

The other Frankfurt school

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REVIEW ESSAY

The other Frankfurt school

The Anthem Companion to Karl Mannheim, edited by David Kettler and Volker Meja, London, Anthem Press, 2018, 228 pp., ISBN 13-978-1-78308-480-7

Anthem Press has published *The Anthem Companion to Sociology*, a series of edited volumes offering new assessments of some of the key figures in the European and American sociological traditions. *The Anthem Companion to Karl Mannheim* is part of that series, and attempts, in the course of an introduction and ten contributed essays, to critically evaluate and rethink one of the biggest names of German sociology during the Weimar Republic. It is hard to overstate the gap between Mannheim's reputation during his key years in Heidelberg and Frankfurt in the late 1920s and early 1930s (he fled for England in 1933), and his reputation today. Considered by many to be one of the founders of the sociology of knowledge, his writings have been pushed to the margins of social theory. No one seems to read Karl Mannheim anymore. He seems to have become an informed footnote, a writer for a very specialized audience, but no more.

Karl Mannheim was born in Budapest in 1893, and died in London in 1947, but the years he was famous were spent in Germany, starting in 1919 at the University of Heidelberg; from 1930–33 he held a chair of sociology at the University of Frankfurt. Mannheim was a refugee twice over, first from Budapest to Germany in 1919, in the wake of the counter-revolution against the socialist government he was associated with, and then from Germany to England in 1933, in the wake of the National-Socialist racial laws. So Mannheim was Hungarian, German and a Jew. After his second exile, to England, he tried to become British, but had only mixed success.

The sociological project that made Mannheim an intellectual star was the 'sociology of knowledge' (*Wissenssoziologie*). It blossomed between 1928 and 1933, five years during which the Weimar Republic was vibrant with intellectual and artistic and political experimentation. Weimar was a completely new thing in Germany, a democracy and a republic, but it was simultaneously also part of a great tradition, a town identified with artistic greats like Goethe and Schiller. The sociology of knowledge fit right in. It was an attempt to find new foundations when the shifting of foundations had made everything seem relative. It started with a simple but central proposition: the ultimate foundations of knowledge are sociological. Mannheim's project was an attempt to replace the philosophy of knowledge – epistemology – with sociology. This project was as old as sociology. All of its founding fathers had contributed to it. Emile Durkheim, in particular, sought to replace Kant's synthetic unity of apperception with society, which meant there were as many fundamental worldviews as there were societies, by which he mostly meant nation-states. Marx developed the idea of ideologies varying with class, and how people's interests distorted what they thought. But both appeared to believe that it was easy for a social scientist who understood this to step outside, and tell truth from distortion, using some sort of science.

Mannheim took these views one crucial and vertiginous step farther. What if there was no outside? What if I say your interests are distorting your views, and you say the same about me,

and we are both right? How can one find the truth in such a mind boggling universe? And how to deal with the rancor caused by these mutually delegitimizing claims? Mannheim was the originator of the sociological concept of worldview (or *Weltanschauung*). He not only sociologically explored it before anyone else, he explored it in greater philosophical depth than almost anyone since. Today, the concept remains as baffling and important as it was a century ago.

We have David Kettler and Volker Meja to thank for trying to resurrect Mannheim. They have spent over 50 years explaining and interpreting his life and thought and trying to advance it. Kettler, a research professor at Bard College in the USA, started writing about Mannheim in 1967, 20 years after his death, and has continued ever since. Volker Meja works out of Newfoundland in Canada. Over the last few decades, he has written several works on Mannheim, some of which in collaboration with Keppler. In addition to writing about him, they have also edited his work in both English and in German. They are truly (together with Colin Loader and Nico Stehr) the keepers of the flame of Karl Mannheim. Thus, it seems only fitting that David Kettler and Volker Meja should have edited and contributed to *The Anthem Companion to Karl Mannheim*.

