



# The Unpublished Correspondence between Hans Simmel and Max Horkheimer (1936–1943). Some Remarks on Critical Theory, Georg Simmel's Sociology, and the Tasks of the Institute for Social Research

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Article abstract

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The aim of this paper is to reconstruct the relationship between the philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) and Hans Simmel (1891–1943), Georg Simmel’s first son.\* The findings

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\* I am very grateful to Jochen Stollberg (Universität Frankfurt am Main) and Dr. Matthias Jehn (Universität Frankfurt am Main) for giving me full support, some years ago, during my archive research at the *Archivzentrum, Goethe-Universität*

are based on a folder I scrolled through some years ago in the Universitätsarchiv in Frankfurt am Main<sup>1</sup>. It highlights not only the engagement of Horkheimer and his attempt to arrange a visa for Hans Simmel to travel to the US. On the one hand, it delivers a testimony of an intellectual debt (Horkheimer's to Georg Simmel), which has been transformed into a biographical debt toward Hans; on the other hand, it sketches a tragic link with the rise of Nazi party, and the consequences of the persecution and diaspora of Jews from Germany. Consequently, this paper has two principal aims: firstly, to reconstruct the biographical events which connect Hans Simmel and Max Horkheimer during a specific period (1936–1943), furnishing details about concrete aspects of their historical situation; secondly, in the background is the ambivalent relationship between Georg Simmel's thought and the former Frankfurt School authors, who appreciated Simmel's innovative style, yet distanced themselves from his irrational-bourgeois approach.

The review of Horkheimer's archival papers basically follows these steps: 1. Analysis of the state of art of Georg Simmel's influence and reception among the Frankfurt School scholars, from the first to the last generation (that is, from the inspirers Lukács and Korsch, through Benjamin, Horkheimer, Adorno, to Honneth and Jaeggi); 2. This Frankfurt archival evidence gives some hints for a

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Frankfurt am Main. I owe PD Dr Gregor Fitzi (Universität Potsdam, President of the Georg Simmel Gesellschaft) many hints and generous human support in my recent research on Simmel's works. I am in debt to Prof. Dr Em. Alfred Schmidt (†), *Goethe-Universität* Frankfurt am Main, for orienting my interests towards Horkheimer's work as well as supervising my research on his writings and unpublished material. I also feel sincere gratitude to Prof. Dr Em. Otthein Rammstedt (†) for giving me (when I met him in Bielefeld), several opportunities to research Simmel's work and his biographical details. I am also grateful to Stafana Breitwieser and Barbara Niss (Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai – Archive) for recent suggestions on New York archive records on Hans Simmel.

<sup>1</sup> Max Horkheimer Archiv (Nachlass) – *Archivzentrum*, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main: Heft I 23.25-121 [henceforward MHA I, then the number of the paper].

deeper analysis of the impact of Georg Simmel's (social) philosophy on Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory. 3. The second evidence-based aspect acquires new strength given a historical and biographical contingency, that is, the "reciprocal solidarity" between Horkheimer and Hans Simmel (who took care of Horkheimer's parents in Stuttgart when he was already in the US); 4. As Dirk Käsler already highlighted, Hans Simmel obtained support (at least from Earle Eubank) to find help and have a chance to emigrate to America after the Nazis rose to power. However, the reconstruction of Horkheimer's support towards him is unedited and unpublished, so this evidence could give a new, decisive historical contribution to this context of analysis 5. Finally, beyond the historical contingent conditions, Horkheimer explicitly remarks in some letters in this archival document on his "intellectual debt" towards Georg Simmel's philosophy for developing his work, so again prompting further exploration of the possible theoretical influences of Georg Simmel on the whole program of Horkheimer's Critical Theory.

## 1. Georg Simmel and the Critical Theory

The debt to Georg Simmel is surely undeniable among the first generation Frankfurt School philosophers. However, this remained an unspoken influence owing to the many forms of resistance to Simmel's *portrait* in the academic and scientific debate. By virtue of his ambivalence principle and his unsystematic theory, Simmel had rightly predicted his destiny in the lucky figure of plural 'money heritage'. As he wrote on his intellectual legacy: "I know that I shall die without spiritual heirs (and that is as it should be). Mine is like a cash divided by many heirs, and each converts his share into whatever business suits his nature, in which the provenance from that legacy cannot be seen" (Simmel 2004: 261; Simmel 2010: 160).

From the very beginning, on the one hand Simmel was considered a war-monger, nationalist, right-wing thinker (a bourgeois society defender), also due to the stigmatization of Ernst Bloch or Georg Lukács' assessment in *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft* (1954). On the other hand, owing to Simmel's anti-conformist and

anti-academic style, he was simultaneously considered as a typical Jewish left-wing thinker, such as by Aby Warburg. Warburg was very skeptical about Simmel's thought: when his brother Max suggested a chair for him in Hamburg in 1915, Aby considered, apart from Simmel's virtuosity, that his eclecticism and relativism were very dangerous and injurious for the academic milieu, so his opinion was very negative (Simmel 2008: 937-938).

Ernst Bloch (one of Simmel's most prominent pupils among his Berlin students) dissociated himself from the Frankfurt School, as he was also unsympathetic towards Georg Simmel, when he recalled his intellectual position on Germany's involvement in WWI. In particular, Bloch condemned Simmel's conviction about taking sides for the nationalist argument in the debate in 1914 (Bloch 1958; on this aspect see also Watier 1991; Fitzi 2005 and 2018; Thouard 2014). He was all the more outspoken considering that Simmel always avoided taking a strong position or decision (Bloch uses the formula *tertium datur*). Nevertheless, Ernst Bloch was greatly impressed by Simmel's theory and thought (Leck 2000: 284-304), as he stated: "Simmel was the finest mind among all his contemporaries. But beyond this he is wholly empty and aimless, desiring everything except the truth. He is a collector of standpoints which he assembles all around truth without ever wanting or being able to possess it" (quoted in Dahme 1990: 18; see Maus 1959; Kemple 2018: 159).

Lukács, who besides Karl Korsch was one of the most influential Marxist intellectuals of the first generation of Frankfurt School thinkers, condemned Simmel's irrational late thought as a form of conservative, reactionary and even "imperialist" theoretical arrangement and a form of reflection of early 20th-century bourgeois society. Simmel's theory was, for him, "imperialist vitalism" (Lukács 1980: 13). Despite the initial influential ascendancy of Simmel's theory of forms for Lukács (especially for his aesthetical writings), the Hungarian thinker, who attended Simmel's lectures in Berlin, overturned his position on Simmel's intellectual *portrait*, condemning him for his irrational and vitalist

position (on the “ambivalent” regard to Simmel see Levine 1984: 335-345).

Simmel undoubtedly had a great impact on Korsch and more so on Lukács (Dahme 1990: 18 and ff.; Wiggershaus 1995: 77) due to Simmel’s meaningful contribution in the Neokantianism debate in the early 20th century (Stuart Hughes 2008 [1958]:190 and ff.; Podoksik 2016; Amat 2018). Before the discovery (1932) of Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* of 1844, Lukács and Korsch were deeply impressed by Simmel’s interpretation of Kant and Hegel as well: the Simmelian attempt to construct a new analytical “storey beneath the historical materialism” in his masterpiece *Philosophie des Geldes* left a remarkable trace on many intellectuals and probably also on the early Frankfurt School philosophers (Jaworski 1997; Helle 2001; Ruggieri 2019).

In 1930 Max Horkheimer achieved significant progress in his academic and scientific life due to his double appointment: he obtained the chair for Social Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt as well as becoming Director of the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (end of July 1930). On January 24, 1931, Horkheimer gave his inaugural lecture as the Chair of Social Philosophy with the title *The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research* [“Die Lage der Sozialphilosophie und die Aufgaben eines Instituts für Sozialforschung”] (Horkheimer 1988: 20- 35). Horkheimer was part of the same *Zeitgeist* of Frankfurt academic life with such prominent intellectuals as Paul Tillich, who accepted an appointment to the chair of philosophy from 1928, and Karl Mannheim, who served as a professor of sociology and political economy at the same university from 1929 (Horkheimer had a very stimulating, but strongly critical intellectual relationship with Mannheim). During this period Horkheimer consolidated the friendship and the intellectual relationship among the early Frankfurt School authors, particularly with Theodor W. Adorno, who on May 8, 1931 gave his inaugural lecture as a *Privatdozent* in philosophy. At that time, the name Georg Simmel circulated in intellectual debates as well as wider academic circles. As

Wiggershaus claims: “Horkheimer and Tillich held courses jointly: in the summer semester of 1930, a seminar on ‘Reading Philosophical Texts’; in the winter semester of 1930–1, a seminar on Locke; in the summer of 1931, a seminar on a philosophical writer. There were also joint courses by Tillich and Wiesengrund [*Adorno*]: in the winter semester of 1931–2, a seminar dealing with selections from Hegel’s philosophy of history; in the summer of 1932, a seminar on ‘Lessing: The Education of the Human Species’; in the winter semester of 1932–3, a seminar on ‘Simmel: the Main Problems of Philosophy’” (Wiggershaus 1995: 111). David Frisby remarked that “the dialectic of subjective and objective culture, whose increasing separation from one another not merely strain that dialectical relationship but also, for Simmel, constitute, variously, a ‘crisis of culture’, a ‘tragedy of culture’ and even a ‘pathology of culture’” (Frisby 1990: 70). This aspect is particularly relevant for what preoccupied Horkheimer about subjective and objective reason (see *The Eclipse of Reason* as well as *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*) especially regarding the domination of the former (as logical, abstract, scientific reason) over the latter. The social conflicts and the “tragedy of culture” are also relevant and inspiring if we consider the recent views of Axel Honneth on “the social pathologies”, referring more and more to Simmel as well as Horkheimer (Honneth 2002; 2017). If Honneth remarks Simmel’s importance on giving accent on social conflicts in order to understand the grammar of society, Rahel Jaeggi recently maintains a critical enquiry on forms of social life within the late capitalistic society, according a typical Simmelian scheme (Jaeggi 2015; 2018).

Simmel’s thought attracted the interest of Theodor Adorno *via* Siegfried Kracauer within a large intellectual triangulation with Korsch and Lukács, too. As Wiggershaus refers: “The philosophical positions around which Kracauer orientated himself critically in the post-war years and the first half of the 1920s were, on the one hand, Simmel’s relativism and his metaphysically shallow ‘philosophy of life’, together with the sharp distinction made by Max Weber between value-relativism and the ideal of scientific objectivity; and,

on the other, Max Scheler's approbation of Catholicism, or rather of a religiously inclined phenomenology, along with Georg Lukács's approbation of Dostoevsky's work and of the Russian soul as a fulfilment of the longing for a world filled with meaning. He shared with all of them their analysis of the time as involving a demystification of the world and of the relations between human beings together with the inability of the sciences to point to a way out of the crisis" (Wiggershaus 1995: 68). In a letter sent to Benjamin (November 10, 1938), Adorno explicitly referred to Simmel with regard to his intuitions on the modern life of individuals in the metropolitan milieu: "I have a sense of such artificiality whenever you put things metaphorically rather than categorically. This is particularly the case in the passage about the transformation of the city into an interior for the flâneur. I think that one of the most powerful conceptions in your study is here presented as a mere 'as if'. There is an extremely close relationship between the appeal to concrete modes of behaviour, like that of the flâneur or the later passage about the relationship between seeing and hearing in the city, which, not entirely as a matter of coincidence, enlists a quotation from Simmel, and the kind of materialistic excursions in which one never completely sheds the anxiety anybody would feel for a swimmer who dives into cold water when covered with the most terrible goose bumps" (Scholem and Adorno 1994: 581).

Walter Benjamin attended Simmel's Berlin seminar in 1912: "Benjamin's metaphysically oriented sense of the social was nourished to some degree by his university studies that fall and winter. Enrolling in philosophy at the Friedrich Wilhelm University, where, in October 1912, he began the first of five (nonconsecutive) semesters in Berlin, he attended lectures by the distinguished philosophical sociologist Georg Simmel" (Eiland and Jennings 2014: 48-49). In Frankfurt Benjamin attended seminars (on history of social ideas) of the sociologist Gottfried Salomon-Delatour, who had taken his doctorate with Georg Simmel in 1915 and had a great influence from his thought (see Salomon 1991; Salomon-Delatour

1994; Käsler 2005): six years later was attached to the Sociology Department of Frankfurt University (under the direction of Frank Oppenheimer)<sup>2</sup>. Salomon-Delatour enthusiastically supported Benjamin's project and study on *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* – in vain, unfortunately (Eliand and Jennings 2014: 178; Müller-Doohm 2005: 73).

