

ELEMENTS OF A CRITICAL THEORY OF ZIONISM. THE JEWISH STATE, THE DISASTROUS HISTORY AND THE CHANGING FUNCTIONALITY OF ANTISEMITISM IN THE LATE THOUGHT OF MAX HORKHEIMER

*Elementos de una Teoría Crítica del sionismo.
El estado judío, la historia como desastre y la funcionalidad cambiante del
antisemitismo en el pensamiento tardío de Max Horkheimer*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores Max Horkheimer's Spätwerk, i. e. his scattered, fragmentary and enigmatic late writings from the time after his return to Frankfurt in 1950 until his death in 1973. The author claims that Horkheimer's late writings contain significant 'Elements of a Critical Theory of Zionism'. While elaborating on Horkheimer's account of Zionism in a close connection with his account of Judaism and of the Jewish Diaspora, the author argues that precisely these 'Elements of a Critical Theory of Zionism' may serve as a foil, a prism, for deciphering Horkheimer's enigmatic late work. This deciphering comes down to a reinterpretation of the latter in a historic-materialist fashion, which sharply contradicts the common view that late Horkheimer has become conservative and/or religious in the conventional sense. Rather, the author reconnects the issue with Horkheimer's core conception of Critical Theory, especially regarding the relationship between philosophy and history. However, in the course of the argument the internal problematic of Horkheimer's core conception, as it is deeply reflected in his late work, is illuminated as well. Drawing on this, the closing section pays special attention to late Horkheimer's theory of (the functionality of) 'antisemitism'.

Key words: Max Horkheimer; Critical Theory; Philosophy of History; Late Work; Zionism; State of Israel; Jewish Diaspora; Antisemitism; Religion; Judaism.

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RESUMEN

Este artículo estudia la obra tardía de Max Horkheimer, es decir, los textos dispersos, fragmentarios y enigmáticos que Horkheimer escribió en el periodo desde su regreso a Frankfurt en 1950 hasta su muerte en 1973. El autor sostiene que en estos escritos tardíos contienen elementos significativos para una Teoría Crítica del sionismo. A la vez que expone las consideraciones de Horkheimer sobre el sionismo en estrecha relación con sus consideraciones sobre el judaísmo y la diáspora judía, el autor sostiene que estos “elementos para una Teoría Crítica del antisemitismo” podrían servir como un prisma adecuado para descifrar la enigmática obra tardía de Horkheimer. Se trataría de una reinterpretación de estos escritos de manera histórico-materialista, en abierta contraposición a la común interpretación del Horkheimer tardío como un teórico conservador y/o religioso en sentido convencional. Más bien, el autor intenta re-conectar la cuestión con la concepción nuclear de la Teoría Crítica en Horkheimer, especialmente en lo que respecta a la relación entre filosofía e historia. Sin embargo, a lo largo de la argumentación también se intenta hacer luz sobre la problemática interna de la concepción nuclear de Horkheimer tal y como se refleja en su obra tardía. Partiendo de estas consideraciones, la sección final del texto se centra especialmente en la teoría tardía del último Horkheimer sobre (la funcionalidad de) el “antisemitismo”.

Palabras clave: Max Horkheimer; Teoría Crítica; filosofía de la historia; obra tardía; sionismo; estado de Israel; diáspora judía; antisemitismo; religión; judaísmo.

Nowadays Max Horkheimer is well known for his work from the 1930s and the 1940s, prominently the ‘Dialectic of Enlightenment’ and his great essays from the ‘Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung’. This general picture accords with Horkheimer’s theory of Antisemitism, which has –most notably expressed in the ‘Elements of a theory of Antisemitism’ section of the ‘Dialectic of Enlightenment’¹– well made its way into academic discourse. On the contrary, Horkheimer’s late thought (his so called *Spätwerk*), i. e. his work from the time between his return to Frankfurt in 1950 until his death in 1973, has been so far –unfortunately– barely studied. Nevertheless, this scattered and fragmentary *Spätwerk* is nevertheless of particular interest, since it illuminates Horkheimer’s Critical Theory in general. Moreover, it opens up a radical different perspective on his theory of Judaism and of Antisemitism in particular. As I demonstrate in the following, paying attention to the

¹ Max HORKHEIMER / Theodor W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung. Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1988.

hidden but striking account of Zionism, which is contained in Horkheimer's Spätwerk, enables us to conduct such a re-framing of his thought.

