', whose power dynamics consists in a continuous re-structure of itself (CT: 25)<sup>39</sup>. Hence, society is not an eternal monolith based on hierarchical

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<sup>39</sup> [1933, *Materialism and Metaphysics*]

structures but the products of the dynamics of power relations, presenting a totalising system upon which human life may depend only partially (CT: 25).

In the light of this conception of human society, the aim of Horkheimer's critical theory in the 1930s was to help human beings avoid identifying their life with the existing social reality and its power dynamics. In this sense, Horkheimer states in the quotation above that critical theory may appear *biased* and *unjust* yet serves to confront with the social practices of domination politically. Indeed, the critical theorist wants to state in public that society as it appears to be does not constitute an absolute truth. He does so by highlighting the cleavages between concepts concerning social life and the social practices to which they refer. In sum, the critical theorist unmasks the human social practices that systematise violence in propositional language and that are finalised to pursue power. It is from this perspective that I hold Horkheimer to consider dialectical and materialist thought as decisive to the goal of critical theory. However, to understand this argument more fully, we need to address the Marxist traits underlying Horkheimer's critical theory<sup>40</sup>.

#### **1.4 Dialectic and Materialism**

Horkheimer's critical theory highlights that thinking about a concept of society as a fixed totality is a way to stifle the possibility of a theoretical analysis of social processes in their concretisations (CT:26). For Horkheimer, the relationship between the experience of human beings in the world and how they think about their experience through concepts remains indeterminate. However, the concretisation of social practices constantly changes, meaning that human beings can only grasp the concretisation of social practices partially by abstracting their particularities conceptually.

In Horkheimer's view then, social theory should investigate the continuous alteration of social practices even if the representation that they make of them in concepts will remain indeterminate. Moreover, this indeterminacy remains also when human beings use concepts to establish a logic of power on reality. From this perspective we can ask: How does the violence, which conforms a contingent

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<sup>40</sup> For a historical-philosophical study on the influence of Marxism in Horkheimer's thought and his criticism, see Jay (1984: 196-219)

representation of reality to a power logic, appear in the formation of concept? My answer is that it appears as a tool to censor a discourse that can denounce the violence and liberate from it. How does then this violent censorship work?

Human beings determine their representations of reality with concepts through violence by cutting off any further discussion which may put the validity of these concepts in question. However, this violent censorship of thought and discourse cannot completely dominate how human beings concretise a social life which is in continuous change. As we have mentioned before, the concrete development of human beings' social life is transient and does not depend on how commensurable it is with any conceptual representation, even when human beings affirm these concepts with violence.

Hence, the failure of human beings to achieve complete domination of reality through representation testifies the role of violence in the formation of concepts. Violence here exists in the censorship of this indeterminate relationship between human experience of the world and the conceptualisation of this experience. This censorship is then finalised to commensurate the representation of reality to a logic of power. Power logic eternalises the indeterminate relationship in an abstract concept so to make it appear as immutable. When the relationship between experience and concept is calcified in an abstract representation - i.e. attached to an identity such as class, nation, political party - it may not only be ideological, or a bad conscience in Marx's sense. Human beings may also start to take their representation as the only possible reality, so it becomes also a second nature to them; or to use a Marxist term, reality is reified.

It is useful here to recall the influence of Lukács' concept of reification on Horkheimer. Writing in the early 1920s and echoing the chapter on *The Fetishism of Commodity and its Secret* in Marx's *Capital*, Lukács defines reification as the cognitive process by which 'a relation between people has taken on the character of a thing' (Lukács 1971: 83). Reification points to the process of cognition of actual objects in abstract representations which also serves to solidify social relationships in the world. Some critical literature on the influence of Lukács' concept of reification in the early work of Horkheimer generally points to Horkheimer's will to rectify the consciousness of the working class in the light of a possible revolution in the 1920s Germany<sup>41</sup>. From a strictly political point of view,

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<sup>41</sup> See Bottomore (1984:17) and Bronner (2011: 43).

it can truly be affirmed that Horkheimer saw the possibility that the German working class of the 1920s would take the initiative to stage a revolution<sup>42</sup>. However, Horkheimer does not translate this hope for social change on a philosophical level by theorising the working class as an historical subject that will make a revolution. As Jay argues, the novelty of Horkheimer's reading of Marx and Marxist literature is his criticism of the holistic concept of totality (Jay 1984: 198). Following this critical line, I would argue that we can understand better the rejection of the holistic concept of totality in Horkheimer's idea of critical theory by drawing directly upon Marx's criticism of Hegel's idealism. In my view, Horkheimer agreed with Marx that human thought has never been isolated from the historical-social concretisations of human life. However, unlike Marx, he did not propose communism as the superseding of the capitalist relationships that makes reality appear as objectified-reified. I will briefly discuss these two statements.

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscript of 1844*, Marx clarifies that thought becomes absolute knowledge (in the style of Hegel) when abstract mental labour starts to think positively about itself and removes the negative, i.e. alienation (Marx 2007: 152)<sup>43</sup>. Absolute knowledge is when human beings take what they have objectified in thought as an essence; thereafter they start to think about themselves from the standpoint of that essence. For Marx, alienation is expressed as the estranged life produced by the objectification of human life in private property, which becomes both the consequence of the estranged labour and the beginning of an estranged life (Marx 2007: 80). In the light of alienation, Marx explained that the way in which human beings approach the world is determined by the objectification of human life in private property:

Each of his [*man's*] human relations to the world [...], in short all the organs of his individual being [...] are in their *objective* orientation, or in their *orientation to the object*, the appropriation of that object, the appropriation of *human world*; their orientation to the object is the *manifestation of the human world*, it is human *efficaciousness* and human *suffering*, for suffering, apprehended humanly, is an enjoyment of self in man. Private property has made us so stupid and one-sided that an object is only *ours* when we have it -when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly possessed, eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited, etc., - in short, when it is *used* by us. (Marx 2007:106).

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<sup>42</sup> See the note *Theorie und Praxis* written between 1926 and 1931 (GS11: 275).

<sup>43</sup> Karl Marx's *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* was published posthumously in 1932. For the influence of the manuscripts in terms of reevaluation of Marxism for the thinkers of the Frankfurt School, see Jay (1996: 41-44).

In the first part of the quotation above, Marx defines a non-alienated approach to the world as the experience (*the manifestation of human world*) of the individual. By mediating his actual action in the world (*efficaciousness*) with his actual confrontation to the world (*suffering*), the individual comes to what could be described as a real-sensuous identification (*enjoyment*) with the image of himself in history. This non-alienated approach rejects the transfiguration of the ordinary life of human beings in society determined by the capitalist logic of power based on social relationships of private property. To achieve a non-alienated approach to the world, Marx then proposes that communism is ‘a positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement, and therefore as the real appropriation of the human essence by and for man’ (Marx 2007: 202). This transcendence is understood as human being’s capacity of a social life in which there is no longer the objectification brought about by private property. Regarding this totalising-teleological Marxian view, Horkheimer seems to be more reluctant<sup>44</sup>.

In his inaugural lecture of 1931, Horkheimer stresses that Marx’s social thought enfolds the difficulty of social philosophy when thinking about society (BPSS: 7,8). Social philosophy aims to construct a social whole. Both in the notion of the being-by-each-other and in the idea of critical theory itself, Horkheimer hence points to the indeterminate interpenetrative moment between individual experience and social life rather than subscribing to a totalizing view of it. Instead, Marx held that a non-alienated approach to the world leads to a non-alienated society, where ‘Society is the consummated oneness in substance of man and nature -the true resurrection of nature- the naturalism of man and the humanism of nature both brought to fulfilment’ (Marx 2007: 104).

Marx then proposed communism as the historical solution for what he called the resurrection of nature, or the liberation of human beings from relationships of private property. As Marx put it, ‘Communism is the riddle of history solved, and it knows itself to be this solution’ (Marx 2007: 102). Communism is thus philosophically conceived as materialist and practical solution to history. Here, Horkheimer understood Marx to perform an absolute materialist judgement on reality after developing a critique of Hegel’s idealist absolute knowledge<sup>45</sup>. In

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<sup>44</sup> For a further explanation of Horkheimer’s reception of Marx see also Jay (1996:57).

<sup>45</sup> In the 1956-1958 note *Hegel und Marx*, Horkheimer makes clear how the historical solution proposed by Marx makes him ‘an executioner [*Vollstrecker*] of the absolute’ (GS6: 262).

simple words, Marx's judgement was that there was a riddle to solve in history and that communism would be the solution.

Moreover, Horkheimer understood that Marx did not leave aside the metaphysical foundation of idealism. Instead, Marx required an unexplainable transcendental moment that he considered to be already inside human beings and that will make human beings conscious of their alienation so to liberate them from it<sup>46</sup>. In this sense, Marx did not explain why human beings come to know communism as the solution of the riddle of history but he described how they can put communism into practice. Horkheimer thought that Marx's criticism of Hegel was important because it showed that metaphysical thought reduced theory to the knowledge of a totality devoid of practice. For Horkheimer, the impetus to practice is both the kernel of Marx's philosophy and the philosophical move by which Marx criticises Hegel's idealism (BPSS: 129)<sup>47</sup>. Indeed, practice in Marx is related to the possibility of overcoming the estrangement produced by the spiritualisation of private property. Marx argued that Hegel's idealism equates human beings with self-consciousness. Once human beings objectify reality, then they start to take reality as given. As Marx described it, 'the re-appropriation of the objective essence of man, begotten in the form of estrangement as something alien, therefore denotes not only the annulment of *estrangement*, but of *objectivity* as well. Man, that is to say, is regarded as a *non-objective, spiritual being*' (Marx 2007: 152). When human beings think of themselves as abstract entities able to grasp a given reality, the activity of thinking alienates them from their corporeal-material constituency and breaks what could be their immanent relationship to the world. For Marx, this alienation of self-consciousness posits *thinghood* as an objectified reality that human beings will take as already given. Marx hence aimed to unmask the thinghood in its abstract identity and so brings to light the estrangement of the material power of human beings (Marx 2007: 155).

Horkheimer agreed with Marx's criticism of Hegel. Absolute knowledge in Hegel is an abstract whole created by human beings who start to live in the world that they have objectified after having thought themselves to be absolute - i.e. boundless and endless. As Horkheimer stated in 1932 in the essay *Hegel und das Problem der*

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<sup>46</sup> In the note *Über Theorie und Praxis* of 1961-1962, Horkheimer clarifies the idealism in Marx by explaining this argument: 'The teaching of Marx that theory and practice are one, is already understood in the Kantian teaching' (GS6: 383).

<sup>47</sup> [1930, *A new concept of ideology?*]

*Metaphysik*, 'From the point of view of idealism, the self-knowing subject must regard himself as identical to the absolute; he must be infinite. [...] German idealism tries to ground particular knowledge in the knowledge of totality [...] From this premise, Hegel determines his philosophical system' (GS2: 296). In Horkheimer's view, Hegel's metaphysics created a totalising system of absolute identification between the general concept, which unifies all particular beings, and reality. Horkheimer understands that absolute identification in Hegel to be the sublation (*Aufhebung*) of the general concept that unifies empirical contradictions into an objectified worldview (GS2: 297)<sup>48</sup>. For Horkheimer, thought as such does not exist but there is 'a determinate thinking belonging to a determinate human being that is certainly conditioned by the general social situation' (GS2: 301)<sup>49</sup>.

Horkheimer hence decides that what gives Hegel's philosophy its metaphysical character is the unity between reason and reality, i.e. between thinking conceptually and objectification of thought in the material world. Indeed, Horkheimer defines metaphysics as a general thought that aims to give foundation to the particular (GS2: 304)<sup>50</sup>. But, in his view, giving any foundation to thought constitutes a censorship of human being's concretisations of social life. The concretisations of social life remain indeterminate to any final definition as they entail the possibility of a change.

Both Horkheimer and Marx understood that the problem of Hegel's idealism was the conception of mental labour as the exclusive object of philosophy, making it the kernel of its totalising idealistic system. But unlike Marx, Horkheimer does not think that the idealism of Hegel can be superseded if the exploited labour of the alienated man of the working class is brought to light and then transcended positively in communism. Moving a critique of the idealist philosophy of history from a materialist idea of history as history of class struggle - as Marx did - can help to show the bourgeois ideology of idealism; that is, mental labour as exclusive object of philosophy.

However, Marx's materialist critique does not reject the logic of thinking teleologically about an idea of a good society as the final destiny for a non-alienated humanity. To put this in a question: Why do human beings who do not own the means of production -i.e. the proletariat - should make a revolution leading to the

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<sup>48</sup> [1932, *Hegel und das Problem der Metaphysik*]

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

end of private property after they have become conscious of being a class of expropriated individuals? What is their motivation to actualise historically this project of liberation? In Horkheimer's view, Marx does not give an answer to these questions because he frames the negative moment of the alienation and suffering into a materialist conceived social philosophy<sup>51</sup>. Marx's materialist social philosophy is dialectically oriented towards communism as the solution to the historical problem of the alienation of labour.

Horkheimer clarifies that in the historical context of Hitler's National Socialism and Stalin's Socialism, the 19<sup>th</sup> century historical materialism of Marx and its dialectical framework does not present a mode of thinking about negation as a mode of critique then able to resist the irrational dimension of totalitarian logic of power. As Horkheimer stated in the 1961 note entitled *Marx and Liberalism*, 'Marx's theory was meant as a critique of liberalism. But it was itself a liberal critique and falls prey to the authoritarian force of history' (D&D: 205).

As we have touched upon, Horkheimer thinks already in the 1930s that critical theory should reject the idea of totality as a teleological framework that closes human thought within a concrete social philosophy. In doing so, Horkheimer regards human work as an indeterminate moment, a continuous alteration of human beings' social life. Human work is not disconnected from the historical-social practices of domination but not totally determined by them. As Horkheimer states in *Traditional and Critical Theory*, 'The viewpoints which critical theory derives from the historical analysis as the goal of human activity [...] are immanent in human work but are not correctly grasped by individuals or by the common mind. A certain concern is also required if these tendencies are to be perceived and expressed' (CT: 213). Here it becomes clear that the abstract claims of the critical theorist results from an analysis that is entangled in the concretisations of social relationships, such as work relationships. However, the critical theorist's claims do not necessarily find the general approval of other human beings or express the concerns of a specific social class such as Marx's proletariat.

As 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Marx still located the proletariat and its class consciousness as the possible trigger for a positive transcendence of private property. Horkheimer in the 1930s showed that critical theory could not locate a class-consciousness (the class-consciousness of the expropriated) and a subject of

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<sup>51</sup> See the 1956-1958 note *Marx als Stadium* (GS6)

history (the proletariat) as a possible trigger of social change. The increase in social domination over the social life of individuals brings about a growing increase in the estrangement of human life. As Horkheimer remarked, 'Unemployment, economic crises, militarization, terrorist regimes - in a word, the whole condition of the masses - are not due, for example, to limited technological possibilities, as might have been in earlier periods but to the circumstances of production that are no longer suitable to our time' (CT: 213). Horkheimer's materialism does not conceive of social relationships as the product of the history of class struggles but as an indeterminate moment of the individual with historical-social practices. The interpenetrative moment and its indeterminacy constitute, in a first place, in a non-teleological way both a dialectical moment of negation of identity-thinking and, in a second place, the materialist impetus to practice. Horkheimer's critical theory does not lean on teleology as principle of dialectics and does not consider the end of history as the goal of theoretical thinking.

Instead, dialectics for Horkheimer is the never-concluded process of contradictions between flesh-and-blood human beings and the concretisations of their social life. His idea of the dialectics comes from Hegel's idealism, even if he rejects its metaphysical character. The main problem of Hegel's dialectic consists, in Horkheimer's view, of thinking about 'contradiction in the process of its development as a figure of the same decisive contradiction' (GS6: 204)<sup>52</sup>. In Hegel's philosophy, contradiction refers to an object of thought that is determined by the terms of the contradiction (affirmation and negation). In this view, negation can only be determined by the logic of contradiction and so oriented towards the sublation of the contradiction in a prospective reconciliation. Taking the lead from Marx's criticism of Hegel, Horkheimer considers the impetus to practice as a mode of avoiding reducing contradiction to a merely object of thought. However, Horkheimer rejects Marx's idea that there is a riddle of history and that it resolves teleologically in communism.

In sum, Marx removes negation from Hegel's idealist thought but does not remove it completely from the dialectical scheme of contradictions and its teleological horizon. We might pose the following question as consequence. How does Horkheimer conceive of the interpenetrative moment between the experience and

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<sup>52</sup> [1949-1952, *Notiz zur Dialektik*]

the theoretical design of conceptual representation if there can be no possibility of reconciliation between them?

In Marxist fashion, Horkheimer takes the idea that a transformation of society may also happen if there is a transformation of the immanent-practical way in which human beings make sense of reality. As Jay suggests, 'Echoing Marx's critique of Feuerbach [...], Horkheimer stressed the active element in cognition which idealism had correctly affirmed. The objects of perception, he argued, are themselves the products of man's actions, although the relation tends to be masked by reification' (Jay 1996: 53). In his first thesis on Feuerbach, Marx points to the 'sensuous human activity' or 'practice' as the activity of a real human being as such and not as an abstract representation, as would be the act of contemplation in an idealist philosophy like Hegel's (Marx 1998: 569).

Nonetheless, Horkheimer does not make practice the immanent action of an historical subject who will bring history to its solution. As he writes in *Materialism and Metaphysics*, 'The claim that there is an absolute order and absolute demand made upon man always supposes a claim to know the whole, a totality of things, the infinite' (CT: 27). In this sense, Horkheimer considers practice - which Marx regarded as a sensuous activity - as a sort of negative materialism, in which the stress on historical social conditions 'maintains the irreducible tension between concept and object and thus has a critical weapon of defence against the infinity of the mind' (CT: 28)<sup>53</sup>.

Why then can we define Horkheimer's materialism as negative? Negation here is still determined by a contradiction lying in the tension between concept and object. However, negation is not sublated into a reconciliation in the history of philosophy (Hegel) or in the history of class struggle (Marx). Negation becomes a critical mode against the framework of theoretical thinking present in a teleological discourse - against what Horkheimer named 'the infinity of the mind'.

In this respect, Horkheimer's negative idea materialism demonstrates that there is no reconciliation between experience and thought. Therefore, his idea of materialism is negative and keeps the tension between experience and thought unreconciled. In contrast, Hegel's philosophy of history and Marx's history of class

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<sup>53</sup> The term *negative materialism* is borrowed from Alfred Schmidt's interpretation of Max Horkheimer's philosophy. See Chapter 2 for a further explanation.

struggle bring the tension between experience and thought to a sublated end of history present either in absolute spirit or communism.

By breaking with the teleological framework of Hegel's dialectics and Marx's materialism, Horkheimer conceives in my view negation both as the term of a dialectical contradiction and as a mode of thinking incommensurate with the dialectical contradiction, the latter emerging when we look at relationships between critical theory and the idea of time.

For Horkheimer, a claim about reality comes only from the transitory judgment of the theorist. This judgement has both specific historical and social determinations. Nonetheless it is not disconnected from the indeterminate relationship between experience and concepts. As he states,

The essential relatedness of theory to time does not reside in the correspondence between individual parts of the conceptual construction and successive period of history, that is a view on which Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind* and *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*, examples of the same method, are in agreement. It consisted rather in the continuous alteration of the theoretician's existential judgement on society, for this judgement is conditioned by the conscious relation to the historical practice of society (CT: 234)<sup>54</sup>.

This statement became object of an academic dispute in the 1970s over whether critical theory shall be considered as a variant of existential philosophy or as a theory rooted in the Hegelian-Marxian tradition (Jay 1984: 210). In my view, Horkheimer moves his critical theory from an Hegelian-Marxian framework. As the above cited text demonstrates, Horkheimer notes that the claims of the theorist are conditioned by his or her conscious relations to historical social practices. Such a conscious relation is grounded in the dialectical contradictions between concept and experience. Therefore, judgement is the product of a social mediation between individual experience and historical-social practices. However, Horkheimer clarifies that the essential relatedness of theory to time must be found in the continuous alteration of the existential judgement of the theorist. This reference to a 'continuous alteration' testifies in my view a groundless dimension in Horkheimer's critical theory. This groundless dimension informs the inconclusiveness of critical theory in determining social relationships within a teleological idea of history.

Regarding the same cited quotation then, we would say that *existential* shall be read as *experiential*. In my view, the reference to experience should be ascribed to the

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<sup>54</sup>[1937, *Traditional and Critical Theory*]

influence of both Kant and Schopenhauer's philosophy on Horkheimer. Let us clarify this statement with reference to the said quotation.

Judgment is a claim about reality that remains open to an indeterminacy because it is subject to what, in the above quotation, Horkheimer calls *continuous alteration*. Alteration is conceived in Schopenhauerian fashion as the continuous transformation of theorist's experience of the world<sup>55</sup>. Horkheimer seems here to take implicitly perception as a moment of experience and, in doing this, he echoes Schopenhauer's philosophy. The term 'alteration' involves a dimension of irrationality that the historical conceptualisation of dialectic lacks. The dimension of irrationality in the theorist's judgment is rationalised when the theorist consciously relates the continuous alteration of his judgement both to the chronological time of history and to the observed social practices. In this view, the theorist's claims of truth about society are neither eternal nor immutable. They are always restricted to subjective experience; that is, to the theorist's perception and thought. In Horkheimer's view, the theorist is a flesh and blood human being and not a hypothetical subject. Therefore, the subjective experience remains conditioned by the historical and social circumstances and so are the claims of truth derived from it.

By considering the analysis of social reality in relation to time as a decisive moment for the theorist's judgments, Horkheimer brings Schopenhauer's negative thought into a renewed dialectical thought that confronts the web of social-historical relations. At the same time, Horkheimer brings Marx's materialism into negative thought; that is, into a groundless thought that does not consider exclusively the historical-social practices as theoretical framework for the analysis of society. This groundlessness is conceivable with a non-chronological idea of time. This idea of time is not historical but an ever-fleeting present that takes the moment of death as the testimony of transience instead of the final destiny of a lifetime.

In my view, this idea of non-chronological time is not Hegelian but Schopenhauerian. As I will discuss in Chapter 4, Schopenhauer's philosophy presents individuals, social relationships, institutions, arts and culture in general as transient manifestations of an illogical dimension. The world represented by human

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<sup>55</sup> In my view, the expression *continuous alteration* echoes Schopenhauer's notion of law of causality (see chapter 4).

beings is a spatially and temporally determined manifestation of a-temporal and a-spatial dimension of human beings' experience of the world, which Schopenhauer entitles the will.

Critical theory can be then said to relate to time in two ways. On the one hand, it is the chronological time of history, conceived materialistically in the dialectical contradictions of the immanent social practices. This first idea of time echoes Marx's materialism. On the other hand, within that chronological time, there is an idea of time as ever-fleeting present unfolding continuous alterations. This non-chronological idea of time echoes Schopenhauer's metaphor of the world as will and representation<sup>56</sup>. From this perspective, critical theory would be characterised by the negative thought of Schopenhauer because it is not grounded in a positive teleological framework but remains in a radical tension with society and history.

In conclusion, we can see in Horkheimer's critical theory of the 1930s an intersection of Marx's criticism of Hegel's idealism with Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the world as will and representation. The loving approach described in the episode of the happy island of the youth is translated into a mode of dialectical thinking conceived in negative materialist fashion within the idea of critical theory. Both the loving approach and dialectical thought thus point to the interpenetrative moment between the experience and representation of reality, which informs his idea of critical theory.

### **1.5 Late Developments**

In the 1930s, Horkheimer's academic activity was threatened by the Nazi persecutions. In 1933, he was relieved of his professorship and directorship, while in 1934 he moved to New York where the Institute of Social Research is relocated at Columbia University. At the beginning of the 1940s, he still resided in the US and continued to reflect upon the design of the interdisciplinary research method of the Institute of Social Research. In the light of the political change in Europe in the 1930s, the term *critical* means the deactivation of the totalitarian power of society. As Horkheimer states in the 1941 *Notes on Institute Activities*, 'The totalitarian states are imposing the political values of imperialist power politics upon all scientific, cultural, and economic activities' (CTS: 265). By analysing the

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<sup>56</sup> See Chapter 4.

totalitarian dimension of power politics in the social life, Horkheimer nudged the idea of critical theory towards a critique of instrumental thought and gradually abandons the hope of actualising a rational state of society which had characterised his thought in the 1930s.

In 1944, Horkheimer and Adorno wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment* - a collection of philosophical fragments which represented a turning point of Horkheimer's thought. In their preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno clarify that the task of critique has become disproportionate to the power of totalitarianism (DE: XI). In the face of the Nazi persecutions, the concentration camps, the terror of the Stalinist Soviet Union and the authoritarian conformism of Western democracies, Horkheimer re-considers critical theory as a critique of totalitarian power. In sum, totalitarian states are structured by dynamics of power and social relationships which dominate the whole social life of the individual with instrumental logic.

During the Second World War period, the entanglement of totalitarian power in social relationships presented a mode of domination no longer leaving any room for the concretisation of a human life autonomously from the instrumental logic. Here, the term 'totalitarian' refers hence not only the National Socialist and Fascist regimes but also to the advanced capitalism of Western countries. In this vein, Adorno and Horkheimer state that 'There is no longer any available form of linguistic expression which had not tended toward accommodation to dominant currents of thought; and what a devalued language does not do automatically is proficiently executed by societal mechanisms' (DE: XII). But if propositional language embeds the violence of totalitarian states, how can critical theory resist the move towards a totalitarian society? In Adorno and Horkheimer's view, 'social freedom is inseparable from enlightened thought' (DE: XIII). Theory does not renounce his critical character only because propositional language expresses the totalitarian systematisation of violence in social life.

For Horkheimer, critical thought testifies to the possibility that individuals in flesh and blood become conscious that their social world is not already given. Hence, enlightened thought is, for Horkheimer and Adorno, the 'general progressive thought' that liberates human beings from fear by pursuing a project of liberation outlined in the following terms: 'The disenchantment of the world; the dissolution of myths and the substitution of knowledge for fancy' (DE: 3). However, under

totalitarian domination, progressive thought establishes its sovereignty as a practice of domination by destroying its own reason, meaning the possibility of a life liberated from fear, 'a truly human condition' (DE: XI)<sup>57</sup>. If reason has lost its progressive-enlightening character and so its capacity to show that the social world is not already given and immutable, then how can critical thought survive?

Adorno and Horkheimer's response is that 'The task to be accomplished is not the memory of the past but the redemption of the hopes of the past' (DE: XV). What is at stake is no longer the hope for the actualisation of a rational state of society. What is at stake instead is the hope that, under the pressure of totalitarian domination, critical thought might retain the possibility of negating the constituted order of power as immutable and work towards the abolition of oppression and injustice. The task of such thought is then to deactivate the totalitarian character of society. In 1946, in the preface to *Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer underlines how critical thought is compelled towards this task. As he says, 'advance in technical facilities for enlightenment is accompanied by a process of dehumanization. Thus, progress threatens to nullify the very goal it is supposed to realize- the idea of man' (ER: VI). In short, reason has become instrumental and accompanies a process of dehumanisation.

To avoid the re-emergence of totalitarian regimes in the development of capitalism after World War II in Europe, Horkheimer invites his readers 'To interpret accurately the profound changes now [in the late 1940s and in the 1950s] taking place in the public mind and in human nature' (ER: VI). However, Horkheimer makes it clear that he does not suggest anything resembling programme of action, for 'the modern propensity to translate every idea in action is one of the symptoms of the present cultural crisis' (ER: VI). He seems to suggest instead that the critical theorist needs to clarify what kind of social and cultural processes are at stake in the present situation of society and challenge them. In this vein, by the 1950s and 1960s, Horkheimer conceives a notion of non-conformism as the possibility of a human life that questions instrumentality and domination with its concretisation as a social life.

In the notion of a non-conformist life, Horkheimer seems to echo the memory of the happy island of the youth as the possibility of escaping the violence of social relationships. As Horkheimer and Pollock admitted in a private memorandum of

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<sup>57</sup> In chapter 5 I will discuss about this point as the self-destruction of Enlightenment

1951, 'Our life should be an evidence that utopia is to be realized in small. We wish the other [*das Andere*] the new, the unconditional [*das Unbedingte*]. Our life is earnest. The laws of society should not find their validity in us' (GS11: 290)<sup>58</sup>. As we shall see in Chapter 6, the idea of non-conformism moves beyond the idea of a revolution because it is devoid of teleology. In the idea of non-conformism, human emancipation is entangled as a question of experience determining a critical attitude toward dynamics of power and domination. Progressively, the loving approach of the being-by-each-other of Horkheimer's youth, then the dialectical thought and the negative materialism of the critical theory of the 1930s finally became in the 1960s the notion of the longing for the totally other.

With the end of the Second World War, Horkheimer and the Institute returned to Frankfurt where he became university rector. During the 1950s and the 1960s, he dedicated himself to the writing of essays, notes and aphorisms, which make his late thought more unsystematic and fragmentary compared to his work of the 1930s. The critical reflections of the 1950s and 1960s upon the possibility of overcoming the instrumental thought of advanced capitalism are collected in the essays that make up *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, published in 1967. In the foreword to this collection, Horkheimer emphasised that the concept of reason has lost its critical character in favour of a mechanism of self-destruction.

Horkheimer's late thought is still focused on a reconsideration of critical theory capable of triggering identification and solidarity among human beings. I will argue in the following chapters, that Horkheimer condenses in the idea of the longing for the totally other the hope for a solidarity devoid of the logic of power.

## 1.6 Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have used my notion of the unspoken as a prism to read Horkheimer's thought, highlighting two recurrent themes therein. First, propositional language does not have any intrinsic power to determine social reality. Instead, social reality is made up by flesh-and-blood individuals and the concretisations of their social relationships. The second theme is the longing to deactivate the dynamics of power which make reality appear falsely as immutable and already given. The connection between these two themes is that language is the

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<sup>58</sup> This memorandum is quoted in the editor's remark to *L'île heureuse*.

place where Horkheimer investigates the cultural and social practices producing the dynamics of power and where he traces the possibility of their deactivation.

The non-philosophical idea of being-by-each-other in the youth, the idea of critical theory of Horkheimer's intellectual maturity and the longing for the totally other of his old age point to the possibility that a political change may occur in the abolishment of all the logic of power, violence and oppression in every aspect of human relationships (culturally, socially and economically). Conceptual thought and propositional language hence adopt a role of primary importance in the possibility of this change because they are vehicles of meanings, cultural and social practices. Hence, Horkheimer's critical theory entails the possibility of unmasking the dynamics of power in the concepts of everyday language by analysing the gap between the conceptual representations of reality and their concretisation in social life. Critical theory suggests then the possibility that human beings identify themselves in solidarity precisely by deactivating the violence and the instrumental logic of power relationship.

Before moving on to the next chapter, I would like to mention the artistic and poetic writing *An Maidon. Zum Schicksal der Religion* that Horkheimer dedicated to his wife and was published in 1972 with an etching by the artist Giuseppe Guerreschi. In my view, the following words of Grytzko Masciani that appears in the same work shows, in a very illuminating way, Horkheimer's approach to human life as an unspoken:

No science, capable of resolving *per se* the feeling, exists. In the same way, there is no alternative to poetic speech, unless we want our image, nude like a larva and meaningless, to be cast into the abstraction of a thinking, which devours itself and disown itself by becoming a barbaric practice. Love demands a human involvement into the anxious hesitation of error and expression. It calls for return and loyalty to the most ancient way of knowing the other, to the primal need of not being left alone. (Masciani in Horkheimer 1990: 148)<sup>59</sup>.

Like Masciani, Guerreschi gives an equivalent idea of Horkheimer's unspoken approach to the world by portraying him in an etching as a thoughtful man with a head in assemblage, whose body, dressed up in bourgeois clothes, is vanishing backwards in favour of a blooming plant in a vase, which he tries to touch (Guerreschi in Horkheimer 1990: 155). This etching represents the perfect image

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<sup>59</sup> This artistic and poetic work of Guerreschi and Masciani was printed in Italy in the manuscript Horkheimer, M. & Guerreschi, G. (1972) *An Maidon. Zum Schicksal der Religion*. Milan: M'Arte Edizioni. It has been published in Germany in 1990 in a collection of 1956-1972 documents entitled *Horkheimer und Italien* (Horkheimer 1990).

of a human being imprisoned in a society that he perceives surrounded by barbed-wire fence. Yet he cannot escape society which constrains him in the same way the bourgeois clothes remain buttoned up at his neck and head. Nonetheless, the man in the etching endeavours to find his own nature in society as it exists. By pursuing it, he discovers that his nature can only flourish in a vase which represents an enclave, or perhaps an *île heureuse*, as an imaginary-material place where he might discover the totally other. Unfortunately, the totally other is still condemned to remain alien to the existing society and he can only long for it, just as the substanceless hand of Horkheimer seems, by a sort of dimensional overlapping, to lean on the plant but cannot grasp it firmly.

# Chapter 2

## The late thought of Max Horkheimer

### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will discuss how the existing literature evaluates Horkheimer's late thought. To recall, the hypothesis presented by this thesis is that the idea of human emancipation in Horkheimer is to be found in his concept of longing for the totally other, a notion emerging in his late thought through an interest in Schopenhauer's philosophy and Judaic theology. In the light of my hypothesis, the review of the literature conducted in this chapter will mainly highlight how Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason and his turn to theology mark the exhaustion of critical theory in developing progressive thought.

First, I will review Habermas' and Sloterdijk's criticism of the late thought of Horkheimer which is thought as influential. They discuss the exhaustion of critical theory from two different perspectives. Firstly, while Habermas concentrates on the conceptual-philosophical implications of the late critical theory, Sloterdijk focuses on the theological-philosophical implications.

Secondly, the two interpretative lines of Habermas' and Sloterdijk's criticisms can be found in other literature on the late thought of Horkheimer, although this link is not explicit. Nonetheless, we can divide the literature into two main streams. The first stream shows that Horkheimer's late thought presents a less effective reading of social processes, which is weaker than his critical theory of 1930s. The second stream revives the religious and theological interest of the late works. However, both streams share the view that Horkheimer's late thought lacks a method for investigating social phenomena and, in its place, moves towards the history of philosophy and negative theology.

In addition to these two main streams, I will discuss a third one highlighting Horkheimer's attention to moments of experience that are entangled with corporeal materiality. Here, I will draw here on Alfred Schmidt's and Mechthild Rumpf's criticism of Horkheimer's thought. Schmidt sheds light on the presence of Schopenhauer's legacy in Horkheimer's idea of materialism, while Rumpf focuses on the role of maternal love in Horkheimer's investigation of Authority and Family

to highlight how Horkheimer thinks about an identification beyond discursive reason.

This third stream of criticism then gives us the hook to describe how Horkheimer framed the role of negation in his critique of propositional language and in the critique of power. I will argue that Horkheimer draws on Schopenhauer's thought to conceive of a negation as a denunciation that lays bare the irrational dimension of violence inherent to human being's pursuit of power. This theoretical move enables Horkheimer to find a philosophical gateway out of the impasse of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* by giving a response to the following question: Can we save progressive thought and emancipation from an overwhelming instrumentality?

## **2.2 Habermas and Sloterdijk on the late critical theory**

Habermas and Sloterdijk start from two separate premises when discussing the late critical theory. Habermas demonstrates the possibility of thinking through a discursive ethics, in what has become known as his theory of communicative action. For his part, Sloterdijk underlines that Adorno and Horkheimer bring two traditions of Western thought to their extremities: the Judaeo-Christian idea of redemption and the Ancient Greek idea of knowledge.

From two different philosophical pathways, Habermas and Sloterdijk reach the same conclusion: Horkheimer's late critical theory implodes within itself and it becomes exhausted in interrogating its own philosophical premises. The two theorists assume that such an implosion is possible because both Adorno and Horkheimer are in search of a reason - a discourse - that can reconcile in a thoughtful unity the human experience of the world with its representation. For Habermas, this search is incompatible with the unrelenting critique of Western thought staged in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Contrastingly, in Sloterdijk's view, Adorno's and Horkheimer's late thought can be regarded instead as critical only in the light of its Judaic theological motive and its Greek epistemological outlook. In this sense, Sloterdijk suggests that reason is salvation, and the critical theorist becomes the messiah who, with his redemptive knowledge, frees human beings from their gloomy world.

In my view, these critiques on the part of Habermas and Sloterdijk underline that Adorno and Horkheimer cannot accept the decay of the autonomy of the Western

liberal-bourgeois subject; that is, the possibility for the individual to be wise and happy in conjunction with the social whole. In this section of the chapter then, I will present my own viewpoint by drawing on Habermas and Sloterdijk's texts.

For Habermas, the late critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno is stuck in an irresolvable philosophical impasse. He discusses this point in the section dedicated to the critique of instrumental reason in the first volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984). Habermas shows that, from the 1940s, Horkheimer and Adorno insist on a theoretical position which demonstrates how the social practices of domination in advanced capitalism have totalised each aspect of human life with instrumentality. The kernel of the philosophical impasse emerging in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is then the determination of an escape from this instrumentality<sup>60</sup>. According to Habermas, Horkheimer and Adorno are conscious that human beings can no longer be wise and happy simply by appealing to a substantive and normative idea of truth, such as that present in religious and metaphysical worldviews.

Furthermore, the autonomy of the individual in enabling the bourgeois subjectivity of rational and moral man is ultimately destroyed by the totalitarian domination of society that overwhelms the potentialities of individuals. In sum, Habermas suggests that critique has lost its progressive impetus to improve the world through a dialectical confrontation with social practices of domination. Instead, critique remains only a negative practice serving to unmask society as untrue whole, meaning that critique may be able to show the bad in society but it cannot provide any idea of the truth and the good. An affirmative imagination of society is totalised by an instrumental thought that absorbs any idea of the truth and the good in the logical equivalence of means with ends. In this equivalence there is no distinction why a worldview should be better than another. Having said that, how do Horkheimer and Adorno then develop their critique of instrumental reason?

Habermas argues in philosophical terms that Horkheimer and Adorno submitted the instrumentality of reason to 'an unrelenting critique from the ironically distanced perspective of an objective reason that had fallen irreparably into ruin' (Habermas 1984: 377). Here Habermas highlights the paradox of Horkheimer's and Adorno's philosophical mode of critique, which I sum up in two steps. First, their

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<sup>60</sup> See also section I of Habermas' lecture *The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment: Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno in The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures* (Habermas 1990).

philosophical thought contains the dialectical antagonism between negation (the unrelenting critique) and affirmation (the normative principle of thought). Second, they transcend this antagonism in favour of negation where such a negation remains a term of a dialectical contradiction while staying open to an undefinable dimension once liberated from its coercion to affirmation<sup>61</sup>.

What then is the philosophical impasse that Habermas highlights? As unrelenting critique, negation can no longer take a progressive role if the domination opposed by negation cannot then be transcended. If domination has become invincible, then in the web of social relationships there is no longer a moment of negation but only the meaningless affirmation of instrumentality.

Horkheimer observes that advanced capitalism has revealed its totalitarian potential in its capacity to trap human life into its instrumentality and within a meaningless systematic replication of violence<sup>62</sup>. But here Habermas suggests that Horkheimer and Adorno still see the transcending power of philosophy as a negation, even if they do not see the possibility of negation in the historical-social context in which they live. Consequently, Horkheimer and Adorno proceed to hook negation to a bygone idea of philosophy which echoes the idealism of a harmonious metaphysical totality; this is called 'objective reason' in Horkheimer's vocabulary<sup>63</sup>. This is an echo of the same idealism unmasked by their unrelenting critique with a consequence that is regarded by Habermas as both paradoxical and ironic. Horkheimer and Adorno appeal to a bygone idealistic vision of philosophy while not aiming to revive it. They reject its metaphysical and harmonious character strongly, but they seem to find the critical negative moment of philosophy there. They then maintain it as the philosophical mode of critique to be wielded against instrumentality, mobilised against a way of thinking and living that is marked by domination for the sake of domination.

What is this critical negative moment of thought that becomes a philosophical mode of critique? As Habermas states, Horkheimer and Adorno need 'a conceptual apparatus that will allow them, nothing less than to denounce that the whole is untrue' (Habermas 1984: 377,378). On the one hand, the very idea of retaining a conceptual apparatus as a reified logical abstraction had itself been denounced by Horkheimer and Adorno. On the other hand, Horkheimer and Adorno know that

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<sup>61</sup> See Adorno's notion of non-identity in *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 1973: 5).

<sup>62</sup> I will discuss this point in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>63</sup> See the term reason in the section 0.7 of the introduction chapter.

philosophy finds expression in concepts and propositional language. If there are neither abstractions nor propositions, then there is nothing to negate. In this respect, Adorno and Horkheimer want to safeguard the conceptual apparatus of reason even if they are aware that it has reified into instrumentality at the expenses of its inner dialectical movement; that is, the struggle between claims of liberation and claims of coercive order.

In my view, this is the insoluble impasse of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that Habermas highlights in his criticism. The consciousness which sees the world as a dialectical antagonism between negation (emancipation) and affirmation (domination) and which stands in favour of the emancipation, only becomes exhausted when it realises that domination has overwhelmed the possibility of emancipation and has become totalitarian. As Habermas remarks, ‘The dialectic of enlightenment is an ironic affair: it shows the self-critique of reason the way to truth, and at the same time contests the possibility *that at this stage of complete alienation the idea of truth is still accessible*’ (Habermas 1984: 383)<sup>64</sup>. Here, the exhaustion of critical theory becomes ‘the exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness’ (Habermas 1984: 386).

On the one hand, Habermas rightly states that the task of critique is ‘to recognize domination as unreconciled nature even within thought itself’ (Habermas 1984: 384). With this claim, Habermas reminds the reader that critique unmasks domination as the reconciled correspondence in thought between the capacity to represent reality and the representation of reality. Yet critique does not negate the capacity to think in general. In summary, human beings only offer representations of reality through words and abstract concepts. However, the reality that they claim to conceive objectively does not carry any absolute affirmative truth about a definitive reality.

On the other hand, Habermas questions how human beings who are conscious of the instrumentality of their way of thinking can transform the mimetic impulses - that are still latent in them - into discursive insights and not ‘merely intuitively in speechless mindfulness’ (Habermas 1984: 384). Here, Habermas demonstrates an awareness on the part of Adorno and Horkheimer of the ways to approach the world beyond thinking and speaking, which involve a sort of direct identification with the world through an organic, immediate approach of spontaneous mimesis. But if

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<sup>64</sup> In italics, I transcript Habermas’ quotation of Horkheimer’s *Eclipse of Reason*.

thinking becomes instrumental, critique will not find any conceptual apparatus from which it is possible to deny that instrumentality. Then, how can human beings translate non-discursive approaches of direct identification with the world (such as mimetic impulses) into propositions and concepts?

In Habermas' view, this question is the riddle of Horkheimer and Adorno's late thought. In the light of this riddle, Habermas recognises the gap between Adorno's and Horkheimer's thought. He concludes that Adorno had no desire to escape this riddle. As Habermas puts it, '[Adorno's] *Negative Dialectics* is both the attempt to circumscribe what cannot be said discursively and an admonition to seek refuge nonetheless in Hegel in this situation' (Habermas 1984: 384). In this respect, Habermas judges Horkheimer's late philosophy to be less 'consistent' than Adorno's in his attempt to solve this riddle (Habermas 1984: 384). Indeed, after the end of the Second World War, Horkheimer continued to be preoccupied with a project to write a positive dialectic of Enlightenment. This project would consist in the capacity of Enlightenment to achieve self-transcendence of its authoritarian traits and illuminates the possibility of an emancipation from instrumentality through the anti-authoritarian tendency embedded within it<sup>65</sup>. But where did Horkheimer locate this embedded anti-authoritarian tendency? In fact, in undertaking this search, Horkheimer moved his research towards investigations of theology as well as the history of philosophy.

In contrast, Habermas' project is to consider thought and language in the light of a renewed possibility of communication. Hence, in describing the late critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno as 'an exhaustion of the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness' Habermas invokes 'a change of paradigm to the theory of communication [that] makes it possible to return to the undertaking [of the program of the early critical theory] that was interrupted by the critique of instrumental reason' (Habermas 1984: 386). Habermas suggests that we should move beyond thinking of advanced capitalism solely as totalitarian domination - or, in philosophical terms, as instrumental reason. Instead, we should illuminate instead the critical-discursive potential present in the historical-social context of Europe after the conclusion of Second World War<sup>66</sup>.

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<sup>65</sup> Habermas clarifies this argument in the section II of his article *Remarks On The Development of Horkheimer's Work* (Habermas 1993) and not in the first volume of *Theory of Communicative Action*.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, the essay *Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State* (Habermas 1999).

In contrast to Habermas's take on Horkheimer, Sloterdijk addresses the end of critical theory by unpacking its theological roots. He emphasises that the late critical thought of Horkheimer and Adorno constitutes a hyperbolic theory whose exaggerated character hides the admission of a cultural defeat; namely, an admission of the loss of the promise that salvation is possible through knowledge. In *Essays after Heidegger*, Sloterdijk characterises Adorno and Horkheimer's late critical theory as a 'cryptotheology [...] a quarrel between Jerusalem and Athens insofar as it orchestrates the entrance of thought of redemption into a question of knowledge' (Sloterdijk 2017:151). Sloterdijk's main argument is that Horkheimer and Adorno start from the assumption that any thought reconciling subject and object is untrue. In Sloterdijk's view, they are unable to escape from this assumption. We discussed above, the task of their critique is to unmask any discursive identification that finds the validity of truth in human being's absolute representation of the existing historical and social relationships. As Sloterdijk then affirms, critical theory 'wishes to undo existing identifications and liberates individual things from the grip of reason' (Sloterdijk 2017: 153).

But Sloterdijk questions how Adorno and Horkheimer can know that the thought of other individuals is untrue and how they know what this truth itself is. In Sloterdijk's view, critical theory goes awry in the face of the questions by starting from a privileged position of wisdom, whose privilege is only possible if a horizon of salvation is established within wisdom. Following Sloterdijk, we can say metaphorically that Jerusalem (the Judaeo-Christian tradition of salvation) enters Athens (the Greek tradition of knowledge). Here, the critical theorist may not be the only one to provoke the quarrel between redemption and knowledge, but he is the only one who can solve it.

