

ON A DISCUSSION ABOUT RACKETS THAT WAS NOT HEARD BUT SHOULD BE

Thorsten Fuchshuber, *Rackets. Kritische Theorie der Bandenherrschaft (Freiburg im Breisgau: ça ira, 2019)*, 672 p. ISBN 9783862591459

*DENNIS: You're fooling yourself. We're living in a dictatorship. [...]
A self-perpetuating autocracy in which the working classes...
WOMAN: Oh there you go, bringing class into it again.
DENNIS: That's what it's all about if only people would...*

Monty Python and the Holy Grail, Scene 3¹

I

In this scene from their take on the legend of the holy grail in which King Arthur stumbles upon a medieval anarcho-syndicalist commune which schools the baffled sovereign on the fragility of his legitimacy, while still having internal debates, the British comedians ingeniously mock the many discussions on the left (which they obviously knew quite well) on the question of class in the 20th century.

If not reified by official Marxism-Leninism, for which the notion of class was more a propaganda phrase than anything else, insecurity and attempts to gloss over this insecurity prevailed. Class was something that was brought “into it again” when attempts towards a critique of society were discussed, but at the same time the unwillingness or inability of the actual proletariat to act according to its supposed role as revolutionary subject could not entirely be ignored. This transformed the notion of class from a means toward understanding modern society and sharpening its critique into a shibboleth to demonstrate one’s correct, revolutionary political stance. In turn, this hollowness of the notion was of course noticed, leading to the rather irritated moan by (not only) Monty Python’s nameless woman who had heard the same sermon time and again.

¹ *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* script (online at montycasinos.com/montypython/grailmm1.php.html [accessed April 15, 2021]).

Even the most advanced of the endeavors in the first half of the century to retain Marx's critique of society by renewing it did not dare to scratch the halo of class and kept their teleological optimism that, one way or another, the proletariat would act as the subject-object of history, becoming the last class and abolishing domination and exploitation forever. For the early Georg Lukács, the proletariat should be able, thanks to its position at the levers of production, to lift the veil of the fetishizations of the commodity form. And even for Karl Korsch, who tried to apply Marx's critical materialism on Marx's critique itself, thereby keeping the latter up to date, never posed the question as to what repercussions the changes in society have had on the notion of class.

This has made inquiries into this subject (and a more pessimistic assessment of the situation, as were formulated by the Frankfurt Institute of Social Research around Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Löwenthal, and Friedrich Pollock) a *bête noire* for most theoreticians. Their work, especially Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, is often considered as a turning point at which this current abandoned Marxism, started to ignore the questions of class and class struggle, and shifted their philosophy to a more abstract, more anthropological level. Perhaps the most pointed expression of this charge was Lukács's famous condemnation of the group of critical theoreticians as dwelling in the "Grand Hotel Abyss," relishing in an aesthetic cultural pessimism and in the decadent joys of a declining society while ignoring social struggles.

It is not the least merit of Fuchshuber's book that it rectifies this perception by revisiting and reconstructing Critical Theory's attempt to formulate a theory of the rule of rackets. The word "racket," most probably originating in the ganglands of cities in the USA around 1900, simply designates a gang or a close-knit group of criminals, mainly blackmailers. Closely connected to the world of "mafia," these groups are Janus-faced: on the one hand, they are agents of physical violence and force, while, on the other, they fulfil a social and charitable function, forming the notorious "family." To get an impression of the meaning of "racket," it is perhaps a good idea to think of all the movies and series this constellation has spawned.

Of course, the Institute's deliberations on the topic dig deeper, while taking up these developments. In a nutshell, the concept of the racket reflects what happens to class relations and to liberal bourgeois society, whose mode of domination is an abstract one that does not depend on direct personal rule, when all elements of social mediation like law, the free market, or even the psychological ego and its reflective thought lose their function, and with this, the mode of domination is re-personalized and direct violence re-emerges. This theory of the racket has always, as Fuchshuber points out, been conceptualized as a "contribution to a contemporaneous theory of class, as *critique of class*."² (27) Quoting Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, he describes Horkheimer's goal to "twist himself free of the myth of the revolutionary subject, without falling behind a

² As Fuchshuber's book is only available in German, all translations are mine, FR.

critique of political economy into an illusionary critique of culture” (27). As a finalized version of this theory never saw the light of day, Fuchshuber takes up the task of collecting the bits and pieces and fragments that can be found all over the work of Critical Theory’s main protagonists, as well as in the archives, to put them into context and to review them critically, resulting in a contribution towards a critique of class theory in post-liberal society.

