Critical theory and lived experience

Interview with Detlev Claussen

Detlev Claussen with Jordi Maiso

Detlev Claussen (b. 1948) is Professor Emeritus of Social Theory, Culture and Sociology at Leibniz Universität Hannover. In the mid-sixties he moved to Frankfurt to study with Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, where he was actively involved in the protest movements associated with the political upheavals of 1968. In the seventies, Claussen worked as Oskar Negt's assistant, with whom he shared the common project of opening up new avenues for critical theory without renouncing the thought of their intellectual mentors. Since then, Claussen has argued that instead of offering an overarching theory that can be applied from 'outside' of existing social reality, critical theory offers a variety of strategies that allow us simultaneously to disentangle and invigorate present experience. Claussen has written on a wide range of themes, including social theory, psychoanalysis, the sociology of science and culture, as well as anti-Semitism, racism, nationalism and migration. His biography of the legendary Jewish coach and footballer Béla Guttmann, yet to be translated into English, offers a prime example of how his published work cannot be separated from the wider context of his intellectual biography. Both an essayist and Adorno's biographer, Claussen is one of the leading lights of critical theory today.

Jordi Maiso: How did you come to critical theory?[1]

Detlev Claussen: The need to transform the society in which one lives: that led me to critical theory. For me it wasn't present from the start, but the other way around, as is often the case with normal citizens lacking in intellectual self-awareness: they arrive at the theory after encountering obstacles in their attempt to change society. They begin to reflect on why such a transformation is so hard; and, when they come up against the failures that lived experience presents in the process, cannot help but ask what went wrong. Critical theory offers the means to understand this process because it was conceived from the outset as a reflection on a failed revolution. That is, while trying to understand society from the point of view of its transformation, critical theory participates in the Marxian theoretical tradition. However, how it thinks of its historical genesis is different. For critical theory it makes no sense to talk about the supposed 'revolutionary optimism of the twenties', as certain intellectual historians have put it. Rather, it was a desperate situation in which nobody knew if the attempt to transform society would have any effect or outcome whatsoever. It is this reflexive concern for historical experience that characterises critical theory, requiring it to constantly renew itself under the imperative of immanence. At the time, this imperative meant the incorporation of psychoanalysis. Yet this need for immanent renewal also means that one cannot focus exclusively on Adorno and Horkheimer's project.

JM: As a student, you moved to Frankfurt with the intention of transforming society. Why Frankfurt? Were you already familiar with Horkheimer and Adorno's work?

DC: I moved to Frankfurt in 1966. In Bremen, the city where I grew up, I'd listened Adorno's 'Progress' lecture as a student, and was completely convinced by it.[2] Immediately I knew I wanted to study with him. Until then I had only read one book by him, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, but gathered in it was everything I'd had to suffer intellectually as student; namely, the trivialised Heideggerianism that marked the intellectual climate in the Federal Republic of Germany. Today, I would say that it was a post-national-socialist climate, Nazi-lite, so to speak, that manifested itself in an omnipresent language: from radio stations and evangelical academia through to the 'Popular University' [*Volkshochschule*], etc. This jargon was omnipresent, and it had a sinister element, because as a teenager you didn't have the least idea of where it all came from. Then I read *The Jargon of Authenticity*, that blue pocket book which demonstrated the direct relation such language had to Nazism. The whole atmosphere was terribly oppressive, and behind its apparent naivety the ideology of 'national community' or *Volksgemeinschaft* persisted. Today the fifties are idealised, but that era was terrible. The Cold War was frightful: that narrowness that penetrated everyday life, the persecution of all remotely divergent behaviour. It was a totally conformist society. Likewise, if for some reason you disagreed, you were told to 'get lost to the other side!', to the German Democratic Republic. That's the environment we grew up in. The meanness and narrowness of the dominant mentality was unbearable. When you encountered the likes of Adorno, it was as if the blindfold had been lifted.

JM: Adorno was therefore a way out of this oppressive provincialism and post-national-socialist regime. Was Frankfurt also an appropriate place to leave behind the narrow mentality of the Federal Republic?

DC: Yes, Frankfurt was ideal. There, the student bodies were the product of the post-war re-education programmes. Student halls of residence were self-governing and had to offer something to different to the traditions of the German student fraternities [*Burschenschaften*]. We had for example a self-run film studio, where we could watch the whole gamut of contemporary films: from French New Wave to the new 'third' Polish cinema and American movies, etc. Similarly there was also the self-managed student magazine *Diskus*; a magnificent magazine for which I became editor of the culture section. At the time, the most important writers interested in democratic initiatives (for example, Günther Grass, Peter Weiss, Heinrich Böll, Martin Walser or Hans Magnus Enzensberger) had a great interest in writing in student publications because they knew that their future readers were there. As a student in Frankfurt there were many activities on offer, and that greatly expanded our intellectual horizon: it was like an explosion that took you out of the old Federal Republic. And all these institutions existed thanks to Horkheimer's work as rector, thanks to what he'd made possible on both a practical and a political level. It should not be forgotten that at the time in the Federal Republic people only ever talked about the wall and the division of Germany, accompanied by the constant lament that painted Germany as the victim of universal history: 'What a disgrace, everyone always against us Germans, why, such injustice', etc. On the other hand, Frankfurt offered another perspective, among other things because it was the city of the Auschwitz trials. Nevertheless, in general Frankfurt allowed a totally different relationship to society outside. There were many American students, but also some Israelis, and in this way we were suddenly confronted with realities which until then we hadn't had the slightest idea about. The media and the press were worse than they are today.

There was no news of conflict in the Middle East, for example, nothing was known about the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), because in the media it was not mentioned at all. Yet, in Frankfurt, the Six-Day War was acutely felt as it affected our Israeli friends and their families.

JM: And in this broader Frankfurt context you began to study with Adorno. What do you remember about his lectures?

DC: When I arrived in Frankfurt, in the winter of 1966-67, Adorno was on a sabbatical term during which he finished writing *Negative Dialectics*. Instead I had the opportunity to attend an introductory course by Horkheimer, which influenced me decisively. At that point Adorno was totally overwhelmed with work, by the enormous effort that writing *Negative Dialectics* entailed, and which contributed to his early death. Actually you could argue that *Negative Dialectics* is a kind of extension of *The Jargon of Authenticity*: Although many people do not take it into account, they contain the same political impulse. In my second term I attended a series of seminars by Adorno on *Negative Dialectics*. I attended despite being only nineteen years of age because Hans-Jürgen Krahl, who was doing his doctorate with Adorno, thought that I had to learn everything as soon as possible, so he took me with him and said: 'You come with me, sit in the seat next to me, and nobody will dare question why you are here.' For this reason I ended up attending the seminar alongside twenty-seven-year-olds and doctoral students. I also met Angela Davis there, and that's how our friendship, which has lasted to this day, began.

JM: Did guests also attend the seminars from time to time?

DC: Of course. When there were two upholstered chairs it meant that Horkheimer had come from Montagnola, and if there were three, Horkheimer and Pollock. When Horkheimer was there, Adorno didn't talk to any of us. He was simply trying to present his ideas in order to hear what Horkheimer thought of them. That was enormously interesting. For example, sometimes they ended up arguing about the Freudian concept of sublimation, and Adorno was at the end of his tether as Horkheimer saw things completely differently. Then he would say: 'But Max, you have always said the same!' That's why it's so ridiculous that certain historical studies speak presumptuously of 'paradigmatic differences', asking whether or not one viewed a problem in one manner and the other in another: all that is nothing but pseudo-historiography. They discussed among themselves a variety of subjects as normal intellectuals do, albeit vastly learned ones. In any case they would usually agree on a joint formulation in the end. Later, these experiences prompted me to write about the real context in which critical theory was actually produced, and of course the Adorno biography offered the ideal opportunity to present my observations.

JM: What was Adorno's relationship with his students like?

DC: At first, Adorno seemed very elusive, but once you got past that he was very interested in his students and their individual progress. He always spoke of 'my students', and all those who were his disciples in the fifties and sixties had a very close and personal relationship with him. Many ended up in the media or in radio station newsrooms, that's why there are so many pieces for radio by Adorno. There was nothing better for an editor with a script at her disposal than the chance to invite Adorno on, because he spoke so well that you could print it directly. What's more, he always had something interesting to say. He often brought along some of the most distinguished protagonists of the German art and theatre worlds. There are some simply excellent radio broadcasts, of which a good many were ad-libbed. For example, the comments on

Proust collected in *Notes on Literature* are improvised glosses that Adorno made as Marianne Hoppe read his text live on air. It's amazing what can be gained from that text, and it was all off-the-cuff! You can read it five or six times and always discover new takes.

JM: And yet the academic situation for Adorno and his students was not easy, am I correct?

DC: It was not easy at all. Adorno followed his student's professional development closely, as for those who had done their doctorates with him it was not easy to find an academic placement. At the time it was very difficult to find a place in the university system and, contrary to what some argue again and again (all these stories about the 'Frankfurt School' as the 'second foundation of the Federal Republic' and other nonsense), Frankfurt was in fact very isolated, and Adorno himself was isolated in the University of Frankfurt until the end of the fifties. Working with Horkheimer and Adorno meant fewer professional opportunities. For example, Ralph Dahrendorf soon latched onto this and quickly disappeared from the Institute for Social Research because his stay in Frankfurt did not help him at all to promote his academic career. Habermas's relationship with the Institute is an unfortunate story, but it also highlights a typical impasse. This is what I wanted to document with the publication of Horkheimer's letter to Adorno in 1958 as it demonstrates very clearly what a university position meant for Horkheimer.[3] Horkheimer institutionally rejected the approximation of academic and political radicalism, because for him this necessarily led to a merely verbal radicalism. I think that in this context, rather than accuse Horkheimer of political cowardice for having dropped Habermas from the *Institute*, it is important to reflect on the veracity of those claims, given that ten years later Habermas' arguments against the students would be quite similar, but not exactly the same either.

JM: Was Horkheimer still the 'political brains' of the *Institute*?

DC: Without a doubt; to tell the truth, more so even than Adorno. While gathering information for my Adorno biography I found many things in the Horkheimer Archive that I could not use in the book. There I found for example a huge file on Iraq. I discovered that Horkheimer had dealt extensively with the coup in Iraq in 1958, as well as the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Many people simply did not understand just what drove him to study these events so devotedly, but he certainly had a good instinct. For him it was not solely about Iraq, rather that something terrible had happened there: it was a paradigmatic case of what I have called an 'ill-fated revolution'. And he had to study and reflect on it, because he saw that it was an absolutely fundamental issue.

JM: Yet one often gets the impression that Horkheimer is not taken into account. One might say that he is studied even less today. What was your impression of him?

DC: In Horkheimer, one met with a *grand seigneur*. For me, that's highly appealing and enormously likeable. Among today's academics you no longer see that at all. Even at the time Horkheimer had an elegance that few could match. He lived the good life: good food, good drink, good hotels, and the others, more or less, tried to follow his lead. There is a very nice memo of a conversation between Horkheimer and Pollock, in which they argue about what they want to do with the Institute and what rules they want to establish. Horkheimer writes to him: 'never do expenses'. His noble instinct was already evident in that for him there were much more important things than a career. For Horkheimer, as for many socialists of the twenties, the term 'upstart' was an insult: he did not want such people in the Institute. It is a completely different attitude to today's, from another culture, even. When in my first term I attended an introductory

course taught by him, he impressed me deeply: his enormous intelligence and sharpness, his experience, the serenity with which he explained to students who were only eighteen years old *The Phenomenology of the Spirit*. I immediately wanted to find out more about him, and I soon discovered that without him there would have been no critical theory and no Institute for Social Research as we know it today.

JM: However, his later interpretations are often oversimplified or misinterpreted, which may have to do with his relatively scarce output, productively speaking, after his return to Europe. It would seem that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* signalled some sort of end for Horkheimer, at least for his writing, while Adorno's return spurred him to take on a frenetic work-rate. How would you explain this situation?

DC: When we talk about Horkheimer's apparent lack of productivity, we should not forget that few men have understood so quickly and synchronically that which came to pass after 1941. Once that is accepted, we see that the question of his output, not to mention that of an academic career, is ultimately not the most important thing. One is not especially motivated to pursue these directions either. However, Horkheimer's late annotations, the only things he came to write after 1945, are an inexhaustible source of interest since they contain excellent analyses. Many of them stem from conversations. Horkheimer and Pollock lived in Montagnola, and Pollock realised that he ought to write down the conversations he'd had with Horkheimer next to the fireplace over a glass of red wine. This is how *Splinters: Notes on a Conversation with Max Horkheimer* happened [*Späne: Notizen über Gespräche mit Max Horkheimer*], in which there are extremely intelligent reflections to be found.[4] It is a text that can be read again and again and one will always discover something new. Much the same can be said for the piles of correspondence. Horkheimer was a prodigious letter writer, and these letters have a lot of substance. The letters themselves provide excellent commentaries on specific situations of the time, and bear witness to the intelligence and precision with which he approached his subject matter. Nevertheless, it is fundamental to keep in mind that Horkheimer recognised and understood the significance of

the fragment for the philosophy of history. Faced with the supremacy of political systems and conceptual disintegration, the fragment offered an appropriate response. Therefore, although it hadn't been planned that way, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* passed down as a collection of fragments, a torso, a work in progress. That's why it can't be read as an exclusively academic text: it does not represent the last word on any given matter; rather it attempts to capture a particular historical moment, specifically the state of the world from 1944-47. The great contribution of the book is that Horkheimer and Adorno managed to recognise and express the epochal quality of the historical-social transformations they were examining precisely as they were taking place. Normally, the meaning of a particular shift is only ever understood twenty years later. Today, our understanding of the epochal change that took place in 1989 still has a long way to go, yet *Dialectic of Enlightenment* managed to recognise what was changing contemporaneously.

JM: Hence your insistence on the 'temporal kernel of truth' ...