In Sloterdijk's view, this quarrel is expressed in the rhetoric figure of exaggeration: hyperbole. Critical theorists start with an exaggeration of their knowledge of society but do not explain why they possess such a knowledge. They avoid responding the problematic question about the origin of their wisdom about society by using exaggeration to point towards a path of salvation, so stating that society is untrue, as the Adornian aphorism 'the whole is untrue' admits (Sloterdijk 2017: 168)<sup>67</sup>. However, since Adorno and Horkheimer do not have any substantial knowledge of

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<sup>67</sup> The aphorism is the last sentence of the fragment 29 *Dwarf Fruit* in *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 1978).

truth, they are soon confronted with the ‘unbearability’ of their privileged position and their critical theory breaks out of knowledge and moves towards aesthetics instead (Sloterdijk 2017:159).

For Sloterdijk, the exaggeration that makes the world unbearable lies in the continuous reference to social relationships as ‘the existent [*das Bestehende*]’ (Sloterdijk 2017:161). By insisting on the hyperbolic definition of society as the existent, Horkheimer and Adorno ‘spoke neither as sociologists nor as contemporaries. Under the appearance of social critique, they incorporated forgotten practices of negative metaphysics as critique of the world’ (Sloterdijk 2017: 161). Sloterdijk regards exaggeration as the key rhetorical device of the late critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno. Then he demonstrates that the introduction of a discourse of redemption into a discourse of knowledge brings both redemption and knowledge to a philosophical collapse. Yet the conclusion reached is only that the world is an unbearable place to live in.

In the end, Habermas’s and Sloterdijk’s criticism brings to light the two main structures underlying the late thought of Horkheimer and Adorno. The first structure is the conceptual logic of their late critical theory which is taken to be a philosophical strategy that submits to critique any claim attempting to say definitively how the world is. But how then can Horkheimer and Adorno submit critical theory to critique without using the same theoretical means of critical theory? That is, to submit critical theory to its own unmasking strategy?

By striving to answer this question, Habermas demonstrates how the late critical theory is stuck in the paradigm of philosophy of consciousness.

The theological motive of the late critical theory then presents a second structure. Sloterdijk demonstrates that the task of critique is not only marked by an issue of knowledge - namely, the unreconciled nature of the relationship between subject and object. It is also indeed deeply rooted into the Judaeo-Christian horizon of salvation. Instead of redeeming the violent affirmation of logic, Horkheimer and Adorno’s late critical theory ends up confirming its unveiled instrumental power with a continuous negation. Such a negation is the claim that the social whole is untrue. However, this negation can no longer provide salvation because it does not see any escape from the totalitarian domination. Sloterdijk hence draws a peremptory conclusion about the late thought of Horkheimer and Adorno,

describing how the ‘critical Messiah’ fails to deliver salvation to a world that is hyperbolically described as untrue (Sloterdijk 2007:159).

### **2.3 Literature on the late thought of Horkheimer**

In engaging with Habermas and Sloterdijk’s criticism, I have shed light on the two structures of critical theory: its conceptual logic and its theological motive. I will now discuss their appearance in the existing body of research literature on the late thought of Horkheimer. In the first place, I will briefly outline the case of the scholars who highlight the conceptual-logical structure of Horkheimer’s late thought and read it through the lens of social theory. I will then introduce scholars who place their emphasis on the theological side of Horkheimer’s late thought either to show the philosophical impasse of late thought or to use his late thought to revive the religious meaning of philosophy in general. It is worth underlining that these two streams of the existing literature on Horkheimer’s late thought do not move so much far from the critiques of Habermas and Sloterdijk.

First of all, the scholars who aim to investigate Horkheimer’s philosophy as a method for social theory do not consider Horkheimer’s late work to provide a substantial tool for getting to grips with his materialist method. Indeed, Habermas explicitly affirms that ‘anyone who wants to take up the intentions of Horkheimer’s materialism and pursue them in today’s altered theoretical contexts must refer to the substance of his work, which appeared before the end of the war [*World War II*]’ (Habermas 1993: 51). Habermas views the late thought of Horkheimer as indissolubly linked to his inability to overcome the experience of emigration in the period of National Socialism (Habermas 1993:61).

In line with Habermas’ criticism, Wolfgang Bonß (1993) states that, in Horkheimer’s early works of the 1930s, critical theory should be conceived as a critique of scientific knowledge. There, Horkheimer tried to develop a new form of organising scientific work by throwing light on the social role of science. Bonß then regards the change of critical theory in Horkheimer’s late thought as the emergence of the ‘epistemological weakness’ already present in the critical theory of the 1930s (Bonß 1993:100). Horkheimer’s epistemological weakness is hence manifest in his a priori presupposition that the task of critical theory is to determine the social role of science according to its partisan spirit.

Similar to the interpretation supplied by Bonß, Alex Honneth suggests that we need to draw upon Horkheimer's works of 1930s to understand how the openness of Horkheimer's critical theory to interdisciplinary explorations implies a 'sociological deficit' in his thought (Honneth 1993: 210). This deficit then reveals Horkheimer's intention to make sociology merely an 'auxiliary science' rather than an 'autonomous science' separated from critical theory (Honneth 1993: 210, 211). Hence, this line of criticism places Horkheimer's late thought in confrontation with his description of society and highlights how Horkheimer highlights escapes from staging a confrontation with the role of science in social sciences, which was consistent in his critical theory of the 1930s.

On the level of social theory, the line of criticism given above seems to echo Habermas's argument to the extent that it unpacks the conceptual logic of the late critical theory by showing the lack of epistemological rigour in Horkheimer's late thought. Indeed, scholars who investigate the work of Horkheimer from the perspective of history of philosophy consider his late work either to be a critique of domination void of any historical specificity or as an aporetic eschatology. As John Abromeit (2011: 425) states, 'Horkheimer's and the Institute's work from the late 1920s and 1930s could serve as a more promising point of departure for contemporary efforts to renew critical theory rather than his writings after 1940'. Here, Abromeit supports his claim by pointing out the clarity of historical-specific conceptualisations in Horkheimer's early work. The late work instead becomes a trans-historical critique of domination.

In Brian J. Shaw's view (1985), the linkage between domination and the philosophy of history in the critical theory after 1940s leads Horkheimer to change his position concerning the political implications of critical theory. The urge for collective social action and the hope for a revolution are substituted for what Shaw describes as 'a nostalgia for a bygone past and a return to his youthful, inchoate yearning for some unarticulated state of affairs' (Shaw 1985: 177). This substitution highlights Horkheimer's aporetic eschatology which, in Shaw's view, is well represented in the nihilistic idea of the totally other. Shaw regards this idea as a cause for 'absolute despair and resignation' because Horkheimer's demand for a just world completely free of suffering remains unrealisable in post-war advanced capitalism (Shaw 1985: 178,179).

Instead, Peter Stirk describes Horkheimer's late thought as a 'philosophy of pity', demonstrating that the eschatological moment of freedom from suffering is left without any possible concretisation (Stirk 1992: 178). In Stirk's view, pity is the virtue aligned with the longing for justice - or connected to the redemption for past suffering - which is unleashed after human beings become conscious of the suffering of other human beings. Stirk demonstrates that such a virtue has a paradoxical nature in constituting the kernel of Horkheimer's aporetic eschatology. In his view, 'pity induces the hope that suffering will be redeemed, but the virtue of pity lies, for Horkheimer, in the solidarity which exists only through suffering and pity that it induces' (Stirk 1992: 202). Hence, this aporetic eschatology derived from the paradoxical nature of pity constitutes the source of Horkheimer's renewed critical theory which, in Stirk's view, seems to take the form of a 'sound religion' (Stirk 1992: 202).

These accounts of Horkheimer's late thought from the perspective of the history of philosophy highlights that the increased inconsistency of Horkheimer's critical assessment of society is accompanied by the emergence of redemption as theological motive. They appear to suggest that in Horkheimer's case, the de-contextualisation of social analysis, the feeling of discontent with the development of Western post-war society and the wish for the redemption from suffering emerges in his late thought only when the question of salvation enters knowledge and pierces it right through.

Now, in addition to this historical-philosophical perspective, I will briefly consider some authors who refer clearly to the religious and theological sides of Horkheimer's late thought. In this way, I will shed light on possible political and religious practices that are in oppositional confrontation to the instrumentality of advanced capitalism. Michael R. Ott (2001) takes religion as the fundamental critical idea that structures Horkheimer's critical theory of society and the struggle for human emancipation. In Ott's view, the longing for 'the totally Other' (which Ott writes with the capital letter) constitutes 'a religious statement of indictment of oppressive injustice' (Ott 2001: 104). Ott interprets this longing as a struggle against social injustices with the hope of a reconciled future where such injustices will be overcome by this totally Other. The totally Other seems, in Ott's interpretation, to resemble an undefined transcendental entity whose reminiscence in human beings can lead them to struggle against injustice. Ott hence considers

Horkheimer's longing of the totally other to be one possible means of renewing religious messianism. As he puts it, the longing for the totally other is 'The secular heir of the theory and praxis of prophetic Judaism and a Christianity expressive of the dangerous memory and hope of the freedom of Jesus as the Messiah for all people' (Ott 2001:139).

Establishing a more secular and political emphasis in his critique, Roland Boer (2011) suggests that Horkheimer's interest in religion and theology - and particularly in the late thought - can be analysed in terms of how religious ideas and practices come to a compromise with secular powers. In Boer's view, the late thought of Horkheimer sheds light upon the dialectical tension between the categories of resistance and betrayal in religion. Boer takes Horkheimer to understand religion as an authentic way of knowing the world devoid of domination. The resulting concept of resistance subsequently suggests the incorruptibility of religion in the face of power. The notion of betrayal then highlights the way in which religion becomes itself a practice of domination and loses its incorruptibility. In effect then, resistance and betrayal are the two practices by which religion deals with the existing institutions of power. In following Horkheimer's position on religion, Boer concludes that we can 'take sides' to support the resistant and non-conformist attitude of Christianity and so retrieve it as a political option (Boer 2011: 395).

In Rudolf Siebert's analysis of the religious and theological dimension in Adorno, Benjamin and Horkheimer, we find a re-evaluation of Horkheimer's late thought as it locates itself between theological interest and religious renewal. Taking the three volumes of his *Manifesto of Critical Theory of Society and Religion*, Siebert unpacks the theological implications of the thinkers of the Frankfurt School by claiming that their entire critical-philosophical project is traversed by the desire for a world other than the existing one (Ott in Siebert, 2010). Examining a preliminary article of the manifesto project, Siebert outlines how Adorno and Benjamin think about an 'inverse theology' that considers religion to be the practice of humanising mankind (Siebert 2005: 62). Such a humanisation happens when theological content is transferred from religious doctrines into secular discourse, and from secular discourse into a political practice standing in contrast to domination and violence. For Siebert, the longing for the totally other thus becomes the metaphor by which Horkheimer and Adorno hint at such a process of humanisation of mankind as 'a

redemptive quest for the rescue of the hopeless' (Siebert 2005: 60). From this perspective, Siebert states that the 'dialectic of enlightenment still continues in late capitalist society today' (Siebert 2005: 104). Siebert concludes that the world after the Second World War moves precariously between the possibility of devastating catastrophes - such as totalitarian regimes or nuclear wars - and the redemptive possibility of stopping this course of events.

With a similar emphasis on the religious, Ilan Gur-Ze'ev considers Adorno and Horkheimer's late thought to be a negative theology which gives rise to a diasporic philosophy. For him, diasporic philosophy is a negative thought that debunks any dogmatic truth while not renouncing 'creativity, love of life and responsibility of the eternal improviser' (Gur-Ze'ev 2010: 299). In this sense, Gur-Ze'ev clarifies that the late critical theory is a diasporic philosophy to the extent that it is 'an existential self-positioning and counter-educational erotic endeavour that opens for us the possibility of non-repressive creation, happiness, responsibility, and worthy suffering that is most relevant to our life in face of global capitalism' (Gur-Ze'ev 2010: 299). To explain this argument, Gur-Ze'ev shows how Adorno and Horkheimer rescue the Judaeo-Christian tradition of the unity of love, truth and justice with the negative religiousness of a messianism without a Messiah. With the term 'diasporic', Gur-Ze'ev does not suggest that the late critical theory implodes in a crypto-theology, as Sloterdijk claims.

Instead, Gur-Ze'ev emphasises how the diasporic philosophy of Adorno and Horkheimer's negative theology is a proposal of 'counter-education and active cosmopolitanism' (Gur-Ze'ev 2010: 312). Gur-Ze'ev places a spotlight on the impetus towards practice to which the late critical theory gives rise in its focus on negation, but he avoids explaining how it overcomes the dialectic between finitude and infinity, between domination and emancipation. In fact, Gur-Ze'ev's diasporic philosophy frames the late critical theory in its theological significance as 'a prayer in a Godless world [...] a religious quest, the existential readiness, for such an openness to infinity' (Gur-Ze'ev 2010: 307).

Despite the differences in interpretations, the literature that highlights the theological motives in Horkheimer seems to address the same point; namely, that the religious intensity of his late thought provides a gateway out from the philosophical impasse of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. However, these scholars place so much emphasis on this religious-political aspect that, instead of explaining how

the philosophical impasse of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is superseded, they justify it as a confirmation of an eternal struggle between the already-given forces of good and evil that otherwise animate society.

## **2.4 Materiality and corporeality in Horkheimer's thought**

Beyond the interpretative lines outlined above, I now want to draw on Schmidt's and Rumpf's critique and present them as a critical stream focused on how Horkheimer thinks about both material and corporeal dimensions of thinking in his critical theory. Such an enquiry will help us understand how Horkheimer employs these material and corporeal dimensions as moments negating the logic of power of social domination.

Schmidt suggests that Horkheimer's idea of materialism is a peculiar combination of Marx' and Schopenhauer's philosophy, which might be defined as 'negative materialism' (Schmidt 1977: 132). Indeed, he states that the linkage between Schopenhauer and Marx is in Horkheimer 'entirely substantial and not simply a formal analogy' (Schmidt 1993: 31). On the one hand, Horkheimer's materialism intends, in Marxist fashion, to carry out a critique of society by denouncing the relations of power in specific historical-social contexts. On the other hand, the intervention of Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will in the materialist analysis of society gives Horkheimer's late critical theory a more radical perspective about human existence. What then is this radical perspective about human existence? We need to make some references to Schopenhauer and Horkheimer to unpack Schmidt's argument and clarify the notion of materiality with broader theoretical lens.

Schmidt remarks that Schopenhauer's philosophy underlines the finite nature of human being who remain 'a needy something in the cosmos'<sup>68</sup> (Schmidt 1974: 139). In my view, Schmidt's point is that, instead of representing human beings as a nothingness dwarfed by the infinite size of the universe, Schopenhauer focuses on the finitude of human beings to highlight a state of indeterminacy. Indeed, Schmidt interprets Schopenhauer's idea of human being as a needy (bedürftig) something and not simply as a something in the cosmos. What does this finite nature of the

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<sup>68</sup> 'Ein bedürftiges Etwas im Kosmos' (tba).

human being refer to in Schopenhauer's philosophy? What are human beings in need of?

We may start now to think speculatively with Schopenhauer and Horkheimer by following Schmidt's idea that Horkheimer's materialism is negative. In philosophical terms, this idea of finitude refers to a critique of the idea of the human as an abstract being. Human beings think of themselves as different from other living and non-living beings in the world and so construct their identity as an object of discourse. The term 'object of discourse' refers to something (an object) that exists because it finds ground in the linguistic construction of an otherness (i.e. *human contra animal*). This is the construction of human identity through a logic that establishes a principle of difference - in the sense of a human being as *other than something*. It then underlies, in this Schopenhauerian perspective, the desire of human beings to give meaning to their meaningless existence<sup>69</sup>. In simple words, it expresses a desire to fill a nihilistic condition with meaning. This nihilistic condition is not innate, but it emerges when human beings take the moment of death to be both the end of their destiny and the measure of their life.

Nonetheless, we need to anticipate some of the themes of Schopenhauer's philosophy to explain the connection between the construction of otherness and the desire to give meaning to existence. For Schopenhauer, human beings are finite because they are transient manifestations of the indeterminate continuous transformation of the materiality of the world, which he calls 'the will'. In Schopenhauer's view, human beings are abandoned to the experience (the world as representation) of this indeterminate continuous change (the world as will). In simple words, the indeterminacy of the will refers to the idea that human beings cannot be fully in control of their existence, regardless of how much efforts they make and how much violence they exert in their attempts to control this changing world. So, if human beings are the transitory manifestations of a materiality in continuous change, how can they think of themselves as an object of discourse and construct their identity as an otherness? They turn death from a contingent moment into an abstract measure of their life<sup>70</sup>. How do human beings take death as the measure of their life and construct their otherness?

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<sup>69</sup> In chapter 4, I will clarify this point when discussing Schopenhauer's idea of human as abandoned.

<sup>70</sup> I will explain in chapter 4 the relationship between time and space (*principium individuationis* in Schopenhauer's vocabulary) and the fear of death in making death the measure of human life.

In Schopenhauer's view, human beings abstract an idea of death from their perceptual experience of fear of death. This abstraction refers to the destruction of their spiritual and physical nature as individual faced with an external world which remains without them.

Then, because of their ability to think abstractly, human beings develop a need for metaphysics when they stand 'consciously face to face with death' (Schopenhauer 1966a: 160). This need for metaphysics then expresses that what human beings desire to know is beyond the possibility of experience; that is, it is beyond the appearance of the world in perception (Schopenhauer 1966a: 164). From this standpoint, Schopenhauer calls human beings 'animal metaphysicum' (Schopenhauer 1966b:160). In this view, human beings are beings who share with animals the faculty of perception. From the representation of their perceptive faculty, human beings can develop through abstract thinking a knowledge that goes beyond the possibility of the perceptive experience and is expressed through language. In the light of this Schopenhauerian idea of human as *animal metaphysicum*, the finitude of human beings expresses itself in a paradoxical state. Human beings are the transitory expression of an indeterminate materiality in constant change (the will) while remaining beings able to abstract from perception a point from which they construct an image of themselves and project it onto the surrounding world. For Schopenhauer, both abstract thinking (or the faculty or reason as he calls it) and language express a subjective representation of world without defining how the world is in its essence.

Taking his lead from Schopenhauer then, Horkheimer sees in human beings' abstract thought and propositional language the possibility to express their transient experience of the world rather than a way of establishing a principle of truth that determines how reality is in its essence. From this Schopenhauerian perspective, Horkheimer views an act of violence inherent to the claim made by any language believing itself able to define reality in its essence. In contrast to Adorno's opinion that Schopenhauer's philosophy is an ontology of nothingness, Horkheimer understands Schopenhauer's philosophy in a non-ontological way and defines it as 'the expression of a violated nature' (G12: 596)<sup>71</sup>. What is this expression of a violated nature? Schopenhauer expresses human beings' violence in making abstract representation as the absolute point from which to determine their life as

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<sup>71</sup> [1946, *Retzung der Aufklärung. Diskussionen über eine geplante Schrift zur Dialektik*]

human. In this sense, Schopenhauer reminds us that the notion of *human* refers to subjects who are abandoned to the chimeras of abstract thought rather than being subjects who might find power in abstract thought.

In my view, Horkheimer considers Schopenhauer's philosophy as a theoretical mode of resistance against the reduction of human beings to a finitude that is conceived as the construction of an otherness. To be clearer, Horkheimer criticises the construction of otherness when the notion *the other* is deduced from a primary abstraction that is taken as the absolute criterion by which one can measure his life. For instance, in discussing fascist anti-Semitism, Horkheimer explains how in the mind of the Fascists the Jews are *the other* because the Fascists represent the life of Jews as the negation of Fascist domination. The life of the Jews testifies of the possibility of a non-conformist life in the Fascist order and therefore their life become intolerable to the Fascists<sup>72</sup>.

Instead, Horkheimer discusses the notion of the *other* as the possibility of the individual who thinks of a neighbour with whom to share a common existence in the world. This notion of the *other* points to the concrete possibility of a neighbour, who remains undefinable in its essence but definable as the expression of a common material world. In a 1970 interview, Horkheimer refers to his rejection of the otherness with this formula, 'identification not with the other but with others' and explain it in these terms, 'I am interested in the destiny of others, I know myself as a member [Glieder] of humanity [Menschheit] in which I will continue to live [fortleben]' (GS7: 401)<sup>73</sup>. Here the idea of humanity entails an idea of human both as a transient member of a historical community and as a permanent entanglement in a materiality in constant change.

In the end, Horkheimer draws on Schopenhauer's philosophy to put into question the idea of the human as an object of discourse from which to commensurate the world. Horkheimer agrees with Schopenhauer in undermining the primacy of an idea of the human which refers to human beings as powerful beings just because they are capable of discourse. The possibility that human beings systematise in propositional language the necessary violence to impose an order of power is seen in Schopenhauerian style as a despairing reaction to the fear of death. To deactivate such an idea of the human, Horkheimer recalls an idea of materiality that indicates

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<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 5.

<sup>73</sup> [1970, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*]

the interrelations of human beings with earth, animals and inorganic beings. As Christina Gerhardt correctly highlighted ‘For Horkheimer, animals underscore that humans are not superior and that precisely when they believe they are, their alleged superiority may well be based on a forgetting of the very real materialist conditions on which they depend and with which they interrelate. [...] In this way, when animals appears in Horkheimer’s writings, they question how humans relate to concepts of otherness, of alterity’ (Gerhardt 2020: 122).

From this point of view, the idea of materiality that Horkheimer learns from Schopenhauer is a materiality which, unlike the one of Marx’s historical materialism, does not draw upon an analysis of social and historical practices of human beings. This Schopenhauerian materiality should not be confused with a ‘crude materialism’ which Schopenhauer himself criticises vehemently because such a type of materialism takes reality as an essence to be discovered (Schopenhauer 1966a: 123)<sup>74</sup>. Neither does this materiality make any reference to pantheism, which, in Schopenhauer’s view, transposes from man to nature the possibility of an innate generative power (Schopenhauer 1966b: 590)<sup>75</sup>. As I will explain later in chapter 4, this idea of materiality is interrelated with a metaphysics of transience that Schopenhauer derives from an adjustment of the Kantian division between the realm of phenomena and the realm of noumena. Having said that, what then is the true value of Schopenhauer to Horkheimer’s critical theory?

Gerard Raulet’s response to this question is that Horkheimer takes Schopenhauer as a critic of Hegel in order to ‘reject both the rationalities of Western economies and the degeneration of Marxism into a self-contained rationality’ (Raulet 1979: 100). I agree that Horkheimer takes Schopenhauer to escape the degeneration of dialectics into a thought of totality. But Horkheimer also draws upon Schopenhauer to renew materialism in the non-ontological sense. For non-ontological, I refer here to the possibility of thinking without determining or classifying a fixed objective reality. Human beings classify reality when they turn names into discursive categories (i.e. reason, man, spirit, class, nation) and establish a logic of being by imposing a mechanism of definition as an act of violence on an indeterminate state of things. Indeed, in the fragment of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and

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<sup>74</sup> Schopenhauer refers to some physical and mechanic materialist theories of his time which resembles Democritus’ materialism.

<sup>75</sup> Schopenhauer refers to Spinoza’s theory of ethics and a renewed Spinozism in some of his contemporary. theory.

Adorno describe that classification - the use of names to order reality in discursive categories - is 'a condition for cognition and not cognition in itself; cognition in turn dispels classification' (DE: 238).

In renewing materialism, Horkheimer shares with Marx's materialism the attention to social practices in their historical context but refuses a totalising historical horizon of analysis, such as class struggle<sup>76</sup>. Horkheimer then takes Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will as a metaphysics of transience, employing it as a means of deactivating the primacy of a dialectical notion of history as an analytical category through which a materialist analysis of society can be framed<sup>77</sup>.

This combined utilisation of Marx and Schopenhauer against the absolutisation of conceptual thought can be found in Schmidt's interpretation of Horkheimer's materialism as negative, a materialism that neither resolves dialectics into a totalising theory nor renounces identification as an immediate and transient approach to the world. As Schmidt explains, 'While Horkheimer takes this Schopenhauerian moment in his criticism of Hegel, he is able to get away from the fascination of Lukács and Korsch's new proposed dialectics' (Schmidt 1977: 139). What Schmidt suggests here is that Horkheimer was able to distance himself from a renewed emphasis on grasping the social whole as the Marxist intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s sort in their dialectical thought<sup>78</sup>.

In considering Schopenhauer's philosophy, Horkheimer became highly critical of the concept of totality but does not put aside the concept of identification. The rejection of totality in Horkheimer is hence based on the idea that the individual is irreducible to any discursive collective (e.g. nation, party, class) because his human condition is indeterminate. In his late thought, this *Schopenhauerian moment* (as Schmidt calls it) becomes primary when Horkheimer's critical theory of society moves towards a radical critique of the concept of the human. As Schmidt himself argues that 'From this humble but human perspective there is a precise interpretation of the often misunderstood late philosophy of Horkheimer: analytically oriented towards Marx, metaphysically to Schopenhauer and both overcome' (Schmidt 1977:109). As we can see here, Schmidt's interpretation

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<sup>76</sup> See the note *The Relativity of Class Theory* (D&D: 103)

<sup>77</sup> In chapter 5, I will explain this point by drawing on Horkheimer's essay *History and Psychology*.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion on Lukács and Korsch's reevaluation of Marx's concept of totality, see chapters 2 and 3 of Jay (1984)

upholds the radicalism and the novelty of Schopenhauer's philosophy in Horkheimer's attempt to renew materialism through critical theory.

Following Schmidt's suggestion then, I consider Horkheimer's employment of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a way to reframe the concept of materialism in a negative way. Negation here is not the dialectical term of a contradiction within the philosophy of history nor the history of class struggle. Negation lays bare an irrational dimension of human being's pursuit of power: the fear to die. By moving negation out of the dialectic of contradictions, Horkheimer gives materialism a non-ontological sense: the possibility of concepts to be expressions rather than definitions of something. I would suggest that thinking concepts as expressions implies that they are devoid of practical aim. This way of thinking can be called metaphorical. In my view, Horkheimer draws upon Schopenhauer to illustrate how a metaphorical way of thinking opens the possibility of deactivating the systematisation of violence in propositional language<sup>79</sup>. What do I mean by referring to a metaphorical way of thinking?

Here I do not want to refer in a dictionary-style to the notion of metaphor as 'a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is applied to an object or action to which it is not literally applicable' (Soanes & Stevenson 2003: 1103). If we define metaphor as a figure of speech, we apply to our thinking an ontological premise that separates concepts from figures of speech. A concept would then be an abstract idea that 'determines the application of a term, especially a predicate and thus plays a part in the use of reason or language' (Soanes & Stevenson 2003: 358). As figure of speech, metaphor could now be instead conceived as a modality by which concepts can be expressed, and specifically a modality that translates meanings by analogy. If we keep the separation between concepts and metaphor, then the conclusion would be the possibility to analysing metaphors as a self-referential theoretical realm<sup>80</sup>. Instead, the metaphorical way of thinking discussed here is not in contrast to the possibility of thinking with concepts. The metaphorical way of thinking has a negative function: to show that concepts may not be tool of power. When do concepts become a tool of power? In Horkheimer's view concept becomes a tool of power when, in first place, we transpose a logical question of truth - which

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<sup>79</sup> In chapter 4 I will explain how Horkheimer defines Schopenhauer's way to give meaning to concepts as tropic.

<sup>80</sup> An example of such an analysis is Hans Blumenberg's metaphorology and his speculation of the possibility of absolute metaphors (Blumenberg 2010).

involves concepts only as speculative abstractions - to a question whether a practical deed is right or wrong. Then we commensurate this transposition to the possibility of increasing the submission of the social life of individuals to a sort of general pursuit of power (GS12: 323)<sup>81</sup>. This general pursuit of power is directed to dominate not only singular groups of individuals but possibly the entire world (humans, animals, other organic beings and inorganic matter). The violence of language consists then in treating concepts as deeds and their signification as a tool of power useful to pursue a general domination of the world. As Horkheimer and Adorno state in the note *Thought of Dialectic of Enlightenment*,

The belief that a truth of a theory is the same as its productivity is clearly unfounded [...] Nowadays this sort of fetishism takes the most drastic forms. Thoughts have to be answered as though they were deeds. *In Europe there is almost no country where one would not be shot because of a lapsus linguae.* Not just the word as authority's target but the tentative, experimenting word, testing the possibility of error, is for this very reason regarded as intolerable (DE: 244, 245)<sup>82</sup>.

Now we can start to see more clearly the theoretical connection between the systematisation of violence in language and Fascist culture. To recall, we put forward in the introduction of the thesis the hypothesis that Horkheimer's critical theory may be understood as the possibility to deactivate the systematisation of violence in propositional language. The aim here is to think about the possibility of a language that is no longer commensurate with the logic of power. As we have already stated, the logic of power is to be found in the bourgeois cultural forms of life that legitimise these dynamics.

The task of critical theory is to unmask the power dynamics and the coercive power relationships. These latter inhere bourgeois cultural forms of life as vehicles for the development of an authoritarian way of life based on domination for domination's sake. In this view, the metaphorical way of thinking is a mode of unmasking the irrational dimension of the pursuit of power. The metaphorical way of thinking shows that concepts do not have any power to determine reality as immutable. Instead, concepts are the expression of a transient way of life that is the product of social-historical practices.

The metaphorical way of thinking is the key to understand Horkheimer's negative materialism in its unspoken dimension, a dimension that shows language as an

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<sup>81</sup> [1949, *Magie des Begriffs*]

<sup>82</sup> The sentence in italics is my translation from the German first publication of 1947, then omitted in the publication of 1969, see the note *Gedanke* (GS5: 276, 277).

expression of the transient experience of flesh and blood human beings who live in determined social and historical circumstances. As an expression of a transient experience, language remains open to a series of possibilities that are stifled and excluded when human beings use language as a tool of power to legitimise the existing relations of power. Horkheimer gives expression to these series of possibilities with a language devoid of power, which he calls metaphorically the longing for the totally other his 'non-scientific wish' that 'the earthly horror does not possess the last word' as the longing for the totally other (GS18: 790)<sup>83</sup>. This possibility of a non-fascist culture is then expressed in a metaphor of a high political intensity. As Schmidt notes,

[...]Horkheimer refused to think that 'the totally other' was still something that could be reached in this world. In his late thought, Schopenhauer got the upper hand over (the still positivist) Marx; Horkheimer considered the world not as an Absolute but as a product conditioned by the constitution of our -biologically and socially connected - intellect and perceptive apparatus. In Horkheimer's view, no positive theology can be derived freely from all of that. [...] Accordingly, he did not understand theology as dogmatism; he meant instead the longing of the finite human being for escaping from the administered world (Schmidt 1974: 141,142).

The merit of Schmidt's interpretation of Horkheimer's late thought as a combination of Marx and Schopenhauer is how he implicitly highlights the notion of longing for the totally other as metaphor for a political wish of emancipation. However, he does not explain neither how the notion of longing for the totally other is a metaphor nor why Horkheimer speaks with metaphors to translate his political wish to defeat injustice. Nonetheless, I would suggest that the four concepts of Horkheimer that Schmidt elucidates - i.e. the totally other, world, longing and theology - are expression of something rather than being a definition of something. In my view, those concepts are thought metaphorically. Let us examine them in the above quotation of Schmidt.

The notion of *totally other* is an immanent practice to escape the administered world but it is difficult to imagine its possible actualisation in the post-war situation of Europe. When Horkheimer says *world*, he is referring to experience as it unfolds a state of indeterminacy involving the corporeal materiality of human beings and their social-historical practices. Then, *longing* is an embodied impetus, an instinctive character to escape the administered world. The administered world is the determinate experience of conformism in post-liberal advanced capitalism. To

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

escape the administered world thus means to extract experience from the calcified determination of social conformism. The function of longing is then to negate; that is, to open a series of possibility that the administered world excludes and stifles. Finally, *theology* should be understood as the self-identification of human beings in a solidarity based on their longing to end the administered world.

Schmidt does not say why Horkheimer uses concepts like the *totally other, world, longing* and *theology* to speak about *practice, experience, character* and *identification*. Nor does Schmidt clarify how Schopenhauer's philosophy takes a primary position in Horkheimer's late thought because it helps Horkheimer to think concepts metaphorically beyond any instrumental logic. Metaphors help him speak about the concept of human in terms of experiences of identification without falling prey of the ontological premises, which establish a question of truth as a question of power. I will clarify these arguments when examining the contrast between the concept of administered world and the notion of longing for the totally other in chapters 5 and 6.

Now I wish to show briefly how the idea of materiality entails an idea of corporeality by drawing upon Rumpf's reading of Horkheimer in her 1993 essay, which looks at the paradigm of the maternal. What Rumpf calls 'maternal' are those experiential 'aspects in the constitution of the subject that resist the separation of reason and sensuality, of self and other, aspects in which a rupture of the subject-object structure is implicit' (Rumpf 1993: 311). Her main argument then is that Horkheimer suggests that the love between mother and child implies an approach to the world that is not marked by the instrumentality of reason, the logic of means and ends (Rumpf 1993: 314). In my view, Rumpf's argument helps us understand how the emergence of a corporeal dimension in abstract thinking (reason) may deactivate the closure of thought in the instrumental logic of means and ends. In fact, Rumpf's thesis takes two positions on Horkheimer's thought. First, Rumpf clarifies that, for Horkheimer, the love relationship between mother and child does not happen on a linguistic level but on the 'libidinal' level and should be thought in terms of sexual excitement (Rumpf 1993:315). Furthermore, she argues in the same essay that Horkheimer does not think that of a relationship on such a sensual level is in contrast to reason. Since the dimension of maternal love does not stand in contrast to reason, Rumpf states that the underlying meaning of the dimension of maternal love in Horkheimer's thought 'contains the cultural transformation of

nature and calls to mind a dimension of objective reason: the idea of solidarity relationship among people' (Rumpf 1993: 315,316). She thus concludes that 'Horkheimer contrasts the *maternal* with reason that has become instrumental - not, however, with reason per se' (Rumpf 1993: 316).

In presenting this paradigm of maternal love, Rumpf appears to highlight the same point of Schmidt: Horkheimer's critical theory entails ideas of materiality and corporeality that deactivates the logic of power. Indeed, Rumpf interprets Horkheimer's maternal love as an experience between the mother and the child that is colonised by the development of the Fascist trait of bourgeois society. This development consists in the gradual loss of the mother matrix in the constitution of the male subject. As she claims, 'The self-destruction of reason through the internal and external domination of nature refers to the non-recognition of the *uniquely maternal* and the unrealized promise of mutual recognition in the relations of sexes' (Rumpf 1993: 318).

Fascism destroys reason because it violently totalises any approach to the other which escapes the logic of power; that is the maternal love in this instance. By drawing upon Horkheimer's essays on *Authority and the Family* (1936) and *Autorität und Familie in der Gegenwart* (1947-49), Rumpf outlines the connection between the loss of maternal love and the way in which adults experience capitalist society through domination. As Rumpf writes, 'Horkheimer's intention was to confer upon pre-conceptual experiences and the mother-child interaction a language opposed to the idea of monadic self' (Rumpf 1993: 330). Hence, without the experience of the love relationship between mother and child, the historical social practices of advanced capitalism and fascism will develop an impulse to dominate in human beings which may become a more longstanding feature of the human character<sup>84</sup>.

This Fascist character is thus authoritarian to the extent that it rejects the pre-conceptual experience paradigmatically represented by the libidinal mother-child interaction and hypostatizes masculinity as hardness; that is, as a rejection of any affective and emotional traits. Rumpf thus underlines that Horkheimer considers the authoritarian rejection of the maternal love as the rejection of 'the other'; that is, the rejection of everything that does not conform to the authoritarian power logic. (Rumpf 1993: 329). Rumpf thus takes maternal love as an example of what

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<sup>84</sup> I will contextualise this point in Chapter 5 without the emphasis on maternal love.

Horkheimer means with the concept *the other*, which does not itself construct otherness but entails the role of corporeality in our experience of the world. Rumpf places this corporeality in the pre-linguistic interaction of the mother and child. In this sense, maternal love retains the possibility of an approach to the world devoid of domination.

To sum up, Schmidt discusses the Schopenhauerian legacy in the context of Horkheimer's conception of materialism while Rumpf focuses on the corporeality of maternal love in Horkheimer's study of authority and family. In my view, both Schmidt and Rumpf highlight how Horkheimer thought that a critique of concepts was also a critique of power. We have seen how the notions of negative materialism and the pre-linguistic mother-child interaction refers to moments of indeterminacy (the materiality in continuous change in the former and the libidinal level in the latter) as the possible entanglements of human beings in experiences able to deactivate the instrumental reason dominating the social field.

## **2.5 The late thought of Horkheimer as a question of experience**

As we have seen in the literature review, the late thought of Horkheimer is characterised by a renewed task of critical theory: to deactivate the logic of power in the instrumental social historical practices of fascism and the post-liberal advanced capitalism. Horkheimer seeks the possibility of such a deactivation by focusing on moments of experience that move beyond this logic of power. As David Held argues, Horkheimer's late thought unfolds 'dimensions of experience that transcends the empirically given world', particularly his appeal to a totally other and his revived interest in Western metaphysical and theological tradition (Held 1980: 198). In my view, Held is right to focus on the role of experience in Horkheimer's late thought. But the dimensions of experience that transcend the empirically given world to which Held refers are framed within the programme of critical theory. My feeling then is that these moments of experience are to be traced back philosophically from Horkheimer's thought by reviewing the influence of Marx and Schopenhauer, as Schmidt suggests<sup>85</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Horkheimer himself recognises in a 1957-1967 note *Geister Stammbaum* that Schopenhauer (Kant) and Marx are primary in his intellectual genealogy (GS14:391).

Indeed, the moments of experience sought by Horkheimer refer to a critique of propositional language able to bring to light the state of indeterminacy, which the use of concepts may bog down in absolute representations of reality. As I discussed in Chapter 1 in references to the 1934 essay *The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy*, this state of indeterminacy refers to the idea that propositional language does not any have intrinsic power to determinate social reality. To recall Horkheimer's arguments, human beings can demonstrate the falsehood of a proposition, but this demonstration does not imply that the falsehood of the proposition causes a change in the existing social dynamics of power. Furthermore, concepts define abstract features of reality, but they do not define how reality is unfolded in its eventual social concretisations.

In the light of these arguments, Horkheimer finds in Schopenhauer a philosopher with whom he can think about the possibility of a deactivation of the logic of power in propositional language. In Horkheimer's view, Schopenhauer's philosophy 'does not set up any practical aims. It criticizes the absolute claims of programme without itself proposing a new one' (CIR: 80)<sup>86</sup>. Schopenhauer's critique of any practical programme is based on a philosophical way of thinking of the irrational dimension of human beings' existence. This irrational dimension refers to the metaphysical notion of the blind will; that is, an unceasing and meaningless transformation of the matter of the human body and the circumambient world.

In the light of this conceptualisation of the irrational dimension of human being's existence, Horkheimer takes that Schopenhauer's philosophy to give 'the perfect expression to what young people today [in 1960s] feel: that there is no power that can transcend truth - indeed, truth carries in it the character of powerlessness' (CIR: 79). It is a highly significant point in Horkheimer's interpretation of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a critique of propositional language. To demonstrate the falsehood of a proposition does not guarantee a change in the power relations of society. To say it in philosophical term, negation as a dialectical contradiction in logic does not assure that a social change may take place in practice. Schopenhauer's conception of the will entails a negation which does not contradict but lays bare the irrational dimension of power's pursuit. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, the blind will refers to a continuous material transformation of the world which remains independent from the influence of human agency.

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<sup>86</sup>[1961, Schopenhauer Today]

Schopenhauer's notion of the will refers to a metaphysical idea that the material transformation of the world that is beyond good and evil and devoid of any teleology. Horkheimer finds in Schopenhauer's thought a critique of the irritational dimension of power because Schopenhauer points to the irrelevancy of human agency on the transformation of the world. In sum, inorganic beings, animals and human beings might perish in their transitory forms. However, their material nature, by which they are made, remains in its continuous transformation without a purpose<sup>87</sup>. Schopenhauer's notion of the will also refers to the indestructibility of matter as an endless flow without the a priori categories of time and the possibility of representation - *principium individuationis* in Schopenhauer's vocabulary (Schopenhauer 1966b: 309)<sup>88</sup>.

On the one hand, Horkheimer takes Schopenhauer's notion of the blind will to be a critique of the human in the sense of a subject of power. On the other hand, he considers how Schopenhauer uses the blind will as a metaphor for a negation that exposes 'the motive for solidarity shared by men and all beings: their abandonment. [...] For such solidarity that stems from hopelessness, knowledge of *principium individuationis* is secondary' (CIR: 82). Horkheimer uses Schopenhauer to renew materialist thought by highlighting the experience of identification through a metaphysical idea of materiality that makes inorganic beings, plants, animals and humans an incommensurable negativity. Why does Horkheimer think of a solidarity in this more metaphysical and less historical materialist way?

As I will discuss in Chapter 5, Horkheimer thinks that Fascism and advanced capitalism have destroyed the possibility that the individuation of a negative subject of history -such as the proletariat- may be a vehicle of emancipation from an oppressive social order. As Horkheimer states the 1968 note *Wahr contra Richtig* 'history has developed differently from what Marx thought, the heavy crisis of 1929 has brought about the New deal and Fascism, not Socialism. The proletariat in the advanced countries is interested only in better wages, better conditions of work, more spare time and not in the change of the economic order.' (GS14: 485).

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<sup>87</sup> 'The course of the world is like that of a clock after it has been put together and wound up; hence, from this undeniable point of view, it is a mere machine, whose purpose we do not see' (Schopenhauer 1966b: 319).

<sup>88</sup> See also On the Doctrine of the Indestructibility (Schopenhauer 1974c) and Chapter 4.

By drawing on Schopenhauer's philosophy, Horkheimer removes materialism from an exclusive historical horizon to open dialectics to the possibility of negation which is no longer determined by abstract categories of contradiction.

This possibility of negation lies in a materialist experience whose main source Horkheimer understands to reside in the character of human beings rather than in the perceptive apparatus (the Kantian and Schopenhauerian time-space). As Horkheimer claims in a note of 1960s, 'To make experience [Erfahrung] means to change the structure of character and to preserve it anyway. Life is this dialectic [between change and preservation]. [...] Object [Gegenstand] of experience is not the mere empirical [Empirie] but also the capacity to stand happiness and pain' (GS14: 292)<sup>89</sup>. What kind of experience is being referred to here? Horkheimer refers to a sort of materialist experience as an entanglement of corporeal materiality and of historical-social practices. The litmus paper to see this entanglement is the possible change in the character of human beings.

Instead of debating the loss of undamaged experience such as Benjamin and Adorno, Horkheimer frames a notion of experience that is far from the dualism of lived experience (Erlebnis) and the objective experience (Erfahrung)<sup>90</sup>. Indeed, in his criticism of Dilthey's *Verstehende Geisteswissenschaft*, Horkheimer distances himself from any emphasis on lived experience in human and social sciences (GS4: 352)<sup>91</sup>. In this critique of positivism and empiricism, Horkheimer instead highlights how the appeal to an objective experience (Erfahrung) has lost its progressive function (CT: 151, 152)<sup>92</sup>.

But if the task of critical theory is to abolish injustice and oppression, how can Horkheimer conceive the experience of the suffering caused by injustice and oppression, defined as negativity in dialectical terms? As he stated in a conversation with Adorno, 'For me the consciousness of negativity is the point of identity of thought, but this is not reconciliation [*Versöhnung*] [...] the positive is my experience [*Erfahrung*] of identity' (GS12: 595, 597)<sup>93</sup>. Here *Erfahrung* is not objective experience. It refers to an approach to the world that takes place without the primacy of the agency of the subject as its source. Such an approach involves

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<sup>89</sup> [1957-1967, *Erfahrung*]

<sup>90</sup> For the debate about Erlebnis/Erfahrung, see the chapter *Lamenting the Crisis of experience: Benjamin and Adorno* in Jay (2006).

<sup>91</sup> [1940, *Psychologie und Soziologie im Werk Wilhelm Diltheys*]

<sup>92</sup> [1937, *The Latest Attack on Metaphysics*].

<sup>93</sup> [1946, *Rettung der Aufklärung. Diskussionen über eine geplante Schrift zur Dialektik*]

dialectics and consciousness but does not arrive at a final reconciliation between subject and object. The subject -the flesh and blood individual- is the conceived as, say, a *through* (*durch*). The subject takes part in the unfolding of experience instead of being the source and measure of experience<sup>94</sup>.

While Horkheimer distances himself from a Hegelian-style idea of reconciliation he takes Schopenhauer as a philosophy to express another idea of negativity. This latter refers to an indeterminate moment that cannot be commensurate to the logic of power aimed at reconciliation. Indeed, Schopenhauer's notion of will is completely a-logic; that is, devoid of any a priori theoretical foundations (for Schopenhauer time, space and causality). Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will entails a negation which reveals that power originates from a despairing reaction to death. What is this reaction? Human beings affirm a will to dominate their existence and the circumambient world. This occurs when they turn the transient experience of the fear of death into a memory from which they abstract death as the measure of their existence. As a consequence, they start to live only from the point of view of their individuality<sup>95</sup>.

However, once the irrational dimension of violence is unmasked in the pursuit of social power relations, it is questionable whether human beings will decide to pursue the abolition of domination and injustice instead of taking part into the constituted order of power.

In other words, why should human beings be engaged in denouncing the injustice of the constituted order if this order has been responsible for the improvement in their living standards through the increasing domination of social life (as this is the case in the post-war European countries according to Horkheimer's view)?