In recent times, the diagnosis of a crisis of the rule of law and of liberal state institutions has rekindled an interest in this analysis. For example, the renowned scholar of the history of Critical Theory, Martin Jay, underscored in an interview on the exiled Institute for Social Research the importance of the rediscovery of the notion of the racket: “Only recently acknowledged, their suggestive, but ultimately abandoned conceptualization of ‘racket society’ as a model to explain the rise of fascism should also be mentioned.” In the same interview, he also referred to Fuchshuber’s book and the potential of the racket relation for the analysis of present-day developments: “In Germany, a massive new book by Thorsten Fuchshuber [...] is devoted to their analysis, and I tried to apply some of its lessons to our current situation in a piece this past April called ‘Trump, Scorsese and the Frankfurt School’s Theory of Racket Society,’ in the *Los Angeles Review of Books*.”³ Before scrutinizing Jay’s attempts to apply these lessons, a discussion of the book’s content is necessary.

II

Fuchshuber distinguishes in his project two distinct but connected approaches to the theory of the racket: an historical one (the development of the discussions on the topic) and a more systematic one (what the elements of the theory are, how they are connected, where possible flaws can be criticized).

He begins the historical part of his work by reviewing the prehistory of the notion of the racket in the first third of the 20th century in the USA. These discussions formed the background of the Institute-in-Exile’s attempts to conceptualize contemporaneous social relations. Fuchshuber underscores that, in these discussions, two strands could be distinguished: one aiming at the monopolization of capital and the establishment of networks within trusts, the other aiming at trade unions, which resorted to non-legal means in class struggle and thereby became entangled in the criminal underworld.

But these American discussions were only one of the sources of Critical Theory’s discussion of rackets. In his following chapter, Fuchshuber traces elements of this discussion further back still, especially focusing on the experiences of members of the Institute at the end of the First World War and during the Weimar Republic. The author emphasizes how Horkheimer, in his early belletristic work, which mainly describes situations

³ The National WWII Museum New Orleans, “Critical Theory, the Institute for Social Research, and American Exile: An Interview with Martin Jay, PhD,” Dec. 11, 2020 (online at nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/social-research-american-exile-martin-jay-phd [accessed June 17, 2021]).

during the end of the war, already points to central themes of the later racket theory: the growing impotence of the individual against collectives which is enhanced by the disappearance of an – at least partial – social sphere and the drive to directly identify with state and nation, as well as antisemitism. Fuchshuber also points out the role of the German *Freikorps*, nationalist militias who were on the one hand allied to the social democrat government to repress worker's unrest but on the other gave rise to a wave of terrorism and extra-legal violence against the new republic, which can be taken as the first rackets that the Institute encountered. Their contribution to the destabilization of the republic and the rise of Nazism cannot be underestimated. At the same time, early studies in the social psychology of the working class, starting at the beginning of the 1930s, showed that some of the ideological elements of authoritarianism, like the identification with the nation or a glorification of sacrifice, were not limited to traditionally bourgeois circles. The institute, by then already in exile in New York, tried to analyze the reasons – psychological as well as economic – for the sweeping success of Nazism. Fuchshuber also follows these discussions, especially the well-known dispute between Franz Neumann and Friedrich Pollock whether or to which degree national socialism can be considered to be a capitalist social formation. Unlike other studies, this book underscores the common ground of both attempts and that one of the results was the realization of the need for a comprehensive critique of society. This critique, in Horkheimer's mind, should be a collaborative study which focuses on a theory of rackets. Given the widespread interpretation of the "anthropological turn" of Critical Theory, Fuchshuber underscores that much of what was later to be known as the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* had been studies that should be completed by economic aspects of the development. Summing up one of Horkheimer's letters to Adorno, Fuchshuber explains:

That he [Horkheimer] wants to conceptualize a 'sociology of the racket' and that he understands this as a study in economy, gives a first impression of the fact that Horkheimer grasps the theory of the racket in the first place as a sociology of class relations which has to reflect the changed relations within the classes themselves as well as the mode of socialization beyond the abolished instances of mediation; a task with which he does not want to burden only Adorno and himself. (223)

The central chapter on the history of the theory of rackets is dedicated to the drafting process of this research project and its failure. In a detailed discussion of hitherto unpublished drafts and memos on this project, Fuchshuber can show how deeply indebted these theoretical attempts are to Marx's critique of political economy. Firstly, in the sense that the question of the role of the proletariat is posed again:

It becomes clear that the perspective of the research questions formulated [in these drafts] aim towards a how and why of the supposed increasing integration of the proletariat into the society of the value-form under the aspect of its change

due to centralization, concentration, and finally monopolization of the capitalist mode of production. (230)

But perhaps more importantly, Fuchshuber also emphasizes that this project was intended as a social critique, as opposed to formal sociology. He can show how important it was in the endeavors of Horkheimer and his collaborators to also include a critique of sociological theories of elites á la Vilfredo Pareto or Robert Michels, which see the formation of rackets or elites as a superhistorical fact, as an “iron law of oligarchy” (244). Rackets are not seen as an external force corrupting liberal society, but as stemming from it. Connected to this, the drafts also show attempts to explore the possibility of “anti-rackets”: organizations that can resist the trend towards the racket. “Counted towards this intransigent opposition are, according to the notes, for example, the anarcho-syndicalist trade union the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), a not more clearly defined Russian opposition and even the SPD [the German Social Democrats].” (245) Given the rest of the notes, the authors must have had a very special current within the SPD in mind in order to add them to this opposition, as they highlight the form of the council as one of the possibilities to resist the rackets, while the majority of the SPD in power suppressed and disenfranchised the more autonomous expressions of the council movement during the revolution of 1918.

A direct quote from the draft shows what liberating potential the Institute saw in the councils:

The councils as the only institution so far known to dispose of the rackets and prevent their regeneration. Democracy = a society without rackets, without a ruling class, and hence equal opportunity [English in the original] for every human being. When there are rackets, democracy becomes a mere illusion, because they enforce a privileged, that is ruling, class and therefore exclude equal opportunity. (246)

Also in the Spanish Civil War, obviously in the anarcho-syndicalist and left socialist movement, “real forms of an anti-racket, not only in politics, but also in the arts etc.” (251) are, a bit cryptically, detected by the authors.

However, the drafted project never came to fruition. Fuchshuber describes the reasons for its failure, saying that, on the one hand, due to doubts about the whole thrust of the project, some of the intended authors, like Henryk Grossmann, did not deliver their contributions while, on the other, the main drivers of the theory, Horkheimer and Adorno, started to consider a theory of antisemitism the more urgent task, given that Europe was then becoming engulfed by barbarism at a new level. This endeavor resulted most obviously in the *Elements of Antisemitism* as a central part of their collective work, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. It is noteworthy, however, that other parts of this book were already drafted while they were still working on their theory of rackets, showing how closely connected these strands of thought were.

III

After recounting the history of the development of the theory of rackets, Fuchshuber turns to the attempt at connecting the different parts of the theoretical fragments. From the outset, he claims that this systematic reconstruction is not identical to Critical Theory's take on the subject, but rather amplifies it. He identifies four aspects under which the material is scrutinized: the relation of racket theory to the critique of political economy, its significance for a theory of the subject within a racket, its significance for a critique of law and the state, and for a critique of antisemitism.

At first, Fuchshuber discusses the thesis that, due to the progressive concentration of capital, the role of the market and individuals on the market changes. The market, in classical liberalism, understood as an instance of mediation, loses this function tendentially, individuals have to realize their powerlessness, and rackets emerge. This does not mean that liberal society is glorified in hindsight or that Marx's critique can be considered obsolete:

It is not the pivotal question whether the categories of a critique of political economy are still valid, but asking for the consequences for the theory and practice of social critique, when bourgeois society loses, as part of its self-suspension, all its emancipatory elements, all moments that could transcend. (320)

In this context, however, Fuchshuber criticizes what he sees as a certain Leninism of Horkheimer's, who did not develop a clearer theory of the relation of economic and political form, as the different means this economic tendency expresses itself in different countries are not discussed.

One of the most pivotal points is the discussion of Horkheimer's interpretation of the part that is called in some English translations of Marx's *Capital* "primitive accumulation."⁴ He points out that the actual thrust of it gets lost if the full German title is ignored: "Die sogenannte ursprüngliche Akkumulation," "the so-called primitive accumulation." Marx not only describes here the bloody genesis of capital relations by the dissolution of feudal ties, with his appellation of the phenomenon he also mocks the liberal illusion that, after some violence at the beginning, the course of capital accumulation is smooth and can renounce all violence. As rackets are characterized as perpetrators of violence, Horkheimer takes up this Marxian notion and emphasizes

this critique, polemically formulated by Marx, of the [psychological] suppression of violence as an act of suppression which is constitutive for bourgeois society

⁴ E.g., Karl Marx, *Capital*, (online at marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch26.htm [accessed April 24, 2021]). Other translations do not omit the adjective "so-called," e. g., Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), p. 871.