DC: Exactly. The legacy of critical theory, which I aspire to in my own theoretical work, is that we must understand the present. That doesn't mean that the past isn't important. What it means is that our conception of the past has to be continually renewed, but always from the perspective of the present. I would say that critical theory is a critique of the present and that the past is constantly transformed by this criticism. Therefore, it is absurd to try and establish a particular set of axioms or to try and marginalise a certain theoretical orientation by denouncing it as 'orthodox critical theory'. There can be no orthodoxy in the first place, as critical theory is not a doctrine that can be found in this or that book. Rather, it is the attempt to articulate historical and social experience by way of theory. That's why it was so important to Horkheimer to only publish those writings of his that met the demands of the present. In them, his capacity for historical differentiation is evident: a text written in 1966 has to be different than one written in 1944. Hence also his irritation with Habermas' text in his letter to Adorno: in 1958 you could not establish continuity with Marx's early writings without some kind of rupture. It is something people experience in their development: when you're young, you read the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* with great excitement. What you have initially is that very enthusiasm: the encounter has yet to incorporate a moment of reflection. First, you have to keep in mind when the text was written, why it was written like that, what Marx understood by 'work', what relation that has to work today, etc. Of course the impulse behind the pre-1848 era that guides the early writings, known as the *Vormärz*, is very appealing, and that's why one deals with historical issues. However, to understand all that one needs much more than enthusiasm. Hence Horkheimer's distrust of pure enthusiasm and verbal radicalism. He had seen everything. Today I can understand it much better: I abhor verbal radicalism given my own experience. When you reflect critically on the sixties, it becomes clear that verbal radicalism often ends up accepting the conformism of protest. And that has dangerous consequences both theoretically and practically, for example when pre-fascism is confused with fascism.

Critical theory and the student movement

JM: I would like to ask you some questions about your relationship with the anti-authoritarian protest movement of the second half of the sixties. You played an important role in Frankfurt's SDS [Socialist Federation of German Students] and had close contact with key figures in the movement like Hans-Jürgen Krahl and Angela Davis, who also had a strong link to critical theory. What was the historical and biographical situation which led you to the student movement?

DC: When I went to Frankfurt to study with Adorno, it was accepted everywhere that something had to give socially. It was in the air. There was great dissatisfaction with West Germany's post-Nazi situation. Shortly before, there'd been the 'Spiegel scandal', which posed a dangerous threat to the freedom of the press.[5] For my generation, which had been exposed to the benign influence of the re-education programmes, in a progressive intellectual climate, this situation became intolerable. A strong impulse to transform society emerged from the contradiction between the democratic aims we'd been educated in and the day-to-day reality of the Federal Republic. This was compounded by my first experience abroad, to England, where daily life seemed to be marked by a basic democratic outlook that simply fascinated me. It was not merely a democracy without content, where one just goes to vote every four years. Instead, there was a permanent spirit of debate: there were people on the streets that approached citizens for their views on the political issues of the day, asking for example what they thought about atomic war and things like that. Yet the decisive factor in understanding this drive for transformation was obviously Germany's past. In this sense, the Auschwitz and Eichmann trials were enormously important in my upbringing. We mustn't forget that nobody in the Federal Republic ever spoke about such things; it was as if they had never happened. And suddenly both trials could be followed on television. Naturally, this led to conversations within the family: we wanted to know who this Eichmann was, what he had done, and when we read something about him or discovered a new fact we were completely shocked. Little by little we began to understand why Germany was not particularly well-regarded in Europe and to see through the ideological construct that rendered Germany a victim of world history. As you can imagine, given the historical, social and generational situation, the SDS was very attractive. For example, in the mid-sixties the SDS campaigned for Nazi justice reparations, which for me was enormously important. My father was a solicitor who would've liked to have made it as a judge, however his examiner deemed him insufficiently national-socialist, fortunately. I remember that in the early fifties, from time to time my father would see old faces at the court entrance; sometimes, when I asked him what they'd done he'd simply say: 'he used to be a judge'. Only later did I come to understand the situation: as judges they'd handed down death sentences over nothing, over trivialities. During this campaign, we discovered things that somehow we could have intuited but could not demonstrate. That was decisive for my entry into the SDS. The more you dealt with the subject, the more you felt your blood curdle. Besides, what was really mobilising was that not only did you come up against the events of 1933-1945, but also with everything that happened after. For us this didn't represent an attempt to rake up the past, on the contrary, such events were inseparable from our childhood and youth, from this totally enforced silence. It was as if we were covered in muck: there were issues that simply couldn't be touched, as it were, and if one did, the result was immediate social exclusion. In this context, the SDS played a very important role.

JM: That was also one of the main points of agreement between the SDS and critical theory, was it not?

DC: Yes, but in general the Frankfurt SDS had close ties to critical theory. Horkheimer and above all Adorno were regular guests at the SDS headquarters. With Adorno we saw each other very often and we argued a lot. He tried to convince us that it was somewhat imprudent to compare West German society with fascism: one could speak of a survival of national-socialism in the Federal Republic, even of a potential for fascism, but always stressing the fundamental difference between democracy, even in its authoritarian forms, and fascism. In spite of this, there was always the possibility of a reversal back to an authoritarian state, and this was a view that everyone

shared, including Adorno. That's why he always referred to us as 'my students', because we represented the possibility of continuing the work he had done. We saw things in much the same light. For us it was a question of identifying a space in which to articulate a critical theory that understands society from the perspective of its transformability. By then, it wasn't possible to talk about a revolutionary movement of workers, let alone of a vanguard formation that would attempt a 'substitute revolution' of the proletariat, on their behalf and for them, so to speak. That's why we thought that the student milieu was a terrain where transformation could take place. For this reason, as potential intellectuals, the task of the students was to understand society – to understand it, but also to transform it. In this way, we tried to reflect on the problem of students and their social privilege: the intention was not to suppress privileges, but to extend them. The desire to reach beyond the university, to communicate what critical theory knew to the whole of society, all this had to be informed by such an intention. This was what the student movement in the second half of the sixties originally set out to do.

JM: And therefore, when you arrived in Frankfurt, you made the decision to join the SDS.

DC: Yes, in my first week I went to the SDS office on Wilhelm Hauff Street to sign up. Coincidentally Krahl was there, that's how we met, and immediately we went together to the printers to prepare pamphlets. I was quickly accepted into the group. Back then the bars were the heart of the SDS social scene. Krahl drank a lot. He set the pace with his doubles, a nightmare for the liver. Yet there was also much talk and discussion and I learned a lot. First of all, they insisted I read *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. I bought the book right away, but of course I didn't understand a thing, and so it was clear to me that I should join Krahl's research group as soon as possible. They were the ones who took me with them to the seminars: Adorno, Alfred Schmidt and, above all, Oskar Negt – that's how I met him. Negt did many things with us and took great care of our theoretico-political development. He was decisive in our learning: he was extraordinarily well-grounded theoretically and also very interested in working with us. He realised immediately that if he was able to convince Krahl to collaborate with his seminar, then he would bring all of his friends with him and in this way he could bring together the great critical potential there was in Frankfurt. The quality of the discussions in those seminars was excellent, first-class. His seminar on the philosophy of right, which lasted several for years, was also a great mainstay. In 1967 we began with twenty people and by 1968 we were two hundred and fifty, and there were also people like Alexander Kluge and his sister Alexandra. It was thanks to that seminar that Negt met Kluge. In 1968 it was fantastic to see.[6]

JM: What was the relationship with the older critical theorists like? Did they also collaborate closely, as did Negt?