In Horkheimer's view, only a life characterised by the achievement of practical aims and instrumental logic "engenders the pervasive feeling of meaninglessness in which false faith has fertile soil" (CIR: 81). But then what would constitute resistance to the abyss of meaninglessness? Here, Horkheimer continues 'In order to resist it [the false faith of meaninglessness], there would have to be a longing for that which is different, a *longing that would have passed through culture without, however, having been victimised by any of its hardened forms*' (CIR: 81). Here we can see clearly that Horkheimer employs the moment of experience that is not

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<sup>94</sup> See my discussion about the notion of *Durchdringen* in critical theory in Chapter 1.

<sup>95</sup> See §165 (Schopenhauer 1974c: 315)

commensurate to a logic of power in order to formulate a critique of power. Then, this moment of experience opens the possibility that logic of power may be deactivated if a culture devoid of the violent practices of domination is widespread. Horkheimer uses the term *longing* here to refer to a moment of experience that passes through culture and resists the violence of domination in order to imagine the possibility of a human emancipation as a non-fascist culture. What is a non-fascist culture? It is a way of living with human beings, animals, and nature in general without involving the pursuit of power. It is the possibility of propositional language that expresses *concepts without violence*. As remarked in the introduction of the thesis, Horkheimer and Adorno wishfully imagine this propositional language with the preposition *without* in *Element of Antisemitism*: happiness *without* power, wages *without* work, a home *without* frontiers and religion *without* myth.

In sum, non-fascist culture is the possibility of an anti-authoritarian culture. The preposition *without* helps to maintain the negation of power in the attempt to give a positive image of a non-fascist culture. As I will argue in chapter 6, Horkheimer uses the phrase *totally other* to present the possibility of a non-fascist culture and non-instrumentality. However, it is important to remark that such possibility is only achievable in Horkheimer's view by a cultural change in politics and not by practical means (the reforms, manifestos, electoral programmes or even revolutions of politics). As Horkheimer states at the end of *Schopenhauer Today*, 'If young people recognize the contradiction between the possibilities of human powers and the situation on this earth, and if they do not allow their view to be obscured either by nationalistic fanaticism or by theories of transcendental justice, identification and solidarity may be expected to become decisive in their life' (CIR: 82). As I will discuss in Chapter 6, an idea of solidarity devoid of social power structures can be pursued if the systematisation of violence in culture becomes the polemical target of philosophy. Critical theory will hence find an emancipatory practice in the testimony of the life of those who do not comply with social power structures. The possibility of actualising a non-fascist culture then depends on whether human beings reveal a character that may experience the negativity of the existent power dynamics of society and be in conflictual tension with them.

Perhaps to understand this argument better, we need to take Schopenhauer's philosophy not as a transitory point of view but as a consistent structure that is

grafted onto materialism and dialectics in Horkheimer's critical theory. Furthermore, we should understand Horkheimer's idea of longing for the totally other not merely as a non-scientific wish, but as a political-philosophical category constituting the kernel of the main philosophical concern after the 1940s. It is the possibility of a non-fascist culture and the rescue of the hope of progressive thought to liberate human beings from fear which is, in Horkheimer's vocabulary, *the rescue of Enlightenment*.

## **2.6 Concluding remarks**

I have discussed in this chapter how the existing literature on Horkheimer's late thought does not clearly elucidate its political-philosophical implications. These implications arise when we consider Horkheimer's longing for a political change in post-War Western countries as the possibility of a cultural change where language and culture deactivate logic of power. Instead, I have shown how Habermas' and Sloterdijk's criticisms highlight the conceptual logic and the theological motive of the late critical theory of Adorno and Horkheimer. Both philosophers argue that Adorno and Horkheimer's late thought ends up exhausted because they depict the social world as an object of totalitarian domination from which they can offer no escape. Their late thought is hence an exhaustion of the philosophy of consciousness because they cannot rescue thought from its instrumentality, entailing that critique is stuck in a confrontation with instrumental thought that it cannot debunk.

Taking my departure from these two interpretative lines, I then discussed how we can place the existing literature on Horkheimer's late thought in two principal streams. The first stream frames the conceptual impasse of his late thought as a problem of social theory. The second aims to shed light on the theological and religious implications as places for a possible practice of resistance against instrumentality. Both these streams engage with Horkheimer's late thought in some details, although the theoretical kernel of their criticism may be traced back to the conceptual logic and the theological motive that Habermas and Sloterdijk's criticism highlighted.

The criticisms advanced by Schmidt and Rumpf instead highlight moments of experience as the central philosophical questions in Horkheimer's thought. Schmidt

shows how, thanks to Schopenhauer's philosophy, Horkheimer considers materialism in a negative way without finding in history and teleology its own validity. Rumpf discusses the role of maternal love in Horkheimer's work of 1930s and 1940s on authority and the family to show how the indeterminate love relationship between mother and child is what the instrumental logic of fascism aims to destroy in order to affirm its power. In my view, these two critiques constitute a third stream that opens the possibility of a visible entanglement of a critique of propositional language and a critique of injustice. Such an entanglement is condensed in the idea of longing for totally other, where the moment of experience that transcends the empirical given world meets the wish to change the constituted political order by denouncing injustices.

In this view, the longing for the totally other is a political-philosophical notion where Horkheimer points to the politics of the unspoken: the possibility that the denunciation of injustice could spread a non-violent culture in contrast to the conformist politics of fascism and advanced capitalism. I have concluded the first part of my thesis with this discussion of my own interpretation of Horkheimer's late thought and the conceptual apparatus by means of which I will use to develop the second and the third parts of this research.

# **PART TWO**

## **CRITIQUE AND INCOMMENSURABILITY**

# Chapter 3

## Hope or the unspoken in Immanuel Kant

### 3.1 Introduction

In the second part of this thesis, I will discuss the conceptual forerunners of Horkheimer's longing for the totally other; namely, Kant's notion of hope and Schopenhauer's notion of the will. To recall our hypothesis: the notion of the longing of the totally other is where an idea of human emancipation may be found in Horkheimer's thought. This idea of human emancipation appears as a politics of the unspoken, a politics that deactivates the existent power logic by implementing a non-violent culture. As discussed in the previous chapters, the longing for the totally other refers to the wish for the abolition of injustice. Furthermore, this longing is in Horkheimer's view the expression (Ausdruck) of a negative theology. I began in the introduction chapter by outlining how negative theology refers to the consciousness that the world of human beings is only representation and is not an immutable final reality. Horkheimer indeed takes the teaching of the world as representation from Kant and Schopenhauer, making it the ground for a negative theology. The teaching of the world as representation claims that human beings cannot know things in themselves, but they can only know through modes of representing things. In my view, the link between longing and theology in Horkheimer's thought is then based on a philosophical question concerning language. The question can be formulated in the following way: Is it possible to think a language which may not be entrenched with the implementation of power logic?

Considering the link between theology and longing made by Horkheimer, we can answer to the question as follows: If human beings become conscious that the world is representation, then the structure of social domination produced by human beings' relationships of power may not determine how reality is in its essence. In the context of what was argued in the first part of the thesis, this response to the question answer is plausible because we have seen how, in negative terms, Horkheimer conceives the possibility of a language devoid of power being a

denunciation of injustice. Following Horkheimer's conceptualisation then, human beings may spread a non-violent culture in actualising this denounce of injustice. In this second part of the thesis, I will discuss how Horkheimer finds the possibility of such a language in Kant's concept of hope and Schopenhauer's notion of the will. In the Kantian notion of hope, the consciousness of the world as representation is expressed in two postulates. The postulate of a future life informs the notion of hope as a wish for a better world although this better world is invisible in the present. In so far as it is an affect oriented to the future, the notion of hope has a not-actual temporality, hope appears in the present, but it is directed to the future. The postulate of God establishes the impossibility in defining substantially the content of the idea of the good. In Schopenhauer's notion of will, the consciousness of the world as representation is instead conceived through metaphors. The metaphor of the world as will shows the not-actual temporality of representation; that is, the ever-fleeting moment of co-presence between the will and the representation. Then the notion of the aseity of the will stands metaphorically for the impossibility to define the origin of human knowledge.

This chapter will deal with Kant's philosophy wherein I will show that the concept of hope in Kant exhibits an unspoken dimension. Indeed, both the notions of hope and longing indicate a desire for an improvement in human affairs by reducing injustices and suffering. The notion of hope frames such an improvement within the philosophical project of Kant's *Critique*. So without delving too much into the complicated theoretical system of Kant, I will argue that the idea of hope in Kant is the conceptual place where, on the one hand, the propositions do not have a final definition and, on the other hand, the idea of justice may find concretisation in an action. In sum, the question of hope (What may I hope?) opens an unspoken dimension, which the practical realm of reason (What ought I to do?) and the speculative realm (What can I know?) leave aside in Kant's system<sup>96</sup>.

Strategically, I will first lay out how Horkheimer reads Kant's philosophy by highlighting the division between will and knowledge. To describe this division, I will draw directly on Kant's work. The unspoken dimension will be shown to emerge here in division between the will and knowledge. Secondly, I will discuss how Horkheimer investigates the role of judgment in overcoming such a division.

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<sup>96</sup> In parenthesis, the questions are the three questions constituting Kant's canon of reason (Kant 1978: 635).

Horkheimer understands the notion of hope as the unspoken dimension which traverses the division.

Thirdly, I will expand upon Horkheimer's argument by drawing directly upon Kant's work. Here, I will argue that the refusal of war is the primary condition for the possibility of giving a philosophical foundation to Kant's rational-moral world. Fourthly, I will show that the retrieval of the refusal of war within the Kantian notion of civil constitution is kept as the critical doubt for rational-moral beings. This critical doubt consists in the expectation of being worthy of happiness if they comply with moral law. Finally, I will conclude that the Kantian notion of hope resemble Horkheimer's notion of the longing for the totally other because both notions seem to hint at an impossible wished possibility: to actualise a world without injustice.

### **3.2 Hope and the Kantian division of knowledge and will**

The unspoken dimension in Kant's hope lies in the surreptitious connection between the idea that predications cannot establish an absolute truth about how reality is and the idea that the world is not already given but can be changed through action. In a nutshell, hope highlights the active element between theory and practice, which finds concretisation through action in the human world of affairs. I entitle this connection surreptitious because Kant keeps separate in his philosophical system the speculative-theoretical realm (What can I know?) from the practical realm (What ought I to do?). The former deals with knowledge while the latter with the will.

In Kant's philosophy, the notion of knowledge refers to the relationship of human beings' representations with a given object and involves both concepts and intuition (Kant 1978: 161,162). This relationship resides in the subject's proof of the possibility of an object<sup>97</sup>. Instead, the concept of the will refers to the faculty of desire and not to the faculty of knowledge (Kant 1951: 55)<sup>98</sup>.

We can understand the notion of hope if we explore Kant's separation of the speculative question of knowledge from the practical question of moral duty. The

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<sup>97</sup> 'To know an object I must be able to prove its possibility, whether from its actuality as attested by experience, or a priori by means of reason' (Kant 1978: 27).

<sup>98</sup> Faculty in Kant's vocabulary is 'the capacity of the human soul' (1951: 13) Human soul refers to a state of mind as a disposition of feelings. Here soul is Gemüt (soul as animus) not Seele (soul as anima).

point of view of the separation is critical, in so far as Kant submits to previous criticism the possibility and the limits of human faculties (both knowledge and desire). From this viewpoint, the speculative realm of philosophy questions the conditions of the possibility about how human beings experience the world and produce knowledge. In its practical realm, philosophy questions the conditions of the possibility for moral conduct in human action (Kant 1978: 637).

But if these conditions for possibility of experience, both in knowledge and in practice, are put in question in a critical way, how should the primary foundation for these conditions of possibility be thought? Kant calls ‘transcendental’ the philosophical manner of proceeding to the a priori foundation of conditions of the possibility of experience. As Kant states, ‘I entitle transcendental all knowledge which is occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge of objects in so far as this mode of knowledge is to be possible a priori’ (Kant 1978: 59).

On the one hand, the speculative question of knowledge is developed by admitting predications about the conditions of mode of knowledge and not about the knowledge in itself. In this view, predication cannot establish an absolute truth about what the content of reality actually is.

In Kant’s view, if we do not want our critical-philosophical speculation to end in dogmatic metaphysics, we cannot supersede the question about condition of the possibility of experience. In *Critique of Pure Reason* (the first Critique), Kant investigates how it is possible to think about metaphysics as science; that is, a metaphysics that questions the power of thinking in respect with the condition of the possibility of experience (Kant 1978: 57)<sup>99</sup>.

On the other hand, Kant then develops the practical question of moral duty by admitting the idea that the world is not already given to make human beings happy; that is, to fulfil all our desires<sup>100</sup>. Kant questions about the a priori foundation of the conditions that makes possible for human beings to be worthy of happiness. In this view, the world of human affairs is not already given but can be changed through an action conforming to the moral law. Such an action enables human beings to be worthy of happiness (Kant 1978: 637).

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<sup>99</sup> ‘When once reason has learnt completely to understand its own power in respect of objects which can be presented to it in experience, it should easily be able to determine, with completeness and certainty, the extent, and the limits of its attempted employment beyond the bounds of all experience (Kant 1979: 57).

<sup>100</sup> ‘Happiness is the satisfaction of all our desires’ (Kant 1978: 636).

For Kant then, division between knowledge and will is framed in a transcendental philosophy that deals with modes of knowledge, whose conditions of possibility - not the content of possibility - are given a priori. The critical way of Kant's philosophical proceeding challenges instead the propositions which assert the content of the conditions of possibility. In his view, critique works as 'a tribunal' of the transcendental philosophy because it keeps the philosophical way of proceeding strictly within the possibility of experience<sup>101</sup>.

For example, in the first *Critique*, Kant speaks in favour of the division of the speculative and practical realms of reason for transcendental philosophy. When discussing about the transcendental employment of speculative and practical reason, Kant cojoins the term *reason* with the adjective *pure* to qualify an employment of reason which excludes senses and deals with a priori principle<sup>102</sup>.

As far as this transcendental employment of reason is concerned, Kant admits in the *Critique of Practical Reason* (the second *Critique*) that the practical realm is meant to have an influence on the speculative realm. What then is this influence?

In the transcendental employment of reason, the motivation for the speculation ('the interest of speculative pure reason' in Kant's vocabulary) is to place thought within the limit of experience. But this interest of pure reason cannot be grounded in the speculative realm, whose question is 'What can I know?'. Indeed, in its transcendental employment, the ground that motivates speculation is the a priori ground of reason - namely, the will. The interest of pure speculative reason is subordinated to the primacy of the pure practical reason because every interest is related to the will and so it is practical<sup>103</sup>.

In this view, the primacy of pure practical reason over pure speculative reason is not given on a contingent and arbitrary grounds but through the a priori ground of reason. The interest of pure speculative reason is then related to the primacy of pure practical reason whose a priori ground cannot be explained but only postulated. Kant introduces this a priori ground as unexplainable theoretical propositions; that is, postulates in Kant's vocabulary. The three postulates of pure practical reason are

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<sup>101</sup> 'It is a call to reason to understand anew the most difficult of all its task, namely self-knowledge, and to institute a tribunal which will assure to reason its lawful claims, and dismiss all groundless pretensions, not by despotic decrees, but in accordance with its own eternal and unalterable laws. This tribunal is no other than the critique of pure reason' (Kant 1978: 9).

<sup>102</sup> 'Pure reason is, therefore, that which contains the principles according to which all modes of pure a priori knowledge can be acquired and actually brought into being' (Kant 1978: 58).

<sup>103</sup> See the section 'Of the primacy of pure Practical reason in its union with the Speculative reason' in *Critique of Practical reason*.

the immortality of the soul, freedom and the existence of God<sup>104</sup>. However, postulates do not prove the possibility to overcome the separation of the two realms -the speculative and the practical- over which reason legislates. Kant makes this point very clear when discussing the transcendental doctrine of method in the first Critique:

The ultimate aim to which the speculation of reason in its transcendental employment is directed concerns three objects: the freedom of the will, the immortality of the soul, and the existence of God. In respect to all three the merely speculative interest of reason is very small; and for its sake alone we should hardly have undertaken the labour of transcendental investigation [...] since whatever discoveries might be made in regard to these matters, we should not be able to make use of them in an helpful manner *in concreto*, that, is in the study of nature. [...] In short, these three propositions are for speculative reason always transcendent, and allow no immanent employment -that is, employment in reference to object of experience, and so in some manner really of service to us- but are in themselves, notwithstanding the very heavy labours which they impose upon our reason, entirely useless. If, then, the three cardinal propositions are not in any way necessary for knowledge, and are yet strongly recommended by our reason, their importance, properly regarded, must concern only the practical. By the practical I mean everything that is possible through freedom (Kant 1978: 631,632).

These postulates do not serve the study of the world of appearances, they are transcendent propositions. Nonetheless, they concern the interest of pure speculative reason, its ultimate aim as Kant defined in the first Critique.

The speculative and the practical realms remain separate as far as the fields in which they work are concerned. The speculative realm of reason concerns only the sensible world. Its theoretical knowledge should not go beyond what is instructed by experience (Kant: 1978: 631). In contrast, the practical realm concerns everything that is possible through freedom. In sum, the philosophy that investigates the a priori foundation of the conditions of possibility maintains a division between the question ‘what can I know?’ and the question ‘what I ought to do?’. These are the two questions of ‘the canon of pure reason’, which a transcendental philosophy should follow. However, Kant introduces the question of hope as the third:

The third question - if I do what I ought to do, what may I hope? - is at one practical and theoretical in such fashion that the practical serves only as a clue that leads us to answer to the theoretical question, and when this is followed out, to the speculative question (Kant 1978: 636).

Here, Kant shows how the question of hope lies in a blurred zone of ambiguity. The question is indeed introduced by a secondary *if*-clause, whose content is related to

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<sup>104</sup> See the section on ‘the Postulates of Pure Practical Reason’ in the second book of the Critique of Practical Reason

the question of duty: 'What ought I to do?'. This *if*-clause works as the condition for the main clause 'What may I hope?'. We can thus rephrase the question of hope in this way: 'If I act in the sensible world of appearances (not the world of idea) in the way that my action conforms to the moral law, which poses the condition to be worthy of happiness, then what may I expect in the future?'

The condition of the possibility of the expectation is that the action of human beings in the sensible world should follow the idea of a moral world. The idea of a moral world has an objective reality. In Kant's view, this objective reality is quite peculiar. The object of the idea of the moral world refers to the sensible world of appearances but is viewed as an object of pure practical reason, what Kant calls a '*corpus mysticum*'; or 'a world in which the free will of each being is, under moral laws, in complete systematic unity with itself and with the freedom of every other' (Kant. 1978: 637, 638). Kant sees in the idea of a moral world the possibility to be worthy of happiness in the sensible world if rational subjects act in mutual respect as a oneness - a *corpus mysticum*. In the light of the idea of the moral world, Kant answers to the question 'What ought I to do?' through the maxim, 'Do that through which thou becomest worthy to be happy' (Kant 1978: 638).

We see here that the Kantian subject - a rational human being - should strive to become worthy of happiness. In the sensible world of appearances, the objective reality of the moral world consists in the actual efforts made by the subject to become worthy of happiness. Hope is then the expectation that the endeavour of the subject to make his actions conform to the moral law will not be vain.

However, we have also seen how Kant keeps separate the speculative realm (knowledge) from the practical realm (will), although, in their transcendental employment, the interest of speculative reason is subordinated to the practical reason. So, in which realm does the hope for happiness and its connection to the moral law lie in?

Kant does not directly answer this question but introduces two postulates: God and the future life (Kant 1978: 639). The postulate of God enunciates that a 'Supreme Reason' governs in accordance with moral law and causing all happiness in the world. Kant defines the idea of such a Supreme Reason as the ideal of the highest good. Here the postulate of God is an object of the idea of pure practical reason - an a priori foundation -, which gives systematic unity to all ends only in accordance with moral law. As we have described before, the pure practical reason has a

primacy over the pure speculative reason only in the interest. Therefore, the Supreme Reason guides the interest of both the pure practical reason and the pure speculative reason. The interest of pure practical reason leads to the systematic unity of all ends according to moral law. The systematic unity of all ends concerns indeed the admission of the postulate of God and pertains the world to freedom. But since the speculative pure reason holds the postulate of God as transcendent proposition with no immanent employment, the interest of pure speculative reason lies in the purposive unity of all things or ‘the great whole, in accordance with the universal law’ (Kant 1978: 642). As I will discuss later, the unity of pure speculative reason -i.e. its systematisation - is possible only as purposive (*zweckmäßig*) and entails only regulative principles. What is most pertinent in this description of the postulate of God is to understand that, for Kant, also pure speculative reason requires an interest. Such an interest refers to a practical purposiveness which is not the same as the systematic unity of ends, because it only concerns the world of freedom and pure practical reason. As Kant puts it,

What use can we make of our understanding, even in respect of experience, if we do not propose ends to ourselves? But the highest ends are those of morality, and these we can know only as they are given us by pure reason. But though provided with these, and employing them as a clue, we cannot make use of the knowledge of nature in any serviceable manner in the building up of knowledge, unless nature has itself shown the unity of design [*zweckmäßige Einheit*]. For without this unity, we should ourselves have no reason, inasmuch as there would be no school for reason, and no fertilisation [*Kultur*] through objects such as might afford materials for the necessary concepts (Kant 1978: 643).

The interest of pure speculative reason -its practical purposiveness- is to design nature as purposive unity. Without this purposive unity, even the formation of concept will not be possible in Kant’s view. The postulate of God, described within the question of hope in the first Critique, serves to clarify how practical question (the systematic unity of ends) leads to a theoretical and speculative question (the purposive unity of things).

Consequently, the postulate of a future life can be understood as follows: Since the actions of human beings only have an effect upon the sensible world of appearances in which happiness is not a given condition, the consequences of the efforts made to be worthy of happiness are in a future world. In this view, the expectation of happiness is to be located in a future time (the postulate of a future life). Furthermore, this expectation is possible if we admit a moral law oriented to the highest good (the postulate of God, the Supreme Reason).

This postulate of a future life has a particular temporal dimension in which hope for happiness moves the pure practical reason of moral law towards the practical possibility of the experience to be worthy of happiness. Hope for happiness is then guided by its conformity to the moral law oriented towards the highest good. But the effect of conforming one's action to the moral law in the world of appearances does not lead to the achievement of happiness. The actualisation of happiness according to a moral law may occur in a future life. To be clearer, this future life is not the dimension of the beyond devoid of an earthly dimension. It is instead a not-actual temporal dimension of the present time. What is then this not-actual temporal dimension?

In the *The Immortality of the Soul as a Postulate of Pure Practical Reason* in the second Critique, Kant states that the moral progress moves towards infinity. He adds that human beings may take part in this endless moral progress only in the finite temporal dimension of *Gesinnung*:

Only endless progress from lower to higher stages of moral perfection is possible to a rational but finite being. The Infinite Being, to whom the temporal condition is nothing, sees in this series, which is for us the end, a whole conformable to moral law; holiness, which His law inexorably commands in order to be true to His justice in the share He assigns to each in the highest good, is to be found in a single [einzig] intellectual intuition of the existence of rational beings. All that can be granted to a creature with respect to hope for this share is consciousness of his tried character [erprüften Gesinnung] (Kant 1956: 127, 128)<sup>105</sup>.

This finite temporal dimension refers to human being's consciousness that their efforts to act morally 'makes sense'. This 'making sense' (*Gesinnung*) is the becoming conscious that human beings might make the world a better place because their moral action is oriented towards the infinite dimension of the highest good.

As said before, this ideal of the highest good is derived from the postulate of God. yet the section of the second *Critique* quoted citation above states something additional about how human beings may represent the ideal of the highest good. The highest good lies in the intellectual intuition. This is an intuition that actively (intellectually and not sensuously) represent human beings as rational; that is, as if their action were driven towards the highest good. The highest good lies in the possibility that human beings produce actively an intuitive representation of each other, precisely a representation that depicts them discursively *as if* they act as

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<sup>105</sup>A better translation of *Gesinnung* would be 'the making sense of something'. By highlighting the main morpheme *Sinn* (sense) in *Gesinnung* can we understand hope as the notion that makes sense of moral duty in the sensible world of appearances.

rational beings at any time. The discursive existence of rational beings contains the infinite dimension of the highest good because the discursive existence is intellectually intuited instead of being cognised by the synthesis of the understanding. But neither a sensible intuition nor an already given concept are possibilities of human being to experience the infinity of the highest good.

In this view, the postulate of a future life does not present the temporal dimension of infinity. Infinity concerns the dimension of the *Supreme Reason* -the Infinite Being- and so the postulate of God. The postulate of a future life presents the blurred dimension between the efforts made to be worthy of happiness and the future concretisation of happiness. This blurred dimension entails a temporality that is not-actual: it is present in the efforts made by the subject but not actual in the objective world before him. In my view, this blurred dimension can be called the optative mood of hope. What is an optative mood?

It is a temporality of the future in the sense of a not-actual present. The optative mood conjuncts the present with a possibility in the future under the form of a wish. This not-actuality of optative mood can be expressed grammatically with a subjunctive tense ('I may').

We can then respond to the question 'What may I hope?' by constructing the optative mood in the subjective tense: 'May you be worthy of happiness'. Having said that, in my view, Kant expresses the idea of this blurred dimension when he introduces at the end of the first *Critique* the notion of a 'world invisible to us now but hoped for' as a paraphrase for the postulate of the future life:

Without a God and without a world invisible to us now but hoped for, the glorious ideas of morality are indeed objects of approval and admiration, but not springs of purpose and action. For they do not fulfil in its completeness that end which is determined a priori, and rendered necessary, by that same pure reason' (Kant 1978: 640)

We see here that the first postulate of God is necessary to give foundation to the possibility of the moral world as an objective reality. As said, the speculative realm of the sensible world of nature does not interfere with the practical realm of the suprasensible world of freedom. Hence, to admit in transcendental philosophy the interest of making the world of freedom possible in the sensible world of appearances, Kant first introduces the postulate of God. The postulate of the future life is then necessary to make the worthiness of happiness the only actual happiness that human beings can access in the present. The actualisation of happiness, the fulfilment of all desires, will occur in a future life. In this view, the notion of hope

entails the wish to make possible here and now a change of the world in a better way. In short, the possibility of seeing the hoped world completely actualised will be instead postponed to a future time.

The initial argument which situates hope in a blurred zone between knowledge and will is thus preliminary to understanding why Horkheimer thinks that hope is a central notion in the Kantian philosophical system. As Horkheimer states in the 1933 essay *Materialism and Metaphysics*, ‘No philosopher has seen more clearly than Kant that the acceptance of the transcendent order can rest only on man’s hope’ (CT: 23)

Having said that, we can draw on Horkheimer’s *Habilitationsthesis* to see how he understands the role of judgment as a possible conjunction in the Kantian division between knowledge and will. In this sense, we see how Horkheimer moves to investigate the notion of hope as an unspoken dimension of the Kantian division between knowledge and will.

### 3.3 Kant’s notion of judgement

In his 1925 dissertation on Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, Horkheimer affirms that Kant’s philosophy in its entirety is characterised by the original division between knowledge and will, ‘between the world as object of knowledge and the world as meaningful activity, between a natural world and the world of freedom’ (GS2:85)<sup>106</sup>.

In Horkheimer’s view, also when Kant thinks of the primacy of pure practical reason, Kant cannot come to terms with the original division between knowledge and will (GS2: 86). Because of this division, Horkheimer highlights that the object of Kant’s philosophy is ‘the whole (das Ganze) of the rational personality [Persönlichkeit]’ (GS2: 85). In Kant’s vocabulary, personality refers to the identity of ‘the soul’ - the unknowable I of the subject - with ‘its intellectual substance’ - (Kant 1978: 331)<sup>107</sup>. To explain this notion of personality in simple words: I am a person because I can be conscious of myself as a numerical unity in time. Personality is the a priori formal condition of the relation between self-consciousness and time. A rational personality is the self-consciousness of the

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<sup>106</sup> [1925, *Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie*]

<sup>107</sup> See also the third paralogism of pure reason (Kant 1978: 341).

subject in different time units, emptied of any adjective able to define any empirical qualities of this subject. In other words, the rational personality is hence the idea of a subject as a formal condition. It does not refer to the temperamental traits of a human being of flesh and blood.

Horkheimer reads Kant's philosophy to question philosophically what the human (Mensch) means in Kant's view and how Kant constructs the notion of the human (Mensch) as the whole of a rational personality. Horkheimer emphasises that, because in Kant's philosophy the possibility to determine an object of experience is related only to a subject, 'the investigation of the factors of the transcendental subject is the same as the investigation of the analysis of the ultimate constitutive elements of objectivity' (GS2: 85).

Horkheimer suggests that we cannot understand properly Kant's theory of cognition properly if we do not keep in mind the original division between will and knowledge, which affects the personality of the Kantian rational subject deeply. What Horkheimer entitles as the *whole of the rational personality* can thus be interpreted here as the blurred zone between the will and knowledge as it appears in the a priori foundation of the transcendental employment of reason.

The task of Horkheimer's 1925 dissertation is to clarify the role of *The Critique of Judgement* (the third Critique) in surmounting 'the immeasurable gulf' between the (sensible) natural world and the (suprasensible) world of freedom, knowledge and will (Kant 1951: 12). But where is this blurred zone between knowledge and will then to be located? Where is the whole of the rational personality to be found?

Firstly, Horkheimer sees that this division is blurred in the function of judgment as the middle term between understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*) both in their logical and philosophical use. The expression 'logical use' here refers to the articulation of the division between the practical realm and the theoretical realm within the structure of the Kant's philosophical thought. The expression 'philosophical use' refers to how Kant considers such division as the premise from which he constructs his philosophy. Secondly, the blurred zone between will and knowledge appears also in the role of the feeling of pleasure in the activity of judging.

But let us draw first on the function of judgment as a middle term. The understanding is the faculty which elaborates the conceptual representations either of the intuitive representations or of other concepts, without ordering them in a

systematic unity (Kant 1978: 105). The unity given by the understanding is the unity of the manifold appearances. Indeed, Kant calls the knowledge produced by the unity of the understanding a ‘contingent aggregate’ (Kant 1978 :534). The understanding then unifies the representations of these manifold appearances in knowledge. Kant defines this unification as synthesis. Synthesis is derived from the spontaneity of the understanding in actively producing conceptual representations (Kant 1978: 151).

In Kant’s view, the active spontaneity of the understanding in producing concepts stands in opposition to the passive receptivity (or sensibility) of the mind in receiving intuitive representations. The union of the two then produces knowledge because, as Kant states, ‘thought without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind [...] the understanding can intuit nothing, the senses can think nothing’ (Kant 1978: 92,93). We see here that the understanding already needs an intuitive representation to unify in conceptual representations and so produce knowledge.

The elaboration of the raw material which is synthesised by the understanding and upon which knowledge is produced is then made possible both with the sensibility of the mind and the spontaneity of understanding. Knowledge is possible with what Kant calls experience. As Kant states in the first edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, experience is ‘the first product which our understanding gives rise, in working up raw material of sensible impression’ (Kant: 1978:41). Indeed, Kant remarks in the second edition of the first *Critique* that there can be no knowledge antecedent to experience and that all knowledge begins with experience in the order of time (Kant: 1978:41).

Horkheimer defines the unity of understanding as a ‘discursive cognition’ or ‘aggregate [*coacervatio*]’, while describing the unity of reason as ‘archetypal concept’ or ‘articulation [*articulatio*]’ (GS2: 89). What kind of articulation is the unity of reason if understanding alone is a faculty of knowledge?

For Kant, reason is ‘the faculty which secures the unity of rules of understanding under principle’ (Kant 1978: 303). Reason is the faculty which does not deal directly with experience but with the unity of the rules of understanding. Hence, Kant conceptualises reason in terms of systematisation where ‘The unity of the faculty of reason presupposes an idea, namely, that of the form of a whole of knowledge – a whole which is prior to the determinate knowledge of the part, and

which contains the conditions that determine a priori for every part its position and relation of other parts' (Kant 1978: 534). The faculty of reason provides a formal unity, unconditioned by experience because reason deals with the unity of the rules of the understanding. In simple words, experience is shut out of realm of reason. The fulcrum of Kant's critical philosophy is hence that the principle of reason is regulative rather than constitutive. It expresses a formal unity to be understood as the systematic unity of the rules of understanding. This regulative principle is connected to a mere idea. This idea entails objects which are postulated by reason itself. Kant entitles the idea as 'object entertained by reason (*ens rationis ratiocinates*)' (Kant 1978: 556). The mere idea enables the unity of reason because it is the point of view from which 'we may view all connections of the things of the world of sense *as if* they had their ground in such a being [the object entertained by reason]' (Kant 1978: 556). The logic of the unity of reason is then the formal unity of the conditional *as if*. But what are the objects entertained by the idea of pure reason?

Kant explains that the ideas of the I, world and God are the objects of the idea, which retain the regulative principle of reason. The I is the object related to the psychological idea of a self-sustaining intelligence, which poses an a priori regulative principle for *the unity of thought* (Kant 1978: 557). The world is the object related to a cosmological idea referring to a totality of a series of conditions, which poses a a priori regulative principle for *the unity of totality*. God is the object related to the purposive idea of a supreme and sufficient cause of all cosmological series and poses an a priori regulative principle for *the purposive unity of things*. The ideas of the I, world and God set the regulative principles of the unity of reason prior to the determinations of every possible knowledge.

For Kant, the division of understanding and reason in their logical use is reflected also in their philosophical use. Understanding is the faculty of knowledge, related to the sensible world of nature. Reason is the faculty of desire, related to the suprasensible world of freedom. In Kant's view, philosophy is then divided between the theoretical or natural philosophy and practical or moral philosophy (Kant 1951: 7). But if we consider the logical use as a transposition of the philosophical use, what is the role of judgement in surmounting the immensurable gulf between the sensible world of nature and the suprasensible world of freedom?

Judgment mediates in logic the transition between the knowledge of the contingent elaborated by the understanding and the systematisation of the unity of the rules of understanding made by reason. In simple words, how is the mediation of judgement possible if understanding and reason do not ‘speak’ to each other?

Horkheimer thinks that, because Kant cannot answer this question in the first *Critique*, Kant introduces in the *Critique of Judgement* purposiveness (*Zweckmäßigkeit*) (GS2: 92). In the section *Of Purposiveness in General* in the third *Critique*, Kant describes the object of a concept as *purpose* and the cause of the object as *concept*. Purposiveness is the relationship of causality of a concept in respect to an object (Kant 1951: 54, 55).

Therefore, Horkheimer clarifies that purposiveness makes the concept signifies according ‘to what is already executed [nach dem schon Ausgeführten]’ (GS2: 91). This ‘already executed’ refers to the object of the concept, the purpose. The execution of a purpose does not mean that reason interferes with understanding. It refers instead to what we have discussed before: the interest of pure speculative reason - the purposive unity of things – is influenced by the primacy of pure practical reason - the systematic unity of ends. The systematic unity of reason concerns the unity of ends (*Ziel*) in the world of freedom. But the unity of reason that secures the rule of understanding under its regulative principle concerns the purposive (*zweckmäßig*) unity of things. As Horkheimer explains,

the unities bring the seal [Stempel] of the idea in itself, they correspond to the concept of reason. Reason does not constitute object, reason is there to make object actual [wirklich]. The actualization of the idea is in Kant’s view only thinkable through the medium of volitional acts [Willenshandlungen] and only in constant approximation [Annäherung], never they are completely adequate. Only as a conscious product of the activity that is guided by reason can something become closer to the idea so to have a *connection according to a principle* and make it possible to *indicate the parts of the whole*. Unity in the sense of the system is, in Kant’s view, always end [*Ziel*] and the determining ground that forms action [das Wirken], i.e. a purpose [*Zweck*] (GS2: 91).

In this quotation, Horkheimer seeks to interpret how reason exerts an influence in executing the unity of the rules of understanding. We could say that this execution occurs in a blurred zone and so acts as a seal (*Stempel*) insofar as it appears in the discursive cognition of the understanding as if it were already present.

This ‘seal of the idea in itself’ to which Horkheimer refers is both the object entertained by reason (I, world and God) and its regulative principles (the unity of thought, the unity of totality and the purposive unity of things). In my view, this seal is to be found in the understanding rather than reason because reason does not

require a seal. Reason has its own regulative principle. What makes the seal already appear there in the discursive cognition of the understanding is in my view, the transcendental unity of apperception. I would argue that the notion of the original apperception refers to the self-consciousness of the subject as the author and executer of conceptual representations. Such a self-consciousness remains in the realm of the understanding not in the realm of reason (Kant 1978: 152,153).

The transcendental unity of apperception is instead the possibility of a priori knowledge, a formal condition arising from the synthesis between the contingent given by intuition and the concept of the object. Without the moment of apperception, representation will be impossible or there will be only intuition without thought. Only through the subject's self-consciousness of his activity of thinking, can there be a formal condition for a connection in the understanding between the intuition and its conceptual representation. This connection is not made by self-consciousness but is mediated by judgement. As Kant states in the section about *The Logical Form of all Judgements* in the first Critique:

A judgement is nothing but the manner in which given modes of knowledge [Erkenntnisse] are brought to the objective unity of apperception. This is what is intended by the copula [Verhältnswörtchen] *is*. It is employed to distinguish the objective unity of given representation from the subjective. It indicates their relation to the original apperception and its necessary unity' (Kant 1978: 159).

Here judgment is a predication constituted by a subject (a noun or pronoun) and a predicate (a verb) that works as a copula; that is, the verb *to be*. Only with a copula will a judgment express a logical-formal relation to a conceptual representation that can be said to be objectively valid<sup>108</sup>. The copulative function of the verb *to be* asserts something about the object which is independent of the subject of the predication. Kant gives the following example (Kant 1978: 159). The sentence 'If I support a body, I feel an impression of weight', which is a predication whose content is valid only in reference to the state of the subject. The verbs *support* and *feel* are verbal predicates because they relate to state the subject expressed in the pronoun *I*. However, there is no judgement about the heaviness of the body in the verbal predicates *support* and *feel*. Instead, the sentence 'the body is heavy' has an objective validity. It predicates that the representation of *the body* and that of *the being heavy* are combined in the object (the body) regardless of the state of a subject

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<sup>108</sup> This objective validity refers to all judgement in the first Critique. Nonetheless, it seems more to pertain to what Kant defines as determinant judgement in the third Critique.

who predicates. In this case, the predicate is not verbal (e.g. support, feel) but is nominal (is heavy).

The upshot is that the subject of the first sentence - the pronoun I - is the author and the executioner of the conceptual representations (I support a body, I have an impression of weight). In the second sentence, the subject - the noun the body - disappears as the author of the conceptual representation. The nominal predicate (is heavy) represents conceptually the object as already executed (the body is heavy) but not the subject as the author. Instead, the subject as the author needs a verbal predicate. In a nominal predicate, (to be + noun or adjective) the subject is the object to the which the quality or the definition is attributed.

The first sentence gives the following logical structure: subject-verb-object. In this sentence the relationship between subject and object is regulated by the verbal predicate (support, have) that associates the two, but the validity of the predication is given by the subject (I support, I have). In the second sentence we have the following structure *subject – copula – adjective*. The validity of the predication lies in the object - the adjective *heavy* - which completes the predicate *to be* in its copulative function (is heavy). In this case, the predicate is nominal (is heavy), rather than verbal, because the verb *to be* needs to be completed with an adjective or noun to make sense. A predication that shows an objective validity in the relationship between a subject and object is a judgement. This objective validity differs from the subjective validity because the objective one brings the predication closer to the idea. This occurs with the nominal predicate.

In looking at how the discursive cognition given by understanding then approaches the idea given by reason, we see how judgement mediates between the understanding and reason in its logical use. In *The Critique of Judgement*, Kant defines judgment in general as ‘the faculty of thinking the particular as contained under the universal’ (Kant 1951:15). The function of judgement as a middle term is thus its operation as the faculty of thinking. Kant specifies how there are two types of mediation here. First, judgement is determinative when it subsumes the particular under a given universal. It is the conceptual representation of the contingent under an already given concept. Determinative judgement pertains to science and is related to objective rules. Second, judgment is reflective when we start from particular and then seek the universal through purposiveness<sup>109</sup>. The reflective judgments are not

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<sup>109</sup> Kant distinguishes reflective judgement in aesthetic and teleological judgement.

subsumed under scientific a priori concepts but reflects a subjective not-scientific element in judgement<sup>110</sup>. We can formulate the possibility of reflective judgements thus: Is it possible to judge nature without subsuming it under universal laws?

For his part, Horkheimer glimpse in the possibility of reflective judgement the blurred zone between will and knowledge in Kant's philosophy. If the particular is determined by the understanding how can our conceptual representation move towards the idea? Kant introduces the notion of purpose and purposiveness. But purposiveness pertains only to the judgement and involves neither the sensible world of nature nor the suprasensible world of freedom. We must hence seek what conditions the possibility of a reflective judgement.

Since reflective judgments cannot guarantee the unity of the system through subsumption because it starts from the particular to find the universal - , Horkheimer argues that Kant is forced to introduce an a priori 'happy chance [*glückliche Zufall*]', which is a preliminary condition for reflective judgment to investigate the regulative principles (GS2: 97)<sup>111</sup>. To understand this happy chance, we need to divide the logical use of judgement from its philosophical use. In its logical use, judgement is the middle term used to think the particular contained under the universal. Here judgment is the possibility to predicate with the verb *to be* in its copulative function by establishing an objective validity between the representations.

In the philosophical use, Kant describes the feeling of pleasure and pain as what stays between the faculty of knowledge and the faculty of desire (Kant 1951: 15). But only the feeling of pleasure seems to work as the a priori principle of judgement. Indeed, Kant discusses about 'a happy chance favouring our design' in reference to the condition whereby the subject can have a feeling of pleasure when finding the universal starting from the particular (Kant 1951: 20).

To sum up, there are two blurred zones in the division of knowledge and will. These two blurred zones inform the whole of rational personality of the Kantian subject.

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<sup>110</sup> In the third Critique, this element is the purposiveness of nature. This purposiveness of nature is what is left undetermined by the universal laws of nature whose ground is in understanding (Kant 1978: 16, 17). Instead, nature in general is the existence of objects in relation to a priori concepts according to laws. Indeed, Kant defines nature in general in the first Critique as 'the conformity to law of all appearances in space and time (Kant 1978: 173). Furthermore, In § 61 of the third Critique, Kant explains that when we make references to the conformity of the law of appearances (the universal) and derives the particular content of judgement from them, the judgement is determinant and not reflective (Kant 1951: 207).

<sup>111</sup> *ibid.*

The first is where judgment as a logical middle term between knowledge and will in its function as a copula. The second zone of ambiguity is the condition of a happy chance in the reflective judgement.

In the conclusion of his dissertation on Kant, Horkheimer affirms that the possibility of surmounting the immensurable abyss between the knowledge and the will cannot involve the unification of both. In his opinion, there are indications in the *Critique of Judgement* about that this abyss may not be so immensurable (GS2: 146). Then Horkheimer concludes that further investigations are necessary to see how the idea of an original division between knowledge and will is not only Kant's idea but a theme emerging throughout modern bourgeois culture.

Indeed, Horkheimer's investigation of Kant's philosophy is a prism through which Horkheimer can question about the idea of man in the bourgeois world. Indeed, an analysis of the idea of man in the context of the modern theories about rational man are at the centre of his later investigation on the decline of reason and of his critique of instrumental reason<sup>112</sup>.

### **3.4 Horkheimer's reading of Kantian hope**

After his investigations in Kant's philosophy of the 1920s, Horkheimer discusses about Kant mostly with references to the ethical part, leaving aside the theoretical part. Later in the 1930s, Horkheimer considers the notion of hope in Kant as a kind of invisible leitmotif, which traverses all Kant's philosophical system. Horkheimer understands the Kantian notion of hope in a twofold way; one is characterised by a materialist critique of the notion, the other one by a critical understanding. On the one hand, the notion of hope is a product of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century European bourgeois culture. The notion of hope links idealistically the social progress fostered by science and industry with the conditions of possibility for a moral progress. On the other hand, it entails a more hidden motivational dimension for human beings to pursue moral progress.

Let us focus first on how the notion of hope is the product of the 18<sup>th</sup> liberal capitalism, where both private property and public space play a great role as conditions of this social system. Private property is the basis for the autonomy of

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<sup>112</sup> *The End of Reason* (EFSR), *Rise and Decline of the Individual* (ER), *The Concept of Man* (CIR).

the individual, his condition of freedom. As the mode and place where products are exchanged among small entrepreneurs, trade and market is a public space for the human beings' recognition of themselves as bourgeois men; that is, private owners. These two conditions enhance the human desire for happiness as they connect the social progress of a group of individuals with the moral progress, which moves the individuals beyond their interests in an idealist way. Indeed, these two conditions may be concretised in the world of human affairs entailing that the bourgeois man can think of himself not only as member of a social class but also as a universal subject. The bourgeois man thinks of himself as an individual whose actions and conduct are valid as if all other individuals may act in the same way. But how can the particular interest of the bourgeois man be thought as universal without making this universality the mask behind which the particular interests of individuals are hidden?

Horkheimer answers this question by submitting Kant to a materialist critique in terms of his notions of the desire for happiness, conformity to the moral law and his conception of hope. In Horkheimer's view, the notion of hope demonstrates Kant's illusory attempt to reconcile a desire for happiness devoid of utilitarian interests with the conformity to the moral law. Indeed, such a desire for happiness remains illusory for Horkheimer because bourgeois individuals do not erase the conditions of social domination which assure private ownership. The desire for happiness oriented towards the universal idea of the good is hence doomed to stay without concretisations within a system that cannot allow the possibility to erase the social structure of the bourgeois world.

However, Horkheimer appreciates the Kantian attempt to save the possibility of a moral progress. Moral progress is the implementation of a possible culture of mutual respect within the domination practices of the bourgeois social world. Indeed, Horkheimer thinks that the materialist thinkers of his time (the early 1930s) should focus their analyses on those alterations of the social conditions that made the Kantian hope an illusory achievement of happiness. In this way, they might understand the conditions of injustice in their own contemporary time, when liberal capitalism and bourgeois morality have collapsed in fascism and state capitalism<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> See the 1933 essay *Materialism and Metaphysics* (CT: 24) and the 1935 memorandum *Bürgerliche Welt* (GS12: 227). See also Chapter 5 when discussing about liberal capitalism ending in fascism.

Beside this materialist critique, Horkheimer also suggests a critical reading of the Kantian hope. In this reading, Horkheimer takes hope as a notion that moves the Kantian rational-moral subject towards the possibility of a world in which injustice and suffering may be eliminated. In this way, Horkheimer brings to light the theoretical logic of the notion of hope as it appears in the Kantian philosophical system. To formulate it in a question: how does the Kantian notion of hope entail the possibility that the condition of social domination may be eliminated within the structure of this same mode of social domination?

The logic can be summarised this way: human beings are required to do violence upon themselves to make the world rational. The term rational here is to be understood in Kant's transcendental employment of the term. A rational world guarantees not only the end of a state of warfare and cruelty but also the conformity of human being's action to the moral law. In this logic, human beings become subjects in a twofold way. First, they are rational because they cease doing harm to each other. Second, they are moral because they may be worthy of happiness if they ensure that their action conforms to the moral law.

However, Kant's moral law does not entail any substantial content of what the good is. It states only a categorical imperative which establishes a contentless connection between the particular action of the individual and the possibility that such an action is conformed to a will, which can be valid as a principle establishing a universal law<sup>114</sup>.

In Horkheimer's view, Kant solves this problem by giving the notion of hope a philosophical basis that is more dogmatic than critical. As Horkheimer affirms in the 1933 essay *Materialism and Metaphysics*, 'Kant does not simply note the existence of hope which is directed to happiness [...], but gives it a philosophical basis; thus his originally rationalist analysis of reason moves notably closer to a dogmatically metaphysical system such as he was opposing' (CT: 23,24).

To clarify Horkheimer's statement here, we need first to understand what Kant means by dogmatism and then to unpack the theological content of the postulate of the existence of God. The postulate of the existence of God is the unexplainable theoretical proposition in Kant's critique of practical reason, one that transposes the

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<sup>114</sup> Moral law is hence based on a categorical imperative that commands: 'So act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law' (Kant 1956: 30).

theological doctrines of Christianity to his rationalist philosophy in a critical way. Let us begin with the dogmatism.

In Horkheimer's view, Kant is an anti-dogmatic thinker who attempts to give his anti-dogmatism a theoretical ground. Dogmatism in Kant's vocabulary refers to the philosophical thought which reconciles will and knowledge without previous criticism of the power of reason. Kant criticises dogmatism as a doctrine that establishes an absolute relationship between human being's representation of reality in predication and reality as it is. As Kant clearly states:

Critique is not opposed to the dogmatic procedure of reason in its pure knowledge, as science, for that must always be dogmatic, that is, yield strict proof from sure principles a priori. It is only opposed to dogmatism, that is to the presumption that it is possible to make progress with pure knowledge, according to principle from concepts, alone. [...] Dogmatism is thus the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, without previous criticism of its own powers (Kant 1978: 32).

To recall, Kant's philosophy is transcendental, while his philosophical way of proceeding is critique which questions the power of reason in its possibility of experience. In Kant's first *Critique*, human beings' representation of the world is the mode of perception of a subject, rather than an eternal truth existing independently of the subject:

If the subject, or even only the subjective constitution of sense in general, be removed, the whole constitution and all the relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish. As appearances, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us. What objects may be in themselves, and apart from all this receptivity of our sensibility, remains completely unknown to us. We know nothing but our mode of perceiving them- a mode which is peculiar to us, and not necessarily shared in every being, though, certainly by every human being. With this alone have we any concern (Kant: 1978: 82).

Kant makes this argument in opposition to the rationalist dogmatic philosophy of Leibniz and Wolff. The rationalist method of these two philosophers is transcendental but, in Kant's view, it does not result in the active element of the subject in representing appearances. Furthermore, neither Leibniz nor Wolff clearly admit the impossibility to know things in themselves (Kant 1978:84). Horkheimer appreciates the active element in Kant's theory of cognition and keeps it as central to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In a 1930 lecture on Kant's philosophy, Horkheimer clarifies Kant thinks both 'the scientific image of the world' and the object of it -i.e. 'the world'- as 'creatively produced [*schöpferisch erzeugt*]' (GS11: 204)<sup>115</sup>. In Horkheimer's view, Kant's philosophy entails a 'critique of cognition

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<sup>115</sup> [1930, *Über Kants Philosophie*]

[*Kritik der Erkenntnis*]’ which supplies a scientific image of the world because it puts into question the logical premises supporting a notion of reality as having a unified totality in thought (GS11: 207, 208)<sup>116</sup>.

Having outlined Horkheimer’s interpretation of the difference between critique and dogmatism in the way in which Horkheimer interprets them from Kant, I will now discuss why, in Horkheimer’s view, Kant moves towards a dogmatic metaphysics in his practical philosophy<sup>117</sup>. We have already stated that Kant introduces the postulate of God in the first *Critique* when describing the question of hope as a question that is both practical and theoretical. In the second *Critique*, the postulate of the existence of God is then introduced as unexplainable theoretical proposition under the a priori principle of pure practical reason. Furthermore, we have discussed how hope in Kant is directed to happiness (Kant 1978: 636). But this happiness is not the satisfaction of just any desire, but the desire derived from the conformity of actions to a moral law reaching towards the highest good. If, as Kant argues, this highest good is postulated by pure practical reason with the existence of God - the Supreme Reason causing all happiness in the world -, why should we be obliged to make our action conform to a moral law, whose a priori ground is a contentless postulate?

Here we need to look more to faith than reason. Kant presents the notion of ‘the pure rational faith’ as the need (Bedürfnis) deriving from pure practical reason and, specifically, from the postulate of the existence of God (Kant 1956: 126). Kant empties this idea of faith of any connotative religious meaning in order to fit the idea of faith into his practical philosophy as a pure rational faith. This means that faith may have a philosophical rationalist basis (rational) and a transcendental employment (pure). Once faith is introduced into his philosophy, Kant stages a parallelism between the Christian doctrine of morality and the holiness of a Supreme Reason. The Christian doctrine admits the kingdom of God both an end to be reached in another world (the world of God) and as a guideline (Richtschnur) to be followed in this earthly world (the world of man). In the same way, Kant postulates the idea of the holiness of a Supreme Reason as a guideline for the actions of rational beings in the sensible world of appearances. However, because

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid. See also Kant’s division between critique of reason and the dogmatic employment of reason: the former leads to scientific knowledge, the latter to dogmatic assertion or scepticism (Kant 1978:57).

<sup>117</sup> The references made in this discussion are to be found in the section *The Existence of God as Postulate of Pure Practice Reason in the Critique of Practical Reason*.

happiness is not given in the sensible world of appearances but only in the holiness of the *Supreme Reason*, human beings may hope to have a share of happiness if they make their action conform to a moral law.

But again, what exactly ought human beings to do to comply with moral law? After having introduced faith in pure practical reason, Kant admits religion, in the sense of ‘the knowledge of all duties as divine commandments [Erkenntnis aller Pflichten als göttlicher Gebote]’ (Kant 1956: 129)<sup>118</sup>. But if knowledge is separate from the will, where can an a priori principle of the condition of possibility of the experience of religion be found?

Again, Kant returns to the postulate of the existence of God. In the end of this section about the postulating the existence of God, Kant clarifies that the pure practical reason of moral law is insufficient to hope to become worthy of happiness. Instead, religion is to be added to morality. However, such a notion of religion refers to an ethical element of knowledge (the he calls it ‘divine commandments’). This knowledge is devoid of theological content and is obliged (gepflichtet) only to address it to the highest good. Hope then becomes the product of the combination of morality -the worthiness of being happy- and religion - as the ethical element of knowledge. As Kant states,

Morality is not properly the doctrine how we should make ourselves happy, but how we should become worthy of happiness. It is only when religion is added that there also comes in the hope of participating some day in happiness in proportion as we have endeavoured to be not unworthy of it (Kant 1956: 130).

The unspoken dimension in Kant’s philosophy is then to be found in the notion of hope as the not-actual. No matter how much efforts a rational being makes to become a moral person and whether an ethical element is added to the efforts, happiness can only be hoped and not-actualised in plenitude. For Horkheimer, the notion of hope entails the obligation of the Kantian rational being to strive endlessly for the highest good. In this view, Kant’s system shows a negative utopia where a world of happiness is possible only in the not-actual dimension of an expectation; that is, in hope.

Horkheimer suggests in the 1933 essay *Materialism and Morality* that, in Kant’s practical philosophy, the impossibility of achieving the possibility of a perfect

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<sup>118</sup> In *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant defines religion as a conjunction between theology and morality (Kant 1978: 325).

moral constitution in the world of human affairs is replaced by a continuous striving to reach such an impossible possibility. As Horkheimer puts it,

What Schopenhauer called the setting up of a moral utopia -the fulfilment of morality and simultaneously its overcoming- is for Kant no illusion but the goal of politics. [...] Kant's philosophy certainly exhibits utopian elements: they lie not in the idea of a perfect constitution but rather in the undialectical conception of a continuous approach to it [...] the harmony of the interests of all in Kant's utopia can only be understood as a preestablished harmony, as a charitable miracle. In contrast science takes account of the fact that historical transformation also changes the elements of the earlier condition at the same time. The materialist theory is need in order to supersede the utopian character of the Kantian conception of a perfect constitution (BPSS: 27).

Horkheimer states that the possibility that flesh and blood human beings may approximate the idea of the rational-moral subject is, for Kant, the goal of politics. In this perspective, we can speculate that in Kant's thought a possible politics of the unspoken consists in combining the actual possibility of the hope of being worthy of happiness with the not-actual possibility of overcoming the rational-moral system which makes the achievement of happiness impossible. This rational-moral system is conceived as a civil constitution where the term civil means both rational and moral.

To accomplish this project, Kant requires human beings to perform a double self-mastery upon themselves in order to progress morally from a state of nature to a civil constitution driven by pure reason. The first move towards self-mastery is to move from a state of nature to a rational constitution. This state of nature refers to 'the predisposition to animality', in which human being acts only in accordance with 'physical and purely mechanical self-love, wherein no reason is demanded' (Kant 1960: 21, 22). To become rational, human beings need to develop 'the predisposition to humanity', according to which human beings act in accordance with the physical self-love and with the 'inclination to acquire worth in the opinion of the other' (Kant 1960: 21, 22). The second self-mastery is the conformity of actions to a moral law. Here Kant refers to human being's endeavour to become a person, to the extent that they develop their personality as 'the capacity for respect for the moral law as in itself a sufficient incentive of the will' (Kant 1960: 22, 23). The three stages of moral progress are then a sort of anthropological crescendo from animality to humanity and then to personality.

On the one hand, Kant sees the rational constitution as necessary because it prevents human beings from warfare and cruelty. On the other hand, Kant regards the rational constitution as moral because it posits the conditions for human beings to

become persons. The avoidance of war, which for Kant is the source of evil, is then conceived as the ‘negative guarantee’ of human beings. The end of war is the condition of possibility to hope that human beings can live in mutual respect and be worthy of happiness (Kant 1991c: 183). In clearer words, the term ‘human’ means both rational and moral in Kant’s philosophy because rationality entails the avoidance of warfare and the worthiness of happiness.

For Kant, warfare can be stopped not by the suspension of hostility but by the enforcement of peace through formal institutions driven by pure reason (Kant 1991e: 98). In this sense, the refusal of war enables the creation of a civil constitution, which is not based merely on coercion but on the discursive logic of the autonomy of reason, ‘which legislates a priori, regardless of all empirical ends (which can all be summed up under the general heading of happiness)’ (Kant 1991d: 73). In this view, we can speculate that in Kant the refusal of warfare is transcendental because it poses the condition for the critical doubt. This critical doubt consists in the endeavour to continue retrieving the refusal of warfare by conforming human action to moral law, so that the worthiness of happiness may be expected. The actual foundation of the refusal of warfare becomes the not-actual of the moral law; that is, the hope for happiness. Refusal and doubt are here then two discursive ways to see the unspoken dimension in Kant’s notion of hope under the form of a political project driven by pure reason.

In his late thought then, Horkheimer focuses on the messianic aspects of the Kantian notion of hope, configuring it as the not-actual moment of Kant’s philosophy. In his 1957 essay *The Concept of Man*, Horkheimer then returns to the question of hope in Kant by emphasizing its negative sense; that is, the reduction of injustices. Here, Horkheimer explains that the Kantian notion of hope seems to be an incentive to reduce injustice:

Examination of the third question [the question of hope] leads to the idea of the highest good and absolute justice. The moral conscience upon the truth of which depends the difference between good and evil, rebels against the thought that the present state of reality is final and that undeserved misfortune and wrong-doing, open or hidden, and not the self-sacrificing deeds of men, are to have the last word’ (CIR: 2).

Horkheimer understands that the Kantian question of hope for happiness entails the possible idea of a possible world where injustice and suffering, warfare and cruelty may not have the last word. In this view, the question of hope in Kant’s philosophy entails a critique of injustices, which is absent in the questions of knowledge ‘What can I know?’ and of duty ‘What ought I to do?’. As Horkheimer highlights, ‘hope

that urges men on and guides their action is a constitutive element in the Kantian system and plays a role in even the subtlest transcendental analyses, as it is does not in mere epistemology' (CIR: 3)

In Horkheimer's view, Kantian hope is the urge of the human will to change the world by putting an end to injustice. It can therefore be understood as a climax, meaning a continuous striving for a change that might be interrupted only with the not-actual fulfilment of desire, happiness. In a late note of Horkheimer, we see that the Kantian hope entails the idea of the not-actuality of Judaic faith in a Messiah:

Kant gives theoretical foundations in a grandiose way to that which in Judaism is the decisive world of faith: the hope that there is something other and better than this world of injustice, cold and enmity, -briefly said- the hope for a Messiah that in Judaism remains as faith, conserved in tradition. Kant makes room for the hope that there is something else than the world that we know by proving that our statements and the world are subjective [*relativ*] and that we cannot know something like the thing-in-itself (GS14: 391)<sup>119</sup>.

In the last sentence of this note, we see clearly how Kant's notion of hope entails for Horkheimer an unspoken dimension which conjoins a critique of propositional language with a critique of injustice. The critique of propositional language lies in the two main arguments of Kant's theoretical philosophy. First, our world is a world of appearances where we cannot know the things in themselves. Second, no reconciliation is possible between knowledge and the will but only the purposive mediation of judgement. The critique of injustice lies in the impossible possibility of the hope for happiness, meaning the not-actual of the moral law.

In my view, Horkheimer understands the Kantian rational-moral subject to be a hopeful being who embodies the idea of a world of justice, which is a moral world where these subjects will act in mutual respect to each other. Here, mutual respect means both acting rationally (i.e. without doing harm to another) and acting morally (cooperating with each other in pursuing happiness for all).

I think that Horkheimer rightly highlighted how the hope for happiness in Kant's philosophy transposes the Judaic faith in a coming Messiah into the possibility that human beings can expect to be worthy of happiness by acting morally. However, this possibility remains critical. More than a reward, the possibility of expecting happiness refers to the endeavour to reduce human propensity to do injustice (through warfare and cruel acts). What Kant takes to be unconditional is that the idea of moral world may emerge in human beings' consciousness so long as human

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<sup>119</sup> [1957-1967, *Kant, das Judentum, die Hoffnung*]

beings refuse war and cruelty and make such a refusal the condition of their possibility of being worthy of happiness.

To conclude, the notion of hope in Kant entangles refusal and doubt as critical moments for Kant's rational beings. The first moment is the refusal that the world of warfare and cruelty is the eternal true reality. The second moment is the doubt that human action can change the world and that the change is oriented towards justice (justice as the negation of cruelty and war).

### **3.5 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have shown how Horkheimer reads the Kantian notion of hope as an unspoken dimension of the Kant's critical philosophy. This dimension is unspoken because hope introduces a not-actual temporality as the present expectation of a future possibility of happiness. The unspoken dimension becomes clear when Kant's division between knowledge and will is unpacked. The notion of hope is then a surreptitious link between a critique of predication and a critique of injustice.

The critique of predication demonstrates that any proposition cannot establish an absolute meaningful relationship between the subject's representation of reality and the things in themselves. Indeed, the critique of predication lies in the role of judgment as the middle term between understanding - the faculty of knowledge - and reason - the faculty of desire, where judgement entails both the faculty of thinking the particular contained in the universal and the feeling of pleasure. Judgements then requires the copulative function of the verb *to be* to translate this faculty of thinking into propositions. In the case of reflective judgement, Kant then introduces a happy case and a non-scientific subjective purposiveness are introduced to make judgment possible.

The critique of injustice consists in showing that the world of war and cruelty is not a final reality but can be changed through action which is moral. Morality is conceived through unexplainable theoretical propositions, postulates. Morality is oriented towards an infinite idea of the good and its law states how to become worthy of happiness; that is, how to have a share of the good. But the postulates cannot guarantee the actualisation of a moral action as they are theoretical proposition. Then, Kant adds to morality the not-actual temporal dimension of

hope. In this way, hope establishes a critique of injustice which now takes the form of a negative utopia: the not-actual possibility to be happy consists in the expectation to be worthy of happiness if human beings make their action conform to moral law.

This hope entails an unspoken dimension which surreptitiously connects the critique of predication to a critique of injustice. So, the possibility of hope for happiness involves moral action and not a simple religious faith. Nonetheless, the consciousness of the possibility to make the world a better place through moral action is also given by the critical teaching of the world as representation: we do not have the knowledge of things but only mode of perceiving them.

The unspoken dimension of hope consists then in the unrepresentability of a last reality and in the desire to change reality for the good, although human beings can only represent how the good can be achieved (moral action) instead of determining what the good is.

In sum, we can chart a conceptual parallelism between Horkheimer's the longing for the totally other and Kant's hope as it follows: the longing entails the optative mood of hope (the not-actual temporal dimension of hope), while the totally other entails the unrepresentability of what the good is (the postulate of God and the highest good).

In the next chapter we will explore how Schopenhauer maintains the Kantian philosophical division between representation and thing-in-itself. However, Schopenhauer transforms the transcendental dimension of pure reason down into the transcendental dimension of the will, so turning critique into an epi-philosophy. Instead of the future temporal dimension of hope, Schopenhauer conceives the not-actuality as the ever-fleeting temporal dimension of the co-presence between the world as the will and the world as representation. Furthermore, instead of the postulate of God, Schopenhauer conceives unrepresentability as the impossibility of the copula in defining the will (his notion of the aseity of the will).

In this sense, we will see how Schopenhauer's notion of the will entails an unspoken dimension which may be considered the other forerunner of Horkheimer's longing for the totally other.

# Chapter 4

## The will or the unspoken in Arthur Schopenhauer

### 4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will describe how the notion of the will in Schopenhauer's philosophy can be considered as a forerunner of Horkheimer's concept of longing for the totally other. To recall, the longing for the totally other entails an idea of emancipation from the injustice caused by the existing social order. In Horkheimer's view, this emancipation occurs on cultural level. I have described it as human emancipation. The term human is used in a negative sense to indicate the possibility of thinking a language devoid of power.

Horkheimer frames the possibility of a language devoid of power in terms of a theological idea, which refers to the awareness that the world is representation and expresses the longing that injustice may not have the final word. In Chapter 3, we saw how Kant's idea of hope can be considered as a forerunner of the longing for the totally other. Horkheimer considers Kant's notion of hope as a critical-theoretical attempt to connect the social progress, brought about by science and industry, with moral progress. In this view, hope is a philosophical product of the 18<sup>th</sup> bourgeois culture and liberal capitalism.

Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will is instead regarded as the expression of the decay of bourgeois liberal capitalism and a reactionary form of resistance to the overwhelming power of social relationships in the life of the 19<sup>th</sup> century individual. Schopenhauer's metaphysics does not postulate the expectation of a better world, as his teaching of the world as representation is conceived through a metaphorical language. The employment of metaphors points to the continuous not-actuality of the world represented by human beings. In Schopenhauer's philosophy, knowledge and ethics, theory and practice make sense only as a metaphorical representation of an aimless continuous transformation of the world, the will. From this viewpoint, the unspoken dimension of the will is to be located in Schopenhauer's employment of metaphors.

To elucidate this argument, I will first describe Horkheimer's interpretation of Schopenhauer. Then, I will draw on Schopenhauer's work and discuss the not-

actuality of metaphor in two steps. I will unpack the co-presence of the world as will and the world as representation. Then, I will explain the doctrine of the aseity of the will by highlighting how Schopenhauer uses metaphorical language as a language incommensurable to power.

In the final section, I will then show the *écart* (gap) between the Kantian hope and the Schopenhauerian will, which lies not simply in the contrast between postulates and metaphors but, more specifically, in the cultural resource of theology. The Kantian hope takes Christianity as its theological background - the postulates of God and future life. Schopenhauer's idea of the will takes the atheism of Buddhism and the mystical determinism of the Hindu Veda as its theological background. These two different theological backgrounds have an influence on Horkheimer when he frames his longing for the totally other in reference to Christian doctrine of brotherly love and the unrepresentability of the graven image in Judaism.

#### **4.2 The epi-philosophy of Schopenhauer as a negation**

While Horkheimer's approach to Schopenhauer's philosophy occurred before starting out as a student of philosophy at the university, Schopenhauer became central to his way of conceiving critical theory in his old age. In the 1961 lecture *Schopenhauer Today*, Horkheimer presents Schopenhauer's philosophy as 'infinitely modern, so modern, in fact that young people have it by instinct. This thinking knows the contradictions of autonomous truth and it is profoundly irritated by it' (CIR: 79). Horkheimer thus considered Schopenhauer's philosophy to serve as hyper-criticism to counteract any dogmatic metaphysics predicating eternal truths. Within this perspective, Schopenhauer's philosophy is as antidogmatic as Kant's thought. Although, like Kant, Schopenhauer submits to criticism the power of thought, in doing so, Schopenhauer goes much further.

In my view, Schopenhauer adjusts and expands Kant's critique to establish the limit of the conditions of the possible experience. In Kant's style, Schopenhauer thinks that we cannot have the knowledge of things in themselves and that the a priori foundation of the possibility of experience cannot be based on experience itself. He then parts from Kant in his view that, such an a priori foundation should not be

sought in abstract forms of the a priori<sup>120</sup>. The principal source of all knowledge for Schopenhauer lies in the limit of the possibility of experience. Schopenhauer distinguishes between inward and outward types of experience. Inward experience occurs when we access our will, whereas the outward experience is given by a sensuous approach to the world that makes the condition of knowledge possible. In this view, Schopenhauer states that ‘the task of metaphysics is not to pass over experience in which the world exists [...] my path lies midway between the doctrine of omniscience of early dogmatism and the despair of the Kantian critique’<sup>121</sup>. (Schopenhauer 1966a: 428).

On the one hand, Schopenhauer’s metaphysics of the will shares the despair of Kant’s critique; that is, the impossibility of knowing the origin of knowledge. Here, Schopenhauer’s thought unfolds a critique of the dogmatic a priori<sup>122</sup>. On the other hand, Schopenhauer thinks about the origin of knowledge as the incommensurable limit of the possibility of experience. In this view, Schopenhauer shares the teaching of the doctrine of omniscience and defines his philosophical way of thinking as it follows: ‘there is a limit up to which reflection can penetrate, and so far illuminates the night of existence, although the horizon always remains dark’ (Schopenhauer 1966b: 591). Here Schopenhauer’s thought stages a critique of the Kant’s critical-formal a priori knowledge, namely the forms of knowledge antecedent to consciousness (Schopenhauer 1966a: 502, 503)<sup>123</sup>.

Schopenhauer describes as epi-philosophy the philosophy that only deals with the human representation of the world of appearances and with the limit of this representation in the possibility of experience. As Schopenhauer clarifies:

This philosophy does not presume to explain the existence of the world from its ultimate ground. On the contrary, it sticks to the actual facts of outward and inward experience as they are accessible to everyone, and shows their true and deepest connexion, yet without really going beyond them to any extramundane things, and the relations of this world. Accordingly, it arrives at no conclusions as to what exists beyond all possible experience, but furnishes merely explanation and interpretation of what is given in the external world and in self-consciousness (Schopenhauer 1966b: 640).

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<sup>120</sup> See in Chapter 3 the discussion about Kant’s idea of the unity of reason, the regulative principles and the objects entertained by reason.

<sup>121</sup> Schopenhauer clarifies the doctrine of omniscience with the principle: ‘Est quadam prodire tenus si non datur ultra’, there is a limit up to which one can go, even if one cannot go beyond it.

<sup>122</sup> See the discussion about Kant’s criticism of Leibniz’ and Wolff’s dogmatic rationalism in Chapter 3.

<sup>123</sup> These forms were described in Chapter 3 as the object entertained by reason.

In simple words, for Schopenhauer we cannot know the things in themselves. Nonetheless, this limit of knowledge does not lie in a priori abstract forms of reason but in how we can reflect upon the possibility of our experience. In this perspective, the condition of human beings in their capacity to know the world is a condition of powerlessness. Regardless of how much violence human beings exert on themselves and the circumambient world, they will not be able to grasp and master the knowledge of the things in themselves. As we discussed in Chapter 2, Horkheimer understands Schopenhauer's philosophical way of proceeding as a negation that lays bare to the irrational dimension of any claim of power in the knowledge of truth. Let us now clarify how this negation is philosophical.

According to Schopenhauer's doctrine of the world as representation, the content of a proposition does not state how the world is in itself. In Kant's style, it is the representation of a mode of representation. The teaching of the world as representation has two philosophical grounds in Schopenhauer. The first is Kant's critique of dogmatism. The other one is the idea that the possibility of experience entails its own limit. This idea comes from its interpretation of the doctrine of omniscience. In the light of these two philosophical grounds, we see here a critique of propositional language: human beings' claims of any knowledge are powerless and do not establish any truth about how things are in themselves.

Schopenhauer's critique of propositional language becomes even clearer when he discusses the origin of logic in the philosophical schools of Ancient Greece (Schopenhauer 1966a: 47). In Schopenhauer's view, propositions and logic derive from the pleasure for debate. When this pleasure becomes a passion, the confusion in which every debate ended led the members of the Ancient Greek philosophical schools to establish a method of procedure as the guide for the debate. The practical purpose of logic was then to establish a guide for philosophical debates, which could now be logically grounded in primary propositions of truths recognised as a guide by the debaters. In this view, the claims of knowledge of truth are powerless because they refer only to the discursive logic of the debate and not to the essence of the things in themselves. Schopenhauer's philosophy hence presents a philosophical negation referring to the impossibility of the knowledge of knowing, which then constitutes the limit of human beings' possibility of experience. Philosophical negation is thus conceived as a critique of propositional language, in the metaphysical vocabulary of the world as representation.

In my view, Horkheimer understands Schopenhauer in this critique of propositional language and from this critique he speculates even further when he admits that, from the point of view Schopenhauer's philosophy, an idea of solidarity emerges. Such an idea of solidarity is based on human being's abandonment in the powerlessness of their knowledge:

The doctrine of blind will as an eternal force removes from the world the treacherous gold foil which the old metaphysics had given it. In utter contrast to positivism, it enunciates the negative and preserves it in thought, thus exposing the motive for solidarity shared by men and all beings: their abandonment (CIR: 82).

Horkheimer makes explicit here that Schopenhauer's philosophy shows the negative by enunciating the powerlessness of any claim stating the truth of things in themselves, regardless of the logical ground of the claim (metaphysical or scientific). In Horkheimer's view, it may be possible to make the idea of solidarity concrete if human beings become aware of their powerlessness to know things. How then does this powerlessness appear in propositional language? As the world of human being is only the world of appearances, human beings can state they know the things in themselves only by applying a violent censorship to their thinking. This violent censorship constitutes human beings' attempt to master practically things under their command.

In this view, Horkheimer states that Schopenhauer's philosophy 'exposes the negative': it denounces the impossibility of human language to grasp absolute truths, to gain the knowledge of things in themselves. In the light of this Horkheimer's assessment of Schopenhauer's philosophy, what then is the role of violence in language? Violence is systematised in language so to make the contents of propositions appear as true and immutable knowledge about things in themselves. As I outlined in chapter 1, Horkheimer takes human beings to represent transient cultural forms of life as the immutable and true forms of reality. This possibility may become actual when claims of truth about the things in themselves refer to the social life of the individual (e.g. public institutions and modes of organisation of everyday life).

In Horkheimer's view, if human beings denounce the systemisation of violence in language as a tool to cope with the impossibility of knowing things in themselves, then they may find the powerless state of their knowledge of the world as the motivation for a solidarity. In the light of this denunciation of violence, philosophical negation plays a crucial role in Horkheimer's view. As Horkheimer

says in *Eclipse of reason*, 'Negation plays a crucial role in philosophy. The negation is double-edged - a negation of the absolute claims of prevailing ideology and of the brash claim of reality' (ER: 182). Here negation refers, on the one side, to the unmasking of domination in concepts and, on the other side, to a critique of cognition. Negation is conceived as a philosophical way of proceeding that highlights how propositions demonstrate both the contradictions and the transience of the social life of human beings.

Nonetheless, we should recall the argument of Chapter 1 in order not to forget what Horkheimer's critical theory owes to Marx's materialism. For Horkheimer, to show the falsehood of a proposition does not entail a change in the existing social order. The possibility of such a change depends on how human beings act in respect to the historical social practices which maintain certain propositions as immutable truths about how social reality is. In Horkheimer's materialist view, philosophical negation is not enough to bring about a social change for 'to say that the essence or the positive side of philosophical thought constitutes in understanding the negativity and relativity of the existing culture does not imply that the possession of such knowledge constitutes, in itself, the overcoming of this historical situation' (ER: 183).

Philosophical critique is neither able to maintain the possibility of a solidarity through the consciousness of abandonment nor uphold the possibility that such a solidarity may bring about social change. In Horkheimer's view, the question of whether or not a social change may occur indicates a state of indeterminacy which theory is unable to determine<sup>124</sup>. However, the double role of negation helps us to understand, within a philosophical framework, how Horkheimer eventually thinks this possibility of solidarity.

The solidarity conceived by Horkheimer requires a negation that shows the contradiction contained in the content of the claim. This negation is in the style of Hegel's determinate negation<sup>125</sup>. Furthermore, Horkheimer's notion of solidarity hence requires a negation that lays bare the irrational dimension of violence in the claims about the knowledge of truth; that is, violence as a response to the

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<sup>124</sup> As he remarks in the 1955 note *Theory und Praxis*, 'Only impulses that lead to action can result from theory. Human being should decide, and his decision can be reversed. *C'est la condition humaine*' (GS14: 251)

<sup>125</sup> In chapter 1, I described Horkheimer's criticism of Hegel's dialectics and his reading of Marx's materialism. The reference to Hegel is then useful to understand the logic of Horkheimer's idea of philosophical negation.

impossibility to know the things in themselves. This type of negation is in the style of Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will. In my view, Horkheimer uses the Schopenhauerian negation to show the genesis of the claim of truth. Instead, the Hegelian conception of negation helps us think about the validity of truth in the light of the logic of contradiction. As Horkheimer states:

Without thinking about truth and thereby what it guarantees, there can be no knowledge of its opposite, of the abandonment of mankind, for whose sake true philosophy is critical and pessimistic - there cannot even be sorrow, without which there is no happiness' (CIR: 80).

Here Horkheimer clarifies that human beings need to conceive of truth as a knowledge of opposites in a logic of contradiction. But how does this logic of contradiction work? The validity of a claim of truth about social reality is framed in respect to the cleavages between the theoretical content of the claim and the concretisation of the social practices to which it refers. By thinking in this way, human beings may become conscious of the contradictions contained in the claim. Furthermore, human beings need to conceive of the thought that guarantees the claim of truth; that is, the motivation of the ground that makes the claim of truth possible. Such a ground can be the recognition of a primary statement as the guide of logic, an irrational violent censorship, or a blurred situation between the previous two. In every case, the motivation of the ground of the claim is not absolute but relative to the contingent circumstances in which it is spoken. In this way, human beings can become conscious of the genesis of the claims of truth.

Horkheimer frames the concept of truth philosophically as a negation which serves as way of proceeding in his critique of instrumental reason. With this tool of negation, Horkheimer shows the contradictions and the violent censorship carried out by the instrumental reason and its positivist claims of truth. As Horkheimer states, 'This concept of truth - the adequation of name and thing - inherent in every genuine philosophy, enables thought to withstand if not to overcome the demoralizing and mutilating effects of formalized reason' (ER: 180). In philosophical terms, negation combines dialectical contradictions (Hegel) and critique of a priori (Schopenhauer). But Horkheimer goes beyond Hegel and Schopenhauer. He employs Schopenhauer's critique of a priori to think a

determinate negation which does not end in a reconciliation<sup>126</sup>. On the other hand, he draws upon Hegel's dialectics to avoid Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will to be an unconditional principle upon which to speculate on human existence.

Furthermore, Horkheimer does not limit this combination of dialectical contradictions and critique of a priori to think about a possible idea of negation for a critique of propositional language. He transposes negation as the possibility of ethics in the form of a critique of injustice. In this way, negation may unfold an idea of solidarity devoid of instrumentality. Let us focus more specifically on the role of Schopenhauer's philosophy and its combination in a dialectical logic of contradiction.

To recall, Horkheimer employs Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will as a negation able to show the possibility of a solidarity lying in human beings' renunciation of their violence in the relationship to each other and to other beings because they recognise themselves as abandoned to a state of indeterminacy - their impossibility of knowing the thing in itself. But when human beings systematise violence in language to master this state of indeterminacy and turn things into signified objects, they may become aware of the contradictions between how they experience the things and how they represent them conceptually. In the contradictions, the identity of the opposites does not constitute a real reconciliation between the conceptual representation and reality<sup>127</sup>. With the awareness of the contradictions, human beings may recognise that such a systematisation is a violent censorship.

In effect, solidarity may occur philosophically through a sort of negative dialectical consciousness which recognises that the experience of the world is not univocally determined by conceptual representations and that, as determinate abstract representations, concepts maintain a state of indeterminacy through their contradictions. But if contradictions cannot be completely overcome by thinking abstractly, what then is their role?

In fact, a contradiction entails the possibility of using negation to enrich concepts and to keep thinking open to further critique. The negation of an affirmation does not nullify it but shows what the affirmation has excluded, because the logic of

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<sup>126</sup> In chapter 2, I discussed that, for Horkheimer, the negativity is the identity of thought, but this identity is not reconciliation. It is a limit of human experience to approach the world and make sense of it.

<sup>127</sup> As Horkheimer states, 'Reconciliation, the identity of opposites reached through thought, is no real reconciliation, whether it occurred in the present or future state of mankind (CIR: 78).

contradictions continues through enrichment and avoids nullification. In this case, contradiction works without a violent censorship of the activity of thinking.

Putting an end to the critical activity of thought means immortalising the content of a concept as eternal. Such a violent censorship of the critical activity of thought may occur with an absolutisation of metaphysics or with the positivism of science. The former establishes an unconditional principle as the ground for the violent censorship. The latter considers the experimental method of science as a replacement for philosophical speculation. Here, the violent censorship lies in the hypostatisation of scientific thought: to turn the experimental method into the only method for the activity of thinking in general<sup>128</sup>.

In my view, to avoid the absolutisation of metaphysics or the positivist hypostatisation of science, Horkheimer shows that critical thought should maintain a double negation. The first is in Schopenhauer's style and lays bare to the irrational dimension of the violent censorship of positivism and absolute metaphysics. The second negation is in Hegelian fashion and maintains contradiction and determinate negation as the activity for thinking.

To sum up, Horkheimer employs Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will to conceive a solidarity among human beings as an identification which does not end in a Hegelian-designed reconciliation between the reality and reason. But Horkheimer employs Hegel's determinate negation to avoid Schopenhauer's world as will becoming the immutable theoretical background on which human beings displays their life. Indeed, Horkheimer criticises the absence of dialectic in Schopenhauer's thought (GS14: 207)<sup>129</sup>.

In Horkheimer's idea of solidarity, the dialectic of contradictions and the critique of a priori are complementary to each other. Contradiction is how the falsehood of the content of proposition emerges through dialogue. The critique of a priori - both a dogmatic and a critical-formal a priori - is how to lay bare the violence systematised in language. In this view, Horkheimer draws upon Schopenhauer's critique of a priori to expand critical theory into becoming a critique of instrumental reason.

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<sup>128</sup> For Horkheimer's discussion about the neo-Thomism as the metaphysical philosophy of the absolute and positivism as the hypostatisation of science, see the chapter *Conflicting Panaceas in Eclipse of Reason*.

<sup>129</sup> [1952, *Kritik an Schopenhauer*]

### 4.3 Horkheimer's materialist critique of Schopenhauer

Horkheimer has an ambivalent attitude towards Schopenhauer's philosophy. This attitude is even more comprehensible when Horkheimer exerts a materialist critique of Schopenhauer's philosophy. At the end of a 1971 lecture, Horkheimer states 'Schopenhauer's pessimistic teaching is a consolation' and then he adds 'Schopenhauer gave philosophical foundation to the brotherly of love as the love for each creature [...] his thought is not as completely pessimistic as the absolutisation of science' (GS7: 251, 252)<sup>130</sup>.

Horkheimer considers Schopenhauer as an idealist thinker because Schopenhauer does not submit his theory of the world as representation to the contradictions emerging from an analysis of historical-social practices of his time. In this sense, Schopenhauer's philosophy helps find consolation in a social world which is meant to be immutable. Yet, Schopenhauer's theory of the world as the will opens the possibility to think of a theology in the form of an identification with other beings, and therefore devoid of doctrine of divinity. In my view, Horkheimer sees the possibility that Schopenhauer's theory of the world as will helps a critique of instrumental reason to move reason out of its positivist logic of instrumentality.

In his lecture of 1955 entitled *Schopenhauer and Society*, Horkheimer clarifies that Schopenhauer's philosophy provides a critique of the technological progress of the industrial society of 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany which brings to light how progress produces a levelling process of social conformism. Hence, Schopenhauer concludes that the price to pay for the progress is the loss of individuality as an autonomous sphere separate from the social whole. His idea of the aimlessness of the will echoes the loss of individuality in the following terms: human beings are reduced to objects devoid of qualities and engulfed in the aimless flux of the social whole oriented to an endless technological progress.

However, in Horkheimer's view, Schopenhauer noted that technological and industrial progress is not accompanied by a moral progress, a sake of happiness - such as in Kant's practical philosophy (Horkheimer 2004: 88)<sup>131</sup>. From this perspective, Horkheimer sees in Schopenhauer's philosophy the following paradoxical ambivalence. On the one hand, Schopenhauer announces the decay of

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<sup>130</sup> [1971, *Schopenhauers Denken im Verhältnis zu Wissenschaft und Religion*]

<sup>131</sup> I refer to the English translation of *Schopenhauer und Gesellschaft* (1955).

the bourgeois individual; on the other hand, he hints at discontinuance as a reactionary form of resistance to that decay<sup>132</sup>.

In Horkheimer's view, Schopenhauer's idealism reveals the unconscious flows of the individual. Instead of connecting them with social-historical relations, Schopenhauer renders them eternal through a metaphysical operation and so justifies, 'an endless continuance and naturalness of an essentially repressive society' (Horkheimer 2004: 87)<sup>133</sup>. Here Horkheimer clarifies that Schopenhauer's idealism expressed the decay of the liberal bourgeoisie in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To survive as the ruling class, the liberal bourgeoisie has had to increase their political power while struggling against reforms potentially leading to the social inclusion of the lower-middle classes in political citizenship. This continuous struggle then caused new practices of domination such as the empowerment of industry and foreign trade, protectionism in agriculture and colonial systems in occupied territories.

Thus, in Horkheimer's view, the struggle of the liberal bourgeoisie to keep their social power brings about a sense of resignation because the increase of violence in the afore-mentioned practices of social domination overwhelms the power of the individual to develop his personality rationally and morally - say, in the style of Kant's philosophy (Horkheimer 2004: 88, 89). In sum, the decay of the bourgeois individual shows that social progress does not necessarily bring about moral progress.

In Horkheimer's view, Schopenhauer foresees both the automation of the advanced capitalism and its social conformism to become a 'vindictive philosopher' because he understands that 'citizens of his kind will disappear' (Horkheimer 2004: 91). For Horkheimer, Schopenhauer's revenge lies in the idealism of his thought which suggests the aimless acting of the will stems from the inevitable decay of the individual. Moreover, Schopenhauer's idealism illustrates how philosophical thinking constitutes a resistance to resignation before the ineluctable destiny of this decay (Horkheimer 2004: 95). Schopenhauer's philosophical thinking -his epi-philosophy- is an act of discontinuance. It tries to interrupt the instrumental reason of the technological and industrial progress with the philosophical gesture of the

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<sup>132</sup> Discontinuance is a concept referring, in this case, to a form of resistance that aims to register a peculiar protest through interruption and so testify against the state of things, but without taking any further action of opposition.

<sup>133</sup> I refer to the English translation of *Schopenhauer und Gesellschaft* (1955).

metaphorical language: the world as will and representation. Schopenhauer does not pursue any further action because, as Horkheimer noticed in his 1955 lecture, he refused to examine the decay of the bourgeois individual in references to the history of economy (Horkheimer 2004: 88).

Instead, Schopenhauer's form of resistance consists in what Horkheimer calls the *tropic* way of thinking, which indicates the use of metaphor. Horkheimer understands that the way in which Schopenhauer conceives the world as will and representation is tropic and not dialectical. Indeed, the question that Horkheimer posits in regard to Schopenhauer's philosophy is how human beings can think about the will - i.e. their unconscious flows - if the will can only be known through representation (GS7: 249)<sup>134</sup>.

In answering the question, Horkheimer uses the adjective tropic as a synonym for metaphorical, insofar as there are neither dialectical contradictions nor antinomy between will and representation. It is the adverb *as* (in German, *als*) that confers Schopenhauer's philosophy a meaning that opens the dimension of the unconscious that Kant's critique lacks. This openness to the dimension of the unconscious indicates that concepts are also expressions of something and not merely definitions of something.

More clearly, the *something* at stake in the definition is determined by a rule of signification. In Kant's first *Critique*, the schematism of understanding was the rule by which an image of the concept can be related to a universal procedure of imagination in signifying the image *in concreto* (Kant 1978: 182). But when Kant wants to demonstrate the possibility of applying the schematism of the understanding, he speaks of 'an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze' (Kant 1978: 183). The unconscious dimension of the subject remains in Kant's philosophy both unexplored and hidden in the depths of the soul.

Schopenhauer instead highlights this unconscious dimension not in psychoanalytical term (as Freud did after him). Schopenhauer maintains a philosophical investigation of the unconscious dimension in propositional language and concepts. Schopenhauer highlights that, when we define something, we do not only represent through propositions the world of appearances. We also express

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<sup>134</sup> [1971, *Schopenhauers Denken im Verhältnis zu Wissenschaft und Religion*]

something that is implied in the denotation of the content of a concept. This something is the ever-fleeting transience of the concept. Like Kant, Schopenhauer thinks that concepts do not have their own existence and are always connected to the subject who thinks and bespeaks the concepts. In this view, concepts are also the expressions of a subject.

But, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, a subject is the transient manifestation of the will in continuous change. In simple words, concepts are expressions of a subject who will die. The subject is not only the active author who thinks and speaks but is also an expression of his own incommensurable finitude<sup>135</sup>. Besides denoting the object in reference to a subject, concepts thus express the transience of the subject, the flesh and blood human being who thinks and speaks. In contrast to Kant, concepts are understood by Schopenhauer as the expressions of the transient manifestation of the will, which traverses human being's bodily constitution. As Horkheimer recognises, concepts are not merely a product of the activity of understanding, whose rule signification is an art hidden in the human soul. As Horkheimer states,

The body is traversed by the will-to-live - and not governed by the soul - whose concept is in Schopenhauer's view to understand in a meaning which is conferred in a *tropic* way [...] If the will to live is separated from its consciousness in the moment of death, then the will to live must form, according to its concretisation, an happening [Geschehen] which is alien [fremd] to its current singularity in order to survive on this or another planet. The process finally refers to the unconscious that Schopenhauer considered already before Freud as a decisive moment of the life of the individual (GS7: 249).<sup>136</sup>

Schopenhauer's tropic way of thinking is hence the metaphorical use of the adverb *as* between the actuality of representation and the not-actuality of the will. The riddle of Schopenhauer's metaphorical language is the following: the world as representation is a manifestation of the world as will and the world as will only appears to humans and animals as representation. The will cannot be commensurate to any representation but can only be expressed through representation. It is from this perspective that Schopenhauer's way of thinking is tropic because representations are manifestation of the aimless acting of the will and this latter will makes the representation possible. Schopenhauer imagines the world as the will and representation metaphorically as an endless revolving sphere in which there is no

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<sup>135</sup> For a discussion of the notion of finitude in reference to Horkheimer's reception of Schopenhauer's philosophy see Chapter 2.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

centre - meaning no origin - but upon whose surface every representation moves constantly (Schopenhauer 1966b: 325). The metaphorical way of thinking thus provides a negative function: concepts *per se* are not tool of power because they are temporary expression of a perishable manifestation of the will. What is such a perishable manifestation of the will? It is an *animal metaphysicum*, a human being<sup>137</sup>.

Having briefly discussed about Horkheimer's complicated and ambiguous reading of Schopenhauer, I want to introduce the question approached by the next section of this chapter: How can the will be considered the unspoken in Schopenhauer's philosophy?

The will points to an unspoken dimension which is neither actual to the world of appearance nor commensurate to an absolute definition. The logic by which this unspoken dimension is developed is metaphorical, the adverb *as*. I will thus unpack how Schopenhauer's metaphorical imagination of the will as unspoken dimension connects a critique of propositional language with a critique of injustice. But this metaphorical imagination is possible in Schopenhauer through a change of the theological dimension of the logic of language. While in Kant's philosophy, we see postulates as the way to bring a rationalised Christian doctrine of morality into a critical philosophy, in Schopenhauer's epi-philosophy, we should view metaphors as the way to bring into a critical philosophy a theology devoid of a genesis (the postulate of God) and of teleology (the postulate of a future life).

We will see here that the philosophy of Kant and that of Schopenhauer are critical because they separate the world of appearances from the thing in itself. While Kant's practical philosophy remains in a Judaeo-Christian structure of law (the categorical imperative) and grace (the objective reality of the moral world, *the corpus mysticum*), Schopenhauer's ethics presents groundlessness (the Buddhist atheism) and nameless identification (the Hindu formula *tat twam asi*). Within this theological dimension, Schopenhauer uses metaphorical language to indicate the not-actual and unconscious dimension of human experience and the unrepresentability of the source of human experience.

It is from this perspective that I will also elucidate the peculiarity of Horkheimer's reading of Schopenhauer. The unconscious dimension opened by Schopenhauer's

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<sup>137</sup> See chapter 2 for my discussion about Schopenhauer's definition of human being as metaphysical animal.

world as the will does not refer to a psychological structure of the individual. As we have discussed, Schopenhauer's philosophy enunciates the decay of the bourgeois individual. In Horkheimer's view, the world as the will indicates the unconscious as the irrepresentability of the source of knowledge. Horkheimer described Schopenhauer's notion of the will as 'the inner true essence of human being, the great reality, the will that human being would not be able to describe' (GS7: 456)<sup>138</sup>. In my view, this Schopenhauerian teaching of the impossibility to grasp the will and represent it in a final definition hence entails a theological meaning: human beings cannot grapple with the knowledge about the source of their existence and their mortality. I think that this theological meaning might echo the theological idea that Horkheimer sought in his late thought, which somehow outlines the reason why Schopenhauer became so central to it. If we hold as possibly plausible this statement of mine about how to interpret Horkheimer's sake for a theological idea in his late thought, we can then clarify the idea of solidarity that Horkheimer had in mind through the following statements.

If we experience the impossibility of having knowledge about the source of our existence as an incommensurable but common dimension of powerlessness, then an identification devoid of logic of power and constituting a longing for a non-violent culture may find actualisation in the denunciation and reduction of injustice. In my view, this is probably the meaning of the totally other for which Horkheimer longed. Instead, if we turn the impossibility of the knowledge about the source of our existence into an absolute condition of human being's impotency before death, then the fear of death will become the underlying motive for the systematisation of violence in language and other cultural forms of life.

#### **4.4 The not-actuality of the world as will and representation**

The unspoken dimension of the will can be framed in two parts: the not-actuality of the world as representation and the incommensurability of the world as the will. The not-actuality of the world as representation lies in its ever-fleeting co-presence with the world as will, which emerges when Schopenhauer introduces his theory of cognition and discusses the law of causality and his conception of matter. The incommensurability of the world as will is then explained instead in

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<sup>138</sup> [1972, *Das Schlimme erwarten und doch das Gute versuchen*]

Schopenhauer's notion of the aseity of the will. This notion refers to the freedom of the will and can be described in the following way. We can only access the will from within ourselves (self-consciousness), we do not have knowledge of the will (consciousness of other thing)<sup>139</sup>. Therefore, we can describe the will only in the figurative sense of the metaphor.

Schopenhauer's theory of cognition and ethics largely starts off as a critique of Kant's philosophy. Schopenhauer takes the merit of Kant's thought to lie with his critique of abstract thought as *causa sui* or dogmatic reason. However, Schopenhauer highlights that Kant infers from the world of appearances the idea of reason as a thing-in-itself. As Schopenhauer states, 'Even Kant speaks of the thing-in-itself as the ground of reason of the phenomena' (Schopenhauer 1974: 233). In Schopenhauer's view, such an inference is Kant's fundamental mistake, which affects both Kant's theoretical and practical philosophy.

For Schopenhauer, when Kant presents reason as a regulative principle in the first Critique and introduces the objects entertained by reason, then Kant admits that those objects (I, world and God) have no ground in experience or empirical knowledge yet retain an intelligible ground even if this ground is unknown<sup>140</sup>. Where is then the confusion in Kant's philosophy? In Schopenhauer's opinion, Kant confuses reason (Vernunft) with the will of man and admits in the world of freedom a causality beyond the condition of possibility of experience<sup>141</sup>. More specifically, in Schopenhauer's view, Kant made an error in the demonstration of the third antinomy when Kant admits a causality as an 'absolute spontaneity' of the cause which begins in itself beyond the world of appearances<sup>142</sup>. If so, what then does Schopenhauer keep from Kant's Critique?

In his lecture on Kant in 1930, Horkheimer presents the thesis that Schopenhauer's philosophy is inconceivable without Kant's critique, from which Schopenhauer retains the concepts of space, time and the thing-in-itself (GS11: 206)<sup>143</sup>. Starting

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<sup>139</sup> See part 1 of Schopenhauer's essay *On the Freedom of the Will* (Schopenhauer 2010).

<sup>140</sup> As proof of the inference, Schopenhauer (1974a: 233) refers to the Antinomy of Pure Reason (A 562, B 590) The Impossibility of the Cosmological Proof (A 564, 592) and the (A 613, B 641) in Kant's first Critique.

<sup>141</sup> 'From the phenomenon is inferred its intelligible ground or reason, the thing in itself, by the insufficient use, already sufficiently condemned, of the category of causality beyond all experience. For this case of the will of man (to which Kant gives the title of reason or Vernunft quite inadmissibly and by an unpardonable breach of all linguistic use) is set up as this thing-in-itself with an appeal to an unconditional ought, to the categorical imperative that is postulated without more ado' (Schopenhauer 1966: 505).

<sup>142</sup> See the third antinomy (Kant 1978: 411)

<sup>143</sup> [1930, *Über Kants Philosophie*]

from this statement of Horkheimer, we see that Schopenhauer maintains the structure of Kant's theory of cognition (space and time as a priori pure form of intuition). Schopenhauer submits then to criticism the postulates of pure practical reason. Let us start first from the theory of cognition.

Schopenhauer appreciates the Kantian division between phenomenon (appearance) and noumenon (the thing-in-itself). Schopenhauer shares Kant's view according to which knowledge is possible only in the world of appearances. But Schopenhauer shows that Kant does not clarify the concept of reason. In Schopenhauer's view, Kant's notion of reason confuses the critical way of his philosophy when Kant postulates God, the immortality of the soul and the freedom. In Schopenhauer's view, Kant's postulates lead the reader down the mistaken pathway of scholasticism to which Kant himself objected and put up his critical philosophy in opposition (Schopenhauer 1974a 168, 169).

Owing to this confusion in defining the concept of reason, Kant makes, in Schopenhauer's view, the following mistake in his theory of cognition: 'the complete absence of any distinction between abstract, discursive knowledge and intuitive knowledge. It is this that spreads a permanent obscurity over the whole Kant's theory of the faculty of knowledge' (Schopenhauer 1966a: 473).

Basically, Schopenhauer shows how, in Kant's first Critique, the understanding takes up the role of abstract and discursive knowledge, while reason refers surreptitiously to the things-in-itself, the will. Schopenhauer states that Kant makes a triple distinction: representation, object of representation and the thing-in-itself (1966a: 444). Schopenhauer explains that, for Kant, representation concerns sensibility including sensation and a priori form of intuition (space and time). The object of representation concerns the understanding to which the activity of thinking is added through the categories. The thing-in-itself is instead beyond the possibility of knowledge. In Schopenhauer's view, Kant's mistake is to bring into the understanding the categories and avoid explaining how empirical perception is possible (Schopenhauer 1966a: 445). The categories are the objects of concept which cannot be intuited but they are already there in the understanding. Kant states that objects of concept, the categories, cannot be things in themselves (Kant 1978: 137). Nevertheless, Kant names them incognito 'non-empirical, that is, transcendental object = X' (Kant 1978: 137).

In Schopenhauer's view, the categories 'contribute nothing to perception and are not supposed to hold good of the thing in itself' (Schopenhauer 1966a: 444). To simplify, we can formulate Schopenhauer's critique of the Kantian categories in one question: what is then the origin of the categories if they do not derive from the world of appearances?

When stating that the categories are not supposed to hold good of the things-in-itself, Schopenhauer refers to the pages A: 108,109 of the first Rosenkranz edition of *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Kant presents the transcendental unity of apperception. Schopenhauer understands the transcendental unity of apperception as an obscure place where Kant attempts to give justification to the role of the categories in understanding<sup>144</sup>.

Schopenhauer wants to adjust Kant's theory of cognition by avoiding his fundamental mistake of turning reason surreptitiously into the thing-in-itself. In Schopenhauer's view Kant employs the categories both as the condition of the representation of perception and as a function of abstract thinking (Schopenhauer 1966a: 476). Schopenhauer then thinks that, to justify this blurred role of categories Kant introduced the obscure notions of transcendental apperception and schematism (Schopenhauer 1966a: 474).

In Schopenhauer's theory of cognition the things-in-itself is completely shut out of the world as representation<sup>145</sup>. The understanding concerns only the intuition and discursive cognition is excluded from its realm.

Schopenhauer adjusts the Kantian theory of cognition in the following way. Cognition is only possible through representation (*Vorstellung*), operating through the principle of sufficient reason as the 'expression of the fundamental form at the core of our cognitive faculty, namely the basic form of a connexion between all our objects, i.e. our representation' (Schopenhauer 1974a: 130)<sup>146</sup>. For Schopenhauer, the subject is not the source of cognition but the experiential appearance of this process of representation because 'there is no knowledge of knowing since this would require that the subject separated itself from knowing and yet knew that knowing; and this is impossible' (Schopenhauer 1974a: 208). In sum, cognition has

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<sup>144</sup> Schopenhauer defines the original unity of apperception indeed as 'a very strange thing, very strange to describe' (1966a 451).

<sup>145</sup> 'Knowableness in general, with its most essential, and therefore constantly necessary, form of subject and object belongs merely to the phenomenon, not to the being-in-itself of things' (Schopenhauer 1966b: 641)

<sup>146</sup> See also §2 in the first book *The World as Representation* (Schopenhauer 1966a: 5)

no 'absolute ground or reason' because its source of knowledge is impossible to know (Schopenhauer 1974a: 234). Here, Schopenhauer agrees with Kant that space and time are forms of representation that are perceivable in themselves -in Kant's vocabulary, a priori pure form of intuition. The principle of sufficient reason (the impossibility for the subject to know the knowledge of knowing) draws first upon space and time to determine experience as the law of causality. Then it draws upon thought as the law of the basis of judgement<sup>147</sup>. Here we see Schopenhauer's point of rupture with Kant's theory of cognition.

The world as representation is the world represented by intuition (or perception) which elaborates the empirical data of the senses. The world of representation is knowledge, it is the appearances of the world in space and time through the law of causality (Schopenhauer 1966a: 7). Although they are possible, abstract thought and discourse are not required for the representation of the world. In this view, the world as representation is shared through intuition both by humans and animals (Schopenhauer 1966a: 475). Both animals and humans are knowing beings<sup>148</sup>. But humans have also the faculty of reason<sup>149</sup>. Reason refers to the abstraction of the intuitive representation in thought and then to the translation of abstract thoughts into discourse. Knowledge is possible only in the world as representation, meaning that while animals have intuitive knowledge, human beings have both intuitive and discursive knowledge. Contrary to what Kant thought, reason in Schopenhauer's view is not the faculty of desire, but it is the awareness of ideas communicated by words:

Speech is the first product and the necessary instrument of his [man's] faculty of reason. Therefore, in Greek and Italian speech and reason are expressed by the same word, Λόγος, discorso. Vernunft (reason) comes from vernehmen, which is not synonymous with hearing, but signifies the awareness of ideas communicated by words (Schopenhauer 1966a: 37).

Here the concept of reason refers not only to the activity of thinking and speaking but also to an awareness which does not refer to an immediate recognition of the self - a kind of original apperception in Kant's vocabulary or a self-consciousness (Selbstbewusstsein) - but to a state of detachment from the immediacy of intuition. Reason is the faculty to think abstractly; that is, through concepts. In this view,

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<sup>147</sup> See also §3 in the first book *The World as Representation* (Schopenhauer 1966a: 6,7)

<sup>148</sup> 'Knowledge is the real and proper characteristic of animal life' (Schopenhauer 1974a: 252)

<sup>149</sup> 'The animal feels and perceives; man, in addition, thinks and knows. The animal communicates his feelings and mood by gesture and sound; man communicates thought to another, or conceals it from him, by language' (1966: 37)

reason points to human beings' state of abandonment, because, like animals, humans are the knowing beings but, differently from animals, humans can detach their representation of the world from the immediacy of intuition.

Let us see first how reason as abstract knowledge entails a detachment from intuition. In Schopenhauer's view, the gulf between understanding and reason is a state of indeterminacy to be engaged with either through the power of judgement or by falling into a kind of conformity. As Schopenhauer states,

Since the faculty of reason is given to all but the power of judgement to few, the consequence is that man is exposed to delusion abandoned to any conceivable chimera into which he is talked by anyone, and which, acting as a motive to his willing, can induce him to commit perversities and follies of all kinds, and to indulge in the most unheard-of extravagances, even in actions most contrary to animal nature. Real culture, where knowledge and judgment go hand in hand, can be brought to bear only on a few, and fewer still are capable of assimilating it. For the great majority of people a kind of training everywhere take the place of culture. It is achieved by example, custom, and the very early and firm impression of certain concepts before experience, understanding, and power of judgment existed to disturb the work (Schopenhauer 1966b: 69).

Here we see how Schopenhauer thinks that only the combination of judgement and knowledge can give rise to what he calls 'real culture', referring to the possibility of censoring with judgment the state of abandonment inherent the activity of thinking. Schopenhauer does not see such a state of abandonment as neutral but as a 'general training'. This latter refers to the conformism of human beings who do not make the efforts to connect the intuitive representation with the abstract representation (reflective judgement) or to logically deduced an abstract representation from another one (subsuming judgement)<sup>150</sup>.

For Schopenhauer, the abstract knowledge of reason is a state in which human beings are abandoned to phantasies (or chimera, as Schopenhauer puts it). If we draw on the first book *World as Representation*, Schopenhauer explains that the power of judgment is a mediator between understanding and reason (Schopenhauer 1966a :64). The power of judgement serves, in his view, both to fix a concept with the content of an intuitive representation (reflection) and to highlight in abstract knowledge the point of difference of one concept from other concepts (subsumption) (Schopenhauer 1966a: 65).

In Schopenhauer's view then, the power of judgment establishes both the foundation of science (in reflection) and the logic of science (in subsumption). In Kantian style, the power of judgement for Schopenhauer is a bridge between the

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<sup>150</sup> Here, we see an analogy with Kant's notions of reflective and determinant judgements.

intuitive representation and abstract representation, but differently from Kant, judgement now pertains reason. Schopenhauer rejects Kant's division of the faculties<sup>151</sup>. He defines the power of judgment as mediation between understanding and reason through reflection and subsumption (Schopenhauer 1966a: 532). In this case, judgement is a product of reason: it is a proposition with a subject and a predicate and helps bridge the gulf between the intuitive representation and abstract representation with scientific certainty.

However, we have also seen that for Schopenhauer reason is discourse but, most of the time, discourse does not end in a judgement. Hence, what judgements and the propositions which are not judgments share is the violence capable of detaching the world of appearances from intuitive representations. In fact, as Schopenhauer makes clear, this detachment appears as a violent censorship of the whole faculty of reason (both abstract and discursive representations) over the objective knowledge of intuitive representation:

Only by the aid of language does reason bring about its most important achievements, namely the harmonious and consistent action of several individuals, the planned cooperation of many thousands, civilization, the State; and then science, the storing up of previous experience, the summarizing into one concept of what is common, the communication of truth, the spreading of error, thoughts and poems, dogmas and superstitious. (Schopenhauer 1966a: 37)

In the citation above, we see that for Schopenhauer culture is made possible through the faculty of reason (abstract thought and discourse), but knowledge requires only understanding and intuitive representations. In the first sentence, Schopenhauer makes clear that language allows reason to be achieved in cultural forms of abstract and discursive knowledge. As Horkheimer's materialist critique highlights, however, Schopenhauer does not explain how the actions that concretise cultural forms of social life depends on the power relationships of human beings in historical-social practices.

Although Schopenhauer does not make any references to the role of social practices and power relationships in determining cultural forms, he makes an important statement in above quotation. With the aid of language, human beings may transform their detachment from intuitive representation -their abstract representations - into a discursive censorship over abstract thinking. This discursive

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<sup>151</sup> Kant division of faculties in Critique of judgement was: the understanding as a priori legislation of the faculty of knowledge, reason as a priori legislation of the faculty of desire and judgment as a priori principle for the feeling of pleasure and pain (Kant 1951 10,11).

ensorship is the condition of the possibility of the systematisation of language in cultural forms.

Schopenhauer notes that through language human beings create a sphere of communicability by which abstract representations can be discursively represented then systematised in cultural forms (States, science, civilisation etc.). So cultural forms are the products of human actions, and their conditions of possibility are the combination of abstraction, discourse and language. We need to recall that, in Schopenhauer's philosophy, such conditions of possibility are part of the process of representation of the world of appearances. They do not have reason as their absolute ground. Indeed, the faculty of reason does not work as mental mirror of reality but is strictly connected to the sensuousness of human beings' corporeal materiality<sup>152</sup>. In this view, Schopenhauer shares Kant's critique of dogmatic reason.

Nonetheless, the concept of reason was defined by Schopenhauer as an awareness of ideas communicated by words. The conditions of possibility of this awareness are not ascribed in a priori forms of pure reason antecedent to consciousness. In making a critique of Kant's a priori forms of knowledge, Schopenhauer carefully explains how the whole process of representation (both understanding and reason) comes from the senses.

In Schopenhauer's view, the senses are strictly involved in representation both as the 'brain's outlets' (Schopenhauer 1966b: 26) and, broadly speaking, as 'parts of the body that are susceptible in a higher degree to the influence of other bodies' (Schopenhauer 1994: 11). From the senses, human beings experience the representation of the world objectified in space and time through the application of the law of causality as the process by which the understanding makes sense of the contingent alterations of the matter elaborated by senses. Only through the law of causality, can the perceivable world before us possibly become our objective world. Like Kant, Schopenhauer considers the contingent alterations to the objective perceivable world as phenomena. Space, time and causality are hence functions of the brain and relate to sense-organs. As we mentioned, the passage from senses to perception occurs with the law of causality. What is *in concreto* the law of causality?

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<sup>152</sup> See Chapter 2 for a discussion on materiality.

Schopenhauer describes it as the revolving movement of the mass of sense-organs in the nervous system with the mass of the brain. This revolving movement of senses requires the elaborations of matter to make reality appear as representation. Furthermore, Schopenhauer's defines the notion of matter as the acting of our bodily senses in a revolving movement with the external world.

In Schopenhauer's philosophy, the notion of matter is hence causality itself, as the process by which humans and animals represent objective reality (Schopenhauer 1966b: 305). Matter is an activity in the world of representation. Schopenhauer shares with Kant the view that matter refers to mechanical acting, which is represented as the volume of bodies in their space-occupation (Schopenhauer 1966b: 47). Since the nature of matter appears only to act through space and time, knowledge (space, time and causality) cannot be said to be the mirror of the mind in the essence of nature. Instead, knowledge is instead what makes reality actual (*wirklich*) (Schopenhauer 1966b 47). The world as representation does not derive from the things in themselves but from the activity of representation through modes of representations.

However, Schopenhauer reproaches Kant for calling 'the being-object-for-a-subject' the unknown X of the category when, for Schopenhauer, it is the phenomenon as we perceive it through causality (Schopenhauer 1966a: 174). Schopenhauer hence does not infer the thing-in-itself from the world of appearances because he does not divide the corporeal matter of human beings from the circumambient world. Instead, the corporeal matter is the continuous acting of sense-nerves and brain functions (space, time, causality) in a revolving movement with the circumambient world. Moreover, the corporeal matter is a representation of the revolving bodily movement of our sense-nerves and brain functions in their approach to the external world. As he explains metaphorically, Schopenhauer uses the term *will* to characterise this continuous revolving of the body through the circumambient world:

The will is knowledge a priori of the body and [...] the body is the knowledge aposteriori of the will [...] only in reflection are willing and acting different; in reality they are one. Every true, genuine, immediate act of the will is also at once and directly manifest act of body; and correspondingly, on the other hand, every impression on the body is also at once and directly an impression on the will. (Schopenhauer 1966a: 100,101)

Schopenhauer does not state here that the body is the actuality of the will. In simple words, he does not say that we can touch, see, hear and smell the will because it is

manifested as a body. Neither does he state that the will is the not-actual presence of the body (the will is not the possibility of the matter to become visible in the body) because what is not-actual is the co-presence of the world as the will and the world as representation. The co-presence is described by Schopenhauer with the metaphor of the revolving movement of the planets or with the mystical saying of the Hindu Bhagavad-Gita<sup>153</sup>. As Schopenhauer clarifies ‘Here we fall into mystical and metaphorical language, but it is the only language in which anything can be said about a whole transcendent theme’ (Schopenhauer 1966b: 325, 326). The origin and the self-organisation of the knowledge is a transcendent theme in Schopenhauer’s view because it is beyond the possibility of experience. Therefore, Schopenhauer employs metaphors. The not-actuality of the co-presence between the world as will and the world of representation is the use of metaphor to express the acting of animal and human nervous systems, namely the entanglement between the conscious functions of the brain (space, time, causality) and the unconscious brain-outlets with their sense-nerves<sup>154</sup>. This acting of the animal and human nervous system is beyond the possibility of experience and Schopenhauer names it metaphorically the world as will and representation.

Now we can see why Horkheimer thought that Schopenhauer’s way of thinking is tropic and why the notion of the will points to a sort of a great reality that cannot be represented in its acting. Schopenhauer checkmates this unrepresentability of the will - the only in itself - with the use of metaphors.

The notion of the will cannot be commensurate to concepts which defines reality. It refers to the use of metaphor to avoid grounding philosophy on the claim of truths of the positivist language of science and on the absolute formulas of dogmatic metaphysics. In Schopenhauer’s epi-philosophy, every possibility of language is a temporary representation of a transient being where claims of truth are also transitory representations. The condition of possibility of language is human beings’ transient world as representation; that is understanding and reason. But the condition of possibility of the will is its incommensurability in what Schopenhauer

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<sup>153</sup> The saying cited by Schopenhauer is as it follows: ‘undivided it dwells in beings, and yet as it were divided; it is to be known as the sustainer, annihilator and producer of beings’ (1966b: 326). Here Schopenhauer refers to the divinity of the Trimuti in Hinduism as a mystical and metaphorical representation of the world as the will (see §54 in the third book *The World as Representation* Schopenhauer 1966a: 375-376).

<sup>154</sup> The brain with its consciousness isolates individuals [...] the unconscious part, namely the vegetative life with ganglionic system, into which brain consciousness disappears in sleep [...] is the common life of all’ (Schopenhauer 1966b: 327).

describes as the aseity of the will (Schopenhauer 1966b: 320). The aseity of the will entails the impossibility of the will to be a copula, a nominal predicate. The notion of the will indeed refers to a free form of acting that cannot be defined either with an affirmation (e.g. the will is something) or with a negation (e.g. the will is not something). It can only be described metaphorically. Here, for instance, here is an example of the metaphorical language used by Schopenhauer in describing the will:

Our existence and that of animals [...] is a mere *existentia fluxa*, which continuous only through constant fluctuation and change and is comparable to a whirlpool. It is true that the form of the body has a precarious existence for a while, but only condition that matter constantly changes, the old being evacuated and the new assimilated. (Schopenhauer 1974c: 289).

The notion of the will refers to the whirlpool of the acting of our body with the external world. Whirlpool is a metaphorical expression which translates in words the idea of a state of indeterminacy. Such indeterminacy characterises our experience of humans; that is, the possibility to represent the world through intuition, thought and language.

The unspoken dimension of the Schopenhauer's will hence lies in the not-actual co-presence of the world as human experience (representation) and the world as a state of indeterminacy unconditioned by human agency (will). The use of metaphors constitutes instead the unspoken dimension of the world as the will, and so the impossibility of human beings arriving at knowledge of the origin of their knowing.

#### **4.5 Theology and metaphors**

It is through the notion of the aseity of the will that we can understand Schopenhauer's theory of ethics and the role of metaphorical language in it. As Schopenhauer affirms, 'the aseity of the will is the first condition of any seriously conceived ethics' (Schopenhauer 1992:141). We can better understand this statement if we draw on Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's ethics. In Schopenhauer's view, Kant is wrong when he admits a causality of freedom that differs from the causality of the law of nature (Schopenhauer 1966a: 501)<sup>155</sup>. For Schopenhauer, causality is only possible as a function of the brain within the world

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<sup>155</sup> Schopenhauer refers to Kant's first Critique (A 536-7 B 564-5) and to Kant's third Critique, 'the natural concept represents its object in intuition, not as things in themselves, but as mere phenomena; the concept of freedom, on the other hand, represents in its object a thing in itself but not in intuition (Kant 1951: 11).

of representation. In this Schopenhauerian perspective, how can human beings know the will as the free acting of the continuous transformation of matter if they can only know the world through representation?

The solution to this philosophical paradox lies in the metaphor of the world that is both considered as will and representation. Schopenhauer's notion of world refers to a metaphorical way of thinking, one maintaining an epi-philosophical relationship between the aseity of the will and the causality of representation<sup>156</sup>. The aseity of the will is indeed for Schopenhauer the free acting of the will; that is, the incommensurability of the continuous alterations of matter.

We can now clarify the conceptual relationship between freedom and the aseity of the will. Schopenhauer defines freedom in a negative way as 'the absences of hindering and restraining' (Schopenhauer 2010: 3). Freedom does not originate from a primary cause. The only way to conceive freedom is, in Schopenhauer's view, to represent the continuous contingency of alterations as a series of causes without an origin. In reference to the deeds of human beings, what is then the free choice of the will?

In this case, Schopenhauer speaks of moral freedom, where the term *moral* means 'in conformity of one's own will' (Schopenhauer 2010: 37)<sup>157</sup>. Unlike Kant, Schopenhauer does not refer the term moral to *worthiness*. For Schopenhauer there is no primary cause of a free choice of the will, also when it is conceived in Kant's style as a formal condition grounded in a postulate<sup>158</sup>.

For Schopenhauer, freedom cannot be defined in Kant's style as the absolute spontaneity or 'the ability to initiate a series of alterations by oneself' (Schopenhauer 2010: 39)<sup>159</sup>. In Schopenhauer's view, freedom refers to a necessity without a primary cause. Schopenhauer clarifies that 'necessity has no true and clear meaning except that of the inevitability of the consequent with the positing of the ground' (Schopenhauer 1974a: 225). The 'ground' in the above citation points to a contingent alteration, it is not a primary cause.

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<sup>156</sup> 'Wherever there is causality there is the will and that no will acts without causality' (Schopenhauer 1992: 96).

<sup>157</sup> Schopenhauer classifies three types of representations of freedom: physical, intellectual and moral.

<sup>158</sup> See my discussion about postulates in Chapter 3. See also Schopenhauer's criticism of Kant's concepts of dignity and worth (Schopenhauer 2010: 176,177).

<sup>159</sup> See also Schopenhauer 1974a: 227-229

In sum, Schopenhauer's notion of necessity refers to the continuous flux of contingent alterations represented as a series of causes. In this view, we can understand why Schopenhauer thinks that the aseity of the will is the first condition ethics: the acting of the will is free from the determinations of representation and this freedom consists in the necessary acting of the will. Basically, Schopenhauer's idea of aseity of the will is a free acting without origin (without a primary cause) and without a subject of this origin (without a being with its spontaneous act).

The aseity of the will is in his view the point from which we can conceive ethics because it puts in relationship the free acting of the will -which is incommensurable- with the action of human beings -a representation.

Schopenhauer then understands the term responsibility as what strictly follows the necessity of the free acting. Since necessity is the free acting of the will in its aimless and endless series of contingent alterations, the foundation of ethics lies in the being of the human beings.

As Schopenhauer explains 'since I will according as I am, I must therefore be according as I will' (Schopenhauer 1992:141). In the essay *On the Freedom of the Will*, Schopenhauer puts it in simple words 'In that which we do we know who we are' (Schopenhauer 2010: 116)<sup>160</sup>. The deeds of human beings are the representations of their being; that is, the free acting of the will. To be clearer, the term *being* refers to the character of the human beings (Schopenhauer 2010: 115). Human character is the manifestation of the freedom of the will in their mode of reacting with deeds to contingent representations of things<sup>161</sup>.

Having described how the aseity of the will as the ground from which ethics can be conceived, I now want to demonstrate how the aseity of will is conceivable in the light of the theological background between Schopenhauer's and Kant's theory of ethics.

Indeed, we have seen how Schopenhauer equates the notion of freedom with a necessity without origin and without a subject of the origin. In this philosophical move, Schopenhauer modifies Kant's theory of ethics by presenting these epistemological relations between causality and will. However, in doing so, Schopenhauer makes a change in theological ground of ethics.

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<sup>160</sup> Schopenhauer also expresses this concept with the scholastic formulas 'doing follows being - operari esse sequitur (Schopenhauer 2010: 81) or' as the essence is, so is its action unde esse inde operari (Schopenhauer 1992: 141).

<sup>161</sup> See the third part of *On The Basis of Morals* for Schopenhauer's representation of character as egoist, malicious and compassionate (Schopenhauer 2010).

For Schopenhauer, Kant's division of appearance and thing in itself is the most serious attack to any theism (Schopenhauer 1974c: 377). Theism indicates any doctrine that reveals the origin of the world from a primary cause. By adjusting Kant's notion of causality, Schopenhauer takes distance from the Judaeo-Christian theological morals that, in his view, Kant's practical philosophy masks with 'abstract formulations only apparently founded a priori' (Schopenhauer 2010: 178)<sup>162</sup>. Schopenhauer refers here to Kant's notions of the highest good, the postulates of pure practical reason and the moral theology.

As I have described in Chapter 3, Kant's notion of pure rational faith in the postulate of the existence of God translates in a critical-rational philosophy the Christian doctrine of moral. The Judaeo-Christian theological structure of law and grace is translated by Kant into a rationalised moral theology, based on the moral law (the categorical imperative) and the objective reality of the moral world (*the corpus mysticum*). This moral theology has its ground in the postulation of God as the idea of a supreme reason causing all happiness (Kant 1978: 641,642). If we follow Schopenhauer's criticism of Kant's practical philosophy, we then see that all these rationalised theological concepts derive from what Schopenhauer calls Kant's primary mistake of thinking of causality from the basis of a conception of freedom differing from the causality of the law of nature.

Schopenhauer instead uses a metaphor to ground his concept of freedom without origin and subject. This metaphor is the Christian mystical image of the crucified Saviour and refers to the possibility of the negation of the Judaic law<sup>163</sup>. Basically, the mystical body of Christ and its resurrection represent the possibility of forgiveness of the sin. The sin here refers to the biblical story of the fall of Adam. So the Christian doctrine of the redemption of the soul is taken by Schopenhauer to be a negation of the story of the original sin in the Old Testament, according to which human beings are doomed to die and generate other mortal beings under the law of the Judaic God (Schopenhauer 1966a: 328, 329).

In my view, Schopenhauer understands the Christian doctrine of salvation as a metaphor for a liberation from any thought grounded in a primary cause. Furthermore, Schopenhauer addresses this negatively conceived meaning of the

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<sup>162</sup> See part II of On The Basis of Moral for a whole overview of Schopenhauer's critique of Kant's ethics.

<sup>163</sup> 'With me, the will, or the inner truth of the world, is by no means Jehovah; on the contrary, it is, so to speak, the crucified Saviour, or else the crucified thief, according as it is decided' (Schopenhauer 1966b: 645)

Christian doctrine of salvation to the teachings of Buddhism and Brahmanism (Schopenhauer 1966b: 645). In sum, Schopenhauer metaphorically describes the possibility to think about a freedom without an origin and a subject with references to the Buddhist myth of origin and the Hindu teaching of mystical identification via the Christian negation of the Judaic law. Let us draw on the references to Buddhism and Hinduism.

For Schopenhauer, Buddhism is 'atheistic' because it does not ground its way of thinking in a principle of origin as the genesis of the Judaic-Christian tradition (Schopenhauer 1974a: 184). Schopenhauer explains that there is no myth of creation or any super-sensible being in the teaching of Buddha Shakia Muni, Lao-Tze and Confucius. He states that in Buddhism generally, 'The world is not made by anyone; [...] it is self-created; [...] nature spreads it out and draws it again' (Schopenhauer 1974a: 186).

Furthermore, Schopenhauer understands that the absence of a myth of creation does not point to the meaninglessness of the empty space, or the wider universe, from which the theistic question 'Whence Am I?' originates. Instead, Buddhist atheism points to a precipitate, the result of the chemical transformation of states of matter which also expresses the revolving movement of our body in line with the external world. By drawing upon the philological literature of his time, Schopenhauer shows that the Buddhist mythology imagines *Ortshilang*, the continuous change, as something that is caused by and causes the evil of *Jirtintshi*, the universe in its inner and outer relations (Schopenhauer 1974a: 185). By analogy, Schopenhauer's notion of the world as representation does not start from any primary revelation about the origin of the world but from its epi-philosophical connection to the will.

Schopenhauer then draws on the *Oupnekaht*, the Latin version of the Hindu *Upanishad*, which announces mystically that 'It is not to be seen: it sees everything; it is not to be heard: it hears everything; it is not to be known, it knows everything, and it is not to be recognized: it recognizes everything. Besides this seeing, knowing, hearing and recognizing entity there is no other' (Oupnekaht in Schopenhauer, 1974a: 208). From this teaching, Schopenhauer understands that the perception of things is not the way to establish the actual existence of things. Like Kant, Schopenhauer does not believe that there is a way of representing the perceived object standing apart from the perceiving process.

In Schopenhauer's view, the perceiving process finds its limit in its own perceptions, not in a priori abstract formulations. In short, things exist as free acting of the will and independently from human perception. Instead, as phenomena, they exist only in the perceptive representation. What about discursive representations instead? The differences among concepts in language are differences in discursive representations of perceptive representations. As said before, concepts are the expression of transient manifestation of the will in discourse.

The division between the subject and the object in discursive representation lies only the world of appearances. From the point of view of the aimless acting of the will, there is no difference between subject and object, they are a oneness without an origin and subject. In Schopenhauer's view, this oneness without origin and subject is a nameless identification which can be metaphorically expressed in the mystical Sanskrit formula *tat twam asi*, i.e. 'That thou art' (Schopenhauer 1966a: 355).

In the teaching of *Oupnekhat*, this formula is pronounced when every organic and inorganic being is shown in front of the eyes of the disciple, who learns how to identify things without establishing names according to a principle of identity. The formula *tat twam asi* points to the incommensurability of any discursive representations and do not say anything about how things are in themselves.

To sum up, Schopenhauer's theory of ethics is grounded on the use of metaphor as the connector between the representability of causality and the unrepresentability of the will. In doing so, he provides a theological dimension to his epi-philosophy by connecting analogically the Christian negation of the Judaic law with the atheism of Buddhism with the mystical identification of Hinduism.

From this point of view, we see that the notion of will can be considered as the forerunner of Horkheimer's notion of totally other because it uses theological doctrines as metaphorical expression for the incommensurability of the origin of knowledge.

As I will describe in Chapter 6, Horkheimer refers to the Judaic prohibition of any graven image and the Christian brotherly love to point the possibility that an unrepresentable idea of good may find concretisation in a form of solidarity based on the powerlessness of knowledge.

#### **4.6 Concluding remarks**

In this chapter, I have described how we can consider Schopenhauer's notion of will to be a forerunner of Horkheimer's notion of the longing for the totally other. Both of them refers to an unspoken dimension insofar as the reality that human beings represent through perception, discourse and thought is not already given but it depends on their bodily and perceptive apparatus.

In materialist fashion, Horkheimer adds the influence of social practices and power relationships. Furthermore, the teaching of the world as representation is grounded in the use of metaphors in Schopenhauer's philosophy. Language is not exclusively a tool to define reality according to human beings' will. Language is also an expression of human beings' will. In both cases, human beings are not able to control their will as they wish. This lack of total control is interpreted by Horkheimer as a state of abandonment expressing the powerlessness of human beings in their attempt to determine the knowledge of the things in themselves. In the light of the concept of abandonment, Horkheimer thinks of a possible solidarity in which human beings may identify themselves in their powerlessness of their knowledge of things. If human beings become conscious of powerlessness, then there is the possibility in Horkheimer's view that they may act to denounce and reduce the injustice caused by the social practice of domination and seek to reduce it.

However, critical theory can only help the possibility of the reduction of injustice. To determine if the possibility of the denunciation of injustice will result in the accomplishment of its purpose to reduce injustice is beyond the possibility of theory. It is at this point that the late critical theory of Horkheimer unveils its Schopenhauerian characteristic: human actions and their ethical forms cannot be decided by a priori formulations but by its occurrence.

Furthermore, Horkheimer finds in Schopenhauer's use of metaphor a mode of thinking about the possibility of overcoming instrumental reason through a negative identification.

Although Schopenhauer outlined the Kant's teaching of the split between phenomena and things-in-themselves through philosophical and scientific propositions. But in Schopenhauer's epi-philosophy, those propositions are only valid as metaphors rather than scientific or metaphysical claims of truth. Then Schopenhauer explains the impossibility of the knowledge of knowing,

representing it through metaphors and predominately through theological metaphors. He draws indeed on theological doctrines which describe practices of negation, such as the mystical suffering body of Christ, the atheistic origin of the world in Buddhism and the Hindu mystical saying of the *tat twam asi*. As will we see in Chapter 6, Horkheimer employs these theological doctrines as metaphors to describes practices of negative identification. In unpacking the metaphorical meaning of those practices of negative identification, we will see how Horkheimer intends the possibility of a human emancipation within a culture freed of power relationships.

# **PART THREE**

## **THE POLITICS OF THE UNSPOKEN**

# Chapter 5

## Hopelessness, fascism and the administered world

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the second part of the thesis, the description of the politics of the unspoken in Max Horkheimer. The politics of unspoken will be described as a contrast between the practices of domination in advanced capitalism and the possibility of an emancipation from them through a cultural change. As anticipated in the introduction of the thesis, the unspoken dimension of Max Horkheimer's late thought is the longing for a non-fascist culture. This chapter describes how Horkheimer understands fascist culture to empower the instrumentality contained within the bourgeois cultural forms. In Horkheimer's thought, Fascist culture is investigated by identifying meaningless self-preservation and social conformism as cultural forms of life. They are the result of the perversion of the bourgeois practices of emancipation used in the bourgeois struggle for power against the feudal system of the Ancien Régime.

In fact, Horkheimer's investigation of bourgeois practices of emancipation hinges on how he describes them as being twisted into practices of domination characterised by aimless violence and the bleak automation of social life. We will see that Horkheimer uses the notion of fascism and administered world to refer to such practices of domination. The political objective of those practices of domination is the destruction of any possibility of a different human society where culture and language are liberated from domination and violence. From this perspective, domination becomes totalitarian: there is no way to escape from it and the world of human affairs becomes a hopeless place, an inhuman world.

More specifically, I will develop this argument by unpacking how the concepts of fascism and administered world in Horkheimer hints at a perversion of the bourgeois ideology of humanity and the utopia of happiness. Here, the concepts of ideology and utopia indicate cultural practices that inhere the bourgeois way of life. The perversion of these practices then refers to their use of them as resources to be exploited for the self-preservation of the social system rather than for the rational and enlightened development of individual's personality, somewhat in the style of

Kant's project of Enlightenment. I will indeed show that Horkheimer takes the Kant's notion of hope as the historical-theoretical paradigm by means of which it is possible to understand that the perversion of ideology of humanity and utopia of happiness is perverted to end in the systematic violence of Fascist culture and in the bleak automation of the administered world. In doing so, I will interpret the politics of the unspoken in Horkheimer's thought to be framed as the negation of a fascist politics, a politics that destroys any way of life that does not conform to the systematic violence of Fascist culture and its aimless instrumental thought.

## **5.2 History, psychology and negative materialism**

The investigation proposed in this section suggests that the bourgeois ideology of humanity and the bourgeois utopia of happiness are the means of emancipation of the bourgeois subjects. Those means are then twisted into becoming the tools of totalitarian domination. I will first discuss about the complicated combination of history and psychology in Horkheimer's critical theory. After explaining this methodological problem, I will explain how Horkheimer takes the Kantian hope to be the paradigm through which, on the level of theory, we can see the perversion that arises in the transition of the liberal capitalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth century to the advanced capitalism of the twentieth century.

The interest of Horkheimer in psychology needs to be framed within his project of superseding the impasse of material sociology and social philosophy to provide a theoretical design for a critical theory<sup>164</sup>. My intention here is not to discuss Horkheimer's reasons why he regarded the integration of psychoanalysis into the program of the Institute of Social Research as necessary<sup>165</sup>. Instead, I would like to highlight that the critical combination of the dialectical interpretation of history (read Hegel and Marx) with the discourse of psychology in Horkheimer's thought then generated an illuminating perspective on the unspoken dimension of propositional language. From this perspective, propositions are taken to have a dimension of indeterminacy derived from the transience of human beings' experience and the social historical circumstances in which they live.

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<sup>164</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>165</sup> On this point, see the chapter *Integration of Psychoanalysis* in Jay (1996).

I will unpack this argument by drawing upon the article entitled *History and Psychology* written by Horkheimer in 1932 where Horkheimer argues that psychology may be critically integrated to a renewed materialist and dialectical idea of history. From this point of view, history alone cannot provide a complete account of how human beings determine their life and why they decide to do so. Instead, the use of psychology will help to demonstrate that historical discourse does not say everything about the social life of human beings.

Analogously, Horkheimer takes social relationships and their influence on the social life of the individual to be insufficient to determine the identity of an individual completely. From this perspective, the investigation of psychology in Horkheimer's critical theory appears as a philosophical negation that prevents the Marxian materialist idea of history from proposing a social philosophy that serves as a totality. In my view, the main question emerging from Horkheimer's article *History and Psychology* is not whether there might be an 'unnatural marriage of Freud and Marx' (Jay 1996: 86)<sup>166</sup>. Instead, the main question seems to address whether dialectical and negative thought can be combined in a new way that does not reduce both to identity-thinking.

The article *History and Psychology* is fundamental to understand Horkheimer's critical theory as a negative materialism<sup>167</sup>. On the one hand, critical theory should be taken as an inter-disciplinary academic method investigating in a material fashion as it takes place in historical-social practices along with their representation in concepts. On the other hand, such a method cannot be finalised to reach any definitive claim of the truth about how reality is. This idea of negative materialism will then help us to understand how Horkheimer's use of psychological concepts works as a discursive vehicle to express the subterranean processes determining the social life of individuals. It should also be remembered that this use of psychological concepts in a positivist fashion does not seek to provide a framework explaining reality through definitive scientific truths. Nonetheless, the reconfiguration of the relationship between history and psychology in philosophical negation clarifies how Horkheimer's investigation of the relationship between bourgeois culture and Fascism does not carry any positivist, dogmatic claims of

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<sup>166</sup> Following Jay's account, we could say that the debate about a possible marriage of Freud and Marx in theory seems more relevant in the works of other members of the Institute, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse.

<sup>167</sup> On negative materialism see also Chapter 1 and Chapter 2.

truth. I would suggest that Horkheimer advances the proposal that a study of the unconscious tensions traversing individuals is a necessary step to avoid turning historical evaluations into absolute judgments.

In *History and Psychology*, Horkheimer does not reduce history to a chronological sequence of facts according to a mode of cognition (as in his view the Neo-Kantian tradition does) or to historicity, where a concept of history is based on an ontological or phenomenological mode of being (BPSS: 111,112). He draws instead on the Hegelian-Marxian dialectical concept of history. Horkheimer follows Marx in rejecting the Hegelian idea that there can be a comprehensive meaning of history, although he does retain Hegel's idea that history is unfolded through concrete and living social dynamics (BPSS: 116). Differently from Marx and the Marxist tradition, Horkheimer does not consider history as a mere explanation of economic and social tensions among subjects in a determinate period of time, which appear as the class struggle of social forces shaping their future (BPSS: 118). For Horkheimer, the dialectical concept of history can be critically renewed if psychology becomes an 'indispensable auxiliary science for history' instead of a 'foundational science' (BPSS: 119). But what does Horkheimer mean by auxiliary science here?

In fact, Horkheimer does not refer to an integration of history and psychology as a positivist application of the methods of psychology to historical accounts, but it indicates it as a mediation between them. In Horkheimer's view, this mediation is a study of the psychic structure of individual character of individuals combined with an analysis of the economic and social conditions affecting individual life. He terms this combination the 'psychology of the unconscious', a phrase in which the unconscious refers to the dynamism of the individual in the social whole instead of a subterranean universal structural component of the individual mind (BPSS: 120). What Horkheimer takes from Freud's study of the mind is the capacity to bring to light the hidden motives and dynamics that interact between the individual and the social whole.

In this view, psychology is auxiliary science, it helps to understand the complex of social relationships by unveiling hidden motives. As Jay recalls, Horkheimer praises Freud's contribution to knowledge when Freud's psychological theory highlights a more dialectical approach in his early works rather than the biological and positivist approach of Freud's late studies (Jay 1996: 101). In the light of

Horkheimer's idea of psychology as auxiliary science, what then is the unconscious that the combination of history and psychology should bring to light?

Interestingly, at the end of *History and Psychology*, Horkheimer refers to Kant's schematism to provide an implicit contextualisation of the unconscious. As he puts it, 'Kant spoke of a hidden art in the depths of human soul *whose real modes of activity is hardly likely to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze.* Psychology must explain that particular preformation' (BPSS: 123)<sup>168</sup>. Horkheimer hints that this preformation is a definition of the unconscious that is devoid of the positivist claim of the Freudian map of mind with its duality conscious/unconscious (GS14: 198)<sup>169</sup>. Instead, Kant's idealist conception allows him to emphasise the indeterminate, subjective element of human experience of the world.