[...] and wants to retain, systematically and not only polemically, the notion of the 'primitive accumulation' as central for the analysis of capital relation. (330)

This way, violence may be explained as an integral element in the process of capital accumulation. While sublimated as long as capital accumulates without problems in metaphorical fair weather, during crises of capital accumulation, violence comes again to the fore, this time in a modernized form. As society is still not rationally organized, it is still prehistory and archaic moments emerge.

These changes in the social structure also congeal in the psyche of the individual in form of the experience of being interchangeable and virtually superfluous, resulting in conformism and the internalization of authority:

More precisely, the ego retains those qualities which enable the individual to conform dominating (irrational) rationality and reduce it to absolute functionality [...]. This regressive ego molds the social monad to an unconditional, flexible subject without subject (Adorno), turns it into a manager of itself. (385)

At the same time, the suffering that comes along with the permanent molding process is projected in an act of authoritarian rebellion as hate towards outgroups.

Before Fuchshuber discusses this projection in its most toxic form, antisemitism, he revisits the changing function of law and sovereignty in the racket society. Conforming to Franz Neumann's observation on the change of the function of law in modern society, Horkheimer notes a decline in the mediating role and the relative autonomy of law:

The limited, formal and negative generality of law under liberalism not only makes possible capitalistic calculability but also guarantees a minimum of liberty, since formal liberty has two aspects and makes available at least legal chances to the weak. [...] Under monopolistic capitalism, private property in the means of production as the characteristic institution of the entire bourgeois epoch, is preserved, but general law and contract disappear and are replaced by individual measures on the part of the sovereign.⁵

This begs the question of what this means for the role of the sovereign.

While Neumann finds an answer to Nazism by seeing this social formation as a *Behemoth*, a non-state and, in this sense, a society of rackets par excellence (leaving open however the question of what kept this formation together), Fuchshuber again

⁵ Franz Neumann, "The Change in the Function of Law in Modern Society," in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State. Essays in Political and Legal Theory* (New York: Free Press, 1964), pp. 22–68, here 66.

finds fault with Horkheimer's pure economic approach that, in its generality, lacks the power to differentiate between different sovereigns:

But the similarities and differences of the National Socialist order, of 'integral' Soviet statism and the democracy of the New Deal are never determined and developed by Horkheimer and his collaborators. Thus, it is never clearly discerned whether the process analyzed by the theory of rackets in the case of a concrete society indeed terminates in the dissolution of sovereignty, as in the case of National Socialism, or whether it is retained, this social tendency notwithstanding. (471)

Fuchshuber continues his argument by stating that the main force that keeps the centrifugal society of rackets together is antisemitism, even if the

nexus of antisemitism and racket is inevitable. However, a moment similar to pathological paranoia is essential to antisemitism. This moment is strengthened and radicalized by the racket society's basic structure, which is paranoid as well: devoid of all instances of mediation, it only knows of the opposition of in and out, a not at all qualified determinant of friend and enemy. (477)

But, while the victim may be interchangeable in the sense that antisemitism has more to do with the psychological needs of the antisemite and his or her projections on the object of his hate, which can also be attached to another object, for example, Freemasons or Gypsies, in order to form a racket, Fuchshuber notes that historically in Nazism and currently in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as he adds⁶ antisemitism not only unifies the racket, but enables it to gain political unity and a new political quality.

This systematic reconstruction of the theory of the racket is followed by a discussion of its place within a critical theory of society. For Fuchshuber, it is an attempt to con-

⁶ It is lamentable, that Fuchshuber does not elaborate this point in his book in greater detail. While discussions of Putin's Russia and Somalia at the end of the book attempt to concretize the categories of racket theory, the Islamic Republic of Iran is only mentioned incidentally. Some hints on the differences between non-statal rackets and a racket state in a comparison of the Islamic State with the Islamic Republic of Iran can be found in his article (in German). See Thorsten Fuchshuber, "Im permanenten Ausnahmezustand," *Jungle World*, Jan. 7, 2016 (online at jungle.world/artikel/2016/01/im-permanenten-ausnahmezustand [accessed June 17, 2021]). For a discussion of this issue in English see the article on rackets in the SAGE Handbook: Gerhard Scheit, "Rackets," in Beverly Best, Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane (eds.): *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory* (London: SAGE Publications, 2018), pp 1551-1566, here 1561. A more detailed analysis of the role of antisemitism within the Iranian regime can be found in Stephan Grigat, "Adorno and Iran: Critical Theory and Islamic Antisemitism," in *fathom* Autumn 2020 (online at fathomjournal.org/fathom-long-read-adorno-and-iran-critical-theory-and-islamic-antisemitism [accessed June 17, 2021]).

ceptualize the post-liberal society, which retains the hope that naming the misery helps to overcome it. The author also discusses the reasons why, after the Second World War, the theory of rackets faded into obscurity. With the end of Nazism and Stalinism and the formation of the Western and Eastern Blocs, Critical Theory developed a thesis of the administered world which conceptualizes a less barbaric post-liberal society while still containing elements of the older theory, such as the internalization of authority. In this context it is noteworthy that the first book that again took up Critical Theory's idea of the racket, Wolfgang Pohrt's *Brothers in Crime*,⁷ was published in the 1990s, and can be seen as a reaction to the changed situation which brought the social contradictions, muzzled or, at least in parts of the world, muffled during the Cold War, into motion again.

IV

This very condensed and yet lengthy synopsis might be doing an injustice to many aspects of the book, as these would merit a closer discussion, but the fact that it is surely the most comprehensive publication on this topic which heretofore has only been available in German make this lengthy account seem appropriate, especially since, as noted above, recent attempts have been made to understand current social phenomena through the categories found in the theory of rackets.

Martin Jay's already mentioned piece, *Trump, Scorsese, and the Frankfurt School's Theory of Racket Society*,⁸ is, while being a noteworthy attempt, however, rife with misunderstandings. The general thrust of the piece, interpreting Trump's role as that of a racketeer, undoubtedly has its merits. One could even add that the sway that Trump holds over the GOP by non-formal means, even after losing the election, underscores this analysis. But regarding the theory itself, Jay is afraid that Critical Theory's critique could play into the wrong hands. Citing the infamous example of Jimmy Hoffa, he states that while this demonstrates that unions "could certainly be corrupted, it would have been unfair to consider all of them nascent rackets, a dangerous exaggeration that played into the hands of union-busting propagandists."⁹ Hopefully, it has become clear in this review that Horkheimer and his collaborators were hoping to find anti-rackets as well and named the Industrial Workers of the World and similar council communist or anarcho-syndicalist movements as examples. But they knew very well that the problem is less one of individual moral failure than of social relations which make conformism and irrational behavior within an irrational organized society the rational thing to do.

⁷ The very recommendable book has been recently re-published in the framework of Pohrt's Collected Works: Wolfgang Pohrt, *Brothers in Crime. Die Menschen im Zeitalter ihrer Überflüssigkeit* (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 2021).

⁸ Martin Jay, "Trump, Scorsese, and the Frankfurt School's Theory of Racket Society," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, April 5, 2020 (online at lareviewofbooks.org/article/trump-scorsese-and-the-frankfurt-schools-theory-of-racket-society/ [accessed April 25, 2021]).

⁹ *Ibid.*

Also, Jay's final assessment of the theory of rackets is worth a closer look:

The Frankfurt School's 'racket society' analysis, to be sure, faltered when it sought to explain the rise of fascism. Not only did it underestimate the force of ideological motivations, but it also too ambitiously suggested that an epochal page had been turned in the history of global capitalism. Its melodramatic characterization of the labor movement as having to choose between world revolution and corrupt rackets was insultingly dismissive of other honorable alternatives that allowed many workers to be on the side of progressive, non-revolutionary politics while choosing non-venal leaders.¹⁰

Following Fuchshuber's argument, it can be said that exactly the opposite is the case: attempts to understand the rise of fascism formed the core of the theory. Also, the question of ideology has to be posed in a different way. As the society of rackets eliminates all instances in liberal society that had the potential to transcend it, the role of ideology changes. No one is seriously arguing anymore (or at least believing the argument) that the way things are in current society will result in the realization of freedom and equality for all of its members. This teleological historical optimism, which can still be found with the 19th-century liberals, that in the long run everyone will profit, has degenerated into the fairy tale of a "trickle-down-effect" that hardly anyone believes in any more. That daily competition has its victims is known to all; a lesson often learnt the hard way. Wolfgang Pohrt's book mentioned above defined this society thusly: "A racket means that humans act towards their second nature, to society, as if it was the first."¹¹ That, by the loss of all transcendent moments, ideology is potentiated was also clear to Critical Theory when its proponents discussed the latest form of ideology:

If one were to compress within one sentence what the ideology of mass culture actually adds up to, one would have to represent this as a parody of the injunction: 'Become that which thou art:' as the exaggerated duplication and justification of already existing conditions, and the deprivation of all transcendence and all critique.¹²

This "faithless faith in pure existence"¹³ is not a lack of ideology, but its apogee.

Also, Jay's problematic notion of corruption being the main problem has already been mentioned. But his faith in "progressive, non-revolutionary politics," while con-

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Pohrt, *Brothers*, p. 85. My translation, FR.

¹² The Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, "Ideology," in *Aspects of Sociology* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973), pp. 182–205, here 202.

¹³ *Ibid.*

genial, might have to do with a misconception due to a mistranslation. In his text, he quotes Horkheimer:

Horkheimer had written ‘the historical course of the proletariat leads to a turning point: it can become a class or a racket. Racket means privileges within national borders, class means world revolution. The Führer has taken the choice away from the proletariat: they have chosen the racket.’¹⁴

But in the German original it does not read “der Führer” (being of course Hitler), but “die Führer” in plural form, meaning the functionaries of the labor movement themselves decided in favor of national politics and thus for the transformation into a racket among others struggling for a piece of the cake of surplus value. While the fragment bears the title *A History of American Labor*,¹⁵ the same, if not a stronger verdict could be delivered on the majority faction of German social democracy during the First World War and after. Horkheimer and his collaborators knew well enough where this decision leads to, and this, as can be shown with Fuchshuber, was the incentive to formulate the theory of rackets in the first place.

Apart from Jay’s critique of the theory of rackets, it is surprising that, with all the attempts to anchor the theory of rackets in Marx’s critique of political economy, up to now no one has ever mentioned that Marx himself already noted some early forms of gangs and rackets in which some elements, such as the internalization of authority and a certain informality while isolating the individual worker, can already be discerned. In his study of the agricultural proletariat in England, Marx describes the gang system that prevailed in the 19th-century English countryside:

At the head of the gang is the gang-master, always an ordinary agricultural labourer, and usually what is called a bad lot, a rake, unsteady, drunken, but with a dash of enterprise and *savoir-faire*. He is the recruiting-sergeant for the gang, which works under him, not under the farmer. He generally negotiates with the latter over piece-work, and his income, which on the average is not very much above that of an ordinary agricultural labourer, depends almost entirely upon the dexterity with which he manages to extract the greatest possible amount of labour from his gang within the shortest time.¹⁶

If this sounds a bit like a mixture of modern subcontracted labor and the gig economy, it might not be so much coincidence as it might reflect the currency of the racket theory,

¹⁴ Jay, “Trump, Scorsese.”

¹⁵ Max Horkheimer, “Geschichte der amerikanischen Arbeiterschaft,” in *Nachgelassene Schriften 1931–1949. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 12 (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1985), p. 260.

¹⁶ Marx, *Capital*, p. 851.

as do contemporary discourses of self-optimization, which can be seen as a modernized version of the psychology of the subject in a racket. For a necessary further discussion, Fuchshuber's book certainly forms a new basis.

One might critically add that one aspect of the theory of rackets, which is especially discussed in Horkheimer's letters, is only mentioned marginally in Fuchshuber's book: academia and universities as rackets themselves, with their own rituals of initiation, conformism, and mechanisms of exclusion. But as the book stems from a dissertation, that is, one of those self-same rituals, this is only too understandable. Similarly, some repetitions within the text, owing to a structure which scrutinizes first the historical development of the discussion of the theory and then systematizes the content of the theory, can be easily overlooked.

In summary, the theory of rackets, to which the present book is a contribution that sets a new standard, is a way of uncovering how archaic moments are still in force in today's society and how domination in an ever-changing guise is perpetuated. Until this state of the affairs is abolished, one feels the urge to chime in with Monty Python's Dennis (cut short by his sovereign King Arthur): "That's what it's all about if only people would..."

Florian Ruttner