DC: It was of a different kind, though of course very respectful and cooperative, too. They were extremely influential. Adorno was first of all our teacher, for us he was a figure of authority; Horkheimer was slightly secondary, but he was always available, on-hand, and we often bumped into one another. With Marcuse it was different; more of a friendship, and that was a decisive experience for my own personal development. In spite of an age difference of forty years, he was able to cultivate true friendships – that's a quality few people have, and Herbert had it. He always wanted to meet young people and had an enormous interest in what they thought, what they did, etc. On the other hand, his advice helped us a lot in various difficult moments, for example in our discrepancies with Adorno. We invited him again and again to Frankfurt, and from 1967

until his death he came every year, and we also went to visit him in San Diego. We saw each other often and so we could maintain our friendship. His presence was enormously important for me.

JM: Given the context of the relation between critical theory and the student movement, how did things stand with Jürgen Habermas?

DC: With Habermas there were also intense debates and very incisive discussions, but back then Habermas was much more political as an intellectual. His seminar was held on Saturday mornings. His assistants were the ones who prepared the discussion and, as Negt was his assistant, he also participated in the seminar; the discussions with him were simply great, because he was incredibly well prepared. Then there was also Krahl and our group, whose level of preparation was also high. We discussed Habermas' ideas and texts. There were also, of course, some of Habermas's favourite students, such as Albrecht Wellmer and Claus Offe, who generally had little to do with us, but actively participated in debates of an extraordinarily high quality. I remember that there were some enormously interesting discussions, for example on the essay 'Science and Technology as Ideology' [published by Habermas in 1968], and all that was also fundamental to our learning process.

JM: When in this case you speak of 'us', to whom are you referring exactly?

DC: I'm talking a relatively small group of people. In a way, I'm referring to the group that coalesced around Krahl and a handful of students who wanted to do their doctorate with Adorno. As Adorno's doctoral student, Krahl was exemplary. When Horkheimer said that Adorno was proud of 'his students', he was referring to this group of people around Krahl, since, of course, they were not the dimmest and you could expect a lot from them.

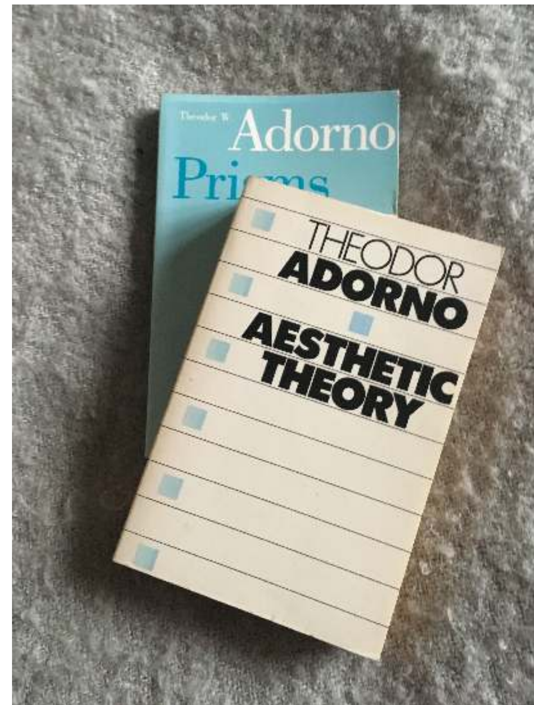
JM: Yet this group of people also played a fundamental role in the occupation of the Institute for Social Research in January 1969, is that correct?

DC: Undoubtedly the occupation of the Institute was the stupidest action we undertook. Few situations are more deserving of the label 'idiotic'. Besides, to top it off, I was the spokesperson for the action and had to try to sell it to the press. In my opinion, Adorno understood everything perfectly: our strike movement was collapsing and we needed a new twist; 'they've done so because they were running out of breath, for propagandistic aims', he said at the time.[7] In fact, it had been Krahl's idea and we agreed to see it through, against our better judgment. It's also true that we already felt it wasn't the right course of action to take. Krahl's obituary for Adorno was shot through with guilt,[8] and when the funeral took place, he said: 'if anyone is out of order, if it occurs to anyone to do anything, I will kill them.' Everybody was on their best behaviour, and usually this only works when the feeling of guilt is widespread. However, at the time we simply hadn't understood the severity of the situation. Not for a moment had we been aware of the terrible strain Adorno and the Institute were under. Walter Rüegg, who was the rector of the university at the time, a sociologist of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences, was not exactly a friend of critical theory. He had put Adorno under enormous pressure, and it was clear that they were going make him personally responsible for anything that may have happened during the occupation of the Institute. That way they could get the Federal State of Hessen to end their financial support to the Institute for Social Research, so that the sociological model of the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences could occupy the whole field, thus eradicating critical theory from the University of Frankfurt. Yet we did not take all that into account, we

behaved like apolitical ignoramuses. We were only interested in how our 'assassination of the father' looked to those outside the university, and indeed in that respect it worked well.

JM: Notwithstanding, wasn't the occupation of the Institute an attempt to stop the further disintegration of the protest movement?

DC: Strictly speaking, that process had not yet begun, but of course the occupation was a decisive contribution to it. What you could already notice then was that little by little militants were becoming increasingly competitive. I do not want to psychologise the facts, but for a period Krahl was afraid that he would be overtaken on the left by exclusively militant forces. There were for example the so-called 'leather jackets' lot that caught everyone's eye because they were totally anti-intellectual and opposed to theory. For example, in our shared flat they assaulted and destroyed a friend's bedroom, and some of the traces of this incident are to be found in Adorno's 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis'.[9] In the desolate atmosphere after the occupation of the Institute, Krahl tried to smooth things over with them, but that only lasted for two or three weeks. In the end he had to distance himself because these were people who were completely hostile to theory and reflection, and Krahl was the epitome of a reflective, theoretically-oriented individual. In the summer of 1969, Krahl turned his attention towards theoretical questions with renewed intensity, and in this last phase he wrote very interesting things about the new problems faced by critical theory in its relation to protest movements.



JM: It is difficult to avoid the impression that Krahl has been unjustly forgotten, especially at a time when movements associated with '1968' are given great historical weight.

DC: Yes, in that respect many things are overlooked. I remember that at the time, Krahl seemed to me to be older, a fully-rounded adult, but he was only twenty-five or -six, like Rudi Dutschke: that's what's incredible! Rudi led a terrible life, travelling constantly from one place to another, and meanwhile he read, read and read like a madman, and that was only possible by sacrificing hours of sleep. That has to be taken into account when his writings are commented on today: it was a lifestyle that had nothing to do with academia or the university. The writings of Krahl or Dutschke available today are texts that have been either taken from notes or transcribed from recordings: they can't be considered in the same way as a piece of writing composed over several years! Yet at that point two thousand people were listening to these texts. Perhaps some half-grasped a couple of their ideas. Today we lack the sensitivity to understand the enormous potential these people had. Krahl was undoubtedly one of the most intelligent and astute people I ever met, who nevertheless had a miserable life-story and an untimely, terrible death.

After Adorno's death

JM: Adorno died in August 1969 and Krahl in February 1970. The working context of critical theory in Frankfurt, in which different teachers from the University of Frankfurt collaborate with one another and with some groups of students, little by little dissolves. You have identified Adorno's death as the key moment in this process. How did this dissolution take place and why? Why did a large number of your circle end up moving to Hannover with Oskar Negt?

