

Towards a moral university: critical theory, social justice and a commitment to the vicissitudes of human fate

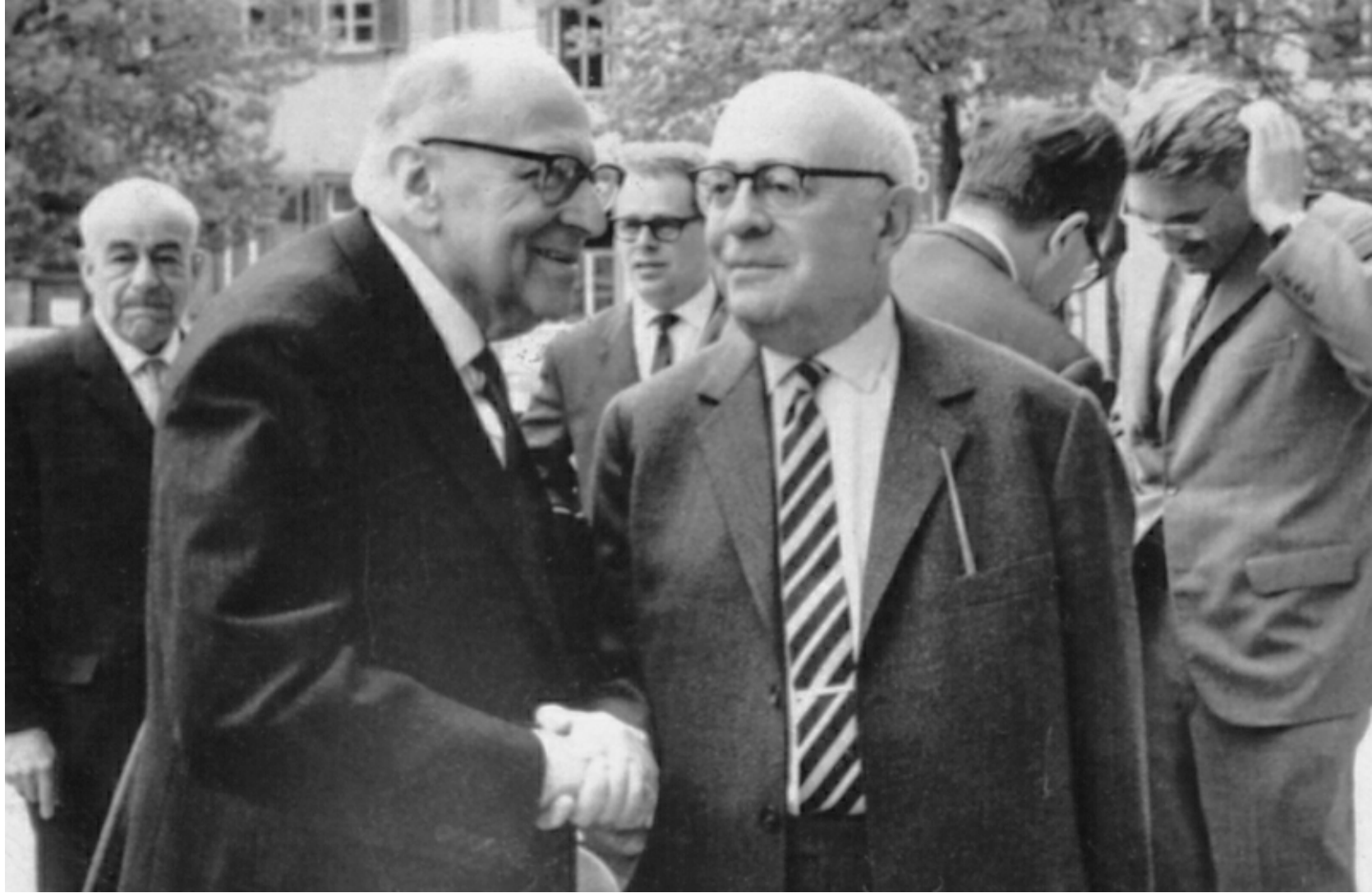
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@JanMcArthur

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How do we research and understand greater social justice from within a society (university/HE sector) that is unjust?