The subjective element that remains indeterminate at the eyes of the researcher should not, in Horkheimer's view, be hypostatized as the 'arbitrariness' of human beings - that is, as an essentialist image of subjects endowed of a metaphysical free-will. Instead, it should draw upon 'their capacities, their upbringing and their labour (in short, their history) which should be grasped in connection with the history of society' (BPSS: 128). Finally then, we see that the integration of history and psychology follows the basic idea of Horkheimer's critical theory that is the interpenetration of general concepts representing social dynamics and particular concepts representing experience of individuals.

Therefore, when Horkheimer investigates how bourgeois liberal capitalism ends in fascism and administered world, he leans on vocabulary from psychology to bring to light hidden motives that historical accounts leave aside. But this psychological vocabulary informs also a line of thought able to describe better how the bourgeois logic of power works in a more violent way in fascism and advanced capitalism.

### 5.3 The twilight of hope

Having discussed Horkheimer's negative materialist approach to history and psychology, we can explore how Horkheimer frames fascism as the perversion of bourgeois ideology and utopia. Horkheimer regards perversion as a psychoanalytical concept in a critical relationship with standard or conventional

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<sup>168</sup> Horkheimer's quotation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* is in italics.

<sup>169</sup> [1952, *Die Schuld von Freud*]. See also the lecture *The Dissection of the Psychological Personality* in Freud (1965).

discourse around historical-social developments. Perversion is presented as a concept that hints at a discursive twist, a distortion (GS6: 216)<sup>170</sup>. Perversion is the distortion of the Enlightenment programme of emancipation from oppression and fear (DE: 93). This distortion is already present in the violence of the cultural practices of bourgeois ideology of humanity and utopia of happiness which are the tools of bourgeois emancipation from feudalism. The concept of perversion thus refers to the idea that the violence of bourgeois cultural practices is unleashed without limits.

In my view, Horkheimer's use of perversion could be read as a synonym for fascism, the limitless augmentation of the destructive violence of bourgeois culture. As Horkheimer writes in *The Jews and Europe*, 'The totalitarian order differs from its bourgeois predecessor only in that it has lost its inhibitions [...] Fascism is that truth of modern society which has been realised by theory from the beginning' (CTS: 78). In Horkheimer's philosophical investigation about the development of bourgeois culture into fascism, fascism is not framed as the destruction of the idealist limit of mutual respect, which is represented philosophically by the Kantian idea of moral duty. On the contrary, fascism is conceived as the limitless empowerment of the violence that is intrinsic to the bourgeois will to dominate nature.

The target of the bourgeois violence, unleashed in the Fascist order, is then the indeterminacy of experience and its possibility of critique (DE: 83). Fascism aims to destroy them as cultural resources for emancipation. It does so in a perverted way, by leaning on the efficaciousness of their violence. In this view, Enlightenment becomes distorted within itself and against itself<sup>171</sup>.

The cultural practices of the bourgeois struggle for emancipation - i.e. ideology and utopia - are increased in their instrumental relationship and distorted as tool to preserve power, once the bourgeoisie is established as the ruling class. They serve to stifle any possibility of collective action that does not conform to a bourgeois rule of domination. Horkheimer takes Kant's philosophy to show paradigmatically that, with the empowerment of self-mastery and the internalisation of fear of death, fascism destroys the idealism of the Kantian rational moral subjects and his autonomy. Self-mastery and internalisation are practices by which the bourgeois

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<sup>170</sup> [1953-1955 *Schreckbild Perversion*]

<sup>171</sup> As Adorno and Horkheimer state, 'Enlightenment itself turned against the bourgeoisie once, as a system of domination, it had recourse to suppression' (DE: 93).

subject of the Kantian idealism could pursue a peaceful life in the hope of achieving happiness in an indeterminate future time. In a nutshell, Fascism increases the instrumental practices characteristic of the Kantian rational moral subject to destroy the last residual possibility of the achievement of the collective non-instrumental life that Kant represented with the hope for happiness and the idea of the moral world. Therefore, the combination of historical and psychological discourses in Horkheimer's investigation are the theoretical means by which he understands Fascism not solely as an historical phenomenon (e.g. Italy under Mussolini's government or the National Socialist Germany) or even as a psychological phenomenon (e.g. perversion), but on a cultural-theoretical level mixing discourses and concepts from various disciplines.

From this methodological perspective, we can better assess how Horkheimer and Adorno describe Fascism and the Fascist subject:

Liberated from the control of the same class which tied the nineteenth-century businessman to Kantian respect and mutual love, Fascism (which by its iron discipline saves its subject people the trouble of moral feelings) no longer needs to uphold any disciplines. [...] The work of Marquis de Sade portrays *understanding without the guidance of the other person*: that is, the bourgeois individual without tutelage (DE: 86).<sup>172</sup>

We discover in this quotation how the perversion of bourgeois culture is not a deviation from the idealist Kantian teleology; that is, the possibility to move from a state of animality to the states of humanity and personality<sup>173</sup>. The perversion of bourgeois culture is inscribed in the discourse of its bourgeois idealism. For Kant, human beings become complete autonomous rational-moral subjects when they leave the state of nature and make efforts to supersede the state of immaturity. At that point, they are no longer uneducated and are physically able to sustain their life with their own means and with mutual respect for other human beings.

It is only in this case that they become enlightened and develop their personality morally through an improvement both in character and their socio-economic status as individuals. In comparison, the Fascist is a bourgeois individual without tutelage, and so a subject who has not become enlightened in such an idealistic way. He is instead a human being who can find neither social-moral improvement to stem for his fatigue and give him satisfaction in his way of life.

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<sup>172</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno's quotation of de Sade in italics.

<sup>173</sup> See chapter 3.

Indeed, the kernel of Kantian philosophy was the hope that by living in a civil constitution of rational human beings, warfare and cruelty could be avoided. The development of personality in this mould would improve social life to the extreme point that human beings might hypothetically come to incarnate an idealised moral subject who loves without harming his neighbour<sup>174</sup>. A Fascist subject is instead the representation of a bourgeois subject who lives according to a purposiveness that compels him to self-mastery in the manner of the Kantian subject.

However, differently from the Kantian subject, the Fascist does not find in the self-mastery a progressive moment; that is, an emancipation from a state of oppression and cruelty in favour of an improvement in his life. Instead, the Fascist subject lives aimlessly and meaninglessly by adjusting his life to the violence of the order of power. In philosophical terms, Horkheimer and Adorno give this aimless and meaningless life the name of *unreason* or, as they put it, ‘pure reason becomes unreason [*Unvernunft*], a faultless and insubstantial mode of procedure’ (DE: 90). Let us translate this idea of unreason in a Kantian-style vocabulary. Without the purposive linkage of judgement between the ideology of rational knowledge (what can I know?) and the utopia of a moral world (if I do what I ought to do, what may I hope?) the bourgeois idealism unfolds Fascism.

Furthermore, fascism enhances the aimless adjustment of human beings to domination and permanent dissatisfaction. Here, unreason does not mean a regression to what, for Kant, was not human -i.e. state of nature, animality. By referring to the literary character of *Juliette* in De Sade’s work of the same name, Horkheimer and Adorno describe this condition of unreason not as ‘unsublimated libido nor regressive libido’, but rather as ‘intellectual pleasure in regression - *amor intellectualis diaboli*, the pleasure of attacking civilization with its own weapons’ (DE: 94). Unreason, then, is a continuously increasing perversion of the enlightened reason.

This perversion can be described in the following way: human beings exert violence in conformity to a social order devoid of any purpose and devoid of possibility to make meaningful connection between them and the social whole. In *Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer clarifies that this unreason is actually reason twisted in what he calls a ‘purposeless purposiveness’ (ER: 89). The violent self-mastery of the Fascist subject is not less effective or less strong than that of the bourgeois subject,

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<sup>174</sup> See in Chapter 3 my discussion about Kant’s ideas of moral world and pure rational faith.

but it is aimless and meaningless. The civil virtue of mutual respect and the love of humanity, which were represented as recaptured elements of the moral world in Kantian hope for happiness, appear in Horkheimer and Adorno's view as 'ephemeral' in the light of the Fascist subject who lives hopelessly (DE: 85).

Horkheimer sees in the Kantian notion of hope both a negation of injustice of the bourgeois order and an idealism that masks the destructive force of bourgeois culture. This destructive force is the adjustment of the individual to the social whole in compulsive self-mastery, which becomes the unreason of the unleashed instrumentality of the Fascist subject. In this sense, hope becomes 'vain' as Horkheimer's note of 1961 highlights (D&D: 203)<sup>175</sup>. If the transformation from bourgeois reason to Fascist violence is inscribed in the enlightenment of bourgeois culture, what then is the trigger that unleashes Fascist violence? In the essay *Materialism and Morality* of 1933, Horkheimer outlines the argument that the identification between the particular dimension of bourgeoisie as social class and the general dimension of bourgeoisie as humanity cannot, in practice, guarantee the actualisation of Kant's idea of hope (BPSS: 19, 20). The failure of such an identification may be found in the bourgeois man having a lack of any material interest in becoming a moral person. The ideological and utopian project of a civilising violence and the prospective actualisation of a moral world both go into ruin because the theoretical framework for such a project does not find any support in practice.

The Kantian hope for happiness is then conceived hypothetically with the conditional subordinate conjunction *if*. The connection between the discourse of a hypothetical life in Kant's philosophy with the analysis of ideology and utopia makes clear Horkheimer's claim that the Fascist is nothing else than a bourgeois individual without tutelage. As Horkheimer states in the 1930 essay *Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History*, 'If ideology affects appearances, the utopia is the dream of the true and just ordering of life [...] Ideology and utopia are to be understood as orientations of social groups that are derivative of the whole of social reality' (BPSS: 314). On the one hand, ideology is the bourgeois consciousness through which the liberation of productive forces of labour seeks a progress for humanity and fosters its self-preservation. On the other hand, utopia is the product of a bourgeois imagination by which progress follows happiness in the satisfaction

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<sup>175</sup> [1961, *Vain Hope*]

of the desire to possess things by dominating nature and of the desire to live peacefully in mutual respect with other human beings.

However, the lack of coincidence between the pursuit of self-interest on the part of the bourgeois individual (the domination of things) and the general interest of the society (mutual respect) is masked in Horkheimer's view by the 'the unshakable belief that a just world could be brought into existence' (CIR: 4)<sup>176</sup>. In a nutshell, this bourgeois ideology consists in thinking that the bourgeois way of life is the only possible righteous way to live. Horkheimer makes clear that this idealist belief serves to mask the intrinsic violence in bourgeois culture, which coincides with the will to affirm that the pursuit of self-interest comes along with the liberation of productive forces. Furthermore, the primary objective of the development of productive forces is to ensure the satisfaction of the bourgeois individual (BPSS: 24, 25)<sup>177</sup>. This connection between the self-interest and the general interest is given with the conjunction *if* and the critical way of making arguments.

In Horkheimer's view, the conditional subordinated conjunction *if* used by Kant when describing the hope for happiness is then actualised in cultural forms when human beings speak by articulating arguments in judgements and not in dogmatic predications. In a preparatory note of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, entitled *Main and Secondary Clauses*, Horkheimer states that, 'Secondary clauses belong to the juridical and argumentative phase of thinking, primitives and totalitarians speak with main clauses. [...] There is a connection between humanity and subordinate clauses' (GS12: 279)<sup>178</sup>. What Horkheimer suggests is that summary justice belongs to ways of thinking that are not critical. It belongs to human beings who take reality as already given. Summary justice is spoken through main clauses that make immediate connection between the content of the statement and reality as such.

Nonetheless, for Horkheimer there is a clear difference between primitive societies and Fascism. In primitive societies, human beings exercise their fear of death in the face of the overwhelming power of nature with rituals and mimesis, i.e. with practices that do not aim to the total domination of nature and its objectification<sup>179</sup>. In this sense, a language without subordinate clauses is used for domination practices that subjugate other human beings and nature without seeking to totalise

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<sup>176</sup> [1957, *The Concept of Man*]

<sup>177</sup> [1933, *Materialism and Morality*]

<sup>178</sup> [1942, *Haupt- und Nebensatz*]

<sup>179</sup> See the glossary of the term reason and domination in the introduction.

the human existence with social demands. Instead, in the twilight of the European feudal harmony, the modern bourgeois subject was left only with his power to dominate, where domination becomes the means and the end of his self-preservation. What the bourgeois subject thus destroys is what initially made him freed from feudalism: the possibility of transcending a state of oppression, what in dialectical philosophical terms is known as negation. As with Kant's philosophy, bourgeois idealism attempts to recover an idea of justice that is not only a system of punishment but also the negation of violence through mutual respect or, in Kantian vocabulary, a hope for happiness. Owing to this retrieval of negation through idealism, Horkheimer thinks that bourgeois philosophy keeps the faith in the 'omnipotence of thought' that was typical of primitive society (BPSS: 24, 25)<sup>180</sup>.

The idealism present in the Kantian concept of hope thus rescues idealistically the possibility that the bourgeois subject can realise a life without domination in a moral world. In the Kantian question 'What may I hope?', the bourgeois ideology of humanity unfolds the possibility that science and industry - i.e. the liberation of productive forces against the feudal system - destroy any dogmatic-idealistic harmony that poses transcendence (a substantive idea of God) as legitimation of temporal power. Hence, the rise of bourgeois culture and the decline of the Ancien Régime goes through Enlightenment and its accompanying ambivalence. On the one hand, Enlightenment signifies the critique of any discourse that hampers the instrumental practice and the instrumental logic which develops the means of self-preservation; that is, industry and science. On the other hand, it refers to the critical claim that industry and science cannot inform the ultimate meaning of life. In Kant's philosophy, the question of 'What may I hope?' is a question about the ultimate meaning of life.

The Kantian notion of hope, then, is the unconditional faith in man's power to set on earth a perpetual peace that somehow relieve human beings of their propensity to warfare and gratuitous violence. As Horkheimer suggests, 'Kant did not deny the existence of God, nor did he make God the assurance for commandments [...] God does not postulate; it is the postulate' (GS7: 169)<sup>181</sup>. For Kant, moral duty is not a meaningful commandment functioning as a religious commandment. Present in

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<sup>180</sup> [1933, *Materialism and Morality*]

<sup>181</sup> [1962, *Kants Philosophie und die Aufklärung*]

Kant's categorical imperative, moral duty is a sort of practical trigger to foster mutual respect in spite of one's own self-interest. Moral duty has the task of compelling bourgeois individuals to restrain their egoism through the following paradox: rational beings must enforce the negation of their egoism by increasing self-mastery over the pursuit of their self-interest.

In *Materialism and Metaphysics*, Horkheimer underlines that this idealism of moral duty 'becomes the means of canonizing the renunciation of desire which natural and societal situations have forced upon man' (CT: 23). Here, desire and renunciation are the social products of the self-contradictory bourgeois way of life: desire seeks the power to pursue self-interest, while renunciation aims at the surrender of self-interest in favour of mutual respect. In argumentative discourses, secondary clauses express the critical experience of the impossibility of the dogmatic reconciliation of both desire and renunciation.

As Fascist subjects, totalitarians speak without articulating arguments. They increase the bourgeois desire for self-preservation by twisting renunciation into resignation and so into hopelessness. Fascism destroys the material condition of bourgeois ideology, erasing the meaning of autonomy as the result of Enlightenment and critique.

For Horkheimer, the destruction of the autonomy of reason in its meaning arises in line with a transformation of the causative nexus between the way in which things should be according to reason and the effect that they have on experience. In Kant, the causal nexus between idea of moral duty and its actualization - 'the perfect spontaneity' in his vocabulary - does not pertain the world of appearances but nonetheless have effects on it (Kant 1978: 473)<sup>182</sup>. The destruction of the identification between the bourgeois social class and humanity is then accompanied with the transformation of this causality from the kind of idealist perfect spontaneity into a procedure useful for the positivist knowledge of science and the standardisation of industrial production.

In the text *Kants Philosophie und die Aufklärung*, Horkheimer suggests that the change of causality from a category conditioned by time and space to a combination of regularities within a positivist procedure shows the transformation of reason from an historically and socially conditioned concept of critical thought to a 'machinery', i.e. to an hypostatized mechanic thinking (GS7: 166). Horkheimer conceives

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<sup>182</sup> See also in Chapter 4 my discussion about Schopenhauer's criticism of Kant's third antinomy.

machinery in Marxian fashion. As Marx clarifies in the *Grundrisse*, machinery is an automatic system, ‘set in motion by an automaton, a moving power that moves itself; this automaton consisting in numerous mechanical and intellectual organs so that the workers themselves are cast merely as its conscious linkage’ (Marx 1973: 692). Not only does this machinery estrange man from his labour but it absorbs him into an automatic regularity that traps his whole life.

The automation of machinery then destroys the possibility of a causal connection between the experience of something through the categories of space and time and its discursive representation in the object of concept. This causal connection was indeed purposiveness in Kant’s vocabulary<sup>183</sup>. The destruction of any causality in argumentation is the destruction of any meaningful connection between subject and object, and so a purposive representation of an experience in a concept. As Horkheimer clarifies, ‘In the absence of syntactic connection among [the conjunctions] *Why*, *Because* and *When*, the night of despair in philosophy is bespoken in which one victim is equal to the other’ (GS12: 280)<sup>184</sup>. The destruction of this meaningful connection thus brings about the end of the universal identification of the bourgeois man with humanity.

As for the perversion of utopia for happiness, I will focus on two modes which informs it: the censorship of negation with social optimism and the individualistic concept of nature. In his *Habilitation* dissertation of 1925, Horkheimer emphasises the division between theoretical philosophy and ethics in Kant’s philosophy (GS2: 81)<sup>185</sup>. In his view, Kant’s notion of reflective judgment is the activity that prepares knowledge as it goes from particular experience to the general concept<sup>186</sup>. Reflective judgement requires the sake of ‘a priori regulative principles’, as those guidelines grounding an inquiry into the basis of human knowledge (GS2: 97)<sup>187</sup>. Since reflective judgments alone cannot assure the unity of the system, Horkheimer argues that Kant is forced to introduce an a priori ‘happy chance [*glückliche Zufall*]’, which is a preliminary condition for reflective judgment to investigate regulative principles (GS2: 97)<sup>188</sup>.

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<sup>183</sup> See Chapter 3.

<sup>184</sup> [1942, *Haupt- und Nebensatz*]

<sup>185</sup> [1925, *Über Kants Kritik der Urteilskraft als Bindeglied zwischen theoretischer und praktischer Philosophie*]

<sup>186</sup> See also Chapter 3 for this discussion on Kant’s notion of reflective judgement.

<sup>187</sup> *ibid.* These guidelines were the objects entertained by reason, see Chapter 3.

<sup>188</sup> *ibid.*

The happy chance is the idea that the use of the regulative principles of reason is accompanied by a sense of pleasure because it helps to find the general concept starting from experience. Only with the help of a happy chance, a reflective judgement can make social and moral progress meaningful. In simple words, the notion of the happy chance refers to the social optimism that social progress (science and industry) is accompanied by moral progress. With this combination of social-moral progress there is the possibility of a non-instrumental dimension. In the bourgeois culture, the moment of emancipation is integrated into the power structure in terms of social and economic progress. The bourgeois culture does not stifle science, industry and entrepreneurship as cultural forms of progress but stifles any possible collective action that aims to subvert the bourgeois power structure based on private property. Utopia for happiness then helps to spread a sense of social optimism according to which social progress follows moral progress in order to preserve bourgeois power structure.

Let us clarify this argument by unpacking the individualistic concept of nature in relationship with the utopia for happiness. In *Egoism and Freedom Movements*, Horkheimer discusses how, in early modern thought and especially in the works of Machiavelli, More and Hobbes, the idea of human beings is no longer bound to the totalising, Medieval idea that the natural world is the divine creation of God. Instead, early modern thought starts to understand human nature through science. In Horkheimer's view, science debunks the old metaphysical order because it refers to 'directly accessible facts [...], to perish represents the greatest evil, while self-preservation and all actions toward that end constitute the highest good' (BPSS: 50). Horkheimer recognises that such simplified naturalism, according to which death and life constitute the ultimate facts of reality, only appears to be a neutral way of knowing reality. It constitutes instead an individualistic concept of nature where everything is measured according to the touchstone of self-preservation. The concept of self-preservation is then the product of the social existence of the bourgeois individual, whose social optimism is grounded in the hope that life can be extended by controlling that which can potentially bring about his death.

In the essay *Beginnings of the Bourgeois History of Philosophy*, Horkheimer argues that during the Renaissance period, natural sciences deduced the practicability of laws from the future recurrence of observed phenomena to lend uniformity to nature (BPSS: 315). Nature was to be made uniform to become an object and a means for

the pursuit of self-interest. Such uniformity, which originates from the development of science and industry, is hypostatized in Horkheimer's view by the positivist thought of the nineteenth century. The goal of the hypostatization of the uniformity was then to create an abstract method able to assure regular laws for the practicability of domination beyond their determination in space and time (BPSS: 316). The change in causality from a determination of space and time to abstract regularity derives from the social optimism and the idea of uniformity of nature. Moreover, this change is accompanied by a transformation in politics. Politics is no longer a struggle for bourgeois emancipation; that is, the negation of the injustice of the feudal system. Instead, it is conceived as a science of natural laws based on the construction of subjectivity and on the planning of action within the framework of law.

The discursive construction of subjectivity concerns the naturalistic conceptualisation of human being or, as Horkheimer states, 'Human beings appear here as interchangeable examples of a biological genus' (BPSS: 334). The planning process instead concerns the possibility of human action. In Horkheimer's view, since human beings are 'of a piece with nature and are thus just as subject to its general laws as all other beings [...] All human actions - unconscious or conscious, voluntary or involuntary - are subject to the necessity of law' (BPSS: 350). The bourgeois subject is the product of a totalitarian project by which no human being can escape domination because the word *human* signifies a member of a biological genus for whom life means self-preservation.

The paradox of the bourgeois subject resides in the manner in which he increases his egoism by destroying the pleasure in the pursuit of the satisfaction that his desire brings about. What remains of egoism is then the perversion of an augmented biological need to survive, or self-preservation. By implementing the principle of self-preservation in the subject's struggle for emancipation from the feudal system, bourgeois individuals condemn egoism as an anti-social value; that is, the pleasure brought about by pursuing one's own desire. In Horkheimer's view, the repudiation of egoism thus presents a contradiction to the everyday practice of bourgeois individuals who live in accordance with the principle of self-preservation (BPSS: 52)<sup>189</sup>.

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<sup>189</sup> [1936, *Egoism and Freedom of Movements*]

As mutual respect, morality was first conceived as a tool to restrict egoism. Devoid of any pleasure, egoism then becomes the endless augmentation of self-preservation. Morality is hence reduced to a compulsive conformity to the self-preservation, whose aim consists in preventing political actions that might challenge the bourgeois order of power. In this sense, Horkheimer affirms that morality in bourgeois idealism is meant to limit the capacity of the bourgeois individual to participate in collective action but it does not actually limit private entrepreneurship (BPSS: 55)<sup>190</sup>.

Horkheimer clarifies that the transformation of the principle of self-preservation from a means of emancipation to a mechanism of subjugation of every stratum of the population to power has been possible through the process of ‘spiritualisation’ as well as internalisation (BPSS: 74)<sup>191</sup>. Spiritualisation is then the process by which the subject becomes accountable for his own actions in contrast to internalisation which is the mastery of the individual’s own desire to be integrated into a group. Here, Horkheimer recognises that protestant reformists like Luther and Calvin and public agitators like Cola di Rienzo and Savonarola all used such practices to pursue political power (BPSS: 76)<sup>192</sup>. Spiritualisation works as scientific systematization of knowledge, while internalisation is a process of integration into the social system. Here, the happy chance of Kant’s reflective judgement is preserved as a function of the systematic logic. It expresses only the perversion of social optimism: the system continues to work, and the progress will be enhanced eternally as the mere replication of violence.

#### **5.4 Fascism at Large: the Administered World**

We have seen how the bourgeois ideology of humanity and utopia for happiness are perversely transformed from the bourgeois means of emancipation to the Fascist tendency towards systematic violence. In Horkheimer’s view, spiritualisation and internalisation are political strategies by means of which the perversion of bourgeois ideology and utopia arises. They also participate together in a perversion wherein spiritualisation is twisted into systematic appliance of abstract scientific

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

knowledge while internalisation is twisted into conformism, i.e. integration of the individual to the replication of the social system.

In my view, anti-Semitism and administered world may be found in Horkheimer's work as the result of this perversion. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno discuss anti-Semitism theoretically in the form of elements that indicate the limits of Enlightenment; that is, the defaults of the programme of man's liberation from fear. As Horkheimer and Adorno clarify, 'Bourgeois anti-Semitism has a specific economic reason: the concealment of domination in production' (DE: 173). In fact, there is no distinction between economic and political processes under the concept of domination as both processes share the same pursuit of power over human life. From this theoretical perspective then, Horkheimer and Adorno investigate the possible destruction of the human condition by totalitarian domination practices, whereby what stays at the core of totalitarian domination is the annihilation of the any cultural forms of life that does not conform to any logic of power.

At the beginning of their discussion, Adorno and Horkheimer indeed suggest that anti-Semitism does not exclusively refer to minority persecutions against the Jews but 'involves the destiny of mankind [...] the fascists do not view the Jews as a minority but as an opposing race, the embodiment of the negative principle' (DE: 168). They clarify that the destruction of *the other* is the ultimate goal of fascism. The term *the other* is a conceptual category referring to something different from one's own individuality. Outlined here is the concept of other human beings whose cultural forms of life do not conform to the existent social order and express the possibility of remaining indeterminate from it. From this perspective, the destruction of *the other* is the destruction of the human condition conceived only as a condition of powerlessness. Regardless how much violence human beings exert on themselves and the circumambient world, human beings cannot determine how things are in themselves, so their experience of the world remains open to indeterminacy<sup>193</sup>.

To understand this human condition in terms of non-conformity to the existing social order, we need to draw on Horkheimer's article *The Jews and Europe* where he states 'Anti-Semitism will come to a natural end in the totalitarian order when nothing humane remains, although a few Jews might' (CTS: 92). What then, in

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<sup>193</sup> See chapter 4 for Horkheimer's understanding of powerlessness through Schopenhauer.

Horkheimer's view, is that 'humane', which is the target of Fascist violence? As Horkheimer himself explains, 'someone who does not belong, who is not protected by treaties, who is not backed up by any power, a stranger, a mere human being is completely abandoned' (CTS: 93). The fascists annihilate the non-conformity of another's life to their logic of power; that is, the state of abandonment of a life that is not at the disposal of the logic of power. Let us now see how this annihilation of a non-conformist life refers to anti-Semitism.

In an article written in 1946 for Ernst Simmel's edited book *Anti-Semitism: A Social Disease*, Horkheimer discusses the difference between illiberal anti-Semitism and fascist anti-Semitism. Illiberal anti-Semitism may be regarded as the figure of 'the anti-Jewish public agitator [*Hetzredner*]', while Fascist anti-Semitism as 'the streamlined [*stromlinienförmig*] fascist anti-Semite' (GS5: 367)<sup>194</sup>. Hence the agitator takes pleasure in the persecution of the Jews in public speech, but the fascist wants to change the political situation with a complete adherence to a systematic programme of extermination of the Jews. For Horkheimer, the streamlined fascist is the perversion of the autonomous bourgeois subject. This perversion is the result of the increased social violence perpetrated in the name of the liberal capitalism of nineteenth century with its power politics and colonial projects. The consequence of this perversion is, in Horkheimer's view, the destruction of free trade markets and of the circulation sphere of the intermediary middlemen in favour of monopolistic cartels, which organise production and distribution (GS5: 370)<sup>195</sup>. The streamlined fascist anti-Semite emerges from the bankruptcy of the bourgeois subject who has lost his autonomy and public sphere by conforming to an aimless enhancement of his power through social domination.

To understand fascist anti-Semitism, I will draw upon two concepts of Adorno and Horkheimer's idea of anti-Semitism: levelling (*Nivellierung*) and hardening (*Verhärtung*). Taking a speculative approach, I will associate these concepts with the formal constituents of the authoritarian-like political thinking that Adorno locates in his examination of the empirical findings of the research published with the title *The Authoritarian Personality*. This work is a study conducted in the United States in the 1940s under the auspices of a project called *Studies in Prejudice*, for whose scientific committee Horkheimer was a director. The following conceptual

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<sup>194</sup> [1944-1946, *Antisemitismus: der soziologische Hintergrund des psychoanalytischen Forschungsansatzes*]

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

associations are thus speculative because, as Jay (1980:143) recalls, a theory of anti-Semitism is absent in *Studies in Prejudice*. This speculative association is useful to understand how the perversion of bourgeois idealism does not end ideologically in the fascist violence but is presented as the limitless embodiment of this violence through self-mastery. Fascism then releases the embodied violence against those who do not conform to the aimless enhancement of power achieved through self-inflicted violence. The fascist destructive outburst of meaningless anger is then a constitutive part of bourgeois theory. It is the bourgeois self-mastery without a purpose. Let us clarify this argument by relating it analogically to the levelling and hardening to Kant's philosophy.

Levelling is the perversion of the Kantian notion of happy chance which was the condition of pleasure for reflective judgment. Instead, levelling is the practice by which the fascists aim to ruin those who are not in a position of power, even though nobody benefits from this violent ruin. Horkheimer and Adorno condense the essence of levelling in the thought that 'those who have no power to command must suffer the same fate as ordinary people. The covetous mobs [...] have always been aware deep down that ultimately all they would get out of it themselves would be the pleasure of seeing others robbed of all they possessed' (DE: 170). The destructive singularity of the fascist comrade finds pleasure in the pursuit of another's ruin, not in the moral development of his personality. Moreover, the pursuit of another's ruin is the annihilation of the possibility of human beings satisfying their desire for happiness as Kant conceived it: "The true benefit of the *Volksgenosse* lies in the collective approval of his anger [...] Anti-Semitism has proved immune to the argument of inadequate profitability" (DE: 170).

Fascism destroys Enlightenment through a regression within itself. Instead of entailing more hope for happiness, fascism entails the levelling of everyone to a state of a permanent dissatisfaction, and so to a life without meaning. As Horkheimer and Adorno state, 'It is the blindness and lack of purpose of anti-Semitism which lends a measure of truth to the explanation that it is an outlet. Anger is discharged on the defenceless victim' (DE: 171). How does this release of anger upon the defenceless individual come to constitute a regression within Enlightenment?

The answer is that the teleological framework of Enlightenment is not strictly overthrown, according to which progress and happiness will be achieved through

the laboriousness of the singular individual in relation to the social whole. Instead, this teleological framework becomes more opaque as it fails to establish rational connections between the individual and the social reality. In this sense, the results of the research reported in Adorno's *The Authoritarian Personality* showed why ignorance and confusion are formal constituents of an authoritarian-like political thinking. In Adorno's view, the failure of an authoritarian-like individual to make rational connections is the failure to put into question his impotence as political agent; that is, as a human being who takes upon himself the initiative to start something collectively. The adjective *authoritarian* refers both to the individual's proneness to identify a priori with the social world (Adorno et al 1969: 658) and to his willingness to avoid reflective judgement in order not to undermine the pattern of this a priori identification (Adorno et al., 1969: 662).

The readiness to put an end to critical thinking in the light of the potential challenge to the individual's pattern of identification is connected to the process of hardening. The process of levelling aims to ruin another person without deriving any profit from doing so. As Horkheimer explains in a note of the late 1930s, the process of hardening consists instead in 'the monopolization of the advantages that are derived coercively from determined regular performances on social process' (GS12: 288)<sup>196</sup>. But if there is no profit to be gained in another's ruin, what is the advantage in monopolising the power to perpetrate this ruin? What is at stake is the capacity to reproduce power aimlessly. Anti-Semitism perverts the ideology of humanity, transforming it from the means of emancipation of the bourgeois subject to an irrational identification with violence.

Moreover, violence is indeed the constitutive element of how bourgeois emancipation was achieved. What does this irrational identification with violence consist of? As Horkheimer and Adorno put it, 'Anti-Semitism is based on false projection. False projection makes the environment like itself' (DE: 187).

False projection is here the incapacity of the subject as anti-Semite to make meaningful reference with reality and so make sense of his action according to a purpose whose future achievement might satisfy his desire. Adorno and Horkheimer describes false projection as this lack of purpose and purposiveness in the subject's representation of the world. Interestingly, in doing so they refer to Schopenhauer:

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<sup>196</sup> [1939-1942, *Die Racket und der Geist*]

Schopenhauer and von Helmholtz [...] knew more about the limited relationship between subject and object than the official conception of neo-psychological and neo-Kantian school: the perceptual image contains concepts and judgements. Between the objects and the undisputed data of the senses, between within and without, there is a gulf that a subject must bridge at its own risk (DE: 188).

In this quotation, the gulf between the subject's activity of representation and the object of representation is the experience which remains indeterminate. There is no primary ground on which to connect experience, so the false projection copes with this gulf through an immediate violent identification between the subject and the social reality. The indeterminacy of experience and the possibility of critique succumb to this violent identification because the subject cannot resist conforming to the constituted social order. This immediate violent identification between the subject and the constituted social order is at the core of the process of hardening of the individual's character.

This process of hardening character enables the Fascist man to feel powerful because he augments his violent identification with the social whole to such an extreme point that he destroys his capacity to begin a relationship with other human beings that is unconditioned by his violence. In this process of levelling, he embodies the feeling of powerfulness through the action that he actualises to bring others to ruin. As Horkheimer and Adorno affirm here, 'The inner depth of the subject consists in nothing other than the delicacy and the wealth of the external perceptions. If this link is broken, the ego calcifies [*erstarrt*]' (DE: 189). In their view, the 'mediation [*Vermittlung*]' taking place among bodily senses, intuition and thought prevents the hardening of one's character (DE: 189). The endless process of hardening, that is 'the morbid aspect of anti-Semitism', hence arises in the absence of that moment of reflection, the moment of mediation that they call the 'life of reason' (DE: 189).

The aimless execution of Fascist violence supersedes and annihilates the experience of reflective judgement, not because this latter is a result of bourgeois self-mastery but because it shows the awareness that the world is representation and not an immutable social reality. The life of a human being who does not conform to fascist violence is, in the fascist view, *the other* to be destroyed because it is the living testimony of negation. In this sense, *the other* appears as the testimony of the actualised possibility of a world that does not conform to the Fascist perversion. This perversion consists in the Fascist man's experience of finding pleasure in violence without getting any satisfaction from it apart from the aimless execution

of violence. The testimony of the other as embodiment of negation then becomes unbearable for the Fascist comrade because it proves that his violent levelling does not find any efficacious concretisation. Through his immediate violent identification with social reality, the violence of the Fascist anti-Semite destroys any actual experience of negation. As Horkheimer and Adorno admit, 'He [the subject] loses the reflection in both directions: since he no longer reflects the object, he ceases to reflect upon himself, and loses the ability to differentiate' (DE: 189). The process of hardening destroys differences because it precludes any identification other than the immediate adherence of the circumambient objects to the subject's violent power.

It is here that we can understand why the process of hardening is revealed as paranoia in the Fascist subject. Adorno and Horkheimer conceives paranoia as a blind-levelling perception of the world, 'the closed circle of eternal sameness' that is determined by the impotence to make any sense of life except for the execution of violence (DE: 191). Here, paranoia appears as a manifestation of the fascist perversion in the character of the bourgeois man. A paranoid subject is a *bourgeois without tutelage*, the product of the perversion of the Kantian rational-moral subject who does not find any satisfaction in his life because he does find not any reason why he should stop replicating the violence of the social system. In this sense, paranoia hardens the character of the bourgeois man by conforming it to the violence to bring to ruin another person. In other words, a paranoid subject is a bourgeois subject without any hope for happiness in the Kantian sense. Hence his perception of the world is thus based only on blind-levelling replication of the experience of violence.

In Adorno's view, paranoia brings about ticket-thinking that he describes in terms of 'stereotypy' and 'personalisation' which are the formal constituents of authoritarian-like political thinking (Adorno et al. 1969: 664, 665). The term 'stereotypy' means thinking with ready-made worldviews that are void of contradictions and that stultify reality as a simplistic combination of pictures. Personalisation is the description of social phenomena in accordance with subjective, personal impressions. Like the 'ticket' of the electoral programmes of Western mass party system, people learn to choose between already given worldviews that are void of any reflective judgement and direct experience. On the one hand, the choice of one stereotype is personal because it makes the subject

comfortable with his immediate identification with the social world. On the other hand, personalisation is stereotyped because it is already framed with the violence that enables the individual to conform to an immediate identification with the social world.

Anti-Semitism is nothing other than the manifestation of the fascist violence and its totalitarian domination that destroys ideology as a means both of bourgeois emancipation and of the preservation of the ideal bourgeois order of rational society. Levelling compels individuals to pursue the ruin of others while identifying themselves uncritically with the totalitarian domination. Ignorance and confusion then work as mechanisms of defence against those who mount a critical challenge to the immediate pattern of identification with the system. Hardening enables the individuals to repeat their aimless, violent power in order to achieve levelling. Ticket-thinking provides individuals with ready-made pictures of the world in order to reinforce the mechanism of identification with the totalitarian domination. Within this optic, Horkheimer and Adorno conclude that anti-Semitism is indissolubly entangled with fascism because both destroy active perception and reflective judgment as moments of the indeterminate experience of human beings and reduce this experience to the repetition of stereotype and resignation (DE: 201). While anti-Semitism is the perversion of bourgeois ideology, the administered world is one of bourgeois utopia.

Horkheimer does not give a clear conceptualisation of the administered world. However, in an interview of 1950, Adorno and Horkheimer emphasise that their criticism of Western post-war society or the administered world does not aim to provide a critique of reason *tout court* (GS13: 127)<sup>197</sup>. Reason remains for them a critical concept referring to the capacity of human beings to negate reality as aprioristically given in order to start something anew. Adorno and Horkheimer criticise the destruction of the progressive function of critique through the perversion of reason.

Horkheimer clarifies the paradox of this perversion in the same interview, by imagining the human condition in the administered world in this way: 'Human beings still make decisions, but their decisions consist in accomplishing [*mitmachen*]' (GS13: 123)<sup>198</sup>. What is at stake in the administered world is not only

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<sup>197</sup> [1950, *Die verwaltete Welt oder: Die Krisis des Individuums*]

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

stultification or doing things without being accountable for one's action. It is also the bankruptcy of liberal capitalism that brings about automation and conformism as the mode of adherence of the subject's life to the power of violence. To understand the concept of administered world within this perspective, I suggest that we look beyond the interviews contained in *The Administered World* and *The Administered World Knows No Love* of 1970 in which Horkheimer explicitly uses that concept. Instead, we should draw upon the works of the early 1940s such as *For a Sociology of Class Relations*, *The Jews and Europe* and *The Authoritarian State* in which the concept does not appear.

The administered world is, in my view, a conceptual reference to hopelessness. The concept of hopelessness itself emerges from an analysis of advanced capitalism in terms of the unleashed domination of the nineteenth century liberalism. It is from this perspective that Horkheimer investigates the perversion of bourgeois idealism in a materialist fashion. Fascist violence then destroys the two principal means of bourgeois emancipation from feudalism: living labour and the development of personality. The abstract connection between these two means is to be found in the Kantian concept of the spontaneity of the causal nexus between efforts to conform one's action to the categorical imperative and the objective reality of the moral world. As we have seen in Chapter 3 the Kantian subject is required to be rational and moral if he wants to expect happiness in the future. His efforts to live in mutual respect with other rational subjects make sense in the light of the hope for happiness. In the view of this idealism, the life of the bourgeois subject, which is characterised by the development of his own productive forces (laboriousness), relates to a moral improvement in his personality and not only to an improvement in his social and economic condition. The political consequence of the decay of feudalism becomes the substitution of inherited privilege for laboriousness as the legitimising condition for bourgeois private ownership and bourgeois social optimism.

Moreover, the intra-class (among capitalists) and inter-class (between capitalists and proletariat) antagonism constitute the theoretical representation of how productive forces were unleashed through bourgeois society. In the ideology of the bourgeois society of nineteenth century, the competition of small entrepreneurs in a free market is the means of reproducing not only bourgeois ideology but also the social and cultural development of personality idealistically imagined. In the same

way, inter-class struggle is the antagonism that made the revolution meaningful for proletarians. The destruction both of bourgeois idealist utopia and of its antagonist - i.e. the proletarian revolution - accompanies the change of the means of productions. It is no longer the autonomy of private ownership that determines rationality but the readiness of such ownership to be used in an irrational mode for social production. As Horkheimer stated in 1943,

Society becomes a systemic and regulated process in relationship not to big events (they are based on blind powers that come out of the struggle between social classes and the ruling groups) but to what concerns the life of the individual. Such process does not refer to its self-governing [...] but it refers to the increased performance of the material and human apparatus of production (GS12: 98).<sup>199</sup>

Here, Horkheimer hints at the meaningless increase of human labour in a society in which not only proletarians - who have already been excluded from the gain of surplus value - but also bourgeois owners have lost any rational connection between individual labour and social production. In this sense, reason becomes unreason. The bourgeois social optimism for progress and happiness based only on the free competition in the market and the social antagonism with proletarians collapse into a blind reproduction of violence, i.e. meaningless laboriousness. I would thus suggest that the administered world refers to the aimless disintegration of bourgeois social life where automation and conformism replace living labour and development of personality. Here, I will unpack this argument by drawing upon the concept of automation.

For Horkheimer, automation is not a concept that is exclusively related to technological progress, as it appears in Pollock's analysis of automation in 1956 upon which Horkheimer draws. For Pollock, automation was a technique of production whose aim is to replace human beings with machines in the entire work process of production (Pollock 1957: 5). In a note from 1955, Horkheimer instead makes clear that automation exhibits the relationship of power between human beings and nature by arguing that, 'Through automation, what is given beforehand in the relationship of domination between man and nature [...] the qualitative change makes visible the things that before nobody saw' (GS14: 253)<sup>200</sup>. What Horkheimer suggests here is that the concept of automation lays bare the irrational dimension of human beings' pursuit of power in the systematic use of violence as

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<sup>199</sup> [1943, *Zur Soziologie der Klassenverhältnisse*]

<sup>200</sup> [1955-1956 *Notizien zur Automation*]

a response to an increasing state of fear. In this view, the logic of automation is to produce things incessantly and give them an existence in themselves without purpose, without a rational purposiveness between their social production and their social purpose. But the existence in themselves given by automation to things is only an irrational identification between the things and the violence that was required to produce them. In the light of this consideration, the logic of automation can be considered as an ontology emerging from a purposeless purposiveness. Let us then see how this logic of automation relates to the destruction of free market in favour of monopolies.

In *The Jews and Europe*, Horkheimer suggests that liberal capitalism is based on the plurality of entrepreneurs, 'a many-headed ruler' requiring labour-forces to expand its industrial plant and increase entrepreneurial profit within the social surplus of production (CTS: 78). The laboriousness implied in the teleology of the social progress and described liberal economic laws and in the economic-theological motive 'no bread without work' has kept together the bourgeois social order (CTS: 79). Therefore, self-mastery has become a necessary process of internalisation of the fear of death for human beings seeking to be integrated in the bourgeois ideology.

In addition to the integration of workers within the consumer market of *petit bourgeois*, the interest of entrepreneurs both in expanding their production and increasing profit then breaks the self-sufficiency of bourgeois autonomy in private ownership as a condition for the development of an ideal rational-moral subject. The bourgeois private factory and the free trade of small entrepreneurs is now replaced by monopolistic corporations and state interventions. The emergence of monopolistic corporations becomes a more useful instrument of domination to manage the industrial production of goods and the permanent unemployment of the great part of population. As Horkheimer notes, 'In the age of monopolies, the investment of more and more new capital no longer promises any increase in profits. The mass of workers, from whose surplus value flows, diminishes in comparison to the apparatus to which it serves' (CTS: 78).

The perversion of the bourgeois private ownership unleashes totalitarian domination, represented by the readiness to make the system work incessantly by enforcing commands and execution of violence. This change in the means of production is then qualitative, but only from the point of view of domination. In the

liberal capitalism of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the means of production was the relationship with capital valorised for the entrepreneur's profit at the expense of the life of labourers. Instead, what counts in post-liberal capitalism is only the readiness of the human being to become an object of domination for the aimless reproduction of domination.

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx understood the relation between the machinery and human labour - automation - as the appropriation by the machinery of human living labour within the labour process aimed at the valorisation of capitalistic social relationship (Marx 1973: 693). Here, the necessary labour process for the valorisation of a capitalist social relationship between the owner of the means of production and the labourer stays within the rule of the private ownership of the means of production. In Horkheimer's view, the ideological bankruptcy of liberalism is the perversion of the labour process whereby it destroys both profit as the purpose for the valorisation of the capitalistic social relationship and its rule of the private ownership. The labour process becomes the aimless adherence to the power of violence or, as Horkheimer states in *The Jews and Europe*, 'The labour market is replaced by coerced labour. If, over the past decades [*the late nineteenth century*], people went from exchange partners to beggars, objects of welfare, now [*end of 1930s*] they become direct objects of domination' (CTS: 80). Automation destroys the ideological foundation of bourgeois private property - i.e. its autonomy - because it no longer requires utopian social order to legitimise its replication. Automation demands only adherence to the scientific formula whereby violence is executed.

In 1941, Pollock referred to this new post-liberal situation as *State Capitalism* by way of explaining that there can no longer be economic laws now that the three main conditions of liberal capitalism have been destroyed (Pollock 1989: 96). First, the balance between the supply and the demand of goods regulated by the market has been replaced by state interventions and mergers of corporations. Second, work employment is now directed by the forces of the vested interests of the state and monopolies of production, rather than by the actual needs of the entrepreneurs to expand their factories. Third, under totalitarian regimes, the ruling groups that entwine the state apparatus and corporate management take the form of what Horkheimer calls 'the structure of rackets' (GS12: 288)<sup>201</sup>.