DC: Without a doubt, Adorno was the figure around which everything had crystallised. Adorno exerted a very strong pull, and not only in the Federal Republic of Germany – that's why Angela Davis came to Frankfurt, through Marcuse. Although in the first analysis we saw ourselves as his disciples, critical theory was for us a collective project that ought to be continued, not a kind of 'unitary paradigm' or anything like that. We considered our work an elaboration of critical theory in the manner that Adorno intended, and our aim was to continue in this direction. Nevertheless, after Adorno's death we found ourselves confronted with the unavoidable question: 'How do we do something new now? From where do we glean new impulses?' To this was added the whole dispute over who was to get Adorno's chair at the University of Frankfurt. First of all, some considered whether Leszek Kolakowski ought to be his successor, but we could not allow it. Habermas' ambivalence towards Adorno's critical theory can already be seen in the fact that he was the one to propose Kolakowski in the first place: he was not interested in a continuation of the old style of critical theory. However, as long as we had the right to our say and a vote, we did our best to make sure that his chair wasn't occupied by someone who was openly anti-Adorno. There were those who attacked us for our lack of sympathy for those persecuted by communist regimes in Eastern Europe, but anyone who has even glanced at the three volumes of Kolakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism* knows to what extent this book is defamatory against critical theory. For example, it claims that Herbert Marcuse had demanded that libraries be burned, as if he were a Nazi book-burner himself! Those assertions are indisputably false, simply defamatory: we could not allow someone with that kind of attitude to occupy Adorno's post at the University of Frankfurt. It would have been more logical then for Oskar Negt to have occupied the chair. Everything seemed to point in this direction, and I think it would have been the best outcome. Negt was surrounded by the most promising young students, and without a doubt was perfectly qualified both intellectually and professionally for the post. However, even though Negt was an extraordinarily political man, he ended up declining the offer. He was afraid that pressure from the Ministry of Culture would be too great, that he'd be involved in a permanent struggle, but also taking into account the fact that it was not yet clear which direction the student movement would take. In the end he preferred a change of environment and moved to Hannover. His intention was to create a centre for critical theory there, and I have been involved in this project for almost twenty years. After Adorno's death it was undoubtedly one of Oskar Negt's merits to have created this space where one could reflect and re-examine the situation. We could no longer continue what we had done in Frankfurt without some sort of interregnum. The point was to ask how we might appropriate a legacy of thought that was so fragmented, and also establish something new, and this transfer to Hannover forced us to resituate ourselves, to rethink our circumstances. This whole process of reflection, which attempted to develop critical theory in a political and not merely academic sense, is documented in my book *With a Heart of Stone* [*Mit steinerem Herzen*].[10]

JM: And where did the renewed impulse to continue with critical theory stem from? By then there wasn't much to be hoped for from the protest movement, am I right?

DC: Certainly not. After 1970, with the dissolution of the SDS, we no longer knew what to do politically. Everything broke down quickly into small groups, the majority of which were of a Marxist-Leninist character, which also reveals the backlash of the movement as a whole. All these Marxist-Leninist groups were really repulsive. To this day I associate them with feelings of disgust. Their anti-intellectualism, their aversion to pleasure and art, their bad asceticism, as if what we needed in the West was the misery of real socialism: all that was frankly repugnant to me. These groups detested critical theory from the beginning, it was their number one enemy, but in reality they were unable to say anything other than 'Critical theory is bourgeois, and you are all bourgeois because you are critical theorists.' Yet what I thought really dangerous was the way such groups enforced conformism in their own ranks: anything that deviated from the norm was threatened and persecuted highly aggressively. That is the most terrible thing of all. And when all these people are expelled or become ex-Marxist-Leninist, the majority of them do not change. Perhaps the outline of what they once defended changes a little, but in any case, anyone who is not mainstream, who does things on their own terms, continues to be a target of hatred. That's why I had to leave Germany – to find something new, new leads, a new well of experience with which to water the theory.

In those years there were several factors and experiences that were very relevant to my development. In the first place, Italy was enormously important. After 1969, the most significant thing that remained of the protest movement was the Italian situation and, through friendships and personal relationships, I myself ended up going there. In the seventies I spent a lot of time in Italy, especially in Milan, later in Rome, and there I met some really intelligent and fascinating people. This is how I met Adriano Sofri, one of the founders of Potere Operaio, an incredibly smart guy, and through him I came round to the idea of examining Eastern modes of production. Unfortunately Sofri has been imprisoned unjustly for years in connection with the events of Piazza Fontana: he has paid a terrible price having done absolutely nothing; and that people like Berlusconi, who are the ones who should truly go to jail, should be re-elected and return to lock Sofri up is simply unspeakable.[11] What has happened in Italian society in recent years is something that I simply cannot understand.

JM: In the Italy of the seventies you must have found a political situation that bore little resemblance to the one you'd encountered in Germany. Is that so?

DC: As an outsider, what quickly caught my attention was that even though friends were clearly distancing themselves from the Italian Communist Party, it was obvious that the PCI was at the heart of the entire Italian political environment, both positively and negatively: the presence of communism was simply stronger and also had institutional support. In those years in Italy I also worked heavily on Eurocommunism, which at that time was enormously important. New friendships emerged from the confrontation with Eurocommunism, especially Luciana Castellina and, through her, Rossana Rossanda. Thanks to them we were also able to get in touch with Eastern European dissidents. That impressed me and affected me a lot, because they were people and intellectuals of a very special order. In 1977 I met some of these dissidents at a conference in Venice [organised by Il Manifesto].[12] Among them were [Ukrainian mathematician and cybernetician] Leonid Pljuschtsch, who had just left the Gulag, Edmund Baluka, one of the leaders of the Szczecin strikes, a movement that preceded Solidarnosc, and, above all, Franz

Marek, thanks to whom I was better able to understand the processes of transformation at work in Hungary and Czechoslovakia.[13] Experience of the Italian situation and contact with Eastern European dissidents enabled me to better understand the divided situation in Germany. On the other hand, thanks to Franz Marek I heard for the first time about the Hakoah football team in Vienna, and also of the enormous role they played in raising Jewish awareness up until the mid-thirties. This discovery would lead me several years later to occupy myself extensively with Béla Guttmann and Jewish football.[14]

JM: The problem of anti-Semitism would also be one of the fundamental concerns of your later work. Was your own biographical experience influential in this regard?

DC: Yes, initially it was thanks to the Jewish and Israeli friends I had met in Frankfurt. However it eventually became a central issue that was to shape the next ten years. In Frankfurt I was in close contact with a Jewish support group, and I learned a lot from how it was established and progressed over time. From then on the situation in Israel-Palestine became a fundamental problem. From there arose the friendship with Dan Diner, who was enormously constructive.[15] Thanks to him, I learned many things about Israel-Palestine, but also about the meaning of the Middle East, in the widest sense. Finally, I became aware of wanting to continue working on the dispute between anti-Semitism and critical theory, since the 'Elements of anti-Semitism' chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was not the final word on the matter, but a point of departure that required elaboration. Out of these political experiences, I came to view my theoretical work as an attempt to articulate this problem and think it anew with pin-point accuracy.[16]

JM: What other experiences of this era were important for your intellectual development?