To achieve this goal, I aim *first*, to give a short characterization of Horkheimer's enigmatic Spätwerk. *Second*, I explore the outstanding position of religion in general and of Judaism in particular in Horkheimer's late thought, while recalling two core intentions of his Critical Theory. Building on this, I intend *third*, to show that Horkheimer's Spätwerk contains an implicit theory of Zionism –or rather, to speak in Horkheimer's own language, 'Elements of a Critical Theory of Zionism'. Although there is a broad textual basis, the significance of the issue of Zionism and the Jewish State for his thought has so far neither been acknowledged –let alone analyzed– by academic work on Horkheimer, nor is his interesting voice to be encountered in contemporary discourses on Zionism. Consecutively, I highlight *fourth*, the significance and the over-arching character of his account of Zionism for the internal dynamics of Horkheimer's late thought. My goal is to show that his account of Zionism may serve as a foil, a *prism*, for re-sorting, re-understanding and deciphering his enigmatic Spätwerk. By following this line of argument, I *finally* argue, that Horkheimer's 'Elements of a Critical Theory of Zionism' eventually bridge into a significantly re-shaped theory of Antisemitism. Thereby, we can understand from Horkheimer's argument that in the age of Zionism the antisemitic logic of identity and violence becomes the sole logic of the perpetuated disastrous history itself.²

1. HORKHEIMER'S SPÄTWERK

Generally, Horkheimer's Spätwerk is regarded as being marginal for the history of the philosophy of the 20th century. For instance, Jürgen Habermas argues that late Horkheimer has been "strangely blocked in his academic productivity"³. Therefore, Habermas continues, is the Spätwerk not part of "the substance of the work of

² Unfortunately the vast majority of Horkheimer's late writings is not yet translated into English. Therefore, I translated all citations. The responsibility for their inaccuracy is fully my own. In the following Horkheimer's work is quoted according to the German edition of the collected works: Max HORKHEIMER, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 19 vol., Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1985-1996. (cited as HGS volume/page number, for instance HGS 6/220).

³ Jürgen HABERMAS, "Bemerkungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Horkheimerschen Werkes", in A. Schmidt / N. Altwicker (eds.), *Max Horkheimer heute. Werk und Wirkung*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1986, pp. 163-179: p. 165.

Max Horkheimer”⁴. Though superficial, this common view is not completely wrong, since there is indeed not a *single* Spätwerk. On the contrary, Horkheimer’s Spätwerk consists of uncountable essays, manuscripts and first and foremost of well pointed notes, whose style recalls the section ‘Notes and Drafts’ of the ‘Dialectic of Enlightenment’. However, I am convinced that this enigmatic and scattered composition does not render Horkheimer’s Spätwerk, which comprises nearly 3000 pages, insubstantial.

In the course of these innumerable fragments, which he apparently could not synthesize into one major work and which he has thus left to us without further explanation, Horkheimer explores a manifold of philosophical and theological questions in a very close relationship with political and historical developments. Within this scattered and enigmatic Spätwerk, Horkheimer’s intensive engagement with the topic of religion is outstanding. Pointed public statements like “It is vain to retain an absolute meaning, without God”⁵ have highly contributed to the view, that, as for instance Habermas argues, late Horkheimer reveals “a metaphysical need of religion”⁶. Accordingly, regarding Horkheimer’s Spätwerk, one encounters the position that, as Habermas continues, late Horkheimer has become “not only very conventional in his cultural criticism, but conservative in general”⁷.

