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NOSTALGIA FOR A
redeemed future



JOHN CABOT UNIVERSITY PRESS

NOSTALGIA FOR A REDEEMED FUTURE: CRITICAL THEORY

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Preface

▪ When Adorno died in 1969, in an interview published by *Der Spiegel* Horkheimer summarized his lifetime friend's philosophy as "nostalgia for total otherness."¹ Although we could argue extensively on the exact meaning of this sentence – whether it had, as in the late, Schopenhauerian idea of Horkheimer, a semi-theological sense meaning of the infinite, or whether it was a materialist call for remembering the non-identity of nature – it still portrayed quite accurately the original spirit of critical theory: a dialectical theory of the disenchantment of the world from the spell of ideology and reification. In choosing this title, first for the conference held at John Cabot University in April 2007 and then for this publication, I thought that the notion of nostalgia for a redeemed future still addressed very well both the main task of critical theory and its relevance in today's society. On one hand, in fact, this idea describes the melancholic ascertainment that the promise of the Enlightenment of freedom and autonomy has been betrayed, that we constantly live under the permanent threat of a global catastrophe. On the other hand, it also remarks the fact that we can still envision a new form of "progress" without falling into mere ideology.

"All reification is forgetting," Adorno and Horkheimer wrote in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and for this reason one of the main tasks of philosophy is to remember nature, the realm of non-identity that has been petrified in a rigidly self-identical "second nature." A redeemed future, the not-yet-existing, is then "dreamed of in remembrance, which alone concretizes utopia without betraying it to existence.³ It is art, as Marcuse shows, that can offer us the best example of how this apparently contradictory experience can occur. As a nostalgia for the yet-to-exist, the mimesis through which artworks are created form some type of memory: "In this remembrance, art has recognized what is and what could be, within and beyond the social conditions. Art has rescued this knowledge from the sphere of abstract concept and embedded it in the realm of sensuousness."⁴ Art provides a model of a possible consciousness of the non-identical, since in art "Spirit" finally "does not identify the nonidentical: It identifies with it."⁵ As a *memento mori*, it reminds us that, in the fetishlike world of commodities, our "life does not live,"⁶ therefore

becoming a *memento vivere*, remembrance of our own non-identity. Yet, art is not the conclusive answer to the reified world. It is our strongest remedy against the ideology of domination, the basis for a counter-consciousness which alone can lead a praxis of pacification. The redeemed future, then, does not have the nihilistic features that haunt the mere desire for an afterlife, nor it is deterministically created by an idealistic conception of totality, where “the totum is the totem.”⁷ But neither can it cannot be either found in the our present life on earth, in the “fullness” of life as it is; that would once again perpetuate domination or, at most, satisfy the demands of destructive commodities’ consumption. The fulfillment of life is increasingly identified today in the fulfillment of coarse “commercials”; art’s promise of happiness has been replaced by the fake happiness promised by merchandises. The authentic future of redemption lies in the respect of the non-identity of nature, and not in the “fetishes” created by an ideology of domination: “The absolute however, as it hovers before metaphysics, would be the non-identical, which would only emerge until after the identity-compulsion dissolved.”⁸

The other, deliberate intention of both the conference and this publication is to stress the relevance to the present of the early stages of critical theory. This intention has a dual value. On one hand it aims at the recognition of the fundamental role played by such authors as Benjamin, Bloch and Lukács in the shaping of critical theory. On the other hand, it wants to reaffirm the fundamental importance of the works of the first philosophers of the Frankfurt School (and in particular Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse) against the sometime hasty consideration of their work as outdated. At the same time, this does not imply by any means a subsequent devaluation of the later stages of critical theory (and in particular of Habermas’ theory of communicative action); at most it wants to show the feasibility of alternative developments of the original spirit of critical theory, since one of the peculiarities of this approach is precisely to avoid the creation of a fixed philosophical “system.”

The common belief of the writers of the articles here proposed is that critical theory is an invaluable tool for analyzing our reality and, at the same time, for proposing an alternative to the dominant model of economic and political control. This does not mean, though, that we all share the same perspective on how to build this alternative. The anti-systematic approach of critical theory prevents us from developing a

static interpretative model. We rather need to establish a dialogue through which where our perspectives can be constantly questioned, and through which where our shared critique of reality can be reinforced by the exchange of new ideas since, if we are to follow Adorno's idea, the only truth we can affirm is the falsity of the whole.

The purpose of this publication is to promulgate the ideas developed during the first conference at John Cabot University, as a part of a broader project of establishing an international center for studies on critical theory. In order to reflect the wide range of topics addressed by critical theory, each article focuses on specific social, political and aesthetic issues. I tried to organize the interventions according to three main themes, which are accordingly proposed here. In the first part of the book we are presenting those interventions that address theoretical issues in Adorno, on some specific concepts such as "domination" (Stefano Petrucciani), "subjectivity" (Stefano Giacchetti Ludovisi), "criticism" (Francesco Saverio Trincia), "normativity" (Fabian Freyenhagen), "autonomy" (Brian O'Connor), "metaphysics" (Samir Gandesha) and "political environment" (Adrian Wilding). The second part addresses more practical issues related to critical theory, such as "technology" (Andrew Feenberg), "immigration" (David Ingram), "constitution" (Giovani Agostini Saavedra), "antisemitism" (Marcel Stoetzler), "Shoah" (Raffaella Di Castro) and "technocratization" (Maialen Galarraga). The last part of the book addresses various elements first in Benjamin's aesthetics first – and in particular "Hamlet's melancholy" (Andrew Cutrofello), "the afterlife of an artwork" (Brunella Antomarini), "aura" (Adam Berg) and "allegory" (Dana Johnson) – and then in Adorno, on the topics of "autonomy" (Andy Hamilton) and "emancipation" (Wojciech Malecki).

I would like here to thank John Cabot University for making this publication (and previously the conference) possible, and in particular President Franco Pavoncello for his support. I would also like to express all my gratitude to my colleagues Brunella Antomarini, Lucia Aiello and David Miller for their indispensable collaboration and contribution. Special thanks special thank goes also to David Ingram, Andrew Cutrofello and Andrew Feenberg for all their support throughout the conference and this publication. I obviously need to thank all the speakers of the conference whose articles are included in this book, but also Max Pensky, Lea Dovev, Christian Nilsson and Lorenzo Fabbri for their par-

ticipation in thisthat event. Lastly, allow me to thank Francesca Marini, Chiara Santoro, Antonio De Giorgis and all my students for their help in Rome, and Tamara and Nina Bolyn for their support in San Diego.

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John Cabot University
Rome, January 2008

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- 1 This interview was later on developed in a small publication, *Die Sehnsucht nach dem ganz Anderen*.
 - 2 M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Tr. J.Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 191.
 - 3 T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, Tr. C. Lenhardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1975), p. 132.
 - 4 H. Marcuse, *The Aesthetic Dimension* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), p.67.
 - 5 T.W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, op.cit., p. 134.
 - 6 Opening quote of *Minima Moralia* from Kürnberger.
 - 7 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Tr. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 172.
 - 8 *Ibid*, p.186.

The concept of domination in Adorno's Critical Theory

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▪ In Adorno's thought, and more in general in the Frankfurt School's thought, the concept of "domination" (*Herrschaft*) assumes a central role during the late '30s and early '40s, in the period within which Adorno and Horkheimer wrote *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. They renewed this concept for a very simple reason: the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and the Soviet state invalidate the Marxist attempt to approach the topic of domination in terms of "class". On the one hand, one does not understand how to interpret the Soviet case, in which it is especially hard to talk about a class-domination or to detect which class holds power. On the other hand, both cases prove, especially according to Max Horkheimer's and Friedrich Pollock's interpretation, that an immediate and direct pattern of domination substitutes for the capitalistic-liberal pattern of domination, which is mediated by the exchange relationship. It is about a historical dynamic that clearly seems to contradict the expectations formulated by the Marxist perspective. If domination continues even in a planned economy (which should have characterized the "rational society" called for by Critical Theory during the '30s), then the weakness of the interpretation of domination in terms of class-relationship seems clear. Therefore, the topic must be inquired into more deeply: it is not about generalizing the capitalistic phase of class-domination, as Marx did in the *Manifesto*, in order to formulate the thesis that all history is marked by class-domination. It is about, rather, putting the liberal-capitalistic pattern of domination in a broader framework, where the liberal-capitalistic phase becomes just an occurrence, just one of many possible patterns experienced in the continuity of domination. Domination, thus, must be understood as a framework that marks the history of human beings since primitive tribes up to the Nazi tragedy.

It is necessary in order to focus on the characteristics of this new reflection upon the theme of domination that I concentrate myself on three essential theoretical passages: firstly, I will deal with the more systematic text, that is *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; then, I will analyse Adorno's text, written down in 1942, the posthumous *Reflections on the Theory of Class*; and, finally, I will deal with Adorno's last reflections upon this topic both in *Negative*

Dialectics (and in the courses in which Adorno illustrates it to the students) and in the long introduction with which he preceded the publication of texts about the dialogue between dialectical theorists and Popperian ones (*Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Sociologie*).

1. The concept of domination in Dialectic of Enlightenment

The inquiry which the authors of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* carry out is guided by a fundamental assumption, which Adorno and Horkheimer have never called into question, that is domination is a constant characteristic of the history of human beings. Although this is a fundamental assumption that Adorno and Horkheimer ceaselessly repeat, one cannot say that they define with accuracy the concept of domination. A rough definition of domination is found within the part of *Studies on Authority and the Family*, the great collective inquiry of the Institute for Social Research published in 1936, written by Horkheimer. It might also be said that the content of the concept of domination is summed up in such an expression: "The majority of men have always worked under the leadership and command of a minority, and this dependence has always found expression in a more wretched kind of material existence for them"¹. Adorno similarly talks about this concept in *Reflections on the Theory of Class*: "Hierarchy has always been a coercive organization of appropriation of other people's work"².

Keeping these references in mind, one might affirm that, from a perspective strongly influenced by Marxism, social domination is apprehended by the Frankfurt School authors as the material and symbolic privilege of a minority, based on the appropriation of surplus labour of the vast majority of the population. Such an appropriation is maintained both through immediate coercion, from which it is impossible to abstract, and through the recognition that domination obtains because of a wide range of reasons, among which the real social function that domination and hierarchy carry out within a social system and the positive idealization that they benefit from thanks to the dynamics of false consciousness and ideology.

But, which are the roots of this structure which has characterized, as a bitter Leitmotiv, all the history of human society? In which terms does

one pose Adorno's and Horkheimer's answer to the old question about the origin of inequality among human beings?

If we follow *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, it seems that a rather clear answer emerges. For Adorno and Horkheimer, who strongly rely on Marx's and Freud's lesson, human beings act as such through domination, mediated by work, over nature and through tool-making; but, work organization, even in its elementary pattern, presupposes obedience to social norms, which in turn imply, as Freud taught in *Civilization and Its Discontent*, the repression of the strongest human drives, both of the sexual ones and the aggressive ones (that is of the drives that Freud interpreted as instantiations of the concept of "death instinct"). Therefore, obedience to social norms presupposes that everyone acquires the ability to dominate their own internal nature, their own emotional drives. Nevertheless, this is possible insofar as society establishes itself from the start as a domination-order, where the ruling class, who fill the higher positions in a hierarchy, forces the dominated, through various patterns of subjugation, to work and discipline. Civilization, therefore, is based on a kind of circular process of domination: social domination, that is domination by a privileged minority over an oppressed majority, serves to dictate that order of work and instinctual sacrifice, in virtue of which humankind frees itself from the natural subjugation and learns to dominate nature and to square it to its own aims. Social domination, domination over external and internal nature constitute a fatal circle, where each moment depends on the other ones and, at the same time, strengthens and supports them.

This general framework specifies and enriches itself with other reflections, which help to highlight further the fundamental aspects of the issue.

a) A first theme of great importance must be immediately focused on: the central connection between domination understood in terms of privilege and power and the social division of labour. Furthermore, within the social division of labour, a fundamental importance is assumed by the issue of the separation of intellectual functions from material labour. There is domination, insofar as, within the overall organism of social labour that guarantees the material reproduction of society, the organizational, hierarchical, intellectual functions separate themselves from the manual, executive and directly productive

aspects. The division between intellectual and manual labour, that is, as Bourdieu said, the monopolization of cultural capital, is an aspect of the social process that cannot be separated from domination, because the former, for Adorno and Horkheimer, is condition of possibility of the latter.

- b)** There is an other aspect of domination, however, that is ceaselessly emphasized by Adorno's and Horkheimer's texts: if it is true that in the history of society power relationships are always in place, then it is also true that the subsistence and the stability of these relationships cannot be explained as long as we fail to understand the dual role played by such relationships. On the one hand, they have guaranteed the survival of privilege; on the other hand and simultaneously, they have guaranteed the permanence and the reproduction of the social totality. Therefore, one might say, by adopting categories from philosophical language, that in power relationships the moment of universality and the one of particularity are deeply interwoven: as Horkheimer writes, "through whole ages of history, subordination was in the interests of those who were ruled, as is the subordination of a child who receives a good education. It was a condition for the development of mankind's capabilities. But even at such times as dependence was doubtless suitable in view of the state of human powers and of the instruments at men's disposal, it has up to now brought renunciations with it for those who were dependent"³.

In the same manner, such issue emerges in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and in some later Adorno's writings. One might say that domination is, at the same time, both the necessary moment in the social reproduction and the privilege, based on coercion, of a minority. It is universality and particularity, guarantee of the social totality and imposition of a partial privilege. Both aspects cannot be easily separated, since they are strictly interwoven and conjoined. It is not easy to say to what extent one might distinguish socially necessary authority from privilege and overwhelming power⁴.

- c)** Both aspects that we have previously mentioned - namely, on the one hand, the connection between domination and separation of intellectual labour from manual one, and, on the other hand, the strict link between the social function of domination and privilege - are the basis of those ideologies that enhance the sacred and natural character,

the necessity, the eternity of the social hierarchy; ideologies that are a necessary aspect for the stability of domination. They are devised by the dominant strata, which inculcate the dominated with them thanks to the link between social hierarchy and the monopolization of intellectual functions.

But, why are these ideologies accepted? Why are not social norms as such understood (that is as operational rules historically determined and contingent), but become taboos striking terror into the dominated, a form of divine commandments, natural frameworks that cannot be called into question? Why does power become sacred? Why do the patterns by which it rules over society become dehistoricized?

The theory of domination developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* strictly relates to a theory of ideology, that Adorno and Horkheimer carry out by making use of Marxian, Freudian, Durkheimian elements. The Marxian moment is the thesis, according to which the ideological and reversed way in which human beings represent their social life depends on the pattern that this social life acquires. As we can read in *Lectures of Sociology*, the social structure generates, by way of its pattern, "an ideological reversal of great importance: the secondary element becomes the first one for men that live under the reign of that institution and remove to a large extent from their consciousness the first truth, that is the real vital process". "The constitution of society became accessible to thought that started reflecting upon the social life as something of so substantial and self-standing, so incontrovertible and in force that before their content – the vital process of humankind – the reflection of society was identified with the consideration of its reified institutions. The veil of social mystification is as old as political philosophy"⁵.

Essentially, what Adorno is saying is that the social structures and the institutions of domination, that are able to reproduce themselves thanks to the work of human beings, are apprehended by human beings themselves, to the extent they remain objects and not subjects, as the first moment of the social hierarchy, as what assures the permanence of the social totality and toward which it is necessary to be submissive. The institutions of domination do not appear to everyone (from those more archaic to those more developed, e. g. the State, the property, the class-inequality) as what they actually are, moments of a determinate social totality; they rather are reified, fetishlike, not transformable state of things.

In this way, however, the Durkheimian perspective is taken up and transformed as well: while Durkheim thought that religion derives from the dependence of men on the social totality, for Adorno and Horkheimer this point must be clarified. This dependence on a social totality is established according to hierarchy and domination: "It is this unity of the collectivity and domination, and not direct social universality, solidarity, which is expressed in thought forms"⁶. But, the power of the ideological representations of the social reality, would be not understandable unless Freud and his theory of civilization based on the repression of the drives enter the scene: the individuals develop a contradictory emotional attitude because of the pressure of an authority that, from one standpoint, incorporates the repressive factor, whereas from another standpoint, it assures protection and sustenance; the repressed drives, the destructiveness, the rebellion against authority are projected outside the individuals, and attributed, in a paranoiac way, to hostile powers, according to the mechanism of the creation of a threatening Otherness, which each time assumes a different shape (the evil spirits, the devil, the witches, the Jews). The subjects, devoid of this hostile part, can then identify in a passive-masochistic way with the superior and overpowering authority, obtaining an offsetting satisfaction. The more the subjects express this hostility in socially accepted ways, namely not against oppressive authority but against Otherness, which is hated, but, at the same time, privately loved; the better they obtain this offsetting satisfaction. Only by way of a sophisticated psychological analysis, as Freud does, the paradox of an overpowering authority that does not generate rebellion, but passive identification and hostility to all what seems to call it into question, becomes understandable and explainable.

2. The question concerning domination in Reflections on the Theory of Class

Adorno's text of 1942 expounds a belief not different from the one expounded in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. But the manner is more provocative, less ambiguous. While Marx applied the concept of "class", that he noticed in the capitalistic system, to all history (putting forward an "empirically" questionable argument, but polemically effective) for Adorno the crisis of liberal capitalism makes necessary an overcoming of the Marxian conception of domination, or at least a deep revision of it. In Marx's analysis, which refers to a liberal and competitive capital-

ism, class-domination seems to reproduce itself as if it were an unintentional effect, always regenerated by the exchange between capital and labour. But the question in Adorno's thought is that society, as it has historically existed, has never worked in accordance with such a model. In addition, this model was overcome during the age, dating from the great crisis of 1929, of the authoritarian or interventionist States. The new primacy of politics over the economy also sheds light on the past and invites to drop "economism" and to interpret economic dynamics in terms of struggle of power between groups, elites, or, as Adorno says later, between gangs and rackets.

The success achieved by certain groups in the competitive struggle, for instance, depends, in great measure, on extra-economic factors: "depends on the power of capital – accumulated outside the competitive mechanism – with which they enter the competition, on social and political power, on the old and new conquistadorial prey, on the alliance with the feudal property, that the competitive economy never destroyed completely, on the relation to the immediate apparatus of military power"⁷⁷. Basically, it is about reversing the perspective, in light of which Marxism often thought: neither class-domination is explainable only through the exchange between capital and labour (inquired into by Marx in its dual nature as both unequal exchange and exploitation), nor the ruling-class is a simple instrument of the economic mechanism, something that is bound by its laws. Rather, it is true that property-relationships and power-relationships pre-existed capitalism. Although they then reproduce themselves by using the capitalistic mechanisms, as soon as capitalism is no longer adequate to the preservation of domination they downgrade it: "The laws of exchange did not lead to the current domination as historically adequate form of reproduction of the whole society, but somehow the old domination went deep into the economic apparatus in order to eliminate it and to make its own life easier, once it took full control over it. History is history of monopolies in accordance with the model that is successful in the last economic phase. In accordance with the model of the evident appropriation that today is worked out in agreement by the managers and the trade unions leaders, history is the history of gangs and rackets"⁷⁸.

The extra-economic factors, which in Marx's theory appear as mere external variables or as mere circumstances that modify the laws of motion of capital, Adorno writes, "have a extra-territorial position com-

pared to the system of political economy, but central position with regard to the history of domination”; “[...] the ruling-class is not only dominated by the system, dominates through the system and, finally, dominate it”⁹. Adorno, by thinking about the totalitarian experience and the seize of power by criminal gangs or powerful elites, proposes, therefore, an anti-economistic and anti-deterministic interpretation of power-relationships, that is far from the traditional Marxist vision because it outlines, in a more stressed way, the role of the dominant strata’s political-strategic subjectivity, and the contingency of power-relationships that each time are in force. This revision of traditional Marxism has, according to my view, an affinity with the theses that Immanuel Wallerstein, one of the most important contemporary theoreticians of global capitalism, has been assuming for many years. Wallerstein analyses a model of capitalism, the so-called “historical capitalism”, that is in many aspects distinct from the one considered by Marx. In a precious book, he claims that historical capitalism is the instrument by which the old pre-capitalistic ruling-classes overcame the crisis which jeopardized the social hierarchy at the end of the medieval age. In this manner, these pre-capitalistic ruling classes built up the stability of their domination again: “it certainly seems to have been the case that the creation of historical capitalism as a social system dramatically reversed a trend that the upper strata feared, and established in its place one that served their interests even better”¹⁰.

3. The topic of domination in Adorno’s later writings

Just in *Negative Dialectics*, and in the related lectures, Adorno’s anti-deterministic and anti-economistic perspective gives rise to an explicit criticism of Marx’s thought. While in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* power-relationships were still considered as necessary (condition of possibility of civilization and, at the same time, a burden rested on it), in the reflections of the ’60s this point is definitely called into question and the rational and interpretive perspective of Marxism is thrown in crisis as well. Whether or not domination has been an absolute historical necessity – Adorno says in his lecture on history¹¹ talking about the topics of the Chapter “World Spirit and Natural History” of *Negative Dialectics* – is an issue that must be left open. Marx derived social antagonism from economic necessity. The consequence was that an overcoming of social antagonism could be implied just by an overcoming of economic necessity. But, in this way, Marx built up a conception of historical evolution far

too idealistic because excessively influenced by logical necessity. But, for Adorno it is necessary to contemplate other possible explanations, among which the possibility that social domination is the outcome of a contingent development or even that it is a sort of natural heritage, which human history continues to perpetuate: "It is not idle to speculate whether antagonism was inherited in the origin of the human society as a principle of a *homo homini lupus*, a piece of a prolonged natural history, or it is evolved thesei, and even if evolved, it followed from the necessities of survival of the species and not contingently, as it were, from archaic arbitrary acts of seizing power"¹².

In the lectures, Adorno is even more explicit about these problems: to the thesis that domination arose as a response to scarcity Adorno objects that "economic relationships and economic antagonism are the product of an original domination". There is originally the will to dominate, the first usurpation, and not scarcity to generate an oppressive and hierarchical structure as the unique one suitable to ensure the preservation of humankind. Marx's choice to give economy the primacy over domination would have been motivated by the political confrontation with the anarchists as well. Those who, says Adorno, at Marx's time ascribed the primacy to domination were on the side of anarchists¹³. But, according to his later writings, the issue of primacy must remain open and even the possibility that domination is the result of an "irrational catastrophe" at the beginning of history, something like the "original sin"¹⁴ described by the mythical-religious accounts, cannot be ruled out. Of course, a theory that poses the catastrophe as explanation principle of history would not satisfy the criteria for a proper theory, because to explain something by referring to an "irrational catastrophe" is tantamount to not explaining it at all. But, apart from this paradox, - and the moment of the "paradox" always plays in Adorno a great role - what is important is to outline the insights and the demands that Adorno's reflection contains and especially the belief that hierarchy and domination are not an obvious fact, but the most difficult problem for a theory that aims to be critical.

1 M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, trans. M. J. O'Connell et. al. (New York: Herder and Herder, 1974), p. 68.

2 Th. W. Adorno, *Scritti sociologici*, trans. A. Marietti Solmi (Torino: Einaudi, 1976), p. 331.

3 M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, p. 70.

4 See on this point Adorno's Introduction to the *Positivismusstreit*: "Perhaps, in primitive societies, the lack of food necessitates organizational modes of constraint which recur in situa-

tions of scarcity in supposedly mature societies where such situations are caused by the relations of production and are consequently unnecessary. The question which comes first, the socially necessary separation of physical and mental labour or the usurpatory privilege of the medicine man resembles the debate over the chicken and the egg. In any case, the shaman requires ideology and without him it would not be possible" (Th. W. Adorno et. al., *The Positivism Dispute in German Sociology*, trans. Glyn Adey and David Frisby, Heinemann, London 1976, p. 64).

- 5 We are quoting from Institut für Sozialforschung, *Soziologische Exkurse*, hrsg. von M. Horkheimer e Th. W. Adorno, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt a. M. 1956; Italian edition *Lezioni di sociologia*, trans. by Alessandro Mazzzone, Einaudi, Torino 1966 (republished more times), respectively, p. 33 e p. 30. See what Adorno also says in *Scritti sociologici*, p. 11: "If one considers the fact that the prominent social processes and institutions arose out of human processes, that are objectivated labour of living human beings, the autonomy of these prominent forces also has the character of an ideology, of a socially necessary appearance, which should be understood and changed. But such appearance is for the immediate life of human beings the *ens realissimum*".
- 6 Th. W. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming, (Verso, London 1997), p. 22.
- 7 Th. W. Adorno, *Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie*, in *Soziologische Schriften I*, (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), pp. 373-391; Italian edition *Riflessioni sulla teoria delle classi*, in *Scritti sociologici*, pp. 331-349, 336.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 338-339.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 343.
- 10 Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism with Capitalist Civilization*, (London: Verso, 1995), p. 43.
- 11 T. W. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), pp. 77-80. On this point see *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton, (London-New York; Routledge, 1970), pp. 321-322 and *Scritti sociologici*, p. 309.
- 12 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Tr. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973), p. 321.
- 13 T. W. Adorno, *Zur Lehre*, p. 80.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 81.

The Over-Bourgeois and the Dissolution of Subjectivity: Adorno as Nietzsche's Scholar

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- The relationship between Adorno and Nietzsche has been thoroughly discussed by a broad array of philosophical literature, with results that usually oscillate between open condemnation (in those cases where a more rigorous Marxist interpretation of Adorno is supported) and approval (especially by those who highlight Adorno's critique of rationality). It is Adorno himself though who, in a lecture given in 1963, openly admitted the indissoluble link between his philosophy and Nietzsche's. "Of all the so-called great philosophers I owe Nietzsche by far the greatest debt – more even than to Hegel."

Throughout Adorno's work we can find both praises and sharp critiques to his supposed greatest teacher, and this ambiguity is caused on one side by Adorno's difficult relationship with contemporary Marxism, and on another side by his misinterpretation of some Nietzschean categories. If it is true that Adorno will never be able to fully free himself from Lukács' political interpretation of Nietzsche, so that he will only partially recognize the extreme closeness of his conclusions to the ones of Nietzsche, this should mainly be ascribed to his attempt to adhere to the common program of the Frankfurt School and his fear of being accused of "anti-Marxism." This is particularly evident in the interpretation of Nietzsche as it is proposed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Here the greatest merit of Nietzsche is seen in his identification of reason and domination and his correspondent "critique of ideology," but Nietzsche's mistake was individuated in his attempt to "idealistically" count on the "superior I" for the overcoming of ideology. Adorno's interpretation of Nietzsche becomes more conciliatory in his later works where, in particular, he recognizes the extreme importance of Nietzsche's conclusions in esthetics. In this respect, Adorno's interpretation seems definitely influenced not by Lukács, but by Ernst Bloch, and in particular by his *Spirit of Utopia*. In this work Bloch refuses Lukács' idea that the tragic hero was able to reach the merging of existence and significance, necessity and realization,³ only through death, since this meant to condemn the idea of utopia – the union of "character and destiny" to be achieved by Nietzsche's

Übermensch – to mere esthetics.⁴ Such convergence could in fact never occur in actuality, but only in art, “on stage.” According to Bloch, instead, the death of the hero should not have any transcendental value, of positing the authentic affirmation of life beyond life itself, but it should be considered as “encounter with the obstacle (Hemmnisbegegnung),”⁵ as “a sort of doctrine of karma, according to which every life can burden itself with sense and become homogeneous on an immanent level.”⁶ In this way Bloch affirms a materialistically immanent spirit of utopia, which is transcendent of social reification and not of concrete existence. Following this scheme, the interpretation of Nietzsche is accordingly modified from Lukács’ perspective. As Bloch affirms in *The Principle of Hope*:

*The Dionysian, too, is utopian. Precisely Nietzsche, with his Dionysus-Apollo antithesis, gave new utopian life to the tension between sensual pleasure and peace of soul, which had become philistine and commonplace. And he gave it, not to the frenzy, as a glowing fermentation, but against his will also to the Apollonian light, because this contains the conquered Dionysus within it; both have to be worked on, both are incomplete.*⁷

This is the interpretation of Nietzsche that Adorno considers as the most valid,⁸ even in its “Hegelian” conclusions. What in fact Bloch thought was still missing in Nietzsche was the dialectical consideration of the two elements embodied in Dionysus and Apollo which should have led to their “sublation,” to a “Dionysian determined in an Apollonian manner” and an “Apollonian which preserves the whole Dionysian content.”⁹ For Adorno, this lack of dialectical insight prevents Nietzsche from opening his philosophy of non-identity to the revolutionary content it has; in his destruction of the notion of truth Nietzsche correctly dissolves the traditional role of the subject, whether individual or social, but then still considers the outcome of the perennial struggle between Dionysus and Apollo as the result of arbitrary acts. In other words, both for Adorno and Bloch, Nietzsche refers to the perennial tension between non-identity and reification, but then instead of proposing only a “permanent” dialectical relationship between these elements, instead of considering them only as completely interdependent, he creates two opposite principles that can always be unilaterally affirmed. Once again, it is Bloch that gives a description of this situation: “In all, it is clear that Dionysus and Apollo are far from being grasped in sufficiently processual, processual-utopian terms. They are, like all earlier and similar antitheses, reified.”¹⁰

This inconsistency in Nietzsche's thought, the fact that he does not allow the existence of any absolute principle and yet Dionysus and Apollo end up having these features, was partially solved by Nietzsche himself, since they are considered as "impulses," and therefore they are not external principles that acts "upon" humans; they are rather an immanent principle that acts "in" humans. At the same time, as "impulses," they are not absolute principles, but they are always dependent on the variety of all the other impulses. Most likely Adorno and Bloch would have answered to this type of interpretation that Nietzsche's inconsistency still depends on the failed recognition of the social character of the "utopian process." According to Adorno, although the choice of any value or principle is not made by the traditional subject – in its various definition of transcendental I, spirit, soul or identity – in Nietzsche this is still an act of an isolated individual.

This is the point where Adorno's and Bloch's interpretation of Nietzsche did not fully develop the potentiality of the conception of *Übermensch*, or where at least they were not willing to "forgive" Nietzsche's provocative arbitrariness. If, on one hand, they were able to overcome Lukács' interpretation of Nietzsche in order to restore its utopian potential, on the other hand they still were considering the affirmation of the *Übermensch* as the affirmation of an individualistic principle. This is the reason why Adorno is unable to solve the inconsistency in Nietzsche's exaltation of "noble" values. If in fact Adorno recognizes that "a positive morality – he would not have called it morality – cannot possibly exist in Nietzsche because of the absence of a substantive, objective spirit," then he also concludes that

having proceeded in a summary fashion, he came up with a positive morality that is really nothing more than the negative mirror-image of the morality he repudiated. Whereas in reality this very attempt on the part of a lone individual to set up in new norms and new commandments based simply on his own subjective whim implies their impotence, their arbitrary and adventitious nature from the very outset. The ideals [Nietzsche] has in mind – nobility [Vornehmheit], real freedom, the virtue of generosity, distance – all these are wonderful values in themselves, but in an un-free society they are not capable of fulfillment, or at best can only be realized on Sunday afternoons, that is, in private life. [...] For what Nietzsche means by man, and what he celebrates as Superman – and it's not for nothing that the latter is based on the model of the appalling and barbaric condottiere Cesare Borgia – would be the go-getter or captain of industry today."

Yet, it is possible to correct this interpretation of Nietzsche by bringing his notion of *Übermensch* to its extreme consequences. The “captains of industry today” are, even in the extremely rare cases when they are actually able of rejecting all the values, “lions,” (using Zarathustra’s terminology) but not the Nietzschean “children.” The reason for the impossibility of their individual, isolated affirmation is clearly recognized by Adorno:

because they control the labour of others, even those who rule are too implicated in the general catastrophe to be able to afford this nobility. If a prominent businessman were seriously to attempt to be as noble as Nietzsche postulates – and not merely as an aesthetic gesture – he would undoubtedly go bankrupt.¹²

Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* cannot be the man of the past, the bourgeois individual, nor live in a society where self-preservation is reduced to blind domination, since this would imply a state of repression towards some “inferior” being, whether it be another human or nature in general, which would unavoidably turn into self-repression. The *Übermensch* is not a concrete, existing figure, but a utopian perspective.

The identification of reason and domination is not affirmed by Nietzsche as an “eternal truth,” but as the outcome of the prevailing of Apollo over Dionysus, to which he does not oppose a unilateral affirmation of Dionysus, of an “irrational” paradigm of pure intuitions, but a different, “poetic” rationality (as he calls it in *The Gay Science*) that counterbalances the domination implied in knowledge with the other, repressed, characteristic of knowledge, its creative force. Bloch was the first one, among the area of influence of Critical Theory, to understand the dual character of Nietzsche’s conception of power, but he still considered it as a dual “essence,” which could be chosen arbitrarily by the subject. He does not see how this “choosing subject” is actually considered by Nietzsche as already the outcome of the prevailing of just one polarity, as the identity created by “scientific” rationality. Adorno substantially accepts this interpretation of Nietzsche and does not recognize the affinity of their paths. For Adorno, as for Nietzsche, each human act, both as “intellectual work” (“creation of metaphors”) and as “manual work” (technical intervention on nature) is an artificial fabrication, the creation of a “second nature.” Reification occurs when humans start to perceive these “artifices” as fetishes, as having a life of their own, when they become – in Nietzsche’s terms – “true.” Capitalism ratifies this tendency into a “law,” but the fetish character of commodities can be already found in concepts.

An alternative to reification, the model for a type of relation which can be established between humans and this necessary creation of "appearance," is developed by Nietzsche and Adorno in the analogous concept of "dream" and "exact fantasy." Adorno shares Nietzsche's evaluation of dreams as a moment in which humans relate directly with their impulses, rather than through the mediation of all the pre-constructed values and norms, as a moment of liberation from ideology. At the same time dreams also involve a non-identifying moment of subjectivity, which dissolves its static identity, since it constructs reality according to a principle of absolute fantasy. But Adorno does not adopt the concept of "dream" because it could be misleading, since it can be understood merely as an unreal moment of separation from reality, exposing Nietzsche's theory to the risk of appearing as "a thought which permanently puts down aerial roots."¹³ In order to maintain the dialectical connotation of dreams, and affirm its application in concrete reality, Adorno developed the contradictory concept of "exact fantasy"; a permanently original arrangement of the objects in theory and praxis which is exact, "objective," since it is immanent to the object, rooted in impulses.

In theory as in praxis, the "exact imagination" has to be created by a subject that is not appropriative and that finally recognizes its social, and not individualistic, nature. Only through the dissolution of the bourgeois subject it is possible to achieve a "pacification of nature," that is, a form of praxis which is not finalized to the "appropriation" of the other, to the reduction of nature into commodity. The model of how "exact imagination" should work can be found in art, since it relates to the product of human activity as semblance, and therefore it cannot be properly possessed by the subject. Art not only represents a positive model for redemption, but it also contains the melancholic perception that, in our society based on reification, in the *Unwesen*, the existence of art witnesses not only the incompleteness of pacification, but also the fact that there will be art as long as "life does not live," until our life will find its meaning beyond individual egoism, in a non-reified social totality. This acknowledgement is at the same time extremely melancholic, because such identification of existence and significance is a chimera for our individual life, and infinitely joyful, since we can transform it in an endless project of fulfillment for a new humanity.

Nietzsche asked in *The Gay Science*: "Who would still dare to undertake projects that would require thousands of years for their completion?"¹⁴

The only answer is: a new human species which is finally species, which considers self-preservation in its non-distorted, social meaning, and which can “eternalize” its individual existence in order to face this task. This “eternalization” of existence cannot be achieved in an inexistent after-life, as the principle of individual identity postulates, in its research for an individual eternity. It can occur in praxis only through the dissolution of the bourgeois concept of progress, since the idea of progress as it has been affirmed in modernity (by Hegel, but also by Marx) leads to a form of fatalistic “wait” for a necessary fulfillment of history.

The approach of Critical Theory to the solution of this fundamental problem varies from the “orthodox” position of Lukács, who locates in the proletariat the unification of subject and object in history, to the “utopian” and “messianic” perspectives of Bloch and Benjamin, who perceive this fulfillment as a tendency, rather than a necessary moment in history. Benjamin, though, understood that if we were considering redemption as an infinite tendency projected in the future, revolutionary praxis would have been reduced to “social-democratic” endless awaiting for the right moment in history. He then developed Bloch’s idea of the present as containing the potentiality for this revolutionary change and identified in the “explosion of the historical continuum”¹⁵ the moment in which it was still possible to arrest the train of progress which is leading towards destruction and jump into the parallel, utopian (in a Blochian, immanent sense) history, which was running in the opposite direction.

Benjamin recognized the real content of Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence, as an immanent (and not metaphysical in a traditional sense) principle of creating the eternity necessary for the convergence of existence and significance, and therefore he understood its real social content, but then he also thought that eternal recurrence would have had the same effects of the faith in that progress that it repudiated. Adorno shared with Benjamin this interpretation of Nietzsche’s idea of eternal recurrence, but never thought that the proletariat, even in its broad sense of “oppressed,” could have been the actor of this redemption. This is the point where Adorno remained closer to the Nietzschean position than he was ready to admit. Adorno and Benjamin were not able to push Nietzsche’s refusal of any “ontological” truth to its extreme consequences, and consider the eternal recurrence in its fully immanent sense. Redemption for Nietzsche had the same meaning that it had for Adorno; it could not be achieved through the bourgeois subject, but through an

"over-bourgeois"¹⁶ which could not be found, ready-made, in our individualistic society. This is why Nietzsche and Adorno's considerations on socialism are similar. Nietzsche, like Adorno, thought that socialists are "at present the most myopic, perhaps most honest, but at any rate noisiest human type that we have today,"¹⁷ since they understand that redemption can occur only on a social scale, but they also rely on human beings as they are in order to achieve a free society. To entrust redemption to the proletariat would mean to reaffirm *ressentiment* and domination, while an even bigger mistake would be to entrust it to petty-bourgeoisie, which is ideologically more enslaved to the bourgeois subject than the proletariat. Adorno saw how much closer to reality the affirmations of Nietzsche were after the Stalinist turning point in "real socialism" and the increasingly destructive complicity with capitalism of Western "social-democracies."

In this sense, Adorno was substantially sharing Nietzsche's conclusions that "*all of us are no longer material for a society*,"¹⁸ but like in Nietzsche that does not mean that we cannot do anything anymore. We have to sustain the task of becoming "fathers" of a "totally other" society. The demolition of the bourgeois subject is immediately an act of what Adorno explicitly calls "resistance." The task of both theory and praxis is the "decomposition"¹⁹ not only – at a theoretical, conceptual level – of the ideology, but – "in practice" – of all the bourgeois institutions. This does not mean that we should affirm new permanently-identical values or institutions (and therefore will eventually not even be possible to call them values or institutions), but that each of them must be seen in the perspective of their permanent non-identity.

But before we get to any conclusion regarding Adorno's evolution of Nietzsche's thought, we should first try to present a plausible interpretation of some crucial notions in Nietzsche's writings, which after all is the only task that he is expecting from his readers. Nietzsche's thought originates from the refusal of this alternative of considering either reason as a completely free activity which derives from itself, or will as the ultimate essence beyond representation. In both cases reason and will are presented as the substitutes of god, which by now is dead; they are the new forms of "truth" that still prevent the creation of a radically different future. At the beginning of his production, Nietzsche found in Schopenhauer a model for affirming the corporeal root of rationality and condemning its "ordered," logical constructions as apparent. But he then realized the

absurdity of Schopenhauer's asceticism, which ended up throwing away passions with reason. For Nietzsche, the infinity of desire is not only the curse of life, but is also its richness. His new perspective aims at the negation, through the affirmation of passions, of that rationality which has been historically developed as autonomous and independent from passions. The only way through which this can be achieved is by negating an ontological scission between intellect and will. So for Schopenhauer the subject in art loses its individuality, so that we can affirm a pure subjectivity "in itself," where knowledge can finally express itself without the influence of the will, for Nietzsche art shows the illusory nature of the subject "for itself" (as individual) and "in itself" (as identity). The idea of a pure subjectivity in itself is "stupid": "*in itself* it just stands there, stupid to all eternity, like every 'thing in itself'."²⁰

Art becomes for Nietzsche an authentic model of how human actions should be carried out; life should be "aestheticized." As in art, humans should free their impulse to the creation of appearances, making each product of the intellect child's play. Human activity, like art before it was locked inside museums, should become a "celebration" of life, a free expression of our passions. The prerequisite for an aesthetical life is the acknowledgement that everything is *appearance*. We must abandon our obstinacy of belief in a fundamental truth existing in itself, especially in the truth of our self-consciousness. The "aestheticization" of life coincides with complete inebriation, estrangement from the rigidity of social roles; the dissolution of the bourgeois subject leads to the negation of self-consciousness. Intellect, as an impulsive force, is immediately the process of the creation of appearances and not an external "first cause" of representations. This is the limit of the traditional approach of philosophy: the fact that it needs to ground itself on some type of reassuring truth – it attempts to find the origin of the principle of causality. This way of proceeding was already condemned by Schopenhauer, and he showed how causality was not originated by an external principle, but by an impulsive, internal "motivation." But then he thought of finding the final cause in the absence of causality, by transcending space and time, where no ulterior causality properly exists. Nietzsche considers this last step of Schopenhauer's philosophy as a relapse into the traditional method of philosophy and considers the impulsive "motivation" as already the product of interpretation of the intellect.

Beyond the appearance there is always another appearance, and this path does not finally lead to the acknowledgement of a metaphysical essence

or any other truth which would justify, in a conclusive manner, any thought. Rather than constructing a theory of the appearance, Nietzsche shows the appearance of any theory. As Adorno observes, this conclusion represents Nietzsche's strongest defense of human autonomy:

Emphatic thinking requires the courage to stand by one's convictions. The individual who thinks must take a risk, not exchange or buy anything on faith – that is the fundamental experience of the doctrine of autonomy. Without risk, without the imminent possibility of error, there is objectively no truth. Nietzsche's pathos knew that. His imperialistically adventurous slogan about the dangerous life basically meant instead: to think dangerously, to spur on thought, to shrink back from nothing in the experience of the matter, not to be intimidated by any convention of received thought.²¹

The confirmation of this perspective can be found in the same aphorism of *The Gay Science* where Nietzsche proclaims that "*war is the father of all good things*,"²² and in fact, his example of the historical figure who has been able to follow this rule coherently is, rather than the "bird of prey," the poet Giacomo Leopardi.

The process of creating abstract identities is a necessary consequence of our thought, and this process is both a "sad" detachment from non-identity of nature and a "joyful" permanent creation of personal projections of nature. Problems arise when these identities are considered real, because then we stop to create always new appearances and begin a cult of those that have been previously affirmed as true. Reason condemns appearances as errors and begins a process of self-referential grounding on fake truths, since one of these fake truths is reason itself. Nietzsche instead affirms appearances and errors as basic features of life which must always be integrated – as the element of "surprise" – in rational calculations, making these calculations practically impossible. What is currently – and emblematically – addressed as the "human factor" (or the "human variable") is, rather than a mere uncontrollable error, our only hope for an authentically new future. What Nietzsche called "poetic reason," the ground for the aesthetic life, is actually the incitement to affirm the "human factor" – the sudden emerging of personal impulses – as the only certainty in the understanding of reality. This moment is at the same time tragic, since the only certainty we have is that we have no certainties, but also comic (and rationally interpreted as folly); a sudden form of behavior that does not "fit" at all with rational expectations. Poetic

reason is then not a form of rationality that can be affirmed parallel to scientific (or “instrumental”) reason, as if each pertained to different aspects of reality, one of which is apparent and the other exact. Poetic reason is the acceptance of exceptions and errors as the limits of reason; a “virtuous stupidity” where the exception “*never wants to become the rule*”²³ and errors never *want* to become correct. It is the result of a courageous act of fully taking on the responsibility of our actions. Reason has built an enormous temple of self-celebration based on the conviction that its foundations are solid and true, but once we have demonstrated that these foundations are apparent we have to pull this temple down; we have to “philosophize with a hammer”²⁴ But this does not mean that the intellect should then renounce constructions of its buildings; rather, it means that it should always consider them in their temporariness, since their foundations are constitutionally “weak.”²⁵ Even our self-consciousness, our home, should never be our fixed abode. The idea of “home” gives us a feeling of security – like anything that is identical, familiar – but if we remain locked in it, we will never be able to discover and enjoy the world outside of it. We should not just leave our home, but permanently pull it down in order to build a new one; we should not be homesick, because in the security of home there is no freedom. It is not by chance that scientific rationality, market and justice originated in the *polis*, with the end of nomadic life.

Construction and demolition of appearances is the dynamic of the intellect as much as it is the dynamic of nature; in order for the new to be born the old has to die. If anything was really eternal, nothing would actually exist. It might seem that, for an extremely rare coincidence, we are taken away from eternity and nothingness in order to be individual, and therefore transitory, forms of life. But eternity and nothingness are not considered the authentic essence of life “in itself” opposed to the appearance of individual phenomena; this would mean to attribute an essence, identity, to non-identity, while its peculiarity is to be transitory. This is the nihilism which Nietzsche condemns in philosophical tradition (including Schopenhauer), since in the effort to create something eternal, this tradition ends up transforming it into nothingness. The only way to avoid this nihilism is to consider every identity as our artificial product beyond which stands the non-identity of nature, about which we cannot properly say anything because our intellect, through the concept, would make it immediately eternal and identical. Any speculation on non-identity is impossible and, in fact, every time Nietzsche gets close to this point (something

which, as Kant indicated, is unavoidable for our thought) he repeatedly affirms: "I already said too much." Eternity is the necessary consequence of our process of identification, and only as such it should be affirmed. The construction of the eternal recurrence of the same expresses the product of our intellect once we do not consider identity (and therefore eternity) as something concrete, but merely as apparent. This is why eternal recurrence and will cannot be considered as metaphysical essences. Even the affirmation that "everything is apparent" does not represent an ultimate truth, but it is just the observation that we can only think in terms of identities.

We've done away with the true world: what world is left over? The apparent one, maybe? ... But no! Along with the true world, we have also done away with the apparent!

(Midday; moment of the shortest shadow; end of the longest error; high point of humanity; INCIPIIT ZARATHUSTRA).²⁶

The irony of this situation of precariousness is wonderfully described by Bataille, when he affirms that "like him [Nietzsche] I'm having fun laughing at people on the shore from a disabled ship."²⁷ Once we recognize the apparent character of the intellect's constructions, we will not have the comfort of *terra firma* that is offered by the solidification of our representations, but we also recognize that on that land we are condemned to be unfree, to not discover anything anymore. We leave this land on a ship that is disabled, "weak," because we can only build it on the error, or otherwise it would be so "solid" that it will never be able to leave. We do not seek any more certainties and the security offered by reason and science, or even less we rely on a heavenly eternal continuation of our individuality, but we finally face the ocean of our passions even if that means that we will drown in them. The bourgeois subject – and even more its by-product, the petty-bourgeoisie – is terrorized by this ocean because he is too "heavy," and he will therefore necessarily drown. We should not be paralyzed by the terror of the non-identical and free ourselves from the heavy armor of self-consciousness.

We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lays spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you realize that it is

infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*—and there is no longer any ‘land’.”²⁸

Adorno has left for the ocean of non-identity, but he does not laugh as Bataille; he is homesick, not for the “land” of reification, but for self-consciousness. The type of nostalgia that Adorno has is very peculiar, since it is directed towards something which never existed. On one hand, Adorno condemns every philosophy – which he generically addresses as idealistic – that maintains a founding role for the subject. Like Nietzsche, Adorno refuses any notion of transcendental essence, and therefore he cannot consider either the subject or its element, pure knowledge, in ontological terms, as “in itself.”

The ideological untruth in the conception of transcendence is the separation of body and soul, a reflex of the division of labor. It leads to idolization of the *res cogitans* as the nature-controlling principle, and to the material denials that would founder on the concept of transcendence beyond the context of guilt.²⁹

On the other hand Adorno’s main concern is that the dissolution of any notion of subjectivity would lead to the creation of impersonal “masses” which takes place both in “real” socialism and fascism. The homologation to the totality of the *Unwesen* represented by our society is made possible through the creation of a standardized consciousness which represses any form of personality. Adorno, like Nietzsche, knows that in order to affirm our creativity we cannot rely on the traditional, bourgeois concept of self-consciousness, because that is the foundation of a merely instrumental reason and of “total” identification which ends up destroying both our internal nature – through psychological repression – and external nature – through the destructive model of exploitation of workers and environment affirmed by capitalism.

The fundamental question raised by Nietzsche to which Adorno tried to answer is the following: how is it possible to rescue the non-identical of nature if we are compelled to identify by the very dynamic of our thought? After Nietzsche, we cannot find an answer by splitting up knowledge and experience, reason and impulses. Even if we recognize the apparent character of the products of the intellect, and therefore we proceed towards a radical critique of culture as “false,” it would be an improper

identification to affirm the existence of a "true" structure beyond appearance. This explains the difficulties encountered by Adorno in offering a definitive answer which would individuate "immediately" (that is, not in a dialectical manner) in Marx's notion of structure (in terms of material production) or in the impulsive root the moment of truth on the basis of which it would be possible to demystify ideology. Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is possible to reconstruct an answer from Adorno's analysis of artistic production. The fulfillment of Adorno's theory will not be found in a mere aesthetical "contemplation" separated from praxis, as the only level in which an alternative to instrumental reason could be expressed, even if that meant the abandonment of any hope which could be concretely realized. The aesthetic dimension is not the final step which can be achieved by the critique of rationality but, as in Nietzsche, it represents an authentic model of how we can develop a praxis of resistance to the passive integration to the totality of reification; a praxis which necessarily goes beyond the aesthetic level. The aesthetic dimension is the dimension of absolute transcendence from "rational" reality, the negation of its falsity, which alone can express the total "otherness" from a society founded on domination. This total otherness is not – as the late, Schopenhauerian conclusions of Horkheimer seem to indicate – a "metaphysical" transcendence from life itself, but it is the transcendence from second nature, which is actually the negation of life. The "aestheticization" of life is a feasible alternative to the blind domination of capitalism, and therefore it should not be merely encouraged but translated into praxis. It represents the alternative to the idea of progress as it is implicitly sustained by positivism and dogmatic Marxism, since they both lead to catastrophe.

The appearance created in art represents, negatively, the falsity of social totality, since in art the fundamental inversion occurs where the form becomes content, and the content becomes form. Adorno, as Marcuse, clearly sustain that art does not change the world, but it makes us gain consciousness of the "inverted world" of commodities. This subversion in consciousness is determined by the same impulse which is at the root of artistic creation: mimesis. This concept, originally developed by Benjamin, expresses the same impulse towards creation of appearances that was affirmed by Nietzsche.

The human is indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings. In such behavior, the primal form of love, the priests of authenticity scent traces of the utopia which could shake the structure of domination.³⁰

The replication of nature is, in line of principle, impossible, and mimesis does not aim at this perfection. In art we imitate nature with the necessary contribution of our personal interpretation; as Nietzsche already pointed out, in artistic production we create an identity but we recognize its apparent character. Mimesis in Adorno becomes the model of how a “non-reified” – and, most importantly, a “non-reifying” – consciousness should act. This brings us back to the crucial notion of “exact imagination,” and Susan Buck-Morss gives an accurate description of this concept in Adorno:

“Exact fantasy” was thus a dialectical concept which acknowledged the mutual mediation of subject and object without allowing either to get the upper hand. It was not imagination in the sense of subjective projection beyond the existing world either into the past or into the future; it remained “immanent,” within the material phenomena, the factuality of which acted as a control to thought. [...] The subject yielded to the objects, yet it did not leave them unchanged. Instead of being merely duplicated in thought, they were transformed within a verbal representation.³¹

The scientific turning point of Enlightenment eliminated magic’s imitation of nature, causing what Jameson calls “the turning of mimesis against itself, with the anti-mimetic taboo of the images,”³² but mimesis is still active in art. Aesthetic expression requires, in fact, a unique (and therefore non-mechanical) reproduction of the content of a phenomenon in a form that maintains its social truth, as can be most evidently understood from musical performance. For Adorno, reproduction of music, like literary translation for Benjamin,³³ should not be considered as a simple transcription of the original, but as a mimetic act which preserves the mainly social content of the model by personally interpreting it.

The capacity to experience the object – and discrimination is the experience of the object turned into a form of subjective reaction – provides a haven for the mimetic element of knowledge, for the element of elective affinity between the knower and the known.³⁴

According to Adorno, though, even if artistic creation could provide an example of how mimesis could still act without creating “fetishes,” it should not be considered as the alternative to philosophical reflection. Art has the power of showing the paradox that its irrationality, particularly evident in currents like surrealism and expressionism,³⁵ is more rational than the supposedly “rational” social order based on domination. But

this paradox cannot be philosophically translated into irrationalism. It only serves the purpose of raising this paradox to consciousness, so that a critical (and necessarily social) consciousness can proceed towards the construction of a non-dominative society.

The various Adornian notions of "mimesis," "exact imagination" and "dialectical images" show a substantial agreement with Nietzsche's attempt to respect the element of non-identity inside the moment of identification in knowledge. It might seem, though, that there is still a radical difference with Nietzsche in regards to the role attributed to self-consciousness. We might in fact conclude that on one hand Nietzsche ends up denying any form of self-consciousness, which is already a form of identification, while on the other hand Adorno insists on the creation of an individual self-consciousness which is finally purified from ideology. Yet Adorno remains more faithful to the notion of non-identity in his refusal of providing any positive image of it. This is the reason he does not elaborate an explicit concept of "counter-consciousness" or even less he affirms the restoring of an individual self-consciousness. In this sense, we can consider Vattimo's critique of Adorno as inaccurate:

Although Adorno is a careful reader of Nietzsche, he basically does not have any suspicions of self-consciousness: not only self-consciousness is not a function of the universal standardization and of total organization – as it is for Nietzsche – but it is actually the last resort for resistance against alienation.³⁶

This critique would be valid if Adorno had a "static," non-dialectical, conception of subjectivity, which would resemble what he ridicules as "idolatry of *res cogitans*." In other words, it portrays Adorno as what he would have called an idealist. Even the terminological mistake is avoided by Adorno, since he rather uses the notion of "self-conscious global subject."³⁷ Self-consciousness, as freedom, is for Adorno a social category which cannot be reduced to any type of identity: neither identity of subject with itself (self-referential reason), nor identity of subject and object (as it has been individuated in proletariat), nor identification of subject with object.

Adorno's notion of exact imagination is the sum of his dialectical approach towards a relationship with nature devoid of any reification, and it is concentrated in the affirmation that "we are no longer simply a piece of nature from the moment we recognize that we are a piece of nature."³⁸ We can achieve the only emancipation possible from nature through the

acknowledgment that we are nature and as such are part of the constitutive element of domination – that is, we live – and yet just because of the fact that we realize this, we already have reached a form of consciousness which, rather than knowledge of non-identity, is a permanent respect of the moment of non-identity. This dialectical consciousness alone can lead to emancipation: “what transcends nature is nature that has become conscious of itself.”³⁹ Thought is necessarily linked to the natural elements of our perception, the instinctual root, and yet it gains autonomy from the natural situation since through imagination we can arrange it in an original manner. The moment of identification in a dialectical consciousness is not just the irreparable separation from first nature, but it also represents the potential for emancipating from blind domination. The consciousness that is achieved in this manner is based on a complete “disidentification” (estrangement) from the ever-identical bourgeois “self.” Whenever Adorno uses the term self-consciousness he does not imply by any means an ontological self: “the self should not be spoken of as the ontological ground.”⁴⁰ The self is, in fact, determined by the impulses, but at the same time it “overcomes and preserves” the impulses through the unavoidable objectification made by thought. The price that the bourgeois subject has to pay for the certainties it constructed through perennial identities is the loss of imagination, dumbness.

Because even its remotest objectifications are nourished by impulses, thought destroys in the latter the condition of its own existence. [...] But if the impulses are not at once preserved and surpassed in the thought which has escaped their sway, then there will be no knowledge at all, and the thought that murders the wish that fathered it will be overtaken by the revenge of stupidity. [...] Fantasy alone, today consigned to the realm of the unconscious and proscribed from knowledge as a childish, injudicious rudiment, can establish that relation between objects, which is the irrevocable source of all judgments: should fantasy be driven out, judgment too, the real act of knowledge, is exorcised. [...] Once the last trace of emotion has been eradicated, nothing remains of thought but absolute tautology.⁴¹

As much as pure thought is tautological, at the same time “the absurd realistic ideal of pure datum”⁴² produces a “false knowledge,” since it leaves out of consideration the creative moment of interpretation performed by thought. Only a dialectical perspective is capable of avoiding the partiality of idealism and realism. Adorno’s negative dialectics rejects the construction of a permanently identical result of the mediation of its opposite moments, and this procedure applies to every form of dualism.

The conventional distinction between subject and object is, in fact, for Adorno

*both real and semblance. True, because in the realm of cognition it lends expression to the real separation, the rivenness of the human condition, the result of a coercive historical process; untrue, because the historical separation must not be hypostatized, not magically transformed into an invariant.*⁴³

A romantic identification between them therefore corresponds to a return to myth, while their definitive separation is the premise of the dominant ideology. For both Adorno and Nietzsche the dissolution of subjectivity represents an act of resistance against the ever-identity of the rational subject, the *ego cogito* (Apollo), but it never means the dismissal of emotions and imagination (Dionysus), because these are actually the qualities of the non-identical aspect of the subject.

The *over-bourgeois* is the new, necessarily social subject, which has finally overcome the limitation of a merely instrumental reason and has affirmed what Nietzsche calls "poetic reason" and Adorno calls "exact imagination," and which is finally able to mediate between Nietzsche's Apollo and Dionysus, Adorno's notions of identity and non-identity. Only this new historical subject will dare to undertake the project of pacifying nature. Adorno's perspective becomes the dialectical tool through which we can make the social potentiality in Nietzsche's thought explicit. This would be the end of the path of an immanent critique of rationality which, from its first formulation in Schopenhauer, can finally open the perspective of an authentic change in our social totality. In order to achieve this we can conclude – paraphrasing the affirmation of Vattimo – that, in order to be faithful to the most authentic intentions of Adorno, we need to "betray" him in his interpretation of Nietzsche.

1 T. W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Tr. R. Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 172.

2 M. Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Tr. J. Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 121.

3 Marcuse, following Benjamin's interpretation (as we have seen in the previous chapter), considers the coincidence of "necessity and realization" as the meaning of Nietzsche's "erotic position towards existence." (H. Marcuse, *Eros e Civiltà*, Torino: Einaudi, 1964. p. 153)

- 4 "Here we can individuate the point in which Lukács and the immanent road diverge in an irreconcilable manner from the formulation of the problem which he transcends. If somebody would fully meet with himself, we would not be able to see himself anymore." (E. Bloch, *Spirito dell'Utopia*, Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1992. p. 278 – My translation)
- 5 E. Bloch, *Spirito dell'Utopia*, op.cit., p. 280.
- 6 Ibid., p. 279.
- 7 E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. 3, Tr. N. Plaice, S. Plaice, P. Knight, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) p. 949.
- 8 This seems to be also the position of Marcuse regarding Nietzsche's work, especially as he formulated it in his *Eros and Civilization*. Marcuse, though, seems to have maintained a more "Heideggerian" interpretation, when he affirms that "[in the Übermensch] Nietzsche builds the image of humanity without desires, where all the needs are technically satisfied." (H. Marcuse, "Discussione da un seminario sulla teoria dei bisogni," in T. W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, *I Seminari della Scuola di Francoforte*. p. 147 – My translation)
- 9 E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, op.cit., vol. 3, p. 947.
- 10 Ibid., p. 951.
- 11 Ibid., p. 172-3.
- 12 Ibid., p. 173.
- 13 T. W. Adorno, M. Horkheimer, H. G. Gadamer, "Dialogo su Nietzsche," in *MicroMega* 5/2003, p. 346. (My translation)
- 14 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Tr. W. Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1974) p. 303. (*Opere*, Vol. V, book II, p. 265).
- 15 This conception is formulated in particular in his *Thesis on History*.
- 16 We can provocatively use this term only after we have understood the authentic meaning of the expression Übermensch, since it actually would help us in rejecting immediately any critique of Adorno as "bourgeois intellectual."
- 17 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op.cit., p. 304. (*Opere*, Vol. V, book II, p. 265)
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 This term is used by Adorno in particular to express the process which religion undergoes in order to be brought "down to earth." (T. W. Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. p. 81)
- 20 Ibid. p. 107. (p. 309)
- 21 T. W. Adorno, *Critical Models* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 132
- 22 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op.cit., p. 145. (*Opere*, vol. V, book II, p. 117).
- 23 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op.cit., p. 131. (*Opere*, vol. V, book II, p. 101).
- 24 As the title of *Twilight of the Idols* reports.
- 25 This idea has been developed by Vattimo in his theory of the "weak thought" (as it is explained in his *Il Pensiero Debole*), a form of thought that does not need any more absolute truths. This theory is clearly based on the Nietzschean consideration that we should free ourselves from the symbolic constructions as metaphysically true, but at the same time we should free our symbolic creativity as the basis for an original future.
- 26 F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, Tr. R. Polt (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997) p. 24. (*Opere*, vol. VI, book III, p. 76).
- 27 G. Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, (New York: Paragon House, 1992) p. xiv.
- 28 F. Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, op.cit., p. 180-1. (*Opere*, vol. V, book II, p. 150).
- 29 T. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Tr. E.B. Ashton (New York: Seabury Press, 1973) p. 400.
- 30 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, Tr. E.F. Jephcott (Surrey: Gresham Press, 1979) p. 154.
- 31 S. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Free Press, 1977) p. 86-7.
- 32 F. Jameson, *Tardo Marxismo. Adorno, il Postmoderno e la Dialettica*, Tr. P. Russo (Roma: Manifestolibri, 1994), p.236. (my translation)
- 33 For an analysis of the relationship between Benjamin's model of literary translation and Adorno's model of musical performance, see S. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, op.cit., pp. 85-8.
- 34 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, op.cit., p.45.
- 35 See, in particular, "Mimesis and Rationality" in *Aesthetic Theory*, op.cit., pp. 91-7.

- 36 G. Vattimo, *Dialogo con Nietzsche* (Milano: Garzanti, 2000) p. 178-9. (My translation)
- 37 See, in particular, T. W. Adorno, *Critical Models*, op.cit., p.144.
- 38 T.W. Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, Tr. R. Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) p.103.
- 39 Ibid., p.104.
- 40 T. W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, op.cit., p. 99.
- 41 Ibid. p. 79.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 T.W. Adorno, *Critical Models*, op.cit., p.246.

Philosophy and criticism. Some observations on the notion of critical theory in Adorno

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▪ My main question is whether a theory, a philosophical theory in the sense that Theodor W. Adorno gives to the notion in his 1965 lessons on *Metaphysics*, on Aristotle's metaphysics in particular, can be in itself a "critical" theory, while maintaining its essential feature of assessment of a truth. That the truth 'captured' by an "open thought" (in the words of Stefano Petrucciani, one of the most influential scholars of Adorno) is not "metaphysical" in the Aristotelian sense, and that this can be one of the reasons why the connection of theory and criticism becomes possible, can be accepted. But still, it remains a problem which kind of truth a philosophy like this can obtain. More radically, it is important to decide if the feature of what we call "criticism" and of what we call "theory" can at some extent become and remain equivalent. It follows from this main point that an analysis of Adorno's criticism can not be different in itself from the attempt to realize a critical exercise, having as goal the establishment of rational "legitimacy" (in the Kantian sense of this expression, asking the *quid juris* of a philosophical assertion) of shaping a "critical" theory. That this attempt can be successful is not at all sure. In fact, if this is not the case because of the impossibility to imagine a sort of void of intentional object, or a kind of permanent virtuality or *dynamis*, that never becomes *entelecheia* or activity, then we have to assert that Adorno's thought breaks in such a radical way the continuity of the tradition of the philosophical thought, as to demand to redefine the notion itself of philosophy as the effort to attain a truth, or to obtain what Hegel calls the quietness after (but also together with) the Bacchic triumph. The idea of a philosophy which is and remains in itself a criticism can be obtained only on the basis of the separation of the movement from the calm result that *both* shape the Hegelian dialectic. In the passage from Hegel to Adorno, the dialectic is supposed to lose any possibility to stop in one concept, in one theory, in one steady system. Only by this sacrifice of *entelecheia*, it becomes entirely criticism – but this sacrifice contains at the same time, according to Adorno, the only possibility of salvation and of safety for mankind as such. There is no difference between salvation and safety of mankind in the time of the triumphing market consumption, on one side,

and salvation and safety of philosophy as such, on the other. Adorno's futurology is based on the idea that criticism is the shape that philosophy *and* mankind have to look for and finally to achieve, if the absence of any hope is going to be the source of the rebirth of some hope. But hope is not a quiet result, is not a system, it is not a truth. Hope is in itself nothing but the backward-forward movement of criticism. The critical problem that arises from Adorno's theory of equivalence between criticism and a philosophy which avoids the risks of self-slavery for isolated individuals (philosophy as safety) and helps keeping hope alive (philosophy as salvation) consists in knowing if and how it is possible to realize a *criticism of this criticism*. It seems that no place, no room is left, from where to ask Adorno's criticism to present its reasons, and to require the proof of its theoretical legitimacy, its *quid juris*, in Kantian words.

It seems also that exactly this attitude of radical escape from the attack of any criticism makes the force of the "critical theory". Nevertheless, if observed not from within but rather from the outside of it, this attitude contains the danger to show its radical weakness. There is not any possibility to get rid of the autonomy of philosophy as metaphysics, because any attempt of this kind is made through the metaphysical thought. Adorno knows very well this impossibility, but still tries to overthrow it. What he calls "critical theory" or "negativity" is this attempt, made with the perfect awareness that it can not succeed. Adorno's criticism is therefore not even a moral 'theory', but a moral gesture, a performative expression of something that neither requires rational proofs, neither receives any kind of refutations. This makes its philosophical weakness just in the moment in which it claims to be a philosophy. If we suppose that Adorno's thought is in itself a negative movement, how is it possible to stop it and ask which are its reasons, its foundations, without destroying its own special attitude, and at the same time the hopes of salvation that it declares to offer? Who could dare ask for foundations of it, without producing a disaster in thought which is in itself a disaster in human life? And, if these risks are to be avoided, are we not going to recognize the necessity to assign to Adorno's criticism the paradoxical attribute of absoluteness, that is of something secularly 'sacred' that can not be criticized because in the first place is not possible to find the point of departure of any possible criticism of this *absolute criticism*, but also because of the enormous danger of taking away to the today humanity the way of its salvation? Philosophy as a positive system is death. Criticism is life. How could someone dare to criticize a life saved by criticism?

Let us read and comment a few pages of the text which can have a paradigmatic value for the demonstration of the problem. As already said, they are taken from the lesson given by Adorno in Frankfurt in 1965, just in the period when *Negative Dialektik* was going to be published. The main philosophical theme is not criticism as such, but the idea that we live in a time when any form of positive philosophy, capable as such to catch something like a truth, is not possible any more. This goal has been possible for the ancient metaphysics starting from Aristotle up to Schopenhauer (whose blind *Wille* becomes a principle of reflection, and has therefore a positive content and in our time a consolatory utility), but it is not any more possible in the post-Auschwitz times. Jean- Paul Sartre is one of the few who has seen the end of the old metaphysics. The metaphysical thought has to become negative in itself, and this means that it should become a refusing social reality thought, that is a thought which is in itself become criticism. Even metaphysics can survive only as criticism. This means that any attempt to arrive to a positive truth must be given up, because it is (or it has become in itself) an ideology, an instrument of falsification. What is most interesting for our critical purpose is not the simple repeating the very well known Adorno's statements on the importance of a negative thought. It is much more relevant to rise the question concerning the legitimacy of affirming that the end of the positive metaphysics and the necessity of starting with a negative metaphysics, which means the end of the research of a truth as the duty of the philosophy, happens as a consequence of the radical changing of the historical times that have brought to the Holocaust. It should be stressed the point that the end of a positive philosophy and the beginning of criticism is not in any way an event of the thought but is the consequence of what happened in recent history, where the evilness of human beings produced results that can not any more be said, or understood in a way that implies a positive construction of a theory, even the theory itself of the end of all the theories. Criticism obtains its legitimacy not by the way of rational proofs but the way of an historical necessity, which shouts the mouths of the philosophers, or transforms their supposed truths in real lies.

Something more should be said. If we look at this paradoxically theoretical destruction of any possibility for a theory to obtain a truth 'today', we find a sort of a rhetorical image of the liberating power of the intrinsically authoritarian dependence of the thought from history. If the attention of the interpreter loses the attraction, the ethical *charme*, that comes from the idea that something containing a too big evil has happened at

the middle of the past century and that philosophy can not behave in a way that does not recognize the necessity of an interruption in the continuity of the theoretical life of mankind, suddenly it becomes clear that Adorno's criticism finds its power in the strict connection between time and thought. From this connection two consequences come about. The first is that it is time and not thought itself that can declare something to be worthy to be researched and to be thought (this point is clearly connected with the loss of any autonomy of the sphere of thought), and furthermore that this declaration of things to be thought concerns also *the way* in which they have to be thought. They have to modify their shape from the truth-object of a positive metaphysics to the critical problems of a negative metaphysics. The second point is still more fatal: time is conceived as a sort of implicit personal but also super-individual subject that 'forbids' philosophers to decide to pursue the attainment of the truth, through the menace that they can become the unwilling allies of the worst never happened in the history. If a philosopher does not recognize the interruption of the continuity of the history of the last sixty years, he becomes morally suspect. The possibility that a philosopher thinks the Holocaust is the worst that men have made to themselves, but that in the same time he or she admits the possibility to conceive philosophy as a positive metaphysics, is radically excluded. This point shows the authoritarian side of the equivalence of philosophy and criticism. Because of the circumstance that it is historical time that orders and defines the limits and the ways of what is thinkable, any difference of moral attitude, of moral practice, and of moral theory is declared suspect. This becomes clear from the point of view from which Adorno thinks he has to claim that metaphysics must recognize the necessity to correspond to its concept. It has to be conceived as a relationship between forms and contents and therefore it has to accept and to receive in itself in a radical way the "*relevance of the intratemporal* for its concept". From this point of view, the equivalence of philosophy and criticisms becomes equivalent to the dissolution of the former in the latter, and all the matter comes to the conclusion that we are analysing. A not secondary observation could be added. Someone could try to build a criticism of Adorno's criticism, only at the condition that he does not accept that equivalence as obvious. The demonstration of this is in the circumstance that our criticism of the "critical theory" is in the first place the result of the refuse of that *reductionist* equivalence and of the retrieval of the autonomy of thought. On one side, this attitude brings us to ask Adorno's criticisms those proofs that it can not offer, proofs of the strict relationship between the con-

temporary times and metaphysical, positive thought. On the other side, negativity comes to be an attribute of metaphysics only by the way of accepting the necessity of this relationship.

Throughout this way, criticism escapes any possibility to be criticized and becomes paradoxically a 'absolute thought'. No place *in time*, and no place *by time* is left for criticism to be criticized. At the origin of this attitude (that makes of the criticism fighting against absoluteness something absolute, in the sense that not any proof of what is said can be asked and that even the claim of a new metaphysics of negativity can not find its demonstration as a truth if it does not want to be self-contradictory), we find in Adorno's reflection on metaphysics *statements without proofs*. What must be thought is simply asserted, under the menace of the moral charge to maintain philosophy separated by a difference, by a tragic distance from the flowing history of the present. At the same time, no proof of a philosophical truth can be given to historical time as such, nor is historical time in any way oriented to ask philosophy truths, and proofs that demonstrate that they are really truths. Criticism is negativity without rest, permanence in the condition of *dynamis*. truth that does not want to be such. It is not the demonstration, obtained through an argument, that something is in itself false. The same idea that thinking can coherently stay in the condition of a permanent *critical potentiality*, and that therefore Aristotle is wrong in assuming that *dynamis* and *entelecheia* are structurally correlated, should be made object of a demonstration by Adorno, because it is here that his assertions could become conceptual entities submitted to the rational control. But this does not happen and can not happen within the horizon of the "critical theory".

According to the text of the thirteenth lesson of the lessons on the concepts and problems of metaphysics, it is radically problematic to believe that a *korismos*, and absolute separation keeps far the one from the other the reality of the world, seen from within it (*innerweltlich*, as it should be said in German) and the transcendent reality. According to Adorno, who makes a very deep simplification of the history of philosophy, this separation expresses the main attitude of metaphysics. But the only objection he raises against the *korismos*, is the very poor and weak statement that it is possible to give proofs that the "eternities" of metaphysics and even its eternal value are extracted from the common empirical experience. It is not difficult to observe that, for example, the thesis that Plato's assertion in the *Republic*, that the "idea of good" is *epekeina tes ousias*,

“beyond being”, comes from the *innerweltliche* reality, should receive a demonstration of its same possibility to be thought as such, and should not maintain the status of an obvious matter of fact. But this is not the aim of Adorno. This point remains completely external to his philosophical awareness. In the case, Adorno says, in which it is forgotten that the eternal values are “abstracted” from experience, metaphysics is going to become an “apology”, that is a thought which tries to defend itself against radical objections. But this kind of thought “is lost”. In general, the salvation of a thought is committed to the principle “throw away to gain”, which may mean that a metaphysics can not remain at the level of a simple philosophy of experience, and at the same time it should not simply forget the experience, but maintain a connection with it, so that to “gain” from it without being prisoner of experience.

It would be too easy to observe the fragility of a thesis which tries in some way to save the Kantian idea of a philosophy which can *not stay without* experience, but does not *derive* from it. It is in some way absurd to pretend to summarize Kant’s *Critique of pure reason* in the popular sentence “throw away to save”. Is it clear that it is impossible to expect from Adorno’s philosophy a theoretical harshness, given that it wants to offer a moral orientation in the after Auschwitz historical times. It is therefore a normal consequence of the “critical theory” which has become criticism without theory, the very simplified use which is done of the Ludwig Feuerbach Hegelian dialectical law, according to which any operation of “abstraction” of concepts from experience offers a confirmation of what is supposed to be left aside. From this point of view, Adorno is the heir of the dialectical tradition and of the whole story of its real or alleged necessity to be overturned. More important seems to be the use of the notion of “apology” as referred to that kind of metaphysics that “keeps itself far” from experience. This case is very symptomatic of the way in which Adorno’s thought actually works. The historical origin of the notion that a theory can become an “apology” is in Karl Marx’s often repeated observation in the *Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Oekonomie* that there have been in the recent past times two kinds of theories of the contemporary capitalist economy: that of those who, like Adam Smith and David Ricardo, have offered a honest description of its way of working, based on a sort of a preliminary understanding of the value-theory, and that of those who, having known the exploitation core of capitalism, wish to defend it, to make its “apology” by demonstrating that capitalism is the eternal and normal way of production. In same way as in Marx the accu-

sation of "apology" is a moral and political charge and has its aims in the practical will to show through the theory that theory in itself is not neutral and can therefore become a subject of the historical and social change, or, on the opposite side, an instrument of preservation and conservation working on the basis of the will to conceal the reality, in Adorno's language "apology" has a practical, even a preformative meaning, and works for the same purpose as that of Marx. The defence of a 'wrong' metaphysics implies and requires the moral charge that is necessary to raise when a worldly urgency is at stake. The primacy assigned by Jean-Paul Sartre to the Existence rather than to Being, shows first of all a very strong awareness of what is needed "in our age", though this relevant choice of the Existence becomes in Sartre an ontology, that is a "doctrine of the essence". This should be, according to Adorno, forbidden. But it is impossible to imagine any doctrine of the prevalence of the Existence which does not imply a doctrine of the way by which the Existence is a being, or is a peculiar "modus" of Being.

But Adorno can not even see this point, where the prevalence of the "content" is going to be justified and transform itself in a theoretical statement, losing its appearance of obvious evidence. The central point is for him something that is taken from the present history. It is not relevant to give a clear definition of what "content" may mean for him within the tradition of the western thought. The point is rather that the "content element" must be accepted, because this means that the metaphysical experience or the concept of metaphysics appear in a very different way. The "sign" of this, not its "symbol", is Auschwitz. The *name* of the Holocaust is not something *representing* the worst of and for mankind, or something that is in some way different from the reality of the worst, that only gives a verbal expression to it. Auschwitz, *just because it is Auschwitz*, is itself giving a direct "sign" of what it has been. It is now evident the meaning of the dissolution of philosophy in criticism and the *impossibility* – not different from an actual prohibition – to refuse, or to criticize, or even only to discuss this dissolution. How could this be made if the spiritual and cultural situation of mankind after Auschwitz is described as follows? "The one who continues to cultivate without worrying the old style metaphysics, and considers what happened, like everything is earthly and human, like something which is under the dignity of metaphysics, and therefore pushes it far from himself, this one reveals himself as a not-man, and the absence of humanity that is necessarily concealed in this attitude must also certainly infect the concept itself of metaphysics that

proceeds in this way". The consequence is that after Auschwitz it is not possible to ask for "the positivity of a sense of Being". If metaphysics has become what after Auschwitz it "necessarily" must be, the *negation of the negation of man*, no place is left to the possible criticism of this criticism, no place, no right for even imaging a different metaphysics. And the paradoxical result is an authoritarian prohibition to free thought – made in the name of the hope to save liberty for men.

No easy way out: Adorno's Negativism and the Problem of Normativity*

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▪ In this paper, I will address a question that has long overshadowed T.W. Adorno's critical theory, namely, the question of whether or not it is possible to account for normativity within his negativistic philosophy. I believe that we can answer this question in the affirmative, but in this paper my aim will be more limited. I will clarify the problem and lay out the response strategies that are open to those hoping to defend Adorno's theory. And I will argue that the problem cannot be dismissed as easily as is sometimes suggested, namely, by those who claim that Adorno's theory is not normative.

Adorno has long been criticized for being too negative.¹ By subjecting everything to critique, he seems to leave himself without a vantage point from which his critique could be justified. In particular, the problem is thought to be that Adorno is not able to account for the normativity to which he lays claim in his theory, that is, he cannot account for the standards of judgment ('norms') on which he relies, their force, and the reasons they (supposedly) give us (reasons to act, to believe, etc.). Adorno cannot account for normativity, since this would require appeal to (and thereby knowledge of) the good (or the right). At least implicitly, accounting for one's standards of judgment will have to make reference to the good—so that when we, for example, say of a sculpture that it is bad we cannot but invoke the idea of a good sculpture. However, within Adorno's negativistic theory, no appeal to (and knowledge of) the good (or the right) is possible.² It is central to Adorno's negativism that (a) the bad, not the good, is currently realized in our social world, and that (b) we cannot come to know the good by conceptual or other means. At the same time, Adorno cannot do without normativity in his theory. This is so for two rea-

* This paper is part of a larger project. My thanks go to all who have commented on the paper and/or the larger project. Among these, I would especially like to thank Raymond Geuss, Richard Raatzsch, Jörg Schaub, Christian Skirke, Bob Stern, and Leif Wenar. For questions and criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper, I am also grateful to the participants of the conference *Nostalgia for a Redeemed Future: Critical Theory* which took place in Rome in April 2007 and especially to Stefano Giacchetti Ludovisi, who organized this event.

sons: firstly, Adorno's theory consists essentially in critique, and critique (one might think) is inevitably normative; and, secondly, his theory contains a number of ethical claims (such as the 'new categorical imperative'),³ and these claims are also normative. Thus, Adorno seems to be faced with a dilemma: either he gives up his negativism, but this would mean losing the substance of his theoretical stance; or he erases all traces of normativity from his theory, but then it would lose its status as critique and he would have to drop his ethical claims.

Consequently, it seems as if there is a problem which affects the very core of Adorno's theory. Call it the Problem of Normativity. If this problem is not addressed, then his theory is subject to a deep-seated contradiction. Thus, it is imperative for those who want to defend Adorno to address this problem.

In order to facilitate the discussion, I propose to formalize the Problem of Normativity as follows:⁴

- 1) Adorno's theory is normative.
- 2) Accounting for normativity requires appeal to (and thereby knowledge of) the good.
- 3) Within Adorno's theory no such appeal (or knowledge) is possible. [Adorno's negativism]
- 4) From (2) and (3), Adorno's theory cannot be normative.
- 5) From (1) and (4), Adorno's theory both is and cannot be normative.

This formalization brings out clearly the alleged contradictory nature of Adorno's position. It also helps to clarify which options are open to defenders of Adorno's theory. They might deny one of the three premises (1)-(3), or, alternatively, they might call into question the inference from premises (2) and (3) to the interim conclusion (4). This suggests that there are four possible ways in which to address the Problem of Normativity.

Firstly, one could argue that Adorno's theory is not normative after all. This would mean that premise (1) is false and that the Problem of Normativity could be avoided altogether. I entitle this strategy to defend Adorno's theory the 'non-normative' strategy. In the last decade, this strategy or non-normative interpretations of his works more generally have *not* been represented in the literature very much. However, recently G. Tassone has proposed an 'amoral' and non-normative reading of Adorno's theory, though without relating this explicitly to the Problem of Normativity as a defense strategy.⁵

Secondly, it is possible to call into question premise (3) and to claim that we can appeal to the good within Adorno's theory after all, either despite what Adorno says, or in a sense which is supposedly compatible with what he says. And if such an appeal is possible, then we can account for the normativity of Adorno's theory in the way demanded by the critics. This defense strategy might be called 'positivistic' insofar as it involves a violation or reinterpretation of Adorno's negativism. A number of commentators have recently proposed interpretations of Adorno's theory according to which this theory is less negativistic than it has been traditionally presented. And while not all of these commentators explicitly present their readings as a reply to the Problem of Normativity on Adorno's behalf, this problem is probably part of their underlying motivation. Among the positivistic interpretations in the literature, there are a number of variants. Thus, it has been suggested that there is a positive core to Adorno's philosophy either in his conception of contemplation,⁶ or his understanding of emphatic concepts (such as the concept of freedom),⁷ or in his engagement with authentic art,⁸ or in the value of the experiences we make by attempting to gain ineffable insights.⁹

Thirdly, one could defend Adorno by denying premise (2), that is, by denying that accounting for normativity requires appeal to (or knowledge of) the good. Doing this would be most in keeping with Adorno's negativism and I, hence, entitle attempts to defend his theory in this way 'negativistic'. There are a number of authors who implicitly or explicitly interpret Adorno's theory in a negativistic way.¹⁰ However, until now this interpretation has not been developed sufficiently as a response to the Problem of Normativity. It is part of my overall project to rectify this.

Finally, there is the strategy of rejecting that interim conclusion (4) follows from premises (2) and (3). The thought here is that even if one granted that an account of normativity would require appeal to the good, one could maintain that this requirement only arises because of the assumption that such an account would have to take the form of a *general* theory of normativity. Yet, one could then argue that normativity is so context-dependent that a general theory of normativity is both impossible and unnecessary. Consequently, it would be unproblematic that within Adorno's theory one cannot provide an account of normativity in the sense just specified. For one cannot fault any theory for lacking what is impossible and unnecessary to provide. On this view, the challenge

would only be to account for each of Adorno's normative claims locally or in their context. And on this issue, there is nothing much informative which can be said about the success or failure of Adorno's normative claims at the general level. Call this the 'context-dependent' strategy.¹¹

In this paper, I will mainly argue against the non-normative reading of Adorno (and particularly against Tassone's recent version of it) and thereby against the non-normative defense strategy. I will show that it cannot be supported by the text, goes against the spirit of Adorno's critical theory and is mistaken in downgrading the ethical dimension of his theory (section I). Moreover, even if Adorno's method of immanent critique is taken into account, it would be misleading to think that this makes his theory non-normative—or so I will argue in section II. I will remain agnostic about the other three response strategies—the aim in this paper is just to show that there is a genuine problem which needs answering and that this problem cannot be dismissed by simply denying that Adorno lays claim to normativity in his theory. This negative result will hopefully make the search for a positive result easier.

Section I: Adorno's theory is normative

It has been argued that Adorno's critical theory is not normative. This argument is connected with what I have called the non-normative strategy to respond to the Problem of Normativity. If successful, this strategy allows one to dismiss this problem as missing the point of Adorno's theory. As mentioned above, this strategy is not popular today in the literature, but this by itself does not rule it out. I will show in this section that the non-normative strategy is unpopular for a good reason: to deny that Adorno's theory is normative would be to fundamentally distort it.

In the introduction, I mentioned two reasons why one might think that Adorno's philosophy is normative. On the one hand, Adorno understands theory essentially as critique and critique (one might think) is inherently normative; on the other hand, his theory contains ethical claims and such claims in turn are normative. Obviously, there is more to say about these issues and I will come back to a complication later (in section II).¹² Still, these two reasons are a good starting point. Accepting them for the moment, allows one to map out what a non-normative defense of Adorno's theory would have to show. It would have to show (1) that

Adorno's theory is merely descriptive or explanatory, not also critical, and (2) that it contains no ethical claims.

In fact, the most recent proponent of a non-normative reading of Adorno's works, Tassone, argues explicitly for (2) and also seems to be committed to (1). According to Tassone, Adorno holds a purely theoretical and explanatory social theory paired with an equally non-normative philosophy of history; and anything which *looks* like being an ethical or moral judgment in Adorno's writings is either *actually* not such a judgment, or is not part of Adorno's theory (but, one presumes, instead merely a matter of his personal opinion).¹³ If anything, Adorno is a critic of morality, who—like Marx before him—denies that morality could be an instrument of change (a 'lever of emancipation').¹⁴ Although Tassone realizes that Adorno is undertaking 'projects of radical transformation of society' and that implicit in Adorno's description of society is 'a moral indictment',¹⁵ Tassone thinks that Adorno ultimately just seeks to scientifically *explain* the current social world and its latent potentialities for change. Any social change will be the outcome of a 'necessary logical-conceptual progression', with 'practical-normative judgments' playing no role whatsoever.¹⁶ Even the New Categorical Imperative (about which I talk more shortly) is just the phenomenological expression of a contradiction in consciousness, not a moral norm which Adorno's theory prescribes.¹⁷

In reply, I will now advance three interrelated considerations against the non-normative reading of Adorno's theory. I will tailor the discussion of these considerations especially to Tassone's account, but, I believe, that they speak against the non-normative reading of Adorno's works more generally.

Firstly, there is strong textual evidence for thinking that Adorno is not just engaged in a merely descriptive or explanatory social theory. If anything, this is clearest in his writings on sociology. As early as 1937, in a critique of the sociologist K. Mannheim with the title 'Neue wertfreie Soziologie',¹⁸ Adorno argues against the very idea of a value-free, merely descriptive sociology. Such sociology fails to be neutral because in the end it justifies the *status quo*.¹⁹ Part of the reason for this is that such sociology would involve taking things as they are, unreflectively accepting states of affairs or opinions as data. Doing so would miss the fundamental underlying causes and mechanism, which do not directly show up in the surface phenomena. To compensate for this, descriptive sociology tends to introduce abstract classifications, which, according to Adorno, have little relation to the social reality they are meant to describe. The end result of

this is that social reality is not grasped, but rather masked by being described in terms of invariant categories. In this way, descriptive sociology is not just objectionable because it overlooks the ‘necessity for criticism’,²⁰ but also because it makes for a bad sociology.²¹ Adorno held on to these views throughout his life, and defended them, for example, against K. Popper and others in a debate about the nature of sociology in the 1960s.²² Similarly, in Adorno’s works which are not directly sociological he also rejects the idea that theory should be solely descriptive or explanatory. To point to just a few examples: (a) Adorno claims that to understand something is already to criticize it, to distinguish what is true and false in it;²³ (b) for him, thinking consists essentially in negation;²⁴ and (c) he argues that critique of ideologies is not peripheral, but central to philosophy.²⁵ That critique is essential to Adorno’s conception of theory is perhaps most explicit in his paper ‘Wozu noch Philosophie’ [1962]. Here, he writes:

*If philosophy is still necessary, it is so only in the way it has been from time immemorial: as critique, as resistance to the expanding heteronomy, as what might be the powerless attempt of thought to remain its own master and to convict of untruth, by their own criteria, fabricated mythology and a conniving, resigned conformity.*²⁶

In sum, there is ample textual evidence to suggest that Adorno was not engaged in a merely descriptive or explanatory project and, in fact, would have dismissed such a project, even when it comes to social theory. Secondly, the thesis that Adorno’s critical theory is merely an explanatory social theory goes also against the very *spirit* of his whole project. For Adorno, a merely explanatory social theory would be what his long time collaborator M. Horkheimer describes as ‘traditional theory’.²⁷ This is a conception of theory, according to which impartial, merely descriptive theorizing is both possible and represents the ideal form of theorizing. Horkheimer and Adorno reject this conception in favor of what they call ‘critical theory’. According to them, it is an illusion to think that one could engage in impartial and merely descriptive social theorizing. Instead one’s social theory will always be informed by an interest (at least implicitly). The important thing is not to theorize independently of any interest (which is impossible), but rather to adopt the right one, namely, the interest in the abolition of suffering and injustice.²⁸ This has an important implication. Critical theory always brings standards to bear on its theorizing—the badness of suffering and injustice (and the interest in their abolition).²⁹ Hence, critical theory is not just descriptive or explanatory, but always

already normative in at least the following sense: it uses certain standards of judgments as norms with which society (and any theories defending it) can be criticized. Moreover, critical theory also involves the demand for social transformation—the demand, well captured in a formulation by Marx, '(...) to overthrow all circumstances in which man is humiliated, enslaved, abandoned and despised'.³⁰ This demand is normative not just in the sense of providing a standard of judgment, but also in the further sense of requiring us to act in certain ways. In fact, Adorno's demand for social transformation often takes the form of an ethical or moral demand. For example, consider a central theme in Adorno's theory, namely, Auschwitz and the events for which this name symbolically stands. Adorno aims not just to explain the occurrence of Auschwitz (as much as this can be done at all); he demands of us to change the circumstances which made Auschwitz possible and which still largely persist. In a key passage, Adorno claims that '[a] new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon human beings in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen'.³¹ This New Categorical Imperative would require detailed analysis—for there are a number of unusual aspects to it (such as the fact that it is *imposed* by Hitler rather than self-legislated or demanded by reason).³² Nonetheless, one thing is clear: this imperative expresses how Adorno's theory is not merely explanatory, but how his critical analysis of modernity results in ethical demands for social transformation and thereby is deeply normative.

Thirdly, this last point also shows that the ethical demands which Adorno makes are not just a matter of his personal opinion, but integral to his theory. It is not that the New Categorical Imperative arrives as an afterthought or optional extra in Adorno's theory. Rather, to understand his analysis of the evils of Auschwitz and how modern society and culture is deeply implicated in them is to accept that we should arrange our thoughts and actions differently; the evils of Auschwitz and the failure of culture thus analyzed *categorically* demand that we should aim to prevent that something similar can happen. Equally with other ethical claims which Adorno makes: it is not the case that we need an extra step from the analysis of something as a form of wrong life to the demand that we should resist it; for Adorno this 'negative prescription' derives directly from life being wrong.³³ Hence, his descriptions and explanations are already ethically loaded. Thus, whether or not one agrees with those commentators who think that Adorno's theory contains an ethics, one

ought to agree that an ethical dimension is not accidental to, or separate from, it. There is a direct line from Adorno's conception of theory as critique to his demands for social transformation and, insofar as many of these demands are ethical in nature (most prominently the New Categorical Imperative), an ethical dimension is indispensable to his theory.

Moreover, it would be a serious confusion to take the fact that Adorno is critical of morality and moral philosophy to mean that his theory cannot contain any ethical or moral claims. To give an analogy, B. Williams is very critical of moral systems in that he rejects modern, principle-based morality and aims to restrict the role of ethical theory in everyday life.³⁴ Yet, no one would want to say that Williams's philosophy is devoid of ethical normativity. In a similar way, one should not conflate Adorno's critical views about morality and moral philosophy with a denial of all ethical or moral claims.³⁵ Admittedly, Adorno is skeptical about the possibility of living rightly in our current wrong social world (as he famously writes, '[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly').³⁶ And he is also skeptical about the possibility that moral theory could change that.³⁷ Yet, this skepticism does not stop him from putting forward ethical demands on how we should live our wrong lives, such as the already mentioned 'negative prescription' to resist '(...) the forms of wrong life which have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds'.³⁸ Such negative prescriptions might not add up to a full-blown morality or be part of a systematic moral theory, but, again, there is no need to think that ethics would have to take either of these forms (think back to the analogy with Williams). Finally, even if it was true that Adorno did not consider morality as a successful 'lever of emancipation' (and I am far from certain that it is true), this need not mean that he made no ethical or moral claims. It would only mean that he did not consider the ethical claims he made to have much practical effect on people. However, Adorno never accepted that the adequacy of a theory should be measured by its practical effects.³⁹ Moreover, if the social conditions are such that they give rise to ethical demands to change them, then this is unaffected by the putative fact that morality or ethics are unsuitable instruments of social change. If anything, this putative fact would constitute a moral calamity in its own right: there would be an ethical demand, but ethics would be powerless to effect that this demand is met. Hence, there is nothing in Adorno's critique of moral philosophy which makes it the case that his critical theory cannot be ethical.

For these reasons, the non-normative reading should be rejected and we should agree with the critics of Adorno that his theory is normative. This also spells trouble for the non-normative defense strategy to the Problem of Normativity. Admittedly, those defending Adorno might have to give up some of what he says, but a non-normative defense would have to give up too much of it.

However, this does not yet settle the matter. One might admit that Adorno's theory is normative and still reject that he owes us an *account* of this normativity. Next, I will discuss one reason for why one might reject this. I will show that this reason is, in fact, not a good reason for doing so.

Section II: The limitations of immanent critique

It could be argued that Adorno's theory mainly takes the form of immanent critiques, meaning that Adorno mainly took the standards or ideals implicit in society (or theories defending it) and criticized society (and those theories) with the help of their own standards and ideals. Such a method need not involve independent endorsement of the claims made use in the critique of a position. For example, to criticize bourgeois society for not living up to its ideals of freedom and equality would be compatible with not actually endorsing these ideals.

In this way, one might think, Adorno's theory can be normative, but does not owe us an *account* of this normativity. The normativity would derive from within his immanent critique and, if anyone, those Adorno criticizes (such as Kant) need to account for it (and if they could not do so, then this would be a problem *for them*, not for Adorno).

As a rejoinder, I will now raise doubts about the idea that Adorno's method absolves him from having to give his own account of normativity. I agree that Adorno largely criticizes positions immanently (or, at least, aims to do so). Yet, crucially, Adorno does not think that immanent critique can be solely immanent.⁴⁰ This is especially so, when it comes to criticizing the social world of late capitalism. Adorno became increasingly skeptical about the possibility of immanent critique of the current social order. He points out that confronting bourgeois society with its moral norms might just lead to these norms being dropped, rather than realized.⁴¹ In fact, he seems to think that these norms (and other ideals used to justify capitalism) had, indeed, been largely dropped by the mid-

dle of the twentieth century, so that it is no longer possible to confront the given reality with the claims it makes about itself. For example, he writes: 'There is not a crevice in the cliff of the established order into which the ironist might hook a fingernail'.⁴² Thus, Adorno suggests that there is no longer a discrepancy between what the social world presents itself to realize (its ideals) and its actual reality. Without such a discrepancy, immanent critique cannot get going. Moreover, even where immanent critique is still possible, Adorno is not only concerned with demanding the realization of what the bourgeoisie had promised.⁴³ Rather, the current state of the world is bad for Adorno, whether or not it cloaks itself in positive claims. We know inhumanity and misery by themselves,⁴⁴ and by themselves they demand their abolition.⁴⁵ In fact, in order to undertake adequate immanent critiques we have to be guided in them by knowledge of the bad and of the fact that our current society realizes the bad.⁴⁶ Otherwise, immanent critiques just turn into instances of false consciousness.⁴⁷ Consequently, we are back with the point which I already raised about Adorno's critical theory: this theory presupposes normative premises of its own. In this sense, Adorno cannot rely on immanent critique alone, but brings into it the knowledge of the bad and the inhuman as well as the interest in their abolition. And to underwrite this knowledge and interest Adorno needs an account of the normativity they contain—or so his critics would argue. Whether or not they are right about this, one thing is certain: the fact that Adorno mainly relies on immanent critiques does not absolve him from providing such an account. Either this form of critique is impossible today, or, insofar as immanent critique still is possible, it relies on normative assumptions brought to it from the outside.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have concentrated on clarifying the Problem of Normativity and on showing that it is a genuine problem insofar as it cannot simply be dismissed out of hand, as those who advance the non-normative reading of Adorno's theory tend to suggest (section I). In fact, as I have also argued (in section II), even Adorno's reliance on immanent critiques does not absolve him from providing an account of the normativity contained in his theory. In this sense, the question put to those defending Adorno still stands: 'can Adorno account for the normativity of his critical stance and ethical demands without giving up on his negativism?' Instead of answer-

ing this question, my main point in this paper was merely to argue that those, who like me, think that this question can be answered in the affirmative should not deny that Adorno's theory is normative. Like so often, what looks like an easy way out is not really a solution.

- 1 J. Habermas was perhaps the first who explicitly stated this criticism of his former teacher (see, e.g., 'Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity – Self-Affirmation Gone Wild (1969)' in his *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (London: Heinemann, 1983), translated by F.G. Lawrence, pp. 99-110, esp. p. 106).
- 2 From now on, I speak only about the good, not the right as well, because the considerations are exactly parallel in both cases and to repeat both would be cumbersome.
- 3 'Hitler has imposed a new categorical imperative upon human beings in the state of their unfreedom: to arrange their thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen' [*Hitler hat den Menschen im Stande ihrer Unfreiheit einen neuen kategorischen Imperativ aufgezungen: ihr Denken und Handeln so einzurichten, daß Auschwitz sich nicht wiederhole, nichts Ähnliches geschehe*] (ND, 6:358/365; translation amended). All references to Adorno's published works are to his *Gesammelte Schriften*, 20 Vols., ed. by G. Adorno & R. Tiedemann, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970-1986. The following abbreviations are used 'ND' for *Negative Dialektik* (English translation by E.B. Ashton, London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1973; but I have also consulted the one by D. Redmond, <http://www.efn.org/~dredmond/ndtrans.html>, 2001), 'MM' for *Minima Moralia* (English translation by E. Jephcott, London: Verso, 1991). I also refer to the transcripts of Adorno's lectures on moral philosophy, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie (1963)*, ed. by T. Schröder, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996 (English translation by R. Livingstone, Cambridge: Polity, 2000), using the abbreviation 'PMP'. References are first to the German edition and then to the English translation (if there is one), separated by a forward slash.
- 4 In formalising this problem I have benefited from Finlayson's work on Adorno (J.G. Finlayson (2002), 'Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable', *European Journal of Philosophy* 10(1): 1–25, esp. 1-5).
- 5 G. Tassone (2005), 'Amoral Adorno: Negative Dialectics Outside Ethics', *European Journal of Social Theory* 8(3): 251–267. For an earlier example, see, e.g., P. Piccone. (1991), 'Does Critical Theory Need Saints or Foundations?', *Telos* 87 (24.1): 146-157.
- 6 M. Seel (2004), *Adornos Philosophie der Kontemplation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp), Ch. 2.
- 7 M. Knoll (2002), *Theodor W. Adorno – Ethik als erste Philosophie*, München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, pp. 172-175. See also J.G. Finlayson (2003), 'Adorno: Modern Art, Metaphysics and Radical Evil' in *Modernism/Modernity* 10: 71-97.
- 8 Mainly among Adorno's critics there are a number of commentators who think that Adorno tried to avoid the alleged impasses of his theory by escaping from philosophy into aesthetics (see, e.g., R. Bubner (1983), *Modern German Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 179-182), and they would probably ascribe this strategy to Adorno also in the case of the Problem of Normativity. However, the thought that Adorno moves beyond his negativism in his aesthetic theory can also be encountered in the writings of those who set out to defend Adorno (see, e.g., H. Brunkhorst (1999), *Adorno and Critical Theory* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press), especially pp. 9, 67f, 118f).
- 9 Finlayson 2002.
- 10 G. Schweppenhäuser (1993), *Ethik nach Auschwitz: Adorno negative Moralphilosophie*, Hamburg: Argument-Verlag (Argument-Sonderband Neue Folge AS 231); U. Kohlmann (1997), *Dialektik der Moral – Untersuchungen zur Moralphilosophie Adornos*, Lüneburg: zu Klampen; and J.M. Bernstein (2001), *Adorno – Disenchantment & Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- 11 The only commentator I know of who holds this view is R. Geuss. However, even in his case he never presented a positive characterisation of this view. Rather, it is implicit in his engagement with Adorno and the contemporary literature on normativity (see, e.g., R. Geuss (1996), 'Morality and Identity', in C.

- Korsgaard *et al.* (1996), *The Sources of Normativity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 189-199, especially 198f).
- 12 For example, one might be skeptical about the first claim, that is, the claim that critique is inherently normative. Perhaps, not all forms of critique need be normative (see R. Geuss (2002), 'Genealogy as Critique', *European Journal of Philosophy* 10.2: 209-215, reprinted in his (2005), *Outside Ethics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, Ch. 9). In section II, I do consider the argument that Adorno's theory is dominated by a form of critique (immanent critique) which absolves him from accounting for the normativity of the claims at issue.
- 13 Tassone 2005: especially 256, 259, 261.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 258:
- 15 *Ibid.*, 258, 260.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 260
- 17 *Ibid.*, 259
- 18 20.1:13-45.
- 19 20.1:39.
- 20 20.1:45
- 21 20.1:33; see also 'Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften' [1962], 8:547-565, here 8:565/English translation by G. Adey and D. Frisby in T.W. Adorno *et al.*, *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1976) pp. 105-122, here pp. 121f.
- 22 See 'Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften' [1962]; 'Einleitung zum *Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie*' 8:280-353/Adorno *et al.* 1976: 1-67.
- 23 *Ästhetische Theorie* [posthumous, 1971], 7:391/trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, (London: Continuum, 1997), 2004, p. 341.
- 24 ND, 6:30/19.
- 25 ND, 6:151/148.
- 26 ['*Ist Philosophie noch nötig, dann wie von je als Kritik, als Widerstand gegen die sich ausbreitende Heteronomie, als sei's auch machtloser Versuch des Gedankens, seiner selbst mächtig zu bleiben und angedrehte Mythologie wie blinzelnd resignierte Anpassung nach ihrem eigenen Maß des Unwahren zu überführen.*] 10.2:464-465/English translation by H.W. Pickford in T.W. Adorno, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) p. 10; translation amended; see also 10.2:470/Adorno 1998: 14.
- 27 See M. Horkheimer, 'Traditionelle und Kritische Theorie' [1937], and 'Postscript' [1937] in his *Die gesellschaftliche Funktion der Philosophie – Ausgewählte Essays*, Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp, pp. 145-209; English translation in his *Critical Theory*, trans. by O'Connell, Matthew J. *et al.*, (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 188-252; see also ND, 6:27-29/pp. 15-18; 20.1: 151; 20.2: 706.
- 28 See *Ibid.*, pp. 199, 205/English translation, pp. 242, 248. See also Schweppenhäuser 1993: pp. 6, 177, 183f, 185f, 190; Knoll 2002: pp. 19, 30, 33, 35f.
- 29 It should be noted that the presupposition of these standards neither is, nor contains a (positive) conception of the good. Also, although the badness of the suffering is the basic assumption, it is not a foundation in the sense of *Ursprungsphilosophie*: it is not grounded in an *a priori* way, but is based on the historical experience of suffering; and it is also not the ultimate ground or something unconditioned, but dependent on the objective existence of suffering and the reality causing it (see Knoll 2002: pp. 33, 42).
- 30 K. Marx, 'Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie. Einleitung' [1844], MEW I:385/English translation in D. McLellan (ed.) (1977), *Karl Marx - Selected Writings*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 63-73, here p. 69.
- 31 ND, 6:358/365; translation amended. For the German original, see note 3 above.
- 32 For a more detailed analysis of the New Categorical Imperative see Bernstein 2001: Ch. 8; see also my 'Adorno's Negativistic Ethics', Ph.D. Thesis, Sheffield 2005, Ch. 7, sect. III.
- 33 See, e.g., PMP, 248/167f.
- 34 See, e.g., B. Williams (1993), *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, London: Fontana Press, [1985], revised edition, especially Chs. 1, 5.
- 35 By saying that Adorno's philosophy is ethical, I do not take myself to be in conflict with Geuss' thesis that Adorno's philosophy lies 'outside ethics'. Geuss uses 'ethics' in a more narrow sense than I do. His claim is that Adorno's rejects the principle-based, Kant-inspired morality which has arguably dominated modern moral philosophy (see R. Geuss (2003), 'Outside Ethics', *European Journal of Philosophy*

11.1: 29–53; reprinted in Geuss 2005, Ch. 3). This claim is compatible with the view presented here—in fact, one way to read Geuss is to understand him to advance a case against (what he perceives as) the monopolizing tendencies of Kant-inspired morality *within ethics* (now understood in my wider sense of the term). In this sense, he might be happy to accept that Adorno's theory is ethical insofar as it offers a guide to how we should live, albeit one (Geuss would emphasize) which is importantly different from the dominant strand of modern moral philosophy.

36 MM, 4:43/39.

37 See, e.g., PMP, 246f/166

38 PMP, 249/167f; translation amended.

39 See, e.g., ND, 6:15/3.

40 See, e.g., ND, 6:183/182.

41 MM, 4:105/93.

42 MM, 4:241/211; see also ND, 6:271/274; 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' [1949, 1951], especially 10:28f/English translation in R. Tiedemann (ed.) (2003), *Can One Live after Auschwitz? – A Philosophical Reader*, trans. by R. Livingstone *et al.*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, especially pp. 161f. It seems reasonable to think that what Adorno says here about the 'ironist', he would also say about the critical theorist.

43 See Kohlmann 1997: pp. 184f. At one point, Adorno states that it would constitute real progress if what the bourgeoisie had promised were actually realized ('Kritik' [1969], 10.2:792f/Adorno 1998: 287). Still, this should not be understood as suggesting that such realization would be all what is required for a free society or the realization of the (human) good. Rather, Adorno is making a more limited point here. He is reacting to the demand that critique of society should always be able to point to positive practical improvements. In response to this demand, he argues that critics can always point out that if a society lived up to its own norms, then this would already be such an improvement— they do not need to present fully worked out proposals for a different society just to be able to criticize the current society. This response is compatible with Adorno thinking that a free, post-capitalist society would go beyond the realization of bourgeois norms. In fact, this *is* what Adorno thinks. For example, Adorno says that it would be an improvement to realize the capitalist ideal of free and fair exchange of equivalents, but, what is more, such realization would then allow the transcendence of exchange altogether (ND, 6:150/147).

44 PMP, 261/175.

45 See ND, 6:203/203.

46 See 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' [1942, 1951], especially 10:27f/Tiedemann (ed.) 2003: especially 160. R. Jaeggi suggests that Adorno undertakes immanent critique at its limit (R. Jaeggi "'Kein Einzelner vermag etwas dagegen". Adornos *Minima Moralia* als Kritik von Lebensformen", in A. Honneth (ed.) (2005), *Dialektik der Freiheit. Frankfurter Adorno-Konferenz 2003*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, pp. 115-141, here p. 141/translated into English as "'No Individual Can Resist": *Minima Moralia* as Critique of Forms of Life', *Constellations* 12.1 (March 2005): 65-82, here 82), that is, he proceeds immanently as much as possible, but also realizes that we cannot restrict ourselves to this procedure and that it does not yield strict contradictions, but only inadequacies. This is partly because Adorno gives up Hegel's optimism of history as the unfolding of reason and, hence, has no longer a warrant that all of the individual immanent critiques would add up to more than just a set of inconsistencies or relativism. In this sense, he cannot just trust on immanent critique, but needs also objective criteria of what success [*Gelingen*] would consist in. Jaeggi does not comment on what these criteria are for Adorno, but the absence of suffering, injustice and unfreedom would be the obvious candidate (especially if anchored by an Aristotelian conception of normativity as I propose elsewhere). Yet, presumably, she means to say that these criteria, whatever they are, do not arise from, but are brought to the immanent critiques (which might, nonetheless, also confirm and validate them).

47 Similar considerations apply to one of the other methods employed by Adorno, namely ideology critique (that is, the critique of a theory or set of beliefs for misrepresenting reality in a way which benefits a certain social group or the established social order). According to Adorno, there is the danger that ideology critique just becomes the blanket accusation that all theorizing relies on particular interests (or that it is in some other way biased). Hence, without a critical stance towards society, ideology critique would just lead to a general relativism (see 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft' [1942, 1951], 10.1:23f/Tiedemann (ed.) 2003: 157; see also ND, 6:198/198).

Adorno and the Rediscovery of Autonomy

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▪ Adorno's analysis of the idea of freedom focuses on the concept and possibility of autonomy. This concept plays a challenging role in his work in that several different lines of thought can be identified. At various points Adorno seems to position himself against the very idea of autonomy. This, controversially, places him at odds with a great deal of progressive social philosophy outside the Frankfurt School tradition. It rejects a conception of freedom which by its very definition appears unexceptionable. Take, for instance, Thomas Scanlon's powerful articulation of the idea of autonomy. He proposes that to "regard himself as autonomous in the sense I have in mind a person must see himself as sovereign in deciding what to believe and in weighing competing reasons for action. He must apply to these tasks his own canons of rationality, and must recognize the need to defend his beliefs and decisions in accordance with these canons... An autonomous person cannot accept without independent consideration the judgment of others as to what he should believe or what he should do."¹ On what basis can this attractive theory of free action be criticized?

Adorno, in fact, develops a number of lines of critical engagement. (1) Employing aspects of Freudian psychology he argues that the ideal of autonomous acting is the *product of repression*, that is, it is a variety of agency associated with the "ego." He writes: "The absolute volitional autonomy implied therein would be the same as absolute rule over one's inner nature."² (2) Adorno alleges that the very idea of autonomy is the theoretical expression of the version of individuality which is *required by and perpetuates* bourgeois society. As he puts it: "The individual was free as an economically active bourgeois subject, free to the extent to which the economic system required him to be autonomous."³ (3) A further criticism is that the emphasis on the autonomy of the individual mistakes the degree to which the individual is *mediated by society*. According to Adorno, "[t]he more critically we see through the autonomy of subjectivity, however, and the clearer our awareness of its own mediated nature, the more incumbent it is upon our thinking to take on what lends it the solidity it does not have in itself."⁴

It would seem that Adorno's criticisms (1: repression) and (2: ideology) leave us with little option but to suspect the modern idea of autonomy as being complicitous in a social totality we must rather criticize and reject. Yet there is (4) a further line of thought – certainly expressed less frequently – in which the idea of autonomy is positively endorsed as the ideal of a rational society. Adorno writes, for instance, “[t]he objective end of humanism is only another expression for the same thing. It signifies that the individual as individual, in representing the species of man, has lost the autonomy through which he might realize the species.”⁵⁵ This view, though pessimistic, seems curiously at odds with Adorno's final looking rejection of autonomy as “ideology.” However, it is important to look at the way in which he actually formulates the view more favorable to the idea of autonomy. His formulation posits the notion that the potential for has somehow been eclipsed in modernity. Indeed this is corroborated in a further passage, in which he claims that the ideal of autonomy was eventually overwhelmed by the norms of contemporary capitalism: “The process of evolving individual independence [i.e. autonomy] is a function of the exchange society and terminates in the individual's abolition by integration. What produced freedom will recoil into unfreedom.”⁵⁶

*This line is not consistently articulated by Adorno. Much of the time it appears that lines (1) and (2) predominate and that the critique of autonomy represents a rejection of modernity. However, the idea of a lost autonomy is of great significance to the rationality of Adorno's enterprise in that it means that he is not helping himself to extra-normative justification when he laments autonomy in its current condition. That is, his discussions of the problems of autonomy draw attention to a specific form in which it has evolved in modernity. The critique of this form, to the effect it is a distortion, is arguable only if there is a non-distorted model to which we might refer. If the non-distorted model is utopian (and extra-normative), however, it will surely be questionable. If it is available to us historically then the critique is undertaken in terms of how far the current model has failed to fulfill its evident potential.

Nevertheless we need to do some work in order to address the apparent incompatibility between the positive notion of a *lost autonomy* and the negative notion of *autonomy as ideological*. Why the nostalgia for a concept of autonomy which manifests itself in modernity as ideological? Adorno's contention, I submit, is that in the current social reality the ideal of autonomy becomes deformed, as it is shaped to the needs of current social arrangements, those of an increasingly totalized society. Indeed,

this thought was central to Adorno's effort to innervate public reason in post-war Germany. The task of the philosopher was to diagnose what it was that led to a form of freedom underpinned by dysfunctional rationality. The diagnosis he offered was as follows: "If they [individuals] want to live, then no other avenue remains but to adapt, to submit themselves to the given conditions; they must negate precisely that autonomous subjectivity to which the idea of democracy appeals; they can preserve themselves only if they renounce their self."⁷ In contrast to this contemporary condition Adorno appeals, as the passage shows, to the ideal of autonomy, an ideal which has been negated by modernity. In order for this to be anything more than a speculative gesture Adorno needs to be able (i) to outline the condition of autonomy before it was lost and (ii) to explain how it was vulnerable to loss.

Issues of fundamental significance for critical theory are in play in these questions (way more than can be considered in this paper). The idea of a rediscovered conception of autonomy faces two dangers at the extremes: too radical a conception of emancipation and it becomes distant from the very individuals who would be emancipated by it; not radical enough and it remains within what might be described as bourgeois theories of freedom, liberal assertions of the rights of the individual against an overbearing state. By examining the ways in which Adorno treats of the concept of autonomy we should begin to appreciate the distinctive version of emancipation he is attempting to establish. I do not want to argue that he achieves a concept of autonomy which trumps the more conventional liberal one. However, what I think is significant – and this I do hope to show – is that Adorno provides an innovative and coherent version of the concept which avoids the so-called bourgeois notion of self-mastery implicit in modern philosophy.

1. The Context of Freedom

Let us begin by considering the problem of freedom, the problem, perhaps, of what Adorno thinks of as the inhibition of freedom in modernity in order to see the context in which Adorno's conception of autonomy begins to emerge. He rejects an idea that underpins classic philosophical debates about whether we are metaphysically "free" or "unfree." He dismisses as "naïve" the theoretical focus on the question "are you responsible or not responsible." His claim is that freedom is not a theo-

retical but a social question: freedom, he writes, “in the sense of moral responsibility can only exist in a free society.”⁸ He holds that “society destines [determines] the individuals to be what they are, even by their immanent genesis.”⁹ The debate about freedom and determinism needs therefore to be conceived as a debate within a social context since freedom, as Adorno writes, “is entwined, not to be isolated.”¹⁰

It is important to see the complexity of this “entwinement.” Adorno’s charge does not follow the standard left-wing rejection of bourgeois individualism, the rejection of the selfish type who would perpetuate inequality and atomized social relations. Rather the very idea of “liberal individuals” reproduces a social context in which this distinctive, and according to Adorno, socially determined version of freedom comes to predominate: “freedom and unfreedom are not primary phenomena, but derivatives of a totality that at any given time exercises dominion over the individual.”¹¹ Indeed, the image of a socially determined freedom is the image of a totality in which its seemingly highest achievement – freedom – turns out to be part of the mechanism of its continuity and perpetuation: “Men are unfree because they are beholden to externality, and this externality in turn consists of men themselves.”¹²

At this point we can see how Adorno’s critique of modernity places him so fundamentally at odds with liberalism. According to Adorno’s conception the liberal gets things the wrong way round in holding that society is preserved through the voluntary delimitation of individual freedom. For Adorno, conversely, individual unfreedom is perpetuated by the very notion of bourgeois freedom which individuals believe they enjoy in society. In this way Adorno is pointing to what he thinks of as the ahistorical bias of the bourgeois concept. This should lead us to a reassessment of the concept as we come to recognize the entwined dimensions of the individual.

It may seem to be a disputable claim that bourgeois philosophy – liberal political theory in particular – misses the historical dimensions. The great propagandists of liberalism, such as Kant, often describe the possibility of rational freedom as a result of humanity’s historical development, or maturation. But what is at issue in Adorno’s rejection of bourgeois social theory is the idea that the social individual – even if an evolutionary narrative such as Kant’s is included – experiences the social dynamic which fundamentally influences the conception of the space of individual freedom as natural and given.¹³ It is at the level of experience that history is missing.

For Adorno, the bourgeois conception of autonomy hinders freedom and thereby human flourishing. He writes that "without exception, men have yet to become themselves."¹⁴ The social reality in which we live inhibits the very possibility of self-realization. Adorno explains that "by the concept of the self we should properly mean their potential, and this potential stands in polemical opposition to the reality of the self."¹⁵

2. Autonomy as Repression

That the modern ideal of autonomy develops from a distortion of human potentiality is a striking claim. It directly denies a more optimistic teleology in which autonomy, in fact, is understood as humanity's highest realization. The great philosophies of history of the modern period posit the ever strengthening sense of freedom, of the growing capacity to act under reason. On what grounds then can Adorno see the contemporary development of autonomy as a regression? The key, it seems to me, lies in the radical way in which Adorno thinks of *acting under reason*. If we take Scanlon's definition from above we can find a way into this thought. Scanlon states that to "regard himself as autonomous in the sense I have in mind a person must see himself as sovereign in deciding what to believe and in weighing competing reasons for action. He must apply to these tasks his own canons of rationality, and must recognize the need to defend his beliefs and decisions in accordance with these canons..." But the very idea of a canon of rationality – as Scanlon's definition allows – is historical, varying according to place, tradition and social forces in general. The canon of reason operative in one's autonomous action will therefore give it a specific character.

The idea that the criterion of what we take to be reasonable can vary in accordance with social forces is, in fact, a distinctive commitment of the Hegelian-Marxist framework of the Frankfurt School. If the attractive notion of "acting under reason" were infiltrated by what one might consider the wrong canon of reason, by the kind of reason which society needs in order to perpetuate itself as a particular kind of totality, then we are left with a distorted – ideological – version of autonomy. Or is the notion of autonomy valid only when one act acts under the right kind of reason? The question, however, is really deeper than that: it is not simply about the right or wrong kind of reason but the way in which we understand reason to operate in our actions (as we shall see).

The concept of autonomy emphasizes self-directedness and the transparency to oneself of one's actions. This statement should not lead us to confuse autonomy with ratiocination, a purely analytic treatment of one's motivations, for instance. Nor should we think of autonomy as a kind of introspection, of the capacity to make our reasons transparent to ourselves. Autonomy is, in essence, a kind of acting which intends doing something in the world. But what is the source of freedom that comes to be articulated and formulated as autonomy? It is here that the extremely challenging nature of Adorno's conception of autonomy is founded.

Adorno's contention is that the sense of freedom is experienced by us as a fundamental impulse. As he puts it, the sense of freedom "feeds upon the memory of the archaic impulse (*Impuls*), not yet steered by any solid 'I' [or "ego," "Ich"].¹⁶ Precisely as an impulse, as something deeper than the ego – of the experience of "I" – it appears to precede reasoning and justification: "a certain archaic element is required for there to be such things as free impulses, or spontaneous modes of behavior that are not triggered by reasons"; it is not "behavior *in accordance with reason*."¹⁷ Yet precisely as an impulse it might seem to be empirically "pure," as an irreducible dimension of the human being. But how can this impulse – any impulse, perhaps – become distorted into the reduced form of freedom expressed by the contemporary version of autonomy? The clue is in one of Adorno's remarks about the Kantian bourgeois subject. He claims that this subject is "a strong ego in rational control of all its impulses...

Great philosophy is set against the idea of a man not modeled after the reality principle, a man not set in himself."¹⁸ In this regard Adorno speaks of the "Hinzutretende," the "addendum," "supplement" or "additional factor." The additional factor is in fact, in Adorno's view, the impulse from which action is motivated. He argues that impulse has been misunderstood by modern theory in that it has come to be "interpreted as nothing but consciousness."¹⁹ And because of this transfiguration the experience of freedom comes to be a matter to be settled by consciousness.

The answer Adorno gives to the question of how the "impulse" comes to be distorted in the first place is quite speculative employing, as it does, certain views of the construction of the "self" in modernity. In Adorno's view contemporary autonomy – operating with a distinctive conception of the location of reason – appropriates this impulse, understanding it as capable of giving rise to essentially transparent motivations. In so far as the "impulse" is construed in this way, however, it is understood as a

property of the "ego" or "I," of that dimension of the human organism associated with reflection and judgment. Not only, then, is (a) freedom identified with the ego but (b) the notion of a non-conscious impulse – what is not identifiable with the ego – is suspected and marginalized. This has negative consequences for the possibility of the experience of freedom. The real "source" or "locus" of the sense of freedom is an impulse which, since the ego was identified as the source of freedom, has been identified with and denigrated as nature and thus, ironically, with unfreedom. When the impulses are in that way construed the very idea of freedom is compromised. Adorno describes this as a "perverted form" (*verkehrten Gestalt*).²⁰ It is on this basis that Adorno's critique of autonomy is developed because he sees autonomy as the distinctively modern conception of freedom which valorizes the ratiocinations of the ego over the sensuous and the emotional. As Adorno writes: "Without an anamnesis of the untamed impulse that precedes the ego – an impulse later banished to the zone of unfree bondage to nature – it would be impossible to derive the idea of freedom, although that idea in turn ends up reinforcing the ego."²¹

There seems to be a primitivism in this position. Yet Adorno's deeper point appears to be – one directed distinctly against the German Idealist tradition – that neither freedom nor action can be derived from reason. If we think they can then we subordinate the impulse (the freedom source) to a preferred notion of reason. This is an important thought, one which checks a distinctively rationalistic tradition of freedom. However, difficult questions must be asked of the notion and status of the freedom-impulse: is Adorno advocating a form of freedom in which freedom is uninhibited impulsive action? And if the impulses are fundamental in themselves – "the untamed impulse that precedes the ego" – why argue for any form of autonomy given that no version of autonomy can dispense with the notion of "acting under reason"? Issues of the deepest significance for Adorno's idea of human experience are involved in answering these questions.²²

3. The Possibility of Autonomy?

The lines of an answer can be found in Adorno's idea of experience in which, in its ideal form, the agent is motivated by a form of reason which defines itself through its responsiveness to its environment. Adorno

refers to this as “mimetic behavior,” which he then goes on to define as “an involuntary adjustment to something extra-mental.”²³ Let us look again at some crucial statements on this responsiveness or mimetic behavior: “a certain archaic element is required for there to be such things as free impulses, or spontaneous modes of behavior that are not triggered by reasons”; it is not “behavior *in accordance with reason*.”²⁴ The phrasing is important: reason is not the cause. And what Adorno is proposing is a notion of reason which might be expressed *in the responsive experience* of one’s environment.

It is worth bearing in mind that Adorno’s high valuation of the genre of the philosophical essay is based precisely on this principle: the essay is a form which is responsive to the object of experience in that it does not force itself into conclusions or into systematic presentations. For that reason the essay is conventionally criticized as “irresponsible” – as not primarily driven by the need to establish conclusions – but, Adorno replies, it is responsible to “the object itself.”²⁵ In this way the essay reveals itself to be at odds with conventional, dysfunctional reason: “Doubt about the unconditional priority of method was raised... almost exclusively by the essay. It does justice to the consciousness of non-identity, without needing to say so, radically un-radical in refraining from any reduction to a principle... The essay does not obey the rules of the game of organized thought and theory that, following Spinoza’s principle, the order of things is identical with that of ideas.”²⁶

This very idea of responsive behavior as rationality has reappeared in contemporary debates in the philosophy of action. Rowland Stout has recently argued for “an outward-looking approach that takes the essence of agency to consist in the agent being bound up in rational sensitivity to their environment.”²⁷ Rationality is characteristic of this sensitivity, but rationality is not the cause of this sensitivity. Rationality does not have an aprioristic location and it cannot be thought of as in any sense outside experience. This point leads us, I think, to a sharper sense of what is at issue in Adorno’s conception of autonomy. We begin to appreciate that the analysis of the impulses serves a polemical function.

We can see this a little more closely if we consider, even in a very basic way, the fundamentals of an action with normative content. Such an action is one intended to give effect to a view. Without the intention the action is blind, or is at least normatively neutral, and without the action

the normative end remains in the realm of the theoretical rather than the practical. Adorno holds that in modernity the two dimensions of a normatively infused action are never reconciled in that they have come to be seen as two separate realms that occasionally interact: "two halves of an integral freedom that do not add up," to cite a phrase that Adorno uses in another context. The key theoretical works of modern philosophy are efforts to find the means by which the two dimensions can be seen to accommodate each other. But this fails to recognize, according to Adorno, that the separation of the two – of theory and practice – is a manifestation of the problem of experience. For that reason, the "two cannot be glued together in a synthesis."²⁸ What is wrong with this conception is that it somehow fixes the two fundamentals of an action with normative content without appreciating the adjustments of one's normative convictions that may arise in interaction with one's environment. Instead, and this is what Adorno himself sets out to achieve, we must try to understand what lies in the false theoretical separation of theory and practice, in the separation of a normative view and its activation.

The troubling consequence of the separation of theory and practice, Adorno argues, is that it cannot explain why we act because it excludes responsiveness. Adorno illustrates the point through an exploration of the figure of Hamlet. He argues that Hamlet's famous flaw, his procrastination, is a powerful artistic representation of the modern separation of thought and action, theory and practice: "it is at the outset of the self-emancipating modern subject's self-reflection, in *Hamlet*, that we find the divergence of insight and action paradigmatically laid down. The more the subject turns into a being-for-itself, the greater the distance it places between itself and the unbroken accord with a given order, the less will its action and its consciousness be one."²⁹ The Hamlet figure, as a being-for-itself, is immobilized by the separation of knowledge and action. And what this tells us is that for Adorno the unified idea of a normatively infused action is not simply a sophisticated synthesis of thought and action but a fundamental mode. This fundamental mode has, however, been transformed in such a way as to separate out or to fix a subjective dimension. This separation has been made by modern reason in which the normative dimension is understood as control of one's impulses. But control of impulses is, in effect, a denial of sensitivity to one's environment. It is, as Nietzsche argued better than anyone, a denial of one's environment. (One might, by the way, propose a different reading of Hamlet in which Hamlet's decisions are highly indicative of a conscious-

ness responsive to environment in that he does not blindly carry out the maxims of honor which he knows convention demands of him.)

Adorno argues that a consequence of this separation is the problematization of the very idea of action. We cannot make sense to ourselves that a reason – one devoid of impulse, pure ratiocination – can prompt action. As Adorno claims: “people suffer from their knowledge [like Hamlet] because they discover that no direct path leads from knowledge to practice.”³⁰ We are left with a form of Cartesianism in which the non-intellectual is instrumentalized by the intellect. The separated subject is, in the end, committed to a voluntarism in which agency is understood as entirely intellectual and the body the vehicle which one wills to act in accordance with the decision of the intellect. But action stands, as Adorno argues, “in need of a third thing, namely that injection of irrationality, of something no longer reducible to reason...”³¹ We need not see this as some blind force, but again as a dimension of experience which cannot be aprioristically isolated, the moment of sensitivity to individual actions. As he claims: “Because of its involuntary nature there is something irrational about this adjustment [responsiveness] that theories of freedom generally refuse to acknowledge but which is part of the definition of freedom.”³²

Adorno’s position is, ultimately, to radicalize reason, to see it as indicative of experience in which one commits oneself to a sensitive engagement with one’s environment. In certain ways this aligns Adorno with a particular strand of nineteenth century anti-idealism. The notion of “aesthetic education” put forward by Schiller outlines a theory in which the dualistic alternatives of what he calls the material – the “physical man” – and the formal – the realm of morality – are to be integrated. This involves a cultivation of the character. Schiller explains it in the following way: “To a certain extent it also proceeds from character, since the way to the head must be opened through the heart. The development of man’s capacity for feeling is, therefore, the more urgent need of our age, not merely because it can be a means of making better insights effective for living, but precisely because it provides the impulse for bettering our insights.”³³ It is important to see here that Schiller has directly connected the idea of cultivating the character with the idea of the education of the sensibility. Educating the sensibility means bringing it beyond the functions of perception and towards an intelligent capacity to engage and act in the world. The possibility of sensitivity to environment, one which is not modeled on the Cartesian picture of an inner agent manifesting itself

through its instructions to a body, is what Adorno is reaching for. The language of “impulses” – a term chosen in polemical confrontation with the rationalistic picture of motivation – tends to obscure his important point. If we are to think of Adorno as offering a version of autonomy it is as a recovery of an ideal of action. Rational sensitivity to environment is indeed demanded in Adorno’s project of an examination of the possibility of a critical rationality, of “dialectical” reason, which is nothing less than responsiveness to the world in such a way that the agent is committed in principle to fallibilism and revisability of her knowledge. Adorno’s notion of autonomy, unlike competitors from the idealist tradition at least, it is not one of “positive freedom,” with all the attendant difficulties revealed to us by Isaiah Berlin. The essence of the difference is that the place of reason in action moves from ratiocination to action itself.

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- 1 Thomas Scanlon, “A Theory of Freedom of Expression,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1 (2) (1972), 215-16.
 - 2 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialektik, Gesammelte Schriften* 6 (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), 253; English translation, E. B. Ashton, *Negative Dialectics* (London: Routledge, 1973), 256.
 - 3 *Negative Dialektik*, 259; tr. 262.
 - 4 *Negative Dialektik*, 49; tr. 39.
 - 5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben, Gesammelte Schriften* 4 (1997), 41 (§17); English translation, E. F. N. Jephcott, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life* (London: NLB, 1974), 38.
 - 6 *Negative Dialektik*, 259; tr. 262.
 - 7 Theodor W. Adorno, “Was bedeutet: Aufbereitung der Vergangenheit,” *Gesammelte Schriften* 10.2 (1977), 566; English translation, Henry W. Pickford, *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2nd 2005), 98.
 - 8 Theodor W. Adorno, *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit, Nachgelassene Schriften* IV/13 (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 280-1; English translation, Rodney Livingstone, *History and Freedom* (Cambridge: Polity, 2006), 203.
 - 9 *Negative Dialektik*, 218; tr. 219.
 - 10 *Negative Dialektik*, 218; tr. 219.
 - 11 *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 286; tr. 207.
 - 12 *Negative Dialektik*, 219; tr. 219.
 - 13 In the lecture series on *History and Freedom* Adorno announced: “...a direct progress towards freedom cannot be discerned. Objectively, such progress is impossible because of the increasingly dense texture of society in both East and West; the growing concentration of the economy, the executive and the bureaucracy has advanced to such an extent that people are reduced more and more to the status of functions. What freedom remains is superficial, part of the cherished private life, and lacks substance as far as people’s ability to determine their own lives is concerned” [*Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 11-12; tr. 5].
 - 14 *Negative Dialektik*, 274; tr. 278.
 - 15 *Negative Dialektik*, 274; tr. 278.
 - 16 *Negative Dialektik*, 221; tr. 221.
 - 17 *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 294; tr. 213.
 - 18 *Negative Dialektik*, 289; tr. 294.

- 19 *Negative Dialektik*, 226; tr. 227.
- 20 *Negative Dialektik*, 221; tr. 222.
- 21 *Negative Dialektik*, 221; tr. 221-222.
- 22 indeed, there is something dangerously paradoxical about the notion of impulses. In discussion Adorno puts it as follows: "The concept of freedom could not be formulated in the absence of recourse to something prior to the ego, to an impulse that is in a sense a bodily impulse that has not yet been subjected to the centralizing authority of consciousness; whilst on the other hand, its trajectory terminates in the strength of the ego itself. In other words, it contains a conflict in itself" [*Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 295; tr. 213].
- 23 *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 294; tr. 213
- 24 *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 294; tr. 213.
- 25 Theodor W. Adorno, "Die Essay als Form," *Gesammelte Schriften*, 11 (1974), 13; English translation, Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Will, "The Essay as Form," in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O'Connor (Malden, MA / Oxford: Blackwells, 2000), 95.
- 26 "Die Essay als Form," 17; tr. 98.
- 27 Rowland Stout, *Action* (London: Acumen, 2006), p. 11.
- 28 *Negative Dialektik*, 281; tr. 286.
- 29 *Negative Dialektik*, 227; tr. 228.
- 30 Theodor W. Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie, Nachgelassene Schriften IV/10* (1996), 168 ; English translation, Rodney Livingstone, *Problems of Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 1999), 112-113.
- 31 *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, 168; tr. 113.
- 32 *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*, 294; tr. 213
- 33 Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters* (English and German Facing) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L.A. Willoughby (*Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen*), 53 (Eight Letter).

Solidarity with Metaphysics at the Time of its Downfall: Adorno Contra Heidegger

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*"Metaphysics may well be proud of the newest attacks against it; it has been identified with thought."*¹ Max Horkheimer

▪ It is difficult to deny fact that at the beginning of the 21st century, far from being rendered obsolete by the acceleration of modernization, as Marx and Engels had famously predicted in the *Communist Manifesto*, religion has returned forcefully within societies that had understood themselves as modern and secular. The public role of religion and theology has elicited two distinct and indeed antithetical kinds of responses. The first understands itself as the heir of the 18th century and seeks to demystify religion by rational-scientific means in order reveal its other-worldly transcendence to be an all-too human, historical construction. One thinks, for example, of the so-called "new" or "militant" atheism of Christopher Hitchens², Richard Dawkins³ and Daniel Dennett⁴. The second is the retrieval of religion as the basis for a redoubled critique of modern reason that, at the same time, presents the "sacred" as a powerful source of identity and, indeed, authenticity. Such a position can be found in the post-modern theology of Mark C. Taylor⁵, in Michel Foucault's writings on the Iranian revolution⁶, the political theory of Charles Taylor⁷ and, more recently, Saba Mamhood's attempt to read the Women's Piety Movement—the sister organization to the Muslim brotherhood in Egypt—as the basis for a critique of liberal accounts of the self.⁸ In the first case, historical explanation of the origins of religion and its attendant liberation of the individual from the fetters of heteronomous traditions is purchased at the *cost of the destruction* of the meaningfulness of human experience. In the second, the self-conscious renewal of thick religious beliefs and practices restores meaningfulness through a renewed orientation towards the good, yet *only by sacrificing rational autonomy* or the idea that freedom consists of being both subject *and* author of moral law.

Two these two positions, a third can be added, one that seeks to address the short-comings of both, and emerges out of the dialogue between Jürgen Habermas and Pope Benedict XVI on the relationship between

“faith” and “reason”. Despite their obviously different starting points, Habermas and Benedict agree that in secular liberal democracies it is incumbent not just on “citizens of belief” but equally on “secular citizens” to acknowledge the limitations of their respective world-views.⁹ Both point to the potentially devastating “motivation problems”¹⁰— ie. the meaninglessness of moral action—that are inherent in a political state whose legitimacy lies solely in rational sources which can, in part, be addressed by a genuine “inclusion of the other.”

None of the three aforementioned positions represents an adequate account of the public role of religion. It is not enough to simply privilege the one over the other nor is it enough to propose, as Habermas does, a quasi-Benjaminian “translation” of theological contents into secular terms with a view to strengthening the normative resources of communicative action within the framework of the constitutional state. Indeed, Habermas notes the manner in which philosophy already inherits in its concepts of responsibility, autonomy, justification, history, memory, etc. the contents of Christian theology.¹¹ While Habermas views this relation not merely as benign but as beneficial insofar as inherent in the process of rationalization lies an irreducible spiritual and normative dimension. This is spelled out most clearly when Habermas argues that:

*It is true that the work of appropriation transformed the originally religious meaning, but without deflating it or weakening it in a way that would empty it out. The translation of the notion of man's likeness to God into the notion of human dignity, in which all men partake equally and is to be respected unconditionally, is such a saving translation. The translation renders the content of biblical concepts accessible to the general public of people of other faiths, as well as to non-believers, beyond the boundaries of particular religious communities.*¹²

Yet, might not the relation between faith and reason be more complicated than this? Nietzsche, for one, while arriving at a conclusion similar to Habermas, namely, that philosophical concepts are deeply and inextricably tied to the Abrahamic religions, evaluates this relation much differently. Moral philosophy takes over in an uncritical and unconscious way what Nietzsche calls the ‘ascetic ideals’ and, in the process, undermines its own intentions.

In contrast to the three responses to the return of the religious I’ve sketched above, I want in this paper to examine the very last line of Theodor W. Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, for it is in this text that Adorno

shows himself to be most aware of the very kinds of problems that center around contemporary liberalism, not least, that of his former assistant, Habermas. This has to do with the persistent oscillation between, on the one hand, a purely formal or procedural understanding of the world, or a "naturalization" of history, on the one hand, which corresponds to the accelerated development of science and technology which, in philosophical terms, takes the form of "positivism." On the other hand, is the resistance to such a naturalization of history, which finds paradigmatic expression in Heidegger's fundamental ontology.¹³ The latter seeks to destroy (deconstruct) the traditional opposition of time, on the one hand, and being, on the other, in such a way to reveal being (or Dasein) as *inherently temporal* or the interpretation of being *as* time. Indeed, against the formal systems against which it revolts, grounded in the subject-object language of modern epistemology, fundamental ontology seeks to locate temporality within the structures of the everyday and, moreover, in a conception of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) rooted in the finitude and radical singularity of the existing being.¹⁴ Thus, if positivism, in providing an account of the world that remains stringently, even obsessively, within the realm of the "facts" or the "given" and therefore within a kind of eternalized present, then fundamental ontology seeks to deconstruct the "metaphysics of presence" (Derrida) in such a way to open up a relation to future possibilities. In contrast to both positions which, each in its own antithetical way, stand decisively against metaphysics, Adorno posits a certain relation, a certain affinity between negative dialectics and such an "unsettled" metaphysics. More specifically, he suggests that negative dialectics takes up a position of "solidarity with metaphysics at the time of its downfall." What does Adorno mean by this enigmatic statement? And how can it assist us in thinking through the return of religion in the contemporary period? These are the two questions which this paper seeks to address.

The paper proceeds in three steps. (I) It sketches the contemporary phenomenon of globalization which sets the stage for understanding the return of the religious in contemporary societies insofar as globalization represents the penetration of every corner of the globe by a aggressive, deregulated capitalism while, at the same time, engendering forms of negativity that take the form, not of social solidarity based on universal principles, but on exclusionary claims to authenticity manifested as "the people" (as in authoritarian populism), ethnic identity and, of course, religious fundamentalism. Yet the latter differs from the first two precisely

because its contents betray a much more subtle relation between universal and particular, and as a result is more susceptible to an immanent critique capable of revealing its hidden normative contents, though in a very different sense from those suggested by Habermas. (II) Such a sketch leads into the basic arguments of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* which anticipate with much greater force and insight Benjamin Barber's analysis of the contradictions of globalization or John Gray's rejection or abstract negation of the modern conception of progress.¹⁵ (III) It is also the basis for grasping Adorno's own understanding of the relation between "metaphysics and materialism," which forms the third and last section

1. Globalization

If the public role of religion has been highly contested, then the same holds for the concept of "globalization." It is not my intention here to add yet another voice to an already cacophonous discussion surrounding this unusually fraught concept. Nonetheless, in very general terms we can understand globalization as involving important transformations at economic, cultural and political levels:

- Economic Level: The creation of a global economy that operates as a single on real or chosen time on a planetary scale.¹⁶ It is characterized by the specific contradiction between the "space of flows" and the "space of places."¹⁷
- Cultural Level: The homogenization of culture, predominantly through US cultural industries, leads to a countervailing eruption of particularistic, exclusionary forms of culture.¹⁸
- Political level: The undermining of the sovereignty of the nation-state from above and from below. Consequently, this has brought to the fore the crisis of representation of liberal democratic institutions.¹⁹

Globalization can be said to involve a process of simultaneous *integration* and *fragmentation*. Yet, we need to be clear that globalization does not represent an entirely novel phenomenon but, rather, intensifies crucial tensions that were already present within modernity itself. There are those who view the deterritorializing logic of globalization to present unique opportunities for new forms of solidarity and the creation of new

emancipatory identities. For example, in *Empire*, a book that has been called the "*The Communist Manifesto* for our time" Hardt and Negri argue that "Far from being defeated, the revolutions of the twentieth century have each pushed forward and transformed the terms of class conflict, posing the conditions of a new political subjectivity, an insurgent multitude against imperial power."²⁰ Yet, it is difficult not to view the processes of globalization as presenting very real difficulties for a new politics. While the global economy is becoming ever more closely integrated, political institutions and identities have become subjected to a progressive fragmentation. The rise of identity politics on the left is the most striking example of this process. Already in the *Communist Manifesto* Marx had identified processes that were pointing beyond the national economies, processes that were integrating territories via new communications and transportation technologies and creating new forms of solidarity that were now beginning to pose a spectral threat to the capitalist state.

Modern industry has established the world-market, for which the discovery of America has paved the way. The market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.²¹

The logic of capitalism involved a constant revolutionizing of the means of production which, itself, played a profound role in what Weber was later to call the disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world, stripping the feudal ties that bound individuals together organically by the "callous cash payment," and "drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy waters of egotistical calculation."²² What was crucial about the constant revolutionizing of the means of production was that it had it transformed being itself: "All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."²³

Yet Marx could celebrate this process in a fairly unabashed manner because he tended to view the destructive moment of modern experience as, ultimately, part and parcel of a profoundly creative dialectic.

Marx believed that the process by which men and women were forced to face the “real conditions of life” would have the enlightening effect of enabling the proletariat to see more or less transparently its universal, human interest in the transcendence of the very social relations that created it. The reconciliation of creation with destruction would happen through the unfolding of history and communism would be the result. All that had melted would, so to speak, become solid once more. History was an *inherently* redemptive story. Globalization accelerates the processes identified by Marx, yet without the reconciliation that would ultimately be achieved by Marx, the creation of a modern Prometheus no longer bound by national, religious or ethnic identities. Indeed, the process of the fragmentation on the left is not, strictly speaking, a recent phenomenon. If the *Manifesto* was written as the founding text of the International Working Man’s Association, some seventy years later, its successor organization, the Second Socialist International, would collapse as a result of the re-emergence of the very forms of particularism, namely nationalism, that Marx had thought were a thing of the past. What was significant here is that—in the absence of a proletariat that constituted a solid majority of the population—social democracy now had to reframe its political discourse and appeal not to the “working class” as such but, rather, to the “people.” The nationalism that was the undoing of the Second Socialist International with the outbreak of hostilities in 1914, became increasingly institutionalized thereafter. That is to say, after the demise of the Second Socialist International and after the long period of war stretching from 1914-1945, the non-Communist, left accepted the nation-state as the fundamental unit of politics. Social democracy, in other words, was forced by purely sociological and pragmatic reasons to return to a language based on the centrality of national-popular as opposed to the international proletarian solidarity.²⁴

Globalization represents an acceleration of the processes that Marx had already identified. It is to be viewed, therefore, as an intensification of the crisis in modernity: namely, a condition in which “All that is solid melts into air.” While Marx believed that the nature of this crisis would resolve itself socio-economically, that is, through the contradiction between the progressive forces of production and ever antiquated relations of production, the crisis turned out to be much more extensive than he, as an Enlightenment thinker, could have imagined. Indeed, as Horkheimer and Adorno recognized writing during the dark years of the Second World War, history was not to be understood as the simply passage from nature

to history; from barbarism to civilization, a condition of “bellum omnes contra omnium” to a condition of peace, but, rather, the two conditions inter-penetrated one another. History was inextricable from nature, enlightenment inextricable from mythology.²⁵ Indeed, Horkheimer and Adorno understood “enlightenment as mythological fear turned radical.” Under conditions of a disenchanted and rationalized world, the earlier fear experienced by humanity—that of an over-powering nature—becomes the fear *produced* in and by a society that had congealed into a kind of “second nature”—historical human practices that, because they appear to lie beyond the reach of human intervention, seem as if they were part of first nature. If mythology and enlightenment were bound up with one another, if there were no straightforward transition from nature to history then lying just below the surface of civilization was a profound insecurity.²⁶

2. *Dialectic of Enlightenment as the Introversion of Sacrifice*

The arguments that Adorno and Horkheimer put forth in this text, while in many ways striking and profound—particularly the reading of Homer—bear the marks of Walter Benjamin’s notion of “allegory,” and Lukács’ conception of “second nature” as the Charnel house of long-dead interiorities,” soon to be transformed via an interpretation of the famous Chapter 1 of the first Volume of *Capital*, into a full-blown account “reification.” Moreover, these arguments are also deeply indebted to Weber’s account of rationalization and disenchantment, which underlie the thesis of “this-worldly asceticism” as it emerges in his study of Puritanism which is ultimately how the authors characterize “enlightenment,”²⁷ and perhaps most importantly, Nietzsche’s account, alluded to above, of the “ascetic ideals” and the “internalization of man” in the *Genealogy of Morals*. The preoccupation in each case is with a secularization process that is unable to fully discharge itself; secularization takes the contradictory form of re-sacralization.

Accordingly, the basic argument of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is that there exists a chiasmic relation between myth and enlightenment. This parallels the concept of natural-history that Adorno elaborates in two lectures during the 1930s as well as a short but extremely dense piece on language, “Theses on the Language of the Philosopher”²⁸. In the “Idea of

Natural-history,” Adorno shows the manner in which history becomes naturalized or reified and, at the same time, nature can be read allegorically as the site at which the new appears. In other words, while under the sign of globalization, history seems to have calcified into a “second nature” impervious to human agency with the apparent disappearance of any meaningful alternatives to the penetration of capitalist social relations and the commodification of every corner of the earth. At the same time, such a penetration, which is increasingly guided by science and technology, makes possible historically unprecedented processes within the very fabric of nature, both in its causes and in its effects, such as biotechnology and climate change, respectively. By the same token, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* seeks to show how while mythology, paradigmatically, the *Odyssey*, can be read as allegory concerning the formation of the new historical category, namely, the bourgeois individual who in mastering nature obeys it. Enlightenment, understood not in historical terms as the “Age of Reason,” but rather in more general terms as the “advancement of thought,” itself falls prey to the compulsion to repeat the past.

The understanding of mythology as always already containing enlightening elements is crucial insofar as it leaves little room for interpreting Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s critique of enlightenment as anything other than “dialectical” which is to say, that the critique of enlightenment is not oriented towards a recovery of some Golden Age from which modernity represents a momentous fall. Hence,

*To celebrate the anger of Achilles and the wanderings of Odysseus is already a wistful stylization of what can no longer be celebrated; and the hero of the adventures shows himself to be a prototype of the bourgeois individual, a notion originating in the consistent self-affirmation which has its ancient pattern in the figure of the protagonist compelled to wander. The epic is the historico-philosophical counterpart to the novel, and eventually displays features approximating those characteristic of the novel.*²⁹

That is, the arguments of Horkheimer and Adorno are directed not simply against the instrumental deformation of reason but equally at those who would throw the “baby out with the bathwater”—figures such as Spengler, Schmitt, Nietzsche, in certain of his moods³⁰, and especially Martin Heidegger who argues, for instance, in the *Principle of Reason*, that that “reason is a most formidable enemy.” Indeed, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger seeks to show the manner in which the history of metaphysics can be read as a a “fallen” history—a history whose original sin

lies in the forgetting of Being or *Seinsvergessenheit* through which Dasein is always already reduced to the present-at-hand and, as he shows in his later writings, becomes inextricable from the "raw materials" it sets about ordering and manipulating in technological domination or what he calls "challenging-forth."

The crucial moment of the dialectic of enlightenment is the transition from the animistic world view which underwrites magical mimesis, on the one hand, and the chiasmic structure of myth-enlightenment. Animism involves an understanding of nature as a site of enchantment or spirit which can be engaged or influenced by sympathetic magic, i.e. by a mimesis of its own forces. Magic seeks to address the object *in its specificity*, that is, as quality. As disenchantment proceeds apace, the object world is reduced to quantity understood as identical with the cultural forms that are projected on to it. Yet traces of enchantment persist, transformed into the sublime, within the realm of autonomous art which preserves the "shudder" which expresses the subjective experience of nature's alterity.

The multitudinous affinities between existents are suppressed by the single relation between the subject who bestows meaning and the meaningless object, between rational significance and the chance vehicle of significance. On the magical plane, dream and image were not mere signs for the thing in question, but were bound up with it by similarity or names. The relation is one not of intention but relatedness. Like science, magic pursues aims, but seeks to achieve them by mimesis—not by progressively distancing itself from the object.³¹

Yet, at the same time, the external relation between subject and object in which the object is increasingly reduced to subjective purposes and meanings in what the authors refer to "a permanent twilight of idols", signalling a close affinity to Nietzsche's diagnosis of nihilism, whereby the "highest values devalue themselves," becomes the model for the subject's relation to itself. In other words, the libidinal impulses of subject, the impulse to happiness and somatic fulfilment, is itself not simply repressed but *actually turned against* the subject. The nihilistic core of the dialectic of enlightenment manifests itself as the self-devaluation of life itself. In other words, the multitudinous qualities of external and internal nature alike are subjected to the rational ego in the interest of self-preservation. Yet, the condition of such preservation is, paradoxically, the negation of the very life that is to be preserved.

Man's domination over himself, which grounds his selfhood, is almost

always the destruction of the subject in whose service it is undertaken; for the substance which is dominated, suppressed, and dissolved by virtue of self-preservation is none other than that very life as functions of which the achievement of self-preservation find their sole definition and determination: it is, in fact, what is to be preserved.³²

In other words, the transition from the magical to the mythical/enlightened world view is that of the progressive internalization of sacrifice.

*The irrationalism of totalitarian capitalism, whose way of satisfying needs has an objectified form determined by domination which makes the satisfaction of needs impossible and tends toward the extermination of mankind, has its prototype in the hero who escapes from sacrifice by sacrificing himself. The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice. In other words: the history of renunciation. Everyone who practises renunciation gives away more of his life than is given back to him: and more than the life that he vindicates.*³³

The introversion of sacrifice represents the key to the dialectic of enlightenment and contains a clue to its critique. The pressure that weighs upon subjects requires a compensatory economy of that results in a politics in which the aggression that accrues through the historical formation of civilization is unleashed on the “enemy” in the rise of fascism throughout Europe. In parallel fashion, in North America, the culture industry produces entertainment which allows subjects a degree of respite from the drudgery of the factory floor or the office and becomes ever more function in the reproduction of the false totality. At the same time, the spiritual compensation for historical domination and suffering both makes possible and maintains such domination yet, at the same time, manifests a demand for its abolition. I shall come back to this in the conclusion. As already suggested, the antecedent for this understanding of the ambivalences of “enlightenment” can be found in the critique of religion in the early Marx—a critique carried forward and transformed in the context of the mature critique of political economy which takes its point of departure the “metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties” of the commodity form. Such a critique is, at the same time, wedded to Nietzsche’s genealogical reading of the origin of the ascetic ideals. Yet, in contrast to both Marx and Nietzsche, rather than posing materialism and metaphysics as, ultimately antithetical Adorno wants to think materialism as the “truth” of metaphysics. Herein lies the moment of “solidarity” of negative dialectics with metaphysics.

3. Negative Dialectics: 'Solidarity with Metaphysics at the Time of its Downfall'

So far I have suggested that far from dissolving the cultural and institutional forms of the *ancien regime*, capitalism has had a much more ambivalent and contradictory relation with tradition than Marx was willing to accept in the *Communist Manifesto*. Yet shortly after its appearance and in the aftermath of the Revolutions of 1848, Marx came to view the relation between past, present and future in much more nuanced terms, suggesting in the *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, that contemporary historical political forms had a tendency, in the process of legitimating themselves, to invoke an illegitimate or heteronomous past. The "new," in other words, is premised upon a repetition of the "old." Or, better, the old repeats itself as the "new." That such a fate should befall the bourgeois parties was, in Marx's view, a given. However, his worry was that it would also befall the socialist movement which, he exhorted, must "draw its poetry from the future and not the past." This is the very concern that motivates the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: How is it possible to break enlightenment's tendency to lock itself into the closed circuit of historical immanence? How is the "new" and therefore the future possible?

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the authors locate in the most advanced works of modernist art a memory trace of an experience of nature that has not yet become reduced to the categories of subjective reason. In other words, the text works with a radical form of temporality whereby the "Origin is Goal" (Krauss). In other words, almost in direct opposition to Heidegger's thinking about the relation between *techne* and *poesis*, the authors suggest that in the most technically advanced forms of artistic technique (what Adorno calls in the *Aesthetic Theory*, "aesthetic forces of production"), it is possible to locate the possibility of an alternative form of enlightenment based on the idea of memory (*Eingedenken*) of nature. For example, in the emancipation of dissonance, the Second Viennese School makes possible what is otherwise in eclipse within the culture of late capitalism more generally, the capacity to express and experience suffering in a non-affirmative manner. While the aesthetic continues to be crucial to Adorno's program of "enlightening the enlightenment about itself," in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno takes up a critique of various philosophical positions, particularly Heideggerian existentialism, Kant's theory of freedom and Hegel's philosophy of history. At the same time, what unites the question of the "aesthetic," thoroughly imbued with a trans-

formed Kantian conception of the sublime (see *Aesthetic Theory*), with Adorno's immanent critique of metaphysics is the attempt to retrieve a conception of what he calls "metaphysical experience" or the experience of "transcendence." As Adorno puts it, "the happiness of thought, the promise of its truth, lies in sublimity alone."³⁴

Adorno's critique of metaphysics, while it presupposes many of the arguments in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, actually draws on the analyses of Husserl in *Against Epistemology*³⁵. In this text Adorno argues that the more Husserl attempts to purify the categories of phenomenology, the more he elaborates the idea of a pure phenomenology, unsullied by its "psychologistic" relation to the world, the more it shows itself to be subject to the very world it eschews. For example, the crucial relation between the intention and intuition of meaning undermines itself insofar as the language that Husserl uses to describe this relation is drawn from the commodity world. Transcendental phenomenology becomes therefore something like a "Kreditsystem."³⁶ This analysis represents a fusion of Marx/Lukács critique of the antinomies of bourgeois thinking and Nietzsche's attempt to locate in the transcendent Christian notion of guilt as grounded in original sin, the fallen condition of humanity, and the idea of "debt"—as both guilt and debt are signified by the German word "*Schuld*."³⁷

As I have already suggested, Heidegger's project of *Destruktion* is particularly important in negative dialectics, indeed, Heidegger is a crucial interlocutor for Adorno from his very earliest publications. The first section of negative dialectics is devoted to a sustained critique of the "ontological need" which gives Heideggerian thought its contemporary power—one that is, in part, renewed in various forms of post-structuralism.³⁸ What is at stake in this critical engagement or *Auseinandersetzung* with Heidegger is of consequence to subsequent philosophical and theoretical debates and is as much about method as it is about substance. What I am referring to is the difference between Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* of the *Destruktion* of the tradition of Western Metaphysics, on the one hand, which forms the basis of Derridean "deconstruction" of the "metaphysics of presence," and, on the other, a dialectical or immanent critique of metaphysics that seeks to retrieve from metaphysics its "truth content" rather than seeking to engage in an *Überwindung* or overcoming.³⁹ In short, Adorno's argument is that because Heidegger eschews a dialectical approach, because he is unable to understand metaphysics as inextricable from a contradictory,

sacrificial logic of civilization, Heidegger actually repeats in his purported over-coming of metaphysics some of its key assumptions in his fundamental ontology. In contrast to both Heideggerian ontology and the positivism that it seeks to conceptually counteract, both of which proclaim the *end of metaphysics*, Adorno's declares a "solidarity with a metaphysics" that which as been deeply troubled by both sorts of attack.

Heidegger attempts to undermine the metaphysical interpretation of the Being of beings by showing this interpretation as "enduring presence" is none other than a specific temporal modality, namely the present, and as such sits in an unthematized relation with the past, and future.⁴⁰ Heidegger also shows that such an understanding of temporality which underlies the interpretation of Being is, itself, made possible by what he calls the ontological difference or the difference between Being and entities; Dasein, the entity for whom Being is a question, and the mere present-at-hand or ready-to-hand. The questionable nature of Being becomes particularly evident for Dasein in its orientation to the future which ultimately takes for it the form of its *ownmost possibility* its basic condition of finitude.⁴¹

Against the Heideggerian *Destruction* of metaphysics is the attempt to engage in an alternative or parallel "*Überwindung*" by confining knowledge claims to inferential relations from so-called "protocol sentences" or sentences that unequivocally reflect states of affairs. This also finds expression, albeit in a much more ambiguous manner in Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, which seeks to present an account of language as exactly mirroring without remainder "the facts" or "that which is the case." For members of the Vienna Circle such as Carnap—one of Heidegger's earliest and most influential critics—Heidegger is a metaphysician precisely because he transgresses the injunction to remain strictly within the confines of a language anchored to its empirical referent. In Carnap's infamous characterization, Heidegger the metaphysician was like a "ein Musiker ohne musikalische Fähigkeit."⁴²

In light of the positivist attack on Heidegger, the nuances of Adorno's otherwise characteristically hostile critique comes into sharp focus. As noted above, Adorno organizes his critique of Heidegger in terms of the "ontological need" or the need for meaningfulness (the basic question of Heidegger's early writings is, after all, the *meaning* of Being) in a rationalized and disenchanting world—a world shaped by the very vocabulary

of positivism with its strict separation of subject and object. In this sense, Heidegger's thinking seeks to counteract the abstractions of the reified world precisely by proceeding in a concrete way—by showing how the existential question of Dasein or "Being-in-the-world" is, indeed must be, prior to any questions about entities (*Seiendes*) found within this world. Indeed, in posing the *Seinsfrage* in terms of *Da-sein*, Heidegger is suggesting that the being for whom being is a question is always already situated or located within a world. In contrast with the subject-object dualism of modern philosophy from Descartes onwards, Heidegger shows how things are disclosed only in terms of the practical worldly activities and engagements of Dasein, as exemplified by the crucial discussion of *zu-* and *vorhandenheit*.⁴³ In this account, epistemology results from breakdown and crisis. In this sense, Heidegger's emphasis on concrete worldly relations responds to the very destruction of experience within the abstractions of modern reason or what Adorno calls "identity thinking" of which the positivism of the Vienna Circle is a paradigmatic instance.

At the same time, the concretion of Heideggerian phenomenology is false insofar as it is grounded in the ontological difference as opposed to the complex historical relations between subject and object. If positivism constitutes the failed attempt to dissolve the subject into the object, then Heidegger seeks to do the opposite insofar as objects are, so to speak, swallowed up in Dasein's worldly relations; history is displaced by historicity. For example, Adorno argues that while Heidegger is acutely aware of the historical nature of language, he ultimately "flees from history." That is to say, in Heidegger's hermeneutics of the meanings of individual words and his unique sensitivity to the world-disclosive power of translation from the authentic Greek to an artificial Latin, he does not locate such transformation within the context of the progressive mastery of internal and external nature in the pursuit of self-preservation—or the material conditions of language and culture itself. Hence, when Heidegger seeks to provide a concrete account of experience in terms of Dasein's worldly relations, grounded in Care (*Sorge*)—its ultimate guilt and anxiety in the face of its putatively "own-most" possibility—far from being concrete and thoroughly temporal, such relations remain, contrary to Heidegger's own stated intentions, abstract and static. In other words, Heidegger engages in an unconscious mimesis of the very positivism against which so much of his thinking rebels. In Adorno's view, Heidegger can only see death as a source of guilt and anxiety in the context of a "life that does not live." "Our current death metaphysics is nothing but soci-

ety's impotent solace for the fact that social change has robbed men of what was once said to make death bearable for them, of the feeling of epic unity with a full life."⁴⁴ Conversely, for the life that was fulfilled—which is precisely now objectively possible in late modernity via the development of human productive powers, which also renders the domination of nature no longer necessary—death itself will, must, take on a radically different historical significance rather than being an ontological given.

Conclusion

Adorno's declaration of "solidarity with metaphysics at the time of its downfall" is premised on a dual critique of positivism, on the one hand, and Heidegger's "jargon of authenticity," on the other. These two positions can be viewed as running analogous to the new atheism, on the one hand, and advocates of post-secular conceptions of the sacred, on the other. Within the context of positivism and fundamental ontology, Adorno's reflections on metaphysics are an attempt to rescue a certain idea of "transcendence" which figures as an openness to a hitherto undetermined future which breaks equally decisively with the naturalization of history (as in positivism) as with the historicization of nature (as in fundamental ontology). As such, it manifests a kind of *Bilderverbot* or prohibition on its concrete and therefore affirmative image. Rather, such conception of the future is possible only in negative terms—that is, it is underwritten precisely by the impossibility of totality to fully incorporate the very forms non-identity the existence of which it presupposes. Adorno clearly spells this out in his lecture course on metaphysics from the mid-1960's. For example, in the final lecture of that course, delivered on July 29th, 1965, Adorno argues that "nothing can even be experienced as living if it does not contain a promise of something transcending life. This transcendence therefore *is*, and at the same time, *is not*."⁴⁵ It is precisely this negative understanding of transcendence that stands in opposition to the complete immanence of a self-destructive enlightenment. Mythology and enlightenment converge in their attempt to subsume nature beneath the categories of subjective reason. At the same time, the dialectic of enlightenment entails not simply the domination of external nature by the subject, it is also, as we have seen, entails a nihilistic domination of the very internal, "human" nature that is to be preserved. That is, the self can only be preserved by means of its own denial. Yet, this leads to a crucial ambivalence. The body that is denied with an erotical-

ly charged force that it is secretly affirmed; the body that is openly reviled is secretly loved. Such ambivalence is most clearly discerned in the subtle eroticism of the most severe forms of ascetic practice as confirmed in, for example, Bataille's writings on eroticism. It is also in evidence, in a different way, in the depiction of the "Fall" of humanity, in *Paradise Lost*, whose Puritan author, John Milton, was famously characterized by the Romantic poet William Blake as being "of the Devil's Party without knowing it." It is possible to understand not just the loss of self in aesthetic experience—in the original experience of the terrifying awesomeness of a nature that threatens to obliterate the individual or in the modern conception of the sublime—but as well, in the experience of the sacred.⁴⁶ That is to say, the sacred represents an attempt of the "self to survive itself" in reference to a notion of happiness.

In opposition to metaphysical thinking, Heidegger's project is to break open the hardened contents of traditional ontology in such a way as to recover the primordial experience of being—now disclosed as thoroughly temporal—underlying it. Rather than pointing backwards to a more primordial relation to being, Adorno emphasizes that "only the hand that wields the sword, can heal the wound." In other words, the domination of reason can only be overcome *by means of reason itself*. The saving form of reason, understood as a form of "immanent critique," aims at the manner in which the social totality contains *transcendent* forms of "non-identity" lying not some how outside of or before it, but rather within its very interstices which reveal as false the truth-claims of the whole. Concretely, such non-identity takes the historical form not of some more primordial experience of being but a form of "anamnesic solidarity"⁴⁷ with those individuals sacrificed upon the "slaughter-bench of history"⁴⁸, for the sake of whom alone, according to Benjamin, we are given hope.⁴⁹ Or, as Adorno puts it, "The concept's unfolding is also a reaching back, and synthesis is the definition of the difference that perished, 'vanished,'—in the concept—almost like Hölderlin's anamnesis of doomed naturalness."⁵⁰ This is the negative memory trace of what never was, what never came into its own, that paradoxically preserves the possibility of a future that might be. In contrast to Heideggerian longing for an originary experience of being, which maps onto a nostalgia rooted in a mythology of the Black Forest centered around the sacred space of Todtnauberg, such a form of anamnesis is a kind of nostalgia for a redeemed future. It is here that I think Adorno's conception of "solidarity with a *fallen* metaphysics" becomes clearest. Metaphysics (and theol-

ogy) represents in sublimated form an attempt to provide a conceptual compensation for the historical sufferings of actual men and women. It represents the broken promise of fulfillment and happiness. Yet, the programmes of a complete *Überwindung* of metaphysics, either in the Carnapian or the Heideggerian sense, are attempts at an overcoming of not simply of what metaphysics actually "is" or realizes but also what it is "not", that is, *what it might promise*. In the process, the programme of total disenchantment becomes indistinguishable from re-mythologization. In contrast, it is precisely at this promise of transcendence that materialism and metaphysics cross paths. As Adorno puts it:

At its most materialistic, materialism comes to agree with theology. Its great desire would be the resurrection of the flesh, a desire utterly foreign to idealism, the realm of absolute spirit. The perspective vanishing point of historical materialism would be its self-sublimation, the spirit's liberation from the primacy of material needs in their state of fulfillment. Only if the physical urge were quenched would the spirit be reconciled and would become that which it only promises while the spell of material conditions will not let it satisfy material needs.⁵¹

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- 1 Max Horkheimer, "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics," *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell et. al. (NY: Continuum, 1986): 163.
 - 2 Christopher Hitchens, *God is Not Great: How Religions Poisons Everything* (NY: Twelve Books, 2007).
 - 3 Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006)
 - 4 Daniel Dennett, *Breaking the Spell: Religion as Natural Phenomenon* (NY: Viking, 2006).
 - 5 Mark C. Taylor, *Erring: A Postmodern A/Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
 - 6 Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution: Gender and the Seductions of Islamism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).
 - 7 Charles Taylor, *The Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989) and, more recently, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belnap, 2007)
 - 8 Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).
 - 9 See J. Habermas, "On the Relations Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion" 251-260, and Pope Benedict XVI, "Prepolitical Moral Foundations of a Free Republic" 261-268 of *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Secular World*, de Vries and Sullivan (eds.) (New York: Fordham University press, 2006).
 - 10 A concern echoed by many, including Jean-Luc Nancy, "Church, State, Resistance," *Political Theologies*.
 - 11 One wonders how genuine dialogue can take place between different faith traditions when the terms of discourse have already been so deeply marked by Christianity (and its critique). This is a question that arises inter alia in the crisis in Denmark provoked by the publication of cartoons depicting Mohammed.
 - 12 "On the Relations Between the Secular Liberal State and Religion," 258. Habermas seems to come very close to Karl Lowith's notion that the modern idea of progress is simply a secularized version of Christian eschatology. See his *Meaning in History* and the refutation of this thesis in Blumenberg's *Legitimacy of the Modern World*.

- 13 A much more muted form of this opposition is the debate between liberals and communitarians on which much ink was spilled in the 1980's and 1990's.
- 14 This critique is up-dated by Hubert Dreyfus's Heideggerian critique of the Cartesian assumptions of Artificial Intelligence research. See his *What Computers Still Can't Do*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992).
- 15 John Gray, *Heresies: Against progress and Other Illusions* (London: Granta, 2004).
- 16 Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture: Vol. I: The Rise of the Network Society* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000): 101.
- 17 *Information Age*, 409.
- 18 Cf. Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld* (NY: Balantine, 2001).
- 19 Cf. *Schattenseiten der Globalisierung* D. Loch and W. Heitmeyer (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2001): 11-40.
- 20 (Cambridge, Mass.: 2000): 394. In a similar manner, theorists of "hybridity" such as Homi Bhabha and feminist theorists of identity such as Donna Haraway take the inherent instability of modern identity as a profound opportunity for the creation of new, liberatory subjectivities. See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) and Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Routledge, 1991).
- 21 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, Robert Tucker (ed.) (NY: Norton): 337.
- 22 *Manifesto*, 337.
- 23 *Manifesto*, 338.
- 24 Cf. A. Pzeworski *Paper Stones: A History of Electoral Socialism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), G. Esping-Andersen, *Politics Against Markets: The Social Democratic Road to Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985).
- 25 The emergence of the self—its differentiation both from external nature at the phylogenic level, and from its primary care-givers, at the ontogenic level, is accompanied under conditions of modernity by the temptation to lose itself, ie. to regression.
- 26 As they show in their brilliant analysis of Anti-Semitism, those groups, like the Jews, who become constituted as "natural" become an object simultaneously of desire—because reconciliation with nature is desired—and hated.
- 27 "The attempt of Protestant faith to find, as in prehistory, the transcendental principle of truth (without which belief cannot exist) directly into the world itself, and to reinvest this with symbolic power, has been paid for with obedience to the world and not to the sacred."
- 28 Theodor W. Adorno, "Theses on the Language of the Philosopher," trans. Samir Gandesha and Michael Palamarek, *Adorno and the Need in Thinking: New Critical Essays*, Donald Burke et. al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007): 45-40. See also, Samir Gandesha, *Ont eh Aesthetic Dignity of Words: Adorno's Philosophy of Language*, *The Need in Thinking*, 78-102.
- 29 Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (NY: Continuum, 1972): 34-44.
- 30 "Nevertheless, Nietzsche's relation to the Enlightenment, and therefore to Homer, was still discordant. Though he discerned both the universal movement of sovereign Spirit (whose executor he felt himself to be) and a nihilistic anti-life force is the enlightenment, his pre-Fascist followers retained only the second aspect and perverted it into an ideology." (44
- 31 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 10-11.
- 32 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 55.
- 33 *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 55.
- 34 *Negative Dialectics*, 364.
- 35 Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology, A Metacritique: Studies in Husserl and the Phenomenological Antinomies* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).
- 36 Interestingly, Husserl refers in the Logical Investigations to the positivistic idea of Denkkonomik. For a similar argument see Derrida's Speech and Phenomena. See also Sabine Wilke for a detailed exposition and comparison of the relation between Adorno's and Derrida's critiques of Husserl.
- 37 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (NY: Vintage, 1989): 57-96.

- 38 The section on Heidegger in this text would have been much longer, however, Adorno decided to publish it prior to the completion of *Negative Dialectics* because of what he considered its politico-philosophical importance (see Jay). This section was, of course, published as the Jargon of Authenticity.
- 39 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Macquarrie and Robinson (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1962): 21-63. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).
- 40 *Being and Time*, 47.
- 41 *Being and Time*, 279-304.
- 42 Cited in Simon Critchley, “Heidegger und Rudolf Carnap: Kommt nicht aus Nichts? Heidegger Handbuch, Dieter Thomä (ed.) (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003): 356.
- 43 *Being and Time*, 91-145.
- 44 *Negative Dialectics*, 369.
- 45 Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Edmund Jephcott (London: Polity Press, 2000).
- 46 Cf. Agamben’s understanding of the relationship between *Homo Sacer* and sacrifice—the sacred is that precisely which becomes available as a sacrificial object. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).
- 47 Christian Lenhardt, “Anamnestic Solidarity: The Proletariat and its Manes,” *Telos*, #25 (Fall, 1975).
- 48 G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953).
- 49 Walter Benjamin, “Goethe’s Elective Affinities,” *Selected Writings Volume 1: 1913-26*, Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (eds.) (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 2002): 356.
- 50 *Negative Dialectics*, 157.
- 51 *Negative Dialectics*, 207.

Pied Pipers and Polymaths: The Politics of Adorno's Late Lectures

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▪ For many readers, the philosophy of Theodor Adorno has become synonymous with esoteric intellectualism, cultural elitism, the isolation of the theorist from the social struggles of his day. The English philosopher Bryan Magee voiced this widespread feeling towards Adorno's thought back in 1978 in a television interview with another member of the Frankfurt School, Herbert Marcuse. He put it to Marcuse that Adorno's writings were "turgid", even "unreadable", and that they erected a barrier between the author and any political agent who might possibly realize their aspirations.¹ Marcuse's response was surprising in its magnanimity, given what we know of the tensions between himself and Adorno. He repeated a claim he had already made, that Adorno was "without doubt a genius," that he knew of no one "so equally well at home in philosophy, sociology, psychology, music..." Whenever Adorno spoke, Marcuse continued, the words could be printed verbatim, so fully-fledged were his formulations. And the difficulty of the ideas Adorno expressed was testament not to a wilful obscurantism but to the opacity and contradictoriness of the social system he attempted to comprehend. Marcuse's spirited defense of Adorno was echoed in remarks by the leading light of the second-generation Frankfurt School, Jürgen Habermas, some years later. According to Habermas,

Adorno was a genius; I say that without a hint of ambiguity. . . . [He] had a immediacy of awareness, a spontaneity of thought, and a power of formulation which I have never encountered before or since. One could not observe the process of development of Adorno's thoughts: they issued from him complete – he was a virtuoso in that respect. . . . As long as one was with him, one was caught up in the movement of thought. Adorno did not have the common touch; it was impossible for him, in an altogether painful way, to be commonplace.²

What Habermas puts down to personality, Marcuse – interestingly – politicizes. Adorno's difficult style is said to be grounded in its very subject matter, the *verkehrte* world of late capitalism. In such a topsy-turvy world of systematic illusion it might be that divining the truth about the

social whole requires a language and a thought-procedure unafraid of contradiction and complexity. In a time when abstract labor and exchange value come to permeate not only social relations but even language and thought, the language of critique included, it might be a necessary cause to resist “premature popularization of the terribly complex problems we face”.³

One reason Adorno is viewed as a philosopher at one step remove from the *sensus communis* is surely the curious and slightly farcical detail of his final months. Adorno’s language alienated him not just from Anglo-American philosophers whose objections Magee voiced, but equally from the student radicals of the late 1960s who mocked his political aloofness and ridiculed him in ways which probably contributed to his fatal heart attack. The now infamous scene in which two female students attacked him with flowers and slogans – “Adorno as an institution is dead!” – reflected a widespread feeling that even this theorist of repression shared in society’s own repressive tendencies. Such judgments must have been all the more galling for Adorno who meanwhile was watching the meteoric fortunes of his one-time colleague Marcuse, participating in the student protests in just those ways which Adorno resisted.

With the publication of Adorno’s *opus postumum*, specifically his lectures from the mid- to late 1960s, it may be possible finally to determine the truth of this picture of an aloof and politically impotent intellectual. But it may also be possible to test the truth of Marcuse’s statement, that what Adorno said could stand on its own, verbatim, unedited, because the lectures Adorno gave in the final decade of his life at the University of Frankfurt were improvised and largely spontaneous. These lectures are all the more remarkable for this, and confirm the picture of a man whose extemporizing could be committed straight to paper and to press. Not only their spontaneity but the sheer variety of lecture topics covered by Adorno, the sustained erudition on themes across the humanities and social sciences, do indeed support Marcuse’s portrait of an intellect totally at home in whichever topic he spoke on.

But whilst one can admire the polymathic erudition of these lectures one can fall into the trap of confirming a cult of genius which Adorno’s own intellect sought critically to engage. To this extent it may be more illuminating to read these lectures in their historical context rather than as the disembodied thoughts of a ‘free-floating intellectual’ which it seems Adorno’s student critics took him to be but which he had already exposed

as fundamentally rooted in that same capitalist division of labor which divided hand and mind, intellect and action, and was itself to be overcome.⁴

A useful way to read these lectures therefore might be not simply as philosophy or theory but also as an expression of the politically momentous times in which they were delivered. To read Adorno in a way which is consistent with his own avowed 'materialism' – not a crude materialism which reduces philosophy and ideas to history or to class interests, but in such a way as would do justice to Adorno's own notion of the philosophical moment of the whole, where thought is able to articulate a crisis-ridden historical conjuncture, and yet through this come to something 'essential'. To read Adorno in other words just as we will see Adorno read Kant's philosophy, not just as philosophy but "as a kind of coded text from which the historical situation of spirit could be read, with the vague expectation that in doing so one could acquire something of truth itself."⁵

'This is the Auschwitz generation'

This requires some background to the events of the late 1960s in which his lectures were delivered, and some knowledge of the trajectory which led Adorno back to Frankfurt after the war and to the position he would attain as one of the leading men of German letters. Some of this background is familiar to readers on the left today: the works which had generated Adorno's fame by the time of the Frankfurt School's exile in America from Nazi Germany are now widely read, even if they are too often taken in isolation from the particular experiences which inspired them. The intellectual touchstones of Adorno's collaboration with Horkheimer for instance, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – Schopenhauer, Nietzsche and de Sade – were testament to just how far the experience of Fascism had dislodged faith in the humanist traditions of the German Enlightenment. In the immediate post-war era, not only were Horkheimer and Adorno's political assumptions rethought (though their 1920s prediction of Fascism was confirmed with chilling accuracy), both had started to believe in a deep complicity between the philosophy of the Enlightenment with its championing of the rational mastery of external and internal nature, and the kinds of worldviews characterizing totalitarianism. Instead of the leading figures of German Idealism and the Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno turned to the Enlightenment's harshest critics. Though not wholly abandoning the Enlightenment proj-

ect they had certainly lost faith in its cosmopolitan and pacific ideal. If in the 1760s Voltaire could confidently argue that torture and similar human atrocities would soon be a thing of the past, to Horkheimer and Adorno, writing in exile as news reached them of the Holocaust, this judgment seemed increasingly Panglossian. For Adorno, only the 'dark writers of the bourgeoisie' could now lay claim to having recognized the world's course, the reversal of an ostensibly self-perfecting humanity into barbarism.

The period between the publication of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) and Adorno's own magnum opus *Negative Dialectic* (1966) is perhaps less well known in its influence on the direction of critical theory. It was an era in which the trends foreseen by Horkheimer and Adorno could not have been further from the dominant consciousness of the German society to which they returned from exile. Germany's recent past was strenuously being played down in favor of ideological unity, economic reconstruction and political re-education, the schooling of democratic values into the new generation. Sure enough Germany was witnessing the beginnings of its *Wirtschaftswunder*, that remarkable growth in productivity and consumption that would eventually give it dominant economic status in Europe. But for a writer like Adorno, there was something worryingly unchanged in German society: the political re-education which the Allies sought to instill in the young was leaving their parents' generation largely untouched.

On the political left there was a growing recognition that the Fascist chapter of German history was not closed. The continuities in political personnel, state structure and corporate power between post-war Germany and the 12 years of Fascism were now there for many to see. To a growing number of people 1950s Germany seemed not a new democracy but a 'restoration society'.⁶ For Adorno particularly, the structural preconditions for Fascism's recrudescence had in no way been thoroughly excised. In an essay from 1959 he argues that the past will have been worked through only when the causes of what happened then have been eliminated. Only because the causes continue to exist does the captivating spell of the past remain to this day unbroken.⁷

What Horkheimer and Adorno had already posited in the 1930s as a continuum rather than a strict opposition between liberal democracy and fascism, was now recognized as the dark secret of the post-war settlement.

By the mid-1960s the residual fascism which these authors found deep within the mass consumption society was becoming clear to the student generation too; that many former Nazis retained their jobs in the universities brought the issue particularly close to home. A Chancellor-led State, unresponsive to opposition by parliamentary means paralleled an undemocratic, hierarchical university structure; both were perceived by students as run by the same 'authoritarian personalities' already diagnosed by the Frankfurt School. For the younger generation a rising standard of living was having the paradoxical effect of fuelling disaffection towards the consumer-led economic boom which had ostensibly vindicated the direction of post-war development. German youth found themselves politicized not just by a rejection of their parents' wartime complicities, but by the emergence of new cultures of personal expression and experimentation which made use of the very free time afforded by economic growth. When fuelled by the wider international protests against the Vietnam War this made for an explosive mix. Not that one should overlook the provocative actions of a right-wing German popular press, which told its readership that students were a fifth column dangerously close to the heart of German society. During the 60s the media empire of Axel Springer was feeding off the increasing number of extra-parliamentary confrontations, informing readers that the students were a Soviet-backed insurrection. The vilified would respond in kind: in 1968 the Berlin Film School was occupied by its students who set about making an agit-prop work, *Manufacturing a Molotov Cocktail*, a film which ends with an inviting still of the glass-fronted Springer newspaper building.⁸

Many students needed no such provocation. On June 2nd 1967, during protests against the Berlin visit of the fascist Shah of Iran, a young man named Benno Ohnesorg was shot in the back by a plain clothes officer from the 'political crimes' squad.⁹ When the police tried to cover up what had happened tens of thousands of students in both Berlin and Frankfurt took to the streets. Later the same day a young woman named Gudrun Ensslin, grand-daughter of the grand-daughter of a certain G. W. F. Hegel, spoke to a meeting of radical students: "This fascist state means to kill us all.... Violence is the only way to answer violence. This is the Auschwitz generation and there's no arguing with them."¹⁰ Soon after, Enslinn, along with her boyfriend Andreas Baader, would plant incendiary bombs in a large Frankfurt department store, describing the act as "sharing with the rich capitalists something of the reality of the Vietnam War". Such actions raised the stakes in the struggle considerably. Sure enough

the West German State was not standing idly by. A grand coalition was busy hurrying through the *Notstandsgesetze* (Emergency Laws), allowing them free rein 'in time of emergency' to censor the press, ban strikes, increase surveillance on dissidents, and to call in the army to disperse demonstrations. An oppressively enforced consensus politics was authorizing a suspension of the very guarantees which the *Bundesrepublik's* constitution had meant to enshrine. It seemed that a dialectical reversal of Enlightenment had been joined by a dialectical reversal of democracy.

'The false persona of a guru'

When unfavorable comparisons are made with the radical figureheads of the German student movement it is forgotten that Adorno himself made several keynote speeches showing sympathy for their aims in ridding the universities of politically tainted personnel, and resisting the emergency legislation.¹¹ But the student revolts also saw Adorno come under increasing pressure to go further and to give intellectual leadership to the student cause. Radicals in the student movement leveled against Adorno the same charge Marx and Engels had made against 'the German Ideology' – that his philosophy was lost in the misty realms of speculation. Adorno, many felt, had privileged theory over practice and abandoned the revolutionary project at just the moment when a new revolution seemed possible. Not oblivious to the clamor around him, Adorno explicitly addressed the issue in his Frankfurt University lectures.

I have found again and again that when carrying out theoretical analyses – and theoretical analyses are essentially critical in nature – that I have been met by the question: 'Yes, but what shall we do?', and this question has been conveyed with a certain undertone of impatience, an undertone which proclaims: 'All right, what is the point of all this theory? It goes on far too long, we do not know how we should behave in the real world, and the fact is we have to act right away!'¹²

Adorno finds himself having to respond explicitly to the increasingly tense situation and the political pressures placed upon him. He tells his students that the call for direct political action is problematical, because it is a desire for immediacy amidst the most mediated, the complex and opaque late capitalist society in which both student and teacher find themselves: "there is nowadays a great danger," he says, "of what might

be termed an illicit shortcut to practical action."¹³ Such shortcuts, he tells them, rest ironically on the reverse of that which philosopher is accused of, a subordination of theory to practice (and an attenuation of the original meaning of both terms), and in this subordination Adorno sees an unholy alliance of radical politics with the most instrumental attitudes of the ruling ideology, a *symptom* of alienation rather than the solution to it. Adorno's turn in these lectures to a careful and remarkably sympathetic exposition of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant can be read as his own way, within the restrictions of an academic syllabus in a philosophy department, of examining such illicit shortcuts to practical action. Kant's moral philosophy, Adorno reminds us, always maintained an interest in action and 'practical reason' as moral thinking was revealingly called. Kant in turn drew on the resources of ancient philosophy, in particular Greek philosophy's foregrounding of *praxis* and 'practical wisdom' (Aristotle's *phronesis*) in its examination of 'the good life'. But by Kant's time practical reason had already lost many of the nuances which the concept of *praxis* evoked for the Greeks. The heyday of the Enlightenment coincided with an emergent division of labor which was busy parceling-up experience into separate spheres such that philosophies like Kant's could respond only with their own specialized critiques. By the mid-twentieth century, Adorno argues, this attenuation of *praxis* had only worsened, becoming mere 'practicality', guided by a wholly instrumental and anti-theoretical idea of action. For Adorno the rhetoric of 'practicality' is symptomatic rather than illuminating of a state of unfreedom:

*The more uncertain practical action has become, the less we actually know what we should do, and the less we find the good life guaranteed to us – if it was ever guaranteed to anyone – then the greater our haste in snatching at it. This impatience can very easily become linked with a certain resentment towards thinking in general, with a tendency to denounce theory as such.*¹⁴

Ironically, the denigration of theory and the intellectual by those outside the academy sits alongside its opposite within the academy: a submissive *over-valuation* of the intellectual, who becomes something of a superego or even 'father-figure', able to bring decisiveness to a moment of political uncertainty. This too, Adorno suggest, is to be resisted: "precisely because I am aware that very many of you have great confidence in me, I would be extremely reluctant to abuse that confidence by presuming to slip into – even if it were only through my lecturing style – the

false persona of a guru, a sage.”¹⁵ The over-valuation of the intellectual is, Adorno argues, a kind of transference, symptomatic of a powerlessness which is instilled in the individual from an early age and is reproduced in the hierarchical structure of society, in much the same way as the Frankfurt School’s *Studies on Authority and the Family* from the 1930s had shown individuals’ susceptibility to authoritarian leaders being nurtured in the most intimate structures of the family. The student’s high regard for their teacher could easily switch over into masochistic abasement before charismatic power. A teacher’s responsibility at a moment of crisis was to avoid such temptations. The art of imparting practical wisdom becomes for Adorno a tightrope walk, using the authority of the speaker to empower the addressee in non-pathological ways.

The desire for decisive leadership in a moment of political crisis is caught up in a whole series of societal mediations, not the least being the existing structure of hierarchy and authority. Not that Adorno is simply denying immediacy in favor of mediation; this itself would be undialectical. But the philosophical point had some political reasoning behind it: Adorno seems to anticipate how easily direct actions on the part of the students would be used to legitimize repressive counter-measures by the state, turning latent into manifest power, and limiting the possibilities for future struggle. And yet he acknowledges that in even drawing attention to this possibility he will be accused of reaction.

However, I do not think that because we ruthlessly define the blocked state and disproportionate power relationships of the present situation, we should therefore be branded with quietism or resignation. For anyone who shrinks back from analysing the existing structure for the sake of a thesis to be demonstrated or a goal to be achieved thereby betrays both truth and theory; and that is quite certainly not what has ever been meant by the unity of theory and practice.¹⁶

Recognition of the mediation of the immediate does not render the immediate *aufgehoben*; on the contrary, it is equally true that there is no mediation without a moment of immediacy.¹⁷ It is not that spontaneous actions are to be condemned. It is just that the student movement had not had, in Adorno’s eyes “that slightest experience,” as Hegel calls it, which would have revealed the dialectical nature of its political activity.

Adorno’s formulations are not without their problems. His notion of ‘the blocked state’,¹⁸ a condition as much intellectual as social in which every

attempt to radically change society seems closed off, would appear to hypostasize in the form of a structural constraint something which is surely more contradictory and fluid. In his lectures on Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* Adorno seems to respond to this criticism, condemning a similar conception of the 'blocked state' which led Kant to see individual freedom as 'noumenal', incapable of being experienced. This notion, Adorno tells us, may merely register a limit inherent in the bourgeois society of Kant's time. It would be the duty of a critical theory of society to refuse the boundary-setting of Kantian philosophy and to think of a freedom actualized and actualizable.

'A Coded Text of the Historical Situation'

Not only does Adorno use these lectures to warn his students of the complex relation of theory to practice, he also makes thematic the very practical situation in which his students find themselves, their social position as future labor-power in an education system mediated by economic imperatives. It is as part of the university's preparation of its students for a life of "socially useful work" (as Adorno quotes Marx's ironic phrase) under the sign of increasingly "anonymous and opaque economic processes" that they have come to his lectures in the first place.¹⁹ Like Weber in his 1918 essay on 'Science as a Vocation', Adorno begins his 1968 lecture series *Introduction to Sociology* by warning his students of the perils of studying the very subject they have embarked on. Where Weber had warned of the 'Americanization' of the academy – there a student treats the lecturer as selling knowledge "just as the greengrocer sells cabbage"²⁰ – Adorno half a century later tells his students that they will find their academic work no less subject to the capitalization of the life of the mind. He also warns them that the kind of insights upon society which their subject will give them could make it very difficult for them to happily adapt to that same society and to find in it their station and its duties.

Today this fact – that the better one understands society, the more difficult it is to make oneself useful within it – has probably become a regular part of the consciousness of the intellectually progressive sector of students, and at any rate, I expect, of those in this hall today.²¹

These words come from April 1968, almost at the height of the protests, and show Adorno was well aware of how radicalized his students had

become. But he was also cognizant of how that radicalism could be abused by those who presumed to speak on the students' behalf. A rift was clearly emerging between the Frankfurt School and the student leadership. Demands for critical theory to lead the way in political intervention, to "describe a concrete utopia" as student figurehead Rudi Dutschke asked of the School,²² were for Adorno anathema to the very dialectical nature of the social object critical theory analyses. It was bad theory which indicted theory as such for having no clear praxis.

Not that one could thereby explain or excuse all of Adorno's actions during the height of student unrest: his calling the police to evict striking students from the Frankfurt University building has become infamous – rightly so – but probably only because it is so easily contrasted with Marcuse's enthusiastic part in the sit-ins at American campuses. The contrast may reflect merely the directness and perspicuity of Marcuse's version of critical theory than something inherently conservative in Adorno's. Indeed Adorno seems to have felt the call for him to lead his students out of the lecture theatres and onto the streets as just the sort of Pied Piper role – what Weber called 'charismatic authority' – of which a genuinely critical intellectual should be deeply suspicious.

One reason why Adorno might have been reluctant to endorse such activity may have been – surprisingly – the influence of one of his students, Jürgen Habermas. Habermas had already conducted research at Frankfurt into the political consciousness of the generation coming into their majority during the post-war reconstruction. *Students and Politics* (1957) was the result of extensive polling which sought to determine how students were coping with the *Bundesrepublik's* attempt to instill democratic values. Habermas' study drew on the techniques of the First Generation Frankfurt School's research on authority, which in the early 1930s had found the germs of authoritarianism in various strata of German society. Habermas found similarly entrenched ambivalence towards democratic ideas in the post-war period. What he learned in his *Students and Politics* research would be ammunition for his belief in the late 1960s that the student revolts might well be doomed to failure.

Habermas went further than Adorno in criticizing the student revolts, and in more striking language. When Rudi Dutschke (responding to the death of Benno Ohnesorg that had made incendiaries of Enslinn and Baader) voiced the relatively tame demand for "continuous action against all

forms of authority", Habermas called Dutschke's "a voluntarist ideology which in 1848 one would have called utopian socialism," but which in 1967 amounted to "left fascism".²³ These two words were a red rag to the bulls of the student movement, and Habermas would not be forgiven for them. He was unrepentant, though. Reflecting in 1969 on the previous year's actions, he argued that the student protests had been a 'phantom revolution', which like the rebellious act of the sons against their father in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, had succeeded only in re-inscribing patriarchal state power. Identification on the part of the protesters with revolutionary struggles in the Third World was, according to Habermas, an illusory compensation for the derailing of the revolutionary project in the First World, and underlined the symptomatic nature of the revolt. What had happened in Germany, he argued, had left the existing order intact, only further legitimizing the state of emergency. There was something to this: the German chief of police certainly welcomed the blank cheque he was given to root out and incarcerate 'terrorists', now firmly connected in the public mind with student activists, the result of a skillfully orchestrated press campaign. The deaths in Stammheim prison a few years later of Enslinn and Baader would give some idea of the ferocity of the state's backlash. Ironically, the Frankfurt School would be held partly responsible for the ideology of groups like Baader-Meinhof, though mostly on the evidence of a prominent member of the CDU with a particular distaste for 'critical theory', a certain Josef Ratzinger.²⁴

Such posthumous smears on the Frankfurt School's First Generation were the ideological aspect of the State's victory in the struggle. They are all the more reason to look carefully beneath the surface of a history of 1960s Germany that has been 'written by the victors'. But this also requires going beyond the apparent silence in Adorno lectures on what was happening *extra muros*, and realizing that the political events are, despite appearances, reflected in them at a deep level, through Adorno's choice of academic subject matter, concepts and language. We need to hear, as it were, the 'noises off', occasionally registered by *Lectures'* editor, for instance in the cheers which attend Adorno's more committed statements. We also need to realize what was at stake in an intellectual turning the academic syllabus towards topics he would have known were of theoretical and practical import to the political actions occurring outside. Even in the seemingly abstruse topic of lectures on Kant's first and second *Critiques* Adorno can be seen to lay before his students new ways of conceiving the relation of theory to social actuality. The practical

resources contained within the tradition of German philosophy were themselves threatened by a crude but popular Marxism which had ostensibly 'solved' the problems of philosophy.

It may be possible too that Adorno was trying to impart something of the inspiration of his first encounter with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, as a 17-year old schoolboy. Adorno suspected that there was more than met the eye in this forbidding tome: "I experienced the work from the beginning not as mere epistemology, not as an analysis of the conditions of scientifically valid judgments, but as a kind of coded text from which the historical situation of spirit could be read".²⁵ He found in Kant's first *Critique* the expression of an early bourgeois world, emergent modernity, in which the scientific Enlightenment, flush with the ideal of progress, has nevertheless put restrictions on reason and knowledge and turned its face towards the practical.

We might say that the achievement of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that a whole series of these great metaphysical, fundamental concepts vanished from the horizon of what could be rationally decided....It is a critique of the ability of reason to pose such [metaphysical] questions, to do them justice. We may say perhaps that the enormous impact of the *Critique of Pure Reason* has its source in the circumstance that it was in effect the first work to give expression to the element of bourgeois resignation, to that refusal to make any significant statement on the crucial questions, and instead to set up house in the finite world.²⁶

Kant's philosophy turned away from metaphysical speculation, put a 'no entry' sign around the Absolute (that 'block' again) and whilst turning its gaze heavenward (as Kant's Second *Critique* famously ends) actually resigned itself to the mundane practical sphere:

*We might almost say, then, that what has been codified in the Critique of Pure Reason is a theodicy of bourgeois life which is conscious of its own practical activity while despairing of the fulfillment of its utopia.*²⁷

It is just this resignation, this despair of realizing its utopia that Adorno warns against, clearly aware that the same charge has been leveled at his own work. Statements such as this, where Adorno seems to defend that metaphysical impulse which Kant castigated for "straying into intelligible realms", suggest in their own coded form an allegiance to a utopian image unrealizable within the framework of bourgeois life. Not the concrete, well-planned utopia demanded by the student leaders, but an

ideal definable only negatively, by its negative relation to everything bourgeois.

This theme is dealt with in more depth in one particular set of Adorno's lectures, those he gave during 1964/5 on Hegel, Kant and the philosophy of history. Entitled *Zur Lehre von der Geschichte un von der Freiheit*, or 'Towards a Theory of History and Freedom', they show Adorno clarifying his relation to the philosophies of Hegel and Kant, and the attitude of both towards notions of historical progress. Early lectures from this semester see Adorno dealing with the recurring theme of 'mediation and immediacy', but also see him developing his own philosophy of history negatively, out of a critique of Hegel's own treatment of these topics. A later lecture from this semester is devoted to a close reading of Walter Benjamin's theses 'On the Concept of History', a powerful critique of those progressive theories born of the Enlightenment. It is instructive that Benjamin's argument for a discontinuous history of revolutionary 'leaps' and his championing of 'a real state of emergency' over its repressive state imposed analogue is explored by Adorno at this time of great political upheaval.

The most intriguing of the *History and Freedom* lectures deals with a term drawn from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the notion of the *Weltlauf* or 'Course of the World'. By this term Hegel meant the perception of a malign and perverse character to historical events. In the moral philosophies of his time Hegel saw a tendency to set the virtue of the individual against 'the way of the world' understood as 'universally perverted'. According to Hegel the virtuous moral individual protested loudly but vainly against the supposed madness of this 'world course' and in doing so failed to recognize their own part in the very world they denounced.

Something in this notion of the *Weltlauf* appeals to Adorno, who increasingly adopts it as shorthand for the malign and seemingly irrational tendency of his own late-capitalist world. True, he will castigate Hegel for having hypostatized the 'way of the world' as something inevitable and against which the individual is impotent – thus the charge in these lectures that Hegel's is an 'appeasing' philosophy. I have argued elsewhere that in key parts of the *History and Freedom* lectures Adorno misrepresents this part of Hegel's philosophy and in ways which are revealing of weaknesses in Adorno's own politics.²⁸ But here the focus must lie with Adorno's specific usage of this concept. The key lies in the notion that a society could be 'generally perverted', set on a wholly irrational course. For Adorno, the *Weltlauf* stigmatizes the protesting individual as irrational

and so legitimizes its own irrationality. The irrationality of society is *devolved*: it appears to be not society that is mad, but the individual. But the irrational individual in turn aligns himself with the irrational world, through a kind of perverse identification with general perversion.

This sets up a catastrophic vicious circle in which human beings have an objective interest in changing the world and which this change is quite impossible without their participation. However, these mechanisms of identification have stamped themselves on people's characters to such a degree that they are quite incapable of the spontaneity and the conscious actions that would be required to bring about the necessary changes. This is because, by identifying with the course of the world, they do so in an unhappy, neurotically damaged way, which effectively leads them to reinforce the world as it is. And that, I would say, is the truth about the situation of human beings in history.²⁹

It would be easy to take this statement as Adorno's epitaph for the student movement. But it must be taken with a pinch of salt – there is something deliberately hyperbolic about this formulation, as its author must have realized: how could the protesting individual (Hegel's 'virtuous moralizer') articulate this vicious circle if his delusion were as complete as is suggested, if the subject's reactionary identification with the *Weltlauf* or 'way of the world' is total? And if the world's course is wholly irrational, then what individual could with reason articulate this fact and expect to be heard? Adorno seems to realize the untenability of his formulation, and pulls back from it in a letter he writes to Horkheimer.

It is only the other side of the same coin that, with the current course of the world [Weltlauf], situations may arise today or tomorrow which, while they are very likely to be catastrophic, at the same time restore the possibility of praxis which is today obstructed. As long as the world remains antagonistic and itself perpetuates contradictions, the possibility of changing it will be a legacy.³⁰

Here the world course appears unpredictable, not the unstoppable movement it is imputed to have in Hegel and which it tended to become for the Adorno of the lectures on *History and Freedom*; it can favor repression yet it can open up revolutionary counter-tendencies. This formulation is undoubtedly more dialectical and more plausible. It lines up with the many examples given above where Adorno, rather than being the epitome of a resigned philosopher, points to ways out of political resignation, indeed indicts resignation for its wrong-headedness. In fact resignation is

just what Adorno finds pervading the existing social sciences, in the discipline of sociology for instance, a subject which he feels has abandoned a critical theory of society for specialized, fragmented knowledge: "one no longer dares to conceive of the whole since one must despair of changing it."³¹ Critical theory by contrast understands that conceiving the social whole means overcoming the divisions within and between the disciplines, that grasping the whole is immanently related to the conceivability of changing it.

'As if in his Ivory Tower'

In a sense the very polymathism of these lectures, the sheer scope of Adorno's attempt to make sense of the social whole and to pass on these insights to his students is as important a legacy as their various reflections on the mediation of theory and practice. This polymathism can be seen to take one Enlightenment tradition – the encyclopedic approach of the *philosophes*, of Goethe, Schiller and even Weber's 'Faustian universality'³² – and set it against the compartmentalized thinking of that other great Enlightener – Kant – the limitations of whose philosophy are shown to be those of bourgeois society itself. In Adorno's hands polymathism consciously breaks down the intellectual division of labor, attempts to halt the relentless drive towards academic specialization, seeks to apprehend an alienated whole.

Though this will hardly reassure those for whom such philosophical traditions are of dubious relevance to political practice. Any re-examination or rehabilitation of Adorno within a left-wing context will always have to negotiate a prejudice that the Frankfurt School in general and Adorno in particular embody the historical pessimism of intellectuals separated from the revolutionary movements of their time. The *doxa* on Adorno is that his philosophy was devoid of a politics and was proved hopelessly impotent in the face of real political praxis; worse, that he helped quench the fires of revolutionary enthusiasm. The Adorno of these *Lectures*, critics will argue, is the perfect illustration of how hidebound academics can be, unable to engage with the political activism of students or the class struggles being waged beyond the university walls.

The above should have rendered such a charge more difficult to sustain. It is not borne out by a careful reading of these texts

which do reveal the influence of the times in which they are written, and address them in a philosophical language which does justice to their complexity and their mediatedness. Politics does not somehow become less mediated in a time of intensified struggle. This is the illusion of a certain kind of spontaneism, and one reason why it can have disastrous political results. Adorno does not pass a negative judgment on the possibilities of spontaneous action, but only on “thought bowing irrationally to the primacy of practice”,³³ a practice which in its anti-theoreticism is left at “the prey of power”, whether that of charismatic leaders or revolutionary parties.

Amongst Marxists the contrast between Marcuse and Adorno’s reactions to the events of the late 60s will no doubt continue to be the lasting memory of the post-war Frankfurt School, even if the way it is presented today is still couched in stark terms which have changed little in the century and a half since Sainte-Beuve praised Victor Hugo over Alfred de Vigny:

*“Hugo, strong partisan ... fought in armour,
And held high his banner in the middle of the tumult;
He still holds it; and Vigny, more discreet,
As if in his ivory tower, retired before noon.”*³⁴

It is to Sainte-Beuve that we are indebted for the term ‘ivory tower’ with all its unfortunate connotations of the separation of the academy from politics and society, philosophical thought from political practice. But we cannot imagine – especially today – that the academy is somehow immune to the influence of the ‘outside world’, to what goes on *extra murus*. It is subject to the same imperatives and exhibits the same struggles, as Adorno already recognized, over the reduction of life and mind to labor, struggles that pervade ever more corners of society. These *Lectures* allow us to begin to dismantle the caricature of Adorno as a thinker removed from Sainte-Beuve’s ‘tumult’, to dismantle too the legacy of anti-theoreticism which still derides the polymath as a ‘jack of all trades and master of none’. To resist the desire for an intellectual figurehead, a Pied Piper, whilst defending the critical role – neither crudely committed to every cause nor free-floating – of the polymathic intellectual in an specialized,

instrumentalized world: in these final lectures Adorno forces his way beyond these false alternatives.

In 2003 an Adorno centenary conference took place in the infamous lecture theatre VI of Frankfurt University, where in 1969 a bare-breasted student had announced 'Adorno as an Institution is dead'. What brought the delegates together was a recognition that Adorno's thought, whether institutionalized or not, is very much alive. The gradual publication and translation of these lectures from the 1960s demonstrates an afterlife of thought that is more vibrant than that of many other twentieth century philosophers, whose surface radicalism has often failed to stand the test of time. That the non-institution which is Adorno is very much living is, I suggest, testament to its radical and prophetic core.

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 - 13 *Ibid*, p.2.
 - 14 *Ibid*, p. 3.
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 - 16 Adorno, *Introduction to Sociology*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 28.
 - 17 Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (London: MIT Press, 1993) p. 91. Compare G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter Hodgson, trans. R. F. Brown, P. C. Hodgson & J. M. Stewart (London: University of California Press, 1988) p. 99: "Only slight experience is needed to see that where there is immediate knowledge there is also mediated knowledge, and vice versa. Immediate knowledge, like mediated knowledge, is by itself completely one-sided."
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Technological Rationality and the Problem of Meaning

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I

▪ The attempt to generalize formal rationality as a culture, to found a civilization on it, is so bizarre that it commands our attention once it is noticed. Yet this is in fact the dystopian paradigm of modernity in the 20th century. The critique of this astounding project in thinkers as diverse as Weber, Lukács and Heidegger, Marcuse and Foucault, should also command our attention. It points the way to a new type of social theory. Only a critical theory of science and technology can address the fundamental problems of modern society. The humanities are still too timid in the face of these powerful fields. They and we can only benefit from a more self-conscious reckoning with the potentials and dangers of modern knowledge.

The chief obstacle to such a reckoning is the assumption that science and technology are autonomous, separate from society and founded on pure rationality. In Weber and systems theory that assumption is called the "differentiation of cultural spheres." This is the social ontological equivalent of the epistemological notion of pure rationality. It originated simultaneously with its early critique in Marx. Marx discovered that the market has a unique rational form imposed by sundering capitalist economic exchange from tradition, religion, and politics. But he also showed that this apparently "differentiated" and autonomous market rationality is tied to the rise of a specific class and creates a class biased society. Neutral rationality and class bias are conjoined in the market.

Once that discovery was made, the way was open to a generalized critique of rational social forms, however, Marx's most influential if by no means orthodox follower was Max Weber, who focused on the notion of autonomization and ignored the critique. Only later, in the 1920s, on the basis of Weber's contribution did Lukács recover Marx's critical theory of rationality.

Following Weber, Lukács generalized the Marxian critique of market rationality to cover the whole surface of modern capitalist society, technology, administration, the media, and so on. This is the famous theory

of reification which revolutionized Marxism, if not capitalism, and bore fruit in the Frankfurt School, influencing also directly or indirectly Heidegger and many other critics of modernity. Lukács offered the first version of an argument that continues in Marcuse according to which behind modernity's apparently autonomous, value neutral rational systems lie power relations of a new type. The so-called "differentiation" of rationality from other cultural spheres is only apparent.

Lukács's early version of this argument attempts to broaden Marx's original critique of market rationality into a more radical critique of scientific-technical rationality. He notes the similarity between scientific knowledge and the laws of the market Marx criticized. The market is a "second nature" with laws as pitiless and mathematically precise as those of the cosmos. Like the worker confronted by the machine, the agent in a market society can only manipulate these laws to advantage, not change them. Weber's analysis of bureaucratic and legal systems reveals a related formalistic paradigm at work. In these social domains, resistances testify to the living human content that cannot be fully accommodated to the reified forms. Lukács thus takes seriously the reorganization of modern capitalism around the kinds of abstractions characteristic of modern science and technology. As he writes,

What is important is to recognize clearly that all human relations (viewed as the objects of social activity) assume increasingly the objective forms of the abstract elements of the conceptual systems of natural science and of the abstract substrata of the laws of nature. And also, the subject of this 'action' likewise assumes increasingly the attitude of the pure observer of these—artificially abstract—processes, the attitude of the experimenter.¹

Lukács's position depends on his critique of the paradigmatic role of mathematical physics in the structure of modern knowledge and social practice. Since the 17th Century, physical law has been the model for all true knowledge and effective rational action has been identified with the kind of technical manipulation that can be based on such laws. These laws are formal universals, abstracted from all specific time-space coordinates and from the developmental process of their objects. Considered as the model of knowledge in general, their cognitive universality promises equally universal technical control of all aspects of nature and society. But insofar as they are purely formal, they are incapable of comprehending social practice and the ever new historical contents it produces.

Lukács set out to analyze this tension between historical content and the dominant paradigm of law in terms of Hegel's critique of Kant's notion of formal-analytic rationality, also based on the model of physics. He transposed the Hegelian critique into the social realm, and identified correspondences between it and the Marxian critique of capitalist market rationality. The Marxian critique was thus raised to the highest level of abstraction and became the basis for an alternative cognitive paradigm. This is a major aspect of the background to Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional society. The fact that Marcuse did not cite Lukács is, I believe, due to the uptake of these ideas by the Frankfurt School. By the post-World War II phase of his career, Marcuse could take for granted the basic Lukácsian approach to the understanding of the relationship between capitalism and science and technology. However, there is a second partially hidden source of Marcuse's thought in this period. Heidegger's critique of technology also influenced his radical critique of science and technology. The Heideggerian theory of the enframing and the contrast between ancient *technē* and modern technology shape Marcuse's approach. Interestingly, the two critiques, that of Lukács and that of Heidegger, converge around several basic themes that reappear in Marcuse. These are:

1. The emergence of scientific-technical rationality as a dominant and ultimately exclusive cultural framework;
2. The neutrality of this formalistic paradigm of rationality, i.e. its differentiation from meanings and values circulating in the lifeworld;
3. The consequent loss of an authoritative cognitive grasp of significant aspects of reality;
4. The potential for catastrophe implicit in this limitation of the dominant culture.

Naturally, the way in which Lukács and Heidegger develop these themes is quite different, but in Marcuse's appropriation a kind of synthesis is achieved. The central notion of this synthesis is the paradox of value neutrality which at one and the same time isolates science and technology from the social and integrates them to it. This is the basis of Marcuse's critique of what he calls "technological rationality," a form of rationality that grasps its objects through technical understanding and control without presupposing any goal except its own application and extension.

In chapter six of *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse writes, “It is precisely its neutral character which relates objectivity to a specific historical Subject—namely, the consciousness that prevails in the society....”⁷². Thus “Theoretical reason, remaining pure and neutral, entered into the service of practical reason....”⁷³ “This interpretation would tie the scientific project (method and theory), *prior* to all application and utilization, to a specific societal project, and would see the tie precisely in the inner form of scientific rationality....”⁷⁴ Marcuse’s approach, as exemplified in these passages, is based on the notion that the differentiation of modern scientific-technical rationality is linked to domination. Neutrality is just the reverse side of the insistence on quantifying and controlling all objects indifferent to any goal including their own inherent potentialities. Other forms of action associated with artistic production, craft, and the care of human beings and the cultivation of nature do not offer the prospect of full control and so are dismissed as prescientific or irrational.

Why is neutrality specifically linked to the project of domination of capitalism? The answer to this question has two parts. In the first place, capitalism requires a knowledge that is differentiated from meanings, traditions, and values insofar as technological production breaks with the past and all the restraints it placed on the pursuit of productivity and profit. Traditional forms of knowledge are too close to the very lifeworld which capitalism must destroy in the course of its advance. They condense cognitive and valuative dimensions in ways that block technological rationalization, for example, by limiting the exploitation of labor or the natural environment, or preventing the optimization of resources and land. In the second place, the form of scientific-technological knowledge is adapted to the pursuit of power by its selective focus on aspects of its objects through which they can be broken down and transformed. Organic and essentialist paradigms of knowledge that presuppose some sort of teleology have no place here and give way to a mechanistic approach based on the measurable attributes of things. The reduction of meanings and values to mere subjective preferences is the precondition for ignoring the obstacles to the full deployment of technology they represent. The differentiation of modern knowledge is thus both real and unreal, breaking the chains of religion and tradition only to enter the prison house of power.

Marcuse’s application of the reification/enframing thesis he derived from Lukács and Heidegger leads inexorably to the demand for a restoration of meaning through a transformation of the paradigm of knowledge.

Meanings are required both for human life to make sense once again and as cognitively valid guides to technological processes that threaten human wellbeing and survival. But Marcuse insists that this restoration must not take the form of a return to premodern modes of thought. A "qualitative physics" is excluded at the outset. Instead, he promises a kind of synthesis of art and science, an aestheticization of technology that would bring values into the design process as quantifiable parameters. While interesting and provocative this rather vague positive outcome of a very persuasive critique is bound to be disappointing. I do not believe Marcuse ever worked out the alternative satisfactorily although he developed a convincing diagnosis of the problem. The impression of pessimism and indeed dystopian despair left by his contribution is due in large part to the disproportionate effectiveness of the critique relative to the rather weak positive perspective on the future.

II

In this second part of my paper I would like to reconsider the problem of meaning in a different light. The philosophy of technology has encountered the very same question that preoccupied Marcuse, namely, how can meaning be restored in the context of a civilization based on a paradigm of rationality that reduces it to subjectivity.

To this end I want to reconsider the contributions of Albert Borgmann and Lorenzo Simpson, two philosophers influenced by Heidegger (Borgmann, 1984; Simpson, 1995). They have developed the argument for taking culture seriously in the context of essentialist philosophies of technology. If we drop their essentialist premises we can draw on their arguments to address the problem of meaning.

Their work helps us address two problems associated with this notion: first, the lack of rational grounds for culturally general meanings, and second, the problem of consensus in a postconventional society. Both Simpson and Borgmann reject the relativistic refusal of local meaning in terms of some absolute standard of rationality they deem inappropriately applied to culture. They also reject the notion that cultural differences in modern societies can be adequately represented as differing concepts of the good. This supposed "good" is a matter of opinion rather than the articulation of a way of life and as such it is subject to infinite and arbitrary variation. They agree with Marcuse that there *is* a very definite con-

sensus around a way of life in technologically advanced societies. This consensus is not located at the level of opinion but at the practical level, where technology shapes a common framework of experience and action. Simpson and Borgmann argue that a desirable way of life will sustain human and community relations independent of the technological fixation of modern societies. The worth of such an alternative must be judged in terms of its contribution to human growth and development.

Simpson's and Borgmann's critiques are based on the distinction between function and meaning and the overestimation of the former at the expense of the latter in modern societies. Today, individuals commonly talk as though the objects by which they are surrounded were essentially functional. Indeed, they even extend a functional understanding to themselves and their human relations. This is the sociological crux of the one-dimensionality thesis. Such an understanding cannot be said to be false, but it is certainly partial and that partiality is obvious even to those who talk in this way. The parents tell their child to eat more vegetables in order to be healthy, but the child knows that vegetables are not merely functional; they also have a taste, and that is the problem. Every parent is familiar with this dialogue: health versus taste, good for you versus good. The narrowness of functionalism is already apparent by age five but that does not prevent it from serving as a standard way of thinking and talking in adulthood.

Functional understanding is encouraged by the existence and prestige of technical disciplines in modern societies. The transportation function of the automobile is of special concern to automotive engineers and is represented in their technical discipline. Engineers are obviously justified in narrowing their focus in their work. But there is a sense in which an ordinary non-professional interpreter who understands the automobile exclusively in terms of its function adopts the engineers point of view in an inappropriate context. There is a risk that the legitimate limits of the engineer's standpoint, which open up for him or her a realm of technical knowledge, may become misleading obstacles to broader understanding for the theorist, the user and the citizen. Yet something like this confusion is implicit in much discussion of technology, and indeed in everyday attitudes as well.

The intellectual heritage of this type of argument should be clear from the considerations presented in the first part of this paper. The differentiation of society has enabled function to be distinguished from all these com-

plex aspects of artifacts in their concrete relationship to social life. One-dimensionality results from the attempt to totalize a functional view of the world, denying the residue of meaning excluded from the differentiation of function. The effectiveness of this totalization is not a theoretical but an empirical question. In Marcuse's view as in the views of Simpson and Borgmann, it is sufficiently effective to suppress awareness of the most important "dimension" of social life, the meanings or potentialities that enable humane understanding and self-knowledge, and, Marcuse would emphasize, social progress.

Lorenzo Simpson addresses this problem as the reduction of "meaning" to "value." Values as he defines them are simple ends or goals. They can be abstracted from the complex web of meanings in which they emerge in actual life and represented independent of that context. Such abstractions have their uses, but when they are substituted for the larger framework of meaning, the results are dispiriting.

Meanings are built out of myriad connections between experiences and spheres of life. They are not definite, bounded things we have at our disposal, but structures or frameworks which we inhabit and which contribute to making us what and who we are. Meanings are enacted in our perceptions and practices. They are not chosen but rather they "claim us" from "behind our backs." Within these complex phenomena it is possible to isolate particular elements and to privilege them as we have seen. When the privileged moment of the whole is taken to be its purpose, the technologies that mediate that achievement appear peculiarly central. The pursuit of ends with means, preferably technically efficient means, replaces an understanding of the complex structure of meaning. The focus on the means leads to a forgetfulness of the complexity of the structure and eventually to the lopping off of whole dimensions of the original experience as they appear irrelevant to maximum efficiency.

Simpson points out a second consequence of the reduction of meaning to value. Structures of meaning belong to a way of life. They can be justified only within that framework, by reference to each other and to the general virtues of the way of life in question. Values, on the other hand, seem arbitrary unless justified by arguments with rational appeal under any and all conditions. But such arguments invariably fail and so the values-perspective leads directly to a relativism that devalues the idea of the good life generally.

Relativism results from the objectifying glance of the outside observer who peeks in on a way of life represented by its “values” and can find no compelling reason to prefer it to any other. A represented world viewed objectively can make no claims on the individual. But participants who belong to a world immediately experience its claims as the substance of their daily life. The participant is engaged with meanings practically and so experiences their force in context. Simpson argues that the values perspective and its accompanying relativism presuppose an absolutely detached observer. But the “death of God” is also the death of an absolute knower, uninvolved in any social world and tradition. Simpson writes,

What happens in such a transformation of meaning into value? As meaning becomes thematized as value, the manifold connections which operate in part ‘behind our backs’ and which, through informing and shaping our experience, predispose us to experience in a characteristic way, are transformed into premises. The validity of these value-premises, apart from the referential anchoring in the meaning which gave rise to the value, stands or falls with the rational evaluation of those premises. Our inability to provide purely rational foundations for such premises, in abstraction from the meaning that gives them point, results in our inability to experience as binding in a nonarbitrary way. That is, such values qua values, that is, in isolation from meaningful practices, cannot claim us.⁵

If the position of the participant is privileged rather than that of the outside observer, relativism is avoided by reference to the internal significance of the meanings that circulate in a way of life. Those meanings do not have a compulsory evidence; they can be thematized and criticized. But the exercise of critical intelligence is a moment within the way of life, not a transcendence of any and all involvement. Criticism does not automatically devalue meaning in general, but enables a more refined and appropriate relation to meaning in the particular situation of the participating individual. Simpson calls this a “*sittliche* account of rationality,” referring to the Hegelian notion of value as immanent in the way of life of the community rather than speculatively constructed in abstraction from any involvement.⁶

Unfortunately, Simpson does not see that the very reasons he adduces for insisting that values not be disengaged from their background in meanings apply to technologies as well. Technologies, considered apart from their context, are just as abstract as goals artificially isolated from the framework within which they are pursued. As a result, Simpson’s account is vitiated by an unconvincing opposition between technology

and meaning. It is true that Simpson notes on several occasions the distinction between a technological mentality and actual technologies, but he fails to locate his critique clearly on one or the other side of the line between them.⁷ Thus he recognizes that a different cultural environment would generate different technologies and yet he also wants to insist that the properties of technology he criticizes constitute a "residue" characteristic of technology in general.⁸ Meaning then shrinks to the margins of his conception of modern life, repelled by the very technical means on which it depends today for its context and realization.

In reality, technology is everywhere involved in the meanings that engage us. In this respect we are not different from other peoples in other periods of history. Artifacts have always played a central role in the construction of meaning. What is distinctive about modernity is rather the assumption that meaning is contingent in the invidious sense of arbitrary, subjective. This assumption is related to the cultural power organizations exercise in modern societies where meanings are consciously constructed as well as inherited from the past.

Simpson is right to relate relativism to the reduction of meaning to value and the privileging of technological means that results, but he overlooks the social roots of this peculiarly modern outlook and instead focuses on properties of technology he identifies with it. If this phenomenon were clearly signified as a specifically modern "technological rationality," made possible by certain features of technology, but not identical with technology as such, the critique would promise an alternative development of technology based on a different mentality emphasizing different features. That constructive outcome is remarkably similar to the conclusion Marcuse drew from his own critique of technology, however Simpson only hints at this line of argument.

Marcuse went considerably further but his own interpretation of the alternative was closely tied to the New Left, a transient historical experience. Yet the New Left put forward a core of demands that continue to define the horizon of progressive thought to this day. The creation of a technological infrastructure based on these themes would constitute a fundamental reorientation of modernity. New meanings would emerge in conjunction with technological changes. A new way of life would occupy center stage instead of being confined to the margins as it is today. We need to think through the implications of such a transformation.

Borgmann's argument is especially interesting in this connection since it explicitly contrasts a consumer oriented way of life with an alternative organized around what he calls "focal things" in something like the Heideggerian sense. For Heidegger the concept of the thing refers not merely to an existing entity but to the gathering power of the objects around which the rituals of everyday life are organized. Things "thing" according to Heidegger in the sense that they lay out the framework of a local world within which relationships and identities are defined. In that world individuals are active participants rather than passive consumers, although Heidegger insists that their action is not arbitrary but is shaped by the things around which it is organized.

Borgmann believes that we have become so obsessed with the acquisition of commodities that we have lost touch with things in this Heideggerian sense. Technology teaches the sharp difference between means and ends where formerly each implicated the other. The complex involvements of individuals with others and with nature of an earlier time, when our activities were less effectively mediated by technology, give way to isolating and hollow technical control. "Devices, that was the claim, dissolve the coherent and engaging character of the pretechnological world of things. In a device, the relatedness of the world is replaced by a machinery, but the machinery is concealed, and the commodities, which are made available by a device, are enjoyed without the encumbrance of or the engagement with a context."⁹

Consumer society is made possible by a technology sufficiently advanced to provide abundance. But the role of technology is not innocent. It is not merely a means to ends fixed outside its purview. The ready availability of technological means to specific types of satisfactions tends to bias socially sanctioned desires toward just those satisfactions. Facility and convenience exercise a hidden tyranny which Borgmann calls the "device paradigm" dominating our lives. A whole way of life is thus implied in the technology and the consensus it organizes practically is difficult to criticize much less to challenge and overcome. "Technology," he claims, is "the new orthodoxy, the dominant character of reality."¹⁰

Borgmann identifies meaning with engagement with focal things, things that exercise the gathering power to constitute worlds. Such things may be celebrations or occasions as well as objects. They require effort and engagement, a practice "that can center and illuminate our lives."¹¹ They

develop the relationships and skills of those who engage with them. They provide a focus from out of which to experience a context rather than supplying a commodity with efficiency and ease. Borgmann readily admits that focal things are not subject to proof or justification in any scientific sense. A "deictic" discourse can however point to the features of the world that engage our focus. In deictic discourse we can testify to the importance of the focal things in our lives and bring them to the attention of others with the hope of engaging them too in their gathering power.

Like Simpson, Borgmann wants to withdraw from technology into activities on the margins, but he too formulates his program in ambiguous terms. Borgmann rejects regression to a pretechnological understanding of life and claims that a renewed emphasis on focal things will enable us to rectify our relationship to technology. Thus technology itself is not the problem but rather the device paradigm which frames life as the application of efficient means to the pursuit of goals abstracted from a context of meaning.¹² Yet at the end of his book, Borgmann calls for a "two sector economy" in which technology as device will coexist with craft production. This seems to imply that technology is after all the problem and that bounding it is the solution. Once again the argument wavers between condemning the technological mentality and condemning technology itself.¹³

Perhaps the ambiguity belongs to technology, which can support very different worlds. In one of those worlds Simpson and Borgmann identify the sources of a consumer society fated to meaninglessness and despair. But another world is possible in which technology would support a fuller and more meaningful way of life. The word "technology" used in this sense cannot refer to a mentality or attitude but must designate the complex of technical devices located within the imbrication of means and ends, objects and contexts, that characterizes ways of life generally. It is impossible to believe that that complex can remain indifferent to the web within which it functions. Technologies designed for these two worlds will be differently designed.

As Marcuse argued, fundamental change in technology must be an aspect of fundamental social change. A return to focal things must also imply not only a new attitude toward technology but also new technology. There is evidence that something like this process has already begun in small ways. And as attitudes and technologies change, it becomes evident that the refusal to treat certain technologies as focal is arbitrary and

unjustified. This has become especially clear in the case of the Internet. Not only has the Internet served as a the scene on which new forms of sociability have been created, but users have played an unprecedented role in shaping and reshaping the technology. The Internet is not simply a means to ends; it is an environment within which communities form and creative activity goes on (Feenberg and Barney, 2004).

The example of the Internet shows that the emphasis of critique should be less on the ills of consumerism and more on the general problem of agency and the norms under which agency is exercised in advanced technological societies. Recognition of the value of nature and human capacities is not merely a matter of opinion but activates individuals in new ways that belie the pattern of “technology” as Borgmann understands it. We have seen such a recovery of agency in the environmental movement as well as with the Internet. Environmental politics has shattered the myth of technological determinism and its associated technocratic ideology. We know now that we are responsible for our own technology and its consequences. An older understanding of technology as a hidden cornucopia managed by experts in the background of our lives is giving way to a new sense of technology as a terrain on which human initiative is essential to survival and progress.

With the emergence of these technological initiatives some of the consensus creating powers Borgmann attributes to technology may actually work in favor of further beneficial changes. The worry of political theorists that no consensus is possible in a postconventional society was always overdrawn. A way of life is not simply an arbitrarily chosen idea or opinion, but a mode of being in the world. The practical setting of that mode plays an important role in shaping it. As Borgmann argues, technology itself creates a practical consensus about the good life. As it becomes more responsive to concerns about nature and human capacities, it may provide the basis for a new understanding as an expression of the community. That would be the recovery of the promise of technology betrayed in modern times by the its reduction to a mere means.

Contemporary critics of technology work in the shadow of a grand tradition of modernity theory. Their contribution is best understood against this background. Then it becomes clear the extent to which their thought articulates in new ways arguments that have a long history. In this paper I have attempted to bring out the connections between philosophy of technology and Marcuse’s critique of one-dimensional society. Philosophy of technol-

ogy offers resources for Marcuse's position but also falls short of his insight into the entwinement of the technical with the social.

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- 1 Lukács, George. *History and Class Consciousness*. trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971). The passivity of the experimenter to which Lukács refers is only apparent: The experimenter actively constructs the observed object but, at least in Lukács's view, is not aware of having done so and interprets the experiment as the voice of nature. While Lukács does not criticize the epistemological consequences of this illusion in natural science, in the social arena it is defining for reification. Lukács, George. *History and Class Consciousness*. trans. R. Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971).
 - 2 Marcuse, Herbert, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), p. 156.
 - 3 *Ibid.*, p.158.
 - 4 *Ibid.*, 159.
 - 5 Simpson, Lorenzo. *Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 1995) p. 47.
 - 6 *Ibid.*, p. 113.
 - 7 *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 174-5, 182.
 - 9 Borgman, Albert. *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 47.
 - 10 *Ibid.*, p. 189.
 - 11 *Ibid.*, p. 4.
 - 12 *Ibid.*, p. 200.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 220.

Habermas, discourse ethics and doing justice to the exception: immigrants and the law

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Introduction

▪ We live in a time when the state of emergency is increasingly becoming the norm, the exception becoming the rule. The war against terror – like any other war – provides the perfect pretext for by-passing constitutional limits intrinsic to the rule of law, without which law itself lacks force. The interesting question – and one that directly touches on the topic of immigration central to my present concern - is whether the state of war is in some sense intrinsic to the political domain which law constitutes and regulates. A venerable tradition dating back to Hobbes and powerfully resuscitated by the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt in the last century asserts that it is. The anarchy and anomie intrinsic to the friend-foe relationship, Schmitt argued, places liberal parliamentary democracies in a perpetual state of crisis and indecision in which the legal action of the state is implicitly suspended.¹ Under these circumstances, constitutional order can be enforced only under exceptional and paradoxical circumstances, namely, by the intervention of extra-judicial executive action.

This line of reasoning, which Schmitt used to support commissarial dictatorship and which later paved the way for rationalizing Hitler's assumption of full sovereign dictatorial powers, has been given new life under the administration of George Bush. The expanded powers bestowed on the president by the Patriot Acts effectively allow the president and his minions to unilaterally redefine the meaning of the constitution. Nowhere has this impact been felt with greater force than in the area of war powers, which allows the president to determine whether persons suspected of being terrorists should be classified as 'enemy combatants'. Suspended between prisoner of war status and criminal status, the status of enemy combatant marks the very erasure of legal status as such. Not surprisingly, it has been non-citizens, and increasingly immigrants, who make up the vast bulk of those who officially bear this stigma; for those falling under this designation are denied the right to a normal courtroom hearing to determine their innocence or guilt; and those who have been incar-

cerated outside of U.S. territory have been stripped of other rights as well, including those governing the Geneva Convention against torture (cf. Footnotes 15 and 17). We might say, following Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, that such extra-legal persons - by which they meant a broad class of exceptions that included precisely those undocumented immigrants and stateless refugees whose status I now wish to examine in this paper - have been stripped of all identity save that of bare life itself.²

Before addressing the exceptional status of undocumented immigrants, let me add one more comment by way of preface. Perhaps what we are witnessing today is a general governmental trend toward executive and administrative privilege that has accompanied the growth of the security state over the last one hundred years. In the words of Agamben, the state of exception now paradoxically designates a new norm or paradigm of governance. Unlike Schmitt, Agamben sees this new suspension of law as not merely the outer limit of law. Its meaning is not exhausted by constitutional measures empowering legislatures to endow executives with full sovereign powers to respond to states of emergency or other forms of civil crisis; nor is it identifiable with revolutionary acts that found new legal orders; nor again is it identifiable with forms of executive privilege such as the right of pardon. Rather, following Jacques Derrida's earlier analysis of the force of law,³ Agamben insists that we must locate the suspension of law at precisely that moment when its force is most immediately felt: in the decision of the judge or government official who applies the force of the law to a newly arrived asylum seeker who is waiting to see whether he or she will be mandated for repatriation (SE: 86-88 – cf. note 15). The mysterious force of law – as a pure indeterminate potentiality – is realized only when it meets concrete life. But this meeting of law with reality is at the same time its erasure by means of what certainly looks like an unlawful act of violence. Either official judgment mechanically interprets, categorizes, and subsumes the living event in accordance with a fixed and imperious norm that denies its exceptional status, or it arbitrarily tailors the norm to accommodate this status, which only it – without prior restraint - can decide. The question then remains how we are to understand this act. Is it illegitimate tyranny, judicial dictatorship that pretends to be legitimate, or is it something that must be opposed in an act of revolutionary violence, as Walter Benjamin suggests?⁴

I think another option exists besides this abstract dichotomy between revolutionary justice and legal domination that is to be found in the writ-

ings of a philosopher whose own studies of Schmitt and Benjamin over the years have led him to embrace a very different position that has its roots in Kantian philosophy. Jurgen Habermas has labored mightily in showing how a discourse ethical conception of law and democracy can do justice to our revolutionary moral ideals – can, in other words, mediate the divide between concrete political life and abstract conceptions of law – without appeal to the pure violence of extra-legal political action. The problem is trying to understand how the idea of impartial legal justice can be applied in a way that can do justice to the exception without devolving into partial violence.

Unfortunately, the few remarks of Habermas that bear on this dilemma offer scant guidance in resolving it. In some places he opposes law to the exception. As he puts it

Both moral and legal rules are general in at least two respects. First of all, they are general insofar as they address an indeterminate number of persons while admitting no exceptions and excluding both privileges and discrimination in their application.⁵

This position accords with the Kantian standpoint that Habermas takes as definitive of a modern conception of right. Elsewhere in the same text he contradicts this statement, as when he observes that a statutory law “can also take the form of special legislation and private bills” (BFN: 159). In this paper, I take his word that legitimate statutory legislation can allow private bills and regulatory applications that discriminate on a case by case basis without regressing behind deontological morality to a neo-Aristotelian balancing of goods and values based solely on personal discretion. However, if we grant that a private bill granting a person an exemption from normal legal procedures – e.g, a bill that exempts one from deportation or confers upon one the status of permanent residence or citizen - *can be a bonafide law and not merely an exception to the law*, we must then explain how its exceptional status can be justified from within the law itself. As a law it differs from a judicial decision or executive decree that applies only to a particular person. Yet the line separating legislation and adjudication is not hard. The *holding* – as distinct from the *dictum* - in judicial rulings is intended to apply to similar cases in the future; corresponding to such *judge-made law* we find acts of legislation that specifically designate one person as their addressee. If there is a difference between judicial legislation and legislative application it resides in the emphasis that each kind of discourse places: either on the justifi-

cation of norms or on their application (which already presumes that the norm being applied is *prima facie* justified). According to the discursive logic of legislation as Habermas understands it, a private bill must still be *justified* as advancing universal moral interests, national ethical interests (the national welfare), or a compromise that fairly balances competing interests. Thus a private bill that grants an undocumented worker with an exemption from immediate deportation, permanent residence, or citizenship for specific reasons would seem to establish a reasonable and justified precedent that might be applied to other similar cases, perhaps eventually justifying a law providing for a general amnesty.

As Habermas notes, the legislative justification of norms and their judicial application mediate one another. Moreover, judicial application of an appropriate norm to a particular case not only must be guided by principles of discursive impartiality but it must in turn be interpreted *vis-a-vis* the unique circumstances of the case. That is why the process of statutory legislation and judicial application are *both* essential to realizing the revolutionary idea of law as an institutional embodiment of democratic ideals of inclusion, freedom, and equality – ideals that Habermas continues to identify with the socialist project. I will argue then, that the exception must be a legitimate possibility within law as a revolutionary project, in much the same way that civil disobedience is. In this sense, the exception is *not* outside of law if by ‘law’ we mean not *positive law* as defined by extant legal documents (statutes, legislative committee reports, written judgments, etc.) but law as a *living tradition* consisting of both abstract norms and a concrete historical understanding of them. So construed, the exception is what can be *exemplary* – a *law unto itself* that best interprets and creatively extends (and transcends) the law that already exists.⁶

I. Immigration: A Test Case

Certain areas of law exemplify this exceptional status more than others. Immigration law, for instance, is rife with exemptions and exceptions. Such exemptions and exceptions have taken on special and by no means legitimate status as the developed nations of the North Atlantic have felt themselves placed under a new state of emergency – besieged, as it were, by an invading plague of economic and political refugees⁷ - to which they respond by empowering the police with new quasi-military powers⁸. The irony behind this exceptional response⁹ was succinctly cap-

tured by Jacques Derrida when he noted that our post-9/11 reaction to immigration has all the appearance of an auto-immune disorder, in which the anti-bodies we have unleashed against the external threat end up attacking our own body.¹⁰ This reaction is doubly paradoxical because the capacity of our body politic to resist external threats – often depicted by neo-liberals in terms of intellectual, economic, and military disadvantages we face from our competitors abroad - depends, ironically, on the healthy infusion of more – not less - foreign bodies.¹¹ *Tolerance* against economic globalization might well require *toleration* of precisely those innocuous agents who inoculate us against our own false sense of sovereign superiority and self-sufficiency¹² (and who, I might add, build up the reserves in our national pension and health insurance schemes threatened by an aging, low-birth population¹³). Instead, we witness an all-too-familiar defensive reaction: a virulently racist and xenophobic drive to expel an uninvited guest that threatens to establish itself within an increasingly inhospitable host.¹⁴ Even when the political atmosphere is more ambiguous – as it currently is in the United States – the resulting legislative gridlock over “immigration reform” has given the executive branch a green light to unilaterally impose its own “solution,” thereby again apparently confirming Schmitt’s diagnosis that in this particular arena of friend-foe politics, the “exception” as dictatorially decided remains the rule rather than the exception in the rule of law.¹⁵

I will resist the temptation to follow Derrida in his piercing analysis of the immigrant as foe or exception. Likewise I will desist from deconstructing the rights of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants as these are actually implemented – or, as the case may be, brazenly violated - by Europe and the United States.¹⁶ Instead I will invite you to consider the plight of Mexican national Elvira Arellano – who represents the other side of the exception. Arellano, an undocumented worker who formerly resided in the United States, is the founder of Familia Latina Unida, an organization that fights against deportations that separate spouses from one another and their children. She founded this organization after she herself was apprehended by immigration authorities in 2002 and taken from her then three-year-old native-born son. She and her son had been claiming sanctuary in a Methodist church on Chicago’s Southside, waiting to see if Homeland Security would carry out the deportation threat it issued in August 2006. A year later, while in route to a political rally in Washington D.C., she was apprehended by Homeland Security officials in Los Angeles and deported to Tijuana, Mexico.

Interestingly, Arellano has outraged immigration critics such as CNN's Lou Dobbs by defiantly comparing herself to Rosa Parks, the civil rights activist who in 1955 refused to give up her seat to a white passenger. Although I personally find this comparison compelling - Arellano and Parks, after all, both struggled to expand our awareness of the human dignity of those whom society has cast out - few persons in positions of power have rushed to Arellano's defense. Thanks to an Illinois congressional delegation, she had been granted three stays of deportation since 2003 in order to care for her son, who was diagnosed with ADHD and other health problems. Unfortunately, her request for a private bill that would grant her an exemption from the law has not been supported by lawmakers, who argue that it would be unfair to other undocumented workers in her situation if the law were to treat her as an exception.

Indeed the little Kant lurking in all of us balks at the prospect of making an exception to a general rule. Does deontological moral theory then leave us without hope? True, the use of hypothetical thought experiments that abstract from the historical details surrounding our lives cannot possibly provide an impartial method for uncovering the sorts of reasons that serve to justify exceptions. As we all know, immigration law is, if nothing else, a quagmire of regulations wherein the exception is the rule. Flexible citizenship,¹⁷ quotas,¹⁸ amnesties,¹⁹ emergency exemptions,²⁰ special subcategories within categories are just some of the examples of the exceptionally fluid and contextual nature of immigration law. Assessing the justice of these exceptions requires blending questions of desert and merit with historical questions concerning past harms demanding rectification, as well as responsibilities and commitments assumed in the past. Finally, as we have seen in the case of Arellano, immigration law is rife with individual exceptions that focus our attention on the particular claims to justice that engage us from within a narrative expressive of a life born in desperation.

Here discourse ethics can help us out²¹ For instead of abstracting from historical differences - the chief weakness of the Kant-inspired liberal social contract theory advocated by Rawls - discourse ethics recommends real dialog as the mechanism for achieving impartial insight and rational consensus. However, in applying discourse ethics to immigration policy we must not stop at the preliminary stage of justifying immigration statutes in some *prima facie* way, in terms of their satisfaction of universalizable interests taken in a general and abstract sense - a shortcom-

ing I find in Seyla Benhabib's otherwise commendable use of discourse ethics to illuminate the rights we owe immigrants as a general class of persons. We must also continue with the complete justification of the statute as it is applied to concrete living persons with their unique biographies – a view that finds compelling support in Habermas's own writings on immigration. Although Benhabib might appeal to Habermas's distinction between justification and application discourses in stopping her analysis at the level of legislation as an embodiment of *prima facie* moral norms, Habermas himself rightly notes that the distinction between discourses as well as the distinction between legislative and judicial functions is not rigid. Judges must consider the justice of laws in light of their moral justification just as legislators must anticipate the appropriate ways in which their laws will be applied (BFN: 173, 193). For this reason, not only does Habermas endorse the collaboration of judicial experts and lawmakers in drafting constitutionally sound legislation but he allows for the existence of "private bills" that apply to specific persons. In this way, discourse ethics narrows the chasm between norm and exception, law and life, without entirely bridging it and without abandoning its deontological discursive emphasis in favor of a monological neo-Aristotelian balancing of values.

Part II: Habermas, Discourse Ethics and Immigration

The question about whether discourse ethics has anything to say about immigration is not easily answered. Habermas himself urges us to refrain from drawing concrete policy recommendations from discourse ethics. Instead, he tells us that discourse ethics implies a democratic procedure by which citizens reach agreement on such recommendations by themselves. When applied to immigration, discourse ethics allows communities some latitude in determining for themselves who they admit and under what circumstances so long as they do so under conditions that duly respect discursive moral ideals. These ideals, which are universal and cosmopolitan in scope, require that any legitimate norm or policy be rationally acceptable to all those affected by it. Discourse ethics further stipulates that the way we determine whether they are so acceptable is by allowing all those affected to discuss the merits and demerits of the norm or policy all together (so as to maximize the inclusion of alternative perspectives) under conditions that approximate a perfect freedom from constraint (internal as well as external), an equal opportunity to speak,

and an impartial orientation toward the best and most rationally convincing argument.

Despite its proceduralist focus, discourse ethics is not without substantive content. Habermas himself has said that any community rigorously adhering to its procedural ideals would be prevented from enacting policies that discriminate against the interests of affected parties. This aspect of Habermas' understanding of discourse ethics is exemplified in his writings on immigration. Writing in the wake of revisions (1993) made in Germany's Basic Law concerning the right to asylum, Habermas was alarmed by the xenophobic reactions he saw among his compatriots and Europeans in general. Reserving some of his harshest criticism for Germany's "exceptional" immigration law, he underscored the injustice of a policy that granted 'ethnic Germans' (*Statusdeutschen*) a constitutional right to citizenship while denying this same right to Germany's unmarried male guest workers, who were recruited from southern and south-eastern Europe to work as cheap labor from 1955-1973 and forced to wait fifteen years before applying for citizenship. He also argued against Germany's restrictive immigration policy, which (with the exception of ethnic Germans) virtually cut off immigration from all but the wealthiest and most highly skilled.

At issue in Germany's immigration debate were two distinct visions of national identity: *communitarian* and *cosmopolitan*. The communitarian vision privileges a particular (ethical) conception of the good over universal moral rights. Communitarians such as Michael Walzer argue that honoring rights to assist desperate strangers by granting them asylum or refugee status within one's own country is qualified not only by available economic and legal capacities but by an ethical demand to maintain the cultural integrity of the nation.²² The cosmopolitan vision defended most forcefully by Joseph Carens and other Rawlsians (but, oddly, not by Rawls in the *Law of Peoples*) reverses this priority.²³ They defend a *prima facie* right to immigrate that must accommodate an *open* immigration policy unless a government can demonstrate that honoring such a right would result in undermining its liberal democratic political culture.

Habermas's discourse ethical approach incorporates both communitarian and cosmopolitan visions of national identity, though in a manner that privileges the latter. Conceding that nineteenth-century European nation-building forged a sense of democratic solidarity out of quasi-racial conceptions of ethnic-national identity, he observes that ethnic nationalism

as such contradicts the universal moral foundations of the constitutional state. Janus-faced, the modern nation state, he urges, must now come to terms with its liberal, multicultural status as a nation of immigrants and insist upon a "post-national" identity rooted in "constitutional patriotism." For Habermas, insisting that political identity principally revolve around a loyalty to human rights means that "the ethical substance of a political integration that unites all the citizens of the nation must remain 'neutral' with respect to the differences between the ethical-cultural communities within the nation, each of which is integrated around its own conception of the good."²⁴ However, even he admits that the "uncoupling of these two levels of integration" runs up against a hard fact: political integration involves more than loyalty to abstract constitutional principles; it involves loyalty to a particular culture-bound interpretation of these principles.

Habermas claims (out of deference to the principle of multicultural recognition) that immigrants should not be expected to assimilate to "the way of life, the practices, and the customs of the local culture across their full range" if this means having to give up "the cultural form of life of their origins," unless that form of life is politically unreasonable (in Rawls's terms) or intolerant of other reasonable cultural forms of life (IO: 229). At the same time, immigrants can be expected to "enter into the political culture of their new homeland" which "safeguards the society from the danger of segmentation" and from a "separatist disintegration into unrelated sub-cultures." From this vantage point, expecting immigrants and their children to learn the language and history of their new homeland straddles the line separating common political culture and particularistic social culture (BFN: 513).

Allowing immigrants to retain the reasonable cultural identity of their native country is not without risks. As Habermas notes, immigration cannot but alter "the composition of the population in ethical-cultural respects as well."²⁵ Immigration may be unproblematic for multicultural countries like the United States that have no religious identity but it can pose severe challenges to more ambiguously liberal democracies like Israel that want to maintain a dominant religious identity in the face of Palestinian and non-Jewish immigrants.

That said, discourse ethics helps us to frame the question that communitarian and cosmopolitan approaches to immigration must address: Where does a common political culture end and a dominant societal culture

“across the full range of life activities” begin? The citizens of a nation who must answer this question together must first determine who *they* are and who they want to become. From a communitarian perspective, democracies must be politically bounded if they are to be legally self-determining at all. Because they cannot allow everyone who is affected by a norm to have an equal influence in debating it, the claims of potential immigrants in discussing immigration policies must weigh less than the claims of current citizens. Yet discourse ethics requires that anyone who is potentially affected by a norm be included as an “equal” participant.

Given their inherently open nature, liberal democracies must acknowledge a basic right to emigrate, but they must also acknowledge a basic right to move and associate freely across borders. Anyone can therefore claim a *prima facie* human right to become a member of the polity. True to this cosmopolitan perspective, Habermas asserts that an inclusive moral use of discourse ethics requires that the problem of immigration be assessed impartially,

not just from the one-sided perspective of an inhabitant of an affluent region but also from the perspective of immigrants who are seeking their well-being there; [viz.] a free and dignified existence and not just political asylum (BFN: 511).

The above requirement means different things depending on whether the immigrants in question are current residents or prospective residents. Discourse ethics would seem to justify giving residents an equal right to participate in political life (including, perhaps, an equal right to vote in elections), since no one should be subject to laws that they have not co-authored democratically (BFN: 509). Whether this amounts to weakening or effacing the distinction between citizens and permanent residents is a question Habermas does not pursue. Less clear is what discourse ethics would require of citizens in their consideration of prospective residents. The quote cited above leaves little doubt that prospective residents should have their perspectives represented “virtually” in all policy debates affecting them. Political participation – centered in the global formation of public opinion – should not – nor cannot – be restricted to bounded voting rights. But what does this requirement actually entail?

We’ve already noted one entailment: discourse ethics prohibits discriminating against the interests of select classes of prospective immigrants based on morally arbitrary criteria such as race and ethnicity. Does dis-

course ethics also provide a principle for determining the relative weights assigned to various perspectives that are to be represented? Distinctions must be drawn within the class of "all those affected" if the inclusion principle is to be workable. Indeed, immigration policies would appear to affect some persons' interests more deeply and directly than other persons' interests. A policy that spells the difference between life and death for some persons obviously affects their interests in a deep way, and that might explain why Habermas thinks that economic refugees – and not just political asylum seekers - should have a relatively unconditional legal right to temporary residence in a safe country.

The obligation to assist the economically destitute through aiding them abroad or allowing them to immigrate is a general moral obligation that follows from the "growing interdependencies of a global society that has become so enmeshed through the capitalist world market." In this global society each of us assumes along with everyone else an "overall political responsibility for safeguarding the planet." Beyond this, Habermas notes that there are *special obligations* of compensatory justice owed by members of affluent nations to peoples of the developing world based upon a past history of colonization and "the uprooting of regional cultures by the incursion of capitalist modernization" (IO: 231). For this reason, it is wrong to establish immigration quotas that are below those that are reasonable given extant capacities, resources, and necessities. Most importantly, quotas must be established "in accordance with criteria that are acceptable from the perspective of all parties involved" (IO: 232). In particular, Habermas expressly questions quotas that are based entirely on the host country's economic needs and not on the needs (for example) of immigrants to be reunified with their families.

In sum, although Habermas might be understood as recommending a concrete prioritization of duties and rights based on an ideal type of the immigrant as a desperate refugee, the logic of discourse ethics really takes him in a different direction.²⁶ The post-national configuration of trans-border communities possessing heterogeneous identities reflects neither liberal nor communitarian (identity or welfare-centered) commitments. The libertarian demand for open borders is as abstract as the communitarian demand for closed borders. At the very least, the fact of unavoidably porous borders reflecting unavoidable global interdependencies and global imbalances means that the question of immigration criteria and priorities must themselves be generated by a global public

sphere and be framed in terms of a highly specific cases. Failure to take this step, as we shall now see, can lead to a certain rigidity in the formulation of criteria.

Part III: Benhabib on Immigration

Taking up Habermas's discourse ethical ruminations on immigration, Seyla Benhabib agrees that distinctions must be drawn within the class of "all those affected" if the inclusion principle is to be workable. Like Habermas, Benhabib thinks that asylum seekers and refugees have a relatively unconditional legal right to temporary residence in a safe country. Unlike Habermas, she believes that religious or ethnic preferences might be justified as in the case of German or Israeli immigration policy, so long as they do not discriminate against prospective immigrants who are non-ethnic German and non-Jew. Others, such as Carol Gould,^{xxvii} and Michael Walzer, have argued that it is the undocumented worker who has already contributed to the community (and already has a stake in it) that should be favored.

How then, should we rank immigration priorities? Do we give preference in the debate to those who are deeply and directly affected by a policy or to those who have already contributed to the group making the decision? The importance of contribution in determining American immigration policy – reflected in the unusually high priority that family reunification is assigned in U.S immigration policy – is almost equal to that of impact in current debates about whether and to whom amnesty should be granted. The importance of contribution in assessing immigration priorities suggests that Benhabib's own privileging of asylees and refugees is not entirely unproblematic. Here a case might be made against deporting persons like Elvira Arellano – and one, moreover, that directly rests on discourse ethical grounds: Depriving undocumented workers of her voice could arguably undermine their equal opportunity to be effectively represented in the great immigration debate that is certain to impact their and our fortunes.

Benhabib's distinction between discriminatory and non-discriminatory immigration criteria is of special interest to us because it represents an important attempt to specify Habermas's own non-discrimination principle in a way that seems to offer some clarification of Arellano's case.

Benhabib argues that no one should be barred from entering a country or from becoming a citizen on the basis of their ascriptive properties, by which she means non-elective properties concerning "race, gender, religion, ethnicity, language community, or sexuality." This follows from the discourse ethical principle, which states that

[I]f you and I enter into a moral dialogue with one another, and I am a member of a state of which you are seeking membership and you are not, then I must be able to show you with good grounds, with grounds that would be acceptable to each of us equally, why you can never join our association and become one of us. These must be grounds that you would accept if you were in my situation and I were in yours. Our reasons must be reciprocally acceptable; they must apply to each of us equally. (RO: 138)

In contrast to criteria based on ascriptive properties, Benhabib insists that criteria that

stipulate that you must show certain qualifications, skills, and resources to become a member are permissible because they do not deny your communication freedom. Length of stay, language competence, a certain proof of civic literacy, demonstration of material resources or marketable skills are all conditions which certainly can be abused in practice, but which, from the standpoint of normative theory, do not violate the self-understanding of liberal democracies as associations which respect the communicative freedom of human beings qua human beings. (RO: 139)

Benhabib concedes that these criteria might be abused. Indeed she recognizes that past historical injustices have played a significant role in distributing assets and talents among the different races and nationalities of the world. Therefore, it remains unclear whether the non-ascriptive criteria for restricting immigration that Benhabib cites would in fact survive the discourse ethical test that she proposes. Is proof of civic literacy a condition that both citizens and would-be immigrants would reciprocally impose on one another for determining rights of citizenship? Is language competence? If so, then not only Elvira Arellano but hundreds of thousands of American citizens would find themselves disenfranchised under Benhabib's criteria.

Part IV: Discourse Ethics: Justification and Application

Benhabib's treats immigration criteria at the most abstract level – as norms that have been justified as *prima facie valid* in light of their satisfac-

tion of universalizable moral interests. To consider how such criteria might inform a private bill granting Arellano an exemption from deportation we must proceed to a more concrete level of application. Although legislators seldom resort to this exceptional measure – preferring to let judges carve out individually tailored applications of norms – there may be instances when they have little recourse but to do so. Today we see a growing lack of confidence in judges’ ability to apply and interpret the law impartially and compassionately way (see note 15). In that case, legislators must engage in two types of discourse revolving around justification and application, just as judges and even executive officers do when considering hard cases. But how do we get from justification to application?

To see why this mixing of discourses is sometimes legitimate we must recall that for Habermas the process of justifying a norm cannot be entirely completed without factoring in to its reasons considerations regarding the norm’s applications – not merely its past applications and predictable future applications but also its surprising and – from the standpoint of the present – exceptional applications. According to discourse ethics, we must factor into the process of moral justification the consequences a norm has in all situations for upholding other valid norms. But then it seems that we must test it with respect to all possible situations in which it might apply and foresee all the consequences it might have for our obeying other valid norms. This in turn requires determining what other norms are valid. In the end, it seems as if we cannot test a single valid norm without testing all norms – including ones not yet discovered – and we cannot do this without qualifying (and ranking) each and every one of them with respect to every conceivable situation in which they might apply.

Given the impossibility of carrying out this strong conception of moral justification, Habermas prefers a weaker formulation developed by Klaus Gunther which treats *justification* and *application* as two separate stages in testing the validity of norms. Each stage captures a different feature of impartiality: First, the satisfaction of generalizable interests and second, the integration of all descriptions of a situation insofar as these enable the selection of just those features that are most morally relevant in deciding which among our many norms fits the situation most appropriately. In the first stage, we seek to determine whether we can *justify* the *prima facie* rightness (or universalizability) of a norm as it applies to typical, broadly defined situations. Justification here operates with a time

and knowledge index; that is, we consider only current knowledge about our needs and the impact the norm in question has had on them in typical situations or will likely have on them in foreseeable ones (JA: 39)). In the second stage, we apply our system of norms to *one* particular situation in order to select the one *prima facie* norm that is most *appropriate*. We begin by taking into account all of the normatively relevant features of the situation as these appear from the perspectives of all concerned ; then we show why some of these features are especially weighty. This justifies choosing one among our *prima facie* norms as most appropriate for dealing with these features.

This leads to two important points. First, as in the case of justification discourses, application discourses require that the description of the morally relevant features of a situation as they impinge upon the interests of all those affected be the outcome of real discussion. Because persons' interests are interwoven with their life histories, it is possible that collectively interpreting a problematic situation from the points of view of all affected will also bring about a change in the way individuals understand themselves. So face-to-face narration followed by collective reinterpretation is indispensable for situating and clarifying interests.

Second, not only is the application of norms dialogical but so is their interpretation. Application discourses extend and feed back into justification discourses. Application discourses help specify norms that otherwise lack prescriptive content because they are too broadly formulated. We cannot determine the consequences and side effects of vague and abstract norms as these bear on the interests of all affected. Indeed we cannot even determine what these interests are. However, once we have arrived at a more specified norm capable of being applied to a given situation, we must then reverse our tracks and ask whether it can be justified in more general terms.

Only by repeating the cycle of justification – application – justification can we reach sufficient precision in our moral norms to be able to say, conclusively, that they are right or wrong appropriate or inappropriate – an unavoidable assumption in any cognitive ethics that is designed to test the impartiality of norms, since unqualified unconditional duties generally cannot be conclusively justified. Obviously, this back and forth circle of understanding undermines any semblance of foundationalism; for even if some general and abstract principles remain constant in all liberal democracies – think, for instance, of the principle of equal respect and

concern for all that Habermas, following Ronald Dworkin, insists is the most basic norm underlying the rule of law – their concrete application in hard cases will sometimes “found” exceptional judgments and exemplary interpretations (see note 6).

Part V: Discourse Ethics and the Exception: A Different Approach to the Immigration Problematic

However, it is far from clear whether this extension of the concept of impartiality to encompass the inclusion of all relevant points of view on a given context of application suffices to address the concern among ethicists that morality sometimes requires making individual exceptions to general rules. So the question we must now ask is whether a discourse ethics can accommodate a compassionate concern for the exceptional status of persons like Arellano. For Habermas, ensuring procedural justice does not suffice to effect the empathetic exchange of roles needed to determine whether a norm would be acceptable by everyone as advancing generalizable interests. Solidarity with the other also requires formulating terms of discourse in a way that will allow each person to express her needs to everyone else without distortion and to be persuaded by others in terms she can accept. At the level of application, solidarity with the other also requires examining how a norm must be qualified to do justice to a particular individual in a particular situation.

For the sake of argument, let’s assume that a norm prohibiting people from benefiting from lawbreaking is *prima facie* valid. Let’s further assume that a norm permitting the deportation of persons who have knowingly entered a country illegally follows from it. Is there any way we might justify Arellano’s plea to be exempted from the impartial application of this norm?

We might begin to do so by pointing out the unique circumstances surrounding Arellano’s case. Arellano left Mexico as an economic refugee during the Mexican monetary crisis of the 1990’s. Not only is she the mother of a juvenile American citizen with special needs but Arellano is a political spokesperson for immigrant families whose parents or children face deportation. She occupied a low-paying unskilled job that most Americans have no desire to do and she paid her taxes. Her family in Mexico – to which she would be repatriated – lives in one of the poorest

regions in Mexico. And she and her son are now famous, having elicited support from the Mexican Assembly and many churches.

These factors would have to be assessed along with countless others. In bringing to bear all the relevant points of view, we would likely end up with many *prima facie* valid norms that could apply to her situation, including (in addition to the legal norms mentioned above) the following list of norms:

- (a) Those who have established a stake in a community through hard work and civic involvement should not be deported unless they have committed a serious crime;
- (b) Parents should not be faced with the choice of leaving their children behind or moving with them to a place where their prospects will significantly diminish;
- (c) Penalties imposed on those who have violated the law should not impose severe hardship on innocent third parties who depend on them.
- (d) Persons should be forgiven or only mildly penalized for committing illegal acts that caused no demonstrable harm to others and were done out of desperation in pursuit of a wholly natural and worthy desire to secure their well-being.

To these norms must be added others that indirectly impinge on Arellano's situation. Habermas (IO: 226-34) mentions some of them in his critique of Germany's policies governing asylum seekers, economic refugees, guest workers, and foreigners of German-descent. They can be paraphrased as follows:

- (e) It is wrong to deny citizens of a democracy the right to choose laws regulating membership in their own community, subject to the following provisos:
- (f) It is wrong to impose immigration policies unless they are or could be accepted by all persons affected by them in moral discourse;
- (g) It is wrong to limit a basic right to choose where one lives unless a compelling reason can be given for doing so;
- (h) It is wrong to treat membership in a political community exclusively as a function of birthright because doing so fails to acknowledge that political boundaries and circumstances of birth are morally arbitrary and that most members of a political community are themselves immigrants or descended from immigrants;

- (i) It is wrong to deny persons the right to join a political community for the sake of protecting a thick ethno-racial or cultural identity; however it is not wrong to do so for the sake of protecting political values essential to any well-ordered constitutional democracy;
- (j) It is wrong to establish immigration quotas that are below those that are reasonable given extant capacities, resources, and necessities; it is wrong to require visas for those seeking asylum and refuge,²⁸ as this effectively denies those who are most desperate the right to ask for asylum;
- (k) It is wrong not to compensate victims and their descendants for past acts of injustice committed against them by one's own community, especially when these acts produced cumulative disadvantages that might be remedied by a more liberal and forgiving immigration policy (or by a policy of repairing the harm through developmental assistance);²⁹
- (l) Given the growing interdependence of communities within a global capitalist economic system in which some international, multilateral, and bilateral policies regulating trade, foreign investment, foreign loans, and currency fluctuations harm vulnerable people living in developing regions to the benefit of affluent peoples living in developed regions, it is wrong for developed communities not to implement remedial policies – including more liberal and forgiving immigration laws – that rectify or compensate for this injustice;
- (m) It is wrong to deny entry to anyone fleeing political or economic oppression.³⁰

Now, it is certainly conceivable that an application discourse might issue in a near-consensus³¹ in which the legal norms mentioned at the outset of this case were qualified by norms (a) through (m). The general interest in not allowing lawbreakers to benefit from their lawbreaking and the general interest in allowing the deportation of persons who have entered the country illegally would then also be qualified. A qualified norm of the sort: “Undocumented workers may be deported unless doing so contravenes a valid stakeholder claim, deprives a vulnerable minority of an irreplaceable spokesperson, imposes severe hardship on innocent third parties, or forces parents to move their children to very insecure circumstances or leave them behind” might capture the spirit, if not the letter, of current American immigration law. For the general interests served by that law include the following: helping persons who have already contributed to the community reunite with their families; providing refuge for persons

fleeing economic and political oppression; finding persons who will do jobs that most of us don't want to do; creating a diverse and tolerant multicultural society; compensating those whom our foreign policies have harmed; and providing enough work visas and officials to process them in order to ensure that the effective demand for workers and their families can be satisfied through legal channels rather than through the black market.

Following this scenario, it is indeed possible to reconcile the demands of discursive impartiality with our care for Arellano and her son as unique persons meriting exceptional treatment. Of course, it would have to be shown that a qualified norm permitting such an exception would be the outcome of an impartial discourse of application.³² Indeed the qualified norm I just presented probably cannot withstand justification in its present form given its use of such vague expressions as "severe hardship," "insecure circumstances," and "valid stakeholder claim." So taken in this abstract form, it is still far from clear that it would be the best norm for resolving Arellano's case.

To show that it would be, we would have to qualify it further by building into it all the morally relevant features of Arellano's situation that led us to initially adopt the norm in the first place. But then the norm would have purchased its appropriateness and justifiability at the expense of its normative generality, or status as a general precedent that might apply to other cases. For this reason I suspect that it is not an impartial norm that ultimately justifies making Arellano a particular exception, but just the unique circumstances of her situation, in which case there will be an inexhaustible potential for discursive perspective sharing that cannot determinately and definitely decide her case. If, in the final analysis, we find Arellano's story a convincing hook on which to hang our impartial reasoning, it will be because it elicits from us a caring, emotion-laden response that simply cannot be distilled into a finite set of reasons (see note 6).

Part VI: Conclusion

In conclusion, the state of exception must be an immanent possibility within any legitimate law. We cannot completely determine whether a norm given abstractly satisfies generalizable interests; we can only know this at the moment of application in which the norm itself is qualified and

reinterpreted to fit very specific circumstances. This act of interpretation, however, is not properly described as an act that is without reason, purely extra-judicial and extra-moral. The impartial sharing of perspectives that legislators, judges, and executive officers should publicly facilitate in applying the law is poorly described as an act of arbitrary discretion, or violence. Of course, this is not to deny that the spirit of the law is often honored in the breach, in the force of law that descends upon the individual with all the violence of an inflexible machine or arbitrary fiat.

That leads to one final consideration that time prevents me from addressing. I believe that Habermas is right when he observes that discourse ethics requires legal institutional embodiment in order to be realized.³³ In modern pluralistic societies that permit actors extensive freedom to pursue their strategic aims, the scope for achieving agreement on universal norms narrows down to just those basic constitutional and democratic procedural rights that protect individuals from one another and the state. However, these rights also institutionalize a process by means of which citizens can democratically determine the concrete scope of their own freedom; without them, freedom of speech within civil society and the public sphere would be insecure and the stringent demand for fair and inclusive representation and debate within legislative, judicial, and executive bodies would go unmet. Constitutional democracy thus sets in motion a reflexive process by means of which the formal ideals of argumentative discourse and conflict resolution are concretely applied, first at the level of statutory legislation and then at the level of judicial and executive application. This circular process ensures that exceptional and unexpected events can have a revolutionary impact on the meaning of law.

But this raises a troubling question: In light of the irreducible gap between the living facticity of the individual event and the ideal norm, how can a legal procedure that absorbs the limitations imposed by concrete historical reality be morally justifiable? The *paradox of reflexive self-realization* – justifying from within moral discourse the less-than-moral legal procedures that realize moral discourse – finds its corollary in the *paradox of obedience*: On what basis can realistic procedures obligate dissenting minorities or individuals to respect outcomes they dislike if they regard these procedures as essentially unjust?

It seems that the departure of real discourses from the ideals postulated by discourse ethics can be justified only with respect to ethical consider-

ations that lie outside the province of morality, narrowly construed. These considerations refer to feelings of compassion and care that we have for our fellow human beings, whose exceptional needs and interests are revealed to us only in the stories they tell about themselves. Perhaps in this sense we can affirm what Agamben has less charitably characterized as the essentially fictive nature of law's attempt to articulate a connection between the norm and the exception.

- 1 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985); and *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).
- 2 See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1973); and Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 2005 – hereafter SE), especially pp. 1-4.
- 3 J. Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundation of Authority," *Cardozo Law Review* 11, nos. 5-6 (1900).
- 4 W. Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," in *Selected Writings, vol. 1, 1913-1926*, ed. M. Bullock and M. Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 5 J. Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996 – hereafter BFN), p. 154.
- 6 The concept of the exemplary as used here demands an extensive discussion that I cannot here undertake. Suffice it to say, the concept is related to Kant's notion of reflective judgment, which unlike determinate judgment, does not involve the subsumption of a particular case under a pre-given universal norm but instead invents (or discovers) the universal that best captures the particular as it is immediately experienced. Kant had in mind judgments of the beautiful and sublime but also political judgments. The 'universal ground' for such judgments rests on a *sensus communis* which, following Arendt and Habermas, I understand as referring to a concrete, shared aesthetic-ethical preunderstanding and not a purely rational "view from nowhere" that acquires its impartiality and universality through formal abstraction from substantive historical and cultural differences. So construed, private bills, which otherwise appear as exceptions to the law, can be justified as exemplary and politically reasonable interpretations (or inventive applications) of the law. But the reasons underlying our judgment that they are so justified will convince only in their totality and in light of an essentially indefinite, normatively charged description/interpretation of the particular case. For that reason, justification will take the form of a compelling narrative, not a legal deduction. For further discussion of the concept of aesthetic rationality, reflective judgment, and the exemplary, see I. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. J.H. Bernard (London: Macmillan, 1951); Ronald Beiner (ed), *Hannah Arendt: Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Volume One: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984); D. Ingram, "The Postmodern Kantianism of Arendt and Lyotard," *Review of Metaphysics* 41 (October 1988): 51-77; D. Ingram, *Reason, History, and Politics: The Communitarian Grounds of Legitimation in the Modern Age* (Albany, SUNY Press, 1995); D. Ingram, "The Subject of Justice in Postmodern Discourse: Aesthetic Judgment and Political Rationality," in M. P. D'Entreves & S. Benhabib, *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1996); and A. Ferrara, *The Force of the Example* (forthcoming).
- 7 According to the Pew Hispanic Center, the number of "unauthorized migrants" living in the U.S. is 11 million; 57 percent of those come from Mexico and 24 percent from Latin America. 80 to 85 percent of the Mexican migrants entering the U.S. are undocumented. The number of undocumented persons entering the U.S. annually – about 700,000 – now exceeds the number entering legally. These numbers reflect a large increase from the 1980's when illegal immigration averaged about 130,000 annually. Demographic trends suggest that the problem of large migrations from Mexico may become less urgent given Mexico's current low population growth rate of 1.3 percent – about the same as Canada's – and

the decline in Mexico's fertility rate (2.5 children per woman compared to 6.9 in 1955). According to the Mexican Migration Project at Princeton University, prior to 1986 40-50 percent of undocumented Mexicans returned to Mexico within a year; following passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act in 1986, stricter enforcement has lowered that figure to 25 percent. Statistical data gathered by La Raza shows that an undocumented Mexican stays in the U.S. for nine years compared to an average of between 2-3 years in the 1980's.

- 8 The chance of an undocumented person being caught crossing the Mexico-U.S. border in the 1980's was 33 percent; today that figure has declined to 5 percent. Meanwhile, the cost of apprehending a single illegal border crosser rose from \$100 in 1986 to \$1,700 in 2002. The post -9/11 militarization of the Mexico-U.S. border has been costly with the construction of additional wire fencing in San Diego costing 3 million dollars per mile; as of 2004 the Border Patrol's budget had reached 3.8 billion dollars to staff less than 11,000 agents. Proposals to supplement this force with 36,000 National Guard troops would cost another 2.5 billion dollars. Finally, according to a recent study by the Center for American Progress, the cost of deporting undocumented aliens, as Georgia Representative Charlie Norwood and former House speaker Newt Gingrich have urged, would cost between 206-232 billion dollars to implement over five years and would raise profound legal and moral questions, since 3.2 million citizens by birth, many of the children, live in families where either the principal breadwinner or a spouse is undocumented (as cited in a Pew study).
- 9 A typical response is that expressed by Representative Tom Tancredo of Colorado, who cites Samuel Huntington's concerns about the threat to American identity – or to Western Civilization, as Tancredo puts it – posed by the “the continuing immigration from Latin America, especially from Mexico, and the fertility rates of these immigrants compared to black and white Americans.” Huntington is concerned that these new immigrants will not assimilate to the dominant English-speaking, Anglo-Saxon culture, thereby creating two separate cultures with the Southwest becoming ‘the United States’ Quebec’ (see S. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenge to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004). Contradicting Tancredo and Huntington's concern – which has also fueled the English-Only and Minuteman Movements – is the statistic, cited by Richard Alba and Victor Nee in their book, *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005) that 60 percent of all third-generation Mexican-American speak only English at home.
- 10 As Derrida eloquently puts it, “We are always led back to the same *aporia*: how to decide between, on the one hand, the positive and salutary role played by the “state” form (the sovereignty of the nation state) and, thus, by democratic citizenship in providing protection against certain kinds of international violence (the market, the concentration of world capital, as well as ‘terrorist’ violence and the proliferation of weapons) and, on the other hand, the negative or limiting effects of a state that closes its borders to non-citizens, monopolizes violence, controls its borders, excludes or represses non-citizens, and so forth? Once again, the state is both self-protecting and self-destroying, at once remedy and poison. The *pharmakon* is another name, an old name, for this auto-immunitary logic.” Cited on p. 124 of Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues With Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago, university of Chicago Press, 2003), pp. 124.
- 11 The plan proposed by President Bush does not provide for amnesty for undocumented persons who are currently here but does outline a guest worker program – similar in design to the Bracero program in place from 1942 to 1964 – that would authorize the importation of an indeterminate number of workers possessing 3-year visas at the request of employers, so long as employers could show that they had made every reasonable effort to find an American to fill the job before extending job offers to foreign workers. This plan could well prove to be too cumbersome for employers. The Security and Order Act sponsored by Senators John McCain and Edward Kennedy would initially create 400,000 guest worker visas and would allow workers to petition for permanent residency after four years; undocumented workers already in the U.S. could take advantage of this program after paying a fine. The Agricultural Job Opportunity, Benefits and Security Bill (AgJOBS) sponsored by Kennedy and Senator Larry Craig would legalize up to a half-million temporary agricultural workers and allow them to apply for permanent residence status. Finally, the Development Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act (DREAM) sponsored by Senators Orrin Hatch and Richard Durbin would grant 6 years of conditional residency to undocumented high school graduates to apply for permanent residency after completing two years of college or two years of military service. (It is estimated that every year 65,000 undocumented students

graduate from high school.) Those covered by the Act – about 300,000 persons - would include only current residents who were 16 years old or younger when they immigrated and who have resided in the U.S. for at least 5 years. Until DREAM is passed, undocumented high school graduates will be caught in a double-bind: ineligible for scholarships, student loans, and resident tuition rates that might enable them to pursue a college education, they will also be legally prevented from working.

- 12 Libertarians favor unrestricted flows of labor from abroad so long as the new arrivals contribute to overall economic growth and, most importantly, do not receive benefits that might threaten current inequalities in wealth and power. Guest worker programs that maximize labor exploitation with minimal commitments in the form of benefits are ideal from this narrow point of view, but better still are laws that mainly impose harsh penalties on undocumented workers (imprisonment and deportation) while merely fining employers. The hypocrisy of the corporate lobby in favor of less restrictions lies precisely in its support of at least some restrictions that will guarantee a steady flow of desperate undocumented workers who will be terrified into working for slave wages in an underground economy hidden from the oversight of labor inspectors. *Time* magazine recently reported that investigations of employers hiring undocumented workers declined by 70 percent from 1992 to 2002, from 7,053 arrests to 2,061; arrests on job sites declined by 94 percent, from 8,027 to 451; and the number of fines levied on companies for immigration violations declined 99 percent, from 1,063 to just 13. For an argument against restrictive borders of any kind, see Teresa Hayter, *Open Borders: The Case Against Immigrant Controls* (Pluto Press, 2004). For an argument that economic global justice, rather than immigration reform, should be the proper struggle among progressives, see Jacob Stevens, "Barring the Doors," *New Left Review* 12, November-December 2001.
- 13 A recent *New York Times* report suggests that undocumented workers – 75 percent of whom use false Social Security numbers - may be keeping the Social Security system solvent. These workers contribute \$7 billion a year in Social Security taxes and another \$1.5 billion to Medicare and they receive no benefits. Totalling \$420 billion, the Social Security Fund receives a 10 percent boost from these taxes.
- 14 In the mid-1990's Derrida wrote an article in *Liberation* in which he criticized President Francois Mitterand's reference to a "threshold of toleration" in speaking of a natural limit on the flow of immigrants who do not identify with French nationality, culture, and language, and customs. According to Derrida, the language of merely tolerating foreign asylees and refugees contradicts the ethical spirit underlying the right to asylum enshrined, for example, in Article 13 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and in the Geneva Convention of 1951 Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. This ethical spirit, he believes, was first – albeit imperfectly - intoned by Immanuel Kant in setting forth his third definitive article for perpetual peace, subtitled: "The Law of World Citizenship Shall Be Limited to Conditions of Universal Hospitality." As the sole cosmopolitan right governing conduct between individual persons and foreign states, the right to hospitality (*Wirtbarkeit*) "means the right of a stranger not to be treated as an enemy when he arrives in the land of another." Kant adds that "one may refuse to receive him when this can be done without causing his destruction; but so long as he peacefully occupies his place, one may not treat him with inhospitality. Kant qualifies this otherwise unconditional right by noting that "it is only a visitation right (*Besuchsrecht*)" and not a right to be a permanent guest (*Gastrecht*). Kant continues by noting that this right of visitation (or right to association) follows from the fact that the people of the earth "cannot infinitely disperse and must finally tolerate the presence of one another" As Seyla Benhabib notes, the moral obligation to respect the external freedom of persons to move freely from place to place – to cross borders if necessary – entails a right to hospitality. However, Kant's contention that the earth's surface has been privately appropriated by original acts of occupation inclines him to limit this right with reference to the state's sovereign control over its bounded possessions, a control that is also equally necessary for the legally protected exercise of external freedom. The result – replicated in current UN and International Treaties – is that right to emigrate – even for the sake of survival – is not reflected in a reciprocal obligation on the part of states to honor a corresponding right to immigrate, be it as a visitor or as a permanent guest. Derrida diagnoses a similar tension in Kant's text. Unlike Benhabib, however, he believes that this tension – between unconditional cosmopolitan responsibility to the other (unconditional hospitality) and conditional toleration of those whom we choose to invite in – cannot be "mitigated" (to use Benhabib's terms). In my opinion, this way of putting the contrast between Derrida and Benhabib obscures their common commitment to the deconstruction (but not abolition) of the concept of "boundaries" (territorial, political, economic, cultural, etc.) in favor of a cosmopolitan approach based on unconditional human rights. See J. Derrida

and Anne Defourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford University Press, 2000); J. Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes (Routledge, 2001); Borradori, p. 128ff; and S. Benhabib, *The Rights of Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005 – hereafter RO).

- 15 In the face of gridlock, the Bush administration has pushed ahead with its own plan to increase border patrols and mandate employer checks of Social Security identification numbers of current and present employees; a decision whose implementation was suspended by court order pending an investigation of the reliability and speed of government computerized confirmations.
- 16 Immigrants and asylum seekers now constitute the fastest-growing group of prisoners detained in the U.S. Every year, 200,000 non-criminal undocumented persons are currently incarcerated in the U.S., most of them in county prisons, although an increasing number are being held in privately run institutions. In the wake of 9/11 Atty. Gen. John Ashcroft expedited the current process of reviewing immigration and asylum appeals by reducing the three-court appeals panel from three judges to one. Under this mandate the sole presiding judge was required to issue only a one-sentence opinion. As a result of this “streamlining” many persons were wrongly deported. A particularly chilling example of this process is the case of Nourain Niam, a member of a persecuted Sudanese opposition party, who was repatriated in 2003 on an order issued by Judge James Fujimoto in 2001 on the grounds that there was no record of Niam having applied for asylum and that, he did not “face a probability of torture” . . . ‘despite Sudan’s apparently poor human rights record’ and the fact that he was a member of a “disrespected group.” After being denied a “withholding of removal” (or stay of deportation), Niam fled to Chad , where the U.S embassy denied him a visa. He was beaten by Sudanese secret service agents and has since returned to the U.S., thanks to the 7th U.S. Circuit of Appeals headed by Judge Richard Posner, who has been instrumental in overturning 40% of the deportation decisions that have been appealed. More recently, the Inspector General’s Report highlights serious abuse of immigrant and asylum seeking detainees in U.S. prisons, including lack of adequate food, medical treatment, and access to lawyers. Beatings and sexual harassment were also reported. Despite this record of abuse, the Report continued to recommend that Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (an agency within the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security) police itself. See Mark Dow, *American Gulag: Inside U.S. Immigration Prisons* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). For a critique of similar abuses in the EU, see Jeremy Harding, *The Uninvited.: Refugees at a Rich Man’s Gate* (Profile Publishers, 2000).
- 17 Rights of dual or multiple nationality and flexible forms of citizenship can be found in Southeast Asia, India, Central America, and Europe – places where (unlike the U.S.) citizenship is generally difficult to attain. Indeed, even in countries that do not recognize dual citizenship (such as the U.S.), membership rights are disaggregated to the extent that residency, administrative subjection, democratic participation, and cultural membership are no longer unified. More precisely, political rights, social and civil rights, and citizenship status are no longer strictly bundled together. Thus, one can be an illegal immigrant in the US and still have a right (if one is a minor) to a public education.

As Benhabib notes, any citizen of a member-state of the EU living in another nation within the EU has extensive political, civil, and social rights within that country. But refugees and asylees from Third-party countries are generally denied many basic rights to employment (a waiting period must be met for this is granted) and to freedom of movement. Furthermore, membership, residency, and entrance criteria fall under the Third Pillar of “intergovernmental” EU regulations, which grant member states considerable discretion. [Members from the recently admitted EU nations from Eastern Europe have their mobility rights restricted for seven years (2004) and social rights are not uniform across the EU. (Benhabib, 149)]. However, the European Council reached an accord in Tampere, Finland in 1999 and the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Thessaloniki of 2003 are steps toward creating a common policy of asylum (ibid, 152-3).

Throughout the EU one finds that political rights are decoupled from national origin; in Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands third-country nationals can participate in local elections. Most EU countries permit naturalization (with the exception of Greece and Luxembourg) and most practice a liberalized form of birthright naturalization (*ius soli*), including Germany, which also recognizes ethnic naturalization (*ius sanguinis*).

In sum, Benhabib notes that there are three models for incorporating immigrants in the EU: The German, where naturalization via *ius soli* is made contingent on the satisfaction of an 8-year residency status by at least one parent; the French, where *ius soli* is not so dependent and children become citi-

zens by their parents' request (age 13), by their own (age 16), or automatically (age 18); and the Dutch where third-country nationals take part in city elections and form political parties.

- 18 Michael Dummett has argued that the near-universal practice of sanctuary countries demanding that asylum seekers first obtain a visa in their country of origination before migrating amounts to violating the right to asylum enshrined in Article 14 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, since many of the most desperate do not have the means or knowledge necessary to do this. As a related matter, the use of quotas in artificially restricting the number of visas granted to asylum seekers - *The Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act of 1996* lowered the number to a bare 50,000 - seems vulnerable to this charge. The U.S. allows asylum seekers who manage to enter the country illegally to plead their case before a low-level INS official who then decides whether the seeker should be immediately deported. Those who are denied their request have just seven days in which to appeal their case before an INS judge whose decision is not subject to any further review. Refugees who pass the test may still be deported to another safe country with which the U.S. has a bilateral agreement. See M. Dummett, *On Immigration and Refugees* (London: Routledge, 2001); and David Ingram, *Group Rights: Reconciling Equality and Difference* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 2000), ch.6.
- 19 Does bestowing amnesty on undocumented workers give them a totally undeserved advantage over those who wait years to be admitted legally? Yes, in the trivial sense that governments cannot and should not allow lawbreaking rule to reward the lawbreaker as a general rule. No, in the sense that those who enter illegally may have neither the wherewithal to apply legally for a visa nor the time to wait for its uncertain delivery, given their desperate circumstances. In general the question of fairness cannot be answered in the abstract, especially when the consequences of applying the principle of not rewarding lawbreakers in this instance would cruelly inflict untold amounts of suffering on children and other family members. The film *Children of Men*, I think, graphically depicts the state of barbarism a liberal democracy can sink into when it undertakes to incarcerate and evict a substantial portion of its population (which in the case of the United States, would heighten beyond imagination the racist and xenophobic reactions that many whites and blacks have toward Hispanics).
- 20 The story about Lance Corporal Jose Gutierrez – an undocumented immigrant who died fighting in Iraq – unleashed a bit of soul-searching among American legislators who hastily patched together some provisions that would grant undocumented immigrant soldiers posthumous citizenship. Currently, there are 37,000 immigrants serving in the armed forces. Unlike other immigrants, who must wait up to five years before receiving benefits under provisions stipulated in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act, active and formerly active soldiers and their families may receive benefits immediately (sec. 402[a]). Other exemptions apply to aliens who have been paroled into the country (sec. 431[b]), and persons who lack sufficient means because they have been separated from physically abusive spouses (sec. 501).
- 21 In his comments about the paradoxes surrounding Karl-Otto Apel's norm of basic co-responsibility, which morally requires "every political actor to act so as to promote [the] progressive institutionalization of 'the nonviolent practice of moral rationality'," Habermas makes clear that this kind of "morally self-regarding action" involves "the legitimate weighing of moral demands against strategic considerations [that] cannot appeal to any super-moral standards of justifying exceptions from morality." Habermas's point, I take it, is not that exceptions from the demands of moral impartiality are never justified but that such exceptions must themselves be justified from within the standpoint of moral impartiality. As he points out, this apparent paradox is resolved – and the gap between the unconditional demands of ideal morality and other legitimate moral interests is closed – from within legal systems that already harbor some morality in their constitutional core. Legal systems have to "realize" the "fair value of equal rights" by concretely applying general constitutional rights in statutory legislation providing for a historically sensitive consideration of each and every individual's legitimate interests – including an interest in relocating in order to better their lives. Hence, the historically unique and exceptional application of the law – tailored to the passage of private bills granting individual exemptions – can be seen as a realization and concretization of impartial morality. See Jurgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification*, trans. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2003), pp. 47-48
- 22 M. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
- 23 J. Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," in *The Rights of Minority Cultures*, ed. W. Kymlicka (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and J. Rawls, *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). For a critique of Rawls on immigration, see my essay, "Between Political

- Liberalism and Post-National Cosmopolitanism: Towards and Alternative Theory of Human Rights, *Political Theory* 31, no. 3 (June 2003): 359-91, and David Ingram, *Rights, Democracy, and Fulfillment in the Era of Identity Politics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), ch. 7.
- 24 J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996 hereafter IO), 227.
- 25 See Habermas's criticism of Charles Taylor's defense of Quebec's controversial language laws, which required immigrants and Francophone Quebecois to send their children to French-speaking schools. Habermas argued that these laws appeared to stifle a basic freedom of communication and correlative right to interpret one's own identity (and presumably, the identity of one's children). This critique was originally printed in the second edition of Charles Taylor et. al., in *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton University, 1994) and was reprinted in J. Habermas, *The Inclusion of the Other* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), Chapter 8.
- 26 The fact that "post-modern" immigration flows have diverse causes and also reflect the willingness of skilled members of the middle class to up-root their identities so as to take advantage of global economic opportunities is a fact that has received considerable attention in recent years. Persistent back-and-forth cross-border migrations coupled with diverse forms of dual (multiple) citizenship, legal residency, and so on simultaneously call forth more flexible modes of negotiating immigration and immigrant rights and more secure (less flexible) human rights guarantees for immigrants generally, both of which increasingly extend beyond the capacity of the isolated nation state. Hence the need to ground immigration and immigrant rights in a cosmopolitan legal order – extending beyond bilateral and multilateral international treaties between nations – that has its democratic, legitimating basis in a global public sphere. For a good discussion of why current patterns of global migration necessitate the realization of such a sphere – justification for which can be found in discourse ethics – see Max Pensky, *The Ends of Solidarity*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008).
- 27 See Walzer (loc. cit.) and Carol Gould, *Globalizing Democracy and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Part III.
- 28 After 1976 the number of permanent residence visas (green cards) allocated to Mexican nationals was capped by a quota (today it stands at just 20,000 – probably 100,000 short of meeting the demand). The number of work visas granted to applicants from all over the world who do not qualify for the 140,000 visas issued to people who possess needed skills (including 65,000 H-1B high tech and skilled worker visas) is only 5000. Leaving aside the 55,000 visas that are issued to low-immigration countries, the U.S. currently reserves the greatest bulk of its permanent resident visas – 480,000 – for purposes of family reunification.
- 29 Important Mexicans, including former foreign minister Jorge Casteneda, former ambassador to France and prize-winning author Carlos Fuentes, and internationally renowned writer Elena Poniatowski justify the *reconquista* of U.S. territory taken or purchased from Mexico during the 19th century. Many argue that U.S. agribusiness contributed to the destruction of Mexican peasant farming in the 60's and 70's which led to the displacement of millions of campesinos. More recently, NAFTA (which still permits U.S. agricultural subsidies) has been blamed by critics for giving American businesses an unfair competitive advantage vis-a-vis their Mexican counterparts. Others have cited the American government's collusion in the economic crisis that led to the radical devaluation of the peso in the 1990's as another reason why the U.S. 'owes' something to the Mexican people.
- 30 Many other principles could be added to this list. On principle might prohibit developed countries from fashioning immigration policies that result in destructive forms of population depletion or 'brain drain' in developing countries. Despite the importances of remittances in sustaining the Mexican economy – which total about a third of its GDP – there is mounting evidence that emigration to the U.S. has severely harmed rural Mexican communities by depriving them of man-power and exposing the families who reside in them of stabilizing parental influences. The example of Malawi – where most of its desperately needed physicians are currently practicing in Europe – illustrates the other problem. The loosening of border restrictions might encourage more undocumented workers to return to their countries. As for the problem of brain drain, a circular system that couples technical education for immigrants from poor countries with assistance-supported repatriation has proven effective in Europe. I thank Gary Peters for alerting me to the health care crisis in Malawi and for pointing out the remarkable innovation for dealing with it.
- 31 I'm not unaware of the vast public opinion divide separating Mexicans and Americans on the topic of immigration. A 2002 Zogby Poll showed that 58 percent of Mexicans agreed that "the territory of the U.S.

Southwest really belongs to Mexico" (only 28 percent disagreed); and 57 percent agreed that "Mexicans should have a right to enter the U.S. without U.S. permission (only 35 percent disagreed). A 2005 Pew Hispanic Center Poll showed that although 86 percent of Hispanics supported some kind of amnesty for undocumented workers currently residing in the U.S., only 56 percent supported guest worker programs. Hispanics split on the issue of whether undocumented workers should be allowed driver's licenses, with foreign-born respondents favoring and native-born respondents opposing the proposal. Meanwhile, in the Zogby Poll noted above 58 percent of U.S. citizens wanted fewer immigrants; 65 percent were against amnesty for undocumented workers; and 68 percent supported the use of military guards along the border.

- 32 We haven't come up with an example that meets the stringent requirement of a care ethic, which allows that we must sometimes act partially, *against* the demands of impartial justice. Still, we have accomplished something noteworthy: the possibility of reaching genuine exceptions to impartial norms through impartial discursive processes.
- 33 This, I take it, is what Benhabib means by *democratic iteration*. Unlike Rawls's social contract theory, in which the cosmopolitan and communitarian grounds of consensus reflect incompatible appeals to formal abstraction and substantive convergence, discourse ethics frames issues of universal morality from within a real dialog whose participants overflow any particular political community. Participants in discourse ethics are required to "decenter" and 'enlarge" their substantive cultural and social perspectives in a cosmopolitan direction without, however, abstracting from them. In this way, the universal moral norms that regulate their conflict are the outcome of a substantive, critical dialog whose fluid interpretation is relative to an on-going, context-sensitive, democratic iteration.

The Constitution of Recognition: Towards a Critical Constitutional Theory*

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*Recht im juristischen Sinne is im allgemeinen alles,
was Menschen, die in irgend welcher Gemeinschaft miteinander leben,
als Norm und Regel dieses Zusammenlebens wechselseitig anerkennen.*

Ernst Rudolf Bierling

(Juristische Prinzipienlehre, Bd. 1, p. 19)

▪ Constitutional discourse has never been so widespread and more contested than it is today. While the last decade of the twentieth century witnessed a worldwide wave of constitutionalization in many countries, very recently constitutional regimes have been put under stress by the process of globalization. Debates about cosmopolitanism, legal and constitutional pluralism, and new networked patterns of governance which change the nature of political and legal authority in an increasingly globalizing world present a particular challenge to normative political theory. The force of the traditional model of constitutional democracy depends on how it succeeds in making its own conceptual and normative foundations compatible with claims to universal human rights law, transnational justice, cosmopolitan citizenship, and post-sovereign international politics.

The proposed paper will discuss the normative assumptions that underlie constitutional democracy. In particular, I seek to illuminate the crucial problem of the link between the concept of recognition and constitutional democracy. As Avishai Margalit has pointed out recognition, in the context of normative social and political theory, is not one problem but a family of problems. Indeed, it is a research program, in which Axel Honneth is an important practitioner¹. Yet, as Honneth himself readily acknowledges, his work is a work-in-progress, and since he has not yet attempted to create a critical theory of constitutional democracy based on recognition, I would like to outline in what follows some proposals that aim to fill in this gap in the recognitional paradigm of critical social theory.

* I would like to thank Jonathan Trejo-Mathys for his comments and assistance during the process of preparing this article for publication, and for his skilful and patient handling of many subtle questions of translation.

However, developing a constitutional theory based on recognition is not simply a philosophical exercise disconnected from contemporary political problems. The urgent need for this project can be seen in the fact that constitutional theorists seem to have become indifferent to social problems, even as contemporary theories of recognition and multiculturalism have been pushing constitutional theorists to face the following question: how are we to understand the changing forms of political struggle evinced in western constitutional democracies, in particular the rise of demands for social and political recognition of distinctive group identities?

In what follows I want to show that the roots of this indifference of constitutional theorists to social problems can be found in certain philosophical convictions which are widely diffused throughout the juridical community. In the first section, I will summarize the form these philosophical convictions take in what I will call a traditional theory of constitution. In the second section, I shall present Axel Honneth's theory of recognition, especially with regard to what he calls the legal sphere of recognition. Finally, in section three and four, I will outline the basic features of a critical theory of constitution.

1. Traditional Constitutional Theory

One of the main characteristics of traditional constitutional theory is its dualism. It differentiates two disconnected perspectives from which the constitution can or should be analyzed: the observer and the participant perspective (*Beobachter- oder aus der Teilnehmer-perspektive*). According to the defenders of this theory one perspective is totally independent from the other, i.e. constitutional phenomenon should be analyzed either from the observer or from the participant perspective. But when this strong dualism is criticized, the answer is always the same: traditional constitutional theorists strongly believe that this is just an analytic division. According to Alexy, these perspectives should be described as follows:

The participant perspective includes those that take part in an argumentation within a legal system concerning that which is commanded, prohibited and allowed by this legal system, and what it empowers one to do. In the centre of the participant perspective stands the judge. When other participants, like legal scholars, lawyers or cit-

izens interested in the law system, present arguments for or against certain contents of the legal system, in the final analysis they refer to how a judge would have decided, if he wanted to decide correctly. The observer perspective includes those that don't ask what the correct decision in a given legal system is, but rather how it is in fact decided in that juridical system. (Author's Translation).²

In our context, this means that constitutional theorists should decide if they seek to analyze the constitution's social validity or if they want to analyze the constitution from the normative point of view. It is exactly this dualistic way of comprehending juridical phenomena which characterizes what I have called traditional constitutional theory. The consequences of this way of conceiving a constitution are exemplified in the theories of Dworkin, Alexy and Luhmann³.

The theories of Dworkin and Alexy can be seen as examples of a juridical analysis conducted from the participant point of view, while Luhmann's theory is an example of a juridical analysis made from the observer point of view. According to Luhmann's perspective, modern society can be characterized as a society within which all social spheres have been functionalized. In functionally differentiated societies like this, law specializes itself in generating consensual expectations according to its internal code. Thus, the juridical system is comprehended by Luhmann as a closed circle of communication. It bounds itself *autopoietically* and develops relations to the environment only through *observations*⁴.

The questions of the legitimacy and validity of law are also comprehended in Luhmann's theory as accessible only from the internal level of the juridical system: legality produces its own legitimacy, i.e. law differentiates itself as an autonomic system which produces its own law and its own legitimacy. Thus there is no relation of the juridical system to the political system, or to a democratic process of legislation that takes place in the public sphere⁵. The consequences of this theory can be seen through an analysis of the theories of Alexy and Dworkin.

Dworkin supports the notion that law's applicability and validity are concentrated in the person of the judge. The function of legitimating law (in its dimension of validity), which in a democracy should be the public sphere's function, is also produced internally by law. Although he develops in *Law's Empire* the interesting concept of the virtue of political

integrity, which could have made it possible for him to transform his monologic approach to law into an intersubjective and more directly social approach to law, a transformation that would have liberated his *judge Hercules* from transcendental solitude, political integrity is only used by Dworkin to support the notion that judges should be a kind of a moral value representative for an idealized society. According to Dworkin, the judge can only legitimate his decision insofar as he bases his decisions on monologically reconstructed principles that should reflect the choice made by an imaginary community strongly differentiated from the real social community⁶:

My account of political integrity takes the personification much more seriously, as if a political community really were some special kind of entity distinct from the actual people who are its citizens⁷.

Alexy's theory supports the idea that a juridical system which *acts* in the way described by Luhmann, and indirectly also by Dworkin, is a system which reconstructs practical reason through an internal procedure. Valid moral dimensions which should actually be defined intersubjectively in the public sphere are defined instead by specialists who authorize judges to define what the valid contents in a certain society are⁸. According to Alexy, judges would be able to decide impartially and neutrally, because they have, for some unknown reason, a kind of privileged access to the correct interpretation of the constitution. But what happens in fact is that traditional constitutional theory *hypostatizes* the concept of a constitution in two steps: (1) traditional constitutional theory doesn't differentiate monological interpretations of the constitution from the constitution itself; and (2) it concentrates the monological interpretation of the constitution in the judge's *individual Ego (Self)*. With psychology's vocabulary this behavior could be defined as egocentric:

During infancy, egocentrism expresses itself in the idea that all objects are identical with one's perception of them (...). The egocentrism of pre-adolescence is characterized by the conviction that one's own ideas correspond to a higher form of perception of reality. (...) Lastly, at the beginning of adolescence, egocentrism shows itself in the notion that the ideas of others are centered entirely on their own selves⁹.

Traditional constitutional theories support, therefore, what can be called *Egocentric Constitutionalism*. With the analysis of the above-mentioned theories I seek to show with Hegel that traditional constitutional theory

fells into the trap of "not seeing the forest before the trees" (*den Wald vor den Bäumen nicht zu sehen*)¹⁰. Thus, the philosophical content of traditional theories of constitutionalism can be summarized in four main claims:

- (1) The constitution and law should be considered simply as a complex of norms or decisions developed by judges which is and must be disconnected from politics, from the learning process of a society and from social relations of recognition;
- (2) Judges are conceived as protecting the principles of justice by means of monological interpretive procedures;
- (3) The analysis of law should be developed through a dualism of observer and participant perspectives. In other words, a constitution should be understood as a system of norms and principles (participant perspective) or as a social system which connects politics and law (observer perspective). For traditional theory it is very important that these two perspectives should always be comprehended as totally separated spheres which should not be confused. They must be analytically separated from one another. Thus, constitutional theory becomes quite satisfied to live in a kind of schizophrenic world where a constitution is a system of norms and principles totally separated from social reality;
- (4) Finally, traditional constitutional theories defend the idea that these two spheres correspond to two different forms of validity: on the one hand, normative, and on the other, social validity. Constitutional theory should therefore be interested primarily in the normative sphere of the constitution. The only way in which traditional theories have learned to protect the constitution's normativity, however, is to make the constitution too distant from social reality;

Hegel has already shown that problems of theoretical presentation are not external to questions of method¹¹. Thus, one of the theses which I defend in this article is that the theories that accept the above-mentioned claims, i.e. traditional theories, are blind because with their categories they cannot see that the normative dimension of the constitution can only be suitably comprehended from the dynamic viewpoint of a learning process of mutual recognition.

In 1937, Horkheimer was confronted with similar problems when he wrote his famous article *Traditional and Critical Theory*. In order to describe these problems and situate the concept of a critical theory, he

contrasted it with a *traditional theory* which did not see that its philosophical presuppositions are embedded in social-historical learning processes. Critical theory, by contrast, should always be aware of its economic and social-historical pre-formation¹². I think that this distinction can help us to clarify the problems with which contemporary constitutional theories are confronted. Therefore, I intend to connect what I call a critical constitutional theory with the theoretical approach of the Frankfurt School. The most important distinguishing features of this tradition are the following:

- (1) Critical theorists are aware of their conditions as political, social and historical beings, i.e. they are conscious of the connection between critical theory and social learning processes which determines the point of view of their theories;
- (2) Their framework employs the idea of a *social pathology of reason* (*soziale Pathologie der Vernunft*) which enables them to criticize contemporary social problems;
- (3) The idea of social pathology is connected with the idea of an emancipatory interest that forms the basis of the connection between theory and praxis;

The thesis of my paper is that Axel Honneth's work on a theory of recognition offers a fruitful framework to those who want to develop a critical theory of constitution, precisely because he attempts with his theory of recognition to satisfy the three theoretical aims mentioned above. According to Honneth, the primary function of the rule of law is to protect recognition-relationships in order to permit members of a society to achieve self-respect for themselves as equals entitled to make their own decisions on how to conceive and realize their own life plans. Thus, this form of relation-to-self (self-respect) is realized through legal relations which recognize one as equally deserving rights to liberty, access to the political process, social rights, and the burdens of legal responsibility. Rights must be more than simply a translator of some kind of idealized democratic process (Habermas); rights must be able to protect social relationships from the threat of misrecognition. Thus, my thesis in this article is that recognition is necessary to perpetuating a healthy democratic process. In the context of my article this means that institutional arrangements of judicial review must protect recognition-relationships. Moreover, my reinterpretation of constitutional democracy seeks to dispel worries about judicial paternalism and populism.

2. Honneth's theory: the legal sphere of recognition

Honneth's main intention in *Kritik der Macht (Critique of Power)* is to show that a theory of recognition offers a better theoretical framework than Habermas's dualistic way of conceiving society. In *Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas develops two theoretical perspectives from which society can be analyzed: a *communication-theoretical interpretation of social reality (eine kommunikations-theoretische Deutung der sozialen Realität)* and a *system-theoretical version of social reality (eine systemtheoretisch gerichtete Version der Gesellschaftstheorie)*. Honneth's strategy in *Critique of Power* is to develop an internal critique: he uses the first version (*communicative-theoretical interpretation of social reality*) of Habermas' theory to criticize the second one (*system-theoretical interpretation of social reality*). Thus, Honneth tries to show how Habermas's theory of society lost its critical potential with the introduction of the concept of a system into his theory¹³. The idea of a system should be seen as misleading, because it leads us to analyze society as if some spheres of action (e.g., systems of economy and administration) have become independent of intersubjective and social relationships of the life-world. According to Honneth, when capitalistic societies are conceived in this dualistic way (life-world versus system), social theory succumbs to two complementary fictions¹⁴:

- (1) the existence of *organizational spheres of action without norms (normfreien Handlungsorganisationen)*;
- (2) *communication spheres without power (machtfreien Kommunikationssphären)*.

In short, Honneth argues that Habermas' dualist theory of society should be criticized from the perspective of the life-world, from the perspective of a horizon of intersubjectivity within which the institutions are embedded. More precisely, Honneth argues in the postscript to *Critique of Power* that the first version of Habermas' theory of society could be better developed by integrating it with Hegel's conception of *Struggle for Recognition*¹⁵. Thus, the main purpose of his book *Critique of Power* is to show that a critical theory of society must comprehend institutions and the life-world from the point of view of just one category: recognition. In *Kampf um Anerkennung (The Struggle for Recognition)* Honneth attempts to carry out this task. Honneth develops what can be called a *negative* conception of recognition. *Negative* here means that Honneth

does not try to define what recognition is, but rather concentrates on experiences of being misrecognized. He connects these negative experiences with a historical *learning process* (*Lernprozess*) that aims at the expansion of recognition relationships. By outlining three different spheres of recognition (love, right and solidarity) and by explicating three structures of relation-to-self (self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem) he identifies three forms of misrecognition (mistreatment, deprivation of rights, and degradation) as sources of social conflicts.

According to Honneth, in traditional societies legal recognition was based on status. The gradual transition towards what we call today modern societies caused at the same time a slow shift in the constellation of recognition-relationships. Law began to disconnect itself from privilege. In fact, in modern societies law must be general enough to take all citizens into account¹⁶. According to Honneth, this change should be seen as the differentiation of two spheres of recognition: in modern societies legal respect and social esteem separate themselves from each other and begin to fulfill different purposes: legal recognition aims to protect persons without creating an evaluative system within which the value of each person would be determined¹⁷.

Struggles for recognition should be understood as a kind of social force which initiates and perpetuates the historical learning process of recognition. Honneth uses Marshall's analysis of the historical genesis of basic rights in order to show that the meaning of legal recognition changes over the time, though not arbitrarily so. Rather, this learning process has a goal: the expansion of recognition in social relationships. Social recognition nowadays means much more than it did at the beginning of the development of modern law. Today we not only take abstract rights of freedom into account, but also rights that protect a minimum standard of living¹⁸.

In *The Struggle for Recognition* it is not yet clear if Honneth is also taking legal institutions into account. For instance, it is not clear whether the judiciary should have the function of protecting recognition-relationships (either interpersonal relationships or self-relationships). In his exchange with Nancy Fraser, *Redistribution or Recognition* and in his recent work *Verdinglichung*, we can nevertheless find some hints about what could be the role of the judiciary and the rule of law in his theory. In *Verdinglichung* and in *Redistribution or Recognition* we find at least four new arguments about Honneth's conception of law:

- (1) Rights must be more than a mere translation of some kind of idealized democratic process (Habermas);
- (2) Rights must be able to protect social relationships from the threat of misrecognition;
- (3) The legal sphere of recognition enables a positive relation-to-self, namely self-respect, which is realized through legal relations. From the perspective of the legal sphere of recognition, to recognize someone means to recognize him or her as equally deserving of rights to liberty, access to political process, social rights, and the burdens of legal responsibility;
- (4) The judiciary should protect legal recognition-relationships in order to enable members of a society to achieve self-respect for themselves as the equals of other members, and to entitle them to make their own decisions on how to conceive and realize their own life plans¹⁹;

3. Critical Constitutional Theory

My presentation of Honneth's arguments should be seen as a first step toward theorizing how Honneth's theory of recognition could be fruitfully used in order to develop a critical approach to constitutional democracy. In section 2 I emphasized the components of Honneth's theory of recognition which form the basis of a constitutional theory based on recognition. I believe that these insights could help constitutional theorists to solve a number of problems currently plaguing constitutional theory. In short, my proposal is that constitutional theory should seek to analyze constitutions from the perspective of a theory of society based on recognition. In what follows I want to illustrate this with a brief comparison between Ronald Dworkin's and Danielle Allen's analyses of the Supreme Court case *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

In *Law's Empire*, Ronald Dworkin analyzes *Brown vs. Board of Education* in the context of answering the question: "What is Law?" Dworkin's analysis is a typical traditional theory of constitutional democracy insofar as it tries to understand the *Brown* case without taking social processes into account. From his perspective law is only a matter of the judge's decisions:

[In *Plessy v. Ferguson*] "(...) the defendant argued, ultimately before the Supreme Court, that these practices of segregation automatically violated the equal protection

clause. The Court rejected their claim”, [but in the *Brown* case] “(...) the Court decided for the black plaintiffs”²⁰.

According to Dworkin, therefore, on the one hand we have a decision – *Plessy v. Ferguson* – in which the judges rejected the black plaintiffs, and on the other hand some time later we have another decision, in which the court decided for the black plaintiffs. From this traditional point of view there is, of course, no explanation why this change took place: “Its decision was unexpectedly unanimous”²¹.

An outline of a critical analysis of the *Brown* case can be found in Danielle Allen’s book *Talking to Strangers*²². In the first chapter of her book, she analyses the political effects of the publication in the newspapers of the famous photo of Elizabeth Eckford being cursed by Hazel Bryan in front of Central High School (Little Rock, Arkansas, September 4, 1957). The first chapter of the book outlines a new concept of a constitution in order to be able to comprehend the case:

*The time had come for new conceptions of democratic life. With their epiphanic power, the photos achieved psychic pressure significant enough to make the demand for such new conceptions inescapable. The year therefore inaugurated a new constitution. An overstatement? I don’t think so. A constitution is more than paper; it is a plan for constituting political rights and organizing citizenship, for determining who has access to the powers of collective decision making that are used to negotiate a community’s economic and social relations. (...) One can’t claim to understand the Constitution of the United States without looking beyond the document, which bears that title, to the state laws and the customary habits of citizenship – unspoken norms of interaction that constrain who can speak where in public and how – that helped route the basic circuitry of political power. If one takes ≤constitution” in this broad sense, the United States has had several foundings.*²³

I believe that Allen’s concept of a constitution could help us to understand what I call here a constitutional theory based on recognition. The difference between the *Plessy v. Ferguson* and *Brown* cases cannot be explained in abstraction from the struggles of recognition in the United States. Behind the cases there were at least two competing forces: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the citizens of the United States who were against it. In fact, the incident of Little Rock was called by the press: “the Battle of Little Rock”²⁴. We could interpret this case as an example of a change in recognition-relationships in the U.S.A.: the increasingly effective action of the NAACP

was able to change public opinion in favor of African-Americans and to reinitiate a learning process within American society. This learning process then led to a wider and more inclusive social understanding of recognition and mis-recognition. This new understanding not only affected public opinion: it also began to change the way in which judges interpreted the Constitution. Allen's analysis of *Brown vs. Board of Education* makes explicit the learning process of recognition, which I explicated earlier in the essay. The four stages of recognition are as follows:

- (1) Struggle for recognition;
- (2) Gradual change of recognition relationships;
- (3) Gradual crystallization of this new form of recognition in institutions;
- (4) New stage of the learning process;

On the other hand, it seems that institutions like the Supreme Court can allow struggles for recognition to be more than just struggles: institutions can enable struggles for recognition to become learning processes, if they fulfill three main functions:

- (1) To protect social relations of recognition;
- (2) To enable the protection and maintenance of higher levels of recognition a society may achieved;
- (3) To be flexible enough to take part in the learning process of recognition and to perceive that the society has achieved a higher level of recognition;

In sum, the comparison between Dworkin and Allen sought to demonstrate that a constitutional theory based on recognition must comprehend the Constitution as a complex with at least three dimensions: (1) an interpretative dimension, (2) an institutional dimension and (3) a social dimension. As we saw, in Dworkin's analysis of *Plessy v. Ferguson* the court decided against the black plaintiffs while in *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the court decided in favor of the black plaintiffs. This example should help make plausible the claim that legal institutions and constitutional interpretation depends upon the current stage of the learning process of a society:

Courts decisions do matter; though often in unpredictable ways. But they cannot fundamentally transform a nation. The justices are too much products of their time and place to launch social revolutions. And, even if they had the inclination to do so, their capacity to coerce change is too heavily constrained. The justices were not tempted

to invalidate school segregation until a time when half the nation supported such ruling. They declined to aggressively enforce the Brown decision until a civil rights movement had made northern whites as keen to eliminate Jim Crow as southern whites were to preserve it. And while Brown did play a role in shaping both the civil rights movement and the violent response it received from southern whites, deep background forces ensured that the United States would experience a racial reform movement regardless of what the Supreme Court did or did not do²⁵.

Thus, it seems to be plausible to claim that at the end of some phase of transition we have in the first place a change in social relationships. Gradually this new way of considering legal recognition crystallizes itself in legal institutions through social actors like judges, who push society towards a higher level of recognition awareness.

However, Critical Constitutional Theory doesn't want to be a purely descriptive theory of law, i.e. it wants and needs to be much more, for instance, than merely a sociology of law. It needs to root its analysis of a constitution in an immanent normativity, so that the social dimension of the constitution doesn't become reduced to a purely empirical dimension. I believe that the most suitable available methodology for performing this immanent function in a critical approach to constitutionalism is the one which Honneth develops in *Redistribution or Recognition* and that Honneth calls *moral dialectic of the general and the particular*.

Within each sphere, it is always possible to set a moral dialectic of the general and the particular in motion: claims are made for a particular perspective (need, life-situation, contribution) that has not yet found appropriate consideration by appeal to a general recognition principle (love, law, achievement). In order to be up to the task of critique, the theory of justice outlined here can wield the recognition principles' surplus validity against the facticity of their social interpretation. As against the dominant interpretative praxis, it is shown that there are particular, hitherto neglected facts whose moral consideration would require an expansion of the spheres of recognition²⁶.

The normativity of this dialectical model lies in a concept of progress. Progress in the conditions of social recognition takes place along the two dimensions of individualization and social inclusion: either new parts of the personality are opened up to mutual recognition or more persons are included into existing recognition relations, so that the circle of subjects who recognize another grows:

To be sure, such critique can only attain a perspective that enables it to distinguish grounded from ungrounded claims by translating the previously outlined general criterion of progress into the semantic of each sphere of recognition. What can count as a rational or legitimate demand emerges from the possibility of understanding the consequences of implementing it as a gain in individuality or inclusion²⁷.

Thus, those social actors who apprehend in their activities the interpretative dimension and/or the institutional dimension of constitution should, therefore, comprehend themselves as participants in a social learning process of recognition, so that they are able to unfold the normativity of the constitution. The other possibility is to comprehend the constitution from the point of view of a traditional constitutional theory. But traditional theories just capture the constitution in a monological way, in other words, in a voluntaristic or, which is the same, in an arbitrary way. That arbitrariness, however, cannot be tolerated in a democratically-conceived rule of law is a lesson that we have already learned. In fact, that was one of the first lessons we learned in the learning process of recognition.

4. Towards a Critical Constitutional Theory: Some Programmatic Theses

The recapitulation of Honneth's arguments and the analyses of the case *Brown vs. Board of Education* should have given us some hints about how Honneth's theory of recognition can be fruitfully used in order to develop a new approach to constitutional democracy. Now I want to outline the research program of such a constitutional theory based on recognition. Unfortunately, the limits of this paper only allow me to present it in the form of 8 programmatic theses:

- (1) A Constitution (historical or written), and Constitutionalism, must be seen as (a) the last step in a long and on-going historical learning process whose aim is the increasing realization of recognition-relationships and at the same time as (b) the political and moral background of a new step of this process;
- (2) Democracy must be seen as involving the constitutional right of all citizens to take part on the historical learning process of a society;
- (3) A recognition-theoretical approach to constitutional democracy must develop a new method of studying constitutional problems which looks beyond the document itself (in the case of a written constitution)

- and beyond the decisions of the Supreme Court;
- (4) Developing or applying this method should also mean that constitutional theorists will research new institutional arrangements or policies that make possible a gradual integration of new stages of the historical learning process of the society into its culture. For instance, this means that the politics of education should be seen as part of constitutional politics;
 - (5) All the citizens or social groups, who are victims of new experiences of being misrecognized, must be able to take an active part in the interpretation of the constitution in order to make clear what the political and normative content (new insights, experiences or states of affairs) of the new stage of the learning process of a society is;
 - (6) Constitutional theorists must always take into account the possibility of pathological learning processes within constitutional democracies. There are several methods constitutional theorists could use to show this. The one that Honneth finds in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno und Horkheimer) and calls a *disclosing critique of society*²⁸ can be seen as one of the possible candidates. According to Honneth: “The argument of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (...) provokes a changed perception of parts of our apparently familiar lifeworld so that we will become attentive to their pathological character”²⁹. I believe a disclosing critique of society could be combined with a constitutional theory based on a social theory of recognition in order to make visible social pathologies – for instance, the ones which arise from the ‘traditional illusion’ of separating law from politics, institutions from recognition-relationships, and the life-world from the social system.
 - (7) Judicial review cannot be merely seen as the last level of solving practical cases. Misrecognized persons must have the chance to demand a change in the ‘common or institutionalized (and maybe misrecognizing) interpretation’ of the constitution without being directly involved in a practical case³⁰;
 - (8) The institutional arrangements of the Supreme Court must be changed. The idea of judicial review is good, but the institutional arrangements which have been developed until now, are insufficient for dispelling worries about judicial paternalism and for protecting recognition-relationships.

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- 1 MARGALIT Avishai, <<Recognizing The Brother And The Other>>, in *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, Vol. 75, Issue 1, Jul 2001, p. 127-139.
- 2 "Die *Teilnehmerperspektive* nimmt ein, wer in einem Rechtssystem an einer Argumentation darüber teilnimmt, was in diesem Rechtssystem geboten, verboten und erlaubt ist und zu was es ermächtigt. *Im Zentrum der Teilnehmerperspektive steht der Richter*. Wenn andere Teilnehmer, etwa Rechtswissenschaftler, Rechtsanwälte oder am Rechtssystem interessierte Bürger, Argumente für oder gegen bestimmte Inhalte des Rechtssystems vorbringen, dann beziehen sie sich letztlich darauf, *wie ein Richter zu entscheiden hätte, wenn er richtig entscheiden wollte*. Die *Beobachterperspektive* nimmt ein, wer nicht fragt, was in einem bestimmten Rechtssystem die richtige Entscheidung ist, sondern wie in einem bestimmten Rechtssystem *tatsächlich* entschieden wird" (ALEXY Robert, *Begriff und Geltung des Rechts*, München, Alber, 1994, p. 47).
- 3 The theses about Dworkin, Alexy and Luhmann I will present in what follows are a brief résumé of a detailed account I developed in: SAAVEDRA Giovanni A., *Jurisdição e Democracia. Um análise a partir das teorias de Jürgen Habermas, Robert Alexy, Ronald Dworkin e Niklas Luhmann*, (Porto Alegre, Livraria do Advogado Editora, 2006), p. 25-118.
- 4 These theses are developed by Luhmann in lots his books. See, for instance: LUHMANN Niklas, *Soziale Systeme. Grundriß einer allgemeinen Theorie* (Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1987).
- 5 The main work where Luhmann deals with this argument is: LUHMANN Niklas, *Das Recht der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1997).
- 6 The main works where Dworkin deals with this argument are: *Talking rights seriously*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1978; *A Matter of Principle*, op. cit., 1985; *Law's Empire*, op. cit., 1986; *Freedom's Law. The moral reading of the American Constitution*, op. cit., 1996; *Justice in Robes*, op. cit., 2006.
- 7 DWORKIN Ronald, *Law's Empire*, op. cit., p. 168.
- 8 The main works where Alexy deals with this argument are: *Theorie der juristischen Argumentation. Die Theorie des rationalen Diskurses als Theorie der juristischen Begründung*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1991; *Theorie der Grundrechte*, op. cit., 1996; *Begriff und Geltung des Rechts*, München, Alber, 1994. I use Alexy's theory as an ideal type of the *Metatheory of Juridical Argumentation* created and developed by Aulis Aarnio, Robert Alexy, Aleksander Peczenik, Jan Broekman, Enrico Pattaro,

- Robert Summers, Ota Weinberger, Jerzy Wróblewski. See, for instance: ALEXY, Robert/KRAWIETZ Werner, *Metatheorie juristischer Argumentation*, Berlin, Duncker & Humboldt, Heft 108, <<Schriften zur Rechtstheorie>>, 1983; ZACCARIA, Giuseppe (Dir.), *Übersetzung im Recht / Translation in Law*, Münster, Lit, <<Ars Interpretandi, Yearbook of Legal Hermeneutics 5>>, 2000.
- 9 "Im Kleinkindalter äußert sich der Egozentrismus in der Vorstellung, daß Objekte mit ihrer Wahrnehmung identisch seien (...). Der Egozentrismus der Voradoleszenz ist durch die Unterstellung charakterisiert, daß die eigenen Denkvorstellungen einer höheren Form von Wahrnehmungsrealität entsprechen. (...) In der Frühadoleszenz schließlich tritt der Egozentrismus auf als die Vorstellung, die Gedanken anderer konzentrierten sich ganz auf das eigene Selbst" (DÖBERT Rainer, HABERMAS Jürgen/NUMMER-WINKLER Gertrud (Dir.), *Entwicklung des Ichs* (Köln, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1980, p. 177).
 - 10 HEGEL G.W.F., *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1970, p. 14.
 - 11 THEUNISSEN Michael, *Sein und Schein, Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik*, Frankfurt a. M., Suhrkamp, 1980.
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 - 13 HONNETH Axel, *Kritik der Macht*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1989, p. 278 ff.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 328 ff.
 - 15 See the *Nachwort* of HONNETH Axel, *Kritik der Macht*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 1989, p. 386 and the *Vorwort* of HONNETH Axel, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 2003, p. 7.
 - 16 HONNETH Axel, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 2003, p. 178 ff.
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 183 ff.
 - 18 HONNETH Axel, *Kampf um Anerkennung*, Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp, 2003, p. 190.
 - 19 *Ibid.*, p. 194 ff.
 - 20 DWORKIN Ronald, *Law's Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986, p. 29.
 - 21 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
 - 22 ALLEN Danielle S., *Talking to Strangers. Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004.
 - 23 *Ibid.*, p. 6. Sanford Levinson tries to show the problem of an overly rigid concept of constitution in a suggestively titled essay: LEVISON Sanford, <<A Multiple Choice Test: How Many Times Has the U.S. Constitution Been Amended? (A) 14; (B) 26; (C) 420+100; (D) All of the Above>>, in *Pragmatism in Law and Society*, Oxford, Westview Press, p. 295-310.
 - 24 ALLEN Danielle S., *Talking to Strangers. Anxieties of Citizenship since Brown v. Board of Education*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 24 ff.
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 - 26 FRASER Nancy/HONNETH, Axel, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, New York, Verso, 2003, p. 187 ff.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 186.
 - 28 HONNETH, Axel, *The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The Dialectic of Enlightenment in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism*, In: *Constellations*, 2000, vol. 7, Issue 1, p. 116-127.
 - 29 *Ibid.*, p. 124.
 - 30 An example of this possibility could be the 'declaratory action of constitutional review' (Ação Declaratória de Constitucionalidade) which can be found in Brazil's Constitution.

Liberal society, emancipation and antisemitism, why current debates on antisemitism need more Dialectic of Enlightenment

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▪ Adorno and Horkheimer's text 'Elements of Antisemitism. Limits of Enlightenment' (in 'Dialectic of Enlightenment') links antisemitism to contradictions intrinsic to liberal society in a way still unparalleled in the literature and can be put to work for important and powerful interventions into current debates. The liberal critique of antisemitism, from its nineteenth-century through to its twenty-first-century variants, has never been able satisfyingly to explain what makes antisemitism so attractive and dangerous. The perspective opened in 'Elements of Antisemitism' is singularly able to point to some of the reasons why (explicit or implicit) reverberations of the antisemitic debate on the 'Jewish question' are able to capture the imaginations of individuals across all ideological backgrounds still today, and perhaps increasingly so,² in spite of a growing temporal distance and in more and more parts of the world.

The decisive difference between the theory of antisemitism proposed in *Elements* and any alternative theory currently on the market is the bluntness with which it frames its argument within the judgment that the current form of society, i.e. liberal, bourgeois society as based on the capitalist mode of production, is 'the false social order' or 'the false state of things'. Not a false social order, or one that has more or less irremediable flaws, but *the* false social order, which almost amounts to saying that what can be referred to as 'the social order' in the present world is what is false about that world; except of course that hope for its remedy comes from that falsely ordered world itself.³

The radicality of Horkheimer's and Adorno's text is in many passages breathtaking, and their polite attempts to hide this radicality from the public sphere of post-War restoration by way of small revisions were as naïve as ineffective. The first paragraph, whose paradoxical character cannot fail to confuse and provoke on first reading, rings the themes of these seven fragments: when fascists think of the Jews as the anti-race that must be destroyed, they say something that is not just false, while when

liberals think that Jews (with the possible exception of *Ostjuden*, who are different) are but equal citizens with a slightly differing culture or religion, they say something that is quite false. Furthermore, when Horkheimer and Adorno state that 'both doctrines are true and false at the same time' they clearly indicate that the concept of truth will be central to their argument. And this is indeed what makes their contribution unique: the entanglement of liberal civilization and its central category of *Geist* (spirit/mind/intellect) in utter barbarism is argued simultaneously on a number of categorical levels, from the surface levels (historical details such as that German liberals, including those of Jewish background, detested Jewish immigrants from 'the East' as uncivilized) to the deepest, strictly philosophical ones. An approach that puts arguments that are properly at home in various disciplines of the social and human sciences to work in a larger argument framed in terms of social philosophy and theory was the signature of critical theory as a whole, but Dialectic of Enlightenment is an extreme example of this programme.⁴

In this short paper I will look at in detail the seventh section of *Elements*, then briefly outline the overall argument of *Elements* and then, in the remainder of the chapter, point to some of the ways I believe the text could transform the current debate on antisemitism if it were, at last, after some sixty years, given a hearing.⁵

Elements consists of seven sections. Considering that all sections have clearly demarcated themes and develop different aspects of the argument, and that section seven, which was added to the edition of 1947 only, mostly restates aspects of the other six sections, the composition in the form of increasingly longer sections points to an accumulative logic that builds a layered, antithetical but also increasingly detailed argument culminating in the sixth thesis. Throughout the text each paragraph contains one virtually self-contained train of thought – characteristically, on several occasions a paragraph is linked to the previous one by an adversative conjunction such as 'but' – which renders the whole text, in spite of the confusing complexity of its dialectical movements, actually a very orderly and rationalistic composition. (I have chosen for the following discussion to number the paragraphs and refer to the numbered paragraphs rather than to page numbers.)⁶

The seventh section recapitulates in condensed form the whole argument of *Elements*. Perhaps contrary to what one might have expected (keeping in mind the discussion on the revisions of the text), no signifi-

cant change in the general tone and tendency of the argument is noticeable; section seven sounds more Marxist than any other section, apart from the third. Some aspects are pronounced rather more strongly than in previous sections: the responsibility of German liberalism for fascism; the implication of progressive-democratic leftism in the general tendency of a 'rage against difference' and thus, at least indirectly, in antisemitism; the anachronism of the liberal-bourgeois order in the face of the ability of humanity's productive forces to rebuild human society on the basis of abundance rather than artificial scarcity.

The first paragraph of section seven⁷ consists of a particularly dense chain of dialectical inversions and negations that combine the political theme of the paradoxical relationship between antisemitism, liberalism and populism with the more philosophical theme of the destruction of independent thought and the modern democratic process. It begins rather provocatively with '*But!*': 'But there are no antisemites anymore. In their most recent form they were liberals who wanted to assert their antiliberal opinion'.⁸ While at the end of the nineteenth century old-fashioned conservative dislike of the Jews was 'merely reactionary', populist antisemitic demagogues, although numerically still marginal, were 'in keeping with the times'. 'The voicing of antisemitism was felt to be bourgeois and rebellious at one and the same time.'⁹ *Völkisch* ranting was still a distorted reflection of civil liberty. The falseness of German liberalism revealed itself in the beer-cellar politics of the antisemites which thrived on and finally destroyed the former.⁷ Liberalism and antisemitic populism, regularly voiced by former democrats, socialists or indeed liberals, were antithetical as well as interdependent. For these, the most modern antisemites (whose politically articulated antisemitism needs to be distinguished from the general, default 'antisemitism as a cultural code'¹⁰ that reflected the residual conservatism of liberal society), antisemitism was still one amongst several competing motives one had to choose from subjectively. 'Today', i.e. under the totalitarian/late capitalist conditions of the twentieth century, 'there are no antisemites anymore': or rather, antisemites are such by reflex rather than by choice. While *völkisch* nationalist thought has always been stereotyped thought that implied the whole program of chauvinist rhetoric, stereotyped thought is now the only form of thought remaining. A choice is only made between totalities. Even antisemitism itself 'has virtually ceased being an independent impulse and is now a plank in the platform', one of the items on the fascist ticket, the catalogue of the slogans of large-scale industry: like on the ballot paper, one

ticks one 'ticket' or another. The psychology of the individual antisemite is now irrelevant and replaced by the democratic mechanism: the 'yes' to one or other of the mammoth parties for which one has to vote, 'or else one's own convictions will appear to oneself as futile as the number of votes which the splinter groups receive'. Different from the genuine antisemites who 'in their most recent form' were 'liberals who wanted to assert their antiliberal opinion' twentieth century totalitarian society produces the antisemite who is not one. The disingenuous antisemites of today support the annihilation of the Jews for no better reason than that it is part of the ticket that includes the destruction of the trade unions and the crusade against Bolshevism. The formation of political viewpoints has been mechanized to such an extent that subjective experience, such as actual contact with Jews, has become irrelevant. Clichés replace experience; their eager consumption replaces the synthetic imagination, the faculty that is active in the process of experience. This mechanism makes antisemitism on a mass basis possible: few people would explicitly vote for antisemites were antisemitism not part of a ticket which they accept for whichever reason.¹¹ More specifically, it is what makes antisemitism without Jews possible. Members of all social strata must make sure they are as well orientated about which of the eligible instances of power to join as about the latest technological developments.

If stultification is a precondition of antisemitism, a theory of antisemitism must contain a theory of stupidity. It is in this sense that the second paragraph¹² continues the theme of the destruction of thought: it is suggested that in the present world-historical situation, more than in any previous one, thought would finally be able to actually contribute to the realization of an emancipated society, and that this is why the existing social order needs to destroy thought.

'In a world that consists of mass serial production', which is where the concept of the stereotype comes from, 'thinking in stereotypes replaces the work of thinking in categories.' 'Blind subsumption' replaces 'the real act of synthesis'. At an early, or pre-historical stage of human development, judgment meant being able to make quick distinctions in order to shoot the poisoned arrow quickly at the attacking animal. The historical development of exchange and the institutions of law, central to the process of civilization, have transformed judgment that now went through the process of deliberation. In late industrial society judgment regresses onto its prehistoric form that does without deliberation. Language boils down to the *termini tecnici*, providing standardized models, *Denk-*

modelle, through which things are seen unconditionally rather than on their own terms. The subject abandons the 'active passivity' typical of cognition, in which sense data and categories transform each other, 'whereby justice is being done to the perceived object'. With this dialectic abandoned, there are only blind perception and empty concepts next to each other.¹³ With judgment, also the distinction between false and true vanishes. Thinking becomes either 'an old-fashioned luxury' or a specialist piece of equipment for certain professions. Also when thinking, 'one is expected to be productive'.¹⁴ Deliberation is too uneconomic. The processes of thinking are increasingly subjected to the same criteria that are valid for material production: 'The more the development of technology makes physical work superfluous, the more eagerly the latter is elevated into the paradigm for intellectual work'. Thinking modeled on the paradigm of the productivity of physical work, though, means stultification which 'benefits antisemitism'. The question is: why does this stultification happen although it is objectively unnecessary? Horkheimer and Adorno suggest that the 'secret' behind this process is that thought 'must be prevented from drawing the appropriate conclusions' from the possibilities granted by technological progress. These conclusions are not spelt out on this occasion, but they can be inferred: the globally decreasing necessity to exert productive work in order to provide for all humanity's needs makes a societal order more and more absurd that links the reproduction of the individuals to the amount of abstract labor they exert individually. In the face of the immense increase of humanity's productive power the bourgeois principle that forces individuals to work by punishment of cutting off their access to their means of living is hopelessly anachronistic. Horkheimer and Adorno seem to imply that unimpeded, healthy processes of thought would inevitably arrive at just that conclusion, and that therefore the existing absurd and anachronistic social order must destroy the very faculty of thought, and this is done by modeling thought on the exertion of physical labour. In the logic characteristic of destroyed, stultified thought, 'the concept confronts the particular as an external force', and what is true of logic is even truer of society: 'everything that in society represents difference has ever so more to fear. Everyone is labeled as either a friend or an enemy. The lack of concern for the subject makes things easy for the administration. One moves ethnic groups into other regions, one sends individuals stamped Jews into the gas chamber.' It is in this sense that a historical epoch that could have meant the beginning of human, but humane, history, real progress and human emancipation, instead brought total and utter destruction.

The third paragraph¹⁵ summarizes the discussion of the concept of the individual which is discussed here in its dependency on economic forms but also as an economic unit in itself: bourgeois economy has created and in its further development also destroyed the bourgeois individual. 'The indifference towards the individual that also expresses itself in logic is a conclusion drawn from the economic process. The individual has become an obstacle to production. ... Economic rationality, the highly-praised principle of the smallest mean, is incessantly converting the last units of the economy: firms and human beings alike.' Department stores have replaced old-style specialized shops that had been free enterprises that engaged in initiative, disposition, organization, taking risks, making complicated calculations, being finally not most cost efficient (one might perhaps think of the wine shop run by Adorno's father). The individual is like these old-fashioned specialized shops: 'It had emerged as the power cell of economic activity'. When it created the modern individual, modern liberal society did a good thing. After having been emancipated from pre-modern tutelage, the individual took to taking care of itself, proletarians by adapting to the labor market, entrepreneurs to the ideal type of *homo oeconomicus*. Notably writing in the past tense, Horkheimer and Adorno state that psychoanalysis used to analyze the checks and balances of this type of bourgeois individual: in conversation with the social control instance of the super-ego the ego keeps the drives of the id in the limits of the necessities of self-preservation. Although at the cost of inevitable neuroses, 'this apparatus used to facilitate the relatively free interplay of the subjects which marketplace society consisted of'. This model has now become anachronistic: 'In the era of large scale concerns and world wars, though, mediation of the societal process by countless monads proves backward. The subjects of the libidinal economy are psychologically expropriated and libidinal economy is run more efficiently by society directly. The individual no longer needs to work out in the painful inner dialectic of conscience, self-preservation and drives what he or she ought to do.' Associations, corporations, administration and mass culture make decisions in lieu of the individual. Ego and super-ego are replaced by institutions, pop-stars, experts and leaders. 'Whereas in liberalism the individuation of a section of the population was part of the adaptation of society as a whole to the state of technology, today the functioning of the economic apparatus necessitates masses be directed without the impediment of individuation.' 'The irrationality of adaptation to reality is now for the individual more reasonable than reason.' While beforehand, the bourgeois had to make the effort to discipline themselves as well as their

workers, now 'the whole human being is the subject-object of repression'. 'The progress of industrial society' not only produced 'the law of impoverishment' that it claims to have conjured away but also destroys the concept of 'the human being as person, as carrier of reason' which had helped to legitimize the whole affair: 'the dialectic of enlightenment objectively tips over into madness'. The third paragraph of section seven takes up and complements in this way the suggestion made in the previous paragraph that the false order needed to destroy thought because under conditions of potentially universal prosperity, thought was becoming dangerous. The suggestion that 'the order' needed to do something does of course not yet explain why and how it was actually able to do it. In the third paragraph of section seven, by contrast, the destruction of thought, reason and individuality are described as objective processes effected by changes in the economic organization of society. The weak point here is the analysis of the changes in the economic structure, on which the argument of this paragraph is based: the notion that state-capitalism has irrevocably replaced liberal, competitive market capitalism, basically taken over by Horkheimer and Adorno from Friedrich Pollock, is one-sided and overdrawn.¹⁶ Even a very strong tendency to a corporatist, monopolistic economy, be it of a fascist or democratic variant, cannot completely do away with competition and the possessive individualism of isolated commodity owners.¹⁷ However, the dialectical structure of the overall argument of *Elements*, and thus the optimism that is intrinsic even to the negative dialectic, has survived the superimposition of the rather mechanical 'state capitalism' thesis and its tendency to hermetic pessimism (or liberal-democratic apologetics which are but the flip-side of the latter). Reading this paragraph in isolation would be misreading the overall argument. Horkheimer and Adorno's discourse on the loss of individualism incorporates and sublates a kind of radical liberalism: the most valid aspects of philosophical liberalism as in Kant, Humboldt and Mill are salvaged by way of their transferal into the territory of Marxism, as practical, political liberalism has deserted and betrayed, or never taken seriously, the ideals its philosophers have propagated.¹⁸

The fourth paragraph¹⁹ extends the argument on 'the madness' of contemporary world from the concept of the individual to that of national and world politics: 'This madness', the destruction of thought and subjectivity, 'is the madness of political reality, too'. 'Although the abundance of goods that could be produced everywhere and simultaneously makes the struggle for raw materials and markets seem ever more anachronistic, human-

ity is nevertheless divided into a small number of armed power blocs.' Furthermore, although the world has become culturally so standardized that national particularity can most of all be detected amongst those excluded from the development of wealth, the competition between the blocs is fiercer than that between businesses used to be in competitive liberal capitalism. 'Only the total identification of the population with these monstrosities of power, so deeply imprinted as to have become second nature and stopping up all the pores of consciousness, maintains the masses in the state of absolute apathy which makes them capable of their miraculous achievements. ... Ticket thinking, a product of industrialization and its advertising, is being extended to international relations.' The reification of the power structure, 'made possible solely by the passivity of the masses', has been consolidated to the point where 'even the ability to conceive of the true state of affairs' has become 'an irrelevant sectarianism'. 'Mere hesitation has therefore come to be ostracized as desertion.' 'For modern people since Hamlet, hesitation had come to stand for thinking and humane-ness. The time wasted through hesitation at once represented and mediated the gap between the individual and the universal, comparable to the way circulation mediates between consumption and production in the economy.' 'Accordance with reality, adaptation to power, are no longer the result of a dialectical process between subject and reality but are produced directly by the cogwheel mechanism of industry'. Although the individualism of the epoch of liberalism appears in the current context almost as a utopia, Horkheimer and Adorno also emphasize the necessity it be overcome. Generalized wealth would be the material condition of the *Aufhebung* of the individual: in an optimistic account, unleashed productivity was, or perhaps still will be able, one day, to sublimate (*aufheben*) the individual by 'granting it complete satisfaction' of all its wants and needs; in reality, though, the opposite is the case: 'the unleashed colossi of production' have extinguished the subject. This is the dialectic of civilization. In philosophical terms, the subject has suffered formal rather than determined negation. Likewise, the tension between collective and individual asks for reconciliation, which might still come one day, but the most recent development points to the opposite direction as 'the extreme disproportion' between omnipotent collectives and impotent individuals has now created 'faultless harmony' of 'unmediated contradiction, the absolute opposite of reconciliation.'

The fifth paragraph of section seven²⁰ brings the argument back to anti-semitism: the destruction of the bourgeois individual, perception and expe-

rience have created a new, not quite genuine type of antisemite. The 'internal agencies of wrong society' which have always determined the psychology of the individual have not disappeared with the individual itself. The 'character types' have merely been subsumed to the matrix of power more completely. The current proponents of antisemitism, dubbed by Horkheimer and Adorno 'neo-antisemites', 'react not so much genuinely against Jews as that they have developed a new alignment of their drives that receives only from the ticket its adequate object of persecution.' The authoritarian characters have not even enough ego left in them for being genuine antisemites. 'The loss of experience that manifests itself in ticket thinking has rendered inoperative those "elements of antisemitism" that once derived from experience, but the same ticket thinking now mobilizes them anew.' This mechanism can explain 'the empty, impenetrable character' of the most modern form of antisemitism: it is the antisemitism of individuals whose psychology 'lets itself and its contents be constructed exclusively by synthetic schemes' as provided wholesale and *prêt-à-porter* by society, under exclusion of genuine experience. 'The Jewish middleman totally becomes the image of the devil only since economically he has practically ceased to exist.' This relieves the neo-antisemite from responsibility: he is a mere observer of an inevitable historical tendency, easily triumphant, riding the waves of history, 'giving a helping hand only when his role as employee of party or *Zyklon* gas factory call on him to do so. As they designate obsolete sections of the population for extermination, the administrations of totalitarian states merely add the finishing touches to verdicts already passed by the economy.' This sense that nothing more than the economically and historically inevitable is being executed allows the perfectly neutral indifference of the bystanders. The peculiarity in whose name the victims are killed is anything but self-evident or immediately offensive to anyone: 'Now that the antagonistic religions which once set people apart have successfully been assimilated and processed into mere cultural artifacts by the leveling pressure of late-industrial society, those individuals who are to be outlawed as Jews first need to be found out by means of complicated questionnaires. ... Fascist antisemitism needs to invent its object in the first place, as it were.' The members of the national collective suffer from a general paranoid disposition, but they suffer from it on the societal level: object and goal of the paranoid aggression can not be delineated from their individual case histories, the paranoia needs to posit its target in the context of the *Verblendungs-zusammenhang* of wars and economic cycles, it must deliberately name the victim onto which the sick members of the national community will then prey.

The final, sixth paragraph²¹, takes up the notion of an end of antisemitism that was already formulated at the beginning of the first paragraph of section seven, and contrasts it with the paradoxical claim that the 'ticket mentality' and the loss of experience that it is based on themselves *are* antisemitism. As these are in this concluding passage directly related to one of the most basic categories of the capitalist mode of production, abstract labor, it can be inferred that antisemitism, thus re-defined, will not go away unless the capitalist mode of production itself is overcome.

'The fact that antisemitism now tends to exist only as one item on an interchangeable ticket gives irrefutable reason to hope for its end.' Those who follow fascist leaders who happen to be antisemitic would just as well follow fascist leaders who are not. The antisemitic 'plank' in the fascist 'ticket' is equivocal and the leaders could swap it for anything else 'as easily as the followers can be shifted from one location of wholly rationalized production to another'. This prophecy of an end of antisemitism is, of course, rather bitter: the notion of fascist regimes that can deliberately refashion and exchange their goals and slogans is indeed most pessimistic, as is that of a 'wholly rationalized' capitalist production that can 'shift' totally objectified workers from here to there. Although both visions can be criticized as overdrawn, they are, as dominant tendencies, still all too true. It seems that Horkheimer and Adorno are keen in this concluding paragraph to remind their readers that antisemitism is not the root of the problem: 'Anyway, the basis of the development which leads to ticket thinking, is the universal reduction of all specific energy to the one, identical, abstract form of labor from the battlefield to the [film] studio.' This is probably the sentence that most clearly flags up the genuine Marxism of its authors.²² It is immediately followed by another sentence that resists any temptation of joining existing leftist or socialist organizations or traditions: 'The transition from such conditions to the more humane state of things, though, cannot happen because the good and the bad are equally affected by the same general tendency'. Horkheimer and Adorno admit that 'the progressive ticket' attracts 'the psychologically more humane types' but 'the power-political structures which inevitably will result from progressive political decisions have as little to do with the freedom that the progressive platform invokes as antisemitism is essential to the chemical cartel.' The same larger historical tendency makes antisemitism a merely accidental element of the fascist ticket and the pursuit of freedom a merely accidental element of the democratic ticket. Although Horkheimer and Adorno hardly more than hint at this, the key to

this claim is the concept of abstract labor, namely labor as abstracted from the specificity of concrete labor, both in its contents and forms. Society as dominated by abstract labour is a society that devalues and despises difference, and this is true of all members of that society. The 'growing loss of experience ultimately turns also the supporters of the progressive ticket into foes of difference. It is not just the antisemitic ticket which is antisemitic, but the ticket-mentality as such.' The 'rage against difference' is 'teleologically inherent' to it. The only escape from the sickness is the refusal to join any rackets. By implication, if ticket-mentality is a reflection of labor abstraction, if the 'rage against difference' is inherent to it, and if antisemitism is an instant of the latter, this adds up to saying that the capitalist mode of production itself is antisemitic (*contra* antisemites, such as Sombart, who claim it was Jewish). This point is followed immediately by another argument that transcends the specific historical context of capitalism, twisting the argument back to a point made earlier: the persecution of a minority like the Jews is ultimately a projection, or anticipation of a larger paranoid hatred: if antisemitism is 'the resentment of the dominated subjects of nature's domination', it is poised against 'the minority that is nature,'²³ even where they still merely threaten the social minority'.

The last sentences of Elements turn back more specifically to the essential content of antisemitism, referred to earlier as 'the concealment of domination'. 'The elites who are responsible for the societal state of things', hiding in the fog of social relations of property and ownership, control and management, 'are in any case far harder to pin down than other minorities.' To distinguish a group of people who are a ruling class from a group of people who are an ethnic, cultural, religious minority requires the effort of conceptual thought. Under the conditions of the loss of experience and the destruction of thought, 'the ideology of race and the reality of class equally appear as nothing other than abstract difference from the majority': there are people there who are not like us. The actual ruling class can thus appear as a race ('Jews') and that race can in turn appear as a class (moneybags). It does not matter that they differ from 'us' in significantly different ways: what matters is that they differ. It is crucial to note that this verdict applies to democratic society as much as to its fascist counterpart. From here Horkheimer and Adorno move in their final words in this key text to a conclusion that is rather enigmatic: in a comparison between democratic and fascist rule they seem to imply that fascism provides a better chance for enlightenment

to usher in emancipation than does democracy. They argue that the progressive ticket 'actually drives towards something that is worse than what it proclaims as its content', whereas the content of the fascist ticket is so vacuous that 'it can continue to occupy the place of the better state of things only through a desperate effort on the part of the deceived' themselves. The fascist horror is that of the 'obvious but persistent lie'. Although it does not allow any truth, 'in the monstrosity of its absurdity, it brings truth negatively within reach', and in order to keep those under its domination from grasping it, it needs to guarantee 'their total abstention from thought'. Although Horkheimer and Adorno stop short of explicitly saying thus, there is an underlying sense that 'total abstention from thought' is not easily guaranteed: perhaps those under domination will at some point start thinking against and in spite of the total destruction of thought, and will discover how fragile the totalitarian regime is. Probably against the intended meaning – after all this was written by two refugees who were granted asylum in the country that was the epitome of democracy – the text almost says that democracy with its good pretensions is actually rather less favorable for emancipation than are the blunt lies of fascism. Either way, the text ends on a moderately optimistic tone: 'Enlightenment itself, having come into its own and thereby turning into a force, could break through the limits of Enlightenment.'²⁴

The seventh section restates arguments developed in more detail in the other sections of *Elements*. Although trying to sum up the overall argument of *Elements* in a few lines seems rather futile, one can at least determine some recurring themes that run through the whole text: Modern, totalitarian, or 'neo-antisemitism' emerges in the context and as a symptom of the anachronism that lies in the fact that domination and objectification become total in the very moment when their abolition would be feasible. Liberalism as well as democratic politics are fundamentally engaged and interested in maintaining this anachronism and are therefore unable to effectively resist antisemitism. Human rights are a promise of emancipation but remain a lie. The false claim that liberal bourgeois society is based on social harmony and is classless obviously cannot convince and discredits also the truth of liberal thought, the promise of the emancipation of the individual. Those who are in charge of running an antagonistic society have difficulties dealing with social, cultural and religious difference as they have to warrant society's precarious cohesion. Liberal, capitalist society is a particular instance of the devel-

opment of civilization, and more specifically, one of the moments within this development where civilization destroys itself. Antisemitic pogroms are rituals of civilization in which civilization demonstrates its own impotence. Antisemites call the bluff of liberalism but don't quite manage to see through it as they are themselves damaged by the destruction of thought that is intrinsic to the development of civilization. Being the carriers of the marks of a civilization gone wrong, they manage to destroy civilization but only in its own terms. Their critique and simple negation of civilization prevents the potential of determinate negation and *Aufhebung* of civilization by the better state of things. The question, why are the Jews the victims, is being answered on two levels. For one, because they ended up symbolizing the progress of civilization without ever actually having been firmly established in it, i.e. without enjoying any of the power and security that come with being part of the class that is in charge and beneficiary of civilization. Secondly, because Jews developed the concept of God that has been central to the progress of civilization, and whose displacement by the Christian revision of that concept has been equally central to the corruption of the concept of civilization. The Hebrew God signifies emancipation of *Geist*, spirit, from nature but also its distance from it, while the Christian God corrupts the *Geist's* emancipation by giving it a human mediator. The conflict between the two antagonistic concepts of the divine remains central to the process of civilization. The Christians find it hard to live with the knowledge that the Jews know of their trickery, and accuse the Jews as tricksters. The Christians handed over the secular sphere to Caesar, and accuse the Jews of making profane what is holy. Antisemites are disgusted by archaic mimetic behavior that fails to fit into the functional structures of modern civilization, especially the objectifying behavior called work, and in order to defend civilization from what seems to them to be the mimetic behavior of those who are less civilized, they mimic their mimicry and destroy them like animals. The totalitarian order is able to take into its service a mechanism that is 'as old as civilization', mechanical projection. Whereas all perception is projection, in the process of civilization mechanical projection became refined and controlled, a product of which process is also the ego; but refined projection degenerates into false projection, paranoia and the destruction of the ego. Self-reflexivity of the mind that can fight paranoia is destroyed when thought is turned into knowledge which is what happened in the context of the failure of emancipation to be delivered. Judgment does away with deliberation and regresses into its prehistoric form, the unmediated reflex of the animal.

'Elements of Antisemitism' works in a multiplicity of dialectical tensions, including objective vs. subjective factors, society vs. individual, general human civilization vs. the specific constellation of capitalist society, the latter's fascist vs. its democratic forms of appearance. Modern, liberal society is seen as a particular instance of civilization, namely the spirit's struggle to liberate itself from nature, which has historically so far always meant the domination of nature. Civilization opposed itself to nature and has failed to reconcile itself with it, while nature celebrated so many ironic victories over its powerful master. This is the general context within which Horkheimer and Adorno theorize antisemitism.

The fact that 'Elements of Antisemitism' is organized as an analysis of the specific ways in which fascist totalitarianism and antisemitism are rooted in the process and progress of civilization must be seen as a determinate rejection of the general tendency of most liberals and democrats after WW2: the impulse to bracket National Socialism out of the general course of otherwise gradually progressing human history and civilization in order to be able to go back and rebuild the civilization that had so much suffered from the barbarians' onslaught. The 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' is written against the idea that after two world wars and Auschwitz, civilization might simply go back to business as usual. 'Elements of Antisemitism' is thus the key to understanding the more famous remarks Adorno made on the impossibility of culture after Auschwitz, such as in his key essay '*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*', 'The Critique of Civilization and Society',²⁵ or rather, the fact that whatever remained of culture is garbage, in 'Negative Dialectic'.²⁶ This critique also ties in with Walter Benjamin's remarks on progress in his 'On the Concept of History'.²⁷ Whereas less sensitive observers by default continued to see liberal culture and the forward march of the progress of civilization as the point of departure for the development of an emancipated society, the proponents of critical theory disagreed. The critique of civilization contained in 'Elements of Antisemitism' belongs together with Adorno's distinction, developed in his '*Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*', of the critique of civilization that must accompany the longing for a redeemed future from reactionary and conservative *Kulturkritik*. Both texts have the virtue of taking seriously and responding to the reactionary critique of liberal, bourgeois society and economy as proposed by antisemites, fascists and Nazis. Contemporary liberal critiques of reactionary movements from the British National Front to Al Quaida are so much weaker for their failure to do the hard work of conceptually understanding what they attempt to fight.

If present day antisemitism is not 'genuine' in the sense that its nineteenth century predecessor may have been, and if furthermore the leaders of fascist, populist as well as democratic rackets are relatively free to choose or abandon the antisemitic 'plank' in their 'tickets', the question remains why the antisemitic plank is included if and when it is. Horkheimer and Adorno's argument suggests that antisemitism is able to filter into differential contexts as a reactionary form of critique of capitalist modernity, i.e. of the structure and dynamics of modern society and economy and the political and cultural formations that tend to accompany it. In particular, populist and state-centred critiques of socio-economic modernization, especially in periods of capitalist crisis, have the potential to take on antisemitic forms. Fully developed antisemitic ideologies such as Hitlerite 'National Socialism' or the most reactionary forms of 'Islamism' are examples.²⁸ Furthermore, unacknowledged anti-liberal longings for pre-capitalist 'community' might be amongst the psycho-social motives that make perfectly secular, critical and liberal-minded Westerners acquiesce to or even to embrace antisemitic imagery and rhetoric as used by various movements, parties and governments – 'rackets', in Horkheimer and Adorno's term – all over the world that are dedicated to the quixotic attempt to resolve crisis phenomena that are intrinsic to the capitalist mode of production by strengthening the nation state. Both those who attempt to create social harmony and the liberal utopia of the classless society of free and equal commodity owners by means of the nation state, and the metropolitan sympathizers of those who try to use this stale medicine in what used to be called the Third World, are inheritors of the same nineteenth century liberals whom Horkheimer and Adorno identified as responsible for twentieth century antisemitism as unreflecting members of a long chain of self-destructive civilization. The means to come closer to the redeemed future, on the path to which also antisemitism, the false negation of the wrong state of things, must be destroyed, can only be expected from somewhere else. As long as the contemporary critique of antisemitism falls back behind that proposed by Horkheimer and Adorno more than half a century ago,²⁹ it will remain powerless.

1 The 'Jewish question' as posed by Enlightenment and liberal thinkers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries concerned the integration of the impoverished Jewish population of Europe into an emerging bourgeois society and was formulated in parallel, often consciously, to the 'workers' question', the 'Irish question', the 'women's question' and other such 'questions'. The answer to all these 'questions' was uniformly the assimilation to bourgeois values, crucially including subsumption

- under the emerging new mode of production. The reformulation of the 'Jewish question' by nineteenth century antisemites, who came from liberal as well as various anti-liberal backgrounds, continued as well as displaced the earlier debate.
- 2 I do not want here to engage in the question whether antisemitism is actually on the rise, moving in waves or staying constant; the mere fact that it is still around even as a potential would sufficiently justify the kind of discussion I am attempting. Whereas the current debate vacillates between those who warn from potential new massacres and others who argue that Jews never enjoyed as much security and prosperity as at the present time, the authors of 'Elements of Antisemitism' argue that things get worse to the same extent that they get better.
 - 3 In the twentieth century, the Marxist tradition apart from Critical Theory is remarkably disappointing on the issue of antisemitism. Chiefly Trotsky and some in the Trotskyist tradition (most famously, Abram Leon) have contributed to the literature, but remained within the conceptual limits of a rather mechanistic, positivistic form of so-called 'historical materialism' (cp. Norman Geras, *The Contract of Mutual Indifference, Political Philosophy after the Holocaust*, London: Verso, 1998). As for scholars who operate on liberal premises themselves, such as Weberian or Durkheimian sociology, it can hardly surprise that they will at best go halfway towards suggesting these liberal premises were themselves implicated in antisemitism let alone the holocaust (Zygmunt Bauman might belong into this category, but also some of those in France who were influenced by the *Collège de Sociologie*, a line of thought that constitutes more or less a radicalized Durkheimianism). Jean Paul Sartre's and Hannah Arendt's contributions have become particularly influential because of their synthetic and indeed un-paradigmatic character.
 - 4 Hannah Arendt is perhaps the only other intellectual who worked on a similar scale, and also developed an argument that likewise located the reason for the demise of bourgeois society in the structures of that society itself. A careful comparison would probably show that the difference is that Arendt ultimately despairs over the demise of the bourgeois universe of values and hates the bourgeoisie for being complicit in its own destruction, arriving thus at a form of bourgeois self-hatred (cp. Marcel Stoetzler, 'Antisemitism and the Self-Destruction of the Nation-State', in: Dan Stone, Richard King (eds.), *Imperialism, Slavery, Race, and Genocide: The Legacy of Hannah Arendt*, Oxford: Berghahn, forthcoming in 2007), while Horkheimer and Adorno maintain and actually radicalize a revolutionary perspective out of, from within but going beyond liberal society, the longing for a 'better state of things', that can perhaps be described as a 'nostalgia for a redeemed future'; the latter is somewhat muted and muffled by taking into account more consistently than other strands of Marxism the experience of massive defeat that the revolution suffered in Russia, Germany, Hungary and elsewhere. The bourgeois self-hatred that Arendt seems to suffer from in the face of National Socialism is diagnosed by Horkheimer and Adorno as a characteristic of the bourgeois antisemites themselves.
 - 5 'Elements of Antisemitism' is surprisingly little discussed in the literature. To my knowledge no contributor to the secondary literature has so far presented a close analysis of the text and its argument; the most useful comments on 'Dialectic of Enlightenment' in relation to antisemitism are by Anson Rabinbach ('The Cunning of Unreason, in his *In the shadow of catastrophe: German intellectuals between apocalypse and enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 166-198; "'Why Were the Jews Sacrificed?': The place of antisemitism in Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*', in: Gibson, Nigel; Andrew Rubin (eds.), *Adorno: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 132-49); cp. also Claussen, Detlev, *Grenzen der Aufklärung, Die gesellschaftliche Genese des modernen Antisemitismus*, Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1994 (forthcoming in English in 2008 with The University of California Press), Brett R. Wheeler, 'Antisemitism as Distorted Politics: Adorno on the Public Sphere', in *Jewish Social Studies* 7,2, 2001, pp. 114-48, and Lars Rensmann, *Kritische Theorie über den Antisemitismus, Studien zu Struktur, Erklärungspotential und Aktualität* (Berlin: Argument, 1998).
 - 6 I have worked from the German text (Horkheimer, Max; Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklärung, Philosophische Fragmente*, Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1969) and made use of both English translations: Horkheimer, Max; Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 137-72, and Adorno, Theodor W.; Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment, translated by John Cumming* (London: Verso, 1997), pp. 168-208. Cumming, the translator of the older English

language edition has added indentations of his own on several occasions (not, however, in the seventh section), while Jephcott, the translator of the more recent English language edition, remained true to the original indentations.

- 7 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:209-11; 2002:165-6; 1997:200-1
- 8 'Aber es gibt keine Antisemiten mehr. Sie waren zuletzt Liberale, die ihre anti liberale Meinung sagen wollten.'
- 9 'Würde antisemitische Gesinnung laut, so fühlte sie sich als bürgerlich und aufsässige zugleich.'
- 10 Shulamit Volkov, 'Antisemitism as a cultural code – reflections on the history and historiography of antisemitism in Imperial Germany', in: *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 23*, 1978, pp. 25-46
- 11 This point has been confirmed by recent historical research. Oded Heilbronner, 'From antisemitic peripheries to antisemitic centres: the place of antisemitism in Modern German History', in *Journal of contemporary History 35:4*, 2000, pp. 559-76, e.g. argues that not even members of the NSDAP were necessarily militant antisemites.
- 12 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:211-12; 2002:166-7; 1997:201-2
- 13 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (2; B75): 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions (Anschauungen) without concepts are blind'. This is in *Transzendentele Elementarlehre, Zweiter Teil, Die transzendentele Logik, Einleitung*.
- 14 'Man soll etwas vor sich bringen'; this seems to be a play on the literal meaning of *pro-ducere*.
- 15 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:212-14; 2002:167-9; 1997:202-4
- 16 cp. Postone, Moishe; Barbara Brick, 'Critical Theory and Political Economy', in: Benhabib, Seyla; Wolfgang Bonss; John McCole (eds.), *On Max Horkheimer, New Perspectives* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1993), on this.
- 17 Certainly Adorno's work as a whole testifies to and acknowledges the existence of the residual autonomy and agency of the individual in many ways.
- 18 This mirrors a crucial aspect of Marx's position: communism according to Marx is liberalism by better means: radical individualism and the hope for emancipation are reformulated within an analysis of the real world, rather than independently from, or as a normative counter-weight to liberal political practice that actually destroys the liberty that it claims to support. Marx developed therefore communism out of the dynamics of liberal society, and in strict opposition to the conservative reaction to it, including all the numerous (and often antisemitic) reactionary variants of socialism.
- 19 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:214-15; 2002:169-70; 1997:204-6
- 20 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:215-16; 2002:170-1; 1997:206-7
- 21 Horkheimer/ Adorno 1969:216-17; 2002:171-2; 1997:207-8
- 22 On the concept of abstract labour, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination, A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and, more handy, Moishe Postone, 'Rethinking Marx (in a Post-Marxist World)', in: Camic, Charles (ed.): *Reclaiming the sociological classics, The state of the scholarship* (Malden (Mass.): Blackwell, 1997), pp. 45-80.
- 23 This is how I understand the strange formulation 'die natürliche Minderheit' – the notion of a 'natural minority' does not seem to make any sense. The meaning seems to be that nature is, within society, a 'minority' in the sense that nature is the suppressed, the non-identical other.
- 24 It seems important here to acknowledge the ambivalence of the German word '*Gewalt*' (power; force; violence) in this sentence: 'Die ihrer selbst mächtige, zur Gewalt werdende Aufklärung selbst...', an ambivalence that some in the students' movement chose to resolve towards 'violence' rather than 'force' or 'power'. Whether Enlightenment could become violence without betraying itself, or must remain a non-violent 'force' is a notoriously difficult question that might have been in the backs of the authors' minds here.
- 25 Theodor W. Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft", in: *Prismen, Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt/M: dtv, 1963 [1955], pp. 7-26; Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society", in: *Prisms, Translated from the German by Samuel and Shiery Weber* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 17-34.
- 26 Adorno, Theodor W., *Negative Dialectic, translated by E. B. Ashton* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 367
- 27 In Benjamin, Walter, *Illuminationen, Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt, 1977), pp. 251-61.

- 28 The latter, whether they are to be seen as properly fascist or rather clerical-conservative, are in spite of the professed universalism of the *umma* in reality as nationalist as the Stalinist or Baathist regimes they are struggling to replace. On the ways in which the Iranian version of Islamist liberation theology managed to defeat (and slaughter) the state-socialist competition by learning from it, cp. 'Retort' (i.e. Iain Boal, T. J. Clark, Joseph Matthews, Michael Watts), *Afflicted Powers, Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London/New York: Verso 2005).
- 29 The ability of Adorno and Horkheimer to address the dialectic between societal structures and social thought, as well as their adoption of a historically grounded critical concept of the triangle constituted by modern society, the individual and the state (as opposed to a sociology of 'group relations', 'networks', 'communicative structures', etc.), are crucial for a substantive understanding of what anti-semitism actually and essentially (im wesentlichen) is.

Safeguarding Memory against Catastrophic Transmission. Walter Benjamin and the memory of the Shoah

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I. The Era of the "Witnesses of Witnesses"

Walter Benjamin's thought offers an invaluable theoretical and critical approach to the problem of how to transmit the memory of the Shoah to future generations, often described as "the crucial problem" of our time. We are constantly reminded, in a sort of macabre *memento mori*, of the inexorable disappearance of the era's direct witnesses. The duty to find surrogate witnesses or other solutions to fill the void is thus urgent and compelling.

Benjamin not only reminds us, generally speaking, that "every era" needs "to wrest the transmission of the past away from a conformism that is about to overpower it"; but also helps us to unmask some of the risks to the memory of the Shoah and its transmission, inherent to certain ways of relating to the issue.

Certainly, at least in the West, the memory of the Shoah - institutionalised and publicly recognised as a responsibility that concerns society as a whole - is the result of a long and difficult historical process. It risks however, being emptied of meaning and becoming an abstract and moralistic categorical imperative. Taken out of the broader context of writer-survivor Primo Levi's more complex reflections, the exhortation "*Remember so that it never happens again*" tends to become little more than a slogan, leading to the celebration of memory as a value in itself, almost as an act of propitiation. This runs the risk of establishing a deterministic relationship between memory of the past and future deliverance, and between oblivion and the return of evil. Benjamin's aphorisms (such as "*nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost*"³, "*saving the memory*" of "*the defeated*", "*of those without a name*"⁴, "*memory as the gate through which the Messiah might enter*"⁵), if misunderstood as unequivocal images lacking internal polarity (or, in Benjamin's terms, "archaic images" that are no longer "dialectic"), may also end up as mere slogans. The image of time however, whether as "eternal return", or as a chain of causes and effects^{VI} - is precisely the "essence of the mythical

event” that Benjamin wants to “explode”, with the aim of bringing to the fore “the eternal relevance” of what is “genuinely unique” and will thus “never recur”⁸. For Benjamin, remembering does not automatically entail salvation. Remembering does not mean – as David Bidussa suggests – “adhering to a formula”⁹, whether moral or identity-related, but rather taking the responsibility and the risk of bringing into play both the past and the present (as represented by the image of the “chess-player” in the first thesis, which tends to be forgotten in favour of the more poetic figure of the “angel”). “The historical object,” he writes, “does not offer vague analogies with reality, but is adapted to the precise dialectical task that reality is called upon to perform”¹⁰.

Benjamin is also very suspicious “of those who go rummaging in the past as in a storeroom of examples and analogies”¹¹, seeing in it the risk of “expunging every echo of lament from history”¹². In my view, an excessive pedagogical and moral concern for the memory of the Shoah - even if necessary – runs the risk of idolatry, forgetting other components and requirements of memory, if not memory itself. My fear is that insisting on *memory as a duty* may function as what Freud would call false working-through, in the service of the “pleasure principle”: that is, the work of memory and mourning are reduced to a single noble moral duty, simplifying and aestheticizing anything in the memory of the Shoah that cannot be understood, accepted, translated into exemplary moral teachings or categorized into “*already tested forms of experience*”¹³ - what Benjamin calls “lived experience” (*Erlebnis*) or “voluntary memory”. “The perpetual readiness of volitional, discursive memory”, he writes, “reduces the scope for the play of the imagination”¹⁴, which, for the philosopher, is the fundamental condition not only of memory, but also “of political action”¹⁵. The duty *of* memory runs the risk of becoming a duty *instead of* memory or *without* memory altogether.

Indeed, there is the risk of forgetting the essentially *historical* and *political* nature of collective memory in general: that it is not an “eternal image of the past”¹⁶, but a fragile and dynamic “construction” (or “weaving” as Benjamin often describes it), always at the crossroads of oblivion and anamnesis, use and misuse, divided memories that stand in each other’s light. There is thus also the risk of forgetting the *oblivion* to which the memory of the Shoah was relegated for many years, in European national memories. More serious still, is the risk of forgetting the specific details of the facts to be recalled: times, places and responsibilities – not con-

finer by the barbed wire of Auschwitz – and presenting them as simple variations of the history of the clash between Good and Evil, Victims and Perpetrators. The object of the construction of history and memory, precisely in its non-mythical, but rather critical, ethical and political meaning, warns Benjamin, is not “the homogeneous and empty time”¹⁷, “the phenomenological essence”¹⁸ of the past, but “that specific period, that specific life”, “that specific experience in its uniqueness”¹⁹. Only by recalling the *uniqueness* of that *complex* combination of events and experiences – different but connected - that goes under the name of Shoah, can the duty of remembering maintain *universal* meaning and critical power. “If and only if the historical object approaches us as a monad,” inherently necessary and bearing “its own imperative”²⁰, says Benjamin, can we recognise in it “the sign of a Messianic arrest” or “a revolutionary chance”²¹. Only through “the awareness of the critical constellation in which precisely this fragment of the past meets precisely this present”²², does that specific past “attain to legibility”²³ and “the whole course of history” “is both maintained and transposed in it”²⁴.

In my view, the consolidation of an idea of knowledge that tends to revive metaphysical, almost initiatory models, contributes to the hindering of our capacity to hold together the various elements of the memory and history of the Shoah in what Benjamin called a “constellation charged with tensions”²⁵. As a result, the critical force of the image of this past is weakened. There is the idea that only through a complete retrieval of “reality” – “reality exactly as it was”, which for Benjamin is “the strongest narcotic of historicism”²⁶ – and a direct and tangible relation with it – the reality of places, emotions, eye-witness accounts (once again, Benjamin’s “lived experience”) – can knowledge be acquired. In the worst cases, it is thought that “*emotional identification*” with the past (another target of Benjamin’s critique) and, in the case of the Shoah, with its horror, has an automatic pedagogic effect that is sufficient to give young people who listen to direct accounts, in ceremonies or journeys to Auschwitz, the role of “witnesses of witnesses”.

This idea produces a dangerous ambivalence towards the Shoah: alongside mass participation in the Remembrance Days and empathetic identification with the victims, one also senses more or less explicit feelings of estrangement and irritation at a memory that is so linked to *lived experience* that it seems to concern only part of the population and risks being interpreted exclusively as homage, a debt to be paid to the victims.

Only the ability to imagine and understand things on multiple levels, such as we find in Benjamin, a capacity to go beyond the mere *duty*, but also beyond what we can *identify* and *reconcile* ourselves with, can make the meeting between history, politics and ethics a productive and dialectical one, and can enable an encounter between the specific nature of a fact and its universal value, between public responsibility and private involvement. In fact, as Benjamin warns, “where there is experience (*Erfahrung*) in the strict sense of the word” - that is, not mere “lived experience” or “emotional identification”, but openness to a multi-dimensional space – “individual memory” and “collective memory”, “lived experience” or non-lived experience, “voluntary and involuntary memory lose their mutual exclusiveness”²⁷.

II. “Third generation” memories

The tendencies of public memory – *a perceived duty to remember, a ‘metaphysical’ view of testimony, a sense of anguish at the demise of direct witnesses* – are reflected in the individual memories of the new generations of Jews, as I noted in the course of my research²⁸, particularly in various interviews with the “third generation”.

By “third generation” I mean the offspring of those who were children during the Fascist and Nazi persecutions, and so are the last to have received a direct transmission of these experiences. But, above all, they are the adults of today who find themselves as the link between the long years of silence about the Shoah and the era of its omnipresence on the public scene. It is now a moral duty for them to transmit publicly that which was, until recently, extremely private, almost “secret” (Miriam) memories and acts of mourning - often secret even inside the family itself – “boxes of memories” (Ester)²⁹ or “casket-boxes” (Anna), buried in the depths of their “intimacy” (Barbara) - to use some of the images evoked by my interviewees - which were “absolutely forbidden” (Miriam) or extremely dangerous “to touch” (Ester).

I have the impression that the public function of the “duty of memory”, which gives the new generations the role of “new witnesses”, overlays at least two other components of this *duty*, risking confusion with them, amplifying and damaging each other.

“Remember!” (*zachor*) – the liberation from Egypt, the monotheistic nature of God, the observance of the *mitzvoth* – is, as Benjamin reminds

us³⁰, a fundamental commandment in the Jewish tradition³¹: the condition by which Jewish identity and even the relationship with God is achieved and transmitted from one generation to another. This is recalled each year at Passover, in the *Haggadah*: "In each and every generation one must regard oneself as if he had personally come out of Egypt". In fact, God "redeemed not only our forefathers [from Egypt], but also us did He redeem with them." Anyone who exempts himself from this duty of *identification* with the past "denies that which is fundamental": "excludes himself from the community"; and "if he had been in Egypt, he would not have been redeemed".

Identification, in the Jewish spirit, need not be understood as exclusively emotional, but is always accompanied by study, interpretation, and the responsibility of practice and critical reflection on the present and its constant idolatrous risk of a "return to Egypt". The Torah and the Talmud, indeed charge every Jew in every generation with the responsibility of considering himself **as** a witness, interpreter and even participant in the Sinaitic revelation. In this sense, and in this sense only, a certain kind of 'identification' is also allowed by Benjamin, who in his *Essay on Fuchs*, for example, defines "materialist historical understanding" as "reviving what needs to be understood and whose heartbeats can still be felt in the present"³².

In what way does the Jewish tradition of memory and identification with what has not been directly experienced accompany the intergenerational transmission of the Shoah? In the case of the Shoah it becomes more complicated – and this is a further articulation of the duty of memory – because the "as if" of the identification, apart from being an ethical injunction to which one might adhere or not, a "voluntary and explicit project of transmitting" memories, full of paradigmatic values, is also and above all the anguished and involuntary emotional effect of the trauma that is propagated:

"Suddenly – recounts Sara³³ (an interviewee) – it was as if my mother had become possessed by these memories, (...) and had to recount them, (...) that is, she could not control them. (...) Suddenly she would remember what happened to her family and cry, and couldn't hide it!

So there was no explicit project of transmission, it was more her psychological need. And I remember feeling very ill at ease, v-³⁴ very:.³⁵ (.)³⁶ and:., I don't know i- if (.) even though later:., anyway, I- I-"

I should like to emphasize Sara's effort, interruptions and hesitations as she expresses this.

*"I felt a terrible sense of anguish! (...) terribly ill at ease (...)
as if I no longer had my mother in front of me, protective, adult, reassuring, but, eh,
a child who is crying! that is the very child who lived through those things, and:: with
whom there was an immediate sense of identification (...) total! With that little girl,
that is, with my mother (...),
that is, my mother was me, I had lived through it,
as if I had lived through it directly."*

As shown by innumerable studies on the trans-generational psychological effects of the trauma of the Shoah, this trauma – which by its very nature could not be completely worked through by the parents, was therefore assimilated by the children, on the basis of strongly symbiotic mechanisms, as a sort of "unconscious commandment": "Experience the Holocaust and solve it for us"³⁷.

*"The first time I went to Germany – recounts Miriam, another interviewee, whose aunt and grandfather died at Auschwitz – I found myself saying
«So, you see Miriam, you knew it, sooner or later y- you would go back to Germany»"* (notice the identification of Auschwitz with Germany).
*"Pointless telling you that I am in it! [in this story]" exclaims Daniele, whose great-grandmother was deported. "It's as if I was always there
as a spectator; of an absolute evil." "As if I could go back in time..."*

There is the risk that the new generations feel the burden of a contradictory and impossible "mission" (in the words of Stefano, an interviewee who embodies completely the role of "witness of witnesses"). "The mission," says the psychoanalyst Dina Wardi, "to fill the enormous vacuum left behind by the Holocaust", and to be "the connecting link that" "on the one hand preserves the past, and on the other joins it to the present and the future". They feel they have to "heal the trauma of the cutting off and fulfil the enormous expectations of their parents and of the entire Jewish people"³⁸ – to the point that they embody the symbol of this mission and transform themselves into "crypts"³⁹ (in the image used by the psychoanalysts Abraham and Torok) or "candles" (as Wardi says) commemorating the dead and, at the same time, celebratory monuments, both as revenge and as a guarantee of continuity.

"It's a duty for all of us" – the interviewees repeat continually – "to have information, as much as possible, because if your grandparents, aunts, uncles and parents don't tell you these things, then they get lost!" (Daniele)

"We have to do it we have to do it we have to do it! Ask them questions make them talk because this is a memory that disappears, vanishes" (Sabrina). And if we don't, "when all those who were deported are all dead, what'll we do?" (Angelo).

"Our memories are already vague!" "The children of the Shoah have the duty" to "receive the testimony", "so that those who were deported can be at peace". "This is our challenge!" (Stefano).

*"It's important for me to feel at peace – says Ester, daughter of an Auschwitz survivor – in carrying on the memory of my mother (...)
as if this line had not been interrupted"
and "as if I had given back to her what was taken from her".*

This duty to remember – is it in order to transmit knowledge and values, or to compensate for the damage? This duty to remember and impossible mourning would seem to have elicited in my interviewees an extreme idealisation of memory and of how it should be transmitted, which inevitably makes them feel extremely inadequate:

"Actually," says Sabrina, "I know very little of the personal things [in the history of my family]... There was never a transmission in the form of «This is what happened ((in a solemn voice)) I am bearing witness to it by telling you about it»."

This idealisation leads to a devaluation of the transmission that has in fact happened, even without – as Sabrina herself and the others explain – "any big stories" and "big information" (Sabrina, Giorgio, Mario), but – when it was not completely wrapped in silence – through "occasional", indirect, "anecdotal" stories, "family gossip", "flashes of memory" (Giorgio), "half-mumbled words" (Miriam), Benjamin's "fragments" and "pieces of collage" (Sabrina): "these little things that can be told even now", says Giorgio; "these conversations," says Sabrina, "that often start up on Friday evening over dinner when everyone is talking and perhaps some memory from their youth comes up and these [memories about the war and the persecutions] can be among them too".

Sabrina idealises memory and its transmission to such an extent, that at the end of the interview, after telling me at length, and in detail, what happened to her family during the persecutions and how they were - or were

not - described to her, she apologises feeling she has not told me enough:

“I’m sorry if I can’t, if I can’t:: if I can’t say any more about this:: fact, or this way... this way the fact of the Shoah was handed down to me, but actually, you see, really I don’t have...”

“I don’t have the story, the story”.

“I don’t know anything, I don’t know anything”,

“a, a version, a single version that Sabrina can be sure of, doesn’t exist!”

Although I tried to conduct these interviews explicitly on how these memories are transmitted and experienced, I noted that the interviewees tended to respond as if asked to provide a testimony. And so they would try to give me every possible detail: dates, people, places. Sometimes they would interrupt their narrative to show me documents, photographs or books that would make it seem more authoritative, or to read me letters and diaries written by grandparents or other relatives. But they could never really feel sure they had that authority, or that what they were saying was accurate:

“I don’t want to say something silly”, “take it with a pinch of salt”, “I know, if I know...”, “if I’m not mistaken”, “apparently...”, “I’ll tell you what I heard, but it might not be 100% true” (Daniele). “I can’t be sure that what I’m telling you is really what happened” (Sabrina). “If you want, I can ask”, “check”. “I feel so ashamed!” exclaimed Anna when she could not remember the name of a camp she visited.

Is there really some missing document or information that would turn them into the “new witnesses” or is what is missing, as Daniele says, “*just seeing with my own eyes, from real life, something I shall never be able to, because this happened before I was born*”? Is filling the gap of what one has not experienced, but that one feels as if one has, just a *duty*, or is it also a *need*?

The sense of illegitimacy is felt even in relation to this extremely real “as if” that is, in relation to how this non-experienced memory weighs heavily on one’s own life and is an inescapable and central *topos*: emotional, psychological and symbolic. “*What’s it got to do with us?*” Marco asked me before the interview (which lasted more than two hours), only to answer “yes, well, we absorbed it with our mother’s milk!”. Sometimes this “as if” becomes explicit, but interwoven with doubts, justifications and disclaimers:

"I'm not saying I experienced it directly," says Daniele.

"But-, in::: emotional terms I thi-, I can say that-, it's as if I had experienced it directly (...) I think that- I may be wrong but::: I don't know, how can I put it:::".

Emotions, associations, fears, sometimes even dreams are subjected to the verification paradigm:

"because of a sudden very strong depression, which involved a terror of the void," says Sara, "I had started putting the two things together, not as cause-effect I don't know! but, I started thinking that this anguish, this fear of the void, was connected with this- e:::hm, anguish, that was very strong, very symbiotic, but with nothing inside", of "this paradoxical memory of something I have not experienced, but which I feel as if I had experienced directly".
"As if suddenly::: I might have thought «That's why I'm afraid of the void!» even though I can't be sure that's how it is, I associate them somehow."

The experience of the "third generation" is not so much a memory as what Benjamin calls a "dialectical constellation" of multiple reminders, "stratified", "incongruent" (Miriam), "paradoxical" (Sara, Daniele) difficult to reconcile. A "contiguity of similar opposites"⁴⁰ where the "tension is greatest"⁴¹, to use Benjamin's terminology. Laura calls it "an undefined chaos!" of obsessive identifications, "violent and sudden associations" (say Miriam and Barbara). "Memories that are interwoven symbolically", as Daniele says, whose violent father, beating him and his sister when they were children, symbolically becomes for him like a "Nazi criminal". "Memories that are stuck to each other, even without a direct link", in the words of Miriam, whose grandmother died of a tumour after the war *as if* she died in the Shoah. "Strange thoughts" "that come into your head", that jar with common sense, ordinary morality, the image the interviewees have or would like to have of themselves.

"Our parents, our grandparents," says Gioia, with difficulty like the others, interrupting herself, mitigating or denying what she gradually expresses, "unfortunately:::, they leave us:::, as I see it, a little::: with- let's say problems that are a little::: how can I put it?! (...) this fear, this dread, this::: at the back of our mind::: (.) in our mind::: yes we set it aside but it's there.
I don't mean we live with this thing but, it's there! inside us, this- this dread still."

“This fear that is still there”, says Gioia, “this grief that has always been there and that stays and that renews itself and will never go away”, says Daniele, but that “rationally” the interviewees constantly “undo”: a *leitmotiv* that accompanies every explanation Daniele gives of his emotions about the Shoah and, particularly, his fear, “that will always be there in my mind”, of the “Nazi that can burst into my home at any moment” and “take me, he comes in, breaks down the door, takes me away”, and “there’s nothing, not even my parents’ embrace that can protect me”.

This *memory-fear, memory-grief* tends to be undermined and sublimated into *memory-duty*. Confused and at the same time split, rather than recognised and maintained in a polar coexistence – as in Benjamin’s method of “dialectics at a standstill”⁴² – *anguish* and *duty* do not lose their intensity and gravity, but tend to become more formal and empty with each generation, with the risk of blocking memory and transmission rather than encouraging it.

Dalida, a girl from the fourth generation, continues to dream of the Nazis and be afraid they can come back, and, at the same time, feels “an immensely strong sense of duty”. But duty to do what? There is no longer an answer...

“Something I’d like to do is go to Poland [to Auschwitz] (...)

I feel it as something that:: that I have to do (...)

those are things that you have to do.

I feel it as a duty! don’t ask me why, but I feel it as a duty.”

III. The critical force of Benjamin’s thought

How, then, can Benjamin’s idea of remembrance “save” the memory of the Shoah? And, above all, in what sense does memory “deliver”? I don’t want to make Benjamin the judge of the public misuse of memory or the therapist of trans-generational traumas. In fact, in his Messianic perspective, “save” and “redeem” do not mean transfiguring reality or solving problems definitively, but “citing the past”, “what has remained inconspicuously buried beneath”⁴³, bringing out the “negative” in the “positive”, “what is useless, backward and dead” in what is “productive, forward-looking and lively”⁴⁴, “correcting small distortions”⁴⁵, “shifting the angle of vision”⁴⁶ to open new possibilities and immediately seizing the mutual provocations between past and present. “The elements of the Messianic

era are not shapeless tendencies of progress," he warns, "but works and thoughts that are seriously threatened, ill-famed and derided, that lie in the deep womb of every present"⁷⁴⁷. Remembering may be a "guarantee"⁷⁴⁸, the "hinge of the door through which the Messiah can walk in"⁷⁴⁹, but it is a "tiny guarantee"⁷⁵⁰, "a weak Messianic power"⁷⁵¹, "the straw at which the drowning man clutches"⁷⁵².

Benjamin warns against any attitude – moral, theoretical and practical – that hypostatizes "a concept of duty"⁷⁵³, not as a "law of one's own"⁷⁵⁴, an original need that is part of "one's activities"⁷⁵⁵ and that "subsides and grows inside and together with its models"⁷⁵⁶, but as a "mechanical obligation" derived from others, which "is to the advantage of a completely abstract and empty generality", and yet "claims the gesture and attitude of love"⁷⁵⁷.

This, according to Benjamin, is "the fatal error"⁷⁵⁸ of the social-democratic vision of history, which has raised the idea of a classless society to the degree of "ideal"⁷⁵⁹. It replaces the "image of the enslaved ancestors"⁷⁶⁰ still waiting for their "redemption" (because "the enemy has never stopped winning"⁷⁶¹), with the "ideal of the liberated grandchildren". For Benjamin this is an "apologetic" betrayal both of Marxism and the Messianism it secularizes⁶². "The apologia," writes Benjamin, "obscures the revolutionary moments in history. At heart, it seeks the establishment of a continuity. It sets store only by those elements of a work that have already emerged and played a part in its reception. It misses the places where tradition breaks off – hence its peaks and crags, which offer footing to one who would cross over them."⁷⁶³ In his view, the duty of and for future generations – with which our own age too is so concerned – ends up forgetting the "rights of the past", due to the "weak Messianic power"⁷⁶⁴ with which each new generation is endowed: not as a stereotyped formula or a previous and concluded experience, but as an idea that is "determined only through confrontation with another concept"⁷⁶⁵, and so experienced each time as unique, fresh and original⁶⁶. The hypostatisation of the future as the place of fulfilment is not only unrealistic, but seems to Benjamin "a laziness of thought"⁷⁶⁷, which involves deferring action from the here and now⁶⁸, further "weakening" the critical and political force that each present conquers from its relation with its own "pre-history".

The fundamental "task"⁷⁶⁹ of the materialist historian, who is able to combine an angelic and mournful gaze of remembrance with "Messianic hope", "presence of mind" and "destructive drive"⁷⁷⁰, is not that of "devel-

oping plans for what comes ‘later’” or “faith in progress”, but “the firm resolve to snatch humanity from the catastrophe that is looming at every turn”⁷¹. His “task is not only to seize the tradition of the oppressed, but also to establish it”⁷². “There is not a single moment that does not bring with it its own revolutionary chance – it needs only to be understood as a specific chance, a chance for a completely new solution, prescribed by a completely new task”. The “power of a key that a moment possesses over a clearly defined room of the past that had been closed until then”⁷³ is, for Benjamin, the “political” and “Messianic” value of memory. This idea is not only “just as worthy of human beings” and “also closer to human beings”⁷⁴ than the idea of saving future generations, but, much more radically, it is the only one “that first entitles us to speak as we do of humanity and its history”⁷⁵ in a way that is meaningful and that will bear fruit. In fact, the idea of humanity, for Benjamin - as Martin Jay explains in his study, *Against Consolation. Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn* - has value only if understood in a way that excludes sacrifice, false reconciliation and consolation. He rejects “the idea that the work of vanishing generations should go on forever benefiting only those who come later”. “In some mysterious way the progress of history” should be thought of **as if** it had a “retroactive force” “for the past generations” too⁷⁶.

‘As if’, in which Benjamin traces, in his essay on Proust, “the law of remembrance”⁷⁷, another version – moral but not moralistic – of its ‘duty’: “an experienced event is finite – at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is only a key to everything that happened before it and after it.”⁷⁸ In a similar vein, in his reply to Horkheimer⁷⁹ he writes that “what science has ‘determined’, remembrance can modify. Such mindfulness can make the incomplete (happiness) into something complete, and the complete (suffering) into something incomplete”⁸⁰.

A world governed by the abstract “moral” of an “infinite duty”⁸¹ is, for Benjamin, the equivalent of the world of myth that is unable to renew itself⁸² and which holds both future and past “under a spell”⁸³, making the relationship between the generations sterile and harmful. It is a temporality “that stretches empty and undefined between the existence of the sons and that of their fathers”⁸⁴ and “moves the mass of historical happenings as Sisyphus rolled the stone”⁸⁵. That is what the young Benjamin reproached his own period with, particularly the university world, in which he saw “puerile” relations of mere identification⁸⁶ and imitation⁸⁷ between

teachers and students. "Knowledge, wisdom, real life", he says in his essay on *The Storyteller*, "assume transmissible and unforgettable form only at the moment of death"⁷⁸⁸: only by "courageously" accepting "solitude"⁷⁸⁹, the void and the death that opens up between fathers and sons, will *knowledge, experience and memory* "not be traded with their surrogates"⁷⁹⁰ of "profession", *technical know-how*⁷⁹¹, "lived experience", and "voluntary memory". Equally mythical is the "parasitic"⁷⁹², "swampy"⁷⁹³ and traumatic world of Kafka's bureaucracy and families that crush the individual to the point of devouring his "right to exist"⁷⁹⁴: "he no longer lives his personal life, writes Kafka, he no longer thinks his personal thought. He feels **as if** he were living and thinking under the constraint of a family [...] from which he can never be released"⁷⁹⁵.

But equally "reified and fetishistic" is the world of a culture conceived as a "fund of values"⁷⁹⁶: "things to handle", "finished works" that "fall into our laps", like "the dregs that memorable moments", set off by "experiences far from authentic and not at all political, have deposited"⁷⁹⁷. Memory becomes the "souvenir" of a "lived experience": a "secularized reliquary" "in which is deposited the self-estrangement of man, cataloguing his past like a dead possession"⁷⁹⁸. As Benjamin explains in his essay on Baudelaire, with reference to Freud's theory of memory as a different system from consciousness: "incorporating" experiences "in the register of conscious memories" and "assigning" them "an exact point in time in consciousness", would be "at the cost of the integrity of their contents", would "sterilize" them and turn "experience" into "lived experience"⁷⁹⁹.

This idea of culture and memory "increases the weight of the treasures that lie heavy on the shoulders of humanity, but do not give us the strength to shake them off and, in doing so, make them our own"¹⁰⁰. For Benjamin, Kafka's image of the hunched back¹⁰¹, "which has to bear the weight", deformity and weight are "the form that things assume in oblivion"¹⁰² - not oblivion as simple forgetfulness, but much more seriously "the oblivion that forgets itself"¹⁰³ and the "possibility of redemption"¹⁰⁴. Memory itself, reduced to "cultural heritage", "voluntary memory" and "moral duty" is thus for Benjamin, "coincident with oblivion"¹⁰⁵: with the "cosmic weight"¹⁰⁶ of the myth that, as he constantly exhorts, "we need to shake off"¹⁰⁷ - not so as to dismiss memory and its duty, but to rediscover the force and duty of authentic memory. "Ageing," he writes in some notes on Proust and Baudelaire, "is the terrible course of things in the cosmos where all is identical... From its cloudy obscurity the fertile force of memory comes to us like rain, and the world regains its youth in its drops"¹⁰⁸.

From Benjamin's perspective, rather than guaranteeing the safety of the past, with which historians, politicians and educators should concern themselves, the continuity of the "passing of the witness" poses the main threat to memory. Everything that tends to be placed on a line of continuity is for Benjamin the place of conformism, passive identification¹⁰⁹ with the catastrophic course of events, and the natural ally of the oppressors of the moment. "The idea of *continuum* levels everything to the ground"¹¹⁰. "The catastrophe is that everything goes on as before"¹¹¹. The materialist historian must give up an "idea of the present as transition", for an idea of the present as "arrest"¹¹². An "additive procedure" of simple accumulation of facts needs to be replaced with a constructive principle¹¹³: "only by blasting of continuity is the historical object established"¹¹⁴. "The Messiah does not appear at the end of a development", but "cuts off history"¹¹⁵.

Not even the "memory of the defeated", "those without a name", (that is, the representatives of *an other, discontinuous, revolutionary* history), is automatically immune from the risk of being reabsorbed in a new form of conformism and "becoming a tool of the ruling class"¹¹⁶. There is, warns Benjamin, a way of transmitting the past that, quite apart from its contents, is more catastrophic than "discredit and neglect": "its enshrinement as heritage". "Phenomena are saved through the exhibition of the fissure within them"¹¹⁷. "The redemption of the past is possible only for something that a moment later is already irretrievably lost"¹¹⁸.

This is the "fundamental aporia"¹¹⁹, the "danger" or, as Martin Jay writes, the "desperate gamble"¹²⁰, which memory must not forget if it is to obtain its "weak Messianic power". "How," wonders Benjamin, "to reconcile criticism of the past with its salvation?"¹²¹ "Connecting revolutionary destruction with the idea of redemption?" "Showing the link between the feeling for a new beginning and tradition"¹²²? How can we remember what we have not experienced and of which, as Benjamin says of the proletariat, "no memory took place"¹²³? How can we save, remember, transmit, and so in some way make continuous the discontinuous and traumatic history of the oppressed, without cancelling its discontinuity, the wound and the trauma? "Saving what has failed" also means - as Martin Jay explains, and as Benjamin himself warns with regard to a proper understanding of Kafka - "never forgetting its very failure"¹²⁴, against the temptation to build over it sacrificial idols, cultural or moral surrogates that offer facile consolation, false attempts to work-through hasty dismissals or anaesthetizing exposure to the shock in place of the actual trauma¹²⁵.

For Benjamin, remembering is a revolutionary “emergency brake”¹²⁶, an “impact”¹²⁷, a “dialectical leap”¹²⁸, a “gesture” of “arrest”¹²⁹ and a “U-turn”¹³⁰, which is necessary whenever history runs the risk of stiffening into the single-mindedness and single direction of myth. Benjamin’s thought, like his remembering angel, always moves in “two directions”¹³¹, between “two forces, particular and opposed”¹³², “only apparently contradictory”¹³³. “Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well”¹³⁴. It is an “uninterrupted recovery of breath”, an “intermittent rhythmic”¹³⁵, in which “phenomena are broken down and saved”¹³⁶, “devalued and promoted”¹³⁷ at the same time. While “historical ‘reconstruction’ through emotional identification is at one level only”, materialist ‘construction’ of the factual historical nexus “also involves destruction”¹³⁸. If “the past must bring the present into a critical state”¹³⁹, it must in turn be “blown up”, filling it “with explosive, that is, with the present”¹⁴⁰. “One force points to the right and straight ahead, whereas the other turns around and drives back”¹⁴¹. “One direction goes from the past to the present and shows precursors, and the other goes from the present to the past to have the revolutionary potential of these ‘precursors’ explode in the present”¹⁴². “It is not that the past casts its light on the present or the present on the past”. “While the relation of the present to the past is purely temporal and continuous, the relation between what has been to the now is dialectical: is not progression but image, suddenly emergent.” Memory is a “dialectical image”¹⁴³, in which past and present are not collapsed into each other, but “converge in a constellation charged with tensions”¹⁴⁴ and face each other “always anew and never in the same way”¹⁴⁵. “Only dialectical images are genuine images, that is, not archaic”¹⁴⁶, not mythical or idolatrous.

Memory is “*telescoping* of the past through the present”¹⁴⁷, “secret agreement between generations”¹⁴⁸, “the unique and involuntary”¹⁴⁹ “manifestation of a distance” which refuses to be captured but looks at us¹⁵⁰. In it “not only time is recovered, but also closeness”, “not only eternity is immobilized in time, but also distance in closeness”¹⁵¹.

But if memory is an image, a gesture, a meeting, a way of seeing, thinking and acting, an “aura” that does not cancel alterity and distance, then the problem of passing from direct to indirect witness can also, *perhaps*, be seen as a ‘false’ problem. Equally, the new generations’ paradoxical, involuntary and fragmentary memories they have not experienced, *perhaps* regain legitimacy and even open up possibilities other than their traumatic fixity. Anyone – and not only the direct witnesses and their heirs – can at any moment, even after “thousands of years”¹⁵², rediscover “isolated frag-

ments, lost gestures⁷¹⁵³, “Messianic splinters”⁷¹⁵⁴, without becoming the “witness of the disappearing witnesses”. If, as Benjamin suggests in *The Task of the Translator*, memory is a form of translation, we may also be able to understand in this sense his warnings against “translating translations”: it is a monstrous hall of mirrors disappearing into infinity, which risk closing in on themselves and engulfing the understanding¹⁵⁵. “Every moment brings with it its revolutionary chance”⁷¹⁵⁶, just as, in Jewish tradition, anyone can be the Messiah and “every second of time” can be “the strait gate through which he might enter”⁷¹⁵⁷. “Not only the images of involuntary memory reach us unexpectedly”, writes Benjamin in some notes on Proust, but “in that case they are images that we had never seen before we remembered them”, images in which, “as in a dream, we can see ourselves. We are standing in front of ourselves just as we were once, long, long ago somewhere...but never under our gaze”. And yet, it is precisely these paradoxical images of what was never seen that are, says Benjamin, “the most important images”⁷¹⁵⁸. Images of fear and anguish, but also, perhaps, revolutionary ones like those Marxist images of a classless society, of which “no memory took place”⁷¹⁵⁹.

- 1 Geoffrey Hartman, *The Longest Shadow: in the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Indiana University Press, 1996), pp. 10, 42, 62.
- 2 Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hanna Arendt, (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp.253-264, VI, p.255.
- 3 Id., *Theses...*, op. cit., III, p.254.
- 4 Ivi, VII, p.256. *Materiali preparatori alle tesi*, in *Walter Benjamin. Sul concetto di storia*, ed. by Gianfranco Bonola and Michele Ranchetti, (Turin: Einaudi 1997), Ms 447, p.77, Ms 469, p.83.
- 5 Ivi, B, p.264. *Materiali preparatori...*, op. cit., Ms 1053V ad B, p.96.
- 6 “Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal connection between various moments in history. But no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical” (Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., A, p.263).
- 7 Id., *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), D 10 a, 4, D 10 a, 5, p.119.
- 8 Ivi, S,1,3, pp.543-544, N 10, 1, p.474.
- 9 David Bidussa, *Uno sguardo senza nostalgia*, in *Il Manifesto*, mercoledì 27 agosto 2003.
- 10 Walter Benjamin, *Eduard Fuchs. Il collezionista e lo storico*, in *L'opera d'arte nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica. Arte e società di massa*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1991), pp.79-123, p.93.
- 11 Id., *Materiali preparatori...*, op. cit., Ms 471, p.85.
- 12 Ivi, Ms 1098r, p.98.
- 13 Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1986), p.14.
- 14 d., *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp.155-194, p.186. Primo Levi writes something similar: “It is certain that exercise keeps the memory fresh and living, as one exercises a muscle, but it is also true that a memory that is evoked and expressed too often in the form of a story tends to become fixed in a stereotype, in a crystallized form that establishes itself in place of the raw memory and grows at its expense.” (Primo Levi, *I sommersi e i salvati*, op. cit., p.14).
- 15 Walter Benjamin, *Materiali preparatori ...*, op. cit., Ms 490, p.94.
- 16 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., XVI, p.262.
- 17 Ivi, XIV, p.260.

- 18 d., *The Arcades ...*, op. cit., N 3,1, p.462.
- 19 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., pp.82-83.
- 20 Id., *La vita degli studenti*, in *Metafisica della gioventù*, Einaudi, Torino 1982, pp.137-150, p.138, 149; *Premessa gnoseologica a Il dramma barocco* (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), pp.25-26.
- 21 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., XVII, p.263.
- 22 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., pp.82-83.
- 23 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 3,1, p.462.
- 24 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., pp.82-83. *Thesis...*, op. cit., XVII, p.263.
- 25 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., XVII, p.262.
- 26 Ivi, VI, p.255. *The Arcades...*, op. cit., O⁰, 71, p.863.
- 27 Id., *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, op. cit., p.p.159-160.
- 28 Research project entitled *The Third Generation of the Shoah: "Witnesses of what has not been Experienced"*, which I am completing in the Department of the Psychology of the Processes of Development and Socialization at "La Sapienza" University of Rome, under the supervision of Prof. Clotilde Pontecorvo, and financed by the "International Assistance Fund for the Victims of the Nazi Persecutions in State of Need" – Italy, Law 249/2000, Union of the Italian Jewish Communities. For future publication by Carocci.
- 29 See also Helen Epstein, who spoke of "iron strongboxes" (*Figli dell'Olocausto*, Firenze: Giuntina, 1982, p.11).
- 30 Walter Benjamin, *Thesis...*, op. cit., B, p.264; *Materiali preparatori...*, op. cit., Ms 1053V (ad B), p.96; *Franz Kafka. On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp.111-140, p.131.
- 31 See also Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor. Jewish History, Jewish Memory*, New York 1989.
- 32 Walter Benjamin, *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.83.
- 33 The names of all interviewees have been changed to safeguard their privacy.
- 34 This sign "." indicates an interruption caused by hesitations, corrections, self-censorship or association of ideas.
- 35 This sign ":" indicates a sound that is prolonged, often to give the speaker time to find the right word or the right way to express something.
- 36 This sign "(.)" indicates a pause or break.
- 37 Dina Wardi, *Memorial candles: Children of the Holocaust* (New York-London; Routledge, 1992), p.46.
- 38 Ivi, p.6.
- 39 Nicolas Abraham e Maria Torok, (1978), *The Shell and the Kernel*, Nicholas T. Rend (ed. by), University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- 40 Walter Benjamin, *Premessa gnoseologica...*, op. cit., p.25.
- 41 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N10a, 3, p.457.
- 42 Ivi N 2 a,3, p.462. "To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts" (ivi, N 10a,3, p.475; *Theses...*, op. cit., XVII, p.262).
- 43 Ivi, J 77, 1, p.365. On Benjamin's citation theory see also ivi, N 11, 3, p.476; *Theses...*, op. cit., III, p.254; *Materiali preparatori...*, op. cit., Ms 446, p. 76.
- 44 Ivi., N 1a, 3, p.459.
- 45 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., pp.134-135, 125.
- 46 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N1a, 3, p.459.
- 47 Id., *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., p.137.
- 48 Id, *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 477, p.88.
- 49 Ivi, Ms 1053V ad B, p.96.
- 50 Id, *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 477, p.88.
- 51 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., II, p.254.
- 52 Id., *Materiali ...*, op. cit., Ms 477, 481, pp.88-89.
- 53 *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., p.140.
- 54 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.139.
- 55 Id., *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., pp.139, 140, 149.
- 56 Id., *Piccola storia della fotografia*, in *L'opera d'arte...*, op. cit., pp.57-78, p.64.
- 57 Id., *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., pp.140-141.
- 58 Id., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 486, p.93.
- 59 *Walter Benjamin sul concetto di storia*, op. cit., XVIIa, p.53.
- 60 Id., *Thesis...*, XII, p.260, II, p.253, XII, p.p.260. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 466r, p.81, Ms 486, p.93. *The*

- Arcades..., op. cit., J 61 a, 3, p.339, N 8,1, p.471, N 13 a, 3, p.479, N 15, 2, p.481.
- 61 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., p.255.
- 62 *Walter Benjamin sul concetto di storia*, op. cit., XVlla, p.53.
- 63 Id. *The Arcadias...*, op. cit., N 9 a,5, p.474. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 473, p.86, Ms 1820, p.289.
- 64 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., II, p.254.
- 65 Id., *The Arcadias...*, op. cit., Q^o, 21, p.867.
- 66 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.83.
- 67 d., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 447, p.76.
- 68 *Walter Benjamin sul concetto di storia*, op. cit., XVlla, p.55.
- 69 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 4, 1, p.464. *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.83. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 488, p.93.
- 70 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 7, 2, p.469. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 442, p.74, Ms 473,p.86, Ms 481, p.89.
- 71 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., J 61 a, 3, p.339.
- 72 Id., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 488, p.93.
- 73 *Walter Benjamin sul concetto di storia*, op. cit., XVlla, p.55.
- 74 Id., *The Arcadias...*, op. cit., J 61 a, 3, p.339. See also: "One of the most remarkable characteristics of human nature, writes Lotze, is (...) the freedom from envy which the present displays toward future." (*Thesis...*, op. cit., II, p. 253).
- 75 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 13a, 3, p.355.
- 76 Ibid. *Theses...*, op. cit., IV, p.255.
- 77 Id., *The Image of Proust*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp. 201-215, p.202.
- 78 Ibid.
- 79 *Horkheimer's letter on the question of the incompleteness of history*, of March 16, 1937 in *Walter Benjamin, The Arcadias...*, op. cit., N 8,1, p.471.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 Ivi, D 10 a,5, p.119, N 13 a,3, p.479, *Walter Benjamin sul concetto di storia*, op. cit., XVlla, p.53. *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.138.
- 82 D 10 a,5.
- 83 Id., *Thesis...*, op.cit., B, p.264. *Materiali...*, op.cit., Ms 1053V, p.96. *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., pp.138, 149.
- 84 Id., *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., p.145.
- 85 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.130.
- 86 Ivi, p.141.
- 87 Ivi, p.144.
- 88 Id., *The Storyteller. Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp.83-109, p.94.
- 89 Id., *La vita degli studenti*, op. cit., p.149.
- 90 Ivi, p.145.
- 91 Ivi, pp.143-144.
- 92 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.114.
- 93 Ivi, p.130.
- 94 Ivi, p.114.
- 95 Ivi, p.130.
- 96 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.91. See also *Thesis...*, op. cit., VII, p.256, and *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 5a,7, p.468.
- 97 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.91.
- 98 Id., *Parco centrale*, in *Angelus novus*, op. cit., pp.131-144, p.140.
- 99 Id., *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp.155-200, pp. 160-163.
- 100 Id., *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.92.
- 101 See also Id., *L'omino gobbo*, in *Infanzia berlinese* (Torino: Einaudi, 1981), pp.122-125.op. cit., p.305.
- 102 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.133.
- 103 Ivi, p.131.
- 104 Ivi, p.136.
- 105 Ivi, p.134.
- 106 Ivi, p.113.
- 107 Ivi, p.140. *Eduard Fuchs...*, op. cit., p.92.

- 108 Id., *Carte su Proust*, in *Ombre corte*, (Torino: Einaudi, 1993), pp.370-391, p.388.
- 109 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., VII, p.256.
- 110 Id., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 449, p.79.
- 111 Ivi, Ms 481, p.89. *Parco centrale*, op. cit., p.141.
- 112 Id., *Theses...*, op. cit., XVI, p.262.
- 113 Ivi, XVII, p.262.
- 114 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 10a, 1, p.475.
- 115 Id., *Materiali...*, Ms 477, p.88.
- 116 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., VI, p.255..
- 117 Ivi, VII, p.256. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 473, p.86. *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 9, 4, p.473.
- 118 Id., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 448, p.78.
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- 120 Martin Jay, *Against Consolation. Walter Benjamin and the Refusal to Mourn*, in *Refractions of Violence*, (Routledge, New York and London, 2003), pp.11-24, p.21.
- 121 Walter Benjamin, *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 485, p.93.
- 122 Ivi, Ms 449, p.79.
- 123 Ibid. and Ms 466r, p.80.
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- 125 See *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, op. cit..
- 126 Id., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 1100, p. 101.
- 127 Id., *Theses...*, op. cit., XVII, pp.262-263.
- 128 Ivi, XIV, p.261.
- 129 Ivi, XIV, XV, XVI, XVII. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 473, p.86.
- 130 Ivi, Ms 1105, p. 102.
- 131 *The Arcades...*, op. cit., O° 56, p.862.
- 132 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.138.
- 133 Id., *Materiali...*, Ms 449, p.79.
- 134 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., XVII, p.262.
- 135 Id., *Premessa gnoseologica...*, op. cit. pp.4, 5. See also pp.11, 25.
- 136 Ivi, p.11.
- 137 Ivi, p.180.
- 138 Id., *The Arcades...*, N 7, 6, p.470.
- 139 Ivi, N 7a, 5, 471.
- 140 N 9a, 6.
- 141 Id., *Franz Kafka...*, op. cit., p.138. *Thesis...*, op. cit., IX, p.257.
- 142 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., O° 56, p.862.
- 143 Ivi, N 2a, 3, N, 3, 1, p.462. *Materiali...*, Ms 474, p.87.
- 144 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., XVII, p.262, A, p.263.
- 145 Id., *The Arcades...*, op. cit., N 7 a, 1, p.470.
- 146 Ivi, N 2a, 3, p.462; N, 3, 1, p.463. Ms 474, p.87.
- 147 Ivi, N 7 a, 3, p.471.
- 148 Id., *Thesis...*, II, 254.
- 149 Id., *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 474, 491.
- 150 *On Some motifs in Baudelaire*, op. cit., p.188. *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp.217- 251, p.222.
- 151 Id., *Carte su Proust*, op. cit., p.389.
- 152 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., A, p.263. *Materiali...*, op. cit., Ms 469, p.82.
- 153 Id., *Franz Kafka ..*, op. cit., p.137.
- 154 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., A, p.263.
- 155 Id., *The Task of the Translator*, in *Illuminations*, op. cit., pp.69-82, pp.81-82.
- 156 *Walter Benjamin sul concetto di storia*, op. cit., XVIIa, p.53.
- 157 Id., *Thesis...*, op. cit., B, p.264.
- 158 Id., *Carte su Proust*, op. cit., p.390. See Giorgio Agamben, *Walter Benjamin e il demoniaco. Felicità e redenzione storica nel pensiero di Benjamin*, in *La potenza del pensiero. Saggi e conferenze*, (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005), pp. 205-235, pp.232-234.
- 159 Id., *Materiali...*, Ms 449, p.79, Ms 466r, p.80.ù

Herbert Marcuse: between technologization and technocratization

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1. Introduction

• Herbert Marcuse is understood by many today as an author whose utopian theory failed to acknowledge science and technology free of domination. In this paper, however I aim at defending Marcuse from such criticisms through presenting both some of Marcuse's unacknowledged work and some of his Frankfurtean colleague, Franz Neumann's, ideas.

2. Overview of Marcuse in relation to M. Weber

In order to contextualize Marcuse's work we need first be aware of the process of rationalization that triggered the creation of modern societies. Modern rationalization signifies the mathematization of knowledge and experience, the emphasis on rational proofs (for scientific knowledge as well as for society) and the emergence of experts. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Modernity), scientific and technical reason became institutionalized as underlying forces of society. Scientific knowledge became formalized and separated from everyday knowledge and language.¹ This formalization of knowledge is expressed through the implementation of purposive-rational action in the sphere of work as well as the social sphere. It expresses the secularization of society (influenced by the emergence of the Protestant ethic and the Reformation) and the rise of science and technology as forms of legitimation. These events brought about a total transformation of traditional or pre-modern society into the types of technology and associated social organization that characterizes advanced Western societies. More accurately, these changes resulted in an implementation of the rationalist orientation involving aspects such as analytical precision, an emphasis on the systemic world-view and on empirical measurement.²

Modern rationalism also involved a logical and practical problem-solving standpoint and an instrumental approach to objectives. Furthermore,

modern rationalization resulted in a doctrine according to which true knowledge about society and its tendencies will only be possible if interpreted technically. Together with this comes the belief that everything can be redesigned in more efficient and controllable ways.³ In short, this is very much the technocratic world view that the modern rationalization process triggered.

Max Weber was very much an advocate of this kind of technocratic position. As such, Marcuse's starting point is a response to some of Weber's claims. Whereas Weber takes the process of rationalization (and what it carries within) to be a natural and rightful step towards the culmination of formal reason and a value-free science, Marcuse introduces the idea that rationalization not only implies new forms of legitimation but also carries within a certain type of hidden political domination.

For Weber capitalism expresses the culmination of what Marcuse calls the "necessary reason"⁴, technical or formal reason. Formal or technical reason is particularly concerned with a universal quantification (the extension of mathematization to other sciences and life spheres) shown by the practical realization of efficiency, and is supposed to symbolize a neutral reason (a rationality free of values).

However, Weber himself conceded that there are values that remain extra-scientific but still guide the activity of the scientific sphere. According to him, "value-free rationality of administration is dependent upon values and goals that come to it from the outside", because "the administration of industrial society requires outside and superior direction".⁵ Within capitalist industrialization economic and industrial activities are rationally controlled by extra-scientific military and imperialist values. Further, Weber's definition of formal reason implies both the separation of workers from the means of production and the private entrepreneur as the subject of economic activity as 'technical necessities'. This means that, for Weber, the bureaucratic system signifies "objective domination"⁶ and the most rational means of control. Thus, although Weber's concept of reason incorporates values, such values are seen by him as objective values.

For Marcuse, however, Weber's 'objective domination' - that alleged 'outside and superior direction' - is 'the charismatic domination' or the solidification of the interests of domination. Thus, Marcuse argues that the bureaucratic organization, understood as an expression of such an 'objective domination', introduces domination into the definition of capitalist rationality through its configuration.

[...] the administrative apparatus has always been built on the basis of domination and has been established to maintain and strengthen domination. To the democratisation required by rational administration thus corresponds a parallel limitation and manipulation of democratisation.⁷

What is more, due to this bureaucratic rationality, capitalism becomes guided by irrationality:

[I]n the unfolding of capitalist rationality, irrationality become reason: reason as frantic development of productivity, conquest of nature, enlargement of the mass of the goods [...]; irrational because higher productivity, domination of nature, and social wealth become destructive forces.⁸

In his "Industrialization and Capitalism in the Work of Max Weber", Marcuse argues that Weber seems to too easily accept the repression that the economic system inflicts upon individuals and nature under the banner of 'formal reason'. Weber ignores that, under the conditions of capitalist industrialization, the repressiveness of the established order is legitimized.

In this respect Marcuse claims that, under such conditions, it is the very structure of purposive-rational action that is dominating and, as such, its institutionalization makes domination latent but not expressed as orders and commands. In these conditions, the very concept of reason becomes ideological.⁹

Advanced capitalist society, Marcuse argues, is a sick society in which individuals are restricted and driven to fulfill the interests of a dominating force. Marcuse explains this dynamic through his concept of 'repressive desublimation',¹⁰ by which individuals lose their freedom and sovereignty in favor of vulgar material and sensual satisfactions. Through the deceptive means of the system, desublimation (the free flow of desire and absence of repression) becomes repressive and anti-democratic in advanced capitalist societies. This means that, although there appears to be harmony between society and individuals' desires, this is only a 'false harmony': in such a society there is ultimately no room to satisfy individuals' own necessities and desires. What is more, through the 'repressive desublimation' exerted upon individuals, any kind of resistance against such domination is absorbed by the system and ends up contributing to the dynamism of capitalism. Given this, the revolutionary change would have to come not from outside the power (in which case it would be absorbed by the system sooner or later) but from within.

The system is legitimized by an increase in productivity, an increase in the control/guidance of nature and a comfortable life for individuals who participate in such society. Therefore, the apparatus operates with the aim of calculable efficiency and puts things, men, factory and leisure at the service of this calculable efficiency. Given this situation, Marcuse's point emphasizes the need to critically acknowledge the underlying purpose of the apparatus and rule out the idea according to which calculable efficiency is neutral, objective and formal.

In other words, what concerns Marcuse is how Weber presents Western or, rather, bourgeois rationality as the culmination of a pure/abstract idea of rationality itself. Thus, in "Industrialization and Capitalism in the work of Max Weber", Marcuse attempts to bring to light something that seems to be lacking in Weber's account; that is, the inescapable connexion between rationality, capitalism and domination. Weber's account is somewhat deterministic, for industrialization is shown as the necessary destiny of the modern world. According to Marcuse, however, industrialization can develop in many different ways; there is not such a thing as the fate of industrialization, or the fate of domination.

Weber's concept of fate is construed "after the fact" of such coercion: he generalizes the blindness of a society which reproduces itself behind the back of the individuals, of a society in which the law of domination appears as objective technological law. [...] The context of Weber's analysis is the historical context in which economic reason becomes the reason of domination [...]. This fate has become a fate and inasmuch as it has become a fate it can also be abolished.¹¹

Weber's account rules out the identification of domination and thus closes down the liberatory capacities of technical reason.

[T]he very concept of technical reason is perhaps ideological. Not only the application of technology but technology itself is domination (of nature and men)—methodical, scientific, calculated, calculating control. Specific purposes and interests of domination are not foisted upon technology "subsequently" and from the outside; they enter the very construction of the technical apparatus. Technology is always a historical-social project: in it is projected what a society and its ruling interests intend to do with men and things. Such a "purpose" of domination is "substantive" and to this extent belongs to the very form of technical reason. [...] technical reason is the social reason ruling a given society and can be changed in its very structure. As technical reason, it can become the technique of liberation.¹²

3. Criticisms of Marcuse

In the history of philosophy, Marcuse's insights have been represented as belonging to the humanist perspective on technology. As it is generally claimed, this perspective asserts that technology fosters an alienating and dehumanizing culture. It is therefore not surprising that criticisms of such views are today widespread. Such views are criticized on the grounds that they consider the power of science and technology to be almighty and for claiming that, consequently, the only way to express ourselves is in a counter-cultural manner. However, this type of perspective shows an exaggeratedly mythical and unrealistic image of science and technology.¹³

Some of Marcuse's critics take him to be a defender of the idea that advanced society implied only a decrease in individuals' agency, opinion and personal autonomy and that no positive outcome could possibly be achieved from modern technology. Further, they believe that Marcuse claimed that advanced societies bring about only repressive structures, over-efficiency and control into every sphere of life and that they merely implement the existence of elites working for the attainment of their hidden interests.¹⁴

In a different vein, T. Uebel and J. O'Neill have also put forth a criticism of the radical critique of instrumental rationality that the Frankfurter Max Horkheimer initiated and was subsequently developed by other members of the Frankfurt School. In their view, the Frankfurtean critique of reason is politically forceless in the current debate about science and technology.¹⁵ To contextualize: in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno state that reason in the Enlightenment (the modern concept of reason) was already present in myth, for myth contains "a kind of rationality, a way of ordering, classifying and controlling the world"¹⁶ or their statement according to which "aboriginal myth already contains the aspect of deception which triumphs in the fraudulence of Fascism yet imputes the same practice of lies to the Enlightenment. But there is no work which offers more eloquent testimony of the mutual implication of enlightenment and myth than that of Homer, the basic text of European civilization".¹⁷ In his *The Eclipse of Reason*, Horkheimer further clarifies that modern reason is however subjectified in that it only refers to the relation of an object to a purpose and not to the object itself.¹⁸ Under this rationality aims and objectives cannot be judged in themselves but only in relation to something else. There is, therefore, the danger that ideas,

beliefs or principles are not judged in rational terms but their desirability depends instead upon factors other than reason. This is what Horkheimer calls the 'formalization of reason': "no particular reality can seem reasonable *per se*".¹⁹ Given this context democratic principles, for instance, become dependent on the preferences of the people without necessarily being objectively assessed or, in the extreme, on economic forces and, thus, there is no guarantee against tyranny or totalitarian ruling. Further, domination becomes internalized in modern subjects themselves.

In this way Horkheimer exercised a radical critique of Positivism and its definition of rationality understood only as formal rationality. In its effort to separate reason from mythology and madness and to formulate a true concept of science, Horkheimer claims, Positivism fails to justify and legitimate science's absolute authority as an intellectual principle. Instead, scientific reasoning is made into an 'absolute' by means of dogmatic criteria of scientific success.

Horkheimer's ideas are pro-Enlightenment in that he claims we ought to exorcise ourselves from superstition and evil forces, from romantic and anti-intellectual ideas, and also from what is currently (under the influence of Positivism) called reason. However, O'Neill and Uebel state that while Horkheimer provides a radical critique of reason and declares its criteria useless and wrong, he still attempts to use reason itself as the criterion for his own critique. This is a contradictory position that brings his theory to a *cul-de-sac*.

Furthermore, Uebel and O'Neill claim that Marcuse's critique of science and technology carries within the unsolved problems of his colleagues. In order to support their point they recall the aforementioned quotation from Marcuse in *Negations*:

*Not only the application of technology but technology itself is domination (of nature and men)—methodical, scientific, calculated, calculating control. Specific purposes and interest of domination are not foisted upon technology "subsequently" and from the outside; they enter the very construction of the technical apparatus. Technology is always a historical-social project: in it is projected what a society and its ruling interests intend to do with men and things. Such a "purpose" of domination is "substantive" and to this extent belongs to the very form of technical reason.*²⁰

In short, Uebel and O'Neill claim that the mere concept of science and technology implies domination for Marcuse and that therefore he (like the

preceding members of the Frankfurt School) cannot envisage a science free of domination. Marcuse, they say, proposes a new sensibility and a science guided by aesthetic values, but is not clear what the 'rational character' of the new science would be like, what the criteria of his theory would be or what would characterize the new types of concepts.²¹ Similarly, J. Habermas²² claims that Marcuse perceives revolution as a mere matter of changing the institutional framework. This solution, however, does not influence science and technology *per se* since only the guiding values would be changed but the structure of scientific progress would be maintained. Besides, Marcuse's writings are contradictory in that he defines science and technology both as reification vehicles and liberatory ones.

Such lack of clarity makes his entire theory problematic since there is no clear definition of what the opposition to the established technological rationality would be. If science and technology are fundamentally biased toward certain interests, will every use we make of them reproduce capitalist hegemony?; How can we save the concept of reason after having defined technological knowledge as fundamentally ideological? How can the fatal destiny of science be changed without demystifying rationality?

4. In Defense of Marcuse: The Democratization of Functions

We can basically sum up the aforementioned attacks on Marcuse's critique of modern science and technology as three main and interconnected criticisms:

- a) The belief that science is autonomous, develops independently of individuals' needs, restricts individuals' agency and is almighty.
- b) The Frankfurtean tradition's incapacity to save or redeem formal reason.
- c) The unclear and controversial concept of science and technology as repressive and liberatory at once.

I believe these criticisms are unfair in that they do not take into account the intricacies of Marcuse's account. For the rest of the paper I aim to clarify such intricacies and accuracies.

In "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology" Marcuse claims that, contrary to what it may seem, technological and critical rationality (autonomy of thought) *per se* are not absolutely opposing truths but con-

verge in at least one aspect: namely, the capacity for democratization of technology. With technologization, he says, the distribution and production system has been rationalized in such a way that the difference between the subordinate and the expert have now more to do with power and training than with essential insights. The difference between experts and engineers is due more to the division of power than to the division of work. However this gap becomes more noticeable every day. Technological power brings social power in that all kinds of social distinctions are ascribed to the technological leader or the expert. Apart from that, the technologization understood merely as the rationalization of the production and the distribution system provides a framework for the shared knowledge and shared function of the expert and the non-expert, and thus a general democratization of functions.

In short,

*(T)he standardization of production and consumption, the mechanization of labor, the improved facilities of transportation and communication, the extension of training, the general dissemination of knowledge—[...] facilitate an exchangeability of functions.*²³

These ideas that Marcuse is posing suggest that he does not think of technology and science as inherently dominating (as his critiques claim) but rather that there are more issues involved in Marcuse's claim in relation to modern science and technology. There must therefore be another reason why the process of technologization results in technocratic regimes instead of democratic societies.

In this respect, Marcuse claims that the problem of technocracy is not so much technologization but the way it is organized or, in other words, bureaucratization.²⁴ Thus, while specialization by itself is entirely compatible with democratization of functions, "fixated specialization, [...] tends to atomize the masses and to insulate the subordinate from the executive functions".²⁵ Said differently, when the functions of the individuals become divided into rigid, established activities, it becomes almost impossible for the individual to stand as an individual and be able to oppose the organization. "Machine individualizes men by following the physiological lines of individuality: it allocates the work to finger, hand, arm, foot [...]"²⁶ From the point of view of the "natural" way of individuation, *principium individuationis*, men become individuals due to the "uniqueness" of their body. Within the system of scarcity, however, men developed their senses and their organs as implements of labor, of the

struggle for life, business, power... Therefore, men's thoughts, appetites and desires were not theirs but imposed by the struggle. Their senses became antagonistic and this has an immense influence on the individuality of man.

Marcuse believed, however, that techniques might promote the democratization of functions, and facilitate human development in work and administration, if mechanization would focus on human freedom rather than on material production.

The technological process has reduced the variety of individual qualities down to this natural basis of individualization, but this same basis may become the foundation for a new form of human development [...] Technological progress would make it possible to decrease the time and energy spent in the production of the necessities of life, and a gradual reduction of scarcity and abolition of competitive pursuits could permit the self to develop from its natural roots.²⁷

In the same vein, D. Kellner points out that: "In the light of the Frankfurt School tendency to posit technology primarily as an instrument of domination and industrial society as an apparatus of social control and standardization, it is interesting to note that Marcuse presents a more dialectical theory of society and technology in his 1941 study. Marcuse distinguishes between *technology* as an entire "mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behavior patterns, an instrument for control and domination", and *technics* as techniques of production or "such instruments as cars and computers".²⁸ Therefore, it seems to me that Marcuse believes techniques by themselves can promote authoritarianism as well as liberty. Furthermore, we find this idea also in F. Neumann:

Large-scale technology on the one hand may imply the total dependence of the industrial population upon a complex, integrated mechanism, which can be operated only in a highly organized, stratified, and hierarchical system. This system must instill the virtues of discipline, obedience and subordination—no matter who owns the means of production. Thus, modern industrialism preaches the very virtues which every authoritarian political system seeks to cultivate. These virtues are repressive because they are opposed to man's self-determination.

On the other hand, the very opposite virtues may also be strengthened by technology; self-reliance, awareness of one's power and, most particularly, the feeling of solidarity—that is, a spirit of co-operation as opposed to authoritarianism.²⁹

In sum, the image of the bureaucratic system in which individuals are tied to the world of experts, and in which there are seemingly autonomous techniques, can now be reformulated to be understood as an expression of a technical ensemble that has ended up as what we could call 'a technocracy' but does not necessarily have to be so.

5. The Need to look at the Context

In other words, Marcuse is calling for attention to the context in which techniques develop and exist. By arguing that techniques host the capacity to result in a technocratic or totalitarian regime as well as its opposite, a democratic technological society, he is opening a line through which we can explore the relationship between technology and socio-political systems.

Heidegger once said in a famously controversial interview with *Der Spiegel* magazine that:

*Meanwhile in the past thirty years it should have become clearer that the global movement of modern technology is a force whose scope in determining history can scarcely be overestimated. A decisive question for me today is: how can a political system accommodate itself to the technological age, and which political system would this be? I have no answer to this question I am not convinced that is democracy.*³⁰

This quotation shows all too clearly Heidegger's pessimistic philosophy of technology and a tendency towards the anti-democratic ideas he held during his lifetime. The underlying assumption in this quotation points towards a supposed inadequacy of democratic regimes within the context of modern technology.

In this same respect but on the other side of the spectrum, we can recall the concerns that accompanied Neumann during his whole lifetime. As Marcuse puts it in his preface to Neumann's "The Democratic and the Authoritarian State": "[...] why human freedom and happiness declined at the stage of mature civilization when the objective conditions for their realization were greater then ever before".³¹

As I will show, Neumann also reminds us that modern totalitarianism and technocratic regimes cannot be understood outside of the context of modern technologization, industrialization and, further, the weaknesses of democratic ideology itself. I suggest that Marcuse's call for attention to

the context within which technologies are constituted can be understood in terms of at least two overlapping and interconnected trends:

- * The question of democracy in the context of the process of rationalization that results in totalitarianism.
- * The question of technology in the context of the process of industrialization that results in technocracy.

Rationalization, we may say, expresses itself in different modes within the political, the economic or the social system. Thus, whereas rationalization applied to the economy (industrialization/mechanization) can bring technocracy about, the extension of rationalization into the area of political deliberation can also result in totalitarianism. These two processes, however, are not to be understood as separate processes; they feed each other, overlap each other and share the same origin.

Now, let us see what the process of modern rationalization entails. In what follows, I will elaborate on four different aspects resulting from the modern rationalization process which will help us clarify the contingent dynamics that characterize the emergence of advanced capitalist societies.

a) The Market Economy as Pseudo-rationalist Institution

The rationalization process, we learnt from Marcuse and others, is an ideological rationalization. Otto Neurath, an unconventional Positivist and member of the Vienna Circle, refers to the origins of Cartesian rationality to elaborate a similar point. He claims Cartesian rationality to be rather *pseudo*-rationality. In his "The Lost Wanderers of Descartes and the Auxiliary Motive" he explains why: Descartes put forth a conceptualization of theoretical reasoning that would produce definite, certain and repeatable statements and would provide a complete scientific view of the world.

However, when talking about practical rational knowledge Descartes does no longer defend the same view. Quite the contrary, he considers that given that sometimes there are no sufficient insights to make a decision that is certain, we can find ourselves in the position of having to make use of provisional rules (e.g. tradition, drawing of lots, instinct...). Therefore, for Descartes, the nature of practical and theoretical knowledge differs.³²

Neurath not only does not accept the Cartesian difference between theoretical and practical knowledge but also asserts that defining theoretical rational knowledge as an exercise of unambiguous insights is a mistake.

For him, it is utterly important to understand that not only in practice but also in thinking (that is in theoretical knowledge) we are in a situation of having to use provisional rules and having to accept that rational insights cannot avoid ambiguity. The process of theoretical and practical reasoning presents many moments of indecision or ambiguity where one is in a situation of having to use provisional insights and/or make decisions. In these moments of indecision, one is compelled to use auxiliary elements such as instinct, tradition or drawing of lots.³³

*(...) in science, as in everyday life, there are frequent situations in which we tend to seek a 'rational' solution because we do not want to admit that there is no such thing as 'rational' behaviour in many of them; or because we do not have adequate information at our disposal (...) to justify a certain course of behaviour or action. Further reasons for this incapacity may be that we cannot draw conclusions for the future from our experiences to date, or that there are no proven rules of behaviour etc.*³⁴

These auxiliary elements, Neurath claims, are by no means irrational but necessarily belong to the process of reasoning. On the contrary, Cartesian rationalism has always tried to dismiss such auxiliary motives as enemies of rational insights and as belonging to the same category as superstition. Therefore, for Neurath, Descartes' extreme rationalism relied more on illusions and misconceptions than on a realistic definition of reason.³⁵ Given this situation, a redefinition of rationalism must entail the acceptance of auxiliary motives and the recognition of the limits of reason. Neurath asserts that science is historically constructed, negotiated and in need of constantly being rechecked. Science does not offer unique determinate answers; on the contrary, it acknowledges uncertainty and the necessity of provisional statements. This means that the belief in the achievement of the optimal solution is an illusion and those who base their beliefs on this illusion are not rational but *pseudo-rational*.

To clarify: we say of modern rationalism that it is ideological because it pretends to be able to give a rational answer to every possible question; that is to say, because it pretends not to be what it actually is: pseudo-rational. Given that pseudorationality represents that belief that the process of reasoning results in only one best scientific solution, a big concern is that "pseudorationalism is dangerous and may sometimes support totalitarianism".³⁶ Pseudorationalism is the doctrine of the overestimation of reason and a thus mistaken understanding of science and knowledge. Furthermore, as the children of modernity and Cartesianism,

modern socio-political structures are guided by pseudorationalist standards and criteria and as such pseudorationality penetrates into every sphere of modern societies. In fact, we find in pseudorationalism the origin of technocratic beliefs that spread throughout modern times of extreme rationalization, industrialization and bureaucratization.

According to Neurath, pseudorationalist ideas have made possible the emergence of the evils of the capitalist market. The market economy is inflexible and intolerant, for it is constructed upon pseudorationalist ideas of only the one solution (to issues of predictability of future wants or to the difficulties to compare heterogeneous social choices, for instance) and based on the non-pluralist concept of money (the single unit of calculation). Because practical knowledge cannot be translated into propositional form it is impossible to represent it in a non-market society. Hence, defenders of the capitalist market claim that the price mechanism provides a way in which individuals can communicate this tacit information and coordinate their economic activities accordingly.³⁷ Neurath, however, disagrees with the price mechanism. In his opinion, one must judge directly the desirability of the social choices because bringing the decision to a matter of one single unit is not possible.

"Rational practical thinking need not involve any single unit that reduces decision-making to a purely technical procedure. It requires ethical and political judgment"³⁸. The single unit calculation is poor and does not take into account other dimensions (ethical, social, political...); instead it translates everything to pure technical questions. Neurath says:

*no single measure is adequate to the multidimensional nature of welfare [...] [T]here is no reason to assume that one can capture the different dimensions of options by a single unit and reduce choices to a matter of calculation.*³⁹

For Neurath, an argument that defends the necessity of a single unit of calculation in order to make a rational decision is a pseudo-rationalist argument because it does not allow other solutions, it reduces everything to one unit, and does not account for other dimensions that are also important.

Another argument in defense of the capitalist market is the claim that the market economy is a good way of resolving the unpredictability and ignorance of future wants. This is because it represents "a discovery procedure in which different hypotheses about the future are embodied in entrepreneurial acts and tested in the market place".⁴⁰ In response to this

Neurath claims that unpredictability is also present in social decision-making and not only in the market sphere: “the problem of making social decisions in conditions of unpredictability and the absence of complete knowledge is a general fact of social life which, in existing societies, permeates non-market spheres”.⁴¹ The attempt to do away with this unpredictability is another representation of pseudorationalism’s masking of the absence of absolute knowledge.

Following on from Neurath’s insights on the modern pseudorationalist market, we find in Marcuse and Neumann yet other ways in which economic liberalism impinges upon modern liberal democratic societies. One such example is the influence of mechanization upon individuality.

b) The Influence of Mechanization upon the Individual

Neumann and Marcuse explore the modern economic sphere in their respective “Democratic and the Authoritarian State” and “Some Social Implications”. The principle of individuality before the machine age, they say, was defined by the pursuit of self-interest, and self-interest was seen as a rational thing, as something resulting from and guided by autonomous thinking. These were the defining lines that shaped rationality and individuality in the pre-mechanization era. The principle of individualistic rationality was that of constant opposition between the established social order and individual rationality, a constant search for the ideas and values that formed individuals’ rationality and an unceasing opposition to the social ideas and value systems imposed upon them. For these reasons, liberalism (as an ideal of free competition where individuality would be defined by those achievements that were made part of society’s needs) was in principle an adequate social setting that would be harmonized with individualistic rationality.⁴²

With the mechanization process, however, the liberal order changed; the dominion of giant enterprises and machine industry impinged upon the weaker competitors, imposing their force upon nature and abolishing the free economic subject. Competitive efficiency favored the enterprises with highly mechanized equipment and a higher state of technological development; in short, those with the greater concentration of political power. High technologization implies domination by a few enterprises of an entire industry, ownership of materials, equipment and processes. The effect that these dynamics exert on the individual is terrific; they contribute to the disappearance of the individualist rationality. Instead of the

individual, the enterprise machinery becomes the one that dictates the quantity, the form, the kind of commodities to be produced and in this way affects the apparatus, the rationality, of those for whom it produces.⁴³ Given this, the free economic subject of the liberal society becomes a piece of the efficiency paradigm with the duty to do whatever it is assigned to him. The facts directing individuals' thoughts and actions are not only external to the individual and independent from their autonomous rationality, but they also pertain to the machine process.

Furthermore, with the expansion of large-scale industries hierarchical organization consisting of the separation of workers and planners become generalized. Together with this, through marketization, new segments of life become part of the technological apparatus. This brings about a dependence of people on external services (not only in the material sense but also, as Marcuse points out, in the loss of critical thinking). Within this context of large scale organization, individual rationality is transformed into standardized efficiency. The world is rationalized and this rationalization has become a social power. Individual aspects and distinctions are now quantifiable skills. This creates a "world in which the machine is the factor and he (the individual) the factum".⁴⁴ To this respect, we shall remember Andrew Feenberg's example of the speed-bump as a design by which the individual loses the possibility of making a rational choice about the speed of his/her driving and in which the decision is, instead, taken for the individual. Feenberg claims that technological designs and the value system that they carry within represent the social order. His example echoes Marcuse's in "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology":

*A man who travels by automobile chooses his routes from the highway maps. Towns, lakes and mountains appear as obstacles to be bypassed. The countryside is shaped and organized by the highway: what one finds en route is a byproduct or annex of the highway. Numerous signs and posters tell the traveller what to do and think; they even request his attentions to the beauties of nature or the hallmarks of history. Others have done the thinking for him, and perhaps for the better. Convenient parking spaces have been constructed where the broadest and more surprising view is opened. Giant advertisements tell him when to stop and find the pause that refreshes. And all of these is indeed for his benefit, safety and comfort; he receives what he wants. Business, tech-nics, human needs and nature are welded together into one rational and expedient mechanism. He will fare best who follows its directions, subordinating his spontaneity to the anonymous wisdom which ordered everything for him.*⁴⁵

Indeed, the machine, the social order, is perfectly reasonable as well as rational. It represents convenience in such a way that not adapting to it appears as not only incredibly inconvenient - a loss of time and energy - but also unreasonable. In short, rational autonomy becomes ultimately a disadvantage.

The effects of the integration of technological rationality into the social order, as well as the abolition of the opposition by integration into the apparatus, have paradoxically accentuated rather than concealed the features of individualist society. Oppositional groups have become absorbed by mass parties and the crowd (the mass) has realized the total isolation of the individual, stripping individuals of any particularity and leaving their lives as matter of pure brute self-preservation. The crowd is just a grotesque realization of the individuals, says Marcuse, the opposite of the community. One should remember, however: these members of the masses are *still* individuals.

In fact, with the processes of industrialization, mechanization and marketization the realm of political deliberation became dominated by technocratic or pseudorationalist ideas.

c) Technocracy in Political Deliberation

Within the context of industrialization, pseudorationalistic and technocratic ideas extended also into the realm of political deliberation. Technocracy became the ideology of the nineteenth century, consisting of an ideal reduction of our societal institution to empirical formulas. Many started to believe in the Baconian idea that the culmination of modern technology would imply a technical elite ruling in the name of efficiency.⁴⁶ Saint Simon, one of the theoreticians of technocracy, believed that the cultural unity in Europe was breaking down due to the competing forces of Protestantism, capitalism and nationalism. This fragmentation was seen as muddle and counterproductive. In this context both the ideas of expert management, and the administrative state that would manage things smoothly and without muddle, emerged. This is, in fact, the core idea of the technocratic ideology, reminiscent of the pseudorationalist feature in every social sphere. The Positivist, A. Comte, for instance, felt hostility towards politicians and believed democracy to be the root of social and political conflict.⁴⁷ In short, democracy was regarded by the technocratic ideologists as muddle and mess: a complicated and mistaken system of decision-making.

Nothing is more irrational to technocratic theorists than the disjointed, incremented forms of decision making (typically described as "muddling through") that result from a political commitment to democratic bargains and compromise.⁴⁸

These technocrats believed that class struggle should be replaced by technical decision-making and that a good society is one with material productivity and technological progress.

Through the role of experts, technocracy shaped the very way we think and understand politics. In this sense Fischer claims that, in the technocratic context, although "politicians still choose one policy option over another, [...] it is increasingly the experts who shape the deliberative framework within which they must choose".⁴⁹ This highly rationalized and mechanized structure is translated in political terms in the form of a totalitarian regime.

d) Democracy as a Weak Political System

The abovementioned transformations resulted in the constitution of technically advanced democratic systems which, ironically, lead some to the belief that modern democracy can turn out to be weak when put in the context of rationalization.

In this respect Neumann says that economic power is the root of political power, which applies also to democratic regimes.⁵⁰ Whatever economic activity the system partakes in is for the sake of maintaining a stable political order. There is no pure economic activity, nor pure political activity since economic policy is translated into political power. Within modern democracies, an instrument for such translation is the political party. However the political party, an institution whose importance lies in the democratic system itself, turns out to be an ambiguous institution: on the one hand, the political party makes politics more democratic given that there is a need to appeal to social groups larger than the interest of immediate groups. On the other, through the political party each social group presents their selfish interests as universal, so that the struggle for political power becomes hidden, ideological. This makes it very difficult to identify political power within a democracy.

On these grounds Neumann asserts that the attitude of democracy toward political power is undoubtedly positive; "[...] the growing political power will ultimately lead to a totalitarian system"⁵¹ - he says.

Thus, modern rationalization and industrialization impregnate every mod-

ern institution: from politics to science and technology, from the market sphere to work division... This is also what Horkheimer had pointed out when he referred to the political dangers of formalized reason by which objectives are judged in relation to something else—such as economic forces, power or the interest of the majority, to name a few.

In a similar way, Neumann's concerns also echoes those of the Greco-French thinker Cornelius Castoriadis. As he asserts in "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy", ancient Greeks were well aware that democracy implied autonomy since there was not absolute knowledge or heteronomy to rely on. In this respect, Castoriadis argues that ancient Greeks were pioneers in filtering the absence of certainty in theoretical knowledge into practical knowledge of which politics is part.

Democracy is, therefore, the regime of self-limitation, or the 'tragic regime': firstly, because in a democracy there is no absolute criterion to constitute a rule or a law, and secondly, because there is no guarantee that whatever criterion is taken as valid will not be transgressed. In short, a sound democratic regime would not permit the role of experts or professionals of knowledge because in politics, more than in theoretical knowledge, the law is the people themselves.⁵² Therefore, democratic conditions contain within already the danger of ending up in totalitarianism; this is further accentuated within the context of modern democratic conditions and the advanced capitalist system. Neumann says that, however, under modern rationalization the democratic process is overruled by technocratic criteria coming through the economic market. As Neumann and Marcuse showed, the economic sphere is ruled by technical features that result in industrialization and the taking over of the free economic subject by mechanized enterprises with high economic power. Since economic power, we learnt from Neumann, is political power, modern over-rationalization ends up ultimately interrupting the democratic process.

Indeed, Neumann also points out that modern industrialism is politically ambivalent because it contains and intensifies two diametrically opposed trends in modern societies: the trend towards freedom and the trend towards repression.⁵³ A fully developed totalitarian dictatorship, Neumann says, is the form an industrial society may adopt if it should become necessary to maximize its repressive elements and eliminate its liberal ones.^{liv} I find these ideas are not at odds with the reinterpretation of the Marcusean ideas that I have presented in this paper. On the contrary, I

believe Marcuse's claim according to which there is a point of convergence between critical and technological rationality, finds further support in Neumann's ideas. This is so, for instance, in that the ambivalence of modern society has to do with both its inherent potential to be democratic and the contingencies that make of it a technocratic society instead. Furthermore, Neumann's ideas correspond, at least in some aspects, with both Castoriadis and Neurath on this matter.

6. Conclusion

This paper has presented Marcuse within the broadest context of the identification of the processes behind the constitution of modern advanced societies. As such, it shows a part of Marcuse's theory that has been neglected and undermined and forces us to rethink the criticism directed at him. I would like to suggest that Marcuse's theory was not as naïve as has been portrayed, and that his account opens up deliberation around the intricacies that govern modern social-political structures.

Through his revisited definition of technology as encompassing a whole socio-political organization we have shown that he opens up a further debate around what makes modern technology either liberatory or domineering. Furthermore, by looking at the relationship between political structures and the process of rationalization (and the subsequent process of industrialization), Marcuse directs his thought towards parameters rarely associated with the early Frankfurt School that, not by chance, hit on much of Neumann's work on modern authoritarianism and political power. Such a discourse reveals the versatility of Marcuse's definition of technology, as well as of other potentially recoverable work by the Frankfurters.

Besides, by showing Marcuse's relevance to such issues this paper has also focused on theorists who would not, in principle, have much to do with Marcuse's thought, bringing them together in their deliberations on topics such as the relationship between technology and totalitarianism that could not be more relevant today.

In short, this paper has aimed at recovering Marcuse's thought as a relevant and fruitful theory in relation to technocracy and totalitarianism in advanced technological societies.

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- 1 F. Fischer, *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise* (Newbury Park (California): Sage Publications, 1990), 59-74.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 H. Marcuse, *Negations* (London: The Penguin Press, 1968), 202.
- 5 Ibid., 220-221.
- 6 Ibid., 216.
- 7 Ibid., 218.
- 8 Ibid., 207.
- 9 Ibid., 222-224.
- 10 This concept is explained in length in "The Conquest of the Unhappy Consciousness: Repressive Desublimation" in *One-Dimensional Man*.
- 11 Ibid., 214-215.
- 12 Ibid., 223-224-225.
- 13 Quintanilla, *Tecnología: Un Enfoque Filosófico y otros ensayos de la filosofía de la tecnología*.
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- 15 Uebel & O'Neill, "Horkheimer and Neurath", 100-103.
- 16 S. Jarvis, *Adorno* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 23.
- 17 M. Horkheimer & T. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Allen Lane, 1973) 45-46.
- 18 Objective rationalization deals with universal truths and can judge if actions are right or wrong, whereas in subjective rationalization there is no notion of absolute truth but right or wrong is defined by each situation. (M. Horkheimer, *The Eclipse of Reason* (Oxford: Continuum Books, 1973), 6.
- 19 Ibid., 7.
- 20 Marcuse, *Negations*, 223-224-225.
- 21 Uebel & O'Neill, "Horkheimer and Neurath", 20-22.
- 22 J. Habermas, "Technology and Science as "ideology"" in *Towards a Rational Society*, 81-99
- 23 M. Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1998), 56.
- 24 We must also clarify here that by "technology" or "technocracy" Marcuse is referring to a technology that incorporates a given organisation resulting in either technocracy (when the organisation is bureaucratic) or a liberating technology (when the organisation is of a different sort). Thus, when he says "technology itself is domination" (quotation is p.11) I interpret "technology" as already incorporating a bureaucratic organisation.
- 25 Ibid., 57.
- 26 Ibid., 63.
- 27 Ibid., 64.
- 28 Ibid., 5.
- 29 F. Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1957), 251.
- 30 M. Heidegger, in "Only a God Can Save Us" in *The Heidegger Controversy* (Massachusetts: the MIT Press, 1998), 104.
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- 33 Ibid., 4.
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- 35 O. Neurath, "LWD", 7.
- 36 J. O'Neill, "Socialism, associations and the market", in *Economy and Society*, vol. 32, Number 2 (May 2003), 190.
- 37 O'Neill, "Socialism, associations and the market", 189.
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- 39 O'Neill, "Socialism, associations and the market", 189.
- 40 Ibid., 191.

- 41 *Ibid.*, 192 originally from “Neurath-Hayek correspondence, 1945” in *The Otto Neurath Nachlass in Harlem*.
- 42 Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, 43-44.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 44-47.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 44.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 46.
- 46 Fischer, *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise*, 66-69.
- 47 *Ibid.*, 70-71.
- 48 *Ibid.*, 22.
- 49 *Ibid.*, 20.
- 50 Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, 11.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 52 C. Castoriadis, “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy” in *The Castoriadis Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 282-284.
- 53 Neumann, *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State: essays in political and legal history*, 245.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 246.

"Hamlet could never know the peace of a 'good ending'": Benjamin, Derrida, and the Melancholy of Critical Theory

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▪ The reception of *Hamlet* in critical theory is connected to a question about the nature of critical theory itself, namely, Is critical theory irreducibly melancholy, or, instead, is perpetual melancholy a danger that critical theory must ward off? This question is not simply a retrospective one that looks back and takes stock after the fact. Rather, it is a question that has always accompanied critical theory as its troubled conscience. Troubled, because melancholy is, on the one hand, inherently self-critical, the unhappy consciousness that makes critique itself both possible and necessary; but troubled too because melancholy is, on the other hand, prone to despair and thus to quietism. Hence the periodic effort on the part of critical theorists to rouse themselves from their melancholy, as when Lukács threw off the despairing utopianism of *The Theory of the Novel* in favor of the manic revolutionary optimism of *History and Class Consciousness*. But hence too those inverse moments when melancholy has interrupted mania, as in the negative dialectics of Adorno. The question of whether melancholy is a terminable or interminable condition – a “nighted color” eventually to be “cast off,” or “that within” (i.e., something essential) “which passeth show” – is as much a question about Hamlet as it is about critical theory. To those for whom melancholy is critical theory’s way of keeping faith with the dead, Hamlet figures as an exemplary ethical and political subject. But Hamlet is anathema to those who believe that melancholy is critical theory’s problem, the thing that must be terminated in order for philosophers to change the world instead of simply interpreting it. *To brood or not to brood, that is the question*. Herein lies the antinomy of critical theory. Its thesis is that melancholy keeps faith with the dead by refusing to complete a work of mourning that would paradoxically forget the past by memorializing it. Its antithesis is that melancholy fails to change the world not because of its ethical fidelity to the past but because of its self-absorption in its own damaged life. Support for the antithesis can be found in Freud, for whom Hamlet’s melancholy attests to his guilt over having wished for his father to die. On this account, melancholy’s refusal to mourn is less a way of keeping faith with ghosts than it

is a narcissistic failure to come to terms with the dead. But support for the thesis can be found, as we will see, in Benjamin and Derrida's interpretations of Hamlet's melancholy as a response to the foreclosure of the future. In the course of defending this account, I will propose a "dynamical" solution to the antinomy by deploying Benjamin and Derrida's implicit distinction between Hamlet's "messianic" melancholy – his acceptance of the charge to set an out of joint time right – and the "fatalistic" melancholy of Shakespeare's Timon of Athens, whose impotent rage against the predicament of living in an out of joint time condemns him to moral and political solipsism. We can accept both the thesis and the antithesis of the antinomy of critical theory by embracing the ethical stance of messianic melancholy while rejecting the narcissism of fatalistic melancholy.

I.

Matthias Fritsch has recently criticized those who read Benjamin as an essentially melancholy thinker.¹ In his writings on Baudelaire, Benjamin associates melancholy with the bourgeois representation of time as an "homogeneous, empty" medium in which historical events succeed one another like the series of "beads of a rosary."² Benjamin rejected this linear conception of time in favor of a messianic model according to which every moment is charged with the power of redeeming the past. He regarded "left-wing melancholy" as a symptom of being stuck in a fundamentally bourgeois conception of history. By advocating a Kantian interpretation of communist society as a regulative ideal that history was inexorably approaching, the German Social Democrats encouraged political quietism, not only by making action in the present seem superfluous but by counseling patience until an opportune "revolutionary situation" manifested itself.³ Benjamin saw that to wait was to miss political opportunities that exist, literally, at every moment. He saw too that the very sense of a political opportunity could only be grasped by countering the metaphysical conception of time that the Social Democrats shared with bourgeois historicists.

Fritsch associates melancholy not only with the homogeneous "ticking of the seconds"⁴ but with a one-sided politics of memory that focuses exclusively on victims of past violence.⁵ In so doing he implies that there is an underlying affinity between a despairing politics of victimization and the seemingly optimistic politics of the German Social Democrats. This claim

may seem surprising, for the Social Democrats' liberal utopianism, whatever its shortcomings, does not seem to have privileged the past over the future in any obvious way. However, the two interpretations of the melancholy sense of time dovetail if we take Benjamin's understanding of the representation of homogeneous time to foreclose the very futurity of the future insofar as it treats the future merely as a series of not-yet-actualized events whose eventual passing makes them count as in some sense *already* belonging to the past. Such is the point of view of fatalism. This is not to say that the representation of homogeneous time precludes epistemic uncertainty about the future or even freedom; only a teleologically thick projection of historical progress does that. Rather, the representation of homogeneous time is fatalistic simply insofar as it effectively treats the entirety of temporal events – including those that cannot be anticipated, i.e., those belonging to the nominal future or the vanishing present – as if they were already past and thus as the object of a kind of *premature* mourning such as Freud describes in his essay "On Transience."⁸ So understood, melancholy represents a mourning for futurity itself. The flip side of this idea is that even the melancholy attitude toward *past* suffering tacitly presupposes the homogeneous conception of time insofar as it cannot see what Fritsch calls "the *promise* inherent in all useless suffering,"⁷ that is, the promise clinging even to past suffering, refusing, as it were, to let the past be relegated *merely* to the past. If this is so, then even in its attitude toward past violence, there is something paradoxically premature about the grief evinced in melancholy. Like Agamben and Žižek, Fritsch characterizes melancholy as a kind of false mourning that narcissistically seeks to possess its object.⁹ Along with Derrida, he contrasts such "possessive mourning" with an ethically charged experience of "interminable" mourning. But unlike Derrida, who equates possessive mourning with any attempt to be *done* with the dead, Fritsch identifies possessive mourning with the melancholic's narcissistic *identification* with the unmourned dead.⁹ This seems to conflate Derrida's worry about "triumphalism" – the ego's celebratory triumph over the *mourned* dead – with the related but distinct worry about the manner in which a melancholy ego is *haunted* by the *unmourned* dead.¹⁰ Far from representing the regulative ideal of a "good" mourning without the least trace of melancholy, Derrida's admonition against triumphalism bespeaks a concern about *mania*, that is, about the melancholic's attempt to throw off all memory of the past in favor of a stance of sheer expectation. This is the temptation that he thinks Marx succumbs to in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* when he suggests that the proletarian revolution of the future will only succeed if it is able to liberate itself

from the past once and for all, leaving the dead to bury their own.¹¹ If it is true that the conception of homogeneous time reduces all events to the status of the *past*, then, conversely, messianic time could be said to represent all events as belonging to a not-yet-determined *future*. Despite its attentiveness to past events, messianism dreams of an absolute break with the pastness of the past at the very moment when it hopes to rescue the dead from their fate, that is, from fate itself. This suggests that messianic time can be associated with mania in the same way that homogeneous time can with melancholy. Derrida suggests that Benjamin verges on a kind of mania when he rejects parliamentary democracy in favor of a politics based on “pure means,” that is, on means not directed toward any preconceived end.¹² Acting without any predetermined end whatsoever is mania’s way of attempting to purify the future from any taint of pastness. Did Benjamin, in his effort to avoid left-wing melancholy, succumb to the contrary temptation of “left-wing mania”? Or was he just as critical of the one as of the other?

In his account of the relationship between melancholy and spleen in Baudelaire, Benjamin seems to recognize that mania – like the purported triumphalism of a completed work of mourning – is less melancholy’s other than its *symptom*, the periodic outburst of “rage” against “the ticking of the seconds that enslaves the melancholy man.” Benjamin finds the “prototype” for Baudelaire’s “angry,” melancholy man in Timon of Athens, who “rages against people indiscriminately,” unable to distinguish “his proven friend from his mortal enemy.”¹³ The example of Timon is important because, as Derrida notes in *Specters of Marx*, Shakespeare’s misanthrope is *the* figure with whom Marx identifies when he dreams of being done, once and for all, with ghosts, that is, with the quasi-phenomenon of spectrality that “weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”¹⁴ In contrast to Baudelaire’s Timon, who rails indiscriminately against friend and foe alike, Marx’s Timon rails against money, that is, against that which is responsible for blurring the distinction between friend and foe, making it impossible to tell the one from the other in a definitive way. Another way to put the difference would be to say that whereas Baudelaire’s Timon rebels against the monotonous ticking of homogeneous time, Marx’s Timon rebels against the spectral Thing that disadjusts time, making it necessary to set time right. According to Derrida, Marx failed to see that the task of setting right a time out of joint requires not that we do away with anachrony but, on the contrary, that we maintain the “originary” anachrony that is a necessary condition for the possibility of justice – even though it

is, also, the condition for the possibility of all of the injustices against which Marx rightly inveighs. The trick, according to Fritsch, is to figure out how to discriminate between "good ghosts" and "bad ghosts."¹⁵ On this account, Marx is right to want to exorcize the bad ghosts associated with commodity and capital fetishism, but Derrida is right to insist both on the impossibility of eradicating fetishism *tout court*, and on the fact that an ethic of hospitality begins, as it were, in haunted houses.¹⁶ In effect, this is a way of saying that Marx is both right and wrong to identify with Timon, or to say that Timon is right to curse money but wrong to curse human beings for failing to escape the logic that makes them unavoidably susceptible to monetary relations. Timon's error is implied in his perverse variation on "O my friends, there is no friend," the oft-repeated lament that Derrida addresses in *Politics of Friendship*. When Shakespeare's Alcibiades asks Timon "what friendship may I do thee?"¹⁷ – a question whose sincerity, though always subject to skeptical doubts (as Stanley Cavell has emphasized in his readings of Shakespeare), *ought* to be taken on faith (as both Cavell and Derrida urge) – Timon replies, "Promise me friendship, but perform none."¹⁸

The obvious question to ask is whether Benjamin reads Baudelaire's affinity with Timon in the same way that Derrida reads Marx's. If so, Benjamin would be saying that just as it is impossible to do away with originary anachrony and wrong to try, so it is impossible to escape homogeneous time altogether and wrong to try. These two claims may seem to be at variance with each other, but not if we take originary anachrony to situate us *in* a homogeneous time that it simultaneously disrupts. But does Benjamin think that it *is* impossible to escape homogeneous time altogether and wrong to try? This brings us back to the question about melancholy. In his study of the German *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin associates the advent of the melancholy sense of time with the Protestant devaluation of salvation through "good works." By taking human destiny to be independent of any action that the individual might deliberately perform, Lutheranism effectively revived "an element of German paganism and the grim belief in the subjection of man to fate."¹⁹ To be subjected to fate means, as we have seen, to live in empty, homogeneous time and so to be stricken with melancholy. Thus Benjamin implies that the modern representation of homogeneous time is rooted neither in the Protestant work ethic per se, nor in the "homogenization of labor time as the time of abstract labor," as Fritsch, drawing on the work of Jacques Le Goff, suggestively conjectures.²⁰ Rather, for Benjamin, both the Protestant work ethic and the capi-

talist mode of production would themselves be rooted in a felt need to *fill* empty time and so combat the new melancholy. That capitalism remains mired in homogeneous time betrays the melancholy that the mania of commodity fetishism would mask. Timon explodes in rage because he recognizes this predicament without being able to do anything about it. By contrast, Benjamin takes Hamlet to persist resolutely in a melancholy that is finally “redeemed, by being confronted with itself.”²¹ In what sense?

Hamlet’s rhetorical question, “What is a man,/If his chief good and market of his time/Be but to sleep and feed?” represents for Benjamin both an expression of Lutheranism and a “protest” against it.²² Hamlet sees that life becomes literally mortified when subjected to homogeneous time. Torn between a sense of urgency and a sense of sheer futility, he finally allows his actions – and his appointment with death – to be governed by the thought that there is providence in the fall of a sparrow. On this reading, Hamlet’s silence (“The rest is silence”) is analogous to that of the tragic hero. Drawing on the work of Rosenzweig, Benjamin suggests that the pre-Socratic tragic hero was unable to articulate the protest against the mythical world that his death symbolized.²³ Analogously, we can suppose that in “want[ing] to die by some accident” Hamlet – as the exemplary hero not of tragedy but of *Trauerspiel* – registers a symbolic protest against the monotony of homogeneous time.²⁴ By persisting in his melancholy, Hamlet runs the risk of succumbing to “saturnine *acedia*,” or “indolence of the heart,” that is, of endlessly interpreting the world instead of changing it.²⁵ But at the very moment when he treats the future as if it were already past – and thus his own life as if it were already over and done with – Hamlet simultaneously takes on the weak messianic power bequeathed to him by the ghost, a power that he knows “cannot be bought cheaply.”²⁶ Given this two-fold aspect to his sense of anachrony, it would be a mistake – the mistake of mania – to attempt to recuperate the meaning of Hamlet’s death by saying that he would have been better off if only he had been able to carry out good revolutionary works immediately after being interpellated by the ghost. Fritsch seems to encourage such a reading when he identifies “the irresolute character of the baroque tyrant who is doomed on account of *acedia*” with the passive political stance advocated by the German Social Democrats.²⁷ In light of Benjamin’s later critique of “left-wing melancholy,” this retrospective reading seems justified. Perhaps Benjamin changed his mind about Hamlet’s melancholy, as Nietzsche did. However, it is also possible that Benjamin recognized an essential difference between Hamlet’s *messianic* melancholy and the sheer fatalism of “left-wing melancholy.”

In *Specters of Marx* Derrida treats Hamlet as a foil to Marx's Timon because, unlike Timon, Hamlet is keenly aware of the anachrony of time and of the double bind that the duty to set an out of joint time right imposes on the living. In Fritsch's vocabulary, this double bind could be characterized as the memorial duty to redeem the past and the promissory duty to liberate the present for an open future – or, alternatively, as the messianic duty "to blast open the continuum of history"²⁸ and the teleological duty to liberate the present from "the traditions of the dead generations" weighing on its brain. Carrying out these two things simultaneously is what Derrida liked to call "the impossible" – the impossible in this sense coinciding, paradoxically, with the morally obligatory. Hamlet gives voice to the obligatory impossible when he pronounces (while cursing) his responsibility to set right an out of joint time. It is in this respect that Hamlet differs from Timon, who simply ricochets – "like a shot from a pistol"²⁹ – from absolute hospitality to absolute inhospitality without ever discovering that the two can only be simultaneously negotiated, having learned from his fellow human beings (like Caliban of *Miranda*) *only* how to curse. We can take Derrida at his word when he writes, "I do not believe the least trace of melancholic libertinism can be found in what I try to think and say in *Specters of Marx*"³⁰ without taking this to be Derrida's way of distinguishing himself from Hamlet, for to take Hamlet to suffer from "melancholic indecisiveness"³¹ is to read him exclusively through the lens of left-wing mania.

II.

There is a long history of manic readers of *Hamlet*. One especially telling example is Henry Miller, who from November 1935 to October 1938 kept up an extensive correspondence about Hamlet with the writer Michael Fraenkel. The express aim of the correspondence was to exorcize Hamlet's ghost. This is indicated in Miller's first letter:

*If there is to be any success in our endeavor it will be in laying the ghost. For Hamlet still stalks the streets. The fault is not Shakespeare's – the fault is ours. None of us have become naturally modern enough to waylay this ghost and strangle it. For the ghost is not the father which was murdered, nor the conscience which was uneasy, but the time-spirit which has been creaking like a rusty pendulum.*³²

According to Miller, Hamlet's failure to set right a time out of joint made it impossible for him to tell the difference between being alive and being

dead. To avoid succumbing to the same fate as this “arch-symbol of death-in-life,” Miller tells Fraenkel

*it should be our purpose to set the pendulum swinging smoothly again so that we synchronize with past and future. Are the times out of joint? Then look to the clock! Not the clock on the mantelpiece, but the chronometer inside which tells when you are living and when you are not.*³³

To be “naturally modern” is to break with the historical past by substituting a living internal clock for an external clock that is forever confusing life and death. In acknowledging that he himself is not yet “naturally modern enough,” and that “Hamlet is in *our* bowels,”³⁴ Miller initially implies that he and Fraenkel suffer from a common malady that each of them can overcome by separately turning inward. Thus at the very moment that he proposes a *joint* effort to lay the ghost of Hamlet, Miller tells his co-analysand that the task at hand is an essentially solitary one. In subsequent letters, the promise of a joint self-analysis quickly gives way to something closer to a competitive potlatch – at least on Miller’s part. For as Fraenkel maintains that “the Hamlet problem” is insurmountable for “modern man,” Miller repeatedly insists that he, for one, has already resolved it once and for all. If to be haunted by Hamlet is to be uncertain as to whether one is alive or dead, then Miller claims to be not the least bit spooked. “What do I really know...?” he asks in one letter. “Only that I am alive. Does everybody know that he is alive? No! Some only imagine it: they are looking for proofs all the time.”³⁵ In another letter he insists that “there’s no question in my mind of whether I am dead-alive or alive-dead.”³⁶ What was at first characterized as *their* Hamlet problem is now called *Fraenkel’s* problem. Miller pedantically urges Fraenkel to “kill Hamlet off,” reminding him that “We want to get rid of the ghosts that stalk us,” and that “If you are for the death of an outlived tradition, as you say, you have to be passionate about that and prove to us that it really is dead for you by living deeds.”³⁷ So insistent is Miller’s contrast between his own pure, Hamlet-free life, and Fraenkel’s morbid, Hamlet-plagued death-in-life, that one soon gets the impression that Miller is obsessed with Fraenkel’s Hamlet obsession, though of course to admit this would amount to acknowledging that he himself was still haunted in some way, still measuring time by the clock on the mantelpiece.

Notice that the rhetoric of Miller’s correspondence with Fraenkel is the exact inverse of the rhetoric that Derrida detects in Marx’s attack on Max Stirner in *The German Ideology*. Like Miller and Fraenkel, Marx and

Stirner both want to free humanity from its enchainment to embodied abstractions – i.e., specters – of its own devising, but Marx criticizes “Saint Max” for being an ineffective exorcist. Whereas Miller blames Fraenkel for taking *too much* time to dispatch the ghost that haunts him, Marx accuses Stirner of not taking *enough* time to get rid of his. In *The Ego and his Own*, Stirner suggested that a moment of recognition, an awakening – or rather, precisely, a turning-inward – was sufficient to free an individual ego from its enslavement to spectral phenomena. But according to Marx, merely turning inward accomplishes nothing; in order to free living human beings from the dead generations that weigh upon their brains, it is necessary to dismantle the social structures that produce spectral effects – and this takes time and effort. Thus what distinguishes Marx from Max, as Derrida points out, is a disagreement about the relationship between spectrality and time. Like Miller and Fraenkel, Marx and Stirner want to be done with the death-in-life that prevents living human beings from being present to themselves in a pure way. They all believe in the possibility, and desirability, of completing a work of mourning, disagreeing only about the “rhythm” that this work must take in order to be effective.³⁸ Stirner believes that a work of mourning is completed the moment one realizes that one is haunted by representations that ultimately exist nowhere but in one’s own head. But Marx counters that what spectralizes are not mere representations but institutional structures that exist outside of people’s heads. Like Fraenkel, Marx tells the other that one cannot be done with the clock on the mantelpiece as easily as it might seem. But like Miller, he accuses his rival of being the one who cannot shake his belief in ghosts. According to Derrida, the reason why Marx relentlessly hounds “Saint Max” is that Stirner represents Marx’s own specter, the uncanny double or intimate stranger whom he can neither tolerate nor eliminate, and who therefore has to be perpetually exorcized. *Perpetually* because, as Stirner himself recognized, there is no “I am” that is not an “I am haunted.”³⁹ To “learn to live” is to learn to live with ghosts. Derrida finds this insight expressed in Hamlet’s lament that he has been charged with the task of setting right a time that is out of joint. Here Derrida explicitly opposes Heidegger, who in his commentary on the Anaximander Fragment, translates the Greek word *adikia* – conventionally translated into English as “injustice” – as *aus der Fuge*, or “out of joint.” By equating the out of joint with the unjust, Heidegger overlooks the fact that temporal anachrony is the condition for the possibility of *both* injustice *and* justice, for justice presupposes “the irreducible excess of a disjuncture or an anachrony...that...would alone be able to *do justice* or to *render justice* to the other as other.”⁴⁰ Like Marx and

Stirner, Heidegger implicitly reduces Hamlet's charge to the present task of readjusting time so as to be rid of a spectral past and future. So do Miller and Fraenkel, who, without showing any awareness of the Marx-Stirner polemic, effectively restage it as a debate about how to get rid of the ghost of Hamlet.

Derrida does not refer to the Miller-Fraenkel correspondence in *Specters of Marx*,⁴¹ but he does allude to another concerted effort to put the ghost of Hamlet to rest, namely, that of the psychoanalyst Nicolas Abraham. Abraham believed that whereas Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* "purified" the soul," by providing an occasion for a genuine experience of catharsis, *Hamlet* "haunts" audiences because at the end of the play Hamlet is still haunted by the ghost – or, rather, phantom – that visits him.⁴² "Phantom" (*fantôme*) is a technical term that belongs to a whole family of metapsychological concepts that Abraham developed with Maria Torok in order to make sense of mourning and melancholy. Following Sandor Ferenczi, Abraham and Torok draw a sharp distinction between "introjection," which they take to be an effective process whereby an ego adapts itself to the demands of reality by including something new within it, and "incorporation," an ineffective fantasy that purports to accomplish instantaneously, and as if by magic, what introjection has to work at achieving.⁴³ Already we can see the relevance of this distinction to Derrida's reading of Marx's contrast between the effective, revolutionary work called for in the Communist Manifesto and the fantasmatic substitute that Marx accuses Stirner for settling for in *The Ego and his Own*. The distinction between introjection and incorporation is used by Abraham and Torok to correct Freud's account of the difference between mourning and melancholia. For Freud, melancholia reflects an inability to mourn the loss of someone or something about which the afflicted subject was unconsciously ambivalent; in criticizing him- or herself, the melancholic subject directs his or her reproaches to a part of his or her own ego that is identified with the lost object. Abraham and Torok modify this clinical picture by suggesting that melancholia attests to an incorporation that has come under attack. Incorporation occurs when the ego constructs within itself a crypt in which a lost object is fantasmatically kept alive or treated as *not-yet-irrevocably* dead: "the ego looks for this exquisite corpse continually in the hope of one day reviving it."⁴⁴ Far from being someone about whom the subject was ambivalent, the person encrypted within the ego was the object of the purest love; indeed, the crypt is there to protect the beloved from reproaches that *others* would direct toward it. Accordingly, the therapeutic

aim of "cryptonymy" is to enable the suffering subject – for whom the topographical structure of its ego remains unconscious – to allow its crypt to be opened up so that the incorporated (and therefore unmourned) object can begin to be effectively mourned, i.e., introjected. To enable this topographical shift to take place, the analyst must reassure the wounded ego that its encrypted object will be *properly* mourned and not scorned.

In contrast to a *crypt*, which Abraham and Torok characterize as the product of "preservative repression,"⁴⁵ a *phantom* has its point of origin not in the subject's "own" unconscious but in that of another person, someone who has died and taken an enigmatic "secret" with him or her. To be haunted by a phantom is, in effect, to be subject to the return of the one whose buried secret prevents the subject from carrying out an effective work of mourning. Here the aim of analysis is to bring to light the phantom's own secret, but (as in the case of cryptonymy) in such a way as to allow the departed to be forgiven rather than condemned. As long as the subject remains haunted, it is ignorant not only of the "content" of the dead person's secret but even of the fact that there is such a secret. Abraham surmises that this is Hamlet's predicament., and that this is why Shakespeare's play invariably leaves its audiences "bewildered," with a vague sense that a "mystery" has yet to be "unraveled."⁴⁶ In order "to 'cure' the *public* of a covert neurosis the *Tragedy of Hamlet* has, for centuries, inflicted upon it," Abraham composed a new, *proper* ending for Shakespeare's play, a "Sixth Act" entitled "The Phantom of Hamlet."⁴⁷ Act Six begins with the revival of Hamlet, who, appropriately, asks, "Am I alive?"⁴⁸ Thereafter, through a kind of "analysis" with Fortinbras, he is slowly led to discover that the secret that his father took with him to his grave – that Hamlet senior did not kill Fortinbras senior in fair combat on the day that Hamlet was born (as he and we had been led by Shakespeare to believe) but that Hamlet senior had surreptitiously anointed his weapon with poison provided by Polonius. Once this sordid-but-forgivable secret is brought to light (along with several others), the ghost, who until then had lingered, is able to depart in peace, so that now Hamlet is finally able to *live* in peace, that is, to live in the pure, unhaunted way in which Miller wanted to live (as well as Fraenkel, Marx, and Stirner). By implication, *we too* are supposed to be able to live more fully now that *Hamlet* has been given the kind of therapeutic ending that Sophocles gave *Oedipus the King*. Thus Abraham's Sixth Act seems to be intended to satisfy the desire that Miller expressed when he told Fraenkel that "If there is to be any success in our endeavor it will be in laying the ghost."

Derrida alludes to Abraham's Sixth Act when he suggests that "Hamlet

could never know the peace of a ‘good ending.’”⁴⁹ Just as we are always caught in between incorporation and introjection, so there is no subjectivity without the phantom effect.⁵⁰ However, this does not necessarily mean that Derrida is unsympathetic with Abraham’s project in the Sixth Act. Everything depends on whether we read Abraham as attempting to “lay the ghost” of Hamlet once and for all – in the manner of Miller – or as teaching us how to live and speak with ghosts by teaching Hamlet how to do the same. This is the difference between a psychoanalysis that aims at a completed work of mourning and what Derrida calls “hauntology.” Abraham hints at this very difference in the contrast he portrays between Horatio and Fortinbras’s respective therapeutic techniques. When the ghost calls Hamlet “infirm of purpose” and advises Fortinbras not to cede the throne to him, Horatio simply accuses it (“You deserve the fire and brimstone of Hell”), and then unceremoniously attempts to conjure it away (“Vanish!”) To this manic outburst, Fortinbras responds by saying that “We do not stand to gain by burning souls or ghosts. Far better that he stay to speak, and depart blessed.”⁵¹ This contrast clearly anticipates Derrida’s distinction between Shakespeare’s Horatio, who, as “a scholar” (1.1.42), charges the ghost to submit to interrogation,⁵² and “the scholar” of the future – that is, both a future scholar and a scholar *of* futurity – who undertakes the difficult task of giving voice to ghosts:

*the ‘scholar’ of the future....should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her; how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other; in the other in oneself.*⁵³

On this account, the joint task – or, rather, the joint *out of joint* task – of Abraham’s Fortinbras and Hamlet is not to exorcize the ghost of Hamlet’s father but to enable Hamlet to take on the ghost’s secret as his own, or, rather, as the other’s within him. This requires a complicated sort of speech act that Derrida characterizes as “a self-confession that *confesses the other*.”⁵⁴ To be cursed with setting right a time out of joint is to be cursed with the task of confessing the other within oneself. According to Derrida, this is the distinctive mark of all tragedy:

*There is tragedy, there is essence of the tragic only on the condition of this originarity, more precisely of this pre-originary and properly spectral anteriority of the crime – the crime of the other; a misdeed whose event and reality, whose truth can never present themselves in flesh and blood, but can only allow themselves to be presumed, reconstructed, fantasized.*⁵⁵

On this account, *Hamlet* represents the irremissibility of the tragic (as for Levinas Hamlet's famous soliloquy bespeaks the irremissibility of the *il y a*). Alternatively, following Benjamin, we can say that *Hamlet* represents the irremissibility of the melancholy proper to the *Trauerspiel*. Although an irremissibly melancholy Hamlet could never know an unequivocally *good* ending, it might be possible to give him a *more just* ending, and it is possible that this is what Abraham achieves. If so, then instead of providing *Hamlet* with a triumphalist ending that would have pleased Miller, the Sixth Act provides a *less unjust* ending that leaves Hamlet's analysis interminable rather than terminable. This Derrida would have admired.

Not surprisingly, Miller objects to what he regards as the interminability of Shakespeare's play. In describing to Fraenkel his mental image of the play (which he professes never to have seen staged) he writes: "Hamlet is talking – talking the utmost gibberish, as far as I can make out. He has been standing there like that, talking for centuries. The curtain never falls. The speech is never terminated." "What *should* happen," he goes on, is that the play should end with Hamlet becoming "*speechless*," a word that Miller underscores twice.⁵⁶ Like a free-associating analysand, he offers his own version of *Hamlet*, one that he says is based on "free fantasia." This play begins immediately after Hamlet has addressed the ghost of Macbeth. As is his wont, "Hamlet does nothing" while others "are poking and prodding him, as though he were a dead jellyfish." "This goes on for maybe twelve acts, during which time a great many people are killed, or else kill themselves. *All to talk*." "The ghost reappears." Hamlet flirts with Ophelia and then kills Laertes, sighing. When the queen appears, "[s]he seems to be talking about butter all the time, how to make it creamy and palatable." Hamlet, who "is concerned only with Death," accuses his mother of "concealing a foul crime," "but she...always manages to turn the conversation back to butter." A feast is served, and now Hamlet "demands to know outright who killed his father, a fact which had completely escaped his attention throughout but of which he is suddenly reminded now that it is time to eat." More killing takes place. The gravediggers appear. Finally, the dying Hamlet, who has drunk from "the poison goblet," "begins his last and best speech which, unfortunately, is never terminated." "He is talking a blue streak" as "The curtain slowly falls."⁵⁷

Like Abraham, Miller regards Hamlet's illness as communicable, and he does not want to catch it. This is why he would like nothing better than to reduce Hamlet to silence, to end *his* analysis so that he can terminate his

own. In this respect, Miller seems to exhibit all the symptoms of mania. Or can we read him otherwise, just as I suggested we can read Abraham otherwise than as aiming at the completion of a work of mourning? Consider the contrast between Hamlet's obsession with death and the queen's obsession with creamy butter. In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet complains to Horatio that the food reserved for the ritual purpose of mourning his father was consumed at the celebration of his mother's marriage to his uncle: "the funeral bak'd meats/Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables." (1.2.180-1) Miller, who certainly wants to be done with *excessive* mourning, inverts this idea by having Hamlet remember his father's death *only* when "it is time to eat." This suggests that Hamlet may be no better than Gertrude at separating the time for grieving from the time for living. Perhaps this is why in Miller's version of the play it is Hamlet rather than his mother who drinks from the poisoned goblet. Miller does not deny death; on the contrary, he tells Fraenkel in words that recall certain passages in Shakespeare that "Death is there waiting for me, and when He comes I shall embrace Him."⁵⁸ What Miller emphatically does not want to do is embrace death *before* it arrives; that is, he does not want to confuse life and death as Hamlet does. Derrida could reply that this is what everyone living wants, this is what *life itself* wants, but unfortunately – or, rather, fortunately for the possibility of justice – the time of the living is always out of joint. To this, Miller could appeal to Claudius's version of "the time is out of joint." Like Hamlet, Claudius acknowledges that the living present is haunted, but instead of brooding over this fact, he tries to forget it. Thus, unlike Hamlet, who stands for the principle that no period of mourning could ever be long enough, so that it would be wrong for his bereaved mother *ever* to take a second husband, Claudius concedes that his marriage to Gertrude was "o'erhasty," involving "mirth in funeral" and "dirge in marriage." (2.2.57, 1.2.12) By openly confessing to his own narcissism – acknowledging that while remembering the dead "we with wisest sorrow think on him/Together with remembrance of ourselves" (1.2.6-7) – Claudius says enough to convince Hamlet that his uncle is a murderer ("O my prophetic soul! My uncle!"), for even if he hasn't *literally* killed his brother (as he has) he has *symbolically* done so. Claudius and Hamlet agree that there is no life that is not inextricably life-in-death and death-in-life; they differ only in their responses to this predicament, the one defending the right of triumphalist mania, the other the duty of messianic melancholy. But to side with Hamlet rather than Claudius – or Derrida rather than Miller – is not, *pace* Fritsch, to give in to "indolence of the heart" or mere *acedia*; it is to persist in another kind of melancholy, one that is essentially mes-

sianic rather than fatalistic in character. To illustrate the difference between the two, let us briefly return to Shakespeare.

III.

Fatalistic melancholy is personified by the reticent Don John, who in *Much Ado About Nothing* exhibits what Benjamin calls the melancholy of the court intriguer. It is also represented by the more articulate Jaques of *As You Like It*, whose speech about the "seven ages" of man cynically describes as quickly past the homogeneous time of the life of someone whose only good *is* but to sleep and feed. David Bevington thinks that Jaques's depressing image of a man in "second childishness" (2.7.165) lacking teeth, eyes, taste, and, ultimately, everything, is not confirmed but countered by the subsequent appearance of the good and noble Adam, whose last days on earth are being spent honorably.⁵⁹ Like many of Shakespeare's comedies, *As You Like It* ends – or rather *almost* ends – with a celebration of marriage, but Jaques prevents the play from reaching an ethically "false" ending when he tries to get in the last word after the duke utters what by convention sounds like the play's concluding rhyming couplet: "Play music, and you brides and bridegrooms all,/With measure heap'd in joy, to th'measures fall." (5.4.176-7) Just as the audience is about to applaud, Jaques interrupts the banished Duke – and us – with the words "Sir, by your patience" (5.4.178) reminding us that *he* has not found a wife since, as the personification of *fatalistic* melancholy, he is "for other than for dancing measures." (5.4.191) Jaques's decision in favor of a solitary life shows by contrast what marriage is supposed to represent: not the innocent happiness of naive comedy but the "restored" happiness of "redemptive" comedy, comedy that has in some way passed through the tragic. Shakespeare explores this theme at greater length in darker comedies such as *Much Ado about Nothing* and *Measure for Measure*. In *As You Like It* the problem is posed by the questioning presence of Jaques. But the melancholy Jaques is not allowed the play's final word. This is reserved for Rosalind, who in the epilogue bids the men and women in the audience to unite in happy marriages. Cavell suggests that in Shakespeare marriage figures as the solution to (as well as the occasioning cause of) the problem of skepticism – not just skepticism about a partner's fidelity but skepticism in general, skepticism as pervasive doubt about the existence of the world.⁶⁰ Skepticism itself, however, may be taken as a symptom of melancholy, particularly if (as Cavell argues) skep-

ticism's doubt is but a defensive mask worn by disenchantment and disillusion.⁶¹ If this is so, what might the problem of marriage have to do with the question concerning homogeneous and messianic time? A hint can be found in the second of Benjamin's theses on the concept of history, when he suggests that *if* "the women we court" have dead "sisters" whom "they no longer recognize," "[t]hen...we have been endowed with a *weak* messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim."⁶² Benjamin here links courtship with the promise of redemption, marriage with the memory of marriageable sisters. He is writing as a man to men about women, and it is unclear how or whether past "brothers" are to be factored in, but the "secret agreement between past generations and the present one" seems to allude to an affinity between all intended couples, an affinity implied in the constitutive iterability of the marriage ceremony itself. If so, Benjamin can be read as distinguishing between two different conceptions of marriage: one governed by the mechanical laws of homogeneous time, the other by the interruptive leaps of messianic time. The former would not be entirely free of the tinge of fatalistic melancholy, manifest in a sense of marital time as tedium; the latter would avoid such tedium (though not necessarily melancholy, as I will suggest in a moment) by dedicating itself to the recollection of all of the romances of the past with an eye toward redeeming those that turned out unhappily.

This very idea is elaborated in the final scene of *The Merchant of Venice* when Jessica and Lorenzo enigmatically link their promise of a happy marriage to the recollection of legendary failed unions: "In such a night as this,/...Troilus methinks mounted the Trojan walls,/And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents/Where Cressid lay that night." "In such a night/Did Thisbe fearfully o'ertrip the dew,/And saw the lion's shadow ere himself,/And ran dismayed away....[etc.]." (5.1.1-9) This exchange is often read as a bit of jesting repartee or ironic flirtation, for it includes references to unfaithful partners as the two lovers take turns predicting each other's future infidelity. But in giving voice to their shared anxiety, Jessica and Lorenzo not only call attention to the essential fragility of the promise of marriage; in so doing they articulate that "secret agreement" with the past according to which it stands within their weak messianic power to redeem Troilus and Cressida, Pyramus and Thisbe, Aeneas and Dido, Jason and Medea – perhaps we should add Hamlet and Ophelia. This messianic charge is accompanied by a sense of melancholy, explicitly noted by Jessica when she says, "I am never merry when I hear sweet music." (5.1.69) This is not quite the same thing as Jaques saying he can "suck

melancholy out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs" (2.5.11-12), and the difference is that whereas Jaques narcissistically clings to his melancholy solitude, Jessica hopes that Lorenzo will "keep promise" (2.3.20), a promise made to her but destined, as it were, to her less fortunate sisters as well. This contrast between Jaques and Jessica encapsulates the difference between fatalistic and messianic melancholy, and perhaps between Adorno – who did nothing if not suck melancholy out of music⁶³ – and Benjamin, who, like Jessica, sought to connect un-renounced hopes for a future with the memory of past suffering without being able – or rather *entitled* – to forsake a melancholy that bespeaks not moral and political despair but, on the contrary, what Lorenzo calls "attentive" "spirits." (5.1.70) Benjamin's criticism of the tendency of "left-wing melancholy" "to enjoy itself in a negativistic manner" – a criticism that anticipates Lukács's famous quip about "the Grand Hotel Abyss" – aptly fits Jaques.⁶⁴ But to say so is compatible with saying that Benjamin (like Derrida) shared Jessica's messianic melancholy. We resolve the antinomy of critical theory not by zigzagging back and forth between the extremes of fatalistic melancholy and sheer mania, but by keeping faith with the dead – and the yet unborn – by keeping to the promise to change the world.

- 1 Matthias Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory: History and Politics in Marx, Benjamin, and Derrida*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp.162, 201n.14. I am grateful to Matthias for his extensive comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Adam Berg, Nora Brank, David Ingram, Joshua Kates, Bill Martin, Jonathan Maskit, Daniel Price, Tom Steinbuch, and, especially, Stefano Giacchetti, for their helpful comments and conversation.
- 2 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott and others, eds. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 395, 397.
- 3 Fritsch, *The Promise of Memory*, op.cit., p. 35.
- 4 Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings Volume 4, 1938-1940*, p. 335. In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin writes: "The awareness of time's empty passage and the *taedium vitae* are the two weights that keep the wheels of melancholy going. In this regard, the last poem of the 'Spleen et idéal' sequence corresponds exactly to the sequence 'La Mort.'" Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 351. Fritsch cites both of these passage at pp. 223-24n.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 6 Sigmund Freud, "On Transience," trans. James Strachey, in *Writings on Art and Literature*, with a foreword by Neil Hertz, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), pp. 175-79.
- 7 Fritsch, op.cit., p. 2, my italics.
- 8 Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, trans. Ronald L. Martinez, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 20; Slavoj Žižek, *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism? Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion*, (New York: Verso, 2001), p. 146.
- 9 Fritsch, op.cit., p. 59.
- 10 Hence Derrida's reservations, as we will see, about Abraham and Torok's distinction between the "introjection" said to accompany a "normal" work of mourning and the "incorporation" characteristic of

the melancholic's construction of a memorial "crypt" inside its own ego. See Jacques Derrida, "Fors: The English Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok," in Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word*, trans. Nicholas Rand, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. xi-xlviii. Likewise, Derrida's conception of "originary" mourning eludes the Freudian opposition between mourning and melancholia: "If *Jemeinigkeit*, that of *Dasein* or that of the ego (in the common sense, the psychoanalytic sense, or Levinas's sense) is constituted in its ipseity in terms of an originary mourning, then this self-relation welcomes or supposes the other within its being-itself as different from itself. And reciprocally: the relation to the other (in itself outside myself, outside myself in myself) will never be distinguishable from a bereaved apprehension." Jacques Derrida, *Aporias: Dying – awaiting (one another at) the "limits of truth,"* trans. Thomas Dutoit, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 61.

- 11 Fritsch observes that there are texts in which Marx explicitly "mourns the 'victims' of history," and that he laments the fact that the fetishism of capital "blocks any memory of the violent process that created capital in the first place." (*Ibid.*, pp. 20, 19; cf. pp. 212n.59, 163.) But Fritsch shares Benjamin and Derrida's belief that Marx never found a way to integrate the memory of past suffering with his conception of revolutionary promise; or, rather, he could reconcile the two only by adopting a teleological account of history according to which past suffering would be justified by the future advent of communist society.
- 12 Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" in *Acts of Religion*, ed. Gil Anidjar, (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 272. Fritsch thinks he can show that Benjamin's expressed hostility toward parliamentary democracy was rooted in his support of the more radically democratic workers' councils which the Social Democrats opposed. (Fritsch, *op.cit.*, p. 117) As Fritsch notes, this reading allies Benjamin's critique of Social Democracy with Hannah Arendt's more sweeping critique of Marx and Marxism. However, Fritsch concedes that by striving for a total "disenchanting" of the future, "Benjamin is in danger of falling back into the logic that opposes the future to the past." (56) Benjamin was attracted to Georges Sorel's conception of a proletarian strike because he saw it as merely interrupting state power without aiming either at liberal reform or the revolutionary founding of a dictatorship of the proletariat. (106) Fritsch defends this conception of interruptive political action, but he rejects the idea that we have to choose between a fully determinate orientation toward preconceived ends and sheer openness toward a wholly indeterminate future. Instead, he argues that openness toward the future needs to be *situated* like a "blind spot in the horizon of expectation." (51; cf. pp. 71, 140)
- 13 Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," *op.cit.*, p. 335.
- 14 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, anonymous translation, (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 15.
- 15 Fritsch, *op.cit.*, p. 91.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p. 93.
- 17 William Shakespeare, "Timon of Athens," in *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works*, eds. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson, and David Scott Kastan, (London: Thomson Learning, 2001), p. 1115; 4.3.71,74. All subsequent references to Shakespeare, given in the main body of the paper by act, scene, and line number, will be to this edition of the plays.
- 18 Cf. Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 44.
- 19 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, (New York: Verso, 2003), p. 138.
- 20 Fritsch, *op.cit.*, p. 164.
- 21 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, *op.cit.*, p. 158.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 138.
- 23 Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, *op.cit.*, pp. 107ff.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 156.
- 26 Cf. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *op.cit.*, p. 390.
- 27 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," *op.cit.*, p. 396.
- 28 Here, of course, I allude to Hegel's famous criticism of "the rapturous enthusiasm which, like a shot from a pistol, begins straight away with absolute knowledge, and makes short work of other stand-

- points by declaring it takes no notice of them." G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 16.
- 29 Jacques Derrida, "Marx and Sons," in *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida's Specters of Marx*, ed. Michael Sprinker, (New York: Verso, 1999), p. 259; cited by Matthias Fritsch in his "Response to Comments by Andrew Cutrofello and Jonathan Maskit on *Promise of Memory*," unpublished manuscript, p. 8.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Henry Miller, *Henry Miller's Hamlet Letters*, ed. Michael Hargraves, (Capra Press, 1988), p. 19.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 17, 19.
- 33 Ibid., p. 18, my italics.
- 34 Ibid., p. 56.
- 35 Ibid., p. 93.
- 36 Ibid., pp. 102, 110, 140.
- 37 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 132.
- 38 Ibid., p. 133.
- 39 Ibid., p. 27.
- 40 I do not know whether Derrida was familiar with the correspondence, though he may have come across a reference to it in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* (299).
- 41 Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, p.187.
- 42 Ibid., pp. 125-7.
- 43 Ibid., p. 118.
- 44 Ibid., p. 135.
- 45 Ibid., p. 187.
- 46 Ibid., p. 190.
- 47 Ibid., p. 195.
- 48 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., p. 29.
- 49 Cf. ibid., p. 97 and p. 178 n.3.
- 50 Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel*, op.cit., p. 195.
- 51 Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, op.cit., p. 12.
- 52 Ibid., p. 176.
- 53 Ibid., p. 21.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Miller, *Henry Miller's Hamlet Letters*, op.cit., pp. 25-6.
- 56 Ibid., pp. 26-8.
- 57 Ibid., p. 93.
- 58 "Jaques' famous 'Seven Ages of Man' speech, so often read out of context, occurs in a scene that also witnesses the rescue of Orlando and Adam from the forest. As though in answer to Jaques' acid depiction of covetous old age, we see old Adam's self-sacrifice and trust in Providence. Instead of 'mere oblivion,' we see charitable compassion prompting the Duke to aid Orlando and Orlando to aid Adam." David Bevington, "Introduction," William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, eds. David Bevington and David Scott Kastan, (New York: Bantam, 1988), p. xx.
- 59 Stanley Cavell, *Disowning Knowledge in Seven Plays of Shakespeare*, updated edition, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), passim.
- 60 "[S]kepticism's 'doubt' is motivated not by (not even when it is expressed as) a (misguided) intellectual scrupulousness but by a (displaced) denial, by a self-consuming disappointment that seeks world-consuming revenge." Ibid., p. 6.
- 61 Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," op.cit., p. 390, my italics.
- 62 Cf. Andrew Cutrofello, *Continental Philosophy: A Contemporary Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 259.
- 63 Walter Benjamin, "Left-Wing Melancholy," in *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and others, eds. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 425.

Walter Benjamin: the afterlife of an artwork as cognitive heterocracy

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Sono gli effetti a scegliere le cause (Beppe Sebaste)

1. Passages

• In his fragmentary text called *Passagenwerk*, Benjamin's detached observation of the immediate environment ranges from Paris' outskirts to old toys, to the dynamics of fashion. What pervades these reflection is the well-known notion of the *afterlife*: what seems to be lost in the past, is suddenly retrieved, by an occasional occurrence, or seemingly irrelevant objects. And, in its turn, this retrieval becomes the agent of new cultural configurations.

In fashion, as Georg Simmel (one of Benjamin's professors in Berlin) already had elaborated in his philosophy of fashion¹, what becomes popular, must be replaced by something new, but may come back when it is obsolete again. The afterlife of a fact is its fame (its aura) but also its 'ridicule'.² For similar reasons old toys underwent a strange revival after the war, as they came to represent the emotional condition of a generation that rediscovered its interrupted childhood. The construction of new 'old toys' was meant to retrieve a new sense of the past³. The quality of 'oldness' was in fact not a temporal quality, but rather one attaching to the new products. In both cases what is 'old' becomes a factor of value in itself.

A forerunner of Pasolini's aesthetics of the marginal, Benjamin's argument maintains that the existential chaos, found in urban wastelands, those sites on the edge of cities that are the city's crime ridden and desolate, by-products, also brings about new values⁴. In the unpredictability of the afterlife, what seems to be bad can become the source of what seems to be good. Analogously, in *The Task of the Translator*, Benjamin refers to a linguistic afterlife: what a translation produces does not come from an original, but from its afterlife: a translator is inevitably blind with respect to the intentions of the language of origin.⁵ Translators work on texts that have sur-

vived their authors. At the same time such texts serve as evidence, witnesses, and traces of a lost origin. In Benjamin's view, translation takes on the ineluctable role of transmitting and betraying the sense of a document in time. The translator's task involves a paradox: it turns an original text into a living presence, by virtue of its irrecoverable fading away. The argument of my paper is that the notion of *Nachleben*, found throughout Benjamin's essays and notes, and rooted in his reflections upon aesthetics, actually casts light on our concrete cognitive activity in general, and brings to an extreme, hardly admissible consequence: what we know rests upon chance, and it is circumstance which offers knowledge its necessary universality.

Knowledge always needs to refer to the past (and can range from empirical memory to history). And it is an essentially aesthetic notion, based on perception and individual experience, that gives ground to those judgments we stretch over the unperceivable space of history. "Every epoch not only dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening."⁶ As members of a culture elaborate the direction in which they are headed, they also define themselves, 'precipitating' cultural identity out of a dream of its own future, a dream based on images of the past. This view of the future – with all its hopes and desires and fears – causes a certain self-representation. We actually are not able to define our time, precisely because it is passing by, yet we are able to fix a space that we call 'present time', which is an awakening from the dreams of forms. It is as if our inferences about our collective identity were grounded upon contingent premises, that emerge only occasionally. But these constructed premises are not arbitrary: they are the result of a painful consciousness 'precipitated' from the catastrophes of the past. That is: what happened is forgotten, because we need to survive the events that have brought us here, with all their happiness, absurdities and suffering. We are their involuntary 'precipitate'. But the forgotten past leaves traces that remain undetected, until some time in our present space – or 'spatial time' we awaken to the call of a re-enacted event, or found object, or memory. There is a presence of the forgotten that makes it impossible to look back at what it was safer to forget. "Dialectics as awakening and remembering a dream: it is as if the facts of history happened to us now for the first time."⁷

Resorting to the structure of dreams serves the purpose of associating the idea of history with the empirical character of perception. How do we perceive what has passed? By memory. What is an object of memory? What

is left to be thought of as a perceived trace of our thoughts. History happens to us now for the first time. It cannot be otherwise. The very notion of dialectics is undermined. If an older concept of dialectics was framed as the overcoming of a contradiction by means of a solution arising from, but not anticipated in, the component elements, Benjamin’s sense of dialectics is framed as a retroaction: present forms retroact (now) upon what has generated them. ‘New’ old toys do not give the later generations insight into their earlier uses, or faithfully reproduce those earlier experiences, of them.⁸ Passing from the old toys to their reconstruction is a non-linear action, responding to a present need.

Benjamin seems to keep an image’ of dialectics, rather than a concept of it. Benjamin tries to distinguish between: “allegorical image, which is melancholic, and dialectical image, which cannot be. The former consists of an arbitrary assignation of meaning (...). The latter, the dialectical image, must be defined in explicit contrast to this.”⁹

Does a dream happen *before* I remember it? Or does its memory project itself on a wider space in which the *fact* of the dream and its memory are simultaneously displayed?

If the past is the memory of the present, the present will be the memory we will have of it. In his study on time and memory, Paolo Virno states that the memory of the present “matches a potential present (its memory) to real present (its perception); but it also emphasizes their mutual discrepancy and incommensurability”.¹⁰ What is potential is not accomplished in an alleged actualization, but remains unaccomplished, inactual.¹¹

To go back to Pensky’s study of Benjamin’s melancholy, what the philosopher tries to do is “mastering what is toxic.”¹²

“History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the Jetztzeit.”¹³

Time is a non-linear and conflicted concept: a sudden dream, or an unintentional memory which can re-enact, re-define, or betray the past, and finally turn it into a present event.

As a consequence, history, before being a selection of events, is brought to sense by an awakened fragment, one tied to an occasion. And the complex conscious work of ‘dialectics’ is reduced to that presence. In Benjamin’s idea of afterlife there is a logical paradox: the past occurs after it has occurred. How might it be solved?

2. Feedback loops

The fact that historical judgements are continuous redefinitions accomplished within discontinuous 'present times', leads to a first conclusion: Benjamin's argument follows the logic of non-linear thinking: whereas linear thinking implies a judgement of actuality as an effect of causes, moving from the present to the past by reconstructing the linear chain of events from the past to the present, the non-linear connection of thoughts implies that occasional present perceptions (material forms) draw our attention compelling us to look for their causes, as if that contingency required the search for necessary premises.

Thinking of a fact as the effect of one or more causes implies a model of scientific knowledge: an object is reproduced in a laboratory in order to reproduce, correlatively, what has caused its occurrence. But this model implies that a fact can be isolated and be equivalent to a fact observed in the world. The thought of events being connected to one another by causes while being themselves causes for the emergence of other events appears to describe more concretely our actual cognitive work. Within such a non-linear view of facts, there is no sequence of past-present-future events that can be determined by observation or reproduced by experiment.

The afterlife of an event represents this view on an aesthetic level: something is perceived as trace of the past but its very actual and present perception re-enacts and distorts the past as its cause. The effect of a cause causes effects. In other words: the past is cause of the present but it is produced by present forms of it. The clash of this feedback loop is the dream of the future.

*"No fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years."*¹⁴

The cause of a fact is not a historical cause for its own sake. It has some probability to become a historical cause, because it may be recognized later, even after centuries, by chance. A future recognition is the belated cause of our view of the past. In reversal, if we think of ourselves in future re-arrangements, we become aware of being endowed with a meaning that presently escapes us.

The intertwining of causes and effects is what Niklas Luhmann, in *Social Systems*, calls "double contingency".¹⁵

In *Art as a social system*, Luhmann relates his general theory of systems to aesthetics, and argues that modern art increasingly feeds on itself, and describes itself, in successive re-configurations of traditions. Artworks have an essential self-reference. They converse with one another, through citations, rejections, renewal, and irony. A history of art does not have a linear development and direction. As Ernst Gombrich had shown, there are as many stories of art, as there are many ways of making sense of a fact.

And furthermore, the more complex a social system, the more artworks receive legitimacy from what is not art, through hetero-references¹⁶:

*"[Modern art] generates an endless oscillation between inside and outside...and arrives at a new level of self-description."*¹⁷

As modern art defines itself as self-description, by observing its own traditions from an external perspective (an example of this oscillation is Duchamp's *pissoir*: an object taken from outside that enters an ironic and self-referential connection with art history). That oscillation may explain Benjamin's notion of afterlife: a new form of art legitimates or de-legitimizes previous forms of art, or connects art with outside contexts. And although Duchamp initiated this structure with his ready-mades, he would have never imagined the commercial value attributed later to his works. A system (history, art, or society) reinforces itself by virtue of successive re-definitions. Cinema has not developed in a linear fashion. Although traditionally we trace back a 'history of the cinema' as if it were a steady and intentional improvement of the same phenomenon, in hindsight we realize how many trials and attempts and errors we might have traced and how many stories of the cinema are possible, either converging with or diverging from the complex phenomenon called 'cinema'.

3. Cinema as art; history as cinematic display of forms

The well-known thesis of the essay *The Work of Art in the Age...* is that technical reproduction of artworks causes the loss of their aura and their sacredness. But in contrast with Adorno, who rejected the new arts of photography and cinema as responsible of betraying that uniqueness and of handing art over to the market, Benjamin has the theoretical strength to show the positive side of that change, exactly by virtue of a feedback-loop logic, for new art forms the possibility of a new critical atti-

tude. As Georg Simmel argues in his reflections on metropolitan life, the opportunity to enjoy the arts in the privacy of one's home allows at once self-defence from the over-solicitations of the city and a greater freedom in evaluating art.

Adorno seems to rely upon a strict nineteenth-century causalism: the cinema causes a reduction of freedom, provides for control over the spectator, encourages a-critical attitudes, reinforces propaganda etc..

According to Benjamin's feedback-loop logic, the new technique of cinema constitutes greater control over the masses, which in turn react with a new indifference, or private reaction, who in turn react with profound distraction that then becomes a new detached and therefore critical attitude. In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Benjamin establishes a dynamic relation between technological innovation, loss of aura, and the re-definition of art. If art is mechanically reproduced, either it becomes more difficult to recognize an object as an artwork, or we must change our definition of what defines it. The loss of the aura caused by technology causes the emergence of something 'new' that in its turn finds its roots in the very loss that caused its emergence. The engaged apprehension of the unique and sacred becomes detached – unmasking the tricks of illusion; the very 'suspension of disbelief' is rendered conscious and nonetheless continues to absorb its audience. In this manner, the aura of art is like a game; in which spectators pretend to be caught up by its enchantment. They are fascinated and detached at the same time. Their critical ability is safeguarded exactly by what blindly attracts them in the cinematic process. From here on, art will display more and more its own processes and techniques until it becomes a process-oriented self-description, losing its informational value.¹⁸

Benjamin's consideration of photography and cinema not only casts light on what changes in art, but also draws attention to the way in which a new phenomenon reconfigures the past, changes 'history', tells another story. In feedback loop: avant-garde art introduces the cinema as an art, and the cinema produces a new sense of tradition.

Photography and cinema, by reconstituting the role of painting or sculpture, awaken what seemed to be lost or unnoticed in those mediums.

For instance, Picasso by drawing from Cézanne's idea of geometrical forms, of painting as a gesture of reproducing not an object but a 'sensation', turned Cézanne into the inventor of cubism, precisely because he had been retroactively and paradoxically influenced by Picasso.

As Benjamin said, after cinema, literature itself submitted to montage and vice versa we read a novel with filmic eyes; or a sculpture as proto-cinema; an example of this view is Careri’s essay on Bernini’s ‘bel composto’ read as Eisenstein’s ‘pathetic montage’.¹⁹

“Surrealists’ words are like trade names...and nesting to day in trade, names are figments such as those earlier thought to be hidden in poetic vocables.”²⁰

This statement makes it astoundingly clear how a phenomenon is the result of occasional convergences of heterogeneous factors: surrealism offers ‘words’ to publicity and, once nested in trade, these words-figments foist themselves into experimental poetry.

This view of cultural configurations, or ‘passages’, implies that an art form is not an object, but rather a composition in which object and agent, process, technique and final outcome are inextricably intertwined.

This is why we can find abstract traits in Tintoretto’s paintings and we say in consequence that he is a ‘modern’ painter. Similarly we listen to Bach’s atonal music and we think of him as a precursor to Schoenberg.

When an artist is considered as a seer, or a forerunner, it is only because we endow the past with a power of causality that it does not have. Rather, it is a present/future discovery that draws attention to past experiences, giving them a relevance or an intention that they did not have originally.

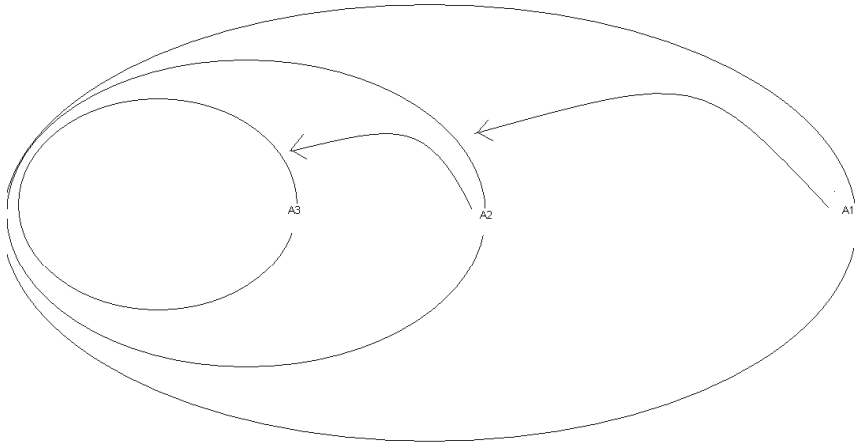
4. Solution to the problem of time

Going back to Benjamin’s cited statement about history: “History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the *Jetztzeit* .”²¹

The paradox of time passing while it is detected only in what does not pass (a trace, a memory, a material product) can find a first tentative solution - in that time is a special present, filled with memories. In Benjamin’s view history is nostalgia for the loss and re-construction of the loss through figments, or images.²² Now: is the story of Nazism a figment? Yes, because the tragic and unbearable memory of the real experience of Nazism *must* be turned into a figment, or an artifice – a monument, Anna Frank’s journal, Paul Celan’s poems, interviews, photographs etc. – posthumous forms that make the past bearable, so that we do not die from the memory of its catastrophe. Nostalgia is the melancholic attachment to what *ought to* make sense and doesn’t. All of our efforts are focused on

constructing an order, a causal chain that would quench the devastating effects of memory. If we want to survive catastrophies and be their witnesses, we must destroy memory and replace it with the re-discovery of the fragment.

Our 'now' is all that may be relied upon, to retrieve narratives of the past. Here is one of many possible ways of visualizing this 'now' retroacting on the past:



The graph shows the present time A1 gives evidence to past events and this space includes the past; the only possible existence of the past, with all its concatenations, associations, hypothetical links, is another 'now': a fragment and a figment of a whole that is paradoxically changing its qualities at every 'now'. The whole (the totality of a 'chain of events') is lacking to the extent that it is replaced by a mobile constellation of 'wholes', an image that is kept relatively flexible to be changed in each successive present moment, A2, A3 etc. In contrast with the later epistemology of 'theory-laden facts', here we find a particular drawing a tentative general meaning in its own sphere (something similar to Kant's aesthetic judgment).

A consequent epistemological problem might address how to save the stability of a view, without jeopardizing its re-configuration, when new facts come to light, when the afterlife requires its rights. Somehow knowledge (both on the level of immediate memories and of history) must renounce both the claim to represent a complete picture of an event and the aim of

redeeming past offences: how can we redeem what has been lost forever? Redemption seems to be but the monuments that present time can erect and replace with others.²³ The very notion of monument there is memory and oblivion, horror forgotten in aesthetic beauty.

Here we find Benjamin's dismissal of dialectics: any dialectical overcoming of contradictions is just an endless link of anything to anything, passages, reconstructions, convergences, survivals, re-enactments, and betrayals: the infinite work of recognition, to be attempted *ad infinitum*.

But this is far from any form of social relativism: no one decides or chooses the new form to give to the past. We are creatures of catastrophes and as such we are compelled to venerate the ruins that are our creators.

It is difficult to accept this view of the past, both for ethical reasons (we are that flâneur, who in full detachment recognizes his inability to gather the past in one whole image, like the philosopher described by Benjamin, standing on the Tour Eiffel, immune to vertigo²⁴) and for epistemological reasons: we are forever dispossessed of an object of knowledge: "The object of knowledge is not identical with the truth."²⁵

An object of knowledge is a belated construction of a chaotic and indefinite amount of events, which makes sense of it. The identification of that object with the truth of what happened is the misrecognition of afterlife as source of sense. By way of example, historians of the XV century discoveries have argued that new sea routes to India or Africa or the Americas were discovered out of a search for new economic sources of wealth, through a new commercial impetus; and a political struggle over the control of territories, etc. But a close reading of chronicles and reports from the period reveals another, less determined reality. It was the poverty of farmers who went to sea out of desperation and most times did not come back; the simple pleasure in possessing gems, spices and furs was another motivation (even the value we give them today is an afterlife of that ancient surprise). It was the legacy of medieval Crusades that gave a sense of missionary work to the adventure. It was the new translations of texts on mathematics and geography from Arabic or Greek into Latin that made scholars and adventurers dared to seek out these lands. Finally, it was mere curiosity about those maps of the known world, tentative works in progress, to be accomplished or corrected by personal experiences²⁶; not to mention those useful errors, serendipitously leading to unpredictable discoveries. A number of heterogeneous elements are independently effective in bringing about an unanticipated network of results. Their afterlife uncovers the reasons for a set of concrete actions.

An emphasis on each of those elements tells a different story, and each is a necessary point of view, unintentionally offered to attention, attracted by a moment-totality.

5. Cognition as heterocracy

*Truth is beautiful: not so much in itself, as for Eros*²⁷

The truth is not merely factual if it is uncovered belatedly, if it is regular and irregular at the same time, depending on the different distances that we take from it; if it is a present space where it is given its only possible existence. Instead, factual truth is an object of beauty, of desire, of perceptual attraction: a material trace of a lost event.

Let's follow the historian Felipe Fernández-Armesto's suggestion: "I have a vision of some galactic museum of the distant future in which diet Coke cans will share with coats of chain mail a single small vitrine marked 'Planet Earth, 1000-2000, Christian era'."²⁸

The aesthetic level of description replaces the scientific level of explanation, but the aesthetic takes on a deadly serious task (Benjamin's homage to Nietzsche?); it is the task of revealing the truth, in its fragmentary but authentic essence.

*"Truth is an intentionless state of being, made up of ideas....a total immersion and absorption in it. Truth is the death of intention."*²⁹

The truth is what is not constructed, not an object or a product intended by an agent in view of a particular result., nor is it an instrument of power. We are instead mastered by it. It reveals itself in our *immediate* gestures of curiosity, unpredictable associations, in whatever afterlife requests our attention and compels us to re-define our certainties.

'Mediation', the key-notion of many philosophies inherited from Hegel, and particularly by Marx and later by Adorno, in their efforts to protect political thinking from that 'false immediacy' that had caused the control of the masses through ideological means is retrieved as an inevitable occurrence in which something appears that seemed to be lost. Whereas mediation disrupts individual cognitive activity as it finds it essentially flawed by ideology, Benjamin's individualistic philosophy has the flâneur as its weak subject. The flâneur discovers something before he can know why and how he ran across that something. The marginal fragment calls for atten-

tion, it bespeaks loss and requires the re-configuration of meaning, independently of intentions and aims. We are in the hand of an heterocratic force of immediacy.

Whereas Adorno's appeal to mediation serves his distinction between art and non-art, between critical attitudes and passive adaptations to the market's requirements, in Benjamin's immediacy shows us that what counts and what does not undergoes the interrupted potentialities of afterlife effects.

There is also a stylistic issue: Benjamin, being cast out of German academy, does not need to be reverent toward that milieu. He uses the language he thinks most appropriate to express his *immediate* ideas and sentiments of ideas. Freed from the stylistic strictures of academia, Benjamin's voice need not be self-referential.

He thinks about what he observes and what he observes is but details of a missing whole, whose theoretical – and authoritarian – voice must come to terms with each occasional observation, giving shape to multiple, successive or parallel universes. Immediacy takes on the value of attention for the unpredictable transformation of the effect-product into a cause-producer, and if any critical attitude is at stake here, it is the ability to doubt the paranoid certainty of causation of fact.

This is why Benjamin is more farsighted in the long run, concerning the new arts of photography and the cinema. He first immediately observes and then adjusts his judgment on those observations.

The afterlife is a space, wider than its whole: what is re-discovered produces new modifications of previous views. What might be lost is actually a witness of any possible future loss; it keeps loss in its own re-enactment..

The afterlife of a fact is the remedy to the guilt of time passing. It consists of the many dramas that have not occurred – or perhaps never will – through the more or less temporary focus of communication. From the standpoint of retrospective influence, any afterlife compels us to think of unrealized potential: a violence never discovered, which – if it would have been – might change our view of the many events connected to it. Slaves' labour, women's silent work, children working in fields and factories. What about their existence *before* their discovery in the afterlife? Products can bear trace of their use-value or exchange-value, but no trace of their producers' suffering. Every moment of history recognizes past suffering while hiding present suffering.

The Marxian general laws of history – and causes of injustice - are replaced with particular occasions to establish, reinforce or overthrow any status quo. These occasions are contingent upon themselves, discovered without the aid of any ‘scientific analysis’ but rather through observation of material traces: what happened in slums cannot be explained away by any general law, it can hardly be understood in its particular occurrence. If what we build will produce what we don’t expect, and control and loss of control act in mutual reinforcement, there is no totality governing our judgments, if they may modify their own certainties in the very moment in which they are conceived: “With the destabilizing of the market economy, we begin to recognize the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled.”³⁰

The market economy is simultaneously in crisis and in function: we recognize its end before it ends; it is an essential catastrophe working out its solutions step by step, day after day. And what we call economic order is not the opposite of chaos but it is a system that copes with chaos to its very limit of break point.

Our political systems are monuments of themselves. They are obsolete before being replaced by other forms of politics, if the forms we use to define them are always already caught in their potential unexpected oblivion and afterlife. They are dead forms of the world that we are able to perceive and use exactly by virtue of their being dead (or dream-like). What we call ‘bougéoisie’ is spread over all classes and does not refer to any social group in particular. It is its own afterlife. We name something that has existed long ago. Its reference is a memory, though we think it has a concrete representation in the real world.

This is what Niklas Luhmann calls political heterocracy: today social groups tend to shift from extreme cohesion (immigrants) to extreme dispersion (insiders; middle class); the first group need to recognize themselves while integrating into the new system in order to be accepted; the second group does not recognize an overall view of political space; the more fragmented the more mobile and flexible. In both cases social groups do not receive a stable identity. In any case, we are aware to be ruled by contingent decisions and choices. This very lack of a general law makes both cohesion and dispersion effective: it generates a changeable and conflictual cultural environment which will govern future societies. The political claim to build a plan of actions and a structure of aims (the equivalent of Kant’s general object and Vico’s *verum factum*) escapes forever our ability to conceive of it.

Benjamin's notion of afterlife can thus be expanded into the socio-political domain: societies are what others will make of them. This society is what will happen to be re-constructed, out of occasional motifs, re-awakening of past tragedies, the compulsion to give meaning to what is left scattered in the corners of historical reconstructions. It is a construction of meaning grounded on destruction (or 'ridicule') and implies the belief that circumstances guide the discovery of hidden potentialities³¹, that, as it were, *chance* causes the truth.

This posthumous definition of the world is the very force of capitalism: its own theoretical poverty resists the alternation of beliefs and utopias. Its economic orientations are safeguarded from the misunderstandings of religions and science, upon which strong political theories are moulded. Capitalism endures crises and cultural changes as it leans on circumstances, it is nothing beside the very image that it gives all over again. A capitalistic ideology does not exist; it feeds upon its own emptiness: cunning, tricks, stratagems, artifices aimed at adjusting itself on circumstances, in the inevitable continual nourishment provided for by afterlife. Benjamin disregards any totalizing principle of individuation in favour of a dynamic formation and disappearance: where is the form of the society we are judging? What is 'revolution' with respect to massacre and totalitarianism? Any radical apocalypse must occur simultaneously with political continuity of government.

- 1 G. Simmel, "Fashion", in *On Individuality and Social Forms*, D. Levine, ed. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971, pp. 294-323) p. 303.
- 2 W. Benjamin, *The Arcade Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 79.
- 3 *Ibid.* p. 100-101.
- 4 *Ibid.* p. 236.
- 5 W. Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator", (in *Illuminations*, London: Fontana Press, 1973, p. 70-82) p. 70.
- 6 Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, cit. p. 13.
- 7 *Ibid.* p. 389.
- 8 W. Benjamin, "Old Toys", in *Selected Writings*, M. Bullock and M.W. Jennings, edd. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1996-2003) pp. 98-102.
- 9 M. Pinsky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the play of mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p.212.
- 10 P. Virno, *Il ricordo del presente. Saggio sul tempo storico*, (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 1999) p.35.
- 11 *Ibid.* p. 67.
- 12 M. Pinsky, *Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the play of mourning*, op. cit. p.29.
- 13 W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", op. cit. Thesis XIV, p.252.
- 14 *Ibid.*.Thesis XVIII, 255.

- 15 N. Luhmann, *Social Systems*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) passim.
- 16 N. Luhmann, *Art as a Social System*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) p. 149.
- 17 Ibid. p.293.
- 18 W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in *Illuminations*, cit., pp. 211-244; p. 219.
- 19 G. Careri, *Bernini : Flights of Love*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) p.75.
- 20 W. Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, op. cit. p.173.
- 21 W. Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", op. cit. Thesis XIV, p. 253.
- 22 Ibid. Thesis V, p. 247.
- 23 Ibid. Thesis XV, p. 253.
- 24 W. Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, op. cit. p. 459.
- 25 W. Benjamin, *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, (London: Verso, 1999) p. 30.
- 26 R. Watkins, *Unknown Seas. How Vasco da Gama opened the East*, (London: John Murray, 2003) pp. 12, 68.
- 27 W. Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, op. cit. p. 31.
- 28 F. Fernández-Armesto, *Millennium. A History of the Last Thousand Years*, (New York: Scribner, 1995) p.11.
- 29 W. Benjamin, *Origin of the German Tragic Drama*, op. cit. p. 36.
- 30 W. Benjamin, *The Arcade Project*, op. cit. p. 13.
- 31 G. Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin. Critical Constellations*, (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2002) p.33.

Equivocating Aura: On Benjamin's Conception of Mechanical Reproduction

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To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose "sense of the universal equality of things" has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.¹

Identifying with the aggressor, Benjamin all too readily succumbed to the present trend that seeks to re-integrate art in the realm of practical ends. Phenomenal distance is that aspect of art works whereby they transcend mere being. By contrast, total elimination of distance, as advocated by Benjamin, amounts to the total integration of art in empirical life.²

1. Introduction

• My present focus will be Walter Benjamin's invoking of the notion of "aura" in his essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". In Benjamin's seminal essay we can find the notion of the "aura" as equivocating different, and at times contrary, signification. On the one hand, the auragenic is defined in relation to a "presence in time and space" which is lost through reproduction. On the other hand, photographic means also entail a novel quality by capturing a transient instant otherwise gone unnoticed. Despite the seminal role which Benjamin's essay still plays in contemporary critical theory, it is often criticized for its conceptual and terminological ambiguities, specifically in relation to the notion of "aura" and more generally concerning the underlying mechanisms of reproduced, mediated communication equally involving aesthetic and political implications.

My main argument is that Benjamin's conceptual equivocation of "aura" is rooted not in a terminological ambiguity but rather in the irreducible duplicity of the role of the aesthetic in reproduction and mediation in particular and technological communication in general. I argue that Benjamin's articulation of the concept of aura still occupies a pivotal place in our critical discourse precisely because of the importance he places on the artwork in evaluating the general aesthetic and ethical questions concerning com-

munication. Furthermore, by inserting the question of art, reproducibility and aura into the critical discourse, which involves political propaganda and mass media, Benjamin inevitably problematized Kantian aesthetics. Through examining Adorno's treatment of Benjamin's aesthetics I argue that Adorno is able to pursue a conception of aesthetic experience that no longer relied on the Kantian (polar) opposition between the aesthetic and the sublime. Instead, Adorno is able to rescue from Benjamin an interpretation of a novel kind of "sublime" which emerges out of the encounter between the technological, the social, and the aesthetic and is articulated through the notion of the "aura". Thus, by critically re-examining Benjamin's articulation, I attempt to disambiguate the notion of "aura" and demonstrate how it presents us with the irreducible multiplicity of our contemporary experience of the aesthetic and ethic, and thus of the indispensability of artworks in envisioning and embodying such plexuses.

2. Equivocating aura

What does "aura" imply or equivocate? One should not overlook in Benjamin's articulation of the term the congruity between the work of art and the past. Accordingly, the work of art and the past are positioned in their decrease or loss of "aura" (i.e. an entropic tendency) in their relation to reproducibility and history. Benjamin's contention that "in principle a work of art has always been reproducible" (218) is not only historically insightful - in suggesting pre-modern reproductive modes (e.g. molds or lithography) - but above all in positioning the "work of art" in a historically evolving (dynamic) triangulation to reproductive technologies, mass-culture and politics. Technological media, as generally referring to reproductive modes of communication, do not in principle obliterate the "aura" of either the artwork or a past moment. Benjamin acknowledged in respect to cinema, that often mass-media technologies generate a unique sense of aura in terms of emanating and/or capturing an "image of the past" that is otherwise difficult to experience. However, given that mass-cultural and political factors are infused with technological mediation, the auragenic dimension of the work of art/past is very much connected to its facticity. In other words, how we come to determine and establish the factual foundation of knowledge of either an artwork or a past event. Indeed, Benjamin's focus on the "work of art" as subject matter for his examination of such a triangulation is imperative to the understanding of his invoking of the notion of aura. Works of art are given the benefit of the doubt - through

their enigma (as posited by Adorno and as I will return to later) - that their indeterminacy of sense of fact is pre-mediated. And unlike political or/and historical events per se, artworks evade historical fixity through their constitutive play and changing context.

Attempts to critically demonstrate the multiple significations and ambiguities in Benjamin's concept of "aura" all stem from an overemphasis on the notion of "aura" as a fulcrum independent of the interpolations of technology into media, consumption and politics. Thus, in the present analysis, I refer to the notion of "aura" not as a tight and unambiguous concept, but rather as one open to re-evaluation and to on-going permutations and hence re-problematization.

Benjamin's conception of "aura" is first linked to his fundamental concern with the interplay between time, past and history in relation to their experience *vis a` vis* a fleeting image/instant. Here, *time* constitutes an ontological category, *past* a cognitive and *history* an epistemic narrative, and which together define the *presence* of artworks as well as *moments* (such as the 9/11) as collectively and /or individually constitutive: what Benjamin refers to "a moment or image of danger".

Benjamin's linking of the "aura" to the "historical" is anything but accidental, and his claim that:

Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject through the time of its existence.

Such claim is strongly echoed four years later in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History" where Benjamin argues that: "The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again." (255)

Thus, the predicament that the work of art shares with the past is its failed reproducibility, its transient and flitting dimension which "flashes up" in a given time and space and then vanishes. As much as works of art are reproduced as copies so is the past reproduced as history, that's Benjamin's deep analogy. The "aura" does not stand for a quality or essence - a big source of mystification - but rather what separates a given experience from its re-producible counterpart: an image of a seized instant. Such recognition leads Benjamin to his initial (and perhaps inevitable) pessimism: that reproducing an image by technological media

like the historical encoding of the past is doomed to redundancy and not revelation. "The situations into which the product of mechanical reproduction can be brought may not touch the actual work of art, yet the quality of its presence is always depreciated." (221)

Insofar as the task of the "historical materialist" is "to brush history against its grain," as Benjamin's trope goes, it shares with the predicament of reproducing artworks the consequences of de-authentication and de-appreciation of the original work. The artwork and the past are both subjected to time's unique and irreversible germination. As Benjamin informs us:

The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced. Since the historical testimony rests on the authenticity, the former, too, is jeopardized by reproduction when substantive duration ceases to matter. And what is really jeopardized when the historical testimony is affected is the authority of the object. (221)

It is crucial to emphasize the cross-fertilization between the concept of the "artwork" on the one hand and that of the "past" on the other hand. These two concepts play an equal role in defining "aura". The inescapable failure of authenticity is hence the outcome of the past being repeated, reproduced, or revisited as "historical" and in turn the "artwork" being universalized through its reproduction. The "aura" should be construed not as a "quality of" but rather dialectically as a "lack of quality." When Benjamin first articulates the concept of the "aura" in his essay he stresses that:

One might subsume the eliminated element in the term "aura" and go on to say: That which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art. (221)

It would be erroneous, thus, to presume that the auragenic is depleted by technological reproductive means per se. Rather, the loss of the aura - a process *symptomatic* to contemporary life and prevalent "beyond the realm of art" as Benjamin affirms - is indicative of the loss of tradition.³

Tradition is phenomenologically constituted by the continuous flow of articulated forms, gesticulations, images which never germinates from a fixed "origin" and instead moves in defiance of its own reproducibility.⁴ Technology and its reproductive means do not determine the loss of tradition, like the loss of aura, but rather its outcome: a prevailing amnesia. Benjamin warns us that "to articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger." (255) We might add

here, not only at a moment of danger but also in danger, think of the Twin Towers as a case which I later return to.

Had Benjamin retained an extra-social understanding of "aura" as a transcendent element of the artwork than he would have postulated its metaphysical powers, such as the power of kitsch to claim the status of a universal beatitude. Such a misunderstanding of his intention often results from Benjamin's lengthy expounding on the aura in relation to Medieval Christian art. Benjamin's important emphasis is on the social context, as underlying what otherwise would be dialectically construed not as "aura" but as "tradition".⁵

The auragenic is never transcendent of the underlying socio-economic and political context of a given work of art, though it transcends a given historical articulation of such context. In other words, the primacy of works of art over that of past events is the result of their *continuous presence* (as imbedded in tradition) and lies in the fact that works of art are never subordinated to their historiography.^{VI} Phenomenologically, the *work of art*, unlike the *past*, should be construed as largely constitutive and only partly institutive as knowledge.

3. Aura and sublimity

Benjamin's equivocation of the concept of aura as the diminishing horizon of the real as the temporal, the present and the historic - in terms of the transient, the mnemonic and the reproduced - is carried onto the realm of nature. Specifically, the "the loss of aura" (unlike say Baudrillard's "loss of real") reshuffles our demarcation of the cultural and the natural spheres and therefore of the Kantian conception of the aesthetic as relegated to the cultural sphere and the sublime to the natural. As Benjamin argues: "the concept of aura ... with reference to historical objects may usefully be illustrated with reference to the aura of natural ones." (222) Benjamin provides the criterion of 'distance' as that which separates the aura with respect to cultural (historical) objects as distinct from natural ones. Expounding that an image that "makes it easy to comprehend the social bases of the contemporary decay of the aura" is found Benjamin's following musing, he writes:

If, while resting on a summer afternoon, you follow with your eyes a mountain range on the horizon or a branch which casts its shadow over you, you experience the aura of these mountains, of that branch. (222-3)

The primacy of perception of the aura, so to speak, constitutes for Benjamin a diminishing horizon in our contemporary perception and experience. Perception, enhanced technologically, fulfills the desire to see “‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which ... bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproducibility.” (223) Insofar as the natural sphere is probed by technological perception (i.e. microscopes or telescopes) so are objects within the cultural sphere subjected to a perceptual probing.

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. (236)

Benjamin's contentions may be extended to anything that is “reproduced” electronically and digitally. What emerges out of his analysis of technological mediation is that reproductive modes (think of biogenetics today!) remove us away from an irreproducible given. In other words, that which is uniquely manifested as part of the experience of the real (its aura) and which overrides our ability to demarcate the boundaries of the natural and the cultural in regards to the perception of objects and perception reproduced as objects. (Think of teleconferencing or any other technologically mediated activity that retains the user as its objective constituent). Furthermore, Benjamin contends that,

Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs from the image seen by the unarmed eye. Uniqueness and permanence are as closely linked in the latter as are transitoriness and reproducibility in the former. (223)

What Benjamin here instigates is an analysis of technologically mass-mediated perception that alters perception itself. Reproduction should be construed not only in terms of reproducing objects of perception (e.g. artistic or historic) but also in respect to perception itself.⁷

Benjamin undeniably exerted an immense influence on Adorno who further articulated the dialectical dynamics between the concepts of the aura and the sublime. Adorno's analysis of the sublime - which can be seen as a precursor to Lyotard's postmodern discourse - is informed by Benjamin's contention and its bearing on the traditional Kantian conception of the sublime, as well as the Hegelian concept of the spiritualization of art. As

Adorno observes,

The concept of the 'work of art' is more applicable to Kafka than is that of the religion. The material, and especially, as Benjamin noted, the language, becomes desolate, transparent, naked. It imbues spirit with a quality of second-order abstraction. Kant's doctrine of the sublime, understood as an emotion, describes more properly the kind of art that vibrates and quakes by suspending itself for the sake of a non-illusory truth content, while simultaneously being unable to slough off its illusory quality as art. (280)

The "non-illusory quality" which Adorno refers to is tied to reproducibility and its effects on similitude. And yet, as Adorno observes, the contemporary sublime charging artworks with their material content, with their perceptual linguistic autonomy, still retains an irreducible "illusory quality as art."⁸ Furthermore, what Adorno perceptibly observes is that the autonomy of art is problematized both in respect to its enigmatic and ideological content and has to defy its political instrumentalization. Adorno thus argues that,

After Kant, the sublime becomes a historical constituent of art. Today the sublime delimits art from what goes by the name of 'arts and crafts'. Kant's idea of art implicitly contained a notion of subservience or service. (281)

Adorno grafts Benjamin's observations on technological reproduction - both in terms of its "close-ups" onto things and as a distancing from their unique reality - into his analysis of a novel sublime and argues that,

Transplanted into art, the Kantian definition of the sublime expands beyond its original confines. That definition states that spirit experiences its intelligible character as something distant from nature if and when it becomes aware of its empirical helplessness vis-à-vis nature. (281)

Drawing from Benjamin's conception of the aura, Adorno critically evaluates Kant's concept of the sublime by suggesting that the subordination of the work of art to sublimity and hence to nature on the one hand, and that of the natural sphere to the sublime on the other hand are irreconcilable.^{IX} In other words, by implicitly charging Kant's concept of the sublime with Benjamin's ideas of reproducibility and the aura of artworks, Adorno articulates a scenario through which the prospect of "self-reflection" has to be at least suspended if not abandoned altogether. Instead, Adorno reiterates

Benjamin's assertion on the primacy of perception and immediacy of the auragenic *vis à vis* the cultural and/or the natural spheres, art objects, historical objects or natural objects alike. "The act of constituting the beautiful in consciousness has to be actualized by immediate experience," writes Adorno, "otherwise it just postulates beauty without really constituting it. Beauty in art and in nature are intimately related in that both seek to restore nature by an act of turning away from nature's immediacy." (385) Nonetheless, it is remarkable that despite Adorno's ability to articulate and introduce Benjamin's contentions into a critique of the Kantian conception of the sublime, his specific reading of Benjamin's concept of the aura is somewhat perplexing. Adorno's reading of Benjamin's aura is a twofold interpretation of the aura as:

- (1) The atmospheric dimension of the artwork.¹⁰
- (2) The objective implications of the artwork beyond its subjective constitution.¹¹

Adorno often remarked his reservations on Benjamin's ambiguous treatment of the aura in respect to technology. There is no other way for Adorno to interpret the loss of aura through technological mediation.¹² For Adorno, Benjamin's views on the auragenic in technological terms, such as in the case of cinema are incompatible with his views of the loss aura of the artwork as result of mechanical reproducibility. Given its pertinence, I would like to expound now and explain why Adorno's exegesis of Benjamin's conception of the aura is limited and to an extent misleading. In the first case, Adorno's emphasis on the *auragenic as atmospheric* stems from his investment in arguing for the work of art's immunity to being descriptively re-produced, or reduced to a political and hence instrumentalist ideology. Adorno's concern is well taken, but it falls short in appreciating Benjamin's insight into the extent which the "horizon of the real" is turned into a new immediacy, or perception, as found in cinema for example.¹³

Benjamin emphatically draws our attention to the difference between the traditional function(s) of the work of art in relation to cult and ritual and our contemporary mass-culture by arguing that "when the age of mechanical reproduction separated art from its basis in cult, the semblance of its autonomy disappeared forever. The resulting change in the function of art transcended the perspective of the century; for a long time it even escaped that of the twentieth century, which experienced the development of film." (227)

In reference to our present technologically mediated society, Benjamin's observations can be applied to notions such as "real time" and the "virtual" with respect to communication. The auragenic dimension construed in such terms, unsurprisingly, induces a reading of the historical as collapsing into the image: the aura of the collapse of an image's perception into its historical time. Think here of the perceptual immediacy - a disturbing aura, a moment or memory in and of danger - of the two passenger planes crushing into the Twin Towers. What had been experienced is still being experienced as perpetually enacted and revisited through technology. On this side of the Atlantic, we watched it in "real time"; an "event" otherwise reiterated by endless replays. But, here, in the case of the Twin Towers' collapse, the historical concurred with its reproducibility, hence, collapsing into the rehearsed moment of danger and disaster. Once again, a moment not only seized in danger but that captures danger, both historically and humanly.

Adorno's second exegesis of the notion of aura of the work of art in terms of its objective constituents misses the poignancy, if not prophetic dimension, in Benjamin's conception in respect to mass-communication and media. Benjamin's contention that, "the camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses" entails a novel aesthetic articulation of both perception and contemporary art making.¹⁴ Again, in relation to our present discourse, Benjamin's suggestion opens up the possibility of construing "aura" not as a binary concept relegating the cultural or natural realms and the subjective and the objective, as two distinct poles of experience. Rather, both inform us of the dissipation of the idea of an "originary" reality that lies *outside* perception. And as Benjamin intuited, technologically mediated perception (e.g. the camera) interjects an "unconscious optics" which utterly transforms our perception of things by re-shaping our perception. The auragenic in such a case signifies a radical departure from the rational model of perception as congruent to events. Instead, mass media, politics and art resurface abound in and through an "unconscious optics".

4. A cybernetic sublime?

If we construe Benjamin's *deep analogy* of the artwork and the past (i.e. between reproduction and history) in terms of the past's fleeting image and its technological acceleration, than the two-phase process of the col-

lapse of the auragenic invokes a novel kind of sublime. An experience of a sublime by either a process by which we may designate the collapse of *image to time*, or identify the collapse of *history into image*. The collapse of the twin towers – by now a synecdoche to 9/11 – exemplified the collapse of image into time; the moment after the ‘world’ has changed and yet its temporal discontinuity manifested a chilling aura: the image of an end to the pre-9/11 era. Could such discontinuity – historical and spectacular at once – be possible without its technological mediation, without *real time*?

Benjamin’s allusion to the “unconscious optics” introduced to the sublime, as transformed by technological mediation, a novel dimension. A dimension which can be generally referred to as “cybernetic” in so far as it is designated by the presence of electronic and digital mediation and communicative networks. Furthermore, such experience of the sublime suggests a sense of a “chiasm” emerging from the reciprocal interplay between the aura of things’ lived and the aura emanated from technological media. Together, as one nexus or body: experiential immediacy and technological perception, do not simply obliterate the distinctions between ‘life’ and its ‘reproduction’, or ‘experience’ and ‘transmission’, in a way resonant of Baudrillard’s take. Rather, the reciprocal influx and the “chiasm” between the production and the consumption of an image, a past or an event, attest to Benjamin’s insightful analogy between the technologically reproductive means and that of the mechanisms of history in robbing the aura out of experience. And in so far as technological media had by now obliterated the temporal relapse between production and consumption of images, than, it is such obliteration that marks a new, perhaps imperceptible sense of spacelessness and amnesia.

Is it possible that such a chiasm, such experiential cavity of the spaceless, is now experienced as auragenic in relation to technique?

Potentially, by re-examining positions, which are critically responsive to that of Benjamin’s, especially those held respectively by Adorno, Debord, Baudrillard and Virilio we may gain a necessary and “un-nostalgic” critical distance. Two principal topics, which are to some extent implicitly articulated in Benjamin’s equivocation of the “aura”, are that of the *spectacle* (Debord) and another that involves *simulation* (Baudrillard). Benjamin, however, neither digressed – despite his Marxist contentions – into an ideological stance such as the situationists, nor did he regress into a sentimental liturgy of the loss of the real (Baudrillard’s “desert of the reals”).

Moreover, the *cybernetic sublime* is connected with a kind of "aura" which is technologically contingent on but never transcendent of the given technological reproductive context. For example, compared with Virilio's aesthetics of speed and his neo-futurism Benjamin's insights on futurism, fascism and mass media are not subsumed by heightened technological rhetoric.

There are advantages to Benjamin's preference of the work of art as paradigmatic case for examining the loss and problematization of aura. Unlike Debord's emphasis on spectacle and hence focus on the socio-political nexus of mass media, Benjamin retains the indispensable uniqueness and particularity of the work of art (and as emphatically developed later by Adorno) as irreducible to reflection and hence as immune to theorizing as such. The aura indispensable to the work of art (without excluding mechanical and digital modalities) is ever contingent upon the historically evolving triangulation of reproductive technologies, mass media and politics, but is defiant of its subordination to its subsequent historical categorization.¹⁵ Moreover, unlike Baudrillard's pessimism, Benjamin's construes the "loss of aura" not as the "desert of reals" and hence in relation to what constitutes reality, but rather, in terms of perceptual constitution, the underlying phenomenological nexus of the real. And finally, perhaps, cautioned by the rapport between futurism and fascism, like Adorno but unlike Virilio, Benjamin never idealized technological mediation with its perceptual acceleration and speed and remained sober in facing the intoxicating powers of mass media. Benjamin reserved the locus of the work of art as perhaps the last archipelago in an otherwise oceanic liquidity of the experiential.

1 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (New York: Schocken Books) p. 223.

2 Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul), p. 429.

3 As Benjamin argues: "One might generalize by saying, the technique of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition." (221)

4 As Benjamin notes, "The uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being imbedded in the fabric of tradition. This tradition itself is thoroughly alive and extremely changeable." (223)

5 "The conditions for an analogous insight," Benjamin writes, "are more favorable in the present. And if changes in the medium of contemporary perception can be comprehended as decay of the aura, it possible to show its social causes." (222)

6 Benjamin reminds us that even tradition is eroded in terms of its content of cult and ritual in favor of the political and such process has surfaced with the appearance of the photographic negative in relation to the concept of authenticity and the original. (224)

- 7 Benjamin notes that “the adjustment of reality to the masses and of the masses to reality is a process of unlimited scope, as much for thinking as for perception.” (223)
- 8 Adorno, like Benjamin, follows the generalization of the work of art as paradigmatically post-dada avant-garde and argues, “the emancipation of the subject by art was co-existensive with the shift towards autonomy in art itself. Once free of all concern for the sensibilities of the recipients, art was able to disregard the sensuous façade, sensuousness being retained only as a function of truth content. This content became invigorated by art’s setting out in all kinds of new untested directions.” (281)
- 9 Adorno writes the following: “The sublimity, Kant argues, is a feeling we have in the presence of nature, but if we follow the logic of the subjective theory of constitution, this means that nature itself must be sublime. Self-reflection in the face of nature’s sublimity foreshadows the reconciliation with nature. [...] This liberation would amount to a return of nature, more specifically a return of the sublime, the counter-image of mere life.” (281)
- 10 Adorno writes that, “what is called aura ...is something that is familiar to artistic experience. It generally goes by the name of ‘atmosphere’. The atmosphere of a work of art is the connection of its moments in so far as they point beyond themselves, singly and together. [...] It is something fleeting and elusive, as anybody who has ever tried to capture the atmosphere of a work of art in descriptive terms knows only too well.” (386)
- 11 In relation to the other sense of aura Adorno writes that, “following Benjamin, who illustrated the concept of aura in reference to nature, we can say that perceiving nature’s aura means to become conscious of that quality in nature which is defining element of a work of art. Aura is an objective signification beyond all subjective intentions.” (386)
- 12 In a television interview, Adorno reiterated his rejection of the possibility of technological aura by arguing that a concert televised to millions of people still has only one given place and time.
- 13 Benjamin observes that “in the case of films, mechanical reproduction is not, as with literature and painting, an external condition for mass distribution. Mechanical reproduction is inherent in the very technique of film production.” (244) Adorno, as cited in the opening of this paper, deplors Benjamin for being “enchanted” by “the present trend that seeks to re-integrate art in the realm of practical ends.”
- 14 Benjamin’s trope of the “unconscious optics” will later be exploited by Rosalind Krauss’ explication of subversive modern trends in art in her book *The Optical Unconscious*.
- 15 Neo-liberal aesthetics falls precisely into such a trap by abiding to the commodification of theory. This can be partly the result of what Adorno intuited as the predicament of the “culture industry” to which the art world specifically, by delusion, denial or both, entertains as a recipe for its immunization.

Walter Benjamin's Theology of the Corpse: Allegory in Lohenstein's Sophonisba

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1. Constellations: Ideas and Truth

In *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* Walter Benjamin asks the following question: How does one represent an idea that has a name, when the goal is to regenerate this name-giving act through philosophical contemplation? How can philosophy restore this primal way of understanding ideas—this “paradise”¹ prior to language’s structured pitfalls—when words in language are reduced to their most obvious empirical meanings while the “primacy of the symbolic character of the word” is neglected?² Philosophy’s task is the struggle to restore this naming act through the representation of ideas, which discards intention and subjectivity for the immersion and absorption that is not a static inductive definition, rather appearing as a perception “in action, like the blood coursing through the body.”³ Will this name-giving process imbued with symbolic meaning provide truth as *contra* the stagnant appraisal of ambivalent signifiers? Will the representation of ideas refer to truth itself, or is this merely a philosopher’s fantasy?

To answer these questions, we must determine what “truth” is for Benjamin, and how it is associated with ideas. “Truth is the death of intention.”⁴ With no intention, how can there be a subject who functions as the origin of the idea? The subjective experience of the image is subverted to the role of collector of fragments to piece together within a mosaic. The *Trauerspiel*, for example, is a collection of fragmented ideas, shattered off from the original text and pasted together in a new work. Did Benjamin as philosopher-collector achieve an active role by intending a certain form of philosophical truth, or as the transient spending his days gathering aluminum cans and other trinkets along the road? Benjamin’s seeming aversion to subjectivity is epitomized in the “mosaic construction” that characterizes much of his work.⁵ This methodology is the reverse of traditional philosophical endeavors, such as the subjective methodology *par excellence* – Cartesian foundationalism that discovers indubitable truth in the

thinking thing, in the I am, which founds all subsequent truth claims. Benjamin, however, will never utter the thoroughly individualized Cartesian “I think there fore I am;” he dares not murder truth before it even has a chance to live. If intention is the death of truth, how is truth sought? In his unquenchable search for the truth, Benjamin will set his intentions aside and act as arbiter between the constellation of ideas that forms in such vertiginous webs as the German mourning plays and his own work on the *Trauerspiel*.

Benjamin likens the relationship of ideas and objects to constellations and stars, respectively.⁶ Truth lies within the relationships between the constellations of ideas, where each object of an idea is its own star, and—likened to Leibniz’s monad—contains the image of the world. These constellations allow room for change; the object of ideas dies, emerges anew, while simultaneously remaining timeless. Ideas disappear, reappear, sustain themselves, and birth themselves. Ideas are born out of ideas. So where so ideas originate, or is origin an infinite regression into ideas? Origin is a historical category compared to a “vortex in the stream of becoming.” Origin is that water emerging from the vertiginous whirling that comes into being and disappear. Origin is a dialectical category of history, and plays a role in the redemptive process that characterizes Benjamin’s theology of the corpse. In the constellation of ideas as a sort of fractured collective, “phenomena are subdivided and at the same time redeemed,” so the fragments are reborn—the phoenix rises from the ashes, the shards of glass return to sand.⁷ The redemption is the breaking away from subjectivity’s cold grasp. The whole becomes the piece, the significant becomes the extreme. This becoming is redemption.

Truth is not the intention with which one employs language; truth is not within subjectivity. If we want to know the “truth” about a *Trauerspiel*, we cannot rely on an answer reducible to a particular tragic drama as we engage in criticism, nor can we betray the singularity of the work by abstracting and theorizing away the extremes. “The idea is a monad.”⁸ The idea reflects an entire world. The representation of ideas is the “outline” of each of these irreducible singularities revolving around other singularities in a constellation. Truth *is* this constellation of ideas, not the thinking about ideas, not the existing as one capable of thinking about ideas, but truth is the web of ideas that transcends the intention of the subject. The fragment, according to Benjamin, is the only way to salvage the representation of ideas, which points to the significance of extremes in this

mosaic of fragmented ideas. One should not, as some scientific research, discard the extremes as inexplicable anomalies. The extremes are a part of the fragmented mosaic that is made up of monadological ideas, "the distinct and the disparate," and testifies to the power of naming, the force of ideas: of truth itself.⁹ Why does Benjamin say, "the value of fragments of thought is all the greater the less direct their relationship to the underlying idea"?¹⁰ Does this create more alluring fragments, greater variety in the details of the mosaic of philosophical contemplation—much like the aphorisms scattered throughout the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* itself—that causes the reader to "pause and reflect" all the more?¹¹ Benjamin states that the "*Trauerspiel* is an idea,"¹² which means that the German mourning play is a fragment within the mosaic of literature, where in literature there is "no new style."¹³

In the *Prologue* Benjamin names thinking philosophically as that which repeats itself. Similar to the repetition of the conflicts between the divine passions in Lohenstein's *Choric Interludes*, Love and Hate will fight for eternity, repeating the same arguments, although each articulation adds levels of meaning, like the piecing together of a mosaic. History likewise repeats itself, mirrored in *Sophonisba's* focus on the rise and fall of empires. How does the *Trauerspiel* rest within the web of ideas, and what truth whirls around this constellation? In this paper I will question why Benjamin describes the corpse as the central allegory of the *Trauerspiel* and how this relates to his "theology" of the corpse, with reference to Lohenstein's *Sophonisba*.

2. The Corpse and Ruins

Benjamin chose to write a book on the baroque drama for the purpose of bringing to the foreground a marginal fragment of a work that has been forgotten in the flow of history. But why is Benjamin so gripped with death? Benjamin explains:

*The characters in the Trauerspiel die, because it is only thus as corpses, that they can enter into the homeland of allegory. It is not for the sake of immortality that they meet their end, but for the sake of the corpse.*¹⁴

This statement shows the secular emphasis of the baroque drama—especially since the tyrant as one of the main characters is always compelled

to provide the corpses¹⁵—however it is also a bit shocking: “*for the sake of the corpse.*” The central moment of the baroque drama is the dead body, depicting the “absolute subjection of humanity to the tug of natural history... [where] subject is translated into corpse.”¹⁶ If Benjamin’s subject is the corpse in his explication of the *Trauerspiel*, then in what way can the corpse beckon a theology? The corpse is a discarded dead body; theology expresses some schema of God’s relation to the world, for example, an eschatology—be it of apocalypse or afterlife—which provide a possibility for the soul after death. Hence the term “theology of the corpse” seems paradoxical. The corpse bears no traditional relation with God, except that it is a gift that houses the eternal soul. What is Benjamin’s understanding of theology?

What “light” will begin to illuminate Benjamin’s theology? The German mourning play lives in history, which differs from tragedy that inhabits mythology. The *Trauerspiel* is also essentially allegoric rather than symbolic. One way to begin to understand Benjamin’s stance is through Lohenstein’s *Choric Interludes*. The divine passions express a tension that spirals into an obsession with the corpse of both divine and human. Which passions are fueled by a death-frenzy? All—even Love. Love orates, “See how some letters glow like stars[...] And the world-to-come will show what pure Love can achieve [...] my fires will light thy funeral pyre.”¹⁷ The divine understands the death drive of both history and the individual within the flow of history. “The choruses expound an edifying psychology of the passions”¹⁸ especially in the instance of Sophonisba’s attempt to refute Jealousy by an *ad hominem* attack, calling the behavior of this allegorical figure that of an “insane melancholic.”¹⁹ However, wherever the human traverses, passions follow—and with these passions a dialogue soaked in blood.

As the forerunners of the 18th century *Trauerspiel*—the engravings of the “Dance of Death” in the 16th and 17th centuries had a similar mechanism providing allegorical significance to the corpse. These depictions reflect the relation between human life and death—depicted by the corpse. One could call these engravings “secular,” as well, because the corpse has no religious significance in itself. The corpse reminds the human subject of her fate, her fallen nature, not of her undying soul.

In the provided engraving, as a woman is held in a deep trance with her own reflection, a rotting corpse awaits in zeal to take her hand and show her even more about the fate of her human body.²⁰ We can only guess

that the image she sees in her hand mirror is her own decaying face, since the corpse is leading her into the path of a venomous snake and her meaningless death. The corpse is not a religious figure: it is not Jesus, Zeus, Virgil, etc...that guides the vain woman by the hand in a solemn procession towards the gates of heaven or hell. The corpse is an allegory for both history and humanity—the double sided coin that the *Trauerspiel* represents as allegory.

One wonders if this image could also be interpreted as a response to Cartesian foundationalism. The woman stares deeply at her image, she contemplates the idea of herself, her inner thought whispers, "I am." The playful skeleton awaits the day when he can reveal to her what truly lies behind her lovely face—the death mask that will silently utter "I am not." Descartes rests truth on the thinking subject, the flesh that will decay and the thought that will be purged from existence. Truth does not wait in the mirror, in the subject, or in the body.

The corpse is an allegory for natural history: decay and transience; it represents the *Trauerspiel* itself as a fragment of history. The corpse is the debris of the body: the fragment, the ruin.²¹ Should these ruins be ignored, leveled, forgotten? "The more nature and antiquity were felt to be guilt-laden, the more necessary was their allegorical interpretation, as their only conceivable salvation."²² Allegory expresses some form of lack, which is contrasted with the idea of symbol. Symbol for Benjamin represents a whole or complete idea; allegory is the fallen, fracturing subjective moment that takes on religious meaning and points elsewhere. Benjamin is interested in the fallen ruins of the *Trauerspiel* taken as allegory. The allegory in Lohenstein is secular in nature as it maps the decline of empires throughout time, and points to the resurrection of the empires via Austria's emergence as a world power.

Although the allegory itself is essentially melancholic in its meaninglessness and death obsession, the allegory has a restorative or redemptive overtone in the rebirth of ideas, meaning, and the name giving process, for example, the birth of the Austrian Empire. It is implied, even in the play itself, that although this new empire is born, it will fall like all the rest. History repeats itself—it cannot escape the swirling vortex of the origin. In Lohenstein's *Trauerspiel*, Sophonisba's corpse insights Masinissa into a hysterical state. Within this madness, Masinissa desires a "dance of death" all his own, an erotic dance involving one living and one dead, in which, as he states, "with your shade I'll ply both love and pleasure" just

“as earlier her body, her corpse...[I will]...bemire.”²²³ Guilt and lust intermingle within Masinissa as he pledges to take his life in this perverse act of atonement; he is entranced by her corpse. “The vacant stare is luring in a tender fashion the ardor of my heart; with all my soul I strive to catch the scent I know upon her lips must thrive,” Masinissa utters. In a similar fashion, Benjamin uncovers one of history’s ruins in this baroque form, and is allured by its marginal place in history. The *Trauerspiel* is likened to Sophonisba’s corpse, which also “preserves the image of beauty to the very last.”²²⁴ Fragmented, fallen from life, a rotting cadaver, both the baroque German drama and Sophonisba’s corpse relay a meaning that hovers in the constellation of ideas, constituting a truth that squeeze melancholy sighs in an appreciation for the extreme peaks of the mosaic. The meaninglessness of Sophonisba’s death is also described through Diotima’s historical prophecy. The Punic War ends, Carthage falls, and Numidia is under Roman rule. Subsequently, Rome falls, the Vandals invade, which is followed by the Arab conquest. This is why Sophonisba proclaims, “I die in ecstasy,”²²⁵ because it is her fate as a subject to fall into the meaninglessness of nature: “My life so fraught with sorrow for me holds no more joy. No bounties holds tomorrow. With my King Syphax rose my own good fortune’s sun, and now with him it sets.”²²⁶ It is meaningless, but simultaneously fraught with meaning; it is a singular event and an event situated within the web of history. History entails birth and death: the birth of nations, the fall of empires.

Natural history is fallen nature. History as fated and fallen is the allegory of the corpse. Seeing the allegory of the corpse surges forth with meaning rife with fallen ruins, death: empires fall, bodies die, and dynasties turn to ruins, passion decays. Benjamin is depicting the state of all natural history through the corpse allegory. History is a dance of death, an allegory charged with meaning and truth during the time of the *Trauerspiels* popularity.²⁷ “In the baroque, especially, the allegorical personification can be seen to give way in favor of emblems, which mostly offer themselves to view in desolate, sorrowful dispersal.”²²⁸ The corpse was not “dead,” but coursing with a kind of life that is depicted in the image of death’s dialectical play with life, a melancholy play that reminds the viewer of her fallen nature. “Seen from the point of view of death, the product of the corpse is life.”²²⁹ The corpse is a living allegory, an emblem that breathes life into history, into human subjectivity, into the ruin and fallen nature of all reality.

3. Subjectivity and Redemption in the Allegory

Christianity plays a vital role in understanding the allegory of the corpse in the *Trauerspiel*, since “The allegory itself was sown by Christianity.”³⁰ Humanity’s fallen nature is sinful to the core, and without divine intervention is fated to die without hope or God. Its only redemption is through the blood of Christ. The aftermath of the Lutheran notion of salvation—founded in faith not works—gave rise to the looming feeling that the world was empty of meaning since all action is futile.³¹ Calvinism’s doctrine of predestination compounds this feeling of helplessness for the very fact that a devoted Christian may never feel secure that God destined her to attain redemption. This establishes the human as “the conjunction of guilt and transience, the person as guilty nature, as flesh.”³² Here the image of the corpse—as the intersection of guilt and transience—is the most fitting allegory for death in the baroque drama because it reveals that humans, as fallen, mourn their state. “Death is the price paid by the guilty; transience secures the universality of death.”^{33, 34} Benjamin says:

*The idea of death fills [humanity] with profound terror. Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of the mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it.*³⁵

But is this contemplation the end Benjamin has in mind, since according to him, “the allegorist is countered by the scornful laughter of hell”?³⁶ Where is Benjamin taking us? The allegorical form can only be made possible by knowledge that with the “penetrating gaze of Satan in the contemplative man” is equated with evil.³⁷ As we approach the end of the *Ursprung*, it seems Benjamin is suddenly throwing us into a violently spiraling vortex, inverting his previous ideas, and changing currents suddenly. Benjamin jolts us with his answer to the theology of the corpse:

*For it is to misunderstand the allegorical entirely if we make a distinction between the store of images, in which this about-turn into salvation and redemption takes place, and visions of the frenzy of destruction, in which all earthly things collapse into a heap of ruins, which reveal the limit set upon allegorical contemplation, rather than its ideal quality.*³⁸

The image of Christ on the cross is not merely an allegory of the “desolation of human existence,” but rather as an allegory for resurrection! Now the corpse allegory of the *Trauerspiel* has been reversed in order to turn

toward redemption. Where there was once meaninglessness and dead objects, now there is infinity and hope. Where did this originate, and how does this relate to the baroque mourning play? Did Benjamin bring us this far within his theology of the corpse, only to reverse this direction and show us that it is actually a theology of a resurrected corpse, a Christ allegory? Does the “death’s-head become an angel’s countenance?”³⁹ This reversal illustrates that allegory can be construed to mean anything, therefore it is ultimately meaningless, it goes away empty-handed. In light of ubiquitous meaninglessness, what is this redemption? It is, in part, the inner awareness of messianic hope in dialectic with the hopelessness of the corpse.

The final section of the book, “*Ponderación misteriosa*” is itself an enigmatic reflection by Benjamin. Benjamin asserts that the “tragedy” of the *Trauerspiel* is the “deficiency of the development of the intrigue.”⁴⁰ Following this assertion, he seems to come full circle to the messianic optimism from the *Prologue*. But is this the redemption of the *Trauerspiel*? How can there be redemption when Benjamin has just pointed out the *Trauerspiel*’s most prominent flaw? “Subjectivity, like an angel falling into the depths, is brought back by allegories, and is held fast in heaven, in God, by *ponderación misteriosa*.”⁴¹ The fallen nature of subjectivity is redeemed through the allegory’s incitement into contemplation of ideas. Benjamin states that mourning was the outlook that led to a satisfaction derived from contemplating the emptiness of the world. By contemplating the corpse and the *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin is led to the allegorical depiction of death. Benjamin is participating in the “dance of death,” as he confirms the finitude of life and history, of the passing of beings and objects, but in a spirit of melancholy—a mournful dance, where Death is not God’s messenger, but the bearer of corpses—Death itself not cloaked in a comforting religious guise. Benjamin is not a comforter; he is a mourner.

*“In the ruins of great buildings the idea of the plan speaks more impressively than in the lesser buildings[...]for this reason the German Trauerspiel merits interpretation. In the spirit of the allegory it is conceived from the outset as a ruin, a fragment. Others may shine resplendently as on the first day; this form preserves the image of beauty to the very last.”*⁴²

Benjamin has given the idea of the corpse a place within the constellation of ideas—that mosaic that surges forth within the vortex of origin—through the truth imbued in the corpse allegory. “The *Trauerspiel* there-

fore has no individual hero, only constellations of heroes."⁴³ Everything exists within a web, even the heroes of the German mourning play. The theology of the corpse lives through fragmented allegories that breathe the ruin of natural history and of humanity itself. *Sophonisba* is a fragmented ruin in herself, an allegory of the passions that arouse and ensnare humanity in its death trap. Redemption is likened to Lohenstein's *Sophonisba* in that the ruins of history are rehashed in an eschatological hope in the overcoming of death in the emergence of an empire that will set aside the failures of the past. However, in Benjamin, the past is always resurrected, even if by disappearing in the whirlpool and emerging in a novel form. Redemption does not lie in the general, it is in the extremes, the margins that have constellations of ideas all their own. The constellation widens, another layer is added to the web, the mosaic's colors darken with the accumulation of further fragments. Truth is the process by which these constellations are understood as singularities, the name-giving process that seemed so enigmatic in the start of this exercise of questioning and hypothesizing.

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- 1 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. By John Osborne, intro. By George Steiner, (London: Verso, 1998), p. 37.
- 2 Ibid., p. 36.
- 3 Ibid., p. 39.
- 4 Ibid., p. 36.
- 5 Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics* (Amherst: MIT Press, 1993), p. 66.
- 6 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, op.cit., p. 34.
- 7 Ibid., p. 34.
- 8 Ibid., p. 47.
- 9 Ibid., p. 28-29.
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- 14 Ibid., p. 217-218.
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- 36 Ibid., p. 229.
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- 38 Ibid., p. 215.
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Adorno and the autonomy of art

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Adorno's unique brand of Western Marxism, in which the ideals of art for art's sake and absolute music remain salient, presents a complex and elusive treatment of the autonomy of art, which it is the task of this article to examine. It may seem puzzling how any kind of Marxist could believe in the autonomy of art. Autonomy is normally taken to mean that art is governed by its own rules and laws, and that artistic value makes no reference to social or political value.¹ Autonomy is taken to oppose the economic conditioning of culture assumed by classical Marxism. However, Western Marxism questioned the base/superstructure model, and Adorno's version of it offers the subtlest account of that relation.² It is a mark of the perspicacity of Adorno's treatment that he was able to do justice both to the social situation of art and music, and to their autonomy status – indeed he did justice to each through the other. Adorno delineates the functionlessness of art, and its social situation in virtue of that functionlessness.

For Adorno, autonomous artworks have a social situation but – as I will put it – no *direct* social function: "Insofar as a social function may be predicated of works of art, it is the function of having no function".³ That is, autonomous art has as its "purpose" the creation of something without direct purpose or function – pre-bourgeois art such as religious or theatre music, in contrast, does have a direct social function. Another way of putting this claim is to say that autonomous art constitutes an autonomous practice that does not serve any other practice. That is, it is an end in itself – comparably, religious practice is autonomous and lacks direct social function. Adorno's picture is that as the artist became free of church and aristocratic patronage towards the end of the 18th century, their work simultaneously became autonomous and commodified through entry into the capitalist market-place. For Adorno, autonomy and commodification stand in a dialectical relation.

Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* thus develops a "social" interpretation of the autonomy of art. It might be argued – perhaps from the direction of Analytic philosophy – that his position involves two inter-related senses of autono-

my, social and aesthetic, and that autonomy and commodification stand in a relation of mutual dependence. But for Adorno the social or sociological and the aesthetic are inter-penetrating; there are not two “senses” of autonomy.⁴ The opposition between autonomy and commodification is too stark to count as mutual dependence. One might say that there is a dialectical relation between “social” and “aesthetic” autonomy, just as there is between (social) autonomy and commodification. However, these strands must inevitably be separated to some extent – as Bernstein puts it, “for all aesthetic phenomena there will be a purely aesthetic or internal way of regarