

Encountering negativity: From the Frankfurt School to the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis

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Abstract

Although the key members of the Frankfurt School made an effort to synthesize Hegelian dialectics, Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis, they did not find a mediating concept running through all these schools of thought. In their endeavors, they developed a negative mode of thinking, but did not consider the concept of negativity derived from both Hegelianism and Freudian psychoanalysis as a mediating concept. Slavoj Žižek, one of the key members of the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, filled the lacuna left by the work of the Frankfurt School. Žižek's success lies in his centering of negativity as a concept, and in so doing, addressing the subjective mechanism through which Nazism, Stalinism, consumer culture, and the subjective aspects of epistemological, ontological and methodological issues operate.

Keywords: negativity, Frankfurt School, Ljubljana School, Hegelian dialectics, Marxism and Freudian Psychoanalysis

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Introduction

The gathering up of different theories into one theory as well as the frequent negation of these theories by the very people who formulated them, happens not only because of the gaps in and failures of the theories themselves but also due to certain traumatic events experienced by the people who were committed to the formulation of such theories. Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm and Marcuse worked in three major philosophical streams: Hegelianism, Marxism and psychoanalysis, and they, firstly, employed Hegelian insights to fill gaps in classical Marxism and to counter the distortions emerging from Soviet Marxism. Secondly, they employed Freudian psychoanalysis to expand Marxist theory to counter the emergence of repressive social and political phenomena like Nazism and Stalinism, which, and I emphasize, were *never* conceptualized in classical Marxism. These scholars correctly understood the validity and applicability of incorporating Hegelian dialectics, Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxist theory into a unified theory. To give profundity to this attempt, they conceptualized the negative dimensions of Hegelian dialectics and the negative aspects of history. However, though they were successful in their endeavors to a limited extent, they did not find a mediating concept running throughout these three theories. Consequently, I wish to argue here that the Hegelian and Freudian concept of negativity is useful as a mediating concept in attempting to unite Hegelian dialectics, Marxist theory and Freudian psychoanalysis. Due to previous researchers' insufficient attention to this concept of negativity, they did not succeed in formulating a sophisticated theory of human subjectivity.

Slavoj Žižek, one of the key members of the Ljubljana School of Psychoanalysis, successfully filled the lacuna left by the Frankfurt School. He related Hegelian dialectics, Marxist theory and praxis and Lacanian psychoanalysis through the concept of negativity. The theory of subjectivity he formulated using the concept of negativity sheds new light on certain subjective problems related to Nazism and Stalinism which traumatized the Frankfurt School. Furthermore, Žižek's Hegelo-Lacanian perspective succeeds in analyzing the subjective dimensions of late-capitalist consumer society, neo-nationalist movements and new spiritual movements.

In the first part of this paper, I elaborate on the extent to which Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm and Marcuse apply the negative dimension of Hegel's dialectics in critical theory. Furthermore, I will address their treatment of Freudian psychoanalysis in critical theory, their limited successes and also their failures in merging Marxism and psychoanalysis. In the second part, I will focus on Žižek's employment of negativity derived from Hegelianism, Marxism and psychoanalysis, and how his Hegelo-Lacanian method deals somewhat more successfully with the problems the Frankfurt School grappled with.

Negative thinking

According to the Frankfurt School, critical theory itself is a negative theory compared with positivism. Hegel's term, 'determinate negation'² is the 'central nerve' and 'governing principle' of critical theory. This negative thinking, which is the foundation of critical theory, becomes 'negative' for several reasons. Thinking is essentially the negation of what is given.

² For Hegel's concept of determinate negation see Stern (2016).

Determinacy presupposes negation. Therefore, thinking through negativity is one of the main ontological and methodological approaches employed by the Frankfurt School. One can identify the following position which has always motivated the negative thinking of critical theory:

The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus, first, that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as a loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of *labor* and comprehends objective man—true, because real man—as the outcome of man's *own labor*. (Marx, 1970, p. 177)³

Then, critical theorists used this approach to transform the idealist dialectic into a materialistic dialectic. The Frankfurt School's obsession with the power of negativity comes not only from the insights gained from Hegel's and Marx's above mentioned notions, but also from other factors, like the traumatic experience of war.

As all members of the Frankfurt School emphasized, the power of the negative had thus far been devalued immensely, not only by orthodox Marxists but also by positivists. As a result, the reactivation of negative thinking became the main task of the Frankfurt School. Adorno writes that '[Hegel] is hardly even given consideration nowadays. Instead of being subjected to criticism, he is rejected as being devoid of meaning' (Adorno, 1994, p. 95). Negative thinking emerges to counter positivism and irrationalism. The positive thinking of the positivist camp was strangely 'negative' towards Hegelianism. Therefore, pondering the dispute between positivism and negativism came to be at the centre of critical theory.⁴ Instead of negating the status quo and the negative factors of society and knowledge like contradictions, antagonisms, suffering, terror, war, destruction, and falsehood, positive thinkers seek to unearth 'positive factors' from their understanding and experience of society and knowledge. In a Hegelian sense, these negativities are not mere distortions of thinking, but essential components to be absorbed into thought. Hegelian thinkers like the Frankfurt philosophers made efforts to establish the positive aspect of Hegelian negativity in epistemological, ontological and methodological discussions.

What the members of the Frankfurt School experienced was not promises of Enlightenment and Marxism: not the trumpet of reason nor a communist utopia, but turbulent events, confusions, disorders, conflicts, the defeat of the left-wing working class movement in Europe, the collapse of left-wing political parties in Germany and their transformation into reformist or pro-Moscow dominated puppet entities, the degeneration of the Russian Revolution into Stalinism, the outbreak of Fascism and Nazism, the Stalin-Hitler pact, anti-Semitism, the Auschwitz concentration camp, the Gulag Soviet forced labour camps, the exile, discrimination and assassination of Jewish scholars, the suicide of Walter Benjamin, the failure of the radical student movement and the absorption of mass movements into mass consumer

³ Adorno quotes this in *Three Studies* (1993:18).

⁴ For the struggle between Adorno and positivism, see Adorno (1976).

culture, pessimism and a demoralized intellectual environment. These ‘negativities’ prompted the Frankfurt School to formulate and maintain negative thinking as an inherent aspect of critical theory. These are the main reasons why Adorno and Marcuse turned to the Hegelian dialectic and its essential ontological characteristic, determinate negation.

The dialectic of the Enlightenment, negative dialectics and Hegelian dialectics

On the one hand, Adorno was clearly anti-Hegelian; on the other hand, he was one of the deepest Hegelian thinkers of the twentieth century. He becomes Hegelian insofar as he defends Hegel’s concept of negativity, and he becomes anti-Hegelian insofar as he reacts against the final closure derived in Hegel’s philosophical conceptualization. Adorno made an immanent critique of the German idealist tradition, but his attitude towards Hegel differed from other idealist philosophers. The most important feature of Adorno’s thinking is his transformation from being Hegelian to being anti-Hegelian, and the place he accords to negativity in his philosophical work, ranging from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* to *Minima Moralia* and from *Hegel: Three Studies* to *Negative Dialectics*.