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<sup>201</sup> [1939-1942, *Die Racket und der Geist*]

The transformation of these conditions of the labour process highlights how living labour is perverted both in the automation and in the meaningless violence of the dissatisfied life of Fascist subject. As Pollock explains, this transformation marks ‘the transition from a predominantly economic era to an essentially political era’ (Pollock 1989: 101). In liberal capitalism, the exchange process of the market guarantees social mediation and identification among bourgeois owners. There is no social mediation in state capitalism but only the rule of command. In Pollock’s view, it is indeed the individual’s political position rather than the extent of his or her private property that determines how much power they have accumulated.

In his essay entitled *The Authoritarian State*, Horkheimer radicalises Pollock’s concept of state capitalism to the extent that the political means of preserving economic life consists in the reduction of both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to resigned objects of unemployment. As Horkheimer concludes, ‘State capitalism is the authoritarian state of the present’ (EFSR: 96). The power of violence assures the integration of any antagonism within the system in a better way than the free competition of liberalism (EFSR: 97).

In Horkheimer’s view then, the adjective *authoritarian* refers to the way in which the power of violence is released towards those who refuse to remain in conformity to meaningless automation: ‘The authoritarian state is repressive in all of its forms [...] it arises out of the exorbitant needs of the power apparatus and the destruction of any initiative on the part of those who ruled: obedience is not so productive’ (EFSR: 102). Thus, the principle of control of economic reproduction is not the free circulation of goods and free trade, but a permanent mobilisation of human beings in readiness to be exploited (EFSR: 103).

But what does this permanent mobilisation refer to? It refers to the readiness of the amorphous social collective to outburst violent anger. By the end of 1920s, Horkheimer had already shown that the impotence of the labourer is no longer his condition of employment as an alienated man who takes upon himself the injustice of the bourgeois order. Like the bourgeois owner, the labourer is instead ‘stranded [gestrandet]’, as a human being resigned to a condition of permanent dissatisfaction because his life as mere object of domination consists in the outburst of violent anger against others (GS2: 369)<sup>202</sup>. The bankruptcy of liberalism thus perverts

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<sup>202</sup> [1926-1931, *Die Gestrandeten*]

living labour and transforms it into automation, but only by making Enlightenment regress within itself.

Horkheimer notes that in liberal capitalism, the bourgeois ideal of the development of personality is accompanied with the fear of failing to become a respectable member of society and an economically independent moral man. In advanced capitalism, conformism to the permanent mobilisation is triggered by the fear of exclusion and of not belonging to the ruling groups of rackets. With their authoritarian commands, rackets preserve the existence of human beings, not in terms of the respectability of their personality but in terms of the readiness to become the objects of domination. As Horkheimer notes in 1943, 'The labelling of all kind of activities as unproductive, together with the constant fear that everything that one does could be useless, seems to make emerge an unconscious angst that all the hectic bustle in the pragmatist society is vain and aimless [*Sisyphusarbeit*]' (GS12: 102)<sup>203</sup>. In such a way, fascist subjects exist only in a world of perversely augmented fear. If one does not adhere to the power of fascist violence, one is excluded in so far as one is a wretched individual, i.e. neither dead nor integrated in the system.

In *The Jews and Europe*, Horkheimer clarifies that the actual destruction of *the other* in national-socialist Germany consists in forcing the Jews down into the *Lumpenproletariat* so that the bankrupt Jews become 'shabby' and neither integrated nor excluded but wretched, we could say (CTS: 91). Here, we find again the processes of levelling and hardening at work. On the one hand, these processes prevent human beings from being wretched, while on the other hand, they enable human beings to boost their feeling of powerfulness by exerting violence even if they do not have gain advantage from it. By the end, rulers and ruled remain stranded, as mere objects of domination.

In any case, whether or not human beings conform to the power of fascist violence, human beings remain wretched within the boundaries of the administrated world where hopelessness is unfolded. What in Kant was the human condition - the perfect spontaneity that conjoins the refusal of warfare and cruelty with the hope for happiness - is demolished by resignation<sup>204</sup>. Human beings discard the bourgeois

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<sup>203</sup> [1943, *Zur Soziologie der Klassenverhältnisse*]

<sup>204</sup> This kind of resignation is well represented as a 'desire of absolute passivity' in which the research group - led by Pollock and Adorno - about the public opinion in Germany in the period after National Socialism sheds light when interviewing participants of the research about the condition of democracy in Germany (Pollock, Adorno et al., 2011: 163).

enlightening process of personality as mere mythology because it does not help them survive under totalitarian domination. Instead, imitation of the stereotyped mode of behaviour of cliques (sports team, classmates, political party etc.) becomes the means of survival in a dehumanised world. The utopia for happiness entangled with the Kantian idea of development of talents is, in Horkheimer's view, destroyed by 'mimicry', meaning the capacity of non-human living beings to protect themselves by resembling other beings (GS12: 91)<sup>205</sup>. The administered world then twists the bourgeois process of spiritualisation and internalisation by augmenting the foundation of the bourgeois cultural resources, which is the fear of death.

Finally, I would suggest that the administered world is conceived here in a twofold way. On the one hand, it is the social disintegration of liberal capitalism. On the other hand, it is the wasteland of a wretched existence marked by what Horkheimer calls 'the blind constellation of power', which whirls around the life of all through automation and conformism (CTS: 86). *No-one* can be called *human* in the bourgeois sense because they can no longer be thought within the antagonism between the autonomous owner of the means of production and labourers to be integrated as an object of welfare. As Horkheimer puts it, *anyone* is a 'follower', ready to be mobilised less for economic profit but to ensure the ruin of those who do not conform to the unreason of the wasteland (CTS: 81). In a certain sense, we could say that the administered world is the Enlightenment that has superseded even Fascism and has become more than totalitarian: a hopeless world.

## 5.5 Concluding remarks

I have discussed how the administered world is a concept that relates to fascist culture. The possibility for a cultural change of the social order is the target of the totalitarian domination. The administered world seeks to destroy it through the perversion of bourgeois culture.

I have shown that this argument is intrinsic to Horkheimer's analysis of the twilight of bourgeois hope and in the analysis of advanced capitalism as fascism. The peculiar methodological combination between history and the negative discursively use of psychoanalytic concepts enables Horkheimer to frame a negative-materialist critique of the human condition in the post-war Western society. The investigation

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<sup>205</sup> [1943, *Zur Soziologie der Klassenverhältnisse*]

takes perversion to be the intrinsic violence of bourgeois culture, which is unleashed through an endless internalisation of the fear of death. This violence emerges without its idealist masks once the bourgeois struggle for emancipation against the feudal system has faded away in favour of the increased affirmation of bourgeois power. Horkheimer sees this perversion at work in the augmentation of bourgeois ideology of humanity and its utopia for happiness. The perversion of these cultural resources transforms the bourgeois idealism of hope for happiness into a meaningless conformism to the replication of the systematic violence of fascist politics. Fascism and the administered world are hence two concepts that refer to the representation of the complete success of this perversion. Fascism is a way of life marked by streamlined anti-Semitism - i.e. the outburst of anger against those who do not conform to the violence of domination practices - while the administered world refers to the purposeless purposiveness of conformism in a hopeless life.

As we will discuss in the following and final chapter, Horkheimer frames the longing for the totally other as the possibility to emancipate from the administered world by deactivating its power logic. The unrepresentability of this deactivation in a positive image of what the coming world will be constitute the politics of the unspoken.

# Chapter 6

## The unspoken and longing for the totally other

### 6.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I will explore how Horkheimer contrasts the notion of longing for the totally other with the concept of administered world. In doing so, I will show that the notion of longing for the totally other indicates the possibility of an emancipation from the administered world. This human emancipation is thought as a critique of propositional language and critique of injustice. The former is conceived by Horkheimer as a critique of the copula; the latter as a critique of any representations of the good.

In unfolding this twofold critique of language and injustice, Horkheimer draws on the theological doctrines in order to speak about possible practices that depose power. Here the influence of Schopenhauer's philosophy and the Judaic prohibition of any graven image inform how Horkheimer imagines the human emancipation. In Schopenhauer's style, Horkheimer draws on theological doctrines to find a metaphorical language that helps to checkmate the logic of instrumental reason. The unrepresentability of the image of God in Judaism is instead conceived as the possibility of giving expression to the elimination of injustice, without making such an elimination the ground for a positive image of justice.

I will conclude then that this impossibility to think about a positive image of a better world informs what I call the politics of the unspoken, a politics that is theoretically conceived as an identification without identity, guided both by the negativity of non-resistance (*Nichtwiderstreben*) and by a sensitivity (*Empfindlichkeit*) to the life of others. The reading of Horkheimer's late thought as a politics of the unspoken gives us the opportunity to begin a dialogue with Agamben's notions of 'destituent potential' and 'contact'. Overall, the possibility of such a dialogue will help us to think of a culture without power, much as Horkheimer wished it.

### 6.2 Beyond instrumental reason

In Chapter 1, I observed that after the Second World War, Max Horkheimer's critical theory moved towards a critique of instrumental reason. The theoretical background that informed such a critique was his perception that the totalitarian regime of National Socialist Germany had been defeated but the instrumentality of power had not been erased. In Chapter 5, we saw that Horkheimer viewed fascist culture as a perversion of bourgeois culture. The bourgeois utopia to conjoin scientific and moral progress in the ideology of humanity had then been destroyed by a purposeless augmentation of the bourgeois practices which systematised knowledge through science and internalised fear of death. The purposeless purposiveness that governs this destruction is the essence of fascist culture. But, as discussed in Chapter 5, Horkheimer points to meaningless self-preservation and social conformism as the forms of power which persist in the advanced capitalism of post-war Western countries. Let us briefly recap how these two cultural forms are described.

As for the meaningless self-preservation, human beings are prompted to put their labour at disposal of the instrumentality of the social system because they exist in a capitalist social relationship devoid of purpose in so far as human labour does not have any meaning except for guaranteeing the mere survival. As for social conformism, human beings fear failing to be integrated into the system because the pervasive domination of the social system overwhelms their possibility to live autonomously from the system. In short, they fear that if they are not integrated, they will be stranded, wretched.

After the end of the Second World War, Horkheimer's description of fascist culture as a purposeless purposiveness brings him to think about political problems as cultural problems. Here the problem might be put as this: If the fascists were politically defeated with the end of the war, how can we avoid that the purposeless purposiveness continues in post-war European countries in disguise? In other words, how can we defeat the fascist cultural heritage by deactivating the instrumentality that characterised them?

The short answer is that Horkheimer wants to conceive a human emancipation able to overcome meaningless self-preservation and social conformism, so deposing any persisting logic of power. Such an emancipation would be indeed both a liberation from the existent constellation of power relationships and from any pursuit of power. Horkheimer thinks that the way to put in practice this emancipation is to

question why progressive thought - Enlightenment - has dismissed its ultimate goal: to liberate human beings from any order of oppression and fear.

In political terms then, Horkheimer confronts his late thought with the question of whether, in advanced capitalism, human beings can still critically find a reason (or a meaning, a sense) to stand up critically against domination and injustice, or whether they can only act instinctively as conformist. He makes this point clearly in a text from 1965 where he criticises how the politics of the Left in post-war Western countries have aimed only to improve the welfare of people's life regardless of the costs demanded by the pursuit of such a politics in terms of violence and injustices (GS14: 365)<sup>206</sup>. In his view, political groups in post-war European countries seeking to express an opposition to the logic of power of advanced capitalism end up being trapped in the same logic that they wish to supersede. These political parties or groups of the Western bloc simply seek immediate responses to the material interests of their supporters because they think that in this way, they will not remain isolated in the system and unable to access power.

Horkheimer thus takes oppositional politics, especially those organised in institutional party politics, to end in bad compromises with the existing order of power<sup>207</sup>. Horkheimer emphasises this point in strict specific terms by referring to the politics pursued by the post-war Western German governments which were led by the conservative party (CDU) in the 1950s and 1960s. Horkheimer identifies the German Social Democrats (SPD) as the oppositional political group who might represent one possible political actualisation of progressive thought in post-war Germany. Why does Horkheimer think that the German Social Democrats might represent a possible actualisation for progressive thought?

Before answering this question, we should recall that, in Horkheimer's view, progressive thought should be addressed against the social injustices caused by advanced capitalism. However, this task does not consist in overcoming bourgeois culture *tout court* but in deactivating the reactionary traits which have led it to fascism. Progressive thought should keep some of the good traits of bourgeois cultural forms such as the free development of productive forces according to one's own attitudes<sup>208</sup>. In Horkheimer's view, progressive thought is not a rejection of the

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<sup>206</sup> [1957-1967, *Eine neue Politik der Linken?*]

<sup>207</sup> [1968, *Keine echte Alternative für eine unabhängige Opposition*]

<sup>208</sup> See the references to the preface of *Critique of Instrumental Reason* in Chapter 1.

bourgeois culture as radical groups of the left in the late 1960s intended it (D&D: 233)<sup>209</sup>. For Horkheimer, progressive thought entails critical theory which, while clarifying what is to be changed still preserves some cultural moments helping to keep thought free from domination (GS7: 345)<sup>210</sup>. The cultural moments to be preserved are the forms of bourgeois culture - e.g. such as the free development of personality -, which display an idea of the human in its negative and progressive sense, where human beings are liberated from fear and oppression.

Horkheimer understands that a critique which is meant to be useful to progressive thought only shows the failure of the Social Democrats to achieve what is to be human in the negative-progressive sense of the term. Put in more practical terms, the Social Democrats' main concern is to pursue a politics that improves the social conditions of work quantitatively through better conditions, better salaries, better standards of life for workers and giving them more purchasing power. But in doing so, they fail to liberate human beings from fear and oppression:

If we could only say that we are fighting a rearguard action. We could perhaps indicate that people are not yet fully aware that they are heading for a situation compared to which Nazism was a relatively modest affair. If we were to tell the Social Democrats today that they should become Communists, that would be quite harmless. But if we were to tell them that they had betrayed bourgeois ideals, that would cease to be so harmless, because the Social Democrats represent the good conscience of our world. We don't want people to say that our writings are so terribly radical. Whoever does not work should not be allowed to eat - that's the point at which we must attack the Social Democrats. We must not say 'you did not want the dictatorship of the proletariat', but 'you have betrayed mankind'. Simply to utter the words 'dictatorship of the proletariat' is to form an alliance with Carlo Schmid and Mao Zedong' (TNM: 59,60).

Horkheimer's critique of the German Social Democrats is that they appear to succeed in pursuing quantitative improvements to standards of life but fail to bring about human emancipation in the possibility of a culture without power and oppression. For Horkheimer, to help progressive thought means insisting with the Social Democrats in reminding them this failure. Indeed, for Horkheimer, the increase of the standards of life occurs with a perversion of the ultimate goal of progressive thought: the equation of the purchasing power and spare-time with the liberation from oppression and labour. In this sense, progressive thought does not liberate human beings from fear of death but distorts the fear of death into the fear of being excluded from the social whole.

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<sup>209</sup> [1966-69, *Gegen den Linksradikalismus*]

<sup>210</sup> [1970, *Was wir Sinn nennen, wird verschwinden*]

Horkheimer thinks that the Social Democrats do not accomplish their task of being progressive because their politics remains entrenched with instrumentality of advanced capitalism. Horkheimer takes the politics of full employment as an example. Social Democrats pursue a politics oriented towards identifying a better quality of life with an increase in the power of workers to accumulate consumer goods, spare time and command upon the labour of other human beings. Here accumulation means maximising the advantages derived from the capitalist social relationship. Accumulation is the attempt to gain more power from another's labour by objectifying it in the acquired quantity of material or immaterial things (e.g. consumer goods and leisure time). The politics of full employment is hence finalised to improve the social conditions of human beings by giving them an employment, a place of work in which they receive a remuneration for their work in terms of an increase in the purchasing power. The logic of the politics of full employment can be summarised as it follows then: if each member of society has an employment, then everyone is integrated in the system and will make sense of their life in the continuous replication of the system. In this way, the instrumentality remains untouched and the system keeps on going.

For Horkheimer, the goal of politics in this logic of full employment is to employ human beings so as to integrate them as consumers whose power consists in the act of purchasing and enjoying the possession of the object purchased<sup>211</sup>. This purchasing power derives from the ability of the workers to comply with their employment. From this perspective, the expropriation of the direct production of things from the labour of the producer - that is, establishing a meaningful connection between one's labour and his private property of things - does not end with a liberation from it and the beginning of a classless society; that is, communism<sup>212</sup>. Such an expropriation is indeed strengthened through the following perversion: the potential of bourgeois man to accumulate the power to dispose of another's labour for the valorisation of his own private property is distorted into the possibility that anyone can increase the power to purchase consumer goods by subduing their labour to the employment found in the social system.

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<sup>211</sup> 'The young worker on the motorbike treats work as his god because he enjoys riding the bike so much' (TNM: 7)

<sup>212</sup> The process of such expropriation is what Marx described as the primitive accumulation of capital in Chapter 24 of the first volume of Capital.

In advanced capitalism, the power to accumulate thus indicates the promptness of human beings to be integrated in the system by emptying themselves of any meaning except for their adaptation to the violent instrumentality of the system. In a 1953 note entitled 'The Age of Full Employment is the Age of the New Barbarism', Horkheimer remarks what he stated in *Jews and Europe* and *the Authoritarian State*: society is not oriented to economic profit but to integrate anyone in the social system by finding anyone an employment. As Horkheimer put it '[the politics of] full employment raises the standards of life but does not put aside fear [Angst]. Unemployment becomes a stigma when it is endured not by countless many but for a minority' (GS14: 227).

The political goal of full employment enables human beings to identify themselves with the social system through instrumentality. Human beings are brought to identify themselves as interchangeable singularities, emptied of any meaning, apart from being integrated into the system as employees. Horkheimer outlines this social identification with the emergence of a new type of middleclass constituted by interchangeable employees (GS8: 112)<sup>213</sup>. Here, the term 'middleclass' does not refer to a social class condition ranked between the working class and the bourgeois class but it points to an amorphous collective or an aggregate of human beings without purpose and a clear form. What keeps human beings together in this amorphous collective is the fear of being hopeless if they are excluded from it.

As we have described in Chapter 5 with Pollock's notion of state capitalism, the power of human beings to accumulate in the advanced capitalism is not based on the economic laws of profit, as it occurred in liberal capitalism, but is dependent on political power. In Horkheimer's view, this political power is concretised in a politics that leverages the fear of human beings of not belonging to amorphous collective.

To simplify Horkheimer's view, human beings become object both of welfare politics and of social domination in the advanced capitalism because they are not able to escape a condition of being a meaningless singularity of an amorphous middleclass, a 'covetous mob'<sup>214</sup>. As we saw in Chapter 5, such a condition is one of hopelessness, where human life has meaning only in the collective approval to bring another human being into ruin.

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<sup>213</sup> [1958, Die gesellschaftliche Lage der Angestellten]

<sup>214</sup> See Chapter 5 for reference.

### 6.3 Politics and negative materialism

Having seen how Horkheimer sheds light on the perversion of bourgeois culture in advanced capitalism to help progressive thought and political progressive groups pursue their ultimate goal, let us now make clear how, on this point, Horkheimer departs partially from Marx's materialist description of the capitalist social relationship.

For Horkheimer, the capitalist social relationship in the advanced capitalism is not representable in the historical antagonism between the labourer and the capitalist in the style of Marx. The representation of this historical antagonism informs the teleological horizon of the liberation from coerced labour. Such a liberation was indicated by Marx as the actualisation of human being's enjoyment to transform nature according to their productive forces, without estranging such a transformation into a private property<sup>215</sup>. Communism in Marx was this positive transcendence of private property and can be summarised in two moments. The first moment is the interruption of the self-estrangement taking place in human work for private property through the class consciousness of those who are not private owners. Labourers become conscious that their social condition of self-estrangement is caused by the exploitation and expropriation of their labour force by the capitalists. This first moment brings about revolution, the violent break of the bourgeois capitalist social relationship. The second moment is then the actualisation of a classless society - or the realm of freedom in Marx's vocabulary - where the human work is no longer domination over nature and other human beings.

In the chapter entitled *The Trinity Formula* of the third book of *Capital*, Marx indeed defines the realm of freedom as a classless society in which work is both the end of the capitalist power relationship and the end of the fatigue necessary for the mere self-preservation<sup>216</sup>. Horkheimer understands Marx's notion of the realm of freedom as freedom from labour. As Horkheimer said in a 1970 interview, 'The realm of freedom means that human thinking is no longer determined by the confrontation with nature but is totally free and that only in this way human beings

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<sup>215</sup> See Chapter 1 for the discussion about Marx's idea of communism and Horkheimer's criticism of it.

<sup>216</sup> 'The realm of freedom really begins only where labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends; it lies its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper' (Marx 1981: 958, 959).

can really develop' (GS7: 370)<sup>217</sup>. In another interview, Horkheimer indeed agrees with Marx about the pursuit of freedom from labour and appreciates that Marx avoids depicting his idea of realm of freedom in a clear positive image (GS7: 458)<sup>218</sup>. Horkheimer's point of disagreement with Marx's notion of the realm of freedom is not only determined by the different social-historical contexts of the two philosophers but also by their evaluation about the motivations why human beings should pursue the actualisation of a social life free from labour.

Given the reflections of Horkheimer about advanced capitalism, he thus questions how a politics of emancipation from power might be motivated if power integrates human beings as meaningless singularities by turning the desire for freedom from labour into the desire for freedom to accumulate<sup>219</sup>?

In Horkheimer's view, this motivation should not be represented historically as the actualisation of a prospective final goal; that is, communism as the solution of history. Horkheimer sees in this type of representation as reminiscent of the bourgeois desire to represent a utopia of positive images<sup>220</sup>. Instead, Horkheimer thinks that this motivation should be represented as the missed actualisation of the task of progressive thought to achieve human liberation from fear and oppression. Horkheimer then clarifies that the difference between him and Marx is not in the desire for a freedom from work but in the representation of this freedom as the goal of history. Horkheimer explains this difference between him and Marx by using theological concepts. Theology, broadly conceived as the discourse -logos- about the divine -theos-, helps to frame the freedom from labour not merely as a transitory political goal but as the ultimate political goal. The reference to theology hence gives the notion of freedom from labour the meaning of a goal worthy of being achieved because its achievement will bring a divine-like fulfilment to the social life of human beings.

In this view, the reference to theology helps Horkheimer to express his and Marx's different motivation for the pursuit of freedom from labour. Horkheimer clarifies it in a 1970 interview: 'I have the feeling that Marx is determined by the messianism

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<sup>217</sup> [1970, *Verwaltete Welt*]

<sup>218</sup> [1972, *Das Schlimme erwarten und doch das Gute versuchen*]

<sup>219</sup> Horkheimer posits this question in his own terms 'If I am already well, why should I make further effort to develop my personality?' (GS7: 459)

<sup>220</sup> See the notes of 1956-1968 *The Three Mistakes of Marx and Marx as a Phase* (D&D), the note of 1961 *Marx and Liberalism* (D&D), the 1968 note *Das Wunder und die Sehnsucht nach dem Anderen* (GS14) and the 1968 paper *Marx Heute* (GS8). See also the first part of 1971 interview *Zur Zukunft der Kritischen Theorie* (GS7: 421-422)

of Judaism, while for me the main issue is that God is not representable and that this dimension of irrepresentability is the object of longing' (GS7: 398)<sup>221</sup>

Here, Horkheimer departs from Marxism. Critical theory is not messianic because it does not represent an ultimate goal of human being's life as the solution of history. Critical theory instead takes the impossibility to know the ultimate meaning of life as the limit of human beings' experience. Therefore, critical theory agrees with the Judaic prohibition of any graven image and the Kantian teaching of the impossibility of knowing the thing in itself (GS14: 507)<sup>222</sup>. In Horkheimer's view, Marx's materialism resembles Judaic messianism because Marx represents the motivation to pursue a moment of liberation by setting a logic for history - class struggle as the engine of history - which will then predict how this liberation will occur practically through human beings' actions. Horkheimer's thought is that the moment of liberation is not representable and least of all with a revolutionary action. In Horkheimer's view, revolution will not give the certainty that there will be no relapse into the old order of domination.

In advanced capitalism, human beings have distorted the possibility of the freedom from labour by transforming an indeterminate experience into the sacred experience of a sacrifice; namely by sacrificing the actualisation of freedom from labour in order to grapple with their fear of death. As Horkheimer states in a 1956 conversation with Adorno that 'people repress their own chaotic drives which might lead them away from work. This is what makes them feel that work is sacred' (TNM: 16). In advanced capitalism, the representation of the freedom from labour as the solution of the history of class struggle becomes, for Horkheimer, a way of grappling with the irrational dimension of human beings' life, the confrontation of human beings with death (GS6: 373)<sup>223</sup>.

In advanced capitalism the missed actualisation of a freedom from labour is not an issue of technological progress or the quantitative improvement of welfare but, in Horkheimer's view, the renunciation of human beings of put in practice the ultimate goal of progressive thought, liberation from fear (DE:41). Human beings renounce the meaning of progressive thought, but they do not deny its technological advantages brought by science and industry. In this way, Horkheimer stresses that they renounce any experience which remains indeterminate from the logic of power

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<sup>221</sup> [1970, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*]

<sup>222</sup> [1968, *Kritische Theorie und Theologie*]

<sup>223</sup> [1961-62 *Gegen die Verdrängung des Todes*]

and turns the indeterminacy into social conformism (DE: 99). In his view, if the confrontation of human beings with death results in the longing to make one's own life free from any pursuit of power and freed from fear of death, then freedom from labour may possibly produce freedom from the logics of power.

In my view, Horkheimer proposes a politics of the unspoken because he wants to highlight that progressive thought can accomplish its task of liberating human beings from oppression only if it liberates human beings from transforming death into the measure of life. In the advanced capitalism of post-war Western European countries, progressive thought and critical theory hence have the same task of making possible an identification among human beings devoid both of logic of power and of fear of death. Horkheimer speaks about non-conformism as the genuine solidarity of human beings, an identification devoid of logic of power (D&D: 240)<sup>224</sup>. A genuine, non-conformist solidarity between human beings cannot only derive from a consciousness of their social condition of being oppressed by an order of domination which they have created. The possibility of this solidarity requires human beings to make meaning from their life by being conscious of their condition of powerlessness and the transience of their existence.

A politics of progressive thought is then a politics of the unspoken, which brings to light both the logic of power concretised in social life and the elements of fear which pervades the logic of power. As a concept in Horkheimer's late thought, negation is then the key mode of thinking and practising such a politics and solidarity. Non-conformism indicates the possibility of a solidarity among human beings able to confront social reality critically by unveiling its contradictions and irrational dimensions. In Horkheimer's view, progressive thought engaging with advanced capitalism should find concretisations in a group of human beings who are 'clear-sighted': they will not turn away from the negativity of social life but denounce it (D&D: 166)<sup>225</sup>.

On the one hand, progressive thought should unmask the domination taking place in society by highlighting the contradictions that those representations of society exclude. On the other hand, progressive thought should denounce the use of violence in the pursuit of power because, by implementing in human beings the fear

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<sup>224</sup> [1966-69 *Für den Non-konformismus*]

<sup>225</sup> [1959-1960, *Für eine Assoziation der Hellsichtigen*]

of being socially wretched, violence and its systematisation in cultural forms stifle the consciousness that human existence is transient.

Horkheimer clarifies that his critical theory stands against the continuous regression of progressive thought within itself. Groups who want to accomplish the task of progressive thought should stop complying with the instrumentality of the system. Instead, they should open the dimension of the human by highlighting the powerlessness of human beings and confronting the moment of death without consolatory compromises. In short, they should be pessimists. The notion of pessimism in Horkheimer's view does not refer to state of mind which does not see the possibility of a better world. In simple words, pessimism does not mean to feel sorry for oneself and live in this state of gloomy despair. Instead, pessimism means becoming conscious of the perversion of social life in advanced capitalism and attempting to overcome this perversion by standing the inevitable contradictions that such a social life presents to us.

To open the dimension of the human in this negative-pessimist sense is in Horkheimer's view the mode to rescue progressive thought from its self-destruction in a time when instrumental thought has become the idol for society (GS7: 232)<sup>226</sup>. The notion of the human here is a negative concept against instrumentality and in favour of the actualisation of the good.

We need to move to a more philosophical vocabulary to understand how this idea of the human informs critical theory as a theory that pursues the good by denouncing the negative. Critical theory cannot seek the motivational resources to pursue the good in dialectical thought - whether dialectical thought is idealist or materialist conceived. The overcoming of the negativity - the suffering and the fatigue of human beings - cannot be thought as a determinate moment within the same logic that causes the negativity. All the concepts used by Horkheimer to define the instrumentality of the human condition in advanced capitalism -e.g. fascism, the administered world, anti-Semitism, the authoritarian state, hopelessness - suggest the impossibility of providing within themselves the resources by which human beings can supersede the instrumentality historically.

In Schopenhauerian fashion, Horkheimer turns to theology to find examples of religious practices that confront negativity without confining them to abstract

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<sup>226</sup> 'non-unoptimistic [human] praxis which, mindful of the universal bad [universalen Schlechten], can anyway improve what is possible [das Mögliche]' [1971, *Pessimismus heute*].

concepts. Such religious practices are considered as metaphorical testimonies for a life without power. In this perspective, Horkheimer turns to the religious dimension of Judaism to find a non-logical cultural resource of negation. He draws on the Judaic prohibition of any graven image to describe the impossibility of defining what a world of liberation by violence and oppression will be. In the Judaic unrepresentability of God, Horkheimer sees the possibility of an idea of the human which remains incommensurable because it does not concede to any form of violence or pursuit of power. In the Judaic unrepresentability of the name of God, Horkheimer and Adorno see a denunciation of the injustice of the world as it is then constituting a resistance to making an image of the good society through the denunciation of this idol:

In Jewish religion, in which the idea of the patriarchate culminates in the destruction of the myth, the bond between the name and being is still recognised in the ban on pronouncing the name of God. The disenchanted world of Judaism conciliates magic by negating it in the idea of God. Jewish religion allows no word that would alleviate the despair of all that is mortal. It associates hope only with the prohibition against calling on what is false as God, against invoking the finite as the infinite, lies as truth. The guarantee of salvation lies in the rejection of any belief that would replace it: it is knowledge obtained in the denunciation of illusion (DE: 23)

Horkheimer and Adorno makes clear that the Judaic prohibition of graven image echoes Hegel's determinate negation insofar as it denounces the falsehood by unpacking the domination in the formation of concepts. Determinate negation is part of dialectics, as the dialogue between human beings that say something about reality. Like Hegel, Horkheimer and Adorno think that any thoughts, as a particular activity of a singular individual, contains already the premises of its falsehood. Differently from Hegel, they think that the admission of this falsehood is the feature of dialectical thought and that dialectics is not a reconciliation in an absolute knowledge (DE: 24). We can see that, in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno agree on the role of determinate negation as a negation from which contradiction emerges and remains insoluble in any positive idea of truth. In contrast to Adorno's negative dialectics, Horkheimer's late critical theory is more focused on the possibility of overcoming instrumental thought and think about of an identification in negativity<sup>227</sup>.

We have indeed seen that Horkheimer makes clear that the denunciation of injustice and determinate negation help to unmask the power relationship and domination

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<sup>227</sup> See chapter 2.

practices which influences social life in advanced capitalism. In political terms, if we only pursue an improvement in the welfare of human being's life by focusing on immediate practical issues, we do not liberate human beings from fear and oppression but, in the best case, make their life more comfortable in a state of oppression. In Horkheimer's view, to deactivate the instrumental logic of advanced capitalism without renouncing the achievement in the quality of life is possible by highlighting the powerlessness of human beings in their project of gaining power over everything and everyone in the world. Powerlessness is a concept that indicates the limit of human beings not only in their bodily perception and mental apparatus but in their possibility to make change in the historical-social circumstances of their life-time. Horkheimer hence turns to Schopenhauer to find a negation that is not commensurable to a logical scheme because it points to the powerless condition of human beings, which consists of their incapacity to make meaning of death without turning the latter into a justification to pursue power. In my view, it is through Schopenhauer's metaphysics that Horkheimer conceives of an incommensurable negation to add to the thought of determinate negation.

In the style of Schopenhauer's metaphorical thinking, Horkheimer draws on the theological teachings of Judaic and Christian religion to use them as discourse reminding human beings of the transience of their life and the futility of achieving power in their life. In this way, Horkheimer's late thought is not a religious turn to find mystical or religious practices that provide a unified sense to critical theory<sup>228</sup>. In his late thought, there is the theoretical attempt to think rationally a possibility to rescue Enlightenment from its instrumentality by highlighting the double genesis of progressive thought: suffering both as the result of social oppression and because of the mortality of human beings. From the late thought of Horkheimer emerges then a twofold negation. The first negation denounces the contradictions of human being's pursuit of power and the second negation highlights the pursuit of power as derived from the fear of death.

In this twofold conceptualisation of negation, an idea of human emancipation emerges which belongs to the enigmatic notion of the longing for the totally other. In the next section, we will see how this notion emerges as the negative possibility to conjoin a critique of language with a critique of injustice.

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<sup>228</sup> 'Thought becomes illusionary whenever it seeks to deny the divisive function, distancing, and objectification. All mystic unification remains deception, the impotently inward trace of absolved revolution' (DE: 39).

## 6.4 Theology, critique of language and injustice

In the introduction of the thesis, I have described how the late thought of Horkheimer seeks a theological idea that could be applied to a rational theory of society in order to highlight the limit of human knowledge. The adjective ‘rational’ qualifies a theory that is critical to the practices of domination and works in deposing their power.

Indeed, we have seen that Horkheimer expresses a notion of theology without referring to a theological doctrine or to a religion. As he remarks in a 1970 interview, ‘we cannot give foundations to a new religion. The old confessions may survive and be effective in the admission that they do not express a dogma but a longing’ (GS7: 351)<sup>229</sup>. For Horkheimer, theology refers to the awareness that the world is representation. This awareness can be at the base of a language expressing a longing, and precisely the ‘longing for this, that the murder might not triumph over the innocent victim’<sup>230</sup>.

Horkheimer employs the term ‘longing’ as a vehicle for a propositional language that does not want to say how reality is once and for all but seeks to transform reality for the good, where the good is the possibility of a culture without domination. A propositional language driven by the longing for the good would be a language through which arguments will be both stances for practical goals concerning how to improve the world while also expressing the interest of the speaker in making the world a better place<sup>231</sup>.

The German word for longing is *Sehnsucht*, which denotes not merely a wish but an urgent desire towards something, a desire that traverses all the individual and his life<sup>232</sup>. As the main morpheme in the word, *Sucht* means a ‘sake’ driven by an urgent desire - the verb *Sehnen* in the suffix - and so to a desireful tension in human beings<sup>233</sup>. This tension is the continuous expression of a desire for something that is not actual and for which those who long continue to strive. The meaning of this not-

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<sup>229</sup> [1970, *Was wir Sinn nennen wird verschwinden*]

<sup>230</sup> See introduction for the reference

<sup>231</sup> See the conversation with Adorno of 24th of March 1956 when Horkheimer states ‘One can argue only if there is a practical implication behind it’ (TNM: 67)

<sup>232</sup> The verb *sehnen* (to long) is not transitive. It requires to preposition *nach* (towards) to indicate the object of the longing. In tis view, *sehnen* express an idea of desire as a tension.

<sup>233</sup> in German, *Sucht* also means addiction

actuality is then given by Horkheimer when he locates negation in propositional language.

The late thought of Horkheimer hence shows linguistic negation - to say *not* - in a twofold dimension: the first type of negation is the expression of a dialogue while the second is the expression of an incommensurable singularity<sup>234</sup>. The first type of negation is the moment in which contradictions emerge in human being's consciousness as the tension between how human beings takes meaning from their social world and their will to change it possibly for the good. This type of negation is conceived in the style of Hegel's determinate negation and helps Horkheimer to express the idea that truth can emerge only through language.

The upshot is that truth may emerge through the possibility that the speaker can negate propositions in interaction with other human beings. Horkheimer hence intends negation as a possibility of language in which sentences are propositions; that is, sentences which are oriented to seek and claim the truth (GS7: 302)<sup>235</sup>. Here, negation is the possibility to give expression of contradictions through propositions and it is oriented to the truth, regardless of the intentions of the speakers involved in the dialogue<sup>236</sup>.

Indeed, this type of negation is only possible through the interaction with another person, in a dialogue (GS7: 302)<sup>237</sup>. This dialogue entails the possibility of truth because it follows the dialectical logic of contradictions. To recall the discussion in chapter 1, Horkheimer does not think that this logic of contradiction remains in the content of propositions. Instead, the logic of contradictions makes meaning in reference to the historical and social practice and the subjective experience of the individual<sup>238</sup>.

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<sup>234</sup> In Chapter 4 I described how Horkheimer conceives negation as a philosophical negation. Here I described how this philosophical negation is concretised in his linguistic use.

<sup>235</sup> 'Each sentence (Satz) that we bespeak must - whether we mean it or not - seek and claim [beanspruchen] to be simply the true' [1969, *Dialog über Dialog*].

<sup>236</sup> As Horkheimer makes clear in his 1935 essay *On the Problem of Truth* 'The truth is also valid for whoever contradicts it, ignores it, declares it unimportant. Truth is decided not by individual's beliefs and opinions, not by the subject in itself, but by the relation of propositions to reality, and when someone imagines himself the messenger of God or the rescuer of people, the matter is not decided by him or even by the majority of his fellows, but by the relation of his assertions and acts to the objective facts of the rescue'

<sup>237</sup> 'A sentence, taken alone, cannot be simply truth, because the truth is the whole. A sentence needs consequently a reply by which its limitation, its partial falsehood [Unwahrheit] becomes visible. Therefore, the one who negates is necessary, at best in another Person' [1969, *Dialog über Dialog*].

<sup>238</sup> See Horkheimer's essay *On the Problem of Truth* when stating: 'Dialectical logic includes the principle of contradiction, but in materialism it has completely stripped off its metaphysical character, because here a static system of propositions about reality, indeed any relation of concept and object not historically mediated, no longer appears meaningful as an idea. Dialectical logic in

The second type of negation is instead the expression of an incommensurate singularity. Here, language is understood not as a tool to say something but as an acting which expresses human beings' will. This type of negation is conceived in the style of Schopenhauer's metaphysics and enables Horkheimer to show that language is also an action which says something about the subject who speaks (GS7: 304)<sup>239</sup>. Indeed, Horkheimer uses negation to lay bare an irrational dimension between language and action. In his view, this dimension says something about how human beings are. Therefore, this second type of negation shows how propositional language entails an incommensurable dimension, which is related not to so much to the content of the proposition but to the subject who acts<sup>240</sup>.

In the light of the twofold use of negation, we can see how Horkheimer draws on theology to exert a critique of propositional language. In Horkheimer's view, propositions do not establish how the things in themselves are and but express a longing for the impossibility of this knowledge. Theology is then necessary to think a language that is devoid of power; that is, devoid of any claim to know things in themselves.

In Horkheimer's view, the divine, *theos*, refers to the impossibility of human beings knowing the things in themselves. The discourse, *logos*, through which we can represent the divine is a language traversed by a longing for the good, for a better world. From this perspective, theology is a discourse that shows the awareness of the idea that the world of human beings is the world of appearances. This awareness is the manifestation of human beings who thinks the divine. The divine is the possibility of a longing for a better world because human beings create meaning of the presence of other human beings. As Horkheimer states 'a longing for this, that the injustice which marks the world shall not remain, that the injustice may not be the last word. This longing belongs to the human being who thinks effectually [wirklich]' (GS7: 350)<sup>241</sup>.

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no way invalidates the rules of understanding [Verstand]. While it has as its subject the forms of movement of the advancing cognitive process, the breaking up and restructuring of fixed systems and categories also belongs within its scope along with the coordination of all intellectual forces as an impetus to human practice in general.' (BPSS: 193)

<sup>239</sup> 'I believe that an expression sticks also to actual doing [Tun], in actual doing there is something which is not so unimportant for the person who acts' [1969, *Dialog über Dialog*].

<sup>240</sup> 'He [human being] acts and by acting he becomes able [vermag] to say something [...] This is not only an event, an happening, but this is also a direct [unmittelbar] expression [...] Language and soing can not be so radically divided [1969, *Dialog über Dialog*].

<sup>241</sup> [1970, *Was wir Sinn nennen wird verschwinden*]

By moving his focus towards theology, Horkheimer seeks to bind together the awareness that the world is representation with a practice: the longing for a better world moves the physical and intellectual forces of human beings towards the liberation from injustice. The injustice is derived from the systematisation of violence in language and from their concretisation in the cultural forms preserving and increasing social domination. If thought and language are liberated from violence and domination, then human emancipation may occur in the form of the deposition of power.

In this view, theology - the discourse about the divine - is the linguistic expression of the longing for a world without injustice. Theology helps to exert a critique of propositional language, which theory alone is not able to perform in advanced capitalism. The social-historical practices of advanced capitalism turn propositional language into a tool of power to assert absolute truth through the vocabulary of positivist science. The object that is submitted to critique is the idea that a language without a longing for the good may be a language which claims to know the things in themselves. A language devoid of this longing makes a violent direct correspondence between the name and the thing. The logic of this language is to make propositions instrumental to power and not dialectically related to truth. In details, Horkheimer thinks that the copulative function of the verb *to be* is the linguistic form in which the violence appears as systematised in language.

In a 1942 paper entitled *Original Sin and The Copula* which was preparatory for *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer sheds light on the function of the copula as a predicate that immortalises reality as such (GS12: 277). Here, the theological doctrine of the original sin is employed to help to understand how, within propositional language, the verb *to be* can operate to make reality appear as immutable and already given. Horkheimer then performs a positive evaluation of Schopenhauer's understanding of the Biblical myth of the original sin (GS7: 391)<sup>242</sup>.

The myth of original sin expresses the idea of the free will metaphorically narrated in the Biblical Genesis as the choice to eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden. Here the idea of free will is read by Horkheimer as the means of emancipation from an apparently immutable state of subjugation, which is

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<sup>242</sup> [1970, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*]. See Chapter 4 for Schopenhauer's interpretation of the original sin.

metaphorically represented as the obedience to God's command not to eat the fruit<sup>243</sup>. Hence, free will is represented as a means of emancipation, i.e. of negation. In the light of this interpretation of the original sin, the copula symbolises the power to cover violence as the non-logical origin of language.

For Horkheimer, language as such - that is, the possibility to communicate through propositions is 'incomprehensible [unverständlich]' because the copula itself is incomprehensible (GS12: 277). To clarify, what is incomprehensible in language is the violence entangled in human being's use of the copula to establish power by making identities appear as given and immutable. From this perspective, the problem of propositional language is the copula, meaning the function of the verb *to be* when it is followed by a noun or adjective<sup>244</sup>. For Horkheimer, the world represented by words becomes intelligible under the category of the copulative function of the verb *to be*.

For Horkheimer, the copula bears the mark of the violence of social domination, which aims to bring the world under its control by signifying it. Indeed, Horkheimer indicates that the relation of power and copula is intrinsic in the history of Western philosophy<sup>245</sup>.

However, Horkheimer sees in Kant's a priori synthetic judgements and Hegel's determinate negation two paradoxical ways to move the copula away from power. They are attempts to open a dimension that is unspoken by power. This dimension is unspoken because it is a negation that challenges power by seeking to remain incommensurable to it. Horkheimer sheds light on this unspoken dimension by taking the negative reading of the myth of the original sin as a litmus test for his argument.

For Horkheimer, a priori synthetic judgements represent the attempt in Kant's philosophy to think about the propositions that are ampliative to knowledge (synthetic) and independent from empirical experience (GS12: 278)<sup>246</sup>. A priori synthetics judgements do not unify in synthesis two different representations, as in the case of a posteriori synthetic judgments, e.g. 'all bodies are heavy' (Kant 1978: 49). Furthermore, a priori synthetics judgements are not a priori analytic judgement because they do not define concepts by breaking them through the principle of

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<sup>243</sup> See the Genesis 3:1-24, The Fall in *English Standard Version Bible*. (2001).

<sup>244</sup> Other verbs, e.g. to seem or to become, can have a copulative function. Here, we draw only on the verb to be as we investigate the logic of the copula and not its different forms.

<sup>245</sup> 'Being [Sein] is undetachable from power [Macht] (GS12: 278)

<sup>246</sup> [1942, *Erbsünde und Kopula*].

identity such as in the sentence ‘all bodies are extended’ (Kant 1978: 48). The a priori synthetic judgement unifies different concepts according to the a priori categories of space and time, without empirical determinations of experience. An example of a priori synthetic judgment is the Newtonian law of action and reaction ‘in all communication of motion, action and reaction must always be equal’ (Kant 1978: 54). In Kant’s first Critique, the possibility of a priori synthetic judgments in metaphysics - and not only in natural science or mathematics - constitute the possibility of a metaphysics as science. In Horkheimer’s view, the copula of a priori synthetic judgement represents the knowledge about the extent and the limits of speculative thought (GS12: 278)<sup>247</sup>. The Kantian transcendental logic of a priori synthetic judgement negates the possibility that analytical judgements can be the only a priori judgements; that is, judgements which precedes empirical experience but still determined by space and time. In a priori synthetic judgements there is instead an idea of negation that challenges the power structure of truth entailed in a priori analytical judgements and the principle of identity.

Indeed, Horkheimer states that Kant’s transcendental logic proceeds ontologically through the copula in order to make his philosophy a system of formal knowledge. However, Kant’s transcendental logic shows itself as a critique of ontology in clarifying the critical role of synthesis in knowledge<sup>248</sup>. In its critical way of proceeding through transcendental logic, Kant’s philosophy shows that the copula does not determine how reality is but expresses only the representation of a mode of representation<sup>249</sup>. In this critique of the copula as vehicle of ontology, Kantian transcendental logic hence retrieves a negation of power within an order of power. This order of power is not ontological but transcendental.

By analogy, the myth of original sin regards the human free will as a negation of power within the law of God that cannot be transcended. In this view, Horkheimer admits that ‘transcendental logic has not ignored the teaching of the original sin’ (GS12: 278).