This book is both a good introduction for readers unfamiliar with Mannheim and for those who are familiar but want to learn more. It is like a retrospective exhibition of a major thinker. Besides the introduction by Kettler and Meja, there are ten different essays, each one opening into a new gallery. Henrik Lundberg, Peter Breiner, Ryusaku Yamada and Philip Walsh all take up different aspects of Mannheim's political project. Lundberg concentrates on the Weimar aspects of Mannheim's thinking, and Yamada looks at Mannheim's work in England after 1933. Breiner and Walsh concentrate on more theoretical issues, looking at Mannheim in the context of Hannah Arendt's theory of action, and also placing him within the history of political theory.

The authors of these first four essays all agree that 1929 is the key date and that *Ideologie und Utopie* is the key text. Both the time and the place – 1929 Weimar Germany – contain in themselves the sense of crisis and time out of joint that pervaded the era, and not only in Weimar. It was the year of the Wall Street crash, part of a chain of financial crises that led to the loss of financial certainty. 1929 was also the year the Kellogg-Briand pact went into effect, the first of many attempts to abolish war as an instrument of international politics. In Italy, the Fascist Party tightened its control and made fascism a legitimate political programme. Leon Trotsky was sent into exile, and a consolidation of what was to be called Stalinism began; millions of private farmers were removed from their land. In Western literature, major works tried to come to terms with World War I, which still loomed large in the European imagination. Books like *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque and *Farewell to Arms* by Ernest Hemingway became bestsellers. Surrealism was en vogue in art and psychoanalysis was not only a therapy but a means of Zeitgeist diagnosis. And the focus of all these movements was Weimar Germany, where Left and Right, Conservative and Liberal in culture, society and politics clashed and denied and affirmed each other at the same time. *The morally ambivalent and stylish The Three Penny Opera* by Bertolt Brecht became the biggest theatre hit in Weimar Germany at the same time Mannheim published his book.

So this was the background against which Karl Mannheim published *Ideologie und Utopie* (seven years later an expanded English translation came out). As Henrik Lundberg emphasizes in his essay on the book, Mannheim defined the task of the social and political analyst as that of synthesizing rival political ideologies. Thus, the sociology of knowledge was not only a social theoretical enterprise, it was a political one. It aimed to hold the fragile Weimar Republic together. Peter Breiner, in his contribution 'Mannheim and the Realism Debate in Political

Theory', discusses how Mannheim's theory was also a wider reaction to the global transformations of 1929.

Ryusaku Yamada examines not only Mannheim's Weimar output but also several essays on social and political planning he published during his years in England, 1933–1947. Yamada argues, in 'Mannheim, Mass Society and Democratic Theory', that Mannheim's premise was that social transformation required a transformation of social theory. It was necessary for social and political theorists to develop a new self-understanding and realize that their purpose was not to produce universal theories, but rather descriptive-diagnostic theories. For Mannheim, universalistic theories of social and political reproduction ruled out the very possibility of grasping transformation and radical change. He argued that the concepts of *ideology* and *utopia* could grasp the struggle between the old and the new precisely because both grasped only part of society's dynamics. Both required *Zeitdiagnose*, a diagnosis of the times, which was also a key concept for Mannheim. He saw the sociologist's work as analogous to that of a psychoanalyst, trying to uncover hidden elements and make them explicit. Of course, such diagnosis and socioanalysis could not be done without value judgments. As such, it was perceived to be arbitrary, and many of Mannheim's critics attacked him on this point. And indeed, as Yamada observes, many diagnoses of the time overgeneralize single events or observations. But the idea of descriptive diagnostic theorizing as proposed by Mannheim means something different. It means the *theorizing* of time diagnosis. This point is brought out by the contribution of Philip Walsh, who compares Mannheim with Hannah Arendt, the theorist of action in politics. The transformation of theory turns the relation between universal theory and theorized descriptive diagnosis upside down. Mannheim argues, in the most thoroughgoing way possible, that theoretical universalism, which until that point had shaped sociology and still does today, is a false universalism because it simply cannot grasp the reality of transformation of the world. As Walsh observes, this is also a point Arendt tried to make in her work, although in less sociological terms.

