

## The World Turned Upside Down

On 22 June 1924, the Institute for Social Research opened at Victoria Allee 17 in Frankfurt am Main. It was an interesting (in the sense suggested by the Chinese curse) time and place for a group of Jewish intellectuals and businessmen to establish a Marxist research institute. Frankfurt was then home to the second-largest population of Jews in Germany and in 1924 had elected its first Jewish mayor. But it was also where the world's largest chemicals conglomerate, IG Farben, had its headquarters. In Frankfurt, they developed Zyklon B, the cyanide-based killing agent later used in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

To get a sense of what Frankfurt's successful industry of mass murder meant for its own citizens consider these figures. In 1933, the Jewish population of Frankfurt was 26,000, but before the Second World War was over, 9,000 Jews had been deported from the city.<sup>1</sup> Today, in the city's Jewish Cemetery, 11,134 little metal cubes arranged in row after row on the Wand der Namen (Wall of Names) commemorate the Frankfurt citizens killed during the Holocaust. And those Frankfurt Jews who were spared deportation to death camps often came to no-less miserable ends.

The city's first Jewish mayor, Ludwig Landmann, is a case in point. On taking office in 1924, he had sought to make his city more humane with new public housing projects such as Neues Frankfurt (New Frankfurt) that resulted in the construction of 12,000 apartments to counter an acute housing shortage, and by establishing the Nassauische Heimstätte, an organisation devoted to guaranteeing

every citizen had access to decent housing. Landmann, though removed from office by the Nazis in 1933 and eventually fled to the Netherlands where, after spending the war sheltered by English relatives, he died from malnutrition during the bitter winter of 1945, aged seventy-six.<sup>2</sup> A Frankfurt newspaper in 2015 headlined an article about Landmann as 'Der vergessene Oberbürgermeister (the Forgotten Mayor).'<sup>3</sup>

The Institute for Social Research was not immune to the anti-Semitism. When its first director, Carl Grünberg, made a rural speech inside the completed building on Viktoria Allee he suggested that the Institute would be an alternative to a German university system that served as a training academy for 'mandarins' who would go on to uphold the status quo. Fine words, perhaps, but as Grünberg spoke neither he nor any of his staff, nor Hermann Weil, the businessman who had funded the Institute, nor his son Felix whose idea it was, realised the truth about the building in which his intellectual revolution was to take place. It had been commissioned by Jews and built by a Nazi.

Franz Roeckle had started his career by building a rather beautiful Egyptian-Assyrian style synagogue in Frankfurt in 1908, but by 1933 he was a National Socialist party member who was jailed for his part in a pogrom, known as the Roter Affair, in his native Liechtenstein. In 1933 Fritz and Alfred Rotter, two well-known Jewish theatre entrepreneurs in Berlin, had fled Germany to Liechtenstein in part to avoid a bankruptcy scandal which had led to them being castigated in the Hitlerite press, but mostly to escape the Nazis – propaganda minister Josef Goebbels was seeking to eliminate what he called Berlin's 'Jew-ridden amusement business'. In Liechtenstein, four Nazis including Roeckle tried to kidnap the Rotter brothers in order to take them back to Berlin where, most likely, they would have been jailed if not murdered. The brothers managed to flee their hotel but in the resulting car chase Alfred Rotter and his wife Gertrude plunged from a cliff to their deaths, while Fritz and his companion were seriously injured. It is not clear whether Alfred and Gertrude's deaths were accidental or if they were driven off the road by Roeckle and his associates. The four Nazis served only short jail sentences for their involvement

in the deaths; indeed, Roeckle and the others were freed early after a 700-signature petition secured their parole (the tiny German-speaking Alpine principality included many enthusiastic Nazi supporters). 'It was a political assassination, perhaps not the only, but the most serious of the small country,' wrote the Liechtensteiner historian Norbert Haas and Hansjörg Quaderer later.<sup>4</sup> As the Frankfurt School's architect was an anti-Semitic murderer, then he and his colleagues put it: 'First he built for Jews; then he built for anti-Jews.'<sup>5</sup>

Frankfurt, *Allgemeine Zeitung* put it: 'First he built for Jews; then he built for anti-Jews to their deaths.'<sup>6</sup> Nor was Frankfurt in 1924 especially amenable to Marxists. Today the city is known as Manhattan, not just for its high-rise skyline, but also because it is a global capital of business and finance, with one of the world's largest stock exchanges and the headquarters of both the Deutsche Bundesbank (the German federal bank) and the European Central Bank. By the 1920s, it was well on its way to becoming a modern metropolis and a hub of global capital: its stock exchange opened in 1879, its central station in 1888, its university in 1914 and its first airport in 1926. Like Berlin, Germany's second city boomed in its first airport in 1926. Like Berlin, it stood at 71,462.<sup>6</sup>

The population after unification: in 1861, it stood at 71,462.<sup>6</sup> Today, certainly, and in 1924, perhaps, Frankfurt looked like the least traditionally German of cities, but it had an ancient pedigree and deep symbolic links in German history and culture. For centuries it had been a Free Imperial City in which the new emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was presented on a balcony overlooking Frankfurt's central square, the Römerberg (the Roman mountain), before a celebration of ox-roasts and fireworks.<sup>7</sup> Even though those venerable ceremonials came to an end when Napoleon destroyed the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, after the Corsican's fall, Frankfurt rose again to become the home for the parliament of the nineteenth-century German Confederation. It was also the birthplace of Goethe, and the city Arthur Schopenhauer chose as his home since he thought it more sophisticated than Berlin: 'Healthy climate, beautiful surroundings, the amenities of large cities, the Natural History Museum, better theatre, opera, and concerts, more Englishmen, better coffee houses, no bad water . . . and a better dentist.'<sup>8</sup> But in the 1920s the old ceremonial Frankfurt centring on the Römerberg, with its facades of patricoloured houses that could only

look more German and gingerbreadly if Hansel and Gretel were of the fairy tale to try to eat them, was being eclipsed by coolly functional Frankfurt was rising, one of austere, better built as part of Neues Frankfurt were the so-called Zigzag houses. Landmann. These three-storey and terraced houses, still sitting paddling pool: the architecture was pared-down, functionally Bauhaus style.