Instead, Hegel’s dialectic shows that the relationship of the copula and power is framed through history. With negations and contradictions, history puts into question the relationship between the copula and power as an already given relationship. For Horkheimer, Hegel shows that the truth is possible only through a

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<sup>247</sup> [1942, *Erbsünde und Kopula*]

<sup>248</sup> See Chapter 3

<sup>249</sup> See in Chapter 3 my discussion about Kant’s notion of transcendental.

determinate negation that challenges the content of a proposition by looking at its concretisations in history. However, Horkheimer takes Hegel to re-establish the relationship between the power and the copula 'with the divinization of the determinate negation, with its reception into the absolute' (GS12: 278)<sup>250</sup>. Therefore, Horkheimer states that the dialectical logic of Hegel stands in contrast to ontology. However, Hegel's conceptualisation of the moment of reconciliation presents the power of the copula to determine reality as absolute. By analogy, the law of God is re-established in the biblical myth of original sin by reducing the free will of Adam into a sin. What Hegel excises from his dialectic with the idea of absolute knowledge is thus the idea that there can be a moment of indeterminacy in which affirmation and negation, pleasure and suffering, good and evil remain incommensurable. After they have passed through the contradictions of reality, those moments of human beings' experience - namely, pain and happiness - should return dialectically into the absolute knowledge in which the whole is the truth. In this critique of propositional language, Horkheimer wants to unveil the power relations between human beings' use of the verb *to be* as nominal predicate and the pursuit of power in human beings' way to use the copula as a violent tool. The analogy with the story of the original sin in the light of Schopenhauer's interpretation of the story helps him to make explicit what the genesis of the violent use of the copula is. This genesis is the abstract representation of the fear of death as the ineluctable end of human life.

The myth of the original sin was described by Schopenhauer indeed as the incapacity of human beings to accept that they will die and to accept that with sexual intercourse they generate a mortal being, metaphorically a son of Adam not a son of God (Schopenhauer 1966a: 405). The meaning of the story of the original sin for Schopenhauer is that the sexual pleasure and enjoyment are excised from sexual intercourse because human beings turn the moment of death into the measure of their life. The fall of Adam represents suffering and mortality as the ineluctable destiny of human beings.

For Horkheimer the function of the copula and its relationship to power depends upon how human beings measure the meaning of their life in its relationships to death. If human beings cannot cope with the idea that they will die, violence will exceed the possibility of human beings to stand pain and happiness in their life. In

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<sup>250</sup> [1942, *Erbsünde und Kopula*]; see also [1956-1958, *Hegels Trick*]

this case, the copula is used in propositional language as a tool for power. The copula shows the attempts to violently define things as things-in-themselves. In Horkheimer's view, human beings stifle with the copula the possibility that the incommensurable singularity of each individual might find fulfilment in a common dimension with other individuals. Through this common dimension, individuals may reduce the suffering, fatigue, and cruelty because they become conscious of the contradictions of their life, of pain and happiness (GS12: 124)<sup>251</sup>. The copula cannot completely define how this fulfilment might happen, but it can establish an order of power which stifles the very possibility that such a fulfilment can be actualised because it excludes one contradiction in favour of another.

In short, Horkheimer's critique of the copula reveals his twofold use of the negation where human beings use the copula to give names to things by excluding the contradictions that influence their experience and by stifling their incommensurable singularity.

The function of the copula to exclude contradictions brings human beings either to identify themselves either in an order of oppression or in the destruction of an emancipation from the relationships of power:

More than anybody else Hegel has grasped the spirit [Geist] of language: the determination of the finite that language puts in proposition [Aussage] means at the same time its pain and its destruction. [...] the individual who says *to be* must necessarily intend power and death. The individual who takes this judgment seriously and sees it completely included in *to be*, he has already the determination of the finite as nothingness, as something that rightly goes away. The identification of language with truth is evil and the separation of truth from language is speechless despair. This is the highest view that brings to the interpenetration [Durchdringung] (GS12: 125, 126)<sup>252</sup>.

Instead, the function of the copula to stifle the incommensurable singularity of the individuals brings human beings to confuse their representation of the world with the knowledge of the things in themselves:

The last truth cannot be translated into human language because all our concepts derive from a subjective organisation. Since the last truth, which should come to expression in religion, cannot be part of human language the world of concept, we can only speak of religion if we realise that the reality of knowledge is not the last reality. We are not empowered [vermögen] to define what the absolute is and of what it consists' (GS7: 238)<sup>253</sup>.

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<sup>251</sup> [1946, Vertrauen auf das Geschichte]

<sup>252</sup> [1946, Vertrauen auf das Geschichte]

<sup>253</sup> [1971, Bemerkungen zur Liberalisierung der Religion]

By showing that human being's life remains entangled with those contradictions, Horkheimer's critical theory indeed wants to shed light on the moment of indeterminacy between pleasure and pain, good and evil, affirmation and negation<sup>254</sup>. Language should represent this entanglement as a never-concluded interpenetration between the particular representations of experience (the thing) and the general concept (the name). Here, the moment of indeterminacy is the point by which we can judge a particular situation of flesh-and-blood human beings by making references to historical-social practices. Indeed, Horkheimer thinks that in the situation of advanced capitalism both in Western democratic countries and in more authoritarian states, we need to shed light on practices that deactivate instrumental reason and logic of power. From this perspective, Horkheimer thinks that theology can help human being to actualise, through human knowledge, a cultural form of love, which can contrast the social conformism of the administered world. As Horkheimer clarifies in an interview of 1970:

Love is oriented towards the absolute, it has no purpose-oriented organised life, it finds no place in pure purpose-oriented thought [...]. From the pure scientific point of view, we cannot differentiate between the feelings of love and hatred; only theology can give motivation by which love is better than hatred (GS7: 359)<sup>255</sup>.

Love has no organised purpose-oriented life because it does not turn the abstract representation of death into a point of no return. Love remains entangled in the contradictions of reality and so deactivating the logic of power that makes appears reality as immutable (GS12: 512)<sup>256</sup>.

Meanwhile, as the expression of a longing Horkheimer sees in theology the idea that language can be a vehicle for a culture without domination. This culture is thought as the capacity to stand pain and happiness in life without making one of them the abstract standpoint from which to determine life and reality. The capacity to stand pain and happiness indeed points to a way of keeping contradictions free from solidification in abstract point of view<sup>257</sup>.

We can see here that language can be a vehicle for a culture without domination in the twofold forms of negation: negation as mediation of contradictions and negation

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<sup>254</sup> See Chapter 1 for the Horkheimer's use of the term interpenetration.

<sup>255</sup> [1970, *Die verwaltete Welt kennt keine Liebe*]

<sup>256</sup> 'mediation: pleasure in pain [*Vermittlung: Freude an Schmerzen*]. Two lovers can desire death so strongly that the coitus appears to them to be banal. Freedom here will be: no longer accomplishing [*mitmachen*]' [1939, *Zur Frage der Naturbeherrschung am Menschen*]

<sup>257</sup> Here we see a point in common with Adorno which indeed describes dialectics in opposition to any already given standpoint: As Adorno states in *Negative Dialectics*: 'Dialectics is the consistent sense of non-identity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint' (Adorno 1973: 5)

as the unrepresentability of this mediation into a last truth. In its twofold forms, negation entails a critique of propositional language insofar as it serves to keep contradictions undetermined from any claims of absolute knowledge and incommensurable to claim about any primary origin of things. In my view, the longing to keep this negation alive is the theological dimension of Horkheimer's late thought. This longing for negation does not reside in a particular practice or programme of action.

How can we put then in practice this culture without domination? How can we break the power of the copula? How can negation be thought in political-practical terms and not only in theoretical-philosophical terms?

Although Horkheimer does not propose a practical program of action he hints at non-resistance and sensitivity to the life of others as examples of negation.

Non-resistance (Nichtwiderstreben) is a non-violent practice serving to deactivate the logic of power by not complying with them, refusing them (GS12: 283)<sup>258</sup>. For Horkheimer's view, non-resistance is not only a practice but a way of life in which human beings overcome the influence of power logic on their life by identifying other human beings as incommensurable singularities who are powerless.

In Horkheimer's view, this identification in powerlessness is indeed what breaks the relationship between the copula and power (GS12: 284)<sup>259</sup>. To break this power relationship by demonstrating that it is based on the violent censorship of the contradictions and of the transience of human life means showing the impossibility of absolute knowledge and of a primary cause of reality (GS7: 440, 441)<sup>260</sup>.

In short, non-resistance means the refusal of any idol as a justification to avoid a confrontation with the contradictions of life in pain and happiness, cruelty and joy, suffering and pleasure. Horkheimer's reference to the sensitivity [*Empfindlichkeit*] to the life of other human beings instead speaks of a contrary attitude of refusing subordination and so a refusal to a state of oppression (GS12: 283)<sup>261</sup>.

For Horkheimer this sensitivity informs the motivation of a revolutionary action to overthrow the existent social order while avoiding that this sensitivity becomes justification for the previously oppressed to become the new oppressors. Horkheimer hence believes that this sensitivity to the life of other human beings

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<sup>258</sup> [1942, *Kampf und Gewaltlosigkeit*]

<sup>259</sup> [1942, *Kampf und Gewaltlosigkeit*]

<sup>260</sup> [1972, *Zum Begriff des Geistes und der Verantwortung des Geistes*]

<sup>261</sup> [1942, *Kampf und Gewaltlosigkeit*]

should express a sensitivity for ‘the nude existence’ of the individual, (which) is not being protected by any power, its powerlessness (GS12: 283)<sup>262</sup>. Horkheimer takes this sensitivity to the life of other human beings to entail the possibility that human beings will not avoid confronting the contradictions of their life and, in their attempt to overcome these contradictions together, they will actualise something divine as their action will be meaningfully oriented towards the good.

In the 1968 note *Psalm 91*, Horkheimer then indicates this possibility in the immanentism of Judaic thought

Jewish thought [...] has not put either happenstance [die zufällige] in confrontation with existential angst, or happiness and unhappiness in earthly existence in confrontation with a destiny in the beyond. Longing for a shelter [Geborgenheit] in the face of everyday perils, disgrace, ruins and nothingness, is immanent to the thought about God. (GS7: 208)

In this citation, Horkheimer explains that we can find in Jewish thought a conception of the divine which does not derive from the hypostatisation of the fear of death. The longing for an improvement in the conditions of life is hence immanent to an idea of the divine, which is a language expressing the consciousness both that the reality of suffering and pain is not immutable and that there is the possibility for a shelter. Nonetheless, even if with the help of knowledge human beings transform their reality to prevent or control sufferings, cruelty and pains, it does not mean that human beings are powerful. It means instead that powerlessness is the condition of all human beings, and all their life can be represented through contradictions which are marked by the experiences of standing moments of pains and moments of happiness. In the light of this negative interpretation of Judaic thought, we can see how longing expresses an idea of the divine, which connects a critique of propositional language to a critique of injustice.

In his late thought, Horkheimer presents this idea of the divine in his term ‘the totally other’. Although, the notion of the totally other may recall some German Christian-protestant theology of early 20th century, here Horkheimer does not refer to any mystical dimension to re-evaluate the irreducibility of religious experience compared to scientific experience<sup>263</sup>.

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<sup>262</sup> [1942, *Kampf und Gewaltlosigkeit*]

<sup>263</sup> For the notion of totally other as mystical religious experience see Rudolf Otto’s *Idea of the Holy* (1958). For a debate about the role of religious experience in the theological debate Jay (2006)

Instead, Horkheimer takes the Kantian-Schopenhauerian teaching as the possibility that human beings can become consciousness of the limits of knowledge presented by their ordinary human experience. Horkheimer's notion of the totally other refers to the impossibility of human beings knowing the things in themselves. This impossibility becomes the experiential limit for human beings to think in a progressive and emancipatory way without being trapped in positivist-scientific knowledge or finding consolation in religion. In this way, the longing for the totally other is the expression of a negative theology whose task is to denounce the injustice of society in a critical way; that is, by highlighting the extent of experience and its limit following Kant and Schopenhauer (GS7: 294)<sup>264</sup>.

As negative theology, Horkheimer understands the longing for the totally other as a the wish for propositional language expressing the idea of an identification without an identity. To clarify this idea of an identification without identity, Horkheimer draws upon the Christian teaching of brotherly love. He considers this teaching to be an example of how to recognise the incommensurable singularity of the individual as an ever-fleeting manifestation of the divine.

Indeed, he understands the Christian teaching of the brotherly love in terms of the anti-dogmatic interpretation 'Love your neighbour, he is like you', instead of its dogmatic interpretation of 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (GS7: 389, 390)<sup>265</sup>. The dogmatic interpretation identifies the neighbour as an identity of the subject while the identification of the neighbour with 'yourself' gives us justification to love our neighbour because our neighbour is the mirror of ourselves, and so expresses a sameness. But the anti-dogmatic interpretation highlights the incommensurable singularity of the neighbour.

In the anti-dogmatic interpretation, the copulative function of the verb *to be* establishes a nameless relationship between us and our neighbour. In the incommensurability of our transient existence to any external power, we can then locate an identification which may liberate us from fear and depose power. The practices helping us to concretise this identification devoid of identity in cultural forms are non-resistance as a mode of forgiveness and the sensitivity to the life of the others as transient beings.

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<sup>264</sup> [1969, 'Himmel, Ewigkeit und Schönheit' Interview zum Tode Theodor W. Adornos]

<sup>265</sup> [Ibid.]

In conclusion then, Horkheimer expresses the possibility of world without injustice as a form of identification among human beings where non-resistance and sensitivity to the life of other human beings maintains this identification devoid of any identity.

### **6.5 Politics of the unspoken and destituent potential**

Having clarified the argument of a politics of the unspoken, can we then say that Horkheimer's late thought points to the possibility to depose power without any violent act and does not constitute any new order of power?

I think we have arrived at a point here where we can better understand the politics of the unspoken if we try to place it in dialogue with the contemporary Agamben's attempt to draw a theory of a destituent potential. In his *Homo Sacer* project, Agamben proposes an archaeology of philosophy where he locates the *arche* of Western metaphysical logic in a mechanism of inclusive exclusion, which he considers as the discursive strategy of the Western metaphysical apparatus. In sum, we can describe in a simplified way this inclusive exclusion in the following terms. Western metaphysics and Western political thought place at their origin a division that excludes something from the possibility of thought while simultaneously including it at the origin of thought. However, this something is not put aside definitively but is pushed to the bottom in order to be retrieved as the origin or the *arche*, the foundational ground of thought.

For Agamben, the realm of reason or *logos*, is exactly this mechanism of inclusive exclusion. For example, human beings are separated from animals and then placed as foundational to rational subjectivity; life is divided between bare life and the politically qualified life which takes the original position of the *polis*. However, this division is not a clean break and constitutes the relation that is at the centre of the moment of origin, *arche*. This latter is indeed the relation that while excluding *something* from its discourse - i.e. animal life from human life and bare life from politically qualified life - includes that *something* through a sanction-sanctification, *sacertà* as sacredness. This sanction-sanctification is an ontological relation by which what is excluded has both been named (animal life, bare life) and been immolated as the point of no return (humans cannot regress to animals). This means that, in order to think about human life, we need to exclude and maintain the idea

of animal life. Animal life is neither destroyed nor rejected but it is posed at the centre of the constituent logic of the ontological relation of reason. Reason, i.e. Western mode of abstraction and discourse, is based on a predication which imposes itself as a name over a thing. But the very act of naming and predicating contains already the division that enables the ontological relation to be a violent act establishing the logical order. It is this ontological relation that is the kernel of what Agamben thinks as constituent power.

In philosophical term, the constituent power of reason would be the original conceptual division of two terms. It is also structured as foundational ontological relation by which we can problematise the activity of thinking accordingly. In political term, the constituent power would be the original moment of violence for a revolution, war, the secession of a nation, which is then structured as a constituted power, systematising this violence into a juridical political normative apparatus (e.g. retributive law). What is important here is that the constituent and constituted power are the manifestations of the same ontological relation of inclusive exclusion. Therefore, Agamben thinks that the only way to escape this ontological relation is to deactivate the very mode of thinking that is the kernel of the problem. We hence need to avoid thinking about ontology as a relation and consider its destituent potential. As Agamben states 'Thinking a purely destituent potential in this sense means interrogating and calling into question the very status of relation, remaining open to the possibility that the ontological relation is not, in fact a relation' (Agamben 2015: 271).

Agamben recalls that this ontological relation is a linguistic problem and therefore demonstrates that the weakness of language lies in its difficulty of establishing a real concrete relation between a name and thing: 'The most invincible force of language is in its weakness, in its remaining unthought and unsaid in what says and in that of which is said' (Agamben 2015: 271). Language does not establish any truth relation and it needs to draw on violence in order to be recognised as power, an order of thing, a logos. Therefore, reason maintains violence as the ontological and political origin. The systematisation of violence in language hence unfolds power. Agamben then concludes that 'where a relation is rendered destituent and interrupted, its elements are in this sense *in contact* because the absence of every relation is exhibited between them' (Agamben 2015: 272). Agamben intends the notion of *contact* as an absence of relation, which is not a separation but a void that

is though fulfilled by a spatio-temporal arrangement which remaining unrepresentable 'because it consists precisely in a representative void, that is, in the deactivation and inoperativity of every representation' (Agamben 2015 :237).

Here the element of contact indicated by Agamben is the point where the relationship between subject and object is interrupted without thinking that this interruption is void. In order to unveil this contact as a point where the Western metaphysical and political machine cannot grasp the indeterminacy of our experience with the signification of the inclusive exclusion, Agamben thinks of archaeological regression as a mode of deactivating power as such and exhibit a destituent potential: 'archaeological regression must neither express nor negate, neither say nor un-say: rather it reaches a threshold of indiscernibility in which the dichotomy diminishes and the opposites coincide, which is to say, fall together' (Agamben 2015: 239).

At first glance, Agamben's idea of destituent potential as contact might be thought to have similarities with Horkheimer, with both referring to non-resistance and sensitivity to the life of others.

Instead I would suggest that the idea of contact to which Agamben refers is the key to understand the inoperativity of representation in the deactivation of the power of language to keep on producing signification. In this view, the similarity between the politics of the unspoken, which I traced though Horkheimer's thought, and Agamben's destituent potential are to be found the Schopenhauerian moment of Horkheimer. With Schopenhauer, Horkheimer thinks a negativity that views human beings as metaphysical animals. As we outlined in Chapter 4, Schopenhauer thinks that humans differ from animals because they create abstract and discursive knowledge from perceptive knowledge. For Schopenhauer then, perceptive knowledge is located in the world of representation, shared by animal and human through the mental mechanism of space, time and causality.

Horkheimer hence agrees with Schopenhauer that animals and humans do not differ in representing the world through perceptive knowledge. But unlike Schopenhauer, Horkheimer does explain perceptive knowledge through mental mechanism. Horkheimer seems to understand through Schopenhauer that the ontological relation to deactivate is to think this mode of experiences (perception, abstract thought, discourse) as cognitive relationship. Nonetheless, when Horkheimer speaks about experience as the capacity to stand pain and happiness, he seems to

prefigure an indeterminate configuration for a perception of the world which moves beyond the a priori categories of time, space and causality; that is beyond the mental mechanism of a cognitive perceptive apparatus described by Kant and Schopenhauer. Horkheimer indeed pointed to human experience as the perceptive approach to the world instead of the perceptive knowledge of the world. As he says in a 1956 conversation with Adorno ‘Happiness would be an animal condition viewed from the perspective of whatever has ceased to be animal [...] To achieve the condition of an animal at the level of reflection - that is freedom. Freedom means not having to work’ (TNM: 26).

In short, the deactivation of the constituent power of reason needs to go through a new mode of conceiving experience (Erfahrung), more as an approach than as a mode of knowledge.

If a politics of emancipation from fear and oppression may be possible, then it would be facilitated by a change in how we think about perceptive experience. In the above quotation from 1956, this change is described as the achievement of the condition of an animal at the level of reflection and it is called freedom. In this perspective, work is not only the organic exchange between human beings and nature which Marx wished human beings could reappropriate though the consciousness of the sufferings derived from the capitalist social relationship. In my view, Horkheimer sought instead to deactivate of the very idea of a social relationship in the way similar to what Agamben outlined in his notions of contact and inoperativity. The hypothesis of this analogy would be better formulated in the following questions. Is it possible to think a language in which propositions touch reality in a never-conclusive spatio-temporal arrangement? If so, will the possibility of such a language deactivate the relationship between the discursive knowledge and the social mechanism of signification?

Furthermore, would the possibility of such a language also entail the possibility of freedom from labour and the irrepresentable happiness derived from the deposition of power?

The questions outlined above may lead us to speculate upon the possibility both of a propositional logic and of a common life that are yet to come. In my view, Horkheimer’s enigmatic notion of the longing for the totally other is a speculation about the possibility of a culture devoid of domination and a language devoid of violence.

Hence, I would use the term 'unspoken' to indicate a politics yet to come, where unspoken refers to the wished possibility that human language may resist following power and remain consistent with powerlessness and the transience of our human existence.

## **6.6 Concluding remarks**

The politics of the unspoken in Horkheimer is the idea that progressive thought should liberate human beings from a state of oppression by deposing the logic of power. This deposition of power is in Horkheimer's view possible so long as human beings do not avoid confronting the meaning of their existence in the light of death. If this confrontation results in a consciousness of the transience of human existence, then human beings may have the possibility of identifying themselves as powerless beings who cannot know things in essence, but only through modes of representations. In Horkheimer's view, negation and irrepresentability are the discursive modes by which the possibility of an identification devoid of power logic can be said.

The politics of the unspoken becomes then a way to know the world and to live in the world it which express through language a longing for the good. While the concept of the good refers to the awareness of the limit of human being's knowledge of the world, Horkheimer's notion of the longing for the totally other indicates that a longing for such an awareness may be the path to a genuine solidarity among human beings able to identify the denunciation of injustice in such a way as to make the world better.

The late thought of Max Horkheimer is fully immersed in this negative dimension, seeking to make of it the critical view from which the progressive thought can overcome the instrumentality of advanced capitalism. For Horkheimer, progressive thought should confront the negativity of the world in its twofold aspects: the suffering derived from the power logic of human being's social relationship and the suffering derived by the avoidance to grapple with the power logic because of fear. From these twofold aspects, the notion of negation takes on a double meaning in Horkheimer's thought. The first one is the denunciation of social injustice by highlighting how the power relations derived from the historical social practices systematise violence in propositional language and cultural forms. The second

negation lays bare to the irrational dimension of power logic by showing how it is moved by human fear of death. But in the light of Horkheimer's consideration of the social conformism and the meaningless self-preservation as the predominant cultural forms which post-war Western European countries have inherited from Fascism, Horkheimer takes the second negation to be a more effective mode for a critique of instrumental reason.

To grapple with how human beings in advanced capitalism confronts death and fear, Horkheimer draws on theological discourses to find new expression in thought able to confront death and fear with a non-scientific language. He considers theology as a language which through stories and doctrines, describes the practices of human beings metaphorically in their attempt to overcome the fear of death. The story of original sin, the Judaic prohibition of graven images of God and the Christian notion of brotherly love are all investigated as metaphors which unveil such human practices. In theological and enigmatic notion of the totally other, Horkheimer also refers to the possibility of a culture devoid of domination in which death does not become the measure of life, in a social order now able to reduce injustice.

From this perspective, I would maintain that Horkheimer pursues a politics of the unspoken in which the experience of human beings remains incommensurable to establish logics of power because they are now able to grapple with death without fear.

In the conclusion of this chapter, I have sought to trace a line between Horkheimer's idea of longing for the totally other and the destituent potential of Agamben's philosophy. Although this discussion is only in its early stages, I wanted to clarify that both Horkheimer's critical theory of society and Agamben's archaeology of Western metaphysical logic seem to converge on the same end; namely, to think about a deposition of the relationship between power and language. In my view, this deposition hints at the possibility that experience and language may not be tied together by a relationship of signification able to give a name to things through a logic of power. On the contrary, if experience and language are devoid of signification, then the entanglement of the two may emerge in a formation of concepts devoid of violence. Such a formation of concept will not grasp reality violently by determining the heterogeneity of experience in closed identities. Concepts will touch reality by maintaining the indeterminacy of experience as limit of human language.

# Conclusion

## 7.1 Initial remarks

This thesis has explored Horkheimer's development of an idea of human emancipation. I have drawn on his late thought to discuss how the enigmatic notion of the longing for the totally other may be considered in political-philosophical terms to express a wish for an emancipation that, while liberating human beings from social injustice, deposes the logic of power. Horkheimer wished a politics for post-war Western countries in the 1950s and 1960s whose goal is a cultural change from Fascist culture and instrumental reason. Indeed, Horkheimer represented this cultural change in the possibility of a social life of non-compliance with the logic of power.

I have thus conceived of this wish for emancipation as Horkheimer's 'politics of the unspoken' because it entails a critique of propositional language. Horkheimer did not propose a rejection of propositional language *tout court* but longed for a language which could not be reduced to a tool of power in the construction of those social identities (e.g. nation, class, family etc.) instrumental to the replication of power. In my view, Horkheimer conceives of a possibility of a language which expresses a longing for the good in the following terms. If human beings become conscious of the powerlessness and transience of their existence, then their language may express an identification devoid of any identities subject to the logic of power relations within society. From this perspective, the notion of the unspoken indicates the possibility of a language devoid of power and a culture devoid of domination.

With regards to this politics of the unspoken, critical theory has the task of denouncing the social injustice provoked by the existing constellation of power and laying bare the role of fear as the irrational dimension that keeps reproducing the logic of power. In presenting this argument, I wanted to contribute to the current literature on Horkheimer's late thought by showing that, if the political-philosophical aspects contained within it are unpacked, then Horkheimer's late thought can help us clarify that human emancipation is possible through a progressive thought aimed at confronting the rational and irrational causes of power.

## 7.2 Critical theory and the politics of the unspoken

My thesis has sought to contribute to the literature of the study of Horkheimer's thought by showing how, in the post-war Western countries of the 1950s and 1960s, Horkheimer understood the risk that the logic of power introduced by Fascism could re-appear in a new form which he called the administered world. To contrast the possibility of this administered world, Horkheimer longs for an identification among human beings that is devoid of any power pursuit, which he calls the totally other. In my view, this longing for the totally other points to an idea of politics which is non-instrumental, meaning a politics that does not comply with the logic of power of the social system. This politics concerns the cultural formation of a common dimension instead of the articulation of practical programme.

Politics and culture should be the vehicle for an identification among human beings which deactivates power by highlighting the condition of powerlessness of every human being. For Horkheimer, the cultural forms created by human beings - e.g. science, philosophy, religion, family, education etc.- do not entail the knowledge of how the world is in its true essence because cultural forms are the transient products of human beings which. The creation of cultural form responds to contingent historical and social circumstances and expresses an interiorised violence related to fear and death (CT 57,58)<sup>266</sup>. If human beings are aware of the sources preserving and perpetrating the logic of power which dominates their social life, then they may start to identify themselves in a way that deactivates this logic of power.

In Chapter 1, I have shown that this idea of an identification devoid of power traverses all the personal and intellectual life of Horkheimer and, as he hinted in some late notes, it was most likely an attitude embodied in his personality. Indeed, if we think of this identification devoid of power as the possibility of a language and a culture incommensurable to violence and practices of domination, then we can see how the non-philosophical notion of being-by-each other in his youth, the idea of critical theory in adulthood and the longing for the totally allow Horkheimer to maintain unrepresentability as a mode both of refusing power and of thinking about how to depose it once for all.

It would be useful here to recap how my thesis has developed this argument about Horkheimer's politics of the unspoken.

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<sup>266</sup> [1936, Authority and the Family]

My intention in the first part of this thesis was to highlight the gap in the existing literature regarding the late thought of Horkheimer. Here, I responded to David Held's suggestion that Horkheimer's interest in theology and metaphysics constitutes an exploration of the dimensions of experience that transcend the existing social world. In Chapter 2, I then demonstrated that what I consider the two major critiques of Horkheimer's late thought - those provided by Habermas and Sloterdijk - concur with the idea that his late critical theory focuses on a critique of instrumental reason and ends with the exhaustion of the philosophy of consciousness.

For Habermas and other scholars of critical social theory, this exhaustion may be found in the inconsistency of Horkheimer's late works in grasping social reality. In their view, Horkheimer's late works fail to provide a meaningful reading of social reality, one that does not emphasise its overwhelming instrumentality. For Sloterdijk, the late critical theory gives rise to a striking philosophical debacle once its theological roots are unpacked. Sloterdijk takes quite the opposite stance to Habermas and depicts the critical theorist as a messiah whose knowledge would redeem the world even if his messianism is impotent. Hence, in Sloterdijk's view, critical theory cannot exert any influence on a social reality which is represented as an unbearable falsity. In this sense, critical theory becomes hyperbolic and implodes within the boundaries of its own theoretical exaggerations. Indeed, other scholars highlighting the negative theological side of Horkheimer's late thought have also failed to escape this hyperbolic scenario and have endowed Horkheimer's late thought with a more religious and messianic emphasis.

My own position differs from these critiques. In my own research, I have proposed an investigation of how Horkheimer's late thought indicates cultural resources pointing to moments of experience able to checkmate the power of social domination. I have thus taken as the starting point for my investigation Alfred Schmidt's consideration that Horkheimer's thought is a substantial intersection between Marx and Schopenhauer. While the Marxist traits of Horkheimer's critical theory and materialism has been generally well known among scholars of philosophy and critical theory, the Schopenhauerian moment in Horkheimer -as Schmidt called it - remained underestimated in the major existent literature. At the end of Chapter 2, I have thus clarified that Horkheimer's turn to Schopenhauer's thought constitutes a philosophical attempt to rescue progressive thought from its

self-destruction (GS12: 594)<sup>267</sup>. Indeed, Schopenhauer's philosophy is useful for two main reasons; it helps to think critically about the relationships between the hypostatisation of thought and the fear of death, and it uses metaphors to stage critique without establishing propositions or concepts as tool of power.

From this perspective, Schopenhauer's philosophy helps Horkheimer remove critical theory from the impasse of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, which can be summarised in the following question: How can we exert critique without being trapped in the instrumental logic of a thought oriented towards social domination? To put this thought more directly, the influence of Schopenhauer on Horkheimer might provide an answer to the following question: How can we conduct a critique of society if the means of critique such as negation and dialectical thought are overwhelmed by the instrumental logic by which reality is reduced to be an aimless reproduction of the social system?

In Horkheimer's view, this philosophical question can be answered if we regard it as a political-philosophical question (GS12: 598)<sup>268</sup>. How then can we conceive of emancipation without becoming trapped in the instrumental logic of party politics, electoral programmes, and the paranoid attitude of acting for the sake of action?

By responding to those questions, I have highlighted that Horkheimer's late thought thinks that a way out from the impasse of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* through the thought of a language as the expression of the longing for the good. This longing for the good is the enigmatic notion of the longing for the totally other. By unpacking this notion, I have shown that a human emancipation can be conceived if we find a motivation for human beings to avoid complying with power.

I have argued here that Horkheimer seeks a sufficient motivation for a critical theory of society able to denounce what is bad in the society while preserving what is good from the present and the past (GS14: 507)<sup>269</sup>. This search for a motivation appears in his late writings as a re-evaluation of theological and metaphysical doctrines. In Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, I have shown that this re-evaluation emerges in Horkheimer's philosophical investigation of Kant's question of hope and Schopenhauer's metaphysics of the will. In carrying out this philosophical

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<sup>267</sup> 'The rescue of Enlightenment, to determine the positive relation between the absolute and thought [...] Our topic is furthermore to conceive [*fassen*] positively the truth in the ascertainment of the meaninglessness [*Sinnlosigkeit*], and, in this way, to rescue thought, to bring Schopenhauer to himself' [1946, *Rettung der Aufklärung. Diskussionen über eine geplante Schrift zur Dialektik*].

<sup>268</sup> [1946, *Rettung der Aufklärung. Diskussionen über eine geplante Schrift zur Dialektik*]

<sup>269</sup> [1968, *Kritische Theorie und Theologie*]

investigation, I have highlighted how a critique of propositional language can be made in conjunction with a critique of injustice. Kant's idea of hope and Schopenhauer's notion of the will are thus examples of a critique of a propositional language that questions human knowledge as the capacity to establish how reality is in-itself. In Horkheimer's view, a critique of a language that expresses the knowledge of things in themselves is already an expression of a critique of injustice. In Kant's philosophy this critique of injustice is then positively imagined alongside the idea of a moral world and the hope for happiness. In these two concepts, Kant unfolded the negative utopia that an order of power -the civil constitution- might generate a world devoid of a logic of power - the moral world. In Schopenhauer's metaphysics, this critique of injustice consists in the impossibility of determining with certainty how human beings will act and why they choose to act in a certain way and not otherwise. In this sense, his philosophy presents the argument that the human will appearing in the character of human beings cannot be commensurate to an absolute knowledge of this will. It is this incommensurability that demonstrates how the action of every human being brings an unspoken dimension.

By taking the lead from Schopenhauer's philosophy, Horkheimer understands here that human language cannot grasp absolute knowledge but only express the indeterminacy of human experience. It is Schopenhauer's philosophy then that supports a critique of instrumental reason because it shows that the systematisation of violence in language and culture expresses the difficulty of human beings to cope with being aware of their transient existence.

By identifying how the systematisation of violence in language becomes entangled in instrumental thought, Horkheimer proposes that power be deactivated philosophically in a twofold negation. To recall, Horkheimer thinks that philosophical critique is not enough to produce a social change but is helpful to give impulses to practice. How is this philosophical negation then to be conceived? Horkheimer notes that human beings should confront the social injustice caused by the instrumental logic of power in two ways. On the one hand, they should denounce social injustices as the defaults emerging from the contradictions of the social system. On the other hand, they should highlight that the instrumental logic of power is the product of human being's avoidance of finding a way to cope with fear of death. From this perspective, social conformism transposes the fear of death into the fear of being excluded, wretched by the social system, and so being hopeless.

My argument here is that Horkheimer stages a critique of propositional language to unmask the reduction of the same propositional language to a tool of power. Negation aims to bring to light that the logic of power of advanced capitalism can exclude any cultural form of life that does not conform to it and so stifle any possible alternative. In the last part of the thesis, I have unpacked how this critique of propositional language is related in political terms to a critique of Fascist culture and the administered world.

In Chapter 5, I have described that Fascist culture emerges as a perversion of bourgeois culture. I have highlighted that the systematisation of knowledge through science and the internalisation of fear of death are two cultural practices of the bourgeois order which Fascist culture distorts against it. The systematisation of knowledge becomes the levelling of every aspect of knowledge to a meaningless execution of violence useful for the preservation of an aimless social system. The internalisation of the fear of death becomes instead the hardening of the character of human beings. This hardening serves to make human beings conform to the violence that is necessary to gain advantages from their integration in the social system. Anti-Semitism and automation are two practical examples of these processes of levelling and hardening that Horkheimer identifies in the advanced capitalism of Fascist regimes and post-war Western constitutional states.

Yet a critical theory of society unmasking domination practices and power relations in the use of concepts remains insufficient to deactivate the logic of power that Horkheimer outlines. Critical theory should now seek a motivation that may make human beings decide to interrupt and deactivate the power logic of advanced capitalism and its Fascist heritage. In my view, ‘the dull indifference and the apathy of the individual towards destiny’, fostered by the social conformism of the advanced capitalism, are the target of polemic in Horkheimer’s late critical theory (CT: 271)<sup>270</sup>. In seeking a motivation sufficient to overcome human indifference and apathy, Horkheimer wants critical theory to redeem the hope that progressive thought - Enlightenment - will be capable of liberating human beings from oppression and fear.

Horkheimer then thinks that critical theory should continue to unmask power relationship and domination in concepts and speeches in general. In this way, critical theory keeps on opposing the constituted order of power by denouncing

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<sup>270</sup> [1940, *The Social Function of Philosophy*]

injustice. However, it should also find practices of resistance different from oppositional politics. In this view, we have seen in Chapter 6 how non-resistance and sensitivity to the life of others are drafted as possible practices. Nonetheless, we should recall that those practices become meaningful testimonies of non-conformity to power logic if the human beings who practice them are conscious of the limited chances of success in deposing the power once for all. Here there is a pessimistic view in Horkheimer.

Horkheimer's pessimism is not a gloomy despair for a state of things that are unchangeable. Pessimism is here to be conscious that catastrophes are always behind the corner and the task of the critical theorist is to denounce what is negative and unjust in the present state of things. By denouncing the negative, the critical theorists bring to light the transience, the fragility, and the powerlessness of human existence, which is what the power politics of advanced capitalism attempts to exclude and stifle.

From this standpoint, Horkheimer longs for the totally other; that is, for the possibility of an experience and a language which touch reality without grasping it. In strictly political terms, Horkheimer translates this longing for the totally other as a wish for freedom from labour. Freedom from labour means a freedom from the activity to transform objects into things useful for the accumulation of the power to command upon the life of other human beings.

At the end of Chapter 6, I have drafted a possible dialogue between Horkheimer's late critical theory and Agamben's theory of destituent potential. Although critical theory and Agamben's archaeology of Western philosophy are two different modes of critical thought, they address the same goal: to depose power and think about modes of collective life that do not restore power relationship.

### **7.3 Is there a future for a politics of the unspoken?**

The answer is a simple one: there is no future for such a politics. I think indeed that it is the imagination of future that the politics of the unspoken wants to deactivate. Indeed, how can we interrupt and depose the instrumental power of advanced capitalism if we continue to imagine the possibility of its overcoming with a positive image of yet-to-come society?

In my view, the imagination of the future is the problematic point of Horkheimer's notion of the longing for the totally other and of its two forerunners, the Kantian notion of hope and the Schopenhauer's doctrine of the will. In Kant, the notion of a hoped world still invisible to us does not define positively the idea of a future of happiness because it avoids presenting a clear image of what it will be. Instead, Schopenhauer's notion of the will deactivates the possibility of the future in an ever-fleeting present, where the idea of the future can only be a discursive product of the human faculty of reason.

Nonetheless, in taking the lead both from Kant and Schopenhauer, Horkheimer's notion of longing for the totally other maintains the possibility of a future as a not-actual present. To explain in simple words this not-actual present: we can say that a better future is there in our longing for it but remains without practical actualisation in present. Indeed, the notion of the totally other does not introduce any positive image of what a good society will be once the power of advanced capitalism are deactivated.

In this view, I have also sought to emphasise that Horkheimer's idea of emancipation is human because he longs for a cultural change that brings into the present social practice of domination the possibility of their own deactivation. From this perspective, a human emancipation might be considered possible within the same society which has unfolded this domination.

Indeed, I believe that it is still worthwhile today to read Horkheimer's late works today because it unfolds an unrelenting critique of the modes of how progressive thought has been developed not only as intellectual forms in the history of philosophy - as the fragments of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* show - but also in terms of the cultural forms occurring in Europe during the first two decades after the end of the Second World War.

Horkheimer hence conducts a critique of the political and cultural forms of progressive thought in the 1950s and 1960s in order to rescue the task of progressive thought to liberate human beings from social oppression and fear. When Horkheimer expresses his longing for the possibility of a language and a culture that do not comply with the instrumental power of advanced capitalism, he rationalises this longing in critical theory by re-evaluating the metaphysics of Schopenhauer and Judaic negative doctrine of ban on image. But the rationalisation of his wish for a language without violence and a culture without domination is

made with the purpose of rescuing the task of progressive thought from its absorption into an administered world. The political goal of late critical theory could not be said to be revolutionary, but its purpose remained a worthy one of saving some progressive cultural forms from the overwhelming power of instrumentality.

Horkheimer does not shy away from outlining the possible catastrophes towards which post-war Western societies edge. In a society in which social conformism becomes the new idol because it guarantees human beings better standards of life, emancipatory political actions (e.g. reforms and revolution) are doomed to be distorted by the instrumental thought seeking the preservation of the existent power relationships. In this view, Horkheimer hence views culture and language as the place for an emancipatory politics.

Nonetheless, while the possibility of a cultural change is thought as possible within the existent society, we need to be careful in the first place to propose practical programme for a politics of emancipation. If not, we may risk carrying out only actions of compliance that remain in with instrumentality<sup>271</sup>. Furthermore, the social-historical changes of today's globalised planet need to be taken into considerations if we wish to give a practical programme to a human emancipation. It might be worthwhile underlining how an investigation of the application of the politics of the unspoken to today's context not only requires much intellectual effort, but requires a mode of empirical research which cannot limit itself to the discursive level but must look at a clear sociological context. In the last twenty years, at least, we have seen an increase in the pervasion of human life by social power<sup>272</sup>.

Here, I agree with the most recent discussions of power that have emerged from the field of cultural studies, according to which power has reconfigured ontology from being an appropriation of predicates to a penetration of the very essence of human beings (Lash 2010: 135, 136). Nonetheless, I think that the transformation of power from the mere domination of language and signification to a pervasive domination of human experience and biological constitution was already partially present in the studies of Horkheimer, Adorno and Pollock about anti-Semitism and automation.

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<sup>271</sup> This was a suggestion that Horkheimer had already made in the 1966-1969 note *Beyond Ideology* (D&D)

<sup>272</sup> See for examples the recent illuminating studies on metric power (Beer 2016) and platform capitalism (Srnicek 2017).

In my view, Horkheimer was aware of this change and the longing for totally other emerges precisely from this awareness.

Horkheimer's late critique of Marx's realm of freedom proves that he understood how the administered world cannot be challenged solely by a utopian imagination. Moreover, the integration of psychology and history in his critical theory demonstrates that a study of society and its power should be accompanied with the exploration of the subterranean power flows that enter the psychic constitution of individuals.

It is within this philosophical context that Horkheimer develops his critique of instrumental reason and his investigation of both theology and metaphysical thought in order to find exempla of negative practices able to transcend the overwhelming power of instrumental thought. In my view, the task of the late critical theory was to maintain alive the consciousness that reality is not given but rather crafted by human beings in a continuous interaction with their circumambient world.

However, I think that this task should be integrated with a materialist analysis of the concepts that the science and the politics of today introduce forward to justify new repressive measures aimed at control the individual by invading their personal and biological spheres. For instance, in today's social and historical context, how can we imagine a study of prejudice being conducted in the same fashion as the *Studies in Prejudices* that Horkheimer co-directed in the 1940s? With which empirical research tools, might we bring to light the unspoken dimension that marks the construction and the spread of prejudices today? Will psychoanalytical methods suffice, for instance, alongside quantitative surveys and qualitative focus groups and interviews? No doubt, they will most probably not be enough.

To embark on such future research ventures, knowledge of medicine, physics, mathematics and all sciences in general is also required because, in my view, science cannot simply be debunked as positivism, instrumentality or scientism. In the style of Horkheimer, we need instead to put ourselves in a position where we can view the anti-dogmatism of new scientific discoveries in relation to previous accepted wisdom, then analyse their dogmatic character in the ontological violence of their claims to be new truths destroying past knowledge. At the same time, we need to be aware that the current research methods of social sciences and psychoanalysis will be insufficient.

On the methodological level, we have seen how a politics of the unspoken takes the imagination of the future as its polemical target. Hence, in my view, the task for critical theory today does not consist in thinking a social role for science but to prevent scientific thought and practice from ending up calcified.

Indeed, as Horkheimer suggested, scientific thought is not disconnected from the historical-social practices. In his investigation of the advanced capitalism, Horkheimer emphasises that levelling, hardening, stereotyping, ticket-thinking, automation and conformism are practices seeking to destroy the teleology of bourgeois utopia and ideology for humanity by twisting them into a continuous, perverted and meaningless striving for a future that will never come. Thus, as the bourgeois idealist kernel of teleology and prediction of future, hope itself abandons the field to hopelessness and aimless replication of violence.

For instance, the permanent high rate of unemployment in Western post-war countries remains for Horkheimer the most evident proof of the destruction of the material conditions of the bourgeois ideological equivalence between private property and autonomy of the individual (CT: 276)<sup>273</sup>. The aimless time then spent waiting for a change that will never come becomes the permanent condition of the bankruptcy of liberal capitalism and its transformation into an administered world. In such an historical social situation, a resurgence of teleology as the meaningful horizon of an individual future will be a reactionary attempt to contrast the advanced capitalism with a nostalgia for an Old European bourgeois liberal world. In contrast to this, Horkheimer conceives of the longing for the totally other as possibility of an identification among human beings without discursive abstract teleology. Having said that, is there truly no future for the politics of the unspoken? Following this discussion, my belief is that the future of a politics of the unspoken lies in the possibility that human language may touch human experience in all its multi-faceted and heterogenous dimension.

In this sense, the politics of the unspoken in Horkheimer's thought refers to an idea of emancipation ungrounded in an idealist hope for prospective liberation from domination (i.e. messianism). Emancipation instead entails the unrepresentability of the unspoken dimension of experience that the human representation of the world seems unable to grasp in logic without employing discursive knowledge as tool for power. This limit in representation constitutes an awareness that what we call

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<sup>273</sup> [1941, Art and Mass Culture]

human may not be defined exclusively by abstract concepts, but can transcend them and remain incommensurable to discourse. In this incommensurability of the concept of the human, Horkheimer imagines a possibility of a world without injustices, a negative idea of happiness.

In the end, the politics of the unspoken presents a practice that starts from the experience that, in general, naming, signification and representation do not constitute any final relationship of truth between the meaning and concept, the thing and the name. The contradictions between what we say about reality and how reality is concretised, and then the powerlessness of our knowledge in the light of the transient of our existence, all show that truth is a question that only pertains human beings and their language. The awareness of this such a human condition may then be thought the kernel of the politics of the unspoken.

Finally then, Horkheimer reminds us that human experience is intrinsically paradoxical and the failure to recognise its paradoxes regrettably produces discourses of truth that impose themselves with a violent affirmation of power by excising any contradictions and indeterminacy. From this investigation of Horkheimer's late thought, I have so sought to underline that the way in which we think about our experience of the world should not be investigated only by making cursory claims for novelty or truth, but with the genuine curiosity expressed about our experiential limit.

I would conclude by saying that Horkheimer's late critical theory and the contemporary philosophy of destitute potential as such the philosophy of Agamben share the same initiative to investigate the limit of human experience of the world. The ongoing pursuit of this investigation might well be the logical continuation of this study.

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