The contributions in the first part of the reader clarify Mannheim's contribution to the development of social theory as a political enterprise. This is the basic difference between Mannheim and other sociological classics. Mannheim saw himself as part and parcel of the Weimar Republic's agenda to reconcile freedom and determinism, not only in theory but also in political praxis. Thus, his sociology was not merely a theoretical enterprise.

This kind of political praxis can also be seen in the editors' own contribution to the volume, 'Karl Mannheim and Women's Research', an especially intriguing take on the sociology of Weimar Germany that focuses on the new role of women in Weimar Germany. On the one hand, Kettler and Meja describe the changing roles for women in society and the family during 1920s and early '30s in Germany. On the other hand they analyze how Mannheim in his essays stresses how women experienced this as the tension of being caught between the new actual situation that treated them as men's equals and the ideology of domesticity that still governed theirs and men's orientation. Mannheim's framework appealed to a new generation of women who came to the university and wanted to study with him, which in turn made Mannheim think of that generation of women as new consumers and producers of innovative sociological thinking. Kettler and Meja relate that Mannheim's lectures in Frankfurt were very popular among women students, many of them Jewish, who found in his openness, and in his parallels between 'free-floating' intellectuals and 'free-floating' women an authentic description of their new social lives. His courses in Frankfurt also dealt directly with female roles, sexuality and feminism. Kettler and Meja's essay cites many primary sources and wonderfully evokes the vibrant intellectual climate that Mannheim introduced to Frankfurt when he got his chair. Many of his discussions and seminars were conducted in the famous Café Laumer, which was not only a meeting point for Mannheim and

his students, but also for the thinkers of the Frankfurt School. Sadly, like most dissertations undertaken under Mannheim at Frankfurt, those of his women students went unfinished after Mannheim's dismissal, and the end of Weimar Germany, in 1933. But this essay here brings alive those books that didn't get written. And as one reads through descriptions of the women's research, they become a perfect illustration of what Mannheim meant when he said he would teach sociologists to combine political analysis with a sociological methodology.

Mannheim did not want to distinguish between the two. For him methodology and political analysis were two inseparable sides of the same process. For Mannheim, it was a given that a serious theorist doesn't choose their subject of investigation (e.g. female roles) arbitrarily. It is precisely this fact, that serious analysts choose subjects that concern them personally, that allows analysts to use Mannheim's two-sided method that examines a phenomenon while simultaneously being aware of the standpoint of the knowing subject. To clarify the two overlapping perspectives, it is necessary to distinguish between the *actor* perspective and the *observer* perspective. And from that follows the distinction between *methodological* and *normative* knowledge. This very complex argument, which is central to Mannheim's thought, is made very clear in Kettler and Meya's essay, which makes it the central essay in the book, both literally and in terms of importance.

The essay by Hartmut Behr and Liam Devereux continues this effort to explicate Mannheim's attempt to combine methodological with normative approaches. Their term for it is 'radical immanence'. They return to his 1929 book *Ideologie und Utopie* and focus on how the Mannheim's shifting of sociology's point of view from transcendental observer to subjective worldview debouches into the problem of freedom and determinism in social thought. They argue that this inevitably leads to a plurality of knowledge, which the authors call 'optionality', which offers bulwarks against essentialism. Behr and Devereux use the word 'melodramatic' to describe thinkers like Mannheim who are caught in the gravitational pull of these debates about relativism and arbitrariness. But they mean it descriptively, not pejoratively. They defend Mannheim as someone who wants to use sociology as a counter force against essentialist thinking. They see him as the ultimate modern, defending the strongly felt standpoint in rational terms against those who think the destruction of the absolute standpoint means the destruction of rationality.

Reinhard Laube takes up this issue from a different angle. His essay 'Historicization and the Sociology of Knowledge' is a Mannheimian essay about Mannheim. Like the preceding essay, Laube is concerned with the connection of Mannheim's thought to modernity, a disenchanted world devoid of gods and transcendent knowledge, and the role of the intellectual or social theorist in such a world. Laube historicizes this view by looking closely at letters Mannheim wrote at Heidelberg, his first station and post after leaving Hungary. Laube takes up two classical Mannheimian concepts, *intellectuals* and *generations*, and puts both into their historical context. As Laube explains, these are not just sociological concepts. Both *intellectuals* and *generations* are self-descriptions of societies. Here Laube discusses the art historian, Wilhelm Pinder, who introduced Mannheim to the idea of generations. Pinder spoke of the 'non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous' (*Die Ungleichzeitigkeit der Gleichzeitigkeit*). Thus, there is the possibility that people can be philosophical contemporaries without being necessarily historical ones. Pinder argued against the idea of art and style epochs. He suggests that, at every moment in time, art historical epochs and styles exist simultaneously and next to each other. They are not to be misunderstood as distinct and closed historical units. As Laube shows, Mannheim and Pinder argued against a notion of historical time according to which one epoch is replaced by another, following the logic of evolution or progress. Mannheim picks up these elements from art history and critically appropriates them for his sociological

theory of generations. Mannheim argues that the understanding of generations can neither be deduced from the biological chronology of generations (demography) nor from the mythical neo-romantic idea of a unity of generation that art historians like Pinder suggest. Laube demonstrates once again quite clearly what all the authors in the volume argue, that for Mannheim the problem of generations is a sociological one. He argues that it is not positivist facts that constitute generations but patterns of social change. In fact, for Mannheim, the concept of generation is a synonym for change and transformation. The concept further implies that members of a generation are social actors. Their unity arises from their action. In this sense generations are political. Their transformative power is grounded in the utopia that they hold and share against resistance.

Thus, Laube shows how Mannheim's political agenda, analysed in the first part of this book, can be synthesized with a methodological view. He does the same with Mannheim's analysis of the 'Intelligentsia'. Mannheim talks about this stratum as 'free-floating', or in more social scientific terms 'socially unattached', and looks at this generation of socially unattached intellectuals as the guardians of modernity. Thus to be an intellectual is to be in the middle not in class terms but in generational ones. Laube shows through an examination of Mannheim's letters from the early 1920s that he believed the classical modern idea, assumed by the very name Enlightenment, that intellectuals can be the masters of the universe, has collapsed. Mannheim tried to show that the mutual influence of particular knowledge systems through the institutionalization of so-called 'free floating intellectuals' produces a many-sided knowledge and even a many-sided truth, but he meant sociological truth, namely a central but growing core of common values; and the variations of local meaning. The task of intellectuals is to think society as whole and to overcome particular standpoints by floating freely over them. Laube also brings in a key article by Mannheim from 1928, 'Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon', a lecture held at the meeting of the German Sociological Society in Zurich in 1928. There, Mannheim broadened the economic concept of competition and analyzed it as one of the most basic social and cultural relations in modernity.

In the next essay, the perspective is broadened once more. Among Mannheim scholars lingers a debate if there is a 'German' Mannheim and a 'British' one (referring to his years in London between 1933 and 1947). Mannheim's writings changed perspective after moving to London, which could be considered in tune with his Sociology of Knowledge approach. Claudia Honegger looks at the distinction between what is considered 'cultural studies' in the Anglo-Saxon world and Mannheim's 'sociology of culture'. One can read in her essay, that after Mannheim's second exile, his project of creating a dynamic sociology of knowledge was cut short. It could not survive his second emigration to England. Mannheim did become a different sociologist in England. He needed to re-direct himself and the transfer of *Ideologie und Utopie* to *Ideology and Utopia* (published in 1936) was part of that enterprise. He leaves Germany at the end of April 1933. Hitler became chancellor of Germany 30 January and a law passed 7 April allowed the Nazis to dismiss Jews from civil service. Mannheim was immediately dismissed from his post in Frankfurt and he left a few weeks later. It seems that his years in England until his death in 1947 could not re-create his former central standing. The English translation stirred mostly negative reviews, but did not stir the intellectual debate it did after its German publication in 1929.

Mannheim probably understood that his project of democratization through dynamic sociology could not be absorbed in democratic England and true to his own dynamic approach started to shift to sociology of planning. Now, Mannheim wanted to prevent dictatorship through education and the planning of freedom. One can see this clearly in the books which contain most of his essays written in England: *Man and Society in an age of reconstruction: Studies in modern social structure* (published in 1940), *Diagnosis of our Time: Wartime*

essays of a sociologist (published in 1943); and *Freedom, Power and Democratic Planning* (published after his death in 1950). This new shift of Mannheim caused the scorn of other émigré liberal intellectuals like Popper and Hayek. However, both Popper and Hayek refer to Mannheim's writings in England, when they all met at the London School of Economics where Mannheim taught since 1934 until his death in 1947 first in sociology and then in the education department. Honegger looks closely at the distinctions between the German versions of his writings, the English translation of *Ideologie und Utopie* into *Ideology and Utopia* and the subtle differences between them. It was difficult to continue his project, which was deeply connected to Weimar Germany after 1933 in England. These were different conditions and different settings. Honegger reconstructs Mannheim's intellectual trajectory in England, his connections to the so-called 'Moot Circle', a Christian intellectual rather conservative group with its probably most prominent member T.S. Eliot.

One can read the essays by Yamada and Honegger together to assess Mannheim's England years, but it seems clear from the reading of both essays that the collapse of Weimar Germany was also the collapse of Mannheim's sociological project. Like many others, he experienced the betrayal of intellectuals who became part of the system. Free-floating intellectualism was not enough to save democracy. Mannheim thought that from now on, only planning could prevent worse things to happen and to save the liberal and democratic project. Mannheim in England believed that democracy is too fragile a system and stability can always turn into instability within a blink of a moment. He also realized that democratic institutions are not enough. One needs to cultivate civility and a democratic ethos, which needed to be carefully planned and constructed. Intelligent democratic leadership conquers fear through hope. But nothing should be taken for granted. Furthermore, he tried to come to terms with the question if experimentation can actually be planned. However, in *laissez-faire* England, he was considered one of the enemies of open society paving the road to serfdom. And in the USA, sociologists like Edward Shils (his actual translator) and pioneers in the American sociology of knowledge or science like Robert Merton paid tribute to his contributions, but thought his work basically useless for strengthening academic sociology, whereas more recent approaches around 'discourse analysis' hardly mention Mannheim's contribution at all. Honegger's essay concludes that what is called today 'cultural studies' cannot connect back to the 'sociology of culture' developed by Mannheim in Germany. According to Honegger, 'cultural studies' picks up on some of the themes of Mannheim's sociology of culture, but it lacks the reflexivity of Mannheim's enterprise and is caught in some dogmatic and moralizing features.

If the reader is asking at this point what is meant by reflexivity, the next essay by Amalia Barboza 'Karl Mannheim's Sociology of Self-Reflexivity' tries to provide an answer to this question. Barboza looks at Mannheim through the lenses of art and art history. She takes Mannheim's book and his lectures in Frankfurt as experiments in styles like an artist experimenting with different colours. Again we observe how methodological observations are being mixed together with approaches to styles of thinking. Barboza follows Mannheim's experimentation with different styles of thinking from his early Budapest years to the years when he studied and taught in Germany. Like others in the volume, she considers a key essay Mannheim's lecture to the Sixth German Sociological Congress in Zurich in 1928 'Competition as a Cultural Phenomenon'. Like already mentioned above, Mannheim broadened the economic concept of competition and analyzed it as one of the most basic social and cultural relations in modernity. In this lecture, Mannheim tried to come to terms with different styles of thinking and that confronting the thinking of rivals or competitors in intellectual thought is an opportunity and not a sign of crisis. This lecture opened up his reputation as an innovative thinker just before *Ideologie und Utopie* was published. For Barboza, these three essays collected in the book just emphasize the experimental character of Mannheim's thinking. But this

experimentation is not arbitrary; not a language game, but its intention is the search for clarity, or at least that is how Mannheim saw it.

Barboza follows up on the fierce criticism Mannheim encountered after the publication of his book, maybe one of the most fascinating intellectual disputes of the Weimar Republic. One key example is Robert Ernst Curtius, a professor of Romance studies in Heidelberg at the time, who accused Mannheim to be a carrier of European Nihilism trying to seduce German Youth. It was important to Curtius to emphasize the connections between sociology's rootlessness and Jews who felt attracted to it. Mannheim responds in a rather triumphant way. He considers Curtius's review as a victory of sociology in the intellectual struggle in Germany. Sociology equals modern seeing, claims Mannheim, combining socialist and bourgeois aspects. Barboza reconstructs Mannheim's 'self-defense' claiming that sociology is being constituted in Germany at a time when economy is being transferred to world-economy, when the world comes closer which causes frictions and tensions. Mannheim defends his dynamic relationism against the claim of nihilism, by arguing that his book is a method of search which believes in the solution of the crisis of being and thinking. This is Mannheim's only response to his critics, which included among others the young Hannah Arendt defending philosophy against the onslaught of a in her opinion freedom-denying sociology.

A bit later, in 1930 Mannheim was appointed to hold the chair in sociology at the University of Frankfurt. In 1930 Mannheim believed that with the publication of his book, the many reviews it received, his appointment as full professor at the University of Frankfurt, the sociology of knowledge has taken a turn to become the dominant way of sociological thinking at the time in Germany. He was right for the next five semesters. Barboza concludes her chapter with a similar sombre note which we encountered reading Claudia Honegger. His thinking did not survive the next step into exile to London.

However, the volume ends on a rather high note regarding the reputation of Karl Mannheim. Ralf Bohnsack's essay demonstrates that Mannheim is more than an interesting footnote to the canon of classical social theory, but rather an open-end process. Bohnsack has over the years developed with the help of Mannheim's work a new methodological approach called 'the documentary method'. It is the most methodological chapter in the volume, disconnects Mannheim from historical context and considers him the founder of a new sociological method, which takes the distinction between actor and observer seriously and turns this into a method of interpretation. According to Bohnsack, our knowledge of the world and of others is a document with which we communicate in the world. Weimar Germany is gone in this approach as a historical setting but has come alive in everyday life. Bohnsack is less interested in the role Mannheim plays in the history of the classics, and more in what Mannheim offers in terms methodology and epistemology. Bohnsack reads Mannheim through the eyes of Harold Garfinkel's ethno-methodological approach and the social phenomenology of Alfred Schutz. Thus for Bohnsack, Mannheim can be interpreted as mainly someone to develop a sophisticated sociological methodology, even though Mannheim did not really distinguish between methodology and political analysis.

Through Bohnsack's essay, we learn that Mannheim always taught that we do choose our subjects not arbitrarily. These are observations of a second order, which look at the same time at a phenomenon and are aware of the standpoint of the knowing subject, living in two worlds at the same time. It is therefore necessary to distinguish between the actor perspective and the observer perspective. From this it follows that a sharp distinction should be made between methodological and normative knowledge. The former is linked to the social-scientific observer perspective, whereas the latter refers to the negotiation perspectives of political actors. In a normative sense, knowledge means that every 'knower' has the right to self-determination within the context of his or her cultural and political boundaries and distinctiveness.

Methodological knowledge – the transition to what Mannheim then terms sociology of knowledge assumes this normative claim as a socio-ontological given and simultaneously links it to the most important conflict and organization orientations of society and politics. According to Bohnsack, these basic tenets have become the main perceptual grid of the social sciences. Indeed, this social-scientific stance is part of our own self-understanding, what Bohnsack calls the ‘space of conjunctive experience’.