The impact of Simmel's style and theory (namely his sociological intuition on the metropolitan life) certainly offered Benjamin an important view: the predisposition to essay as a new form of argument due to describing modernity under the sign of fragmentation, the new "life" of the subjective and objective mind [*subjektive und objektive Geist*] within the metropolitan scenario, the aesthetical dimension as an analytical sphere for philosophical and epistemological issues – any of these elements were decisive for Benjamin's world, namely in terms of the increasing interests in *flânerie*.

Nevertheless, Benjamin systematically dismissed these elements from some of Simmel's theoretical view, as he testifies in a letter to Gershom Scholem (December 23, 1917). Benjamin, who had been reading Simmel's *Das Problem der historischen Zeit*, remarked that it was "an extremely wretched concoction that goes through contortions

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<sup>2</sup> After receiving his doctorate from Georg Simmel in Strasbourg in 1915, from 1921 to 1931 Salomon taught sociology at the University of Frankfurt am Main as an associate professor. Salomon emigrated to France in 1933, where he became a lecturer at a Paris university and editor of the "Information Economique". In 1941, Salomon fled to the United States, where he taught from 1941 to 1943 as a professor at the *New School for Social Research* in New York. Here he adopted his mother's birth name, Delatour, as a second surname, possibly to avoid confusion with Albert Salomon, who also taught as an emigrant in New York. In 1942 he also was appointed at the University of Denver. In the years 1946-1950 he lectured as a sociology professor at Columbia University. Salomon returned to Frankfurt in 1958, where he lectured as academic professor until he died in 1964. Among his pupils in Frankfurt, also Otthein Rammstedt attended his lectures from 1958: one of the most meaningful Rammstedt's writings on Simmel was sketched with a contribution of Salomon-Delatour (Rammstedt 1969).

of reasoning, incomprehensibly uttering the silliest things” (Scholem and Adorno 1994: 106). Benjamin’s hesitation over some theoretical confusions in Simmel’s argumentation was shared within the circle of Frankfurt School thinkers; but besides this idea, there was also a shared conviction, which Benjamin summarized well in the following words (a letter sent to Adorno on February 23, 1939): “You look askance at Simmel. Is it not high time to give him his due as one of the forefathers of cultural Bolshevism? (I say this not to support the citation that, in fact, I would not want to do without, but on which too much stress is placed in its current position.) I recently looked at his *Philosophy of Money* [*Philosophie des Geldes*]. There is certainly good reason for it to be dedicated to Reinhold and Sabine Lepsius; there is good reason that it stems from the time in which Simmel was permitted to ‘approach’ the circle around George. It is, however, possible to find much that is very interesting in the book if its basic idea is resolutely ignored. I found the critique of Marx’s value theory remarkable” (Scholem and Adorno 1994: 599).

## 2. Hans Simmel biographical profile

Hans Simmel, the first son of Georg Simmel, was born on April 6, 1891 in Berlin. He was a general doctor living and working in the city of Stuttgart. We can find information on his life thanks to the attached *Curriculum vitae* (that he probably prepared in 1938) and a list of scientific publications in some letters to Max Horkheimer (MHA I: 92 and ff.). They are useful to relate to his life and his vicissitudes. Another important document was given by Arnold Simmel, his son, who kept the manuscripts of Hans’s memoirs [*Lebenserinnerungen*] (Simmel 1976), now released with a “Simmel studies” review (Simmel 2008b).

In the *Curriculum vitae* sent to Horkheimer, Hans Simmel states that he was the son of Georg Simmel, who was professor of philosophy and sociology at the University of Berlin: after Easter 1914, Georg Simmel moved with his family to Strasbourg where he died in 1918. Hans Simmel attended a classical college, studied

medicine in Berlin, Munich, and Würzburg from 1903–1913: he passed his medical state board examination in Berlin at Easter 1913 (his grade was “very good”), and in summer 1914 he achieved the N.D. (*dissertation eximia*). From May to July 1914, he was voluntary assistant at the Pharmacological Institute of the University of Heidelberg (under the supervision of Prof. Gottlieb). From August 1914 to May 1919 he was an army physician. From October 1914 to March 1917 he was internist in a Strasbourg infirmary under Prof. Erich Mayer. Then he was detailed to the Eastern Front. From May 1919 to September 1920 he was internist at the Pathological Institute in Jena under Professor Rössle. In a certificate testifying to his commitments and career, the Director of the Medical Polyclinic in Jena, Prof. Dr Lommel, refers to Hans Simmel’s particular human and professional qualities due to his ability “to combine authority with a conciliatory attitude” (MHA, Heft I: 96): he worked in fact in Jena since October 1, 1920. Arnold Simmel notes that his father worked in Jena primarily in pathology and haematology, doing both clinical and research (Simmel 2008a: 140).

In 1921 Hans Simmel married Else Rapp, and then had four children (born 1923, 1925, 1926 and 1930 respectively): Arnold, Gerhard, Marianne, and Eva. Hans Simmel and Else Rapp met in December 1920 while he was attending lectures on paediatrics by Prof. Jussuf Ibrahim: Else Rapp was Ibrahim’s assistant at the time (Simmel 2008a: 140; Simmel 2008b: 136). Prof. Ibrahim was a very ambiguous person in regard to his Nazi professional and public involvement: he was responsible for the description of congenital cutaneous candidiasis, originally known as Beck-Ibrahim disease. The discovery of his association with the Nazi euthanasia program during World War II resulted in an effort to rename this disease (Strous and Edelman 2007). Due to the ambiguity of his position with the Nazi party and eugenics practice, and after an investigative commission which discovered Ibrahim’s engagement with the Nazi program (“[...] after evidence surfaced that Ibrahim participated in the T-4 program between 1941 and 1945”, see Sachs 2003), many clinics with his name decided to remove it.

According to his son Arnold, in 1929 Hans Simmel was appointed head [*Chefarzt*] of the *Städtische Krankenhans* of Gera city (Thuringia), where his family moved in the early thirties (Simmel 2008a: 141). In his curriculum sent to the US contacts, he writes that in 1928 he became medical superintendent of the Municipal Hospital in Gera, while he kept his lecturing activity at the University of Jena (MHA, Heft I: 92). Arnold Simmel remarks that in Gera there is a *Professor Simmel Straße* named in memory of his father (Simmel 2008a: 140).

In August 1933 Hans Simmel was deprived of his hospital professional position and lecturing activity because of his father's Jewish descent (see *Lebenslauf* Hans Simmel sent to Earle Eubank in 1936; Käsler 1995: 182). In spring 1933 Arnold Simmel remembers a very meaningful event concerning his father: Hans Simmel was arrested after he had pointed out the Nazi flag in front of his hospital as “a rag” [*Fetzen*], while he was speaking with one of his colleagues. After two weeks of protective custody, he spent a week in a prison that probably became a concentration camp (Simmel 2008a: 143).

From August 1933 to October 1938 he practised in Stuttgart as a specialist for internal diseases. From 1934, he gave numerous lectures in continuation courses for Jewish physicians in Southern Germany (MHA, Heft I: 92: see also the correspondence with Earle Eubank in the late 1930s in Käsler 1991: 176 and ff.)<sup>3</sup>. Arnold Simmel recalls that his parents, “[...] like many others, thought that the Nazi rule was a temporary political phenomenon, and did nothing, at this time, about the possibility of emigrating” (Simmel 2008a: 143). In the mid-1930s Hans Simmel arranged seminars in his dining room in Stuttgart exclusively for Jews (namely Jewish physicians) who were planning to emigrate and who needed to take their medical exams again in their new country (Simmel 2008a: 144).

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<sup>3</sup> For further information on Hans Simmel and his wife Else's professional life, see Rueß 2009: 341 and ff.; Seidler 277-278.

Around 1936 Hans Simmel started to think about emigration for his family, too, due to the increasingly difficult political situation imposed by the Nazi restrictions on Jewish people. After November 9, 1938 (*Kristallnacht*) almost all Jewish men in Stuttgart, including Hans Simmel, were arrested and transported to Dachau camp; he was released one month later (on December 13) and his health was severely damaged (Simmel 2008a: 145). During this period in Dachau camp Arnold recounts (also in Georg Herzberg's reports) that Hans Simmel gave "some heroic medical help to fellow inmates".

In early 1939 Hans Simmel and his wife started to pack personal items in readiness for eventual departure by boat to the US. Arnold Simmel furnishes an important detail about this phase: "Beyond 'worldly goods' what got lost was, of course, anything that we had of my grandfather Simmel's letters, notes, papers, books and whatever memorabilia there might have existed" (Simmel 2008a: 146).

As reported by Arnold Simmel, the quota number for Hans Simmel's family came in February 1940, when they moved definitively to England (Hans Simmel's sons were already there since 1939). They landed in New York on March 21 (on the *Cunard Liner Lancastría*). During the first period in the USA, Hans Simmel and his family probably earned support from various refugee organizations. In Fall 1940 Hans Simmel finally went to Chicago to work for a year in a pathology laboratory at Mount Sinai Hospital. In 1941 he took a position as hospital pathologist at the City Hospital in Warren, Ohio. In 1943 (on August 23) he died of tuberculosis meningitis, after he visited a friend from Stuttgart, Dr Otto Einstein, who was interned in a tuberculosis sanatorium in Colorado (Simmel 2008a: 147). Arnold Simmel synthesized the psychological and existential figure of his father in Gellner's terms as "decent cognitive comportment", meaning he had a very deep sense of responsibility towards his profession and towards others: he remembers him as a very kind person with a serious moral and responsible attitude.

### 3. The Hans Simmel–Max Horkheimer correspondence (1937–1943)

After a short stay in Geneva in February 1933 – the *Society for Social Research* had already been replaced by the *Société Internationale de Recherches Sociales* with its headquarters first in Geneva and afterwards in Paris –, in 1934 Horkheimer was compelled to move to the US, where he carried on the Institute for Social Research along with the academic commitments of Columbia University. In fact, he emigrated to America in May 1934. He was appointed as vice-president of the *Société Internationale de Recherches Sociales* and Research Director of the International Institute for Social Research (MHA, Heft I: 99). The main site for the newborn Institute for Social Research was at 429 West 117 Street (New York City).

Michael Landmann and Peter-Ernst Schnabel (both biographers of Georg Simmel) have reported that Hans Simmel and his family arrived in the US in the late 1930s, although he died a few years later due to the physical consequences of his imprisonment in Dachau concentration camp (Landmann and Gassen, 1958; Schnabel, 1974; see also Käsler, 1985: 187). Dirk Käsler reconstructed the relationship between Hans Simmel and Earle Eubank, who was lecturing at the University of Cincinnati (Ohio): the first exchange of letters could be dated around November 1936 (Käsler, 1985: 182 and ff.). In 1936 Eubank procured the address of Georg Simmel's widow, Gertrud, who lived in Stuttgart with his son Hans until 1938, when she committed suicide (Simmel 2008a: 144; on Gertrud Simmel's life see also Rammstedt 1994).

The correspondence between Horkheimer and Hans Simmel actually begins in 1936. Arnold Simmel recalls that in 1936, after various Nazi restrictions on Jews' everyday life, Hans Simmel was finally convinced that it would be necessary to leave Germany, and to apply for emigration to America (Simmel 2008a: 144). He left Germany in 1939 with his family. Earle Eubank provided an *affidavit* to Hans Simmel (15 August 1938) only for the fact that – as Dirk

Käsler states – he was the son of the very influential philosopher and sociologist Georg Simmel (Käsler, 1991: 177).

The same ideas and suggestions emerge from the correspondence between Horkheimer and Hans Simmel: Horkheimer applied in a letter sent to the American Consulate on November 18, 1938 for a visa to be provided for Hans Simmel, who lived in Stuttgart and took care of Horkheimer's parents: “[Georg Simmel] was a great German Philosopher whose ideas had a considerable influence on his philosophical development” (MHA I: 101). In a draft of this letter, written one day before, Horkheimer stated: “Prof. Hans Simmel, who is applying for an immigration visa and resides at Stuttgart [...], recently treated my mother during a serious and dangerous illness. He is the son of an outstanding German philosopher who greatly influenced my philosophical education and ideas. I feel a strong sense of responsibility towards him and will help him to the best of my ability when he comes here” (MHA I: 99).