And then there was the grand new dye works for Hoechst AG, by Peter Behrens, the architect whose assistants included those of modernism Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, which opened 1924. The swaggering brick-clad fortress-meets-Bauhaus exterior grand enough, but inside it is something even more extraordinary. Symbolic of Germany's growing worship, not of God, but of its industrial prowess: the cathedral-like entrance hall is five storeys high with coloured bricks evoking the dyeing process, a veritable temple to business.<sup>9</sup>

But even the industrial swagger of what is now known as the Peter Behrens building was eclipsed by the the most striking new development in Frankfurt in the 1920s. Built on lands formerly owned by the Jewish banking family the Rothschilds, the IG Farben headquarters, when it opened in 1930, was the largest office building in Europe and remained so until the 1950s. Inside, workers travelled between floors on a new technological marvel, paternoster lifts, that consisted of a series of linked compartments moving continuously on an endless belt.

A year before the opening of IG Farben's vast research laboratory, Benjamin wrote a prescient little essay that put the chemical conglomerate, and the seemingly unstoppable rise of the German military-industrial complex, in his satirical crosshairs. Entitled 'Surrealism', the essay anticipated both the horrors of the Holocaust

(albeit mostly unintentionally) and the Luftwaffe's bombing raids on British cities.<sup>10</sup> It was as if the worship of industry, and the faith of the Germans in its technological achievements, eclipsed what a communist like Benjamin sought, namely socialist revolution. In such a context, he wrote, he resigned himself to

pessimism all along the line... Mistrust in the fate of European mistrust in the fate of freedom, mistrust in the fate of European humanity, but three times mistrust in all reconciliation: between classes, between nations, between individuals. And unlimited trust only in I.G. Farben and the peaceful perfecting of the air force. But what now, what next?!

These profoundly bitter, sarcastic words resonate down the decades: the scale of Benjamin's dismal prognosis is vaster than even the headquarters of IG Farben. The conditions for revolution were everywhere lacking, he concluded grimly; rather, in a fallen world in which there was no class solidarity and negligible shared human values, all that remained to command conviction was the march of technological progress by means of industry. What next? In retrospect, we can answer Benjamin's question of 1929. What came next was that Frankfurt's leading business would help Hitler commit genocide.

In such a city, a Marxist research institute – run overwhelmingly by Jews and funded by Jewish money – was wise to keep a low profile. David Ryazanov, director of the Marx-Engels Institute in Moscow, with which the Frankfurt School was closely linked in the 1920s, urged that under Grünberg the Institute should appear impeccably bourgeois, establishing for example a clear relationship with the University of Frankfurt, but inwardly it should be devoted to collective Marxist research. It was then part Marxist cuckoo in Frankfurt's capitalist nest and part monastery devoted to the study of Marxism.

The Institute's building reflected this: the Swiss architect Sascha Roesler recently described it as being a 'Festung der Wissenschaft' (Fortress of Science), one that expressed in its architecture a 'Symbolik des Rückzugs' (symbolism of retreat).<sup>12</sup> The building that opened in 1924 was an austere cube with space for 75,000 books in its library, a

thirty-six-seat reading room, four seminar rooms with 100 places and sixteen small workrooms. It consisted, Roessler argued, of a 'structure of homologous oppositions' between inside and outside, visibility and invisibility, sociology and society.

The Frankfurt cultural critic Siegfried Kracauer, friend and colleague to many of the Institute's scholars, visited the newly opened building and thought the cell-like reading rooms suggested a cloistered setting as if the study of Marxism in Germany in the 1920s required the ancient monastic virtues of asceticism, humility and discipline. Obviously if Marxism were a tender orchid that needed to be protected from a ragingly hostile environment outside. That orchid sensibility persisted for much of the Frankfurt School's history: throughout its exile years in the United States, for instance, Horkheimer insisted that the Y word and the R word (Marxism and Revolution) be excised from its papers so as not to scare the Institute's American sponsors, and in the late 1950s he refused to publish a paper by the young Jürgen Habermas containing such language because he feared it would threaten the Institute's funding, not least by risking a lucrative research contract with the West German ministry of defence.

The austere cube Roeckle designed, if hardly the most revolutionary building in Weimar-era Frankfurt, was a bracing addition to the broad boulevard. In his review, Kracauer called its architecture 'strange and unadorned'.<sup>13</sup> It was certainly that. Roeckle built a five-storey block in the sober Neue Sachlichkeit style. Neue Sachlichkeit is often translated into English as New Objectivity or New Sobriety; but that doesn't really get to the heart of its German sense: 'Sach' can mean precise; and so 'sachlichkeit' might be rendered as 'matter of factness'. This New Matter of Factness was an artistic movement that thrived in Weimar Germany as a rebuke to the perceived excesses of Expressionism. Instead of self-indulgent romantic longing, business instead of dreams, facts instead of the heroic hour of revolution, the techno-pragmatic sensibility melding Max Weber and William James. In part, Neue Sachlichkeit was Germany turning American.<sup>14</sup>

Neue Sachlichkeit, though, was hardly just American: it was also a German response to a German problem, or at least to a German aesthetic tendency. Be it the minimalism of Walter Gropius's Bauhaus or the abrasiveness of early Brecht plays such as *Baal* or *Drums in the Night*, it was a response to the perceived experience of Expressionist art, but also a call to order after the slaughter of the First World War. In this, too, the architecture captured Grünberg's view of Marxism as scientific methodology rather than political struggle, his work to be sure, the architecture rather than political struggle, on hard facts.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the architecture captured Grünberg's view of Marxism as scientific methodology rather than political struggle, his work to be sure, the architecture rather than political struggle, on hard facts.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the architecture captured Grünberg's view of Marxism as scientific methodology rather than political struggle, his work to be sure, the architecture rather than political struggle, on hard facts.<sup>15</sup> To be sure, the architecture captured Grünberg's view of Marxism as scientific methodology rather than political struggle, his work to be sure, the architecture rather than political struggle, on hard facts.<sup>15</sup>

At the outset, Grünberg's key staff were the close friends Friedrich Pollock and Max Horkheimer, with whom he developed the idea that the institute should be concerned with the 'knowledge and understanding of social life in its full extent'. Later they would be joined by the exiled Polish economist Henryk Grossman and the German historian and sinologist Karl August Wittfogel.

The Institute's project, Grünberg announced, involved 'a new type of scientific work organisation that would be Marxist in that it adhered to Marxism as a scientific methodology. During its first few years, Grünberg's Institute was concerned with collaborating with the Marx-Engels institute in Moscow in producing the first Marx-Engels Gesamtausgabe, or collected edition, jauntily known by its acronym MEGA. This sober, fact fixated, even bureaucratic tenor of the Frankfurt School would change after 1928 when Pollock and later Horkheimer became directors of the Institute, unleashing an era of speculative neo-Marxist theorising inimical to Grünberg and older Marxists such as Grossman; but during the 1920s the Marxist research institute seemed mired in the Neue Sachlichkeit ethos.

