

REVISITING CONCEPTS OF IDEOLOGY

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Introduction

A brief example portraying the common usage of the term ideology can help to clear the path into its differentiation: In the autumn of 2007 Lehman Brothers Inc., one of the largest financial institutions of the world, collapsed; with it the current economic crisis erupted. The debate over its actual cause is still evolving and taking shape today. On the issue of regulating financial markets, during one of the many climaxes of what has come to be called the Euro-Crisis, the social democrat Carsten Sieling accused the German conservative parties, the CDU and CSU, of using ideological rhetoric by claiming that:

We are not only talking about the ones aggrieved by Lehman in the United States, but also about those that had their money invested in German banks. We have to talk about that. We have to act. It is not sufficient to give big, ideological speeches. It is about really helping the people (Deutscher Bundestag 2011: 15738)¹.

This manoeuvre seems familiar: in political debate, opponents are often accused of acting out of ideological motivations; by extension, they act irrationally or dishonestly in pursuit of ulterior motives. Meanwhile, one's own views are portrayed as serving objective reason by acting rationally, honestly, and above all – at least in politics – realistically. In politics this is much more the case than in science. However, there too, the claim is made that actors ought to behave unencumbered by ideology, guided by objectivity. The claim is that objective information, derived from impartial observation, devoid of normative judgement, leads to the formation of objective knowledge.

In a contemporary lexicon of political sciences we find the term ideology described, coming back to a minimalist and descriptive notion of the concept:

In the political sense of the word, ideologies are used to argue for and legitimize political action. Ideologies are therefore always a combination of a)

¹ All quotes in this essay are originally in German and were translated by the author.

certain political views (i.e. communism, conservatism, liberalism, socialism), which result in certain ways to think and judge in a normative sense and b) a combination of certain interests and motives which serve personal goals (less often: altruistic goals) and therefore aim for concrete political and social realization (Schubert/ Klein 2011).

It seems to me that this definition is the result of a historical process in which – at least in Germany, but probably in a wider context – the notion of ideology put forward by one of the founding figures of the *sociology of knowledge*, Karl Mannheim, prevailed over that put forward by the critical theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer.

Karl Mannheim, born in Budapest, was to become a renowned philosopher and sociologist teaching sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Sciences in the thirties and then a professor of education at the University of London. As such he was a relevant intellectual antagonist of Adorno and Horkheimer. In his book *Ideology and Utopia*, published in 1929, Mannheim argued that all political expressions of the particular interests of social groups and classes are ideological (Mannheim 1965: 72). There are striking parallels here to the definition provided in the lexicon. But there is a decisive difference too: Mannheim studied and taught at a time during which the concept of ideology was embedded in a wider debate about Marxism and its effect on academic discourse in general. Thus Mannheim argued that members of classes had certain objective interests due to belonging to their class. But, contrary to orthodox Marxist currents at that time, Mannheim did not hold that belonging to a class might also automatically entail a correct understanding of political concepts. His approach to ideology claims, to a larger or smaller degree, non-normativity which is why Mannheim considered his concept as an analytic tool (Mannheim 1965: 22).

Mannheim's approach is picked up by Karl Popper in the fifties and sixties. He championed the notion of critical realism, and in particular his theory of falsification. Popper, like Mannheim, was unconvinced that any social agent could be sure about what they know to be true, in the sense of being free from normative preconceptions. He developed his theory of falsification in order to address this problem: science, and in a way any judgement, including political or moral ones, can only make claims to truth until they are eventually proven to be untrue (Dahrendorf 1969: 147). Popper adds a general scepticism regarding any claims to universal truth to Mannheim's critical distance towards ideological judgements in political and scientific debate, as embodied in his notion of ideology. In contemporary scien-

tific debate, long after the so called *Positivismusstreit* between Popper and Adorno in the nineteen-sixties, Popper's ideas have prevailed popularly, with Adorno's notion of ideology only holding its ground in scientific and political niches. As a consequence, when conservatives and social democrats both accuse each other of being ideologically driven, they both speak the truth from this prevailing concept of ideology: each of the political perspectives represents and utters the partial truths of their specific group and class interests.

However, it feels like this use of the concept of ideology virtually reduces it to a truism. The concept, potentially a subtle and contested analytic tool, becomes anaemic and purely descriptive, lacking any real explanatory power: we don't really understand what is happening when, for instance, the rise of nationalism, anti-Semitism and racism is considered merely as a political response on a par with any other response to the economic crisis. Instead, it would be crucial to understand this ideological response in the context of the individual coping on a political level with the economic crisis. In order to do so, I would claim that we need to revisit Adorno and Horkheimer's notion of ideology, because they provide us with a more nuanced concept which ties these three strings of analysis together: they recur on economic, political and psychoanalytical ideas to describe the dynamics of ideology formation.

In re-developing their *complex concept of ideology*, we find ourselves better placed to criticize its current use as a mere rhetoric device. Simultaneously we can use this tool to understand alarming trends in contemporary society. Hence, their concept of ideology is already fruitfully being used in the fields of researching anti-Semitism (Claussen 2000a; Claussen 2005; Postone 2005; Salzborn 2007; Salzborn 2010a; Salzborn 20120b), racism (Schmitt-Egner 1975; Claussen 2000b) and nationalism (Finlayson 1998). I will not be able to actually develop an understanding of the above ideologies as a reaction to the crisis; this is part of my ongoing research. But I do believe I will be able to reconstruct the concept of ideology first put forward by Adorno and Horkheimer.

1. Two contradictory strings

First and foremost Adorno claims that the concept of ideology cannot be defined: there is no universal and timeless truth about ideologies. In his essay *Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre*, first published in 1954, Adorno states that ideologies are expressions of specific historic dynamics and therefore entangled with history (Adorno 1975: 458). But there seems to be a contradiction at the heart of this thoroughly his-

toricised dimension of the concept of ideology. On the one hand ideology is seen as a means of legitimizing bourgeois power and can therefore be understood as a top-down-model of ideology. This idea is far more prominent with Horkheimer than with Adorno and I would call this the *traditional concept of ideology* – which can actually be traced back to Karl Marx (Marx 1974: 598). On the other hand Horkheimer and Adorno develop a more complex notion of ideology: they argue that individuals are unable to bear the contradictions of capitalist society, which leads them to fail to ever develop self-sustaining identities. Ideology manifests as a consequence to this. This latter concept could be called the *complex concept of ideology*.

So we have two different concepts of ideology: both are historical, but the first is relatively straightforwardly functional, whilst the latter is best characterized as a dysfunctional psychological mode of perception in capitalist society. I believe that the coexistence of both notions often leads to a misunderstanding. Therefore I consider the effort of differentiating both concepts and pointing to their ambivalence as part of clarifying the present-day debate on concepts of ideology and reinforcing the approach of Adorno and Horkheimer in contemporary debate on ideologies. In order to do so, I will develop and clarify the as of yet relatively vague concepts touched upon above in the course of this essay.

I claim that we must take full stock of the contradiction described above, and recognize the two differing approaches in Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of ideology. In doing so we can avoid the reduction to the simple *traditional approach* and come to fully grasp their struggle with the concept as a whole. The notion that ideology serves as a way of legitimizing social power might have been true for societies in which concrete relations of power dominated, but for modern capitalism, especially in the era of mass consumption and the culture industry, it just simply isn't convincing any more: it does not seem to grasp the complexity of the power-relations. As Terry Eagleton argues, individuals or groups don't have to be those in power in order to argue on ideological grounds (Eagleton 1993: 12). And even if the *traditional approach* can help to shed light on how ideologies are reinforced in authoritarian regimes, at a surface level, it cannot explain the very existence and the social dynamics of ideology itself.

In addition to that, the traditional top-down approach has difficulty in explaining why individuals, deep down in their gut, *believe* that ideologies are true. Why for instance, in spite of the vast amount of critical research into nation building, does the nationalist still *believe* that the nation is natural and great? It is this quality, of believe akin to faith, that lead the sociologist Detlev Claussen, via Adorno and

Horkheimer, to develop the idea of ideology as a *religion of everyday life* (Alltagsreligion) (Claussen 2000c). Based on his writings, I would argue that we must speak of ideology as a fundamental mode of perception in capitalist society, and hence, to skirt Mannheim's thesis that no-one is free from ideological conceptions.