Münchhausen

O. Herrfurth pinx

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‘the passive acceptance of what is merely the case’

Adorno, 2001, p. 121

The Old Is
Dying and
the New
Cannot
Be Born

Nancy
Fraser





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Perspective

Critical theory and critical pedagogy

Exile, Sanctuary and Diaspora (McArthur, 2011, 2013)

EXILE – outside the mainstream, positive and negative

SANCTUARY – safe, but not necessarily comfortable

DIASPORA – multiple senses of belonging, potential safety

Robbins Report 1963

Panoramic perspective on higher education

Evidence-based

Careful research into so-called “pool of ability”

‘All those qualified by ability and attainment – ‘



“We think that in any properly co-ordinated system of higher education the academic grading of individuals should depend upon their academic accomplishment rather than upon the status of the institution in which they have studied”

Robbins Report, p. 8

“We are well aware that there are limits to the realisation of this principle, and that the status accorded by the world to a degree from an institution of long standing and established reputation may well be higher than the status of a degree earned in an examination of comparable severity in an institution of more recent foundation. This is in the nature of things.”

Robbins Report, p. 8

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it must be recognised that within these various categories it is inevitable that some institutions will be more eminent than others. It is in the nature of things that talent should attract talent and that where famous intellectual exploits take place, there should develop some concentration of staff and students especially interested in the subjects concerned. Moreover, such concentrations are not only probable but also desirable.

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The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research

1931

McArthur, 2019, Towards a moral university:
Horkheimer's commitment to the "vicissitudes of
human fate", Philosophy and Theory in Higher
Education 1(3)

John Wyatt – Commitment to Higher Education, 1990





Institute for Social Research (Frankfurt School)

Privately funded

Outside traditional German university
system

Director – Chair at University of Frankfurt

Marxism and Freud

Exile



Institute for Social Research (Frankfurt School)

Social Philosophy – broadly understood

Challenge to prevailing pathologies and distortions in western capitalist society

Wiggershaus (1994) describes Horkheimer as ‘acting from the conviction that he was the bearer of a revolutionary message’. (P. 39)

Possibilities beyond the apparent inevitability of current arrangements

Timing



The Present Situation of Social Philosophy and the Tasks of an Institute for Social Research

An institution of higher education with a
specific, central, all-encompassing
commitment to social justice



Its ultimate aim is the philosophical interpretation of the vicissitudes of human fate – the fate of humans not as mere individuals, however, but as members of a community. It is thus above all concerned with phenomena that can only be understood in the context of human social life: with the state, law, economy, religion – in short, with the entire material and intellectual culture of humanity

Horkheimer, 1993, p. 1

Towards a moral university

Community: the social nature of human experience

Interconnections: relations between the economic and social

Complexity: nature of knowledge and critical interdisciplinarity

Change: a commitment to emancipation and social justice

Community: the social nature of human experience

Community: the social nature of human experience

“The destiny of the particular is fulfilled in the fate of the universal; the essence or substantive form of the individual manifests itself not in its personal acts, but in the life of the whole to which it belongs”

(pp. 2-3)

Dialectical relationship between individual and social

Challenges public/private dichotomy

Solidarity

Community: the social nature of human experience

Not a feel good idea of community

Pathologies and distortions

Neoliberalism emphasis on unfettered individual action

Eg. Use of League Tables and other metrics of performance

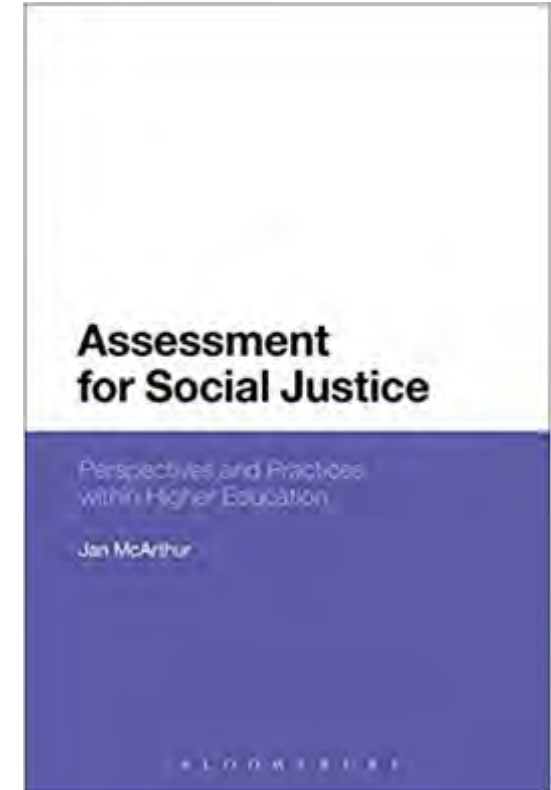
Them and Us culture

Community: the social nature of human experience

Assessment for Social Justice (McArthur 2016, 2018)

Contrast between social nature of learning and individualized and competitive assessment

Achievement – mark or grade, employability, contribution to the social whole?