It was only in the 1930s that the Frankfurt School, led by Horkheimer, Pollock and Adorno, disdained the spirit that the architect of the building they worked in expressed. For the men who more or less invented critical theory in this austere monastic building, before the Nazis forced them in 1933 to abandon Frankfurt and Germany, society and even thought were becoming more machine-like and functional under the new form of capitalism that was

developing in Germany. "Thinking objectless itself to become automatic, self-activating process, Adorno and Horkheimer produces itself so that ultimately the machine can replace the enchantment of Expressionism, then, to what Max Weber (and Horkheimer look to signify humanity's domination, by means of science, over nature) - and from disenchantment to the ultimate condition: the making of thing into human and human into thing as the result that humanity, ultimately, is expendable. Neue Sachlichkeit was the spirit of this age.

There's one last thing to be said about the building's architecture. Rössler detected in it not just the spirit of Neue Sachlichkeit, the creeping presence of the heroic style that would manifest itself in the works of Albert Speer.<sup>17</sup> It's an intriguing point, maybe Franz Koenig built into the Institute for Social Research intimations of the Third Reich. Certainly, his last piece of German architecture, a 1940 monument to the businessman and patron Karl Kroetzberg, was a muscle-bound superman and patron Karl Kroetzberg, with a that fascist heroic style on steroids. But the idea that the best ness-friendly style of Neue Sachlichkeit expressed fascist ideas should not be a surprise. Indeed, the Frankfurt School would, as we will see, come to realise as it studied Nazism that the marriage of Hitler and business was hardly a shotgun affair - it was a love match between two compatible partners.

The austere academic nature of this Marxist research institute and the compromises of its foundation were later waspishly ridiculed by Hanns Eisler. Over lunch one day during Hollywood exile in 1941, the composer and songwriter recounted to his friend the playwright Bertolt Brecht the plot for a planned satirical novel: 'A rich old man (Weil, the speculator in wheat) dies, disturbed at the poverty in the world. In his will, he leaves a large sum to set up an institute which will do research on the source of this poverty. Which is of course himself.'<sup>18</sup> Eisler didn't want to spoil a good story with facts. In reality, Hermann Weil didn't bequeath money in his will to found the Institute

(he died in 1928). Rather, he provided an initial endowment that supplied an annual income of 120,000 marks, which was later supplemented by grants from him and other sources, thus securing the independence and solvency of the Frankfurt School through financial means during the Third Reich, and the Holocaust. The man who made the Frankfurt School possible was, in any case, a much more interesting figure than the capitalist stooge that Eisler tried to present him as being. Hermann Weil hailed from a Jewish mercantile family in Baden<sup>19</sup> and had worked in the last decade of the nineteenth century for a Dutch grain company in Argentina, where in 1898 he set up his own business with his brothers. It proved so successful that, a decade later when he returned to Germany and set up home in Frankfurt, he was the world's largest grain trader.

His son Felix, like so many of the Jewish sons of businessman fathers we considered in the last chapter, turned against this ethos. The Marxist Jewish intellectual son was once more standing against the capitalistic values by means of which his businessman father had achieved material success. And yet, once more, that son was dependent on daddy's money in order for him to fulfil his manifest destiny - to castigate the economic system from which his father had prospered, and to theorise its downfall. Felix became, as he self-deprecatingly put it, a 'sardon Bolshevik', one who consorted with those who wanted to destroy the capitalist system under which his father had made his fortune. Felix wrote his PhD on the practical problems of implementing socialism, which had been published by the German Marxist theoretician Karl Korsch. In the early 1920s, Felix asked his father for some money. He could have asked for anything - a yacht, a country estate, a Porsche. But instead he asked Hermann to fund a Marxist, multidisciplinary academic institute. He wanted it to be independently endowed so it was beholden to no one, least of all the rigid German university system.<sup>20</sup> Felix hoped that this Marxist think-tank could help explain why the revolution had failed in Germany and how, if possible, it could succeed in the future.

That Hermann agreed to his son's proposal is perhaps best explained by two factors: firstly, he was keen to use his wealth to support

institutions in his adopted city (he had already made arrangements to the University); secondly, Jewish family ambitions and Hermann's family purse to pay for an institute that would help the economic system that had made him rich. The Frankfurt School was thus paid for by the economic system it was to indict, and the businessman father who bankrolled it stood for the funding helped the Frankfurt School secure its independence in a survive financial crash, exile and the Holocaust.

The Education Ministry had suggested calling it the *Forschungsinstitut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research), but Weil modestly demurred. Heingrünberg to become its first director. Grünberg was not the first choice: Weil had originally approached a socialist economist, Kurtz Gerlach, but he died of a heart attack aged thirty-six in 1920. Grünberg was professor of law and political science at the University of Vienna with a considerable reputation as a scholar on the history of socialism and the labour movement, and mostly known for a scholarly journal called *Grünbergs Archiv*. Grünberg set out its first research topics as: international trade unions, strikes, sabotage, revolution, wage movement, anti-Semitism as a sociological problem, the relationship between Bolshevism and Marxism, party and mass, standard of living of the population, the improvement of Germany. His opening address suggested that the Institute would be Marxist in that it adhered to Marxism as a scientific methodology: it would not be collegial, but run, as Grünberg put it, as a dictatorship.<sup>21</sup>

It also had no official line on whether the Soviet Union represented a betrayal of socialist hopes or its fulfilment, even as it maintained close links with its sister organisation in Moscow. For instance, when Friedrich Pollock wrote *Experiments in Economic Planning in the Soviet Union 1917-1927*, he was careful not to express support for the Soviet system. Rather, his was a more objective

perspective - suggesting how the Soviet Union, with low levels of technological sophistication and without international support, had understandably struggled to achieve its revolutionary aims and economic projections.

Thus, from its inception, the Frankfurt School was riddled with paradoxes. Marxist, but not so Marxist that it would live up to what Marx wrote in his *Theses on Feuerbach*, words that have often been deemed so key to his work that they are inscribed on his tombstone in Highgate Cemetery in London: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.' Marxist, but bankrolled by a capitalist. Marxist, but without party affiliation. It was affiliated to the University of Frankfurt, and took students, but was still autonomous and financially independent.

Eisler's satirical suggestion, though, went to the heart of the misgivings about the foundation of the Institute and what it was for. For Brecht, in particular, the Frankfurt School perpetrated a bourgeois sleight of hand by posturing as a Marxist institute while at the same time insisting that revolution could no longer depend on insurrection by the working class, and declining to take part in the overthrow of capitalism. There were exceptions of course: in the later 1920s, the street-fighting revolutionary turned academic, Henryk Grossman, developed a Leninist-inspired economic theory of capitalism's demise, taking the line that crises in capitalism and a concomitant rise in proletarian consciousness were both necessary for the forthcoming revolution.

But he was an exception: as Grünberg's directorship gave way to that of Pollock and then Horkheimer in the late 1920s, a newer more pessimistic Marxism was taking over the Frankfurt School, one for which the revolution was not imminent, precisely because the rise in consciousness that Grossman took to be necessary for it was not possible under the new modern conditions. Under Grünberg, it seemed, the Institute became bureaucratic and agnostic; under his successors, it went into a theoretically exciting period of speculative, multi-disciplinary work inimical to the Institute's founding philosophy of scientific Marxism.

But while the Frankfurt School became increasingly sceptical about the German Revolution, it would never overtake the mood, which was better reflected in its architecture: the retreat from a world they could not change and a politics in which they would later argue: As the scholar of critical theory Gillian Triggs

Instead of politicising academia, it academatised politics. This frustration became the basis for its subsequent achievements. Yet time and time again, the history of the School reveals this tension: as it reaffirmed and reinforced those aspects of German life which it criticised and aimed to change, just as it reaffirmed and reinforced those aspects of the intellectual universe which it criticised and aimed to change.<sup>21</sup>

If Rose is right about that, then the Frankfurt School wasn't so much a Marxist institute as an organised hypocrisy; a conservative sheep in radical wolf's clothing.

The men whom Brecht called dismissively the 'Frankfurtians' were aloof from party and had never sullied their fists in political struggle (Grossman was, Brecht might have said, the exception who proved the rule); they were men with cosy jobs who thrived in American exile. At least that is the story that Eisler and Brecht, in Californian exile, told themselves as they dabbled in satire.

THE INSTITUTE for Social Research had its roots in an event that took place in the Thuringian town of Ilmenau a year before its foundation. In the summer of 1923 a group of Marxist intellectuals had gathered for the Erste Marxistische Arbeitswoche – a week-long summer symposium organised by Felix Weil, to address the practical problems of implementing socialism. In the summer of 1923, those who gathered in Ilmenau wanted to know why the old forces had come back into power; the laws of Marxism conceived as a science of

history predicted that the workers should have been more successful in overthrowing capitalism after Germany's defeat in the First World War and the hyperinflation that followed it. It was this symposium that led, a year later, to the foundation of the Institute for Social Research.

The practical problem of implementing socialism was a vexed issue. The symposium took place in the wake of the German Revolution of 1918–19 that had failed, in part, because of splits on the left. Aimed at emulating the triumph of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, it had been crushed by Social Democrat leaders and right-wing military war veterans called Freikorps. Felix Weil's hope for the Ilmenau symposium was that 'if afforded an opportunity of talking it out together', the intellectuals present could arrive at a true or pure Marxism.<sup>22</sup> A lovely if deluded hope: intellectuals hardly ever talk themselves into agreement, and, as more recent history shows, Marxism became more divided by feuding factions even than Protestantism.

Already in 1923, German Marxism resembled the Judean people's movements in *Monty Python's Life of Brian*. First and foremost, there was the so-called Pope of Marxism, Karl Kautsky, the German Social Democratic Party's leading theoretical figure. He had been a leading light of the Second International, the worldwide federation of socialist organisations that was founded in 1881 and collapsed acrimoniously in 1916 over the need for socialist revolution and differing attitudes to the First World War. It was succeeded in 1919 by the Third International, or Comintern, launched in 1919 by Lenin, which advocated world communist revolution. Kautsky, while formally stressing the need for a revolutionary overthrow of capitalism, argued that Marx had demonstrated that history was a succession of different societies and that within each society production grew until a point at which it could grow no further and then revolution took place. Revolutions, thus conceived, required the proletariat to have the patience of the bus queue. They must wait for what would, inevitably, come, and then jump on board.

Then there was Eduard Bernstein, a Reichstag deputy who had founded the Independent Social Democratic Party in 1916, set up to oppose the war that Kautsky, to his eternal disgrace in Marxist circles,

had supported. Bernstein's Marxism had been akin to Kautsky's in implying the essential passivity of the proletariat in the face of economic forces that would, eventually, destroy the bourgeoisie and bring workers to power. Ultimately, Bernstein even junked the long commitment to the violent overthrow of the bourgeois order which Kautsky adhered, arguing that revolution was not necessary.

Then there were Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, the Spartacist rebels. Unfortunately for German Marxism, by 1923 the SPD (as we saw in the last chapter) that Kautsky and, latterly, Bernstein supported.

But most strikingly of all, there was the figure of Lenin who, in October 1917, ousted Kerensky's social democratic provisional government in Petrograd and took Russia out of the war. Where Rosa Luxemburg took revolutionary politics to be an expression of the spontaneity of the proletariat, Lenin conceived of the party as a vanguard for the proletariat. Events had justified his theory – not only were the Bolsheviks successful in leading the Russian Revolution, they had also been so well organised during the resultant civil war as to see off a concerted international effort to oust them. In 1920, at the second conference of the Third International, Lenin threw down a challenge to other Marxists: 'The revolutionary parties must now "prove" by their practical actions that they are sufficiently intelligent and organised, are sufficiently in contact with the exploited masses, are sufficiently determined and skilful to utilise this crisis for a successful and victorious revolution.'<sup>24</sup>

The Marxist intellectuals at Ilmenau didn't pick up Lenin's gauntlet, nor did the Institute for Social Research. Instead of revolutionising Germany, they revolutionised Marxist theory. Two of the most eminent attendees at Ilmenau, Karl Korsch and György Lukács, were Leninists who in 1923 published books that were key to this revolution in Marxist thought. In his *Marxism and Philosophy* Korsch attacked both Kautsky and Bernstein, arguing that their scientific socialism had ceased to be a theory of social revolution. For Korsch, Marxism was a form of revolutionary action, in which theoretical discussion and practice had again to be combined. Korsch was no

armchair intellectual: he had been decorated twice with the Iron Cross for acts of bravery, despite his opposition to the war and despite his claim never to have raised a sabre or rifle while in uniform. In 1919 he joined the German Communist Party and in 1923 became Minister of Justice in the coalition SPD-KPD government in Thuringia, where some hoped that this military figure might lead an insurrection on the sixth anniversary of the Soviet revolution of 1917. But the call to arms never came, and Korsch never became the Lenin of Thuringia.

Nonetheless, Korsch's Leninist perspective was echoed by Lukács whose 1922 masterpiece *History and Class Consciousness* attempted a philosophical justification of Bolshevism.<sup>25</sup> Lukács posited that the proletariat, once conscious of its historic role, would destroy capitalist society. Class consciousness was understood by Lukács as a result of the proletariat being the product of the contradictions of history; chief among which is the exploitation of its labour under capitalism. But then Lukács made a key distinction between the ascribed and actual consciousness of the proletariat – the higher ascribed consciousness was embodied in the revolutionary party, while actual consciousness may not be able to grasp its historic role. The party, in a sense, knows what is good for the proletariat – how it must act, and what the historic significance of its suffering under capitalism is. Into this gap between ascribed and actual consciousness, too, the Frankfurt School, as we will see, would insert itself, trying to understand what it was about capitalism's oppressed that stopped them rising up to end their bondage – to be delighted, rather, with the very chains that bound them.

Revolutionary leaders such as Lenin didn't suffer from such false consciousness – they were adepts at revolution and understood the historic role of the proletariat which, as Lukács put it in Hegelian terms, was to be the subject-object of history, by which he meant that instead of the proletariat being, as it currently was, in a mode of contemplation or passivity, it became an active subject engaged in the production of the world in which it could flourish. But why was there a gap between actual and ascribed class consciousness? Lukács's answer to that is what made his book revolutionary in Marxist theory and go on to have a profound influence on the Frankfurt School. To account for the gap, Lukács developed the notion of reification,



extending Marx's analysis of the 'fetishism of the commodity form' in *Capital*. The problems of society, perhaps even the reason the Great Revolution had failed, could be traced to a riddle of the commodity form that Marx wrote about at the start of his master work.

Lukács's book discussed a new form of alienation that confined industrial workers in the 1920s. Industrial nations such as Germany, Britain and the United States were now entering what became known as the Fordist era, a period of mass production. In 1913, Henry Ford had installed the first moving assembly line for the mass production of motor cars in Detroit, reducing the time it took to build a Model T Ford from twelve hours to two and a half. Fordism's new industrial revolution changed production, consumption, culture and even what it was to be human. At the level of production, by training workers to specialise in one of the eighty-four discrete steps necessary in the car production, and by deploying motion-study expert Frederick Taylor to make those jobs even more efficient, Ford raised output, enabling him to cut the prices of the finished cars and crucially, change the relationship between workers and the product of their labour.<sup>26</sup> For philosophers as far back as Spinoza and, in only alive to the extent that they grasped the world outside themselves in the act of expressing their own specific powers, production, through division of labour, increasingly thwarted the possibility of such fulfilment. The idea of personally fulfilling labour, sanely remunerated and manifesting artisanal skills, was the stuff of William Morris's anti-machine-age socialist-medievalist fantasies. Assembly lines sped up the production processes but diminished workers: they increasingly became cogs in a machine, or, worse, ones rendered obsolete by machines. For example, Henry Ford's car factories included machines that could stamp out parts automatically faster than mere humans. Humans were becoming unfit for productive purpose, a fact that, for Marxists who deemed humans to be essentially productive beings, might have seemed existentially tragic through, Ford said of his cars, 'about everybody will have one'.<sup>27</sup> Humans weren't just becoming machines or being replaced by them,

but were becoming desiring machines – their identities defined through their more or less passive consumption of mass-produced goods.

At the level of culture, Fordism made the world modern. Those mass-produced goods included not just Model T Fords, but also Charlie Chaplin films. Mechanisation didn't just revolutionise industry but also industrialised art, speeding up the possibilities of production and distribution, making new art forms – cinema, photography – possible and making old ones – novels, painting, theatre – seem sluggish. Speed, economy, the ephemeral and the entertaining were the hallmarks of mass-produced culture. While Italian Futurists eulogised on the machine age's unleashing of velocity, and while, as we will see, Walter Benjamin saw revolutionary potential in new art forms, others bemoaned the pace of cultural production. 'In all the arts the output of trash is both relatively and absolutely greater than it was,' wrote Aldous Huxley in 1934.<sup>28</sup>

But it wasn't only conservative dystopians who worried about mass-produced culture. For Frankfurt School thinkers like Horkheimer and Adorno, if not Benjamin, this output of trash had a function: to pacify the masses. Even Benjamin could write of these times: 'Experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into a bottomless abyss.'<sup>29</sup> Weber's iron cage of capitalism had subdued humans during working hours; now the culture industry subdued them at their leisure – changing them increasingly from productive beings to consumers, from the Marxist dream of creatively vital humans to stupefied moviegoers all giggling at the same thing.

What it was to be human was changing radically in this Fordist modern age. Like an unfortunate lover, monopoly capitalism had come on too quickly in its flashy new motor promising all kinds of nutritious temptations to the masses. 'A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and beneath these clouds, in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body,' wrote Benjamin.<sup>30</sup> To be human under such conditions was to find oneself, as Lukács put it in 1920, transcendently homeless, longing nostalgically for what was

lost. To be human involved being alienated from the machine functional, replaceable thing one had become. In 1927, Brecht wrote a poem for his cycle *Reader for City Dwellers* that captured this new sense of self-alienation and that modern fear of becoming obsolete:

The linen hanging out to dry in the yard  
Is my linen, I know it well.  
Looking closer however I see  
Darns in it and extra patches.  
It seems  
I have moved out. Someone else  
Is living here now and  
Doing so in  
My linen.<sup>31</sup>

structure of society, the alienation of workers and the commodity fetishism of the modern world were so complete that they militated against the class consciousness necessary for such a revolution.

But what do these terms mean? Alienation? Reification? Class consciousness? Commodity fetishism? Think of the chair you're sitting on, or the iPhone to which you're umbilically linked. A chair is a commodity – not because you can sit on it, but because it was produced by humans to be traded. It has value, that is to say, not because value is a natural property of the chair, but because each commodity has a use value, measured by its usefulness in satisfying needs and wants. This is all very sensible and straightforward, but hold on to your hat (also a commodity) because we're going into a spectral realm. Under capitalism, the things that humans make take on phantasmagoric lives of their own. Marx's *Capital* is not just a forbidding tome of philosophical and economic thought, but a racy gothic novel, a Frankenstein-like tale of how we created a monster (capitalism) from which we are alienated and which, by means of class struggle, we will slay.

The crack humans opened in the world that allowed all these monstrous things in is the gap between use value and exchange value. Through that gap came the corrupting flood of commodities. Here comes one now: it's Apple launching a fatuous new iPhone minimally different from its predecessor. When a chair or an iPhone is sold, it is exchanged for another commodity (money for instance). The exchange takes no account of the labour that went into the chair's making, still less that, for example, of Apple's overstressed and underpaid workers, some of whom have contemplated suicide in order to escape the penal servitude of manufacturing ostensibly must-have gizmos for you and me.