This is how the volume ends. Reading through all ten essays one is surprised by the different readings of Karl Mannheim and the different trajectories the authors take on what his various contributions to social theory actually was. It fits the frame Mannheim opens. The volume is being held together by the editors’ introduction ‘Karl Mannheim as Interlocutor’. And the terms ‘interlocutor’ tells the story. Mannheim is read as someone who takes part in a conversation. And criticism of his approach is indeed part of the conversation. Maybe he was indeed too relativistic in his view that knowledge is socially determined, maybe too over-determined? This criticism looms large in the secondary literature on Mannheim and the editors are more than aware of it. On the other hand, they try to take Mannheim’s point seriously that we observe the world from a moving platform or from a moving staircase, constantly in flux and that there is no possibility for fixed point of view. And one can see Mannheim also as a thinker trying to establish the superiority of sociological insight as against the philosophers when it comes to knowledge. Mannheim’s attempts to reiterate a positivist idea of objectivity, after he had said that nothing of the sort could exist, have rightly irritated many of his critics. Political ideologies are never universal, they are always particular as Kettler and Meya emphasize, locating Mannheim’s views again within the crisis of absolute knowledge during Weimar Germany.

The *Anthem Companion to Karl Mannheim* is indeed a good introduction to a ‘lost’ classic of sociological theory. It contains essays by Mannheim specialists and is edited by scholars who have dedicated their professional lives to the thought of Karl Mannheim. The volume can contribute to a modest revival of this thinker and to a rethinking of the relationship between social theory and Weimar Germany. But rethinking Karl Mannheim is also a worthy exercise today. If we reflect on our situation in which we are as human beings at the beginning of the twenty-first century, then it is noticeable that two interwoven situations have become normal, yes, almost the *conditio humana* at the beginning of the twenty-first century: the everyday interweaving of the worlds, which has become the basic experience in all places of the world. It shows in everyday life, where people have to communicate with the most different worldviews; in the diversity of languages; in the variety of thought; in the diversity of religions. This everyday merging of worlds is taking place in the triumphal march of the worldwide communication media of the internet, Skype, Facebook etc. and permeates art, sciences, world religions, something Mannheim could not even start thinking about.

Both types of situations have one thing in common: the distant person is in a certain way in our midst, that is, at the same time included and excluded, at the same time distant and near, absent and present. We can only evade these new frontier situations that determine our lives by closing our eyes to them. The sociology Mannheim envisioned around 90 years ago opened up, created, methodologically rethought and reorganized the communication space that spans all borders, including seeing the world (including the pasts and futures) from the eyes of others. According to its own understanding, Mannheim’s sociological and political study of knowledge must become understandable and effective for the everyday world. It must discover the medium of language and develop it in the silent participation in the world-creating possibilities of the arts. This is incredibly difficult and can always fail because of our own prejudices.

This is exactly what makes Mannheim’s so interesting for social and political theory of modern societies: its thinking and living in terms of inclusive oppositions. It attempts to

overcome the naive universalism of early Western sociology. Mannheim's sociology is an antidote to ethnocentrism and nationalism. It should not be mistaken for multicultural euphoria. Mannheim shows us a plural world. And plurality causes resentment, a counter-reaction to the 'mixing' of culture. Mannheim called this resentment in his Frankfurt lectures of the early 1930 'reprimitivization'. In a certain sense, pluralism is actually the mixture of the cultures it absorbed – it gave them a unifying cast without negating them. This must be a provocation to those who argue that life should be simple and more primitive and contained within clear defined borders. And it was a provocation for the rivals of Mannheim in 1930 as it is a provocation today. Thus reading here through the pages, there is a bothering question: What can sociology contribute if at all to bring hope to a world trying to rid itself of plural thinking? How many different ways to live are there? Is the insight that there are many ways to live your life what it actually means to be a good sociologist?

There are, of course, no definitive answers to these questions, but we have to thank David Kettler and Volker Meja to keep the ghost of Mannheim in our midst. Intellectuals in the words of Mannheim were to 'play the part of watchmen in what otherwise would be a pitch-black night'. But there is also a warning. There is only that much that sociology can do. Just a few years after he wrote these words, Mannheim was forced out of his university position by the Nazi regime or if to paraphrase a famous Nazi cliché: 'Whenever I hear the world culture, I reach for my gun'.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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