However, I am convinced that this common position, although it is not completely wrong either, falls short. Regarding this, it is telling that Alfred Schmidt, the editor of Horkheimer’s Spätwerk, has identified the latter as “silhouette of a systematic intention”⁸. According to Schmidt, Horkheimer’s late thought comprises a shadowgraph that awaits until today being deciphered. For my understanding, recalling two basic premises, which have always been at the utmost core of Horkheimer’s Critical Theory, is a formidable point of departure for such a deciphering. According to Horkheimer, Critical Theory means “to name what is wrong and what is bad” in order to prepare “another, a better future”⁹. Hence, Horkheimer’s

⁴ Jürgen HABERMAS, “Bemerkungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Horkheimerschen Werkes”, op. cit., p. 165.

⁵ HGS 7/184.

⁶ Jürgen HABERMAS, “Zu Max Horkheimers Satz: ‘Einen unbedingten Sinn zu retten ohne Gott, ist eitel’”, In: Ibid., *Texte und Kontexte*, Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1991, pp. 110-126: p. 124.

⁷ Jürgen HABERMAS, “Bemerkungen zur Entwicklungsgeschichte des Horkheimerschen Werkes”, op.cit., p.176.

⁸ Alfred SCHMIDT, “Die geistige Physiognomie Max Horkheimers”, in: Ibid., *Drei Studien über Materialismus*, München: Hanser, 1977, pp. 81-134.

⁹ HGS 8/328.

Critical Theory inevitably grounds, first, on the idea of the “*ganz Andere*”¹⁰, the “radical other”, which –of course– cannot be concretely described. This conception implies, second, that the radical other maintains an internal connection with the dynamics of history itself, that this radical other marks a historical space from which Critical Theory can be articulated. In this minimal sense, I think, Horkheimer’s over-all work can be described as historic-materialist.

However, the outlined essential connection between Critical Theory and history has always been, recalling Horkheimer’s ambivalent relationship to Marxist Politics, fragile. Albeit, after 1945 Horkheimer’s conception of Critical Theory turned into a serious problem, since he –thereby contravening basic premises of Marxist Theory– developed the insight that the social antagonisms do not immanently refer to the radical other but refer rather “necessarily to its opposite, the automation of society”¹¹. Accordingly, Schmidt highlights further that Horkheimer’s Spätwerk is “characterized by problematizing the historical space of the philosophy of the present”¹².

While elaborating further on this tensed and nevertheless necessary relationship between Critical Theory and history, I aim in the following, to explore Horkheimer’s late thought. I begin with his special emphasis on religion in general and of Judaism in particular, before turning in the subsequent section to the crucial issue of Zionism. Thereby, I intend to show that Horkheimer’s so-called escape into religion proves to be a desperate form of historical materialism, whereas his so-called Conservatism proves to be a position of mourning, while facing a world in which the logics of antisemitism and violence have become the sole logic of history itself.

2. RELIGION AND JUDAISM

Many aspects of late Horkheimer’s comprehensive analyses of the social function and the philosophical content of religion would well be worth a close examination. However, at this place, I prefer to limit myself to the question why late Horkheimer, who himself did by no means become religious, was that much occupied with religion in general and with Judaism in particular. A point of departure for such an examination forms again Schmidt’s finding, that Horkheimer’s Spätwerk is

¹⁰ HGS 7/365ff.

¹¹ HGS 6/136.

¹² Alfred SCHMIDT, “Die geistige Physiognomie Max Horkheimers”, op. cit., p. 113.

“united [...] by the tendency to resist the negative course of the world”¹³. It is obviously this tendency (of all Critical Theory) that shifted Horkheimer’s interest, after National Socialism and after he lost his trust into Marxist politics and theory, to the topic of religion. Accordingly, Horkheimer highlights that the core of all religion is “to express the desire, which unites all humanity, that the injustice of all history up to now shall not be the eternal fate”¹⁴. Thus, Horkheimer defines “the true meaning of religion” in a strictly materialist fashion, as the “impulse, which is preserved against reality, the impulse, which is still not suffocated, that it shall change, that it shall become the other, that the spell shall be broken”¹⁵. Following this historic-materialist line of thinking, late Horkheimer conceives the essential radical other as being retained within religion. Therefore, religion in general becomes the point of reference for his Critical Theory. However, by the same token Horkheimer argues that the “self-automatizing society” culminates in the liquidation of the autonomous subject, on whose desire alone religion could rely. He simply states: “The eternal God and His commandments disintegrate”¹⁶. Therefore, Horkheimer concludes that in modernity religion in general lacks historical substance. Accordingly religion cannot be the historical space for the articulation of Critical Theory.

However, within the context of Horkheimer’s analyses diasporic Judaism takes a very exceptional position. It is noteworthy, that at this point Horkheimer’s theory closely intersects with his (intellectual) biography, which was highly influenced by his personal and philosophical background in Judaism¹⁷. A fact that is, of course, more true for the time after his return to Frankfurt. Accordingly, late Horkheimer himself used to speak of the two major sources of his philosophical work: The German tradition on the one hand and the Jewish tradition on the other hand¹⁸. For Horkheimer, being Jewish essentially meant to live “in the expectation, that the

¹³ *Ib.*, p. 109.

¹⁴ HGS 6/288.

¹⁵ HGS 6/288.

¹⁶ HGS 6/415.

¹⁷ Cf. Ernst Ludwig EHRlich, *Von Hiob zu Horkheimer. Gesammelte Schriften zum Judentum und seiner Umwelt*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009; Eva G. REICHMANN, *Max Horkheimer the Jew: Critical Theory and Beyond*, in: *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 19 (1), 1974, pp. 181-195; Norbert ALTWICKLER, “Loeb-Lectures. Gastvorlesungen über Geschichte, Philosophie und Religion des Judentums an der Universität Frankfurt am Main 1956-1957”, in M. Boll / R. Gross, *Die Frankfurter Schule und Frankfurt. Eine Rückkehr nach Deutschland*, Frankfurt a. M.: Wallenstein, 2009, pp. 158-161.

¹⁸ Cf. HGS 7/317ff.

world will one day change towards the better”¹⁹. This meaning of Judaism is, as described above, deeply reflected throughout Horkheimer’s philosophy and refers directly to the core of his Critical Theory, which is the imagination that there is something radically other to-come: “*das ganz Andere*”, “the radical other”²⁰.

In his later writings Horkheimer describes Judaism as a “*geistige Realität*”²¹, a “spiritual reality”, in whose diasporic existence he conceives the radical other historic-concretely sublated within the disastrous history itself and thus anchored as a historical force. The point of departure for Horkheimer’s reasoning is Judaism’s universal concept of messianism, which he interprets as expressing a general quality of the radical other to-come. This other to-come is, according to the Jewish logic, not restricted to the Jewish people, but shall be expanded to entire humanity: “The Jewish Messiah shall redeem not only the people of Israel, but the people of the world”²². Furthermore, Horkheimer emphasizes the Jewish focus on this world only. Since Judaism does, as Horkheimer argues, “not know an afterlife”²³, it aims solely to improve *this* life, meaning the life of the entire Jewry and of the generations to-come²⁴. Judaism’s messianic universality in connection with its focus on *this* world only leads Horkheimer to the conclusion that the Jews are “the sign of humanity in the emphatic sense”²⁵. Accordingly, Horkheimer conceives the emblem of redeemed society sublated in the “spiritual reality” of Judaism:

“The true relationship between the individual and the people is retained within the Jewish tradition. The Old Testament hails on the individual as well as on the people. The commandment of love does not only refer to the individuals, but also to the people –and the Lord has made his covenant with the people; the individual is only a part of this covenant insofar as he is a part of the people.”²⁶

Thus, within the thought of late Horkheimer, Judaism appears as the antithesis to the disastrous history, as the radical other: “The essence of the Jews”, writes Horkheimer, “contradicts the state capitalism in the east as well as the monopoly

¹⁹ HGS 7/210.