But that's only one part of the ghost story. The other has to do with what happens when the worker is paid wages for her labour. For Marx, the wage relationship between capitalist and worker takes no account of their respective social positions or of their social relations.<sup>32</sup> The abstract commodity that is equivalent to any other commodity, just as the exchange value of the chair detaches the chair from its use value. This is what Marx calls commodity fetishism.

It seems I have moved out' – here Brecht was capturing not just the uncanny modern sense of being haunted by a *doppelgänger* who is in passivity involved. Indeed, Brecht was increasingly drawn in the 1930s to representing on stage the passive types typical of the modern age who, as his biographer Stephen Parker puts it, 'adapt as best they can to the bewilderingly changing circumstances of the modern world'.<sup>33</sup> In *Man Equals Man*, for instance, Brecht's 1926 parable set in colonial India, he had dramatised the forcible transformation of a civilian one critic to see *Man Equals Man* as prefiguring brainwashing techniques. The drama was in part a satire on *Neue Sachlichkeit*, whose functionalist ethos fitted perfectly with increased human domination by Fordist assembly lines and Weberian bureaucracy. In *Capital* in 1867 Marx wrote about the fetishism of commodities, how human consciousness becomes reified and how the class consciousness necessary for proletarian revolution can be thwarted. The Marxists gathering at Ilmenau were living under a more advanced form of capitalism than the one Marx had described. Why was socialist revolution increasingly unlikely in the 1920s? Because the reified

Strikingly, both Marx and later psychoanalytical thinkers draw their accounts of fetishism from nineteenth-century European studies to African religions.<sup>4</sup> Just as, in some religions, an object, in so commodities under capitalism are accorded magical powers, illusory autonomy. The strange illusions unleashed under capitalism for Marx, aren't just one but many: sometimes the relations between humans become a relation between things; sometimes value appears as what is not a natural property of the thing; sometimes value appears to take on a life of its own and becomes personified.<sup>5</sup>

But, Lukács argued, such commodity fetishism, which existed in Marx's day, has become all-pervasive in the modern age. Under reified or 'thinglike' in a particular way. According to Lukács, the mechanisation and specialisation of industrial work processes become human experience, leading to an attitude of 'contemplation nature' and to an objectifying stance towards one's own mental states and capacities. The commodity form, he wrote:

stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man; his qualities and abilities are no longer an organic part of his personality; they are things which he can 'own' or 'dispose of' like the various objects of the external world. And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic 'qualities' into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process.<sup>6</sup>

Reification affects relations between persons, and even within the person: one becomes an object to oneself, self-alienated as well as alienated from other humans, particularly those with whom we should be expressing class solidarity.

This implies that objects are transformed into subjects and subjects are turned into objects, with the result that subjects are rendered passive or determined, while objects are rendered as the active, determining factor. Hypostatization, a term that runs through Frankfurt

School writing like a thread, refers to an effect of reification which results from the fallacy of supposing that whatever can be named, or conceived abstractly, must actually exist. It's a word that crops up many times in the Frankfurt School's writings, as a jibe to thinkers of lesser stamp. The concept is related to, but distinct from, other terms in Marx's technical arsenal. Reification is a specific form of alienation. Commodity fetishism is a specific form of reification.<sup>7</sup>

The result of all this, for the Frankfurt School thinkers, is that under capitalism we don't so much inhabit a world as a phantasmagoria, a world turned upside down in which things become persons and persons things, and things (both human and non-human) take on a spectral life of their own. It was this spectral life of things that haunted the writings of Walter Benjamin. It helps explain the shift from his first attempt at memorialising his childhood in his *Berlin Chronicle* of the 1920s to the obsessively reworked *Berlin Childhood* of the 1930s. In the process, as we saw earlier, Benjamin's remembrance becomes increasingly depopulated, his attention focusing on things rather than people. But the point here is that in a phantasmagoric society dominated by commodity fetishism, things could stand in for persons and vice versa; perhaps even that things, bearing the Proustian imprint of past painfully recalled, could serve better as fetish guides to our lost childhoods than mere remembered humans.

But what Benjamin draws attention to again and again, particularly in his long laboured-over but at his death incomplete *Arcades Project*, is how the endless substitutability of commodities (both things and humans), and our immersion, under capitalism, in a class struggle that underpins this phantasmagoria. It is as though capitalism, having rubbed out the true nature of class struggle and brushed historical contingency, had covered up the tracks of its murder and diverted us from our detective work with the captivating allure of commodities. But that seeming heaven is exposed by Benjamin as a kind of unwitting damnation – a ring of hell in which the consumerist faithful endlessly buy and sell, eternally deluded in believing that this activity will bring fulfilment.

This was, indeed, the hell that Benjamin explored in *The Project*, a Paris that, for him, created the modern world by contrasting conditions of its existence. *The Arcades Project* is through a twentieth-century Paris he described with Marxist reality, as a beguiling phantasmagoria akin to the one he had witnessed in Kaiserpanorama in Berlin as a child. Paris, to Benjamin, itself would be like if there wasn't commodification of civilisation. What would it be for use rather than for sale? It had become almost impossible to imagine because capitalism had made the way in which it functioned exchange-value follows its own path, its own mad dance, inspection of the real needs of real people.<sup>28</sup> For Lukács, the madness was not between actual and ascribed consciousness.

Classical economists such as Smith and Ricardo saw nothing in the free-market capitalist economy; rather, they treated profits and rents, the law of supply and demand, as natural phenomena. Marx's incendiary point was that these were historically specific features of a particular economic system. They had not existed under feudalism; nor, moreover, would they under communism. The Marxist article of faith, then, is that the horror story must end. Thus, for instance, in his preface to Marx and Engels' *The Communist Manifesto*, Eric Hobsbawm suggested that Marx was right to argue that the

contradictions of a market system based on no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous 'cash payment', a system of exploitation and of endless accumulation' can never be overcome: that at some point in a series of transformations and restructurings the development of this essentially destabilising system will lead to a state of affairs that can no longer be described as capitalism.<sup>29</sup>

But when? That is the \$64,000 question. Henryk Grossman, widely held as the Frankfurt School thinker who theorised when that the

mad dance would end, argued in *The Law of Accumulation and Collapse of the Capitalist System* (1929) that because capitalism increases the productivity of human labour and the rate of profit to production of use values, there is a tendency for the conditions of its fall and, ultimately, for capitalism to create the conditions of its own demise.