In order to explain my final statement above, I will now attempt to perform a historical reconstruction of Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of ideology.

2. Three phases in the conceptualization of ideology

To aid presentation I have split their thinking into three separate phases. Whilst I'm conscious of the impossibility of being able to split their thinking into chunks, I believe this false step leads to a more comprehensive understanding of the whole. I will therefore speak of the first phase as one of strong ambivalence, in which both Adorno and Horkheimer struggle with the traditional concept of ideology and try to work through its capacity as a tool for the analysis of capitalist society. During this process they both engage with the concept of fetishism in Marx's writings. However, Adorno and Horkheimer originally came from very different intellectual backgrounds. Their thought only begins to merge over a long time, during the course of their intellectual and political friendship. Whereas Horkheimer's early thought is shaped by a thorough understanding of traditional Marxist views, Adorno only engages with Marx much later.

As the philosopher Oscar Negt points out, it wasn't until the 1930s, after his inaugural lecture in Frankfurt, that Adorno started to systematically engage with Marx's *Capital* (Negt 2001: 22-23). From the beginning of that engagement he put a strong emphasis on the chapter on commodity fetishism; the chapter that was to play a crucial role in what I will call the second phase of Adorno and Horkheimer's thinking on ideology. The crucial moment in the shift from the first to the second phase can be traced to the chapter entitled *Elements of Anti-Semitism in Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno 1988: 177). Adorno and Horkheimer's reflections on National Socialism lead them to conclude that the traditional concept of ideology could not account for National Socialist ideology and the brutality of anti-Semitism, which eventually culminated in the holocaust. But in the end, both their analysis of National Socialism, and their analysis of ideology, remain ambiguous.

In any case, this third phase also marks the endpoint of their struggle with the concept of ideology: first it seems that they have

more or less completed their efforts of developing the *complex concept of ideology*; but second, Adorno also remarks that he believes the concept of ideology to have become obsolete in late capitalism, with power relations being utterly mediated, impersonal and transparent (Adorno 1975: 466).

3. Phase I: the traditional concept of ideology

According to Adorno, the pre-modern concept of ideology belongs to a world «in which industrial society had not yet fully developed, and where hence no serious doubts existed that formal equality would not simultaneously imply freedom» (Adorno 1975: 464). Approaching the concept of ideology from a historical perspective allows us to see clearly that it was treated entirely different in the *Ancien Régime*, where the concept seems to have first originated. In this era of personal and direct power relations – an era just on the cusp of the development of modern productive forces and modern bureaucracy – ideology was conceptualized as the teaching of idols. It was hence closely tied to the criticism of religious concepts and the original notion of ideology can be traced back to the beginnings of the enlightenment itself. The most prominent proponent of this notion of ideology was Francis Bacon, who, according to Mannheim, argued in favour of empiricism, and against the legitimization of earthly power through god (Mannheim 1952: 58).

Based on Adorno's thinking, the political scientist Kurt Lenk claims that a characteristic of the enlightenment was its perception of the teaching of idols and religious ideas as religious pre- and misconceptions (Lenk 1971: 20). This suggests that the modern debate on ideology derives originally from attempts to disprove certain religious beliefs. In other words: the criticism of ideology was about the rational, empirical and scientific undoing of religious rule. Adorno therefore claims that the criticism of ideology is an idealistic school of thought hoping to lift the veil of religious false consciousness through enlightenment thought (Adorno 1975: 464).

With the economic and social revolutions that transformed traditional power relations with the emergence of capitalism, this understanding of the criticism of ideology was transformed as well. As Detlev Claussen points out, two decisive thinkers bringing about this latter transformation – the mapping of the enlightenment concept of ideology onto capitalist relations of power – were Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Their first systematic critique of modern ideology was *The German Ideology*. In it they criticize Ludwig Feuerbach's phi-

losophy from a materialist perspective. According to Claussen, they argued that ideology was no longer simply a misconception, or an error in rational thinking, but rather the result of the way that social relations manifest themselves (Claussen 2000d: 30).

However, this concept of ideology remains ambivalent: following Kurt Lenk, I would argue that on the one hand it remains stuck in the traditional critique of ideologies (e.g. *The Communist Manifesto*), but that on the other, it develops into an abstract concept elucidating the ways in which social reality systematically appears as different from what it actually is (*The Capital*) (Lenk 1971: 33-34). *The Communist Manifesto*, holding on to the idea that pre-modern power relations continue to exist in modernity, puts forward the notion of ideology as a means for the ruling class to legitimize itself. In line with the Manifesto's overall line of argument whereby the history of humanity is the history of class struggles, the concept of ideology becomes a trans-historic weapon used by the respective ruling classes against their enemies. This notion, relatively close to the original notion as developed during the enlightenment, is taken up and developed by a great host of Leninist currents since. Horkheimer too, uses it when he writes in his essay *Ein neuer Ideologiebegriff?*, published in 1930, that «nations or classes have prevailed through the use of weapons and moral, metaphysical and religious ideas» (Horkheimer 1987: 285). He proceeds to argue that the struggle against the cultural foundations reflect political and economic class struggle at a higher level. It thus appears that Horkheimer identifies the ideology of the ruling class with the ruling class as a social agent, by positing it as something outside the working class, to be challenged through class struggle.

In a certain sense, the idea that the pre-modern notion of ideology remains valid in capitalist society is correct. The ambiguity in Marx and Engels' thinking here is not due to "sloppy thinking" on their part, but rather due to the co-existence of pre-modern and modern relations of power: personal and direct power relations continue to exist between members of different classes pursuing their respective interests; but impersonal power relations now also come into play, which are only acted upon (and felt) by individuals in a mediated fashion (Gerstenberger 1973: 207).

The decisive change, vis-a-vis the pre-modern concept of ideology, is that social phenomena no longer solely correlate to their inherent nature as consequences of direct relations of power. The phenomena remain but they are now governed by impersonal relations of power. Hence, according to Marx and Engels, ideology turns into a false projection of the impersonal power relations of modern society into the minds of its individual members: through the exchange of

equivalent values, relations between humans appear to be «what they really are», namely the relations between things, as opposed to as the relations between humans (Marx 1974: 86).

The chapter on commodity fetishism highlights how focusing on the direct empirical experience of individuals under capitalism cannot point to the social relations actually underlying capitalism. Detlev Claussen thus argues that «commodity fetishism [is] the false consciousness that emerges in the act of exchange» (Claussen 2000e: 99). But, whilst the chapter on commodity fetishism is the main focus for Adorno and Horkheimer, for Marx it is merely the beginning of his analysis of the difference between nature and the appearance of social relations. He develops at least two different kinds of fetishism:

1. the concept of wage fetishism captures the idea that wages paid to the worker are paid on the basis of a *quid pro quo*. Marx shows that this is only partially true at best. He states that the exchange of labour on the basis of equivalence produces surplus value, because the worker can work longer than he needs to reproduce the value of his labour power (Marx 1975: 557). This relationship between capitalist and worker is what Marx grasps with the analytic term *exploitation*. Wage fetishism obscures this real exploitation and is often the cause of misunderstandings: usually when people speak of exploitation, they don't refer to the formally sanctioned appropriation of the surplus value generated by the worker; they refer to, by some external normative standard, “abhorrent” working conditions.

2. At an even higher level of abstraction – on the level of financial capital – Marx states that the appearance of interest as an independent source of profit, as opposed to its actual nature as costs paid for by the profits of value-producing capital, is another instance of fetishism (Marx 1983: 405).

With his concept of fetishism Marx first opens the door to us thinking about ideology as a complex misconception of society's real social relations directly caused by those social relations themselves. But Marx does not write about the mechanism by which ideology is instantiated in the minds of individuals – the reason for which individuals so strongly hold on to ideology. And perhaps he couldn't because the modern subject, with which Sigmund Freud would later be so concerned, was yet to come into focus of societal and scientific debate. As Lenk argues, the Marxist concept of ideology simply remained a mirror of social relations until Adorno and Horkheimer picked up the thread with their focus on fetishism in an effort to me-

diate the Marxist criticism of bourgeois society with the Freudian critique of bourgeois subjectivity (Lenk 1971: 38).