²⁰ HGS 7/85.

²¹ HGS 14/331.

²² HGS 14/410.

²³ HGS 7/210.

²⁴ HGS 14/401-402.

²⁵ HGS 14/533.

²⁶ HGS 8/158.

society in the West. [...] Their existence [...] points towards a society of free and equal human beings, but not towards the *Volksgemeinschaft*.”²⁷

However, Horkheimer conceives the radical other not abstractly retained in the Jewish tradition, but rather historic-concretely sublated in its diasporic existence. Thereby, the radical other gains in the shape the Jewish Diaspora a fundamental relationship with history itself, maintains the status of a *historical force*. This is because Horkheimer understands Judaism’s spiritual reality as produced by the historic-concrete interplay of the Jewish religious tradition and the Jew’s suffering existence in the Diaspora over the centuries:

“No people have [...] suffered more than the people of Israel. The refusal to recognize violence as an argument of truth forms the continuous trait of their history. The Jewish people have transformed the suffering, which was caused by this trait, into a momentum of unity and of continuity. Thereby, instead of resulting in dissolution, [...] the injustice has transformed into a sort of experience. Within Judaism suffering and hope have become inseparable.”²⁸

According to Horkheimer, the radical other is real (a spiritual *reality*), since it is practically lived in the Jewish Diaspora. Thus, the other has its social and historical space in the material existence of the Jewish Diaspora:

“Throughout millennia, the Jews, facing their persecution, have united for the sake of justice. Their religious rites [...] were moments of community and of continuity. Not a nation-state based on power, but the desire for justice at the end of the world used to be called Judaism.”²⁹

All in all Horkheimer argues that the eternal suffering and the never-ending threat the European Jews were exposed to resulted in a kind of ‘social maintenance’ of the radical other, in its sublation within the disastrous history itself. Therefore, the Jewish Diaspora becomes for Horkheimer the lifeline, the historical space of Critical Theory: “They were a people and its opposite, the accusation of all people.”³⁰ At this point it should be clear that diasporic Judaism is truly essential for the thought of the late Horkheimer.³¹ However, this horkheimerian focus on

²⁷ HGS 6/297.

²⁸ HGS 8/158.

²⁹ HGS 6/369.

³⁰ HGS 6/369.

³¹ The notion of the Jewish Diaspora gains, as indicated above, its crucial historical momentum, after the international workers movement, which had also aimed such a change towards the other, has been fallen apart. In the given context it is of particular interest, that Horkheimer blames the historic defeat of the workers movement on a fact, which he calls “Marx betrayed the Jews” (HGS

the material existence of the Jewish Diaspora opens up the question, how the advent of Zionism and the successful Creation and Establishment of the State of Israel, which aims per definition for the negation of the Jewish Diaspora, intervenes into this line of thought?

3. ELEMENTS OF A CRITICAL THEORY OF ZIONISM

First of all, it is noteworthy that Horkheimer, who was much engaged for the sake of diasporic Judaism, has been from the very beginning on somewhat distanced towards Zionism and Zionist Organizations. Despite their high influence in the Jewish community in pre-war Germany, Horkheimer has, as far as we know, never been in touch with Zionist youth movements. Furthermore, Horkheimer's focus on the Diaspora is demonstrated by the fact, that as early as in 1944 he started to worry that within the American Public Judaism could be identified with Zionism.³² This, of course, was the Zionists political goal, whereas Horkheimer feared that precisely these Zionist politics could contribute to antisemitic resentments within the American Public and weakening the position of the Diaspora.³³ Horkheimer's focus on the Diaspora is further underlined by the fact that, within his broad correspondence, he does not devote a single word to the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

However, from the 1950s on we can observe a radical shift in Horkheimer's attention. This shift grounds, for my understanding, on two major facts: First, Horkheimer started to realize that the Zionist enterprise succeeds and that it will have a significant impact on the Diaspora. Second, in Horkheimer's view the young state of Israel appeared vulnerably caught in a very precarious political situation, which threatened the survival of its Jewish population. Accordingly, from this point on we find within Horkheimer's writings on the one hand a very strong publicly displayed political solidarity with Israel and on the other hand a highly

14/351). Thereby, Horkheimer argues that Marx' philosophy had failed to expand the spiritual reality of Judaism on the entire society, since it narrowed the general solidarity on the particularity of the proletariat, subsequently causing the historic defeat of the workers movement.

