

Ludwig Pongratz

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE SUBJECT: REFLECTIONS ON SUBJECTIVITY AND EDUCATION AFTER ADORNO

In the attempt to discover what exactly 'critical theory' is all about, you might have run into that famous (and most likely fictitious) anecdote telling of an American student who, during an intermediate stop off in Frankfurt am Main, embarks upon the search for the 'Frankfurt School.' In the hope of coming across such a building on the campus of Frankfurt University, the student finally comes across the Institute for Social Research. There, however, some helpful soul informs him that the 'Frankfurt School' is really only a symbolically localisable entity. Therefore, the disappointing result of his research indicates that the 'Frankfurt School' is "both nowhere and simultaneously in many places" (Dubiel 1988: 16).

However, the point of this anecdote lies in the unexpected indication that important texts of the 'Frankfurt School' did not even originate in Frankfurt but in America. For the time in which Max Horkheimer gathered that group of young, critical intellectuals in Frankfurt around the Institute for Social Research (and its theoretical appendage, the *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*) was only brief. The group, of which all without exception have attained fame, and which includes the names of Theodor W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Otto Kirchheimer, Leo Löwenthal, Herbert Marcuse, Franz Neumann, Friedrich Pollock, formed in the early 1930s. Their main concern was a socially scientific and, in contemporary terms, interdisciplinarily oriented social analysis. To this end, this group of intellectuals in critical mien took Hegel's historical philosophy as well as Karl Marx' critique of the political economy as starting points in order, as Hegel puts it, "to grasp their era in thought."

"'Their era' was the final years of the Weimar Republic. Relentless realism in their interpretation of the period," thus writes Dubiel in his introduction to the *Critical Theory*, "saved the lives of the group. Already early they had prepared for emigration. Only because of this emigration did it become possible for the Institute for Social Research to continue its existence in exile" (Dubiel 1988: 12). The emigration proceeded in brief stages via Geneva, Paris, and London to New York. Already in 1935 – roughly two years after Hitler had seized power – most of...



Abb. 6 (Bild Riss)

Barbara Heinisch: Ostern (1980), Gep-Galerie, Frankfurt/ Main

Strictly speaking, it is not a picture which is thematic but rather the remaining form of an artistic movement: that which is left over when someone dances behind a white canvas; an artist (in this case Barbara Heinisch) captures this motion, and the hidden person finally tears through the canvas to step into appearance most literally.

The process of transgression is preserved here quasi in its material traces.

There is no hypostasised subject, but nor is there any empty room. There is the place of the event at which subjectivity actualises itself unmistakably. In its motion, the subject tears open a difference, rends the surface of the flat facticity.

In crossing, it is ahead of itself and, therefore, not objectifiable. If one wanted to determine its locus nevertheless, one would have to localise it by following the movements directly here, among us, between all these seats. This is likely what Heydorn had in view when he wrote in his sketch *On a Reconception of the Concept of Education*: "In its destination education is self-help; man is to gain himself on man. It is the birth bed of undetermined possibilities, man's memory of himself... an attempt at itself. This is its anticipatory character with which it raises man above his preset boundary. It is the future in the present... it begins now" (Heydorn 1972: 148).