Hans Simmel's first letter, indexed in the dossier at the *Archivzentrum* University of Frankfurt am Main, was sent to Horkheimer (June 26, 1936). This basically refers to the health conditions of Horkheimer's mother, who was living at that time in Stuttgart, where Hans Simmel was appointed as specialist internist. She was hospitalized on May 21. After some circulatory problems, she had a lung attack and needed to stay longer. Due to her treatment and some complications of the central nervous system, she also had sight problems. After a long time, she finally started to walk around her house, slowly recovering her health. But Hans Simmel was asking Horkheimer to provide assistance to his mother because she still needed to have a quiet lifestyle, despite her very active and social temperament (MHA I: 121-122). Horkheimer charged all the hospital costs for his mother, as already testified in a cable sent by Friedrich Pollock to Hans Simmel on June 22, 1937 (MHA I: 120). On the same date Horkheimer sent a letter to Hans Simmel informing him of the situation: he was in New York and no one but his father remained in Germany to take care of his mother,

so he asked him to liaise with Professor Wetzel to arrange for her any health facility (MHA I: 119).

On July 8, 1937 Hans Simmel replied to Horkheimer with a report of the (improved) health conditions of his mother: cardiac problems seemed to have been overcome, while new compromised speech conditions emerged due to the clinical situation (MHA I: 116). Due to the precarious health of Horkheimer's mother, Hans Simmel suggested that he find a guardian for her, for support during the rehabilitation phase as well as to provide everyday care. During the last medical examination, Hans Simmel was supported by Horkheimer's father, Moses "Moritz", and his aunt Mrs Goldschmidt (from the Netherlands). He observed that Moritz Horkheimer also needed a short sanatorium stay due to his unstable psychological conditions – as detailed by Mrs Goldschmidt. In a further letter of August 7, 1937 Hans Simmel (who was working in a team with Prof. Wetzel) reported to Horkheimer some better news and progress about his mother's health: he remarked on some psychological fragilities due to the loss of household and missing her husband (MHA I: 115). Moritz Horkheimer also showed that it was time for him to leave the sanatorium and come back home.

In autumn 1937 Horkheimer briefly came back to Europe. After the London office of the Institute of Social Research was closed, he wondered whether to establish it in Paris, where Walter Benjamin lived and was actively collaborating since 1935. In 1937 Max Horkheimer released the programmatic essay *Traditionelle und kritische Theorie* in the "Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft" (Horkheimer 1988a). He also stated that the situation in Europe was worsening due to an imminent deterioration of international political stability. In a letter to Pollock, September 20, 1937, he explicitly predicted a tragic and sad future for Europe: "Die Gesamtsituation in Europa ist recht traurig. Die Kriegsangst selbst bildet bloß ein Moment in einer gesellschaftlichen Entwicklung, in der jedenfalls alle kulturellen Werte, um die es sich lohnt, mit unheimlicher Notwendigkeit zugrunde gehen [...]" (Horkheimer 1995: 235).

In a new handwritten letter of January 15, 1938 Hans Simmel sends Max Horkheimer news about his parents' better health conditions. What is particularly interesting is the fact that Hans Simmel gives not only a medical-physiological profile, but through a "psychophysical parallelism" (as he literally writes) he also outlines Horkheimer's parents existential conditions. He uses the term "ego-will" (*Wille zum Ich*) and "will to live" (*Wille zum Leben*)<sup>4</sup> to describe the global situation of Horkheimer's parents and their attachment to life (MHA I: 113). Horkheimer replied to this letter on February 15, 1938: he was heartily grateful to Hans Simmel for his fine and in-depth report on his parents' conditions; and he remarked on the interesting crossing analysis (existential and medical) to describe a clinical profile based on both these two categories (*ego-will* and *will to live*). As Horkheimer writes: "That their will to live affects them is however an extremely correct observation. This applies not only to the time of illness, but to the whole life of my parents" (MHA I: 112<sup>5</sup>).

In a letter sent by Hans Simmel to Horkheimer (October 2, 1938) he reflects on a recent visit to his parents. He reports that after more than 2 years, he must admit that Horkheimer's mother's

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<sup>4</sup> These expressions are clearly reminiscent of a philosophical and psychological lexicon. "Wille zum Ich" is a topic recalling idealistic and post-idealistic themes (see for instance Fichte's philosophy or Julius Bahnsen's theory, as well as moral-psychological frameworks in Schopenhauer and Nietzsche's work); "Wille zum Leben" is also a topic recalling neurophysiological scientific studies (and scholars such as Gustav Theodor Fechner or Wilhelm Wundt), as well as the psychoanalytical frame. "Wille zum Leben" is a specific issue of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche (who are basically authors arguing for "will to live") which were subject of Georg Simmel's essays as well as conference series, released as a book on *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche* (1907) (Simmel 1995). Moreover, the "will to live" issue also converges with *Lebensphilosophie*, which was embraced by Georg Simmel in his last writings.

<sup>5</sup> "Dass ihr Wille zum Leben auf ihn wirkt, ist allerdings eine äusserst richtige Beobachtung. Dies gilt nicht nur für die Zeit der Krankheit, sondern für das ganze Leben meiner Eltern".

illness (namely her speech difficulties) seemed to have vanished (MHA 1: 111).

In the folder of *Archivzentrum* there is also a document (November 16, 1938) sent to the Stuttgart American Consul from the National Bank of New York, where Max Horkheimer and his wife Rose held an account (on June 24, 1936): it basically testifies and refers to the authoritative and responsible figure of Horkheimer. It probably deals with Horkheimer's engagement with the American consul in order to get an affidavit for their parents – as it emerges from a successive letter (November 18, 1938) sent to Samuel Honacker, American consul in Stuttgart (MHA I: 101). In the same letter Horkheimer asked Honaker to grant an affidavit to Hans Simmel as well. On November 17, (1938) Friedrich Pollock in fact sent Horkheimer a cablegram informing him of the internment of Hans Simmel in Dachau camp and about the request of his wife, Else, to obtain an affidavit for him (MHA I: 104).