This process starts in earnest in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Adorno seems to be arguing in favour of a concept where Marx's notion of fetishism is mediated with the psychoanalytical meta-theory of Freud. This leads to a fruitful new approach linking the structural and psychological dimensions of ideology. As such, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be considered as a turning point for at least Adorno's, and perhaps Horkheimer's thought.

4. Phase II: the experience of National Socialism as a rupture

Adorno and Horkheimer's experience of National Socialism, and their thoughts on the role played by anti-Semitism in stabilising the Nazi regime, lead them to re-evaluate their approach to understanding the concept of ideology. In the sense of the traditional concept of ideology, Adorno claimed that its criticism is only possible as long as that ideology contains a rational element. By Adorno, in National Socialist ideology, this rational element was non-existent (Adorno 1975: 465) – an illusion of the collective mind of an entire nation. He therefore argued that in National Socialism, ideology turned into a mere tool of domination (ibid.).

So, at this point Adorno returns to the traditional notion of ideology to emphasise the archaic nature of National Socialist ideology: it is a manifestation of the urge to regress back to direct and personal domination in modern times dominated by impersonal power relations. But if we remain at this level of understanding, we cannot actually make sense of National Socialist ideology. Faced with the question of how National Socialist beliefs were able to take hold of the masses, despite its blatant untruths, Adorno and Horkheimer would differentiate the traditional Marxist concept of ideology. To try and explain this urge for regression of the German masses, lead the two critical theorists onto new ground.

They embarked on work to combine Freudian analysis with Marxist criticism. For them, a linchpin of their argument in the mediation of subject and society via ideology, was the idea of the domination of nature by humanity. This domination, they argued, had taken on a qualitatively new role since the industrialisation and the imposition of the law of value. One of their first works developing this new concept of ideology are the *Studies on the Authoritarian Personality*, which Adorno co-authored. In them he was forced to combine philosophi-

cal speculation, psychological theory and empirical study (Adorno et al. 1950).

I will here only present a sketch of what I take to be the triangular foundation of this complex concept of ideology (which is mainly discussed and developed in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*). It relies on 1) the structural analysis of *fetishism*; 2) the entanglement of the individual in the domination of inner and outer nature; and 3) the psychological structure of bourgeois subjectivity which – in moments of crisis – can be prone to false and pathetic projection. In slightly more detail:

1. Fetishism: as mentioned above, Adorno only started his systematic study of Marx after his inaugural lecture of 1931. After this however, he would often return to the concept of fetishism introduced by Marx. Especially during the *Positivismusstreit*, Adorno emphasised his belief that we could not base our thinking on our immediate perceptions of empirical reality (Adorno 1969: 20): empirical phenomena would, via the mechanism of fetishism, be perceived falsely by us. Social relations would appear to us as purely natural relations. Adorno's emphasis on fetishism should, I believe, be considered as a structural, rather than subjective pillar in his complex approach to ideology. Fetishism is a function of the social practice of our society – the law of value – and can hence not be corrected by a “proper consciousness”, but only by the abolition of that social practice.

2. The entanglement of the individual in the domination of inner and outer nature: due to its ontological elements, this part of the foundation is somewhat controversial. It marks an effort by Adorno and Horkheimer to mediate between structure (Marxist analysis, fetishism, industrial society and thus the domination of outer nature), and the individual (Freudian analysis, psychology formation, subjectivity and domination of inner nature). Despite its controversy, it must be considered the *conditio sine qua non* of the *complex concept of ideology*. By pointing out how the project of the domination of outer nature (the world instrumentalised and controlled by humanity) under capitalism is tied to the individuals' authoritarian domination of their inner nature (emotions, sexuality, gender and other aspects of identity). Adorno and Horkheimer provide an account of the bourgeois subject not as directly dominated by capitalist social relations, but as by necessity entangled psychologically with capitalist totality. Capitalism does not directly dominate the individual; instead, in order for the individual to exist within the capitalist order that individual must do onto itself what capitalism does onto nature.