DC: In 1971-1972 Angela Davis was arrested, and that affected me a lot personally. The Sozialistische Büro was willing to start a campaign in favour of Angela's release and I was actively involved in it and I went to tour with them for a year.[17] On my part, the trip to the United States in 1978 was also undoubtedly a key experience. I visited the country to see friends and acquaintances, and so I acquired a panoramic view of the whole. Above all, I was impressed by the democratic character of daily life in America. Of course, racism, violence and white supremacy are deeply rooted in American society, and without a doubt there are crude adversaries of democracy, such as rednecks or the awful anti-abortionists. However, in spite of everything, it is a country that airs its discussions out in the open. Its basic structures are democratic, everything must be discussed, and that gives rise to a sort of *éducation sentimentale*. Definitively, all these experiences from the seventies were not only thought processes, but vital processes of experience, and that helped me enormously in reflecting on how to continue the tradition of critical theory. That's because critical theory needs the articulation of new experiences to fill it, and that's what I did then. The most important thing about such experiences was acting within a framework of relations alongside people who were working on similar issues, which represented

a breakthrough in my own trajectory, and that is why we did our best to maintain contact; back then establishing such connections was not as simple as it is now. Therefore each encounter carried with it a tremendous broadening of horizons. This whole process of experience was fundamental for understanding the significance of social awareness and behaviour, including that of daily life. Later, in the nineties, I developed a whole theory of daily life, which was completely new territory for me, informed by all these prominent experiences.

JM: In 1978 you returned to Germany. Your return coincides with the so-called 'years of lead' of the Federal Republic, which today has become the subject of numerous publications and even some movies. What was your impression of the socio-political predicament Germany faced at the time?

DC: This period in Germany was unbearable, especially the whole issue with the Red Army Faction (RAF). I got to know everyone personally from the first generation of the RAF. They were all stupid and politically useless. You could say, with Walter Laqueur (with whom I disagree on almost everything else), that there has never been a group of more insignificant people about whom so much has been written. Fundamentally, all that was intended as a strategic backlash against '68, and there are still echoes of it today. The fact is that society had changed for the better, albeit indirectly, but this is how social transformation actually takes place: not because a couple of individuals make their wishes a reality, but through social conflicts and their development. For example, the level of social intolerance significantly decreased. In 1970, if a girl was wearing a short skirt or a boy had long hair, his hair would be pulled or they'd have things thrown at them in the street. Already by 1977 that was unimaginable. However, this process of transformation was counteracted at a political level. A frightening victim mentality emerged. If you made certain comments, that was enough to see you suddenly involved in a disciplinary procedure. If the social and political climate after the kidnapping of Schleyer and the events in Mogadishu had lasted for three further weeks, nobody knows how democracy would have ended up in Germany. That is something that is completely forgotten when talking about the RAF today. Heinrich Böll understood this victim mentality very well when he observed that something was not right in German society given that it had to mobilise sixty million inhabitants against six people. Similarly, among some there was the total idealisation of the RAF, which was completely insignificant with regard to the real social dynamic, with what was actually going on in German society. The RAF was simply a repulsive organisation of truly stupid people. You could not take them seriously, not even one of them was able to think politically. Even Ulrike Meinhof was totally apolitical; she did little else but moralise – not to mention Horst Mahler. And today they are styled as if they had been something extraordinary. The public is fascinated that there are people who go around with hand grenades and weapons! I cannot have the slightest respect for something like that, and I cannot take it seriously politically either. The members of the RAF were ideal victims for the secret services and, if they had not played their own game, they would have finished with them in four weeks: it was very easy to find them! Half the city of Hannover knew when Ulrike was there, because there were people who went around asking everyone if they could crash at hers. And the police, who had special units dedicated only and exclusively to finding her, do not know where she is? Those are the issues that need to be clarified, and not whether Karl-Heinz Kurras received some money from the Stasi or not.[18] What is certain is that the Stasi did not say: 'shoot Ohnesorg in order to trigger the rise of a protest movement in Germany', because the student movement disrupted the entire strategy of the SED [the governing party of the German Democratic Republic]. The illegal leaders of the KPD [German Communist

Party] tried time and again to exert influence on the SDS, but from the opposite direction. They said: 'You mustn't do this, you mustn't do that – you are only going to irritate people!', and things like that. In fact the anti-authoritarian protest movement was a real nightmare for authoritarian communists: they wanted something very different! That's why it's incredible, the nonsense you read in the newspapers today, and nobody dares contradict them.

The actuality of critical theory

JM: From the end of the seventies, some academic volumes began to present the history of critical theory as the unified development of a project of 'interdisciplinary materialism '. In the eighties, with the publication of the theory of communicative action, the so-called 'paradigm shift' in critical theory was proclaimed. Since then the term 'critical theory' is often associated primarily with the name Jürgen Habermas, and Adorno's work is abstractly declared to have been 'superseded'. In this context you have spoken of an 'invention of tradition'. What consequences has this had for the reception of critical theory and for attempts to develop it?

DC: To understand the meaning of this whole process, an analogy could be established with the development of psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic theory and praxis have remained completely at the mercy of the associations of psychoanalysts, and the implications of this development have already been criticised, for example by Paul Parin, who recently passed away. On the other hand, there have also been attempts to re-appropriate psychoanalysis for science, especially from the perspective of literary theory. Nevertheless, such attempts cling to psychoanalysis as a simple mode of representation, as if it were a purely academic theory in which contradictions and drives are no longer recognised, so to speak; that is, psychoanalysis as such is preserved, but its contribution to knowledge and self-knowledge, that which made it worthwhile, is eliminated. Something similar has happened with critical theory. The 'invention of tradition' has academicised it completely, and with this it has eliminated its principal attraction: it has made it one theory among others, a rung on the career ladder. However, according to my experience, critical theory is informed above all by a non-academic impulse. Critical theory requires an interest in emancipation and, to put it crudely, in human happiness. I understand emancipation to be the movement of a social totality that runs within each and every individual. Yet the interest in emancipation also requires reflection on the contradictions that hinder it; that is to say, it refers to what Parin has called 'the contradictions of the subject'. Experiencing these contradictions in the subject and wanting to understand them is the driving force that leads one to dedicate oneself to critical theory – that is why those who present critical theory as some kind of apocalyptic fantasy completely confuse its meaning. Every individual, if she is not psychically damaged, tries to close the gulf between her predicament and happiness. The attempt to overcome suffering is constantly renewed . Theoretical activity is therefore a moment in the articulation of a vital force, it is a union of the 'ego' and 'superego', and the 'super-ego' is not just an enemy soldier who watches over the occupied territory of the 'ego', but must also help the 'ego' to achieve satisfaction. Nevertheless, this is all completely neglected by the 'invention of tradition'.

JM: Sometimes you have the feeling that the so-called 'paradigm shift', with its turn towards the purely procedural, has finally emptied critical theory of all substance and experience.