In the letter of November 18, (1938) Horkheimer describes Hans Simmel as the internist who was treating their parents, but he also describes him, as remarked some lines before, as “the son of a great German philosopher whose ideas had a considerable influence” on his philosophical development. A few lines later he thus expresses his will to help him, also with respect to the recent internment in Dachau camp. Horkheimer admits the unusual request of two affidavits, but he also makes a pledge to Honaker based on his academic and economic position and his ability to take care of these individuals in future. He writes: “I know that in normal times it would be very unusual to send two affidavits for the purpose of immigration within so short interval, all the more since I shall not become an American citizen until next year. But the good fortune that I have found a satisfactory position in this country and am allowed to conduct my scientific research in liberty at one of the great universities, Columbia, gives me the moral obligation to lend a hand at least to a small number of my nearest relatives and proven friends. I do not give these affidavits carelessly, but intend to acknowledge the consequences of each one and to extend material

help to the people who come here on my affidavit so that they shall not become a burden to anyone” (MHA I: 101). It follows a separate letter sent to Honaker with some details on Horkheimer’s academic-professional profile and Hans Simmel’s curriculum vitae (MHA I: 99). In this letter, Horkheimer remarks on the importance of Simmel’s care for his parents in Stuttgart as well as highlighting that Simmel was “[...] the son of an outstanding German philosopher, who greatly influenced [his] philosophical education and ideas”.

On December 8, (1938) Horkheimer wrote to the psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Herbert “Harry” Stack Sullivan, who also was collaborating with Erich Fromm (who is mentioned in this letter) and was research director at Enoch Pratt Hospital (in Maryland) from 1925 to 1930. Sullivan headed the Washington, DC School of Psychiatry from 1936 to 1947. In this letter Horkheimer asked him to help find an academic teaching position for Hans Simmel, because he had difficulties to integrate him into the Institute he directed in New York: he describes him as a “distinguished scientist and great personality” (as well as a “very cultured and sensitive man”). He refers to the difficult situation in Germany after the rise of the Nazi party and his internment in Dachau camp, and thus the urgent request to let have him an affidavit or a visa (MHA I: 84).

The first reply to Horkheimer after Simmel’s Dachau internment comes on December 21, 1938: Hans Simmel is very grateful to Horkheimer, and he states that he has a quite sure citizenship for Chicago city, even if his dossier was still being processed by the Stuttgart consulate. Hans Simmel also states that his family was involved in a joint move to the US, and at that moment was basically divided between Stuttgart and London (MHA I: 81).

On the same date (December 21, 1938) Ernest E. Hadley, executive director of the Washington School of Psychiatry, sent a letter to Horkheimer in which he stated that both he and Dr Sullivan had “[...] gone into the matter of employing Professor Hans Simmel of Stuttgart on the teaching staff of *The Washington School of Psychiatry*. The officers of the School are in agreement as the

desirability of securing the services of Dr Hans Simmel as Lecturer (with professorial rank) on Psychosomatic Medicine” (MHA I: 82). They would have guaranteed a period of two years contract (effective the date of Hans Simmel’s availability for service).

Max Horkheimer did not hesitate to reply to Dr Harry Sullivan about this good news. He replies in fact on December 22, (1938), expressing his gratitude for the acceptance of Hans Simmel’s engagement, while he was guaranteeing the economic coverage for the two years contract. The Institute for Social Research in New York would have been transferring \$1,200 per year to *The Washington School of Psychiatry* in order to cover any contract amounts. In this way, Horkheimer consolidated the prolific collaboration between his institute and the Washington School of Psychiatry; in this regard, he replies to Sullivan: “I am glad that through the appointment of Dr Simmel as Lecturer on Psychosomatic Medicine in your Institute, the connection of the two Institutes, whose interests coincide anyway through our respect for Freud’s theory, is proved in practice through the assistance to a valuable personality” (MHA I: 80). On December 26, Horkheimer’s reply also follows to Dr Hadley, in response to the previous letter and guaranteeing any bureaucratic aspect (MHA I: 77).

Horkheimer’s and Hadley’s agreement on the contract for Hans Simmel was concretized in a letter of January 3, 1939 where Hadley gave further details to Horkheimer and Hans Simmel of the contract proposal (MHA I: 75 and 76). Hadley received a cablegram from Hans Simmel who accepted the appointment and then Hadley communicated it to Horkheimer on January 23, 1939 (MHA I: 73). Hans Simmel expressed his gratitude to Horkheimer in a letter on January 31, where he was confessing his enthusiasm and hesitation for the forthcoming professional experience abroad. He also informed him that he had not yet fixed a date for leaving Germany as well as confessing to some health problems (persistent cough) so that he was planning to have a couple of weeks in Switzerland, in the mountains (MHA I: 69).

On March 16, 1939 Hans Simmel sent a handwritten letter to Horkheimer (from Davos) informing him about his parents conditions, having received news from his wife from Stuttgart (MHA I: 66). A new intense and emotive letter from Davos (March 30, 1939) reports Hans Simmel's engagement toward Horkheimer's parents: Hans Simmel let Horkheimer view some psychosomatic affections in regard to his father's health conditions, and more broadly the difficult social and political situation which probably had effects on everyday life (MHA I: 65). He basically states that is very hard to synthesize in a letter what should be normally referred face to face, that is, the concerns of everyday life: it is a "fleeting occasion" to have a confront on human affairs. In doing so, Hans Simmel mentions (in ancient Greek) Hippocrates' phrase "ὁ καιρὸς ὄξυς" (the whole aphoristic fragment would be "Ὁ βίος βραχύς, ἡ δὲ τέχνη μακρὴ, ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ὄξυς, ἡ δὲ πείρα σφαλέρη, ἡ δὲ κρίσις χαλεπή"<sup>6</sup>).