3. False and pathetic projection: Lenk has pointed to the close relation between the *complex concept of ideology* and Freudian analysis of the individual (Lenk 1971: 30). This connection can be further emphasised by looking at Adorno's essay dating from 1951, *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*. The fascist subject is, according to Adorno, trapped in the modern conflict between a highly developed super ego geared towards individual success and self-determination, but confronted with socially enforced failure to live up to those ideals. Thus the subject, unable to fulfil the demands of the super ego, develops strong narcissistic urges that can only be absorbed and partially satisfied by transference onto an external object. In the case of specifically the authoritarian personality (see above), that object is the charismatic leader (Adorno 1973: 48). A fundamental conflict of modern subjectivity can, depending on social and biographical details, lead to a shift of projection from being a basic mode of perception, to becoming a domineering and false, or even pathetic mechanism.

Despite Adorno and Horkheimer's labours on this more complex notion of ideology, the original ambivalence found in Marx's writings, persist on occasion even in their later writings. Adorno for example makes use of the traditional concept of ideology in the mid-1950s when he speaks of ideology as a means of legitimising power (Adorno 1975: 465).

5. Phase III: Religions of everyday life as a way of re-thinking ideology

For Adorno, the existence of ideologies presupposes the existence of complex, mediated and indirect power relations. Therefore, Adorno argues in his essay *Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre*, through the tendencies of late capitalism towards monopolization, power relations have become so obvious, that the notion of ideology has become obsolete (Adorno 1975: 466). I would suggest that this claim cannot be applied to the concept of ideology as a whole, but should be reduced only to the traditional concept of ideology. I base this suggestion on two arguments:

1. power relations have not at all become obvious. Instead, during the sixties and seventies and the concurrent rise of neoliberal restructuring ("flat hierarchies", de-regulation of the financial markets, transnationalisation of political processes, etc.) they became so complex, that it has by now become difficult to even maintain a theory committed to considering the totality of capitalist society. Of course this

is a development that Adorno could not have foreseen, and I suppose that the whole notion of monopolistic capitalism put him on the wrong track.

2. Only eight pages later Adorno only distances himself from the *traditional concept* of ideology when he states that «with the crisis of bourgeois society, the traditional concept of ideology has apparently lost its object» (Adorno 1975: 474).

If fetishism remains a fundamental feature of late capitalist society, then clearly relations of power cannot have become transparent, and a concept of ideology derived from the concept of fetishism seems to remain relevant. However, the various threads around the complex notion of ideology were then left relatively untouched with Adorno's death in 1969. They were only picked up by Detlev Claussen relatively recently as one of the seams in his work on *religions of everyday life*.

Claussen's writings are based on ideas put forward by Adorno in his essay on *Half-Education*, published in 1959. In this essay Adorno argues that the authoritarian character abandons the traditional bourgeois commitment to knowledge, in favour of the strategy of appearing to know. He favours being a know-it-all over the struggle to know it all. According to Adorno this form of "knowledge" is symptomatic of late capitalist society in which individuals are no longer capable of thinking for themselves (Adorno 1975: 474). For Adorno, this trend is due to the waning power of bourgeois values, which are replaced by ideological fragments of the petit-bourgeoisie's aping of bourgeois values. Opposed to the humanistic bourgeois ideal of education now stands a petit-bourgeois desire to simply emerge victorious in conversation. It is for this reason that Adorno differentiates between *half-education* and no education at all: the latter implies the possibility of the process described by Kant in *What Is Enlightenment?* (Kant 1967); the former resists any such process.

Claussen suggests that, building on the idea of half-education, present day ideologies can best be described as religious substitutes in a society «in which secularisation has gone wrong» (Claussen 2000b: 136). He hence suggests we think of ideologies as fragments of beliefs that don't seek to be justified, or falsified, but as the writ of authority couched in pseudo-scientific language: instead of comprehension, individuals in late capitalist society seek to be impressed by a «scientific aura» (Claussen 2000a: 117). For Claussen the culture industry plays a crucial role in the production of these fragments. It provides products that finely balance emotional pathos and pseudo-scientific discourse, providing the petit-bourgeois mind with the half-

truths it desires. It is hard for us, late capitalist subjects, to resist the temptations of these glossily produced «societal rationalisations» (Claussen 2000c: 21).