Community: the social nature of human experience

Eg, Trust and Honesty

Growth in plagiarism detection *industry*

Distrust on an industrial scale

Necessary de-personalisation



Interconnections: relations between the economic and social

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Horkheimer conceives the foundational philosophical problem as the connection between:

“the economic life of society, the psychical development of individuals, and the changes in the realm of culture ...(to which belong not only the so-called intellectual elements, such as science, arts, and religion, but also law, customs, fashion, public opinion, sports, leisure, activities, lifestyle, etc).”

(p.11)

Interconnections: relations between the economic and social

Tease this quote apart:

Economic sphere

Personal development of individuals

Society as a whole

All three in mission statements across the neo-liberal university sector

Disarticulated social and economic (individual and social)

Horkeheimer – it is the combination – dialectically related

Interconnections: relations between the economic and social

Neoliberalism – narrow economic perspective

Horkheimer – one foot in and one foot outside Marxism

Economic sphere – more than powerful, wealthy, big business or government

Not about producing a compliant workforce for vested economic interests

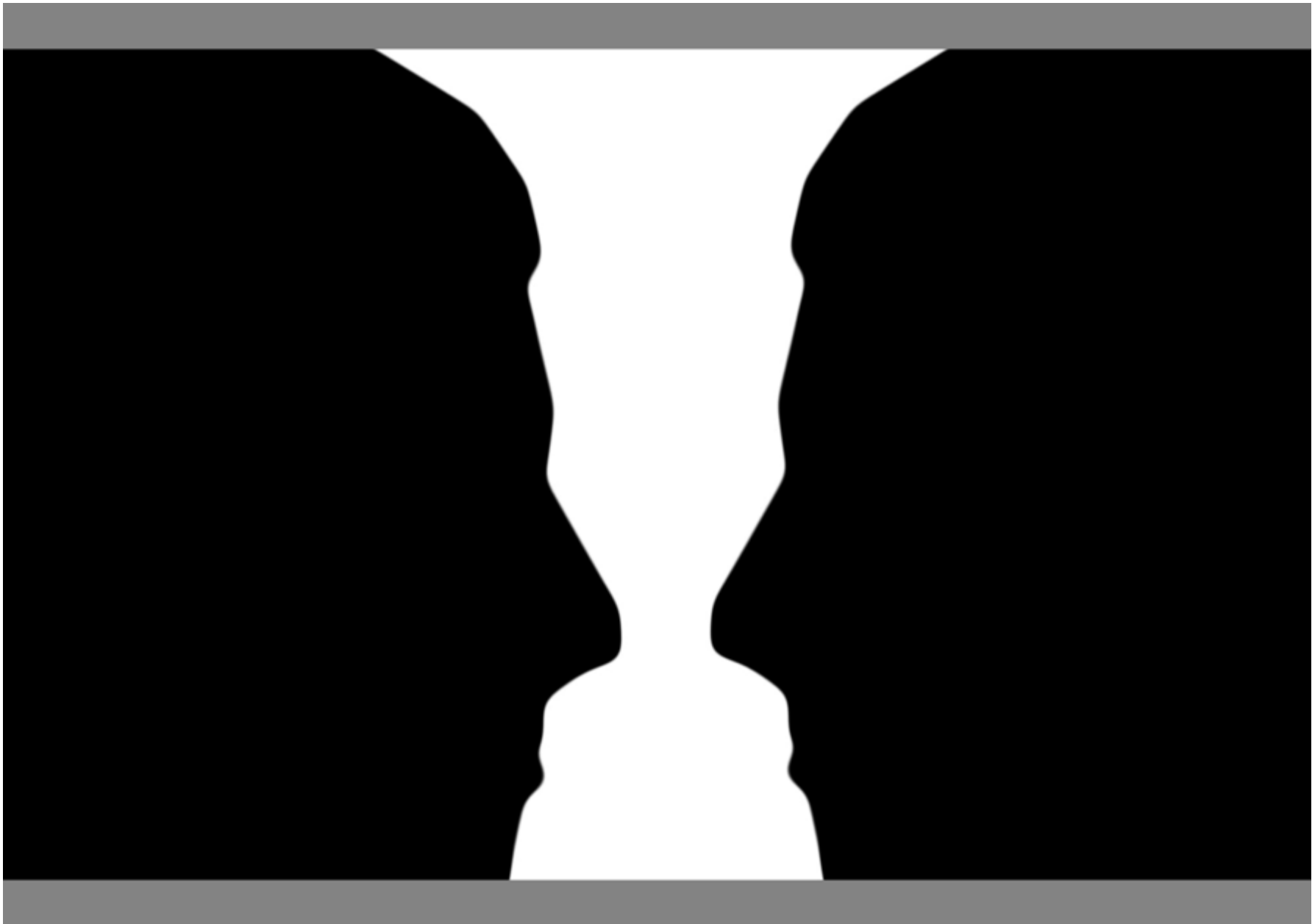
Interconnections: relations between the economic and social

Civic-minded professionals

Carolyn Kreber, *Educating for Civic-mindedness*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016)

Melanie Walker and Monica McLean, *Professional Education, Capabilities and the Public Good*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015)

Assessment for Social Justice: Honneth and mutual recognition, esp esteem recognition



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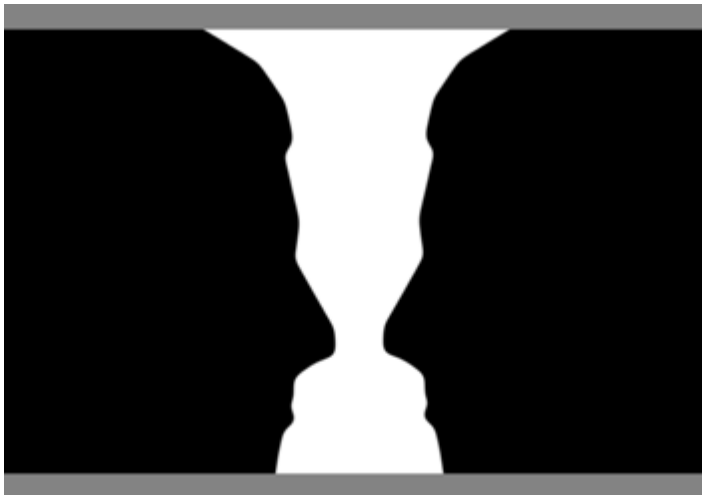


Higher education – both inside and outside society

Inside – commitment to social whole

Outside – beyond prevailing privilege and power

Robbins Report – more than expanding
or diversifying the sector



Complexity: nature of knowledge and critical interdisciplinarity

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Horkheimer - social philosophy and the social sciences; philosophical and empirical enquiry:

“the question today is to organize investigations stimulated by contemporary philosophical problems in which philosophers, sociologists, economists, historians, and psychologists are brought together in permanent collaboration” p. 9

Complexity: nature of knowledge and critical interdisciplinarity

Radical interdisciplinarity

1. challenging and novel compared with entrenched silos
2. pursued for radical ends – harnessing interdisciplinary knowledge for social transformation

Can extrapolate to natural sciences

Complexity: nature of knowledge and critical interdisciplinarity

Thus what is meant by Horkheimer's radical interdisciplinarity is not simply two disciplines working together.

It is the injection into every research and teaching process of this moral imperative to connect with the nature and consequences of human suffering

Such radical interdisciplinarity is thus a way of life, rather than an occasional activity.

Complexity: nature of knowledge and critical interdisciplinarity

Chemistry

Tack on a bit of social philosophy

Look for common ground

Must also be understood as realms of human, historical activity (unlike Biglan's classification)

Its purpose must relate to the furthering of human wellbeing, in its many different forms

Change: a commitment to
emancipation and social justice

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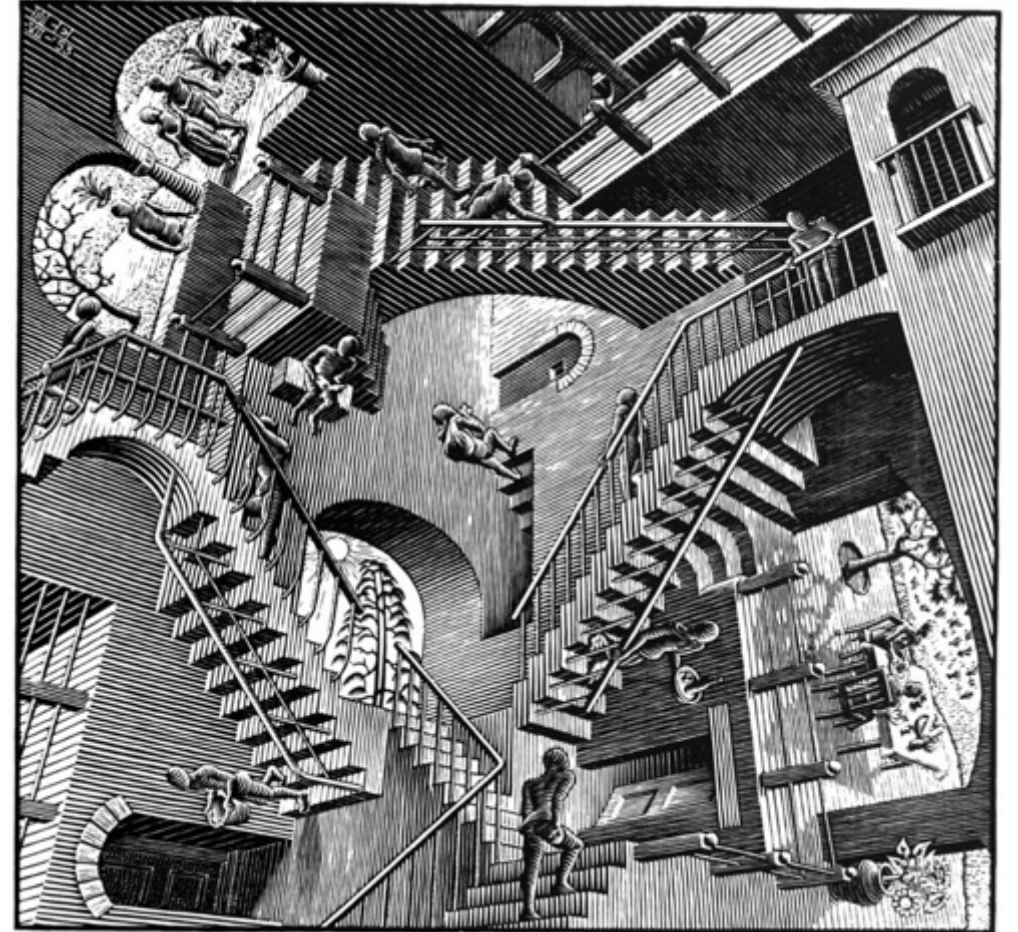
Horkheimer

– mission to challenge and disrupt

Irony of neoliberalism

Rise in risk aversion

Change – in support of status-quo



Change: a commitment to emancipation and social justice

Existing research - anomalous with other pressures driving financial competition in the sector

In the moral university these issues

- including their philosophical consideration
- move to centre stage across the disciplines

Change becomes a way of intellectual life as the challenge of ensuring individual and social wellbeing is never a finished product



Change: a commitment to emancipation and social justice

Current emphasis on impact and use of metrics

What has been done differently as a result of this research?

Horkheimer - what *should* be done differently as a result of this research?

Any notion of impact severed from its moral purposes will be necessarily limited and abridged

Conclusions

May the guiding impulse in this Institute be the
indomitable will unswervingly to serve the
truth!

Pursuit of truth

Unfinished

Moral acts, values and dispositions

Why moral?

An antidote to neo-liberalism

1. Lack of moral core
2. No excuse for inaction
3. Nuanced but not relativist

Moral University

Think differently about how and why we engage in scholarly work

This is a process built on a multitude of critical moments and actions

It is thus about deeply personal beliefs and practices, and shared social commitments

Critical, compassionate and creative ideas across all disciplines, and for the wellbeing of all in society



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