Hans Simmel finally sailed to England in summer 1939, and on August 22, he wrote to Dr Hadley to inform him of his delay due to the bureaucratic requirements to obtain a non-quota visa. He asked him how to facilitate this process (MHA I: 59): Hadley was in touch with Horkheimer, even if he did not know how to help Hans Simmel (Hadley's letter to Horkheimer, August 30, 1939; MHA I: 58). Horkheimer replied both to Hans Simmel and Dr Hadley on September 11: he thanked Hadley for his involvement and at the same time he communicated to Hans Simmel that they could not do anything to help him in that phase. Horkheimer mentioned his gratitude to Hans Simmel for having been taking care of his parents (who had moved in the meantime to Bern) (MHA I: 56). On October 7, 1939, Otto Nathan wrote to inform him about the contact with Hans Simmel through Dr Kaethe Liepmann: he stated that she "[...] felt that the granting of a visa as a non-quota immigrant might be speeded up, if the Washington Institute would

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<sup>6</sup> In Latin, as reported by Seneca: "Vita brevis, ars longa, occasio praeceps, experimentum pericolosum, iudicium difficile".

write a letter to the Consul, pointing out that the services of Dr Simmel are greatly needed and that the Institute is interested in his early immigration into the United States” (MHA I: 52-53). Leo Löwenthal interceded in a letter of December 15 to Hans Simmel with a guarantee to him that Horkheimer had provided a new copy of his affidavit (MHA I: 50). A letter was in fact delivered on December 23 from Horkheimer’s secretary to Hans Simmel who was informed that his affidavit (and all the required attached documents) had been sent one day before to the American consul in London (MHA I: 49). The quota number for Hans Simmel’s family came through in February 1940, and they could finally set sail for America.

A letter to Horkheimer from Hans Simmel’s new American address – 5336 Dorchester Avenue, Chicago – arrived on April 30 (MHA I: 42). Due to bureaucratic obstacles Hans Simmel could not pursue his commitment plans, and he urged Horkheimer to intercede to the Committee for refugees. Horkheimer actually solicited this in a letter of May 11, 1940 (sent to Miss Binder), in which he stated that he would do everything to offer material aid to Hans Simmel, but that he was still having some difficulties in obtaining a fellowship (MHA I: 41).

On September 15, Hans Simmel wrote a confidential letter to Horkheimer reporting on his new life in the nation himself and describing “the best of all possible worlds”: his daughter Marianne was attending Smith College under the supervision of Prof. Bernard Mandelbaum, who was a Jewish philosopher (and afterwards one of the most important figures in the Conservative movement in the 20th century), while his younger daughter Eva was attending the same school with Paul Tillich’s daughter (MHA I: 40). Paul Tillich, as noted some lines before, was a colleague of Horkheimer at Frankfurt University and he was actually compelled to escape from Germany after 1933 due to his Jewish friendly (and defensive) positions as well as because of his socialist ideas (Heywood 1963; Pauck 2015).

Hans Simmel was also planning, as he writes in the same letter, to reach Chicago in October for additional training and American experience in the field of pathology. In this letter Simmel finally asks to Horkheimer to aid a neurologist colleague, Dr Haymann who was experiencing the same destiny as him. Horkheimer replied to him on October 15, giving full support also for Dr Haymann (MHA I: 39).

A new letter (November 3, 1940) testifies to Hans Simmel's new commitment in Mount Sinai Hospital in Chicago (namely in the pathology laboratory under the supervision of Prof. Davidsohn<sup>7</sup>): he could count on a salary supported by the Carl Schurz Stiftung (MHA I: 38). The National Carl Schurz Association, Inc. (NCSA) was originally established in 1930 as the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation (CSMF), named in honour of the ambassador, senator, and Secretary of the Interior on the centenary of his birth. The founders were several German professors and teachers, including Ferdinand Thun, Gustav Oberlaender, Henry Janssen, and Hanns Gram, who each wished to promote and improve the teaching of German language and culture, and to foster friendship between the United States and German-speaking countries (NCSA 2003). Hans Simmel was thus applying for a fellowship grant of the Dazian Foundation for Medical Research.

In the same letter Hans Simmel refers to his journey to Cincinnati, where he met the Director of the Department of Sociology, Prof. Earle Eubank, with whom he was previously in correspondence (Käsler 1985). In this letter Hans Simmel remarks that Eubank considers that Simmel's sociology had a great impact

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<sup>7</sup> The names of Simmel and Davidsohn are actually omitted in the Annual Report of the Mount Sinai Hospital of the City of New York (for the years 1938–1942): Mount Sinai digital archive <https://dspace.mssm.edu/> Only the name of Dr Emanuel Libman (as reported in the letter by Hans Simmel) is mentioned in the annual report for the year: Libman, who was a physician with the medical staff of Mount Sinai Hospital, established the “William Henry Welch Lecture Fund”, an income (\$10,000) to be used to provide lectures to be named after Dr William Henry Welch of Johns Hopkins University.

on American sociologists: he would have sent to Hans Simmel an introduction on his father's thought by Ernest W. Burgess who was one of the most representative scholars of the sociological "Chicago School" (MHA I: 38). Ernest Burgess' *Introduction to Social Sciences* (1921), edited with Robert Park (Burgess and Park 1921), actually contained "10 selections by Simmel, some of them new translations made by Park – many more selections than were drawn from any other author. 'Park and Burgess' became the most influential introduction to sociology in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, playing a major role in the exposure of generations of sociology students to Simmel's writings" (Levine et al. 1976: 813; Levine 1985; Baher 2016).

Horkheimer replies to Hans Simmel on November 23, 1940: a friendly letter in which he informed him about his summer voyages and he expressed his confidence in better times for Hans Simmel and his family, also for his new commitment with the Dazian Foundation. In the late part of the letter Horkheimer expressed his worry on the new political European (namely, middle-European) situation in regard to his parents who were staying in Bern. Horkheimer was very pessimistic about a probable invasion of the Nazi army into Switzerland. He was thus providing a visa to both his parents to let them travel to the US soon, and he asked Hans Simmel for some advices and hints (MHA I: 36-37).

On December 27, Hans Simmel wrote to Horkheimer informing him about his new employment in Mount Sinai Hospital, guaranteed by a stipend from the Dazian Foundation and through the mediation of Dr Emanuel Libman, and his wife's new engagement as secretary in the same hospital (MHA I: 35). He also shared the worry about Horkheimer's parents: he was considering the better conditions in Switzerland as well as the difficult operations for the movement of his parents from Europe. The situation for transfer from Europe to the USA was getting more and more complicated, as Hans Simmel states in a new letter to Horkheimer on February 1, 1941 (MHA I: 33).