Within this approach to ideology, traditional grand-narrative style ideologies are replaced with cultural artefacts manufactured by the disorganised process of the culture industry. Individuals seek to be entertained and informed at once, in order to keep up with the “half-educated Joneses”. Thus, according to Claussen, today’s ideology as a diffuse set of pseudo-scientific fragments of thought, provide an utmost flexible cushion for consciousness, utterly resistant to bourgeois enlightenment (Claussen 2000c: 21). It is for this reason that Claussen refers to this mode of ideology as *religions of everyday life*: fragmented ideologies provide the same mystifying function to their bearers as dearly held religious beliefs.

6. A brief conclusion: picking up the thread

With his notion of *religions of everyday life*, Claussen continues neatly from where Adorno and Horkheimer left off in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. He also takes seriously the concern that liberal bourgeois society never resolved its fundamental crisis, thus robbing modern subjects of the psychological resilience required to hold fast to rational thought. It is because of this that modern ideologies don’t seek to provide narratives about the whole of society – all they need to do is provide re-assuring authority-infused snippets of thought that allow subjects to reconcile the demands of bourgeois ideals with the daily experience frustrating those ideals; they are little totems or mantras which gain their power from being repeated often and loudly enough, as religious substitutes. The material insecurity of the petit-bourgeois (the so-called “squeezed middle”) robs them of a foundation upon which to build an identity. Torn between the desire to enact bourgeois identity and the danger of proletarianisation, the petit-bourgeois flee headlong into the dangerous embrace of nationalism, anti-Semitism and racism as a cure-all for their anxiety and substitute for identity.

The position on ideology sketched in this paper seems far removed from the everyday use of the word. Nonetheless, as opposed to Claussen, I am not convinced by the argument that a new word should be used to designate this process. We still place ourselves firmly in the lineage started by the earliest uses of the word of ideology in the struggle against religious mystification. But if we want to hold true to Adorno’s claim that there is no formal definition of the concept of ideology, then we will have to make sure to analyse pre-

sent-day ideologies based on the contemporary capitalist constellation. So one could think of Claussen's concept of religions of everyday life as being part of such a holistic concept. I am not quite sure whether Claussen would agree with this suggestion. Nonetheless, it seems to me that the path he chose to re-think ideology in contemporary society provides fertile ground for continued elaboration. Through all this we should also bear in mind the ambivalence present throughout Adorno and Horkheimer's writings on ideology, lest we expose ourselves to the danger of a-historically repeating their efforts.

So how could we, based on the *complex concept of ideology*, go about trying to understand, for instance, the rise of nationalism in the wake of the financial crisis? Using our *complex concept of ideology* would imply that we analyse the following three aspects and their interrelations:

1. capitalist structure, fetishism and its manifesting forms: why does the capitalist crisis manifest itself today as a financial crisis?
2. the mediation of structure and subject in the process of domination of inner and outer nature: does today's social constellation demand increased efforts of internally and externally directed control of us? Can we state that "psychological success" appears to be unattainable in the post-crisis climate?
3. the question of perception: can we diagnose a shift in modes of perception from a projective mode which is able to integrate empirical falsification to a false projection, or even, as could be argued in the case of the German mobs attacking refugees, even pathetic projection?

I believe that taking these three levels of analysis into account can help us make sense of the political dynamics emerging with renewed force in the wake of the most recent crisis of capitalism. I also believe that this approach can elucidate the ways in which both social-democrats and conservatives do indeed occupy ideological positions in the Bundestag – though not in the way they accuse each-other of doing.

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Abstract

Capitalist subjectivity can be thought of as being structured by mass-society and ideologies. This seems especially apparent in times of crisis. To a certain extent we can grasp these ideologies as *illusions of the collective mind*. However, I'm concerned that this perspective is too general to describe the specific character of modern-type ideologies such as nationalism, anti-Semitism and racism. The critical theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer developed a differentiated concept which can help us to understand the specifics of the above ideologies. In this essay I will point to an as of yet unresolved contradiction within their concept. My aim is to resolve this contradiction by reconstruction, using Detlev Claussen's notion of *religions of everyday life* (Alltagsreligionen) in the process. After this I will make a case for renewing the concept of ideology as an analytic tool and I will end by sketching some preliminary thoughts on its use in this fashion.

Keyword: capitalism, subjectivity, euro-crisis, ideology, critical theory.