DC: That's right. Actually this 'invention of tradition', with its merely instrumental understanding of knowledge, falls well below the level of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Enlightenment resorts to a

focus on what is crudely instrumental, and in the end we have many great instruments, but we cannot build anything with them. In this sense the 'linguistic turn' has led to a dead end. Critical theory is now without an object, without content, without any experience that reflection requires in order to function. That is why the 'linguistic turn' has left a desolate intellectual landscape: everything consists of theoretical collections in which some things are hoarded alongside others, everything is deemed equivalent, everything is reconstructed, reformulated; it's enough to make you weep. That has nothing to do with critical theory; it is simply adaptation to a conformist academic culture. From those premises you can perhaps build an academic career or direct an editorial line, but of course it has little to do with the possibility of gaining knowledge about a society in transformation. Critical theory can only be renewed if one thinks with reference to new objects, and that also means referring to new contradictions. And in this sense I am an optimist, because there is now a need to restore substance to thought and that is why Adorno is being read again.

JM: Yet if critical theory is understood as elaboration of social experience by means of thought, is it not problematic to include Habermas in this theoretical tradition?

DC: First of all, we can't forget that Habermas represents a leap forward for German intellectuals: Habermas has been for the Federal Republic what Max Weber was for Wilhelmine Germany. He is a tremendously sharp and intelligent individual who has not shied away from political dispute; he is someone who has consistently opposed the reactionary tendencies that crop up again and again in German society. As a deeply democratic intellectual, Habermas is undoubtedly a very important figure for Germany, and also for Europe. However, the critical theory that I was attracted to was different. I think Habermas is actually closer to the tradition of Weber than of critical theory – hence the division of his writing along the lines of 'grand theory' and 'politics'.

The critical theory of Horkheimer and Adorno was closely linked to their experience of emigration and exile, and of course one cannot claim a similar background and say 'I belong to this tradition.' Nevertheless one should try to make such experiences bear fruit in the work itself. It is about making visible the experience of the present from the experience of the past. That's why I deal with issues such as those linked to migration. Today we no longer live in ethnically homogeneous societies and that raises new problems. In this sense, the critical theorist's experience of exile qualifies the understanding that these issues are not only problems of language acquisition or of integration, but that they require a new concept of culture. Culture is not like a billiard ball that is solid and sealed; rather the cultural process is a very complex issue that is in continual flux. That's why I think it is disingenuous when certain authors speak of a 'German' or 'Anglo-Saxon' tradition, as if they were fixed and separate entities that could be theoretically reconciled with the right array of tools.

JM: So, how can the reference to 'tradition' be understood today? In an anti-traditional sense, as Adorno would have said? As the search for the new in the old from the viewpoint of the present?

DC: For me, the book *The Invention of Tradition* by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger was very stimulating because from the German perspective England has always been admired for having an unbroken and accessible sense of tradition. In France, in England, and in the United States, bourgeois society was something real, but in Germany around 1800 there was nothing of the sort; that's why you had to think about it, and that's how the German intellectual tradition came about: without German misery there would have been no German idealism. Be that as it may, today we no longer have a tradition that we may call a whole, instead we have only broken continuities. Today we have to create our traditions, because tradition is not simply the transmission of the old, but the foundation of something new. In this sense you might say that Germany has a head start because we do not have the illusion of continuity that dominates in Anglo-Saxon countries. However, what is true is that we have such a strong rejection of the new that we are not capable of conceiving it as such. In 1989, a new reality was created in Germany, but we have termed it 'reunification', as if it represented the reestablishment of something from the past. In opposition, critical theory wants to understand the new and, after the Cold War, this can no longer be attempted from within national borders, rather it must take into account what has become of society globally. That is the current challenge: we live in a transformed society, but we lack the adequate concepts with which to grasp it. That's why critical theory is not simply 'there', it is not something available to us to inherit; instead it is something that we must develop.

JM: How would you explain the relationship between the inevitably historical character of the work of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse and the relevance of their approaches? What's the significance of this 'tradition of thought' today?

DC: Critical theory is part of the great theoretical tradition of German idealism, in which the big themes were thought, freedom and action. However, it can no longer settle for idealism, as it has become aware of the limits of the Enlightenment, the limitations of spirit, of material contradictions – and that requires consciousness of the most terrible events in history and society. Critical theory states from the outset that these atrocities cannot be cancelled out by intellectual progress or the development of consciousness. And that means that critical theory is only possible by acts of remembrance. That's why I wrote Adorno's biography: for me Adorno is the nucleus of the 20th century, and only following his example can we continue to develop

critical theory. The experiences he gives voice to in his thinking cannot be marginalised, one cannot say: 'that was simply a dark chapter of history'. Such experiences were not just a German adventure, but part of world history, and that is why we must reflect on national-socialism, on the gulag archipelago, and also, for example, on Chinese history, which in the past hundred years has been nothing but an accumulation of catastrophes. Crucially, all these experiences are deposited in today's subjects: the terror of the past is the fear of the present, that's why individuals no longer trust in their abilities, and the whole world has concluded in one way or another that human life is of little value or consequence, and you don't need to be a critical theorist to realise that.

JM: You have also pointed out that today we are no longer in a position to carry out an immanent critique of bourgeois society, since it no longer exists as such. What is there to draw on that could take critical social theory in the direction you propose?

DC: That's the subject of the book that will follow the one I'm working on right now. It is titled *Changes*, and it will thematise the relationship between the 'long nineteenth century', the 'short twentieth century' and the present. It will therefore constitute an attempt to read history and society as a palimpsest. Today the nexus of experience is no longer given: contemporary society is fragmented, everything appears disconnected. The Internet is a magnificent example: there are millions of perspectives, but in reality, the only thing that holds them together is the computer screen. That is, today the nexus has to be built out of the different fragments of experience. The dissolution of received experience, of inherited context, happened over time. Marx could still count on a lot of received knowledge, hence the prominence of Hegel and Ricardo in his work. For critical theory the situation was already more difficult, but nevertheless they attempted to analyse contemporary thought as part of a whole, for example in *The Critique of Instrumental Reason* by Horkheimer. That's no longer available to us, and, given the decline of academia and the university, probably won't be possible in the future either. That's why I'm interested in building an experiential totality, and *Changes* will do it by addressing food, sports, television or art, and also how the different fragments superimpose and overlap with one another. Due to the fact that today the totality of the 'spirit', as it were, or culture, is no longer a unity as it had been during the 'long nineteenth century', this whole is no longer so powerful and it does not subject individuals to such an overwhelming extent. And this also opens up new possibilities. There are those whose listening capacity is pseudo-deformed after a lifetime of being raised on a compromised musical language. Such people become very irritated when listening to Schönberg as his music doesn't have a melody. Nevertheless, current generations of students are free of these prejudices, they encounter Schönberg and are able to listen; for them this music is also sound in which something interesting might be found. Those are the moments in which you can begin to build anew the connections that make critique possible. In this sense, one might say that by doing theory you strengthen the subject, showing that it needn't be as fragile as it currently is. In fact what takes place, generally speaking, is that the subject encounters a series of socially enforced prohibitions and obstacles. These mechanisms prevent subjects from realising their social experience in an emphatic sense. Our job is to work against this tendency.

JM: How do you foster this emphatic intellectual experience? Is it possible to give voice to something like that in universities today?

DC: For the time being, I try to make these experiences possible in the shadow of the university.