The Dialectic of Enlightenment is an inquiry into the philosophy of Western history. Here, Horkheimer and Adorno considered the German Post-Kantian tradition, psychoanalysis and the branches of social, literary and anthropological theory. In Adorno’s overall philosophical project, negativity appears as a thread of continuity (Sherratt, 2002, p. 10).⁵ As he pointed out, Hegel’s thesis was that historical development finally reaches full rationality. However, what Adorno and Horkheimer find in their inquiry is that Western history is a dialectical relation between the forces of Enlightenment and the forces of myth: positivity and negativity. As they put it, and I quote, ‘self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved’ (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. 43). Therefore, as Adorno logically supposed, in the attempt to preserve enlightenment, Western history cannot ever gain enlightenment; thus, Adorno’s critique of the Enlightenment becomes a negative critique. The main problem that is addressed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is why the project of Enlightenment failed and why it degenerated into Nazism; why self-preservation inherently includes self-destruction. As Adorno and Horkheimer write (2002, p. xvi), ‘The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate, the self-destruction of enlightenment’. However, since their project is the extension of Kantian practice: the practice of ‘enlightening’ the Enlightenment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. xvi), Horkheimer’s and Adorno’s work simultaneously challenged Hegel’s idea that in the course of history at the correct time and place, Enlightenment and a completely rational society would ensue and become a reality. In this instance, Adorno and Horkheimer gradually disengaged with Marxist theses on historical development and the proletariat as a historically revolutionary class. Their work implied a conclusion which defied both Hegelian and Marxist theories of history: in other words, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, there is no end to history⁶, and historical development will never achieve completion but remain, always already, an ongoing process (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002, p. xvi). Thus, the above scholars claim that though history has as its professed aim the achievement of enlightenment, its purpose is inherently unachievable (Horkheimer &

⁵ Sherratt strongly argues for Adorno’s utopianism and his positive dialectic.

⁶ The ‘end of history’ thesis does not belong to Hegel or Marx but to Kojève and Fukuyama.

Adorn, 2002, p. xvi). Consequently, their reading becomes a negative philosophy of history and a non-totalizing approach. Here, the Enlightenment is defined with reference to its opposite: the myth. As Horkheimer and Adorno reveal, immaturity, domination and barbarism ruin the promise of Enlightenment. Moreover, they claimed that the dialectical reconciliation suggested and presented by both Hegel and Marx will never be attained. This is the theory behind the notion, which had disastrous practical consequences, that negativity ends the positive promise of history.

In *Hegel: Three Studies*, Adorno directly intervenes in the interpretation of Hegel; Adorno strictly defends the negative and dialectical essence against reconciliation and the unification tendencies of Hegel's thought. As Adorno reveals, what Hegelian thought negates is part of its very essence. Similar to Marcuse, Adorno does not attempt to transcend Hegel by employing Hegel's thought categories in the socio-economic sphere but returns to Hegel himself. It is noteworthy here that German idealism, in general, reduces everything to subjectivity. However, Adorno, setting himself against this relativism, firmly defends Hegel's idea of a fixed identity and its relationship with non-identity.

Hegel: Three Studies is a lesson on the negative experience. Negativity is the unifying thread running through all Adorno's works, from *Negative Dialectics* to *Three Essays*. Here, the negative experience is not merely a philosophical abstraction but the form of experience actually available in a contradictory, antagonistic, perverted society. Negative experience is, then, simultaneously the experience of negation and affirmation, and it consists of nausea, shock, trauma, alienation and despair. Although these negative states may seem rare and even extreme, they are actually quite common and an integral part of social reality.

Three Studies, as with other works of the Frankfurt School, is an examination which turns to Hegel from Marx. Here, Adorno does not present Hegel's dialectics as they are, but presents a new concept of the dialectic, an immanent critique that reacts against all forms of 'transcending Hegel,' rather like that which is available in positivism, phenomenology, existentialism and the so-called dialectical materialism. Setting himself up against these trends, Adorno introduces the 'non-identical' into dialectical thinking. As Adorno insists, the outstanding feature of Hegel's idealism is the original identity of subject and object in spirit, and though they become divided along the way, ultimately, they reunite in spirit (Adorno, 1994, p. 3). However, contrary to Hegel, Kant's division of subject and object makes him a prisoner of his own construction. What Hegel sets out to do is to criticize Kant's static elements and set them in motion (Adorno, 1994, p. 8). However, even when Hegel takes a radical step by overcoming Kant's subject-object distinction, Hegel's philosophy remains a philosophy of spirit, which advances the primacy of subject and which strengthens the notion of totality. For Adorno, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel starts with the subject and then absorbs all concrete contents into the subject's self-movement. However, as Adorno reveals, in Hegel's *Science of Logic*, thought starts with being, which is not a fixed principle (Adorno, 1994: 12). For Adorno, this is the crux of Hegel's philosophy, the objectivity of Hegel's dialectics which quashes all types of subjectivism. In Hegel's subject-object dialectics, according to Adorno, it is the subject which constitutes the whole. The synthetic unity of apperception or Kant's concept of 'I think' is nothing other than the subject (the totality) in Hegel. In contrast to Kant, Hegel seeks the 'mystery' behind the synthetic apperception.

Adorno's notion is that totality is not a synthesized unity but an antagonistic whole with contradictions; in other words, it is a negative whole. Thus, 'unreason' is an integral part of totality. In the same manner that Marx uses labour as the foundation of his social critique, Adorno uses the spirit's labour as the foundation of his critique. Therefore, the identification of the spirit with labour is the positive dimension of Hegel's philosophy as well as the link between Marxism and Hegelian dialectics. As Adorno argues, thought activates itself in accordance with dialectical non-identity. The final essay of the *Three Studies* is called 'Skoteinos, or How to read Hegel'. 'Skoteinos' means darkness or obscurity. It is an extra-conceptual, non-logical and non-analytical sphere. However, this extra conceptual and ambiguous dimension is an ever-present, sinister reality, and cannot be displaced from thinking or by thinking.

Adorno's critique focuses on Hegel's system. This system posits the identity of the subject and the object, a logic which leads to a conceptualization of the Absolute. As Adorno puts it, 'the truth of the system collapses when that identity collapses' (Adorno, 1994, p. 27). However, Adorno later claims that subject-object reconciliation is contradictory. In an apology for the preservation of the status quo, Hegel's philosophical conceptualization in the *Philosophy of Right* is blunt (p. 28). Thus, Hegel's philosophy is essentially a negative critique: a critique of any sort of positivity. His well-publicized aphorism is that 'everything that exists deserves to perish' (p. 30). That is the central idealistic motor of Hegel's thinking, and it is simultaneously anti-idealist and self-destructive (p. 31). Adorno claims that the universality of negation is not a 'metaphysical panacea' which can open all doors, but is an eminently critical philosophy (p. 77). Adorno's attack on Hegelian totality is further formulated in *Negative Dialectics*. He has this to say,

The whole is untrue, not merely because the thesis of totality is itself untruth, being the principle of domination inflated to the absolute; the idea of a positivity that can master everything that opposes it through the superior power of a comprehending spirit is the mirror image of the experiences of the superior coercive force inherent in everything that exists by virtue of its consolidation under domination. This is the truth in Hegel's untruth. (Adorno, 1994, p. 87)

Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics*, examines both the 'truth' and the 'untruth' in Hegel's dialectics. Adorno's main aim is to formulate a 'materialistic' concept of dialectics by undertaking an immanent critique of Hegel's dialectics. This immanent critique is focused on Hegel's system but not on the structure of the system. In Hegel's system, as Adorno mentions, there is, at least, the concept of domination: which means the totalitarianism of the system. The wholeness of the system fully absorbs its parts. This conceptual mechanism is reflected in the totalitarianism of fascism and the totalitarianism of the cultural industry. Consequently, Adorno rejects Hegel's systematization of thinking and Hegel's system itself. Instead, Adorno presents non-identity as a concept that stands against the positivity of the final reconciliation. It is important to note here that Adorno is highly influenced by Hegel's dialectical thinking and the negativity embedded in it, but he detaches negativity and non-identity from Hegel's system.

Adorno's negative dialectics, then, becomes dialectics without an end. As Adorno puts it, 'objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder, that they come to

contradict the traditional norm of adequacy' (Adorno, 1973, p. 5). The 'remainder', 'excess' or 'leftover' is the essence of Adorno's negative dialectics. For him, there is something which resists conceptualization. This notion of irreducibility implies the primacy of the object: thus, objects become irreducible to their concepts. Hence, this irreducibility empowers the non-understanding of the conceptual horizon; consequently, though this thing appears as 'something,' it is unclear what exactly it is; it is critical to note here that this *thing* is not a void or a mysterious place. Rather, it is a moment where and when our understanding fails, putting it in the realm of time. Therefore, this *thing* exists external to symbolic articulation, and it acts as the internal blockage of any sort of conceptualization. As Adorno writes,

What is, is more than it is. This "more" is not imposed upon it but remains immanent to it, as that which has been pushed out of it. In that sense, the non-identical would be the thing's own identity against its identifications (Adorno, 1973, p. 161)

Dialectics operates leaving a remainder; this remainder is non-identity; the alien essence of the object. This non-identity-related thinking is irreducible to universals or thought categories. Unlike in Hegel's dialectics, as Adorno argues, negative dialectics will not reach or include the final reconciliation or *Aufhebung*.

For Adorno, the illusion arising from idealism is the acceptance of an autonomous self-sufficient thinking subject as the source of thinking. For Adorno, this is the 'fallacy of constitutive subjectivity'. In Kantian idealism, there is a systematic separation between form and content, reason and intellect, the thing-in-itself and phenomena. But for Adorno, there is no basis for this separation, as each pole inherently demands the other. As Hegel correctly understands, this is the aporia that entrapped Kant. However, according to Adorno, the illusion entrapping Hegel is his speculative identification with the poles that Kant separated. As an answer, Adorno employs a Kantian approach to criticize Hegel and a Hegelian approach to criticize Kant (Jarvis, 1998, p. 152). The other issue that classical German philosophy couldn't resolve is its consideration of the real antagonisms in society as unchanged and fixed. However, Hegelian idealism releases itself from this illusion. As Adorno writes, 'the only way to reach social categories philosophically is to decipher the truth-content of philosophical categories' (Adorno, 1973, p. 158). The basis of Kant's critique is an inquiry into the conditions of the possibility of experience. Adorno's metacritique goes beyond Kant's critique and searches for conditions where Kant's transcendental inquiry becomes possible (Jarvis, 1998, p. 155). Thinking without 'purity' is Adorno's approach. He criticizes pure reason, pure concepts and pure intuitions. For Hegel, there is something inherent in the object, which always resists the conceptualization of this object. For Hegel, this experience is a 'determinate nothingness'. It is 'unthinking inertia' in which rationality is suspended. It can be called the non-identity of subject and object. Though Adorno assumes Hegel's dialectical logic positively, he criticizes the idea that experience can be fully conceptualized; in his view, then, there is an un-conceptualized element in dialectics. Consequently, the determinate negation focuses on a new articulation of the object.

As Adorno postulates, 'Non-identity is the secret *telos* of identification. It is the part that can be salvaged; the mistake in traditional thinking is that identity is taken for the goal'

(Adorno, 1973, p. 149). Then, according to Adorno, dialectical thinking cannot be separated from identity thinking. However, the aim of dialectical thinking is to expose the insufficiency of any identification. In this sense, dialectical thinking becomes 'negative'. Adorno's argument is that the dialectic is inherently 'negative'. This is compatible with Hegel's approach to dialectics as well. As Hegel insists,

Dialectics is commonly regarded as an external, negative activity which does not pertain to the subject matter itself, having its ground in mere conceit as a subjective itch for unsettling and destroying what is fixed and substantial, or at least having for its result nothing but the worthlessness of the object dialectically considered (Hegel, 1969, p. 56)

However, Adorno advises against making dialectical thinking a method or a worldview, and he does not want to formulate a thought-being identification theory. He wants to do this without falling into idealism. The aim of negative dialectics is not to solve all the contradictions inherent in a final, non-contradictory synthesis, but to accommodate the contradictions and antagonisms in reality itself. Hegel himself is against any type of non-contradictory position. But Adorno criticizes a non-contradictory whole. For Hegel, 'The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development' (Hegel, 1977, p. 11). However, Adorno's idea in *Minima Moralia* is: 'The whole is false (Adorno, 2005, p. 55). This attack is not only upon Hegel's totalistic idea, but also upon a self-totalizing society itself.

Adorno takes non-identity as the generating force of history, and he rejects both the subjective force of history, which is the mission of the proletariat, and the objective course of history, which is totality. This is also a rejection of the Hegelian concept of history as the identification between subject and object. There is no ontologically positive definition of history, since, for the most part, history consists of discontinuities; history is, then, the history of suffering without progress. Consequently, Adorno attempts to reconsider Walter Benjamin's statement: 'only because of the hopeless is hope given to us'. The reasoning behind this causal non-identification is the dialectic without identity. The real force of history, according to Adorno, is the non-identity between subject and object, man and nature and consciousness and reality. Therefore, negative dialectics becomes an immanent critique and logic of disintegration. The concept of 'guilt' becomes that what has been lost in our life. This is the negative dimension of life and the experience of contradiction. The law of life is not non-contradiction but the law of contradiction. As Adorno reveals, 'My thought is driven to it by its insufficiency by my guilt of what I am thinking' (Adorno, 1973, p. 5).

Negativity is the place where reason fails. It is the philosophical reflection of the unconscious experience of guilt and debt. According to Adorno, 'pain and negativity are the moving forces of dialectical thinking' (p. 202); 'suffering is a condition of all truth' (Adorno 1973: 18). Therefore, suffering is an excess of identity. As Adorno writes, 'The non-identical is not to be obtained directly, as something positive on its part; nor is it obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation itself, as it is to Hegel' (p.158). Thus, dialectics is not positive but negative because its condition of possibility is the negative.

Adorno defends Hegel's dialectics despite the fact that it is a subjective subject-object dialectics, and despite the fact that it aims at conceptual closure. However, Hegel's dialectics

finds the ultimate truth of its own impossibility. Thus, dialectics is nothing other than the return of the repressed and it is a form of conceptual awareness that acknowledges the repressed moments of the process (Bernstein, 2004, p. 45).