It happens like this: what Marx calls labour power (roughly, the ability to work) yields surplus value to the capitalist over and above the costs in wages. Capitalists reduce commodity prices to increase profits, often by introducing new technology or machinery (machines, labour productivity). But as output expands, constant capital (machinery, equipment, raw materials) expands more rapidly than variable capital (invested in wages to labour). So what? Well, as a greater share of investment goes into machinery and plant, rather than the living labour that produced surplus value, which under Marxist economics is the source of capitalist profits, the rate of profit to the total capital invested declines. If  $p$  is the rate of profit,  $s$  surplus value,  $c$  constant capital and  $v$  variable capital, Marx's formula goes like this:

$$p = s/c + v$$

So if  $c$  gets bigger relative to  $v$  then, even if surplus value increases, the rate of profit falls. Grossman apparently used to lecture at Frankfurt wearing white gloves and carrying a cane. One can imagine him with a flourish of the cane and a magician's 'Abracadabra!' on clinching the ramifications of this equation.

But, of course, as you'll have noticed, capitalism hasn't ended. Why? Because capitalists found other means of staving off the calamitous decline of  $p$  and thereby their doom – such as exporting loan capital or the crazed speculation that Žižek mentions. Such speculations could defer capitalist oblivion to the long term, that functionally irrelevant prospect in which we are all, as John Maynard Keynes pointed out, dead. Indeed, in *The Law of Accumulation* Grossman argued against Rosa Luxemburg's account of the necessary collapse of capitalism, in which she proposed that only when there are no non-capitalist markets left to be exploited will capitalism founder.

That, he thought, could take ages. For Grossman, her post-absolute economic limits to capitalism comes close to the idea of the end of capitalism is a distant prospect because the capitalist non-capitalist countries is the work of centuries.<sup>42</sup> Centuries, perhaps the biggest crisis for capitalism in the twentieth century occurred when the speculative bubble burst on the New York exchange, starting a world economic crisis and undermining the John Kenneth Galbraith called the faith of Americans in quick and less enrichment in the stock market.<sup>43</sup> But capitalism didn't fall. Instead, capitalists dusted themselves down, renewed their faith in quick, effortless enrichment and started the mad dance again.

Grossman did not specify when capitalism would end. Reflection on in principle forever and that it was not prone to crises that would ultimately destroy it – that the economic disruption was just a problem of disproportionality between different parts of the economy, and that workers' consumer spending was insufficient to buy overproduced goods. The barrier to capitalist accumulation, as Marx explained and as Grossman elaborated, was capital itself.

In such circumstances, it's a great shame that Grossman's analysis has been derided as predicting the automatic collapse of capitalism. The full ramifications of his argument, whose predictions have obviously failed to come true, writes Martin Jay, need not detain us here. Let it be said, however, that the quietistic implications of his thesis similar to those of all Marxist interpretations that stress objective forces over subjective revolutionary praxis, were not lost on some of his contemporaries.<sup>44</sup> That seems a particularly unfair charge to throw at the one Frankfurt School scholar who, unlike his colleagues philosophising from their armchairs, had seen active service in the socialist struggle. Rather, the truth of the matter is that Grossman adhered to the Leninist notion that the revolutionary process was dialectical and that capitalism's fall was one in which workers were actors in history rather than spectators observing the economic forces.

True, much of Grossman's work was directed against those who thought that the revolution could be successfully launched irrespective of the propitiousness of the circumstances. He wrote in 1928, for example, that for a revolution to break out, it is usually insufficient for the lower classes 'not to want [to live in the old way], it is also necessary that the upper classes should be unable [to live in the old way], that it becomes objectively impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their domination in unchanged form.'<sup>45</sup> Rather, Grossman was arguing, in a non-quietist manner, that revolution could only take place when the objective conditions could be exploited by a revolutionary party conscious of the historic role of the proletariat. The place when the objective conditions were dialectical: capitalism created revolutionary process he envisaged was dialectical: capitalism created the working class and the circumstances in which it was compelled to struggle against capitalism. It was during struggle that the proletariat could become aware that the destruction of capitalism was necessary for its self-liberation.

The chastening words here are 'could become', and they take us back to what worried the Marxists gathered in Immenau in 1923. Lukács had argued in the previous year's *History and Class Consciousness* that capitalist society is reified. It was the reification of capitalist society that shifted Marxism from the firebrand optimism of *The Communist Manifesto* to the melancholy resignation seeping through the Frankfurt School: it was as if, under the modern capitalism that confronted Marxists in 1920s Germany, the proletariat had become the gravediggers not of the bourgeoisie but of their own hopes and aspirations, so alienated from their labour and from themselves that they couldn't remember what it was they were burying.

To understand this alienation, Lukács and the Frankfurt School read Marx's early account of it in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844. There Marx draws on the notion of the 'unhappy consciousness' in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807) in which an alienated soul is divided and whose aspirations to universality are thwarted. Hegel's unhappy consciousness is the 'consciousness of self as a dual natured, merely contradictory thing.'<sup>46</sup> For the early Marx, the worker is similarly alienated, finding not joy in her work but slavery before a commodity system that exploits and denies what labour could have

been, joyful and fulfilling. This Hegelian theme of self-alienation was seized on by Marx's predecessor Feuerbach, whose *Essence of Christianity*, came to the view that the Christian God was what we were alienated from as human beings, we turned into a God and called God. For Marx, by contrast, alienation was the consequence of capitalism, distancing the worker from her/his work. She becomes part of a system that exploits her and her fellow workers. As a result, instead of the working class being capable of changing the conditions under which it lives, it becomes passive in the face of the apparently autonomous exchanges of commodities. It becomes, in extremis, unable to create the conditions for its own self-liberation. But if all these thoughts about alienation, commodity fetishism and reification are in Marx already, why was Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* so influential, especially for the Frankfurt School? For one thing, the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in which Marx developed that theory of alienation were not published until the late 1920s in Moscow, so Lukács's Hegelianised Marxism of a decade earlier seemed prescient – or, rather, he had got to the same point as Marx had in his early neglected writings. Moreover, Lukács argues that the commodity fetishism Marx set out in *Capital* was under more primitive economic systems, merely episodic. Now, by contrast, it pervades society entirely. Lukács wrote:

With the modern 'psychological' analysis of the work-process (in Taylorism) this rational mechanisation extends right into the worker's 'soul': even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialised rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts.<sup>45</sup>

As a result, revolution was less likely than ever, especially in an advanced, rationally administered society like Germany. This certainly was how the Institute for Social Research saw Germany in the 1920s – not a place where revolution would be realised any time soon, but one better suited to quiet study.

No wonder then that the Soviet spy working in the library left quickly after the Institute's foundation. Richard Sorge (1895–1944) had taken part in the Ilmenau seminar and was later hired to help organise the library, while all the time reporting back to Moscow on whether the conditions were propitious for the German Army in reports have not been published.<sup>46</sup> The Baku-born, Berlin-raised Sorge had won the Iron Cross while fighting for the German Army in the First World War. While convalescing from shrapnel wounds that broke both his legs and cost him three fingers, Sorge read Marx, later joining the German Communist Party and studied for a PhD in economics at Hamburg. After fleeing post-war Germany, where he had been sacked as a teacher for his political views, he went to join the Comintern. This body, had been sacked as a junior officer for the Comintern. This body, Moscow and became a junior officer for the Comintern. This body, also known as the Third International, was set up in 1919 by delegates from around the world, including Lenin, to fight 'by all available means, including armed force, for the overthrow of the international bourgeoisie and for the creation of an international Soviet republic as a transition stage to the complete abolition of the State'. It was closed down by Stalin in 1943.

In 1921, the Comintern sent Sorge on a mission to Germany. There he worked ostensibly as a journalist but was really gathering intelligence about Frankfurt's business community. In Frankfurt, he married Christiane Gerlach, the former wife of Kurt Gerlach, and assisted for a while in the Institute's library. His views on the Marxist research institute went unrecorded; nor is it clear if his colleagues knew they had a Soviet spy working in their midst. But in any event Sorge was soon recalled to Moscow and thereafter led a life of espionage and adventure undreamt of by his armchair philosopher colleagues. In the 1930s, while still working for the Soviets, he joined the Nazi Party and managed to be sent to Japan on journalistic assignments, writing for newspapers he ideologically despised. Really, though, Sorge was dispatched to Japan to set up a network of informants from whom he could get information about Japanese foreign policy.

During the Second World War, what he gleaned proved vital to the Soviets. He informed Moscow about the German-Japanese Pact and warned of the Japanese attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbour.

In 1941 Sorge reported to Moscow Hitler's intentions to attack the Soviet Union. Later that year, he informed the Japanese that no plans to attack the Soviet Union existed. This information allowed the Red Army commander Georgy Zhukov to redeploy eighteen divisions, 1,700 tanks, and over 1,500 aircraft from Siberia to the western front in time to resist the Nazi advance in the Second World War, enabling the Red Army to break through the Wehrmacht that had already crushed British and French forces in western Europe. By then, though, Sorge's number may well have gone up: not only had the Japanese secret service intercepted his message to Moscow, but, it is claimed, Stalin could not afford to let it be known that he had ignored Sorge's warning over Operation Barbarossa, the Nazis' 1941 attack on the Soviet Union. So it suited him if Sorge did not live to reveal that the Soviet leader's indecision had cost so many Russian lives.

On 7 November 1944, Richard Sorge was hanged in prison in Tokyo. James Bond's creator Ian Fleming, a British intelligence officer during the Second World War, called Sorge 'the most formidable spy in history'. Sorge had to suffer the posthumous indignity of having a film made about his life by Veit Harlan, the notorious director of perhaps one of the most anti-Semitic films ever made, *Jud Süß* (1940), and one of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels' favourite film-makers. Called *Verrat an Deutschland* (Betrayal in Germany), the 1955 film about Sorge's espionage in Japan was banned in West Germany only two days after its release. Another film (*Qui êtes-vous, Monsieur Sorge?* (Who Are You, Mr. Sorge?)) appeared in 1961 and was seen in many countries, proving particularly popular in the Soviet Union. Only in 1964, though, did the Soviet Union officially recognise Richard Sorge's existence as a Soviet spy. He was made that year a Hero of the Soviet Union. A shame he had been dead twenty years before he was thus honoured: not many men can pin the Hero of the Soviet Union medal next to the German Imperial Iron Cross on their chest.

Sorge's life story is worth relating, not merely because this action hero's biography contrasts so markedly with those of other Frankfurt

scholars (though three prominent members of the School – Franz Xaver von Sickingen, Herbert Marcuse and Otto Kirchheimer – worked as intelligence analysts for the Office of Strategic Services, the wartime forerunner of the CIA), but also because his politically engaged activities were inimical to the ethos of the Frankfurt School. While Sorge was slipping across borders in Europe, America and Asia, charged with helping foment world proletarian revolution by the Comintern, Nazi invasion, the Institute remained aloof from the struggle, valuing intellectual independence, preferring its scholars not to be members of political parties and, Grossman notwithstanding, doubting that it was worthwhile picking up the gauntlet Lenin had thrown down to the Marxists around the world. The circumstances that helped make the Bolshevik Revolution successful, *Neue Sachlichkeit* has also been translated as *New Resignation*, and that captures something of the mood of the Frankfurt School in this decade: it was as though the grand era of socialist revolution was over and left-leaning intellectuals would have to accommodate themselves to the Weimar Republic's social order, one that was born in the fateful compromise between the Social Democratic government and the Prussian nobility.

In 1927 Horckheimer wrote an essay called 'The Impotence of the German Working Class'. In it, this new kind of Marxist intellectual finally answered, pessimistically, the question of the practical problems of implementing socialism posed at Ilmenau four years earlier. He argued that the integration of the working class into the capitalist process of production made it unviable as an agent for socialism. The class consciousness and proletarian solidarity Lukács took to be necessary for socialist revolution was lacking in Germany. In part this was because the working class was divided between an employed, integrated working-class elite and frustrated unemployed workers. But it was also in part because the two socialist parties – the SPD and the KPD – replicated that antagonistic division at a political level. The split was tragic, since, as he wrote: 'In both parties, there exists a part of the strength on which the future of mankind depends.' The lack of that unified strength not only militated against the possibility of

socialist revolution in Germany, but, as the Frankfurt School would later realise, undermined resistance to Nazism.

Horkheimer argued that the prospects for reconciling the two positions were contingent 'in the last analysis on the course of economic process'. Here the barb unfairly directed at Henryk Grossman - that he took revolution to be the product of economic forces and that therefore his was essentially a politics of quietism - is better targeted at Horkheimer: it was he who cast workers as spectators observing the working out of economic forces rather than, as they were for the straightforwardly old-school Leninist Henryk Grossman, actors in history. That's not to say Horkheimer was wrong in this pessimistic view, but rather, at the very least, that it changes radically what the purpose of a Marxist think-tank such as the one he directed from 1931 was. In his history of the Frankfurt School, Rolf Wiggershaus concludes: 'None of them [the leaders of the School] put any hopes in the working class.'<sup>48</sup> They became, rather, virtuoso critics of a world that they could not change; the impotence of the working class that Horkheimer wrote about had its parallel in the Marxist intellectuals working at the Institute for Social Research.

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