³² Cf. Martin JAY, *Dialektische Phantasie. Die Geschichte der Frankfurter Schule und des Instituts für Sozialforschung 1923 - 1950*, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1976, p. 393ff.

³³ This issue was apparently of such crucial importance for Horkheimer that he intended to conduct encompassing empirical research on it. However, the planned project never materialized due to a lack of financial means and the changing political situation after the end of the World War (Cf. Anson RABINBACH, *Israel, die Diaspora und das Bilderverbot in der kritischen Theorie*, in: Monika BOLL / Ralph GROSS, *Die Frankfurter Schule und Frankfurt*, op.. cit., p. 253).

critical theorization of the Zionist enterprise, which Horkheimer, who always feared contributing to antisemitic resentments, kept privately.

Horkheimer's, who himself never travelled to Israel, political solidarity with the Jewish state is easy to explain. It was displayed, since the State of Israel provided a safe haven for endangered Jewish individuals. In a late interview, for instance, Horkheimer told: "We do have to support Israel. For me personally it is crucial that Israel provides asylum for many individuals"³⁴.

However, underneath this publicly displayed political solidarity, Horkheimer developed a very unique and powerful dialectical criticism of the Zionist enterprise, which should essentially re-shape his entire thought. All in all, Horkheimer has left us about 25 scattered fragments, in which he develops his theorization of Zionism in a close relationship with the appearance of the State of Israel within world politics. Horkheimer's –until today unrecognized– 'Elements of a Critical Theory of Zionism' are very much connected to his account of diasporic Judaism subverting the other to-come, as outlined above. Therefore, at the bottom-line of Horkheimer's critique of Zionism appears the argument, that the success of the Zionist movement equals the auto-liquidation of the Diaspora and, thus, of the spiritual reality of Judaism:

"The creation of the state of Israel, which materialized due to the persecution and in order to rescue Jewish individuals, is the symbol of the current crisis of Judaism. However, this crisis points towards the end of the 'spiritual reality' of Judaism. This is a fatal dialectic, nevertheless characteristic for our age."³⁵

Horkheimer further stresses that the dissolution of Judaism into a nation equals the transformation of the power-less into competitors on power. However, according to Horkheimer, the radical other was materialized in the Jewish Diaspora and thereby in the disastrous history itself, precisely since the Jews were power-less. Albeit, this social position and thus the historical possibility of the other appear as being destructed forever by the success of Zionism:

"The Jewish people were not nationalistic at all, they were suffering for the sake of all Humanity. Israel, on the contrary, is a nation-state, at its base structured like all others. Thus, the original messianic thought had to vanish for the sake of national existence."³⁶

³⁴ HGS 7/398.

³⁵ HGS 18/643.

³⁶ HGS 14/326.

Horkheimer further elaborates this line of argument in a very telling note entitled 'Staat Israel':

"Nowadays a state claims to speak for Judaism, to be Judaism itself. The Jewish people, whose existence has been the accusation of the injustice of all people, have [...] themselves become positive. Nation among nations, soliders, leaders, money-raisers for themselves. [...] Judaism has, in fact, resigned in the face of its temporally limited triumph! Judaism pays for its ongoing existence the tribute to the law of the existing world. Although Hebrew is the language of the state of Israel, it is the language of success and not the language of the prophets. Judaism has assimilated to the state of the existing world. The one, who is free of guilt, shall throw the first rock. Just –it is sad, since by means of this sacrifice the radical other, which should have been preserved by precisely this sacrifice, vanishes from the world."³⁷

According to his harsh critique of Zionism, Horkheimer polemically writes about modern Jewry: "The modern Jews gave up the better, the other, in order to accept the existing, the worse"³⁸. The outlined force of Horkheimer's critique of Zionism is probably most properly displayed in the following passage of an early draft of his essay 'On the capture of Eichmann':

"Whatever will happen to Eichmann in Israel, demonstrates the lack of power and not the power of the Jews, who are self-conscious and conscious of their rights. It demonstrates the pretension of authority and not the practice of authority by the State of Israel. Everyone knows that Israel's totalitarian affectations, which recall Benito and the Russians, were tolerated this time only with respect to New York."³⁹

This passage, however, was removed from the final version printed in a German daily due to Adorno's intervention. Nevertheless these sentences, which explicitly compare the State of Israel with Stalin's Soviet Union and Mussolini's Italy, spectacularly demonstrate Horkheimer's deep concern regarding the Zionist enterprise and its success. These concerns should, as I show in the subsequent section, eventually transform his entire thought.⁴⁰

³⁷ HGS 6/369.

³⁸ HGS 14/332.

³⁹ HGS 6/348.

⁴⁰ It should also be noted that Horkheimer, of course, thinks the issue of Zionism dialectically. According to him, not the Jews are to be blamed for the fatal transformation of the Diaspora into a Nation-State. On the contrary, Horkheimer perceives the creation of the Jewish State as a result of

4. THE ACCOUNT OF ZIONISM AS A PRISM FOR RE-READING HORKHEIMER'S CRITICAL THEORY

Building on Horkheimer's view, outlined above, that the success of the Zionist enterprise equals the liquidation of the last remnant of the radical other within the disastrous history, I explore in this section the far-reaching consequences of this argument for Horkheimer's over-all thought, before focusing in the last section on the particular issue of 'Antisemitism'. I show, that Horkheimer reasoned in the light of the triumph of Zionism, that the radical other and thus Critical Theory itself has lost its substantial relationship with history, which transforms the entire project into a profession of mourning. In this sense, I think, Horkheimer's theorization of Zionism may serve as prism for deciphering his enigmatic Spätwerk.

Very basically, Horkheimer conceived, for the stated reasons, the fatal success of the Zionist enterprise as the disastrous history coming to itself, as the closing point for the possibility of transforming the ongoing pre-history into real history. Therefore, Horkheimer characterizes the materialization of Zionism in the shape of the Jewish state as the 'darkest aspect of all history': "It is the darkest aspect of all history, the darkest for both Judaism and Europe, that Zionism was proven to be right"⁴¹. If we recall the outlined necessary relationship between Critical Theory and history, Horkheimer's reasoning brings forth far reaching consequences for the possibility of Critical Theory, of philosophy in general. In a note paradigmatically entitled '*The dreams are (time of dreaming is) over*', Horkheimer expresses this relation in a very condensed way:

"The dream of Messiah, of eternal justice on earth, which had given community to the Jews in the diaspora, has come to an end. This dream has produced uncounted numbers of martyrs; it had caused eternal suffering and at the same time given eternal hope. Now, the persecuted went to Zion without Messiah. They have established their nation and their nationalism like all other people, whereas Judaism itself degraded to be a mere religion. The ones, who remain in

the disastrous history itself, as being without alternative in order to provide a safe haven for persecuted Jewish individuals:

"In order to rescue themselves, they could either repudiate their God or become a Nation-State. Both means the decay of Judaism: The former means vanishing from the world, the latter means the transformation into the unavoidable Nationalism of the others: Israel". (HGS 14/314).

⁴¹ HGS 8/166-167.

the diaspora, can decide either for Israel, for disintegrating into a nation [...], or they can maintain Judaism, which means becoming provincial, becoming romantic sectarians that lack historical substance. Nowadays, the diaspora is backwardness. The Jews are remnants. [...] The one, who remains faithful in Critical Theory can opt for a [...] way of nationalism, the so called communism [...], or he can become provincial, a romantic sectarian. Nowadays, the realm of freedom is backwardness. The ones, who remain faithful in Critical Theory, are last and out-dated remnants, like the faithful Jews.”⁴²

According to Horkheimer, in the Zionist age Critical Theory becomes “backwardness”, since it inevitably loses its connection to history, its social space, and therefore its over-all social meaning. Its possibility has passed forever. Facing this general loss, Horkheimer’s critique of Zionism and his Critical Theory as such transform into a position of mourning: “It remains”, writes late Horkheimer, “the fading commemoration, the fading mourning –alone”⁴³. This late transformation of Critical Theory into a profession of mourning, of course, casts doubts, well worth being explored, on Horkheimer’s over-all project.

5. A THEORY OF THE (FUNCTIONALITY) OF ANTISEMITISM IN THE ZIONIST AGE

So far, I indicated that Horkheimer’s reflections on Zionism may serve as a prism for re-reading and re-acquiring his scattered and, unfortunately, often disregarded later writings. Although this field is still open for further research, the implications of Horkheimer’s account of Zionism are particularly interesting regarding the theory of Antisemitism and the latter’s functionality. Accordingly, I aim finally to outline a Horkheimerian theory of ‘Antisemitism’ and its ‘functionality’ in the Zionist age.

Although Horkheimer has developed throughout his life a very broad theory of Antisemitism, which is doubtless worth being explored by its own, in the given context it is very interesting that he directly links Antisemitism to his assumption, outlined above, that the (diasporic) Jews represent the radical other, the better within the disastrous history. For instance, in a late note entitled ‘Zum Antisemitismus’ Horkheimer argues that the diasporic Jews became the object of hate

⁴² HGS 6/392.

⁴³ HGS 6/98. Original: “Es bleibt, das vergängliche Gedenken, die vergängliche Trauer allein.”

and persecution, since they were the physical representatives of the other, the better. Thus, he conceives their mere existence as “the thorn in our side, since they refuse to completely subjugate to the absolute.”⁴⁴ But in Horkheimer’s –romantic– view, outlined above, the Jews, while being exposed to all this hate and persecution did not respond violently. On the contrary, they peacefully recurred to their tradition, thereby preserving the other, the better, among their own threatened community. In Horkheimer’s line of thought, this ‘dialectic’ maintained throughout history the social and historical possibility of the other to-come within the disastrous history itself.

From this argument it is possible to deduce a two core aspects of the ‘functionality’ of Antisemitism, which are two sides of the same coin. First, somewhat cynically, Antisemitism appears to be historically functional, since it maintained, despite all involved cruelty, a ‘dialectic’ sublating and preserving the other within history and society. Second, the function of Antisemitism is giving way to violent regression, since Horkheimer always conceives Antisemitism as the inverted wish of the repressed individuals for change towards the other.⁴⁵

However, according to Horkheimer, precisely the outlined ‘dialectic’ comes with the advent of Zionism to an end, since the powerless Diaspora transforms into a power seeking Nationalism. This implies also that Antisemitism, understood in the sense outlined above, vanishes, too. Albeit, social repression and thus the individuals inverted wish for changing towards the other, their hate on this other, does not vanish with the historical possibility of this other. On the contrary, it remains as strong as ever before. The hate and the negative energy become even universal, as now the Zionist Jewish community is included. But since this inverted wish has entirely lost its object, nothing remains sublating in its ‘functioning’. Thus, from Horkheimer’s point of view, from the success of Zionism on, the entire world functions, so to speak, purely ‘antisemitic’. According to Horkheimer, this stage of history is not only guided by logics of identity and violence, but the logics of identity and violence have become universal and, thus, history itself. He writes: “The path of history tends towards automatic reaction, towards uniformity, which has to materialize through despotic periods”⁴⁶.

⁴⁴ HGS 6/214.

⁴⁵ Max HORKHEIMER / Theodor W. ADORNO, *Dialektik der Aufklärung*, op. cit., p. 179ff.

⁴⁶ HGS 14/139.