Adorno's identification of the negative power of Hegel's dialectics is compatible with Hegel's own ontological, methodological, epistemological and even political project. However, Adorno's rejection of the concepts attributed to Hegel like 'identity theory', 'final synthesis', 'harmonious end', 'reconciliation', 'holism', 'totalitarianism', and 'final completion' has no real basis. They cannot also be attributed to Hegel himself as they have been rejected by Hegel's system. Hegel's Absolute always supposes a gap, an incompleteness, a remainder and a negativity. Hegel's subject is also another name for negativity. I will elaborate on these counter arguments in the final section of this paper. Moreover, as I argue, Adorno's intellectual legacy, *Negative Dialectics* is not a deep examination of Hegel's dialectic of negativity. Adorno always maintains a distance from Hegel's conception of negativity per se. At the very beginning of *Negative Dialectics*, he attacks the 'positive in the negative' or the 'negation of the negation' (according to Hegel, absolute negativity), treating it as *the enemy*. The creation of a conceptual combination using absolute negativity and Auschwitz is also baseless. As Adorno writes,

Genocide is the absolute integration. It is on its way wherever men are leveled off—"polished off," as the German military called it—until one exterminates them literally, as deviations from the concept of their total nullity. Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death. The most far out dictum gathered from Samuel Beckett's *End Game*, that there really is not so much to be feared any more, reacts to a practice whose first sample was given in the concentration camps, and in whose concept—venerable once upon a time—the destruction of non-identity is ideologically lurking. Absolute negativity is in plain sight and has ceased to surprise anyone (Adorno, 1973, p. 362)

Adorno has little to do with the dialectic of liberation and the capacity of negativity to transform the status quo and reality as can be observed in Hegel's conception of negativity.

Reason, revolution and the dialectics of negativity

Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology and Theory of Historicity* makes an important contribution to the renaissance of Hegelian thinking in Europe. *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* is a highly ontological interpretation of the philosophical concepts of Heidegger, Hegel and Dilthey. Though Marcuse was very much engaged with Hegel's ontology as a whole, the concept of negativity was never addressed in particular. Marcuse develops a Hegelian version of Marxism and presents a critical commentary on Hegel's *Logic* and *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Marcuse planned to critique the lack of concreteness of the dialectic in the philosophy of his time, and worked to overcome *the vulgar materialist interpretation* of Marxism.

The focus of this work is the concept of historicity influenced by Hegel, Heidegger and Dilthey. Marcuse's formulation of Marxist theory leads him to consider the historicity thesis analyzed by both Dilthey and Hegel. As Marcuse writes, 'The present work attempts to

explicate Hegelian ontology in the light of its original orientation to the ontological concept of Life and to Life's historicity' (Marcuse, 1987, p. 3). Accordingly, for Marcuse, the theory of historicity is ontological. In a traditional sense, ontology is the investigation of 'being *qua* being.' Marcuse relies on Heidegger's concept of ontology which no longer belongs to the traditional interpretation of ontology. Marcuse enters the problem of ontology through Heidegger's interpretation, but his main focus is Hegel's ontology. As he writes,

Hegelian ontology is the ground and basis of the theory of historicity developed by Dilthey and thereby the basis of the current tradition of philosophical questioning about historicity (Marcuse, 1987, p. 2)

According to Marcuse, the theory of Being is about the theory of historicity: the historicity of human life. Marcuse's thinking is that Hegel's *Science of Logic* provides a radical notion of Being and historicity. Its fundamental idea is that being is always historical. Historicity is a process of happening and a form of motility. The being of the historical constitutes a specific form of motility. The motility of Life is the combination of Spirit and Nature, and furthermore, the determination of Life is the Spirit, and the world is the world of Spirit. Marcuse's exposition centers on the fact that Hegelian ontology is the basis of the theory of historicity, which is further developed later by Dilthey. He holds the ontological meaning of human life as historicity, and gives a new interpretation to Hegel's *Logic*, placing Being at the centre of discussion, rather like the concept of Life developed by Dilthey. According to Hegel, the ontological meaning of Being is conveyed by the *combination* of subjectivity and objectivity: Being-for-itself and Being-in-itself. Thus, motility is the fundamental characteristic of Being. Life is the immediate form of Idea and it is also the unity of subjectivity and objectivity. This unity is the basis and the essence of beings. The Absolute Knowledge developed from the concept of Life is the highest form of the Idea. Marcuse reveals the determination of the Being of Life, which refers to its historicity. Therefore, life can encompass its own historicity, and Hegel's ontological formation is totally ruled by this ontological concept of Life.

As I mentioned earlier, though Marcuse is interested in the ontological features of Hegel's philosophy, in *Hegel's Ontology*, there is no particular emphasis or reference to the concept of negativity. In *Reason and Revolution*, however, Marcuse takes a different stance. Here, he emphasizes Hegel's relation to Marx and the applicability of Hegel's concepts like reason, freedom and dialectics to the development of Marxist discourse. His aim is to create a firm foundation for Hegelian Marxism and the dialectical method. Marcuse's *Reason and the Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* is the first Hegelian-Marxist work ever written in English, and the first systematic study of Hegel. As Lukács did, Marcuse seriously considers the writings of the young Marx, which include themes like subjectivity, negativity and alienation. In these writings, Marcuse discovers an in-depth criticism of positivism and pragmatism. *Reason and Revolution* considers Hegelian dialectical logic as the ground for Marxism. Where positivism provides a negative image of the Hegelian dialectic, Marcuse defends the negative characteristics of Hegel's philosophy. Marcuse's aim is to place Hegel in the Enlightenment tradition of reason as well as within the heritage of the French Revolution. As he insists, although Hegel is the philosopher who appears at the culmination of the German

idealist tradition, the Hegelian idealist tradition itself shatters idealistic fundamentals (Marcuse, 1941, p.16).

Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel in *Reason and Revolution* deals, to a great extent, with Hegel's dialectical method, which has been developed in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*. Both works present the idea of the development of consciousness and thinking through negativity. Marcuse's theoretical project has to do with the way Hegel's concept of negativity can be used to develop historical materialism. While negativity dissolves all fixed concepts and relations, it presents, positively, the antagonistic totality.

Beneath the 'conservative shell' of Hegel's expositions, Marcuse searches for a 'radical kernel': which is the dialectical theory of negativity. Therefore, according to this novel reading of Hegel, negativity is not a distortion of the true essence of things, but is its very essence itself. Moreover, in a socio-historical sense, disintegration, collapse and crisis are not accidental emergencies but the real essence of things. Marcuse's elaboration of negativity goes something like this,

Hegel intentionally emphasizes the negative function of reason: its destruction of the fixed and secure world of common-sense and understanding. The absolute is referred to as 'Night' and 'nothing' to contrast it to the clearly defined objects of everyday life. Reason signifies the 'absolute annihilation' of the common-sense world. (Marcuse, 1941, p. 48)

Marcuse always emphasizes the affirmative conclusions that emerge from negation and refusal. Negation, for Marcuse, is the very essence of thinking and it is the driving force of critical theory; consequently, Marcuse becomes the most affirmative thinker among those who appreciate negativity.