With the current set-up of degree and master's degree, as exists in Germany and many other European countries, the possibility of having formative experiences during one's period of study is greatly hindered if not completely destroyed. Universities have become exam machines: your work-rate is monitored, but not what you learn. I think that the future for universities is pretty dismal as I get the impression that educational policy is directed by financial interests and a misunderstood utilitarianism. With regard to how intellectual wealth is produced, a completely mistaken approach predominates. This is because one can only have wealth when one has abundance, when other variables are allowed to come into play. What's useful from a practical point of view is generally the product of abundance, of a surplus, and not the product of attempting to obtain something directly. There are so many tests that demonstrate this that it's not necessary give any further detail. On the other hand, I don't know if universities are at all suitable places for critical theory. What I was able to experience was that it not only hinders the work of those who carry out critical theory in its most authentic sense, but to a certain extent it also persecutes them for doing so – just as anything that deviates from the norm is also pursued, and which in one way or another has to do with freedom and independence. That's why old-fashioned concepts like 'academic freedom' are today enormously important, because currently the university mostly tends to inhibit freedom rather than enable it.

However we needn't be so grim. In the past ten years I have met excellent groups of students all over the world, even in universities where one expects only to meet students from elite institutions who have been completely hot-housed and know exactly which career path they're on. I found that even in those universities there exist critical theory reading groups that look to maintain and encourage discussions that often go on for hours – such is the liveliness of their interest. When in discussion with them, you sense that their needs come up against the institution, and they thus find themselves called to take up themes and issues that are beyond the mainstream, and that is a good substrate for critical theory. After having been so isolated throughout the nineties and early noughties, seeing this new interest resonate even at a global level has filled me with optimism. This isn't to say that I am naïve. Instead, I would like to think that I am true to the maxim of my mentor, old Horkheimer: 'Pessimism in big matters, optimism in the small.'

Translated by Alex Alvarez Taylor

Notes

1. This interview was held on the 12 June 2009 in Frankfurt am Main. The transposition from spoken conversation to legible text would not have been possible were it not for the work of Arne Kellerman.
2. The transcript is included in Theodor W. Adorno, 'Fortschritt', *Gesammelte Schriften* 10.1.
3. Claussen is referring to Max Horkheimer's letter to Adorno of September 27 1958. After having read Habermas' 'On the Philosophical Question of Marx and Marxism', Horkheimer wrote to Adorno wanting to clarify Adorno's relationship to the Institute and, more generally, to introduce certain changes inside the Institute. The letter, which bears annotations by Adorno, is reproduced in Claussen's biography of the latter.
4. See Max Horkheimer, *Späne: Notizen über Gespräche mit Max Horkheimer*, in *Gesammelte Schriften 14: Nachgelassene Schriften 1949-1972, 5. Notizen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1988). [An English translation is currently unavailable.]
5. The Spiegel-Affäre concerned the freedom of the press in the Federal Republic of Germany. Following the publication of a critical article in the magazine, several editors and contributors to *Der Spiegel* were arrested and accused of national treason. Finally, in 1965 the court of appeal decided not to pursue the case.
6. See Johan Hartle's interview with Oskar Negt, 'Critical Theory's contexts of cooperation', *Radical Philosophy* 2.04 (Spring 2009), 73–85.
7. 'Now they are all contrite, but Krahl organised the

whole action so as to enter preventive detention and keep the Frankfurt SDS – which is breaking down – together, and for the moment it has succeeded. In their propaganda they turn things upside down completely, as if we were the ones to have taken repressive measures and not the students who told us to shut up, who told us we weren't welcome.' Theodor W. Adorno, letter to Herbert Marcuse 14th February 1969, in *Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung*, ed.Wolfgang Kraushaar (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1998), S. 575.

8. See Hans-Jürgen Krahl, 'The Political Contradiction in Adorno's Critical Theory', *Telos* 21 (Fall 1974), 164–67. Originally published in *Konstitution und Klassenkampf* (Frankfurt a M.: Neue Kritik, 2008), 291–94.

9. 'Today once again the antithesis between theory and praxis is being misused to denounce theory. When a student's room was smashed because he preferred to work rather than join in actions, on the wall was scrawled: "Whoever occupies himself with theory, without acting practically, is a traitor to socialism".' Theodor W. Adorno, 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 259–78.

10. Detlev Claussen, *Mit steinerem Herzen. Politische: Essays 1969-1989* (Bremen: Bettina Wassman Verlag, 1989).

11. In January 1997 Adriano Sofri was sentenced to 22 years in prison for allegedly participating in the murder of police officer Luigi Calabresi. Calabresi was one of the officers whose responsibility it was to investigate the massacre that took place at Piazza Fontana. In December 1969, while investigations were underway, one of the suspects, a railworker named Giusepe Pinelli, died in custody after falling out of the window of an office that belonged to Calabresi. The circumstances surrounding Pinelli's death have yet to be clarified; however the conditions under which he was detained strained the limits of legality. At one point, Sofri held Calabresi responsible for Pinelli's death. Calabresi was assassinated in Milan in May 1972 and in 1990 Adriano Sofri was convicted. Sofri has always insisted on his innocence.

12. The minutes from this conference were published in *Potere e opposizione nelle società postrivoluzionarie* (Rome: Alfani editore, 1978).

13. Born to a family of Polish Jews, Franz Marek was one of the intellectual leaders of the Austrian Communist Party (KPÖ). In the 1960s the party shifted towards reformist positions. After the Prague spring he adopted a decidedly critical attitude towards Soviet communism and soon became one of the principal representatives of Eurocommunism. Unable to convince the KPÖ to follow suit, in the 1970s he tried to encourage an independent stream of thought as editor of the Wiener Tagebuch.

14. See Detlev Claussen, *Bela Guttmann. Weltgeschichte des Fußballs in einer Person* (Berlin: Berenberg, 2006).

15. Dan Diner is a writer and historian who lives between Germany and Israel, and who has worked on the conflict in the Middle East, the history of the twentieth century, historical memory, the holocaust and Jewish history.

16. In particular, this line of thought is developed in Detlev Claussen, *Grenzen der Aufklärung. Zur gesellschaftlichen Geschichte des modernen Antisemitismus* (Frankfurt a. M .: Fischer, 1987).

17. The Sozialistische Büro was am important German New Left organisation formed in 1969 that published the magazine *Links* and other influential publications. Participants included, among others, Oskar Negt, Elmar Altvater, Dan Diner, Joachim Hirsch and Hans-Dieter Narr.

18. Karl-Heinz Kurras was a former West Berlin police officer, who on 2 May 1967, at the demonstration against the Shah of Persia's visit to Berlin, shot and killed a student demonstrator, Benno Ohnesorg. The demonstration against the Shah and Ohnesorg's murder triggered the rise of the protest movement in the Federal Republic. The movement gained force when Kurras was exempted from all charges. In the spring of 2009 it was revealed that Kurras had in fact been working as a Stasi agent on behalf of the GDR. The German press began an effort to revise and recast the history of the student movement, suggesting that its entire operation had been organised and orchestrated by the secret services of the GDR. In this way, they hoped to downplay the meaning and scope of the protest movement, as well as the historical conflicts that it drew on, by framing the narrative as one of a simple reaction to the gunshot that killed Ohnesorg.