From December 1, 1941 Hans Simmel was appointed Director for the pathologist laboratories of Warren City Hospital (MHA I: 32). On January 20, 1942 Horkheimer replied to Hans Simmel, who had in the meantime been moving to Warren in Ohio (385, Kenmore Avenue): he states that he “[...] never had any doubt that you finally would make your way in this country which does not withhold its tribute to real ability”. He also congratulated him heartily on his new appointment at the Warren City Hospital (MHA I: 31). This is the only letter for 1942 contained in the folder of *Archivzentrum*.

Unfortunately, a new short, handwritten, and poignant letter (August, 30 1943) was sent from Else Simmel to Horkheimer to communicate that Hans had died on August 23, while on vacation in Colorado, after two weeks illness (MHA I: 28). A very heartfelt reply arrived from Horkheimer to Else Simmel on September 17. While he expressed his deepest sympathy with her, he recalled Hans Simmel for his “outstanding qualities, his integrity, his extraordinary sense of duty and his professional and human qualification” (MHA I: 27). This description extraordinarily coincides with Arnold Simmel’s words – as mentioned some lines before – when he described his father in Gellner’s terms as “decent cognitive compartment” to mean his existential portrait.

Horkheimer remarks in this letter that exactly these human qualities made him sure of his success in his new life in the USA, (although terminated much too soon). And, thus, Horkheimer writes in the same letter: “The fact that he was the son of a philosopher who had great influence upon my own intellectual development was an additional bond”. He concludes by saying to Else Simmel that she could count on him anytime and “[...] consider the help of a friend who will never forget Hans Simmel” (MHA I: 27).

In a different typescript (without any date), probably written after Hans Simmel’s death, Horkheimer remarked that he was to him, “[...] as son of a philosopher who played a durable influence on his intellectual development, the symbol of a spiritual tradition

he recognized with” and he felt very proud of having assisted him with his emigration to America (MHA I: 30).

## Conclusion

I consider this final statement by Horkheimer as a great human and intellectual feature, a substantive debt that he felt to Georg Simmel as a philosopher who was very inspiring to him, as well as towards his son Hans whom he recognized as *the other* so similar to himself. The biographical records, which we recollected and reconstructed here, testify that Critical Theory was primarily for Horkheimer a practice, a peculiar “form of life”: the resistance to a totally blinded world, which was characterized by totalitarian regimes and precarious life conditions on the global stage due to the onset of WWII, rests as a form of human solidarity which Horkheimer learned (from the very beginning of his philosophical career) from the pages of Arthur Schopenhauer’s work. When he was young (aged 18), he discovered with his trusted friend Friedrich Pollock the intimate moral message arising from Schopenhauer’s work.

Rolf Wiggershaus once adopted “Schopenhauermarxismus” as the key to identify the double character of Horkheimer’s Critical Theory; in fact, he was always inspired by two main reference thinkers, Arthur Schopenhauer and Karl Marx (Wiggershaus 1998: 57). The influence of Schopenhauer on Horkheimer’s work is very deep and articulated (Schmidt 1977; 2004; Ruggieri 2015). According to Horkheimer (and referring to Schopenhauer’s metaphysical view), it is possible to survive the misery of the past, the injustice of the present and the uncertainty of a future perspective (lacking in spiritual meaning), if only we ethically and socially encounter ourselves in “solidarity”<sup>8</sup>. This issue, which is

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<sup>8</sup> Solidarity is a key word for understanding Horkheimer’s view on moral and practical actions inspired by his idea of critical theory: the strong feeling of solidarity he experienced towards Hans Simmel (and many other scholars he had encountered in his life) is the same that he felt when he moved to the US. As he

directly inspired by Schopenhauer (even if he pointed out “compassion”, *Mitleid*, as the only moral duty), was in line with the main theoretical program of Critical Theory (Horkheimer 1985: 342)<sup>9</sup>. In 1970, Horkheimer released the interview with Helmut Gumnior (afterwards with the title “The Longing for the Entirely Other” [*Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganzen Anderen*]: see Horkheimer 1985: 383–404) which sounded at that moment like a legacy for the Critical Theory. Under this “longing for the entirely Other” is preserved, elevated and fulfilled what, in the world religions and philosophies, had once been called different names (Eternity, Beauty, Heaven, God, Infinite, Idea etc.), but basically implied Transcendence and the Unconditional. The critical theorists (and surely Horkheimer at the top of the list) were transforming once certain religious dogmas into longings (Siebert 2005). For the sake of this longing, our practices assume a new sense and become worthy. “Expect the worst, and enounce it clearly, but achieve the better (you can)”<sup>10</sup>. This motto (extracted from an interview that Horkheimer released in 1971 to Gerhard Rein) synthetizes his practical view on life as well as an inspiring duty within his critical

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explains in an interview with Otmar Hersche (1969), when he was wondering whether to move to the USA (during his first stay in 1934), the President of the administration Council of Columbia University of New York gave him full and unconditional support (Horkheimer 1985: 333).

<sup>9</sup> In an interview with Otmar Hersche *Vermaltete Welt* (1970), Horkheimer regarded that it as necessary to achieve, in place of the Marxian idea of proletarian solidarity, “[...] a solidarity among human beings who commonly face death and work at least together in order to improve somehow their finitude [*die Solidarität der Menschen zu schaffen, die dem Tode gegenüberstehen, und gemeinsam daran zu arbeiten, die Eindlichkeit in gewisser Weise wenigstens zu verbessern*]” (Horkheimer 1985: 371).

<sup>10</sup> In his interview with Gerhard Rein *Neues Denken über Revolution* (1971), Horkheimer states: “The principle concerning the Critical Theory and its pessimism has always been the same: expect and enounce the worst, but try to contribute to the achievement of the best“ [*Was die Kritische Theorie und ihren Pessimismus betrifft, so galt für sie seit je der Grundsatz: das Schlimme erwarten und aussprechen, damit jedoch versuchen, zur Verwirklichung des Besseren beizutragen*]” (Horkheimer 1985: 418).

theory, and the short biographical experience with Hans Simmel, which we highlighted here, is also a testimony to this.

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