Thus, the 'explosive quality' of Marcuse's critiques and the strength of his works are his analysis of the concept of negativity. It is the ontological backdrop against which he writes throughout his life. The concept of negativity creates the space for him to integrate Hegel, Marx, Freud, and, in so doing, launch a radical critique of contemporary culture (Bernstein 1988, p.13). Rather than interpreting Marx and Freud, emphasizing negativity in Hegel formulates Marcuse's philosophical thought. Although Marcuse uses the term, 'negative philosophy' as a more accurate representation of Hegel's system, the given term spawned a plethora of contemporary opponents: the positive philosophers. The basis of what Marcuse produces via negativity in his lifetime becomes reshaped by the reactions to it, that is, by the works of positive philosophers. According to Marcuse, the genesis of truth inherently expects the death of the given state of being. As he goes on to write,

Hegel's philosophy is indeed what the subsequent reaction termed it a negative philosophy. It is originally motivated by the conviction that the given facts that appear to common sense as the positive index of truth are in reality the negation of truth, so that truth can only be established in their destruction. The driving force of the dialectical

method lies in this critical conviction. Dialectic in its entirety is linked to the conception that all forms of being are permitted by an essential negativity, and that this negativity determines their content and movement. The dialectic represents the counter-thrust to any form of positivism (Marcuse, 1941, pp. 26–27)

In line with Hegel, Marcuse differentiates abstract negativity from determinate negation. According to him, while abstract negativity engenders mere differences, determinate negation forms the truth. In this instance, Marcuse refers to the crux of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*: 'This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being'. To elaborate further, Marcuse focuses on the concept of essence in Hegel's *Science of Logic*. Hegel's conceptual movement travels from thought to being. Negativity is embedded in the very heart of being. Therefore, the transformation and destruction of being is inherent in the negativity of being. Accordingly, anything can become its own negation and incorporate itself into its own being (Marcuse, 1941, p. 147). The idea here is that all things are contradictory in themselves. In line with this train of thinking, all things become self-contradictory and opposed to themselves. As Marcuse reveals, reality does not belong to the immediate existence of a thing, but rather, true existence emerges with the negative aspect of something; in other words, all potentiality turns to actuality and there is no change without destruction and negation. Moreover, according to Marcuse, reason and freedom can only be realized through negation. Thus, it is through this concept of *negativity* that Marx was able to *negate* Hegel's idealism. The failure of Hegel's categories to explicate the existing positive order of things opened up space for Marx's critique of Hegel.

What critical theory really investigates is the inherent negativity in social reality. On the one hand, critical theory negates existing reality; on the other, it enables the full realization of alternate human potentialities (Bernstein, 1988, p. 16). As Marx did, Marcuse compares the concept of negativity to the proletariat and finds similar attributes in the two concepts/entities. The proletariat is potentially the revolutionary class in society. They are the only class that can negate the existing social order and radically transform society. But it should be noted here that the common tendency of the members of the Frankfurt School, including Marcuse, was to doubt the actual potentiality of the working class to achieve a successful social revolution. By successful we mean here a social revolution that ushers in a just, prosperous and happy society. The critical theory of Hegel, Marcuse and others examines the negative factors which hinder such a radical transformation of society.

The Frankfurt School, psychoanalysis and Hegelian ontology

In the work of the key figures of the Frankfurt School there was no general agreement on the manner in which psychoanalysis can be merged with critical theory. But all members of this school applied the principles of psychoanalysis to develop their own ideas, each according to his own perspective. Horkheimer, Adorno, Fromm and Marcuse employ some controversial concepts inherent in Freudian psychoanalysis, not only for developing Marxist theory but also for understanding new social phenomena like the rise of Nazism, Stalinism, consumer culture and sexual instincts in modern society. However, as I argue, none of them have to do with

relating psychoanalysis to *Hegelianism*: moreover, their attention is not focused on observing the inherent power of negativity in Freudian theory. Consequently, in this section, I will elaborate on the extent to which these above mentioned philosophers use psychoanalytical categories and, in doing so, the manner in which they actually neglect the Freudian concept of negativity.

Due to Fromm's groundbreaking work, the Frankfurt School firstly attempted to reconcile Marxist theory and Freudian psychoanalysis. Fromm's belief was that psychoanalysis would provide the missing link between the ideological superstructure and the socio-economic base (Jay, 1996, p. 92). As he writes, where Marx pays attention to the socio-economic structure of society, Freud seeks the libidinal organization of society; while Marxist theory focuses on liberating man from alienation, Freudian theory turns on liberating the individual from illusion; where Marx is concerned with the pathology of society, Freud deals primordially with the pathology of the individual: he considers alienation as one sickness of man, where a neurotic person is defined as an alienated person who wants to overcome his inner emptiness.

Be that as it may, Fromm is invested in examining the *difference* between these two approaches. To this end, he traces some differences between Marx and Freud; where Marx becomes a radical revolutionist, Freud becomes a liberal reformist. Thus, Freud's approach is linked to overcoming an individual's repression without social change. Though Freudianism is a radical movement, albeit one that seeks to create change by reforming the individual, it cannot and does not seek to overcome the existing social order. Freud's pessimism about larger social change is incompatible with the revolutionary hope of Marxism. And revolutionary change is the negation of the existing system.

Fromm's second move relates to rejecting Freud's life and death instinct theory. While he approves Freud's erotic and self-preservative drives, he rejects Freud's concept of the death drive. His claim or belief is that fundamentally libidinal ideas can be displaced by socially acceptable methods. I will argue that Freud's concept of negativity is inscribed in his concept of the death drive, and that Fromm is unable to take into account this negative factor. Instead, he moves towards drives of self-preservation. Fromm rejects patriarchal theory since he links the Oedipus complex with patriarchal theory. He accuses Freud of also becoming a prisoner of patriarchal values. In *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm attacks Freud's 'cultural narrowness', his 'pessimism' and the importance he (Freud gives) to the death instinct. Here, Fromm takes the death instinct to mean the 'need to destroy'. Against Freud's pessimism, Fromm proposes unity or original oneness rather than the unfilled gap. As he says, the only force that can save us from self-destruction is reason (Fromm, 2009, p. 137). Humankind's rationality can absorb its negativity most fully and help itself through a reformation of society. This is about integration with the whole and the perfectibility of man. As I argue, the concept of universal harmony is both anti-Freudian and anti-Hegelian. Therefore, Fromm's interpretation of Hegel is negative, where he seeks neither the revolutionary nor the material aspects of Hegel's concept of negativity.

At the beginning, Horkheimer appreciates Fromm's effort to merge psychoanalysis and Marxism, and the effort to form a psychological supplement to Marxist theory. Moreover, like Fromm, he avoids Freud's concept of destructive drives including the death instinct. However, in the late 1930s, Fromm and other members of the Institute separated and assumed opposing

points of view on (mainly Freudian) psychoanalysis.⁷ Unlike Fromm, Horkheimer considers Freud's concept of the death instinct and its applicability positively in order to understand the destructive urges of modern man. Freud's notion is that modern life is contaminated with traumatic shocks and disjointed personalities, and that the expectation of an unified totality is an illusion. For both Horkheimer and Adorno, Freud has exposed the myth of unity. They consider the antinomies of Freud's thought, the negative dimension of Freud's notions and his pessimistic ideas about the possibility of a harmonious society, quite positively. With growing dissatisfaction and disagreement with Marxism and its Hegelianised supplement, both Horkheimer and Adorno reconsidered the accepted psychological categories. Neither Horkheimer nor Adorno really wanted to develop psychoanalysis as a quasi-transcendental theory of subjectivity but instead, attempted to form a materialist theory of subjectivity that can understand either individual or group consciousness within a determinate social and historical setting (Abromeit, 2011, p. 200).

After the Second World War, though Horkheimer gradually moved away from psychoanalysis, Adorno continues his studies of psychoanalysis and applied some of these concepts in *Negative Dialectics*. As the Enlightenment project became a self-defeating phenomenon, the concept of self-destruction in psychoanalysis continued to gain considerable attention and momentum. Thus, Adorno's non-identity theory seems to be compatible with Freud's anti-harmonious concepts. In Adorno's critique, he incorporates Kantian critique⁸, the post-Kantian philosophy of history and Freudian theory. Adorno points out that the Freudian concept of psyche is highly compatible with Hegelian Marxism; in other words, that the Freudian concept of drive has a material basis. As he posits, the Enlightenment subject becomes continuously impoverished, loses the experience of reality and experiences an implosion into its own ego, an implosion that is commonly known as narcissism; narcissism turns Enlightenment into identity thinking. The *self* in the Enlightenment behaves with a sense of fear towards that which is *not the self*, and it moves to combat, or at least avoid, the *other* with destructive feelings. This is the negative dialectic of the Enlightenment. As I argue, though Adorno identifies the negative power of Freudian concepts and relates them to the dialectic of the Enlightenment, he does not relate Freudian concepts with Hegelianism through the concept of negativity.

In contrast to rational subjectivity in modern philosophy, Marcuse focuses on the erotic and libidinal dimensions of human subjectivity, and relates them to certain socio-political aspects of humans. As Marcuse claims,

Freud's metapsychology is an ever-renewed attempt to uncover, and to question, the terrible necessity of the inner connection between civilization and barbarism, progress and suffering, freedom and unhappiness — a connection which reveals itself ultimately as that between Eros and Thanatos. Freud questions culture not from a romanticist or Utopian point of view, but on the ground of the suffering

⁷ For Marcuse's criticism of Fromm, see Marcuse (2011: 101–106).

⁸ In 1923–24, Adorno writes a paper entitled, 'Kant's critique of rational psychology'. Here, he reveals how Kant indirectly recognises unconscious elements and how rationalism creates unconscious elements. According to Adorno, Kant overcomes the undialectical split between conscious and unconscious elements.

and misery which its implementation involves (Marcuse, 1998, pp. 17-18)

Here Eros and Thanatos are the Greek words for Love and Death, respectively. Marcuse sees the radical potential of instinctual energy. According to Marcuse, this energy should finally be focused on peaceful harmony and reconciliation. Therefore, the role of subjectivity should be to act as a mediator between reason and the senses. Therefore, Marcuse discovers a radical and revolutionary Freud, someone who is not fenced in by individuality. Subjectivity always acts against the present (governing) system of domination and seeks freedom and happiness. In this sense, Marcuse connects radical subjectivity with existing struggles and radical movements. *Eros and Civilization* is a continuation of the interest in Hegel initiated by the Frankfurt School, but it goes beyond a mere merging of Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis. Freudian psychoanalysis has the capacity to move beyond the existing system. Marcuse reads the libido as a materialistic concept and the Oedipus complex as the representation of the fundamental antagonism prevailing in society, while Freud's death instinct is the representation of the ambiguity present in the mind of modern man. According to his interpretation, Freud's concept of destructive instincts is not about self-destruction but about the elimination of destruction; its aim is not to destroy life but to obviate pain. This is the final aim of the death instinct. Therefore, Marcuse reads negative capacity as the potential capability for a positive, harmonious society.

Eros and Civilization emerged at a time when the Western world was experiencing a widely expanding pessimistic culture. Marcuse defends erotic energy as a resource that can be used for creatively constructing life and a non-repressive society. The struggle for a non-repressive society at a time of social repression is a struggle for positivity in negativity; it is an ethos of counter-culture. Basically, what Marcuse does is to use Freudian concepts against Freud himself. He turns Freud's pessimism into optimism. He gains the energy of the instinctual power of Freudian concepts to provide a blue-print for a non-repressive society. On the one hand, he uses Freudian theory to examine the reasons why revolutionary consciousness failed in the face of Nazism, Stalinism and consumer culture; on the other hand, he uses Freudian concepts, incorporated within Marxism, to enhance revolutionary subjectivity. Basically, his utopianism and the concept of a non-repressive society are anti-Hegelian.

Limits of the Frankfurt School and Žižek's intervention

In the 1970s, Slovenian academia was more influenced by the Frankfurt School rather than by Soviet dialectical materialism. Slavoj Žižek does not make an explicit critique of the Frankfurt School, but on several occasions, directly questions the concepts of Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse and even Fromm.⁹ His philosophical articulation is centred along three axes: 1. German idealism: Kant's defense of Cartesian subjectivity, Hegel's concept of subjectivity and negativity, Shelling's idea of negativity; 2. Psychoanalysis: Lacan's 'return to Freud' and his relation to Hegel, Freud's concept of the death drive as negativity; 3. Marxism: Marx's theory of ideology, Lenin's theory of the revolution, revolutionary terror, and the affirmation and negation of the post-Marxist discourse of Laclau and Mouffe.

⁹ See the first chapter in Žižek (1994).

Žižek's main efforts can be defined as follows: the utilisation of Lacanian psychoanalysis for reinventing Hegelian dialectics; Lacanian re-actualisation of the idealist tradition; the deployment of Lacanian psychoanalysis to re-inscribe the Hegelian dialectic as suitable for contemporary political theory; the elaboration of Lacanian psychoanalysis in the light of German idealism. As Žižek himself writes, 'the basic insight elaborated in the first half of *For They Know Not What They Do* is that Hegelian dialectics and the Lacanian 'logic of the signifier' are two versions of the same matrix' (Žižek, 2002, p. xviii).

Žižek develops the link between Hegel and Lacan through the philosophical achievements of Kant, Fichte and Shelling.¹⁰ The main focus here is on subjectivity as negativity; in other words, subjectivity as 'madness' or the 'night of the world'. As Žižek reveals, the dialectical process moves according to disruptive and negative moments; the final dialectical synthesis is impossible and the totality inherent in the dialectical process is inherently incomplete. As I argue in this section, the concept of negativity is Žižek's mediating link between Hegelianism, Marxism, and psychoanalysis and the theoretical background of the political analysis of Nazism, Stalinism, capitalism and consumer culture. Žižek discussed these theoretical concepts parallel to the key concepts proposed by the Frankfurt School, for example, negative dialectics, totality, non-identity, instincts/drives, enlightenment, reason, ontology and revolution. He also introduced certain novel concepts that were independent of the Frankfurt School, like the Real, enjoyment (*Jouissance*), *object petit a*, parallax, gap, lack, rupture, revolutionary violence, ideological fantasy, ontological incompleteness, wound, excess, absence, ontological failure, death drive, Absolute Knowledge, indivisible remainder, extimacy, vanishing mediator, antagonism, class struggle, and out of joint, all of which are modifications of the concept of negativity.

Basically, Žižek makes use of three main Hegelian concepts: speculative dialectics as forming a critical theory; the Hegelian concept of the subject as a self-relating negativity and the Hegelian approach to the critique of ideology. For the formation of the concept of negativity, Žižek relies on two important concepts: the 'night of the world' and 'tarrying with the negative', both of which appear in Hegel. As Hegel puts it,

The Human being is this night, this empty nothing, that contains everything in its simplicity—an unending wealth of many representations, images, of which none belongs to him—or which are not present. This night, the interior of nature, that exists here—pure self—in phantasmagorical representations, is night all around it, in which here shoots a bloody head—there another white ghastly apparition, suddenly here before it, and just so disappears. One catches sight of this night when one looks human beings in the eye—into a night that becomes awful. (quoted in Verene, 1985, pp. 7–8)¹¹

As I analyze this section further, I find that this passage represents both the Freudian unconsciousness and the Lacanian Real. This is the birthplace of Žižek's radical negativity.

¹⁰ For Žižek's articulation of Kant, Fichte, Shelling and Hegel, see Johnston (2008).

¹¹ This passage is quoted in Žižek (2009:42).

Moreover, Žižek relates Hegel's concept of the 'night of the world' to Shelling's concept of the 'pure night of the self'. This further signifies that there is no substantiality without the experience of this negativity; *that there is no direct access to reason without the experience of madness*. The title of one of Žižek's most influential books, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology*, is directly related to Hegel's passage from *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is also about the concept of negativity,

Death, if that is what we want to call this non-actuality, is of all things the most dreadful, and to hold fast to what is dead requires the greatest strength. Lacking strength, Beauty hates the Understanding for asking of her what it cannot do. But the life of Spirit is not the life that shrinks from death and keeps itself untouched by devastation, but rather the life that endures it and maintains itself in it. It wins its truth only when, in utter dismemberment, it finds itself. It is this power, not as something positive, which closes its eyes to the negative, as when we say of something that it is nothing or is false, and then, having done with it, turn away and pass on to something else; on the contrary, Spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being. This power is identical with what we earlier called the Subject ... (Hegel, 1977, p. 19)

This passage implies that subjectivity is formed through the negative relationship; the self can find itself through the other. It can be identified as 'self-relating negativity'; the self-identity is nothing other than its otherness; the power of the negativity is the subject. As Žižek says of negativity; 'It is the destructive power of undermining every organic unity' (Žižek, 1999, p. 31). It is this negativity which unbinds any and every social link and any and every organic social structure (Žižek, 2012, p. 282). For Hegel, negativity is constitutive and ontological, something that undermines the fixity of every particular constellation (Žižek, 1993, p. 91). Žižek's overall project constitutes thinking through radical negativity. As Žižek postulates, negativity derives from Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal; for Kant, the Thing-in-itself exists positively beyond experience, but for Hegel, there is nothing beyond phenomena and the Thing-in-itself only exists as negativity. Žižek writes that 'the limit between phenomena and noumena is not the limit between two positive spheres of objects, since *there are only phenomena and their (self-) limitation, their negativity*' (Žižek, 2012, p. 282).

The implication of negativity is that there is no final synthesis in the dialectical process, but only fissured totality and incompleteness. Hegel's absolute knowledge is nothingness and it is only radical loss (Žižek, 1989, p. 30). Hegelian totality is a whole plus its constitutive excess or symptoms (Žižek, 2012, p. 489). Therefore, negativity remains forever as a threat or excess, and this negativity cannot be sublated by any reconciling synthesis (p. 449). At this point, Žižek's argument departs radically from Adorno's premises. Adorno's identification of non-identity is consistent with Hegel's concept of negativity, but Adorno's attribution and criticism of Hegel's subject-object identification and Hegel's so-called final synthesis in the Absolute,

is anti-Hegelian. According to Žižek, in Hegel, there is no harmonious synthesis and subject-object identification; this is only pseudo-Hegelianism. Although Adorno rejects Hegel's system, Žižek sees the revolutionary spirit of Hegel's system. As Žižek writes, 'There is no absolute subject. The subject 'as such' is relative, caught in self-division' (Žižek, 1989, p. 89). Žižek's critical theory is grounded on fracture, split and negativity; he puts negative Hegel into action, disengages it from dialectical synthesis, and presents the evolutionary notion of finality and harmonious reconciliation. Thus, the dialectic that incorporates the obstacle becomes the condition that makes something possible, that is, engenders the positive.

Lacan's concept of a 'return to Freud' was a revolutionary event in psychoanalysis. For Žižek, Lacan's Freud is immensely Hegelian. Though the Frankfurt School partially relies on Freud, Žižek bases his critical theory on a Lacanian reading of Freud and its compatibility with Hegelian subjectivity and negativity. As a whole, the Frankfurt School tended to be hostile to Lacanian ideas, as they lined up with the 'anti-humanism' of the Lacanian position. The aim of the Frankfurt School was to defend the individual subject from alienation. But these philosophers of the Frankfurt School did not examine the ontological nature of subjectivity in any kind of depth. One aspect of Žižek's project is to formulate the most developed theory on human subjectivity using Cartesian, Kantian, Shellingian, Hegelian, Freudian and Lacanian insights. Kant's notion of subjectivity is 'I think', which is the transcendental apperception; it is the condition of the possibility of all knowledge which cannot be objectively known. Žižek's premise is that Hegel and Shelling are proto-psychoanalysts who emerged before Lacan. Just as the Frankfurt School seeks a political and social Freud, Žižek seeks a philosophical and political Lacan.

Žižek's argument is that most psychoanalytic theorists merely repeat the concept of negativity initiated in German idealism (Žižek, 1993, p. 23). The Freudian concept of the death drive, which is rejected by many key figures of the Frankfurt School, is, for Žižek, absolute negativity in the Freudian sense (Žižek, 1989, p. 192). According to Lacan, there is only one drive, which is the death drive associated with trauma, and which cannot be symbolized. The death drive is the tension which persists and remains outside any harmonious synthesis of being and the principle of Nirvana (Žižek, 2012, p. 132). What Žižek derives from Lacan is consistent with Hegel. It is the subject as a void filled by a fantasy object. The nature of the Hegelian-Lacanian subject is non-acceptance of any ultimate closure or final suture. Therefore, the subject as such is split, and always resists any ideological subjectivisation. For Žižek, the Real of the subject is the empty place or the antagonism. The heart of subjectivity is the void, incompleteness or the gap in being. According to Lacan, subjectivity cannot be positively conceived; it is always already decentred, dislocated. In this instance, Žižek introduces some Lacanian concepts compatible with Hegelian idealism for the formation of one of the most developed forms of critical theory. They are the Real, *objet petit a* (fantasy object or object cause of desire), and *Jouissance*. By employing these concepts, Žižek is able to traverse successfully the stormy seas of obstacles that the Frankfurt School failed to sail.

According to Žižek, the Real is a parallax gap inscribed with fundamental antagonisms. Each reality produces an excess or surplus. Any reality is the objectification of this Real. Therefore, the real is immanent to any possible reality. The Real of the subject is its impossibility. As Žižek defines it, 'the Real designates a substantial, hard kernel that proceeds and resists symbolization, and simultaneously, it designates the left-over, which is posited or

produced by symbolization itself' (Žižek, 1993, p. 36). The Real is inherent to the subject: this traumatic kernel forever eludes the subject's grasping. Žižek connects the Lacanian Real with Hegelian Absolute Knowledge. This Absolute Knowledge is also not the result of a harmonious synthesis. As Žižek articulates, the death drive as radical negativity is inherent to the Real of subjectivity, and this irreducible negativity has high applicability when analyzing contemporary life and culture.

Lacan seeks something beyond the pleasure principle which he calls *Jouissance* (enjoyment); which is obtaining satisfaction through suffering (pleasure-in-pain). It is also a non-discursive obscene excess. For Žižek, it is always attached to the subject and it becomes, simultaneously, a political factor. Its real nature is extimacy (exteriority+intimacy); Žižek says that it is '*something strange to me but exists at the heart of me*'. Through this obscene enjoyment, Žižek elaborates the real ideological mechanism of Nazism, and why people were and still are attached to it and why contemporary people become attached to new ethnocentric nationalist movements all over the world, without embracing truly pluralistic societies through the valuation of multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity. The Frankfurt School also grappled with such issues, but they could not formulate a particularly successful theory to deal with them.

Žižek considers the nation as the 'Thing'. Human subjects often feel that their enjoyment of the nation, the 'golden era' and the 'harmonious synthesis' have been stolen by others (the enemy); this (mis)appropriation becomes the threat and theft of enjoyment.¹² These subjects believe the 'other' has stolen this 'Thing' they once enjoyed. They seek this lost object in the other, though this lost enjoyment does not really exist in the past, but exists as a fantasy object. According to Žižek, 'the original loss of the *Thing*; the void of this loss is filled out by the *objet petit a*, the fantasy object' (Žižek, 1993, p. 3).

Under Nazi ideology, the Germans believed that the Jewish people, the traumatic other, had stolen their (Germans') enjoyment. Fascism needed, and still needs, a foreign external object in order to balance its subjectivity. Both Fascism and Stalinism demand an ideological fetishism. Thus, the Jew becomes a 'sublime object'; a fetish object; the cause of all problems. Today, capitalism, and previously Nazi ideology, shifts and shifted the loss of enjoyment to the theft of enjoyment. Enjoyment as the Real is empty, but the myth of enjoyment has a political power; it can grip subjects as it gives obscene enjoyment. Contemporary capitalism is able to shift the real antagonism into ideological objects. This is how capitalism creates Fascism to maintain its own balance. It is how, today, neo-nationalist movements work as a supplement for the system, and how these neo nationalist movements grip the people. Once, the Frankfurt School also struggled to understand the subjective and psychological reasons for the emergence of Nazism and, after the Second World War, why people successfully integrated themselves into a predominantly consumer culture instead of creating a revolutionary

¹² For an in-depth, Lacanian elaboration of the relation between the nation and enjoyment, see the fifth chapter in Stavrakakis (2007).

subjectivity against the system. Capitalism can maintain the gaps in subjectivity because it can provide subjects with enjoyment. Commodities, acting as objects, place subjects in positions of enjoyment. The subject's object, which is the cause of desire, turns into a profitable mechanism in the capitalist system.

Žižek's interpretation of Marxism is also based on Hegelian-Lacanian insights. Žižek seeks to interpret Marxism through Marx's critique of ideology. Marx's classical definition of ideology is 'they do not know it, but they are doing it'. However, Žižek turns this interpretation upside down: 'subjects do know how things are, but they still behave as if they do not know' (Žižek, 1989, p. 32). Here, Žižek sees the homology between the Freudian concept of unconsciousness and Marx's critique of commodity fetishism. Žižek's question, or rather his doubt is why exactly people behave as they do; the primary reason, Žižek says, is that they gain a vast amount of enjoyment through commodities. The commodities as fantasy objects or as ideological objects fills the lack of subjects. The question Žižek raises is why people cling onto ideology instead of avoiding it. This, he reiterates, is not because of their lack of knowledge, but because they enjoy their own symptoms, another negative concept of Žižek's. Marx's classical interpretation of a symptom is that the proletariat is the symptom of capitalism. However, this definition does not give an adequate interpretation of why people, including the proletariat, are integrated into this system that makes them symptoms of a dis(ease) called capitalism. As Marx's concept of surplus value accumulates capital, the Lacanian concept of surplus enjoyment binds people to this capitalist system. Since people actually enjoy their symptoms, they do not move quickly towards instituting change in the existing order. A symptom is constitutive of subjects. Though the members of the Frankfurt School paid a great deal of attention to the biological and psychological aspects of the Freudian concept of symptoms, they were unable to grasp the political aspects of the symptom.

In Žižek's interpretation of Marxism, he proposes the class struggle as the solution for avoiding the oppressive system. The concept of the class struggle also represents the negativity initiated by Hegel, Marx and Lacan. The class struggle, the fundamental antagonism, traces the limit or furthest boundary of capitalism. It is pure negativity, the traumatic limit that is set up against any form of totalization. It is like the suppurating wound which withstands any and every type of suture. Žižek's dialectical materialism also comes from a negative position. His dictum related to materialism is: 'the world does not exist' (Žižek, 2002, pp. 182–183). This approach opens up a new version of dialectical materialism by centering the concept of negativity. Moreover, Žižek defends political actions and revolutionary violence as a negative capacity that gives birth to a new society. The advent of reason arrives like a light through a night of violence. This is Žižek's version of the dialectic of enlightenment emerging through the negative dialectic.

Conclusion

There is a methodological, epistemological, ontological and political value in the concept of negativity. Therefore, it can be concluded that negativity is indispensable to the formation of a theory of human subjectivity. The Frankfurt School addressed the negativity in Hegel's dialectics in an epistemological sense. Furthermore, the key figures of the Frankfurt School identified the negative dimensions of history that worked against the positive promises of the Enlightenment. They also considered Freudian psychoanalysis as a supplement to

Marxism, and as a tool that helped them understand the problems related to the subject they confronted in Nazism and Stalinism. It is noteworthy here that the concept of negativity is also inscribed in certain Freudian psychoanalytical concepts like the death drive. Lacanian psychoanalysis, which existed as a field totally outside the Frankfurt School, successfully addresses the problem of human subjectivity in a manner that is compatible with Hegelianism. Žižek's primary investigative attention was given to the relationship between Hegelianism and Lacanian psychoanalysis through the concept of negativity. Compared with the analyses presented by the philosophers of the Frankfurt School, Žižek's theory of subjectivity is far more developed, because it is able to address issues related to the subject, both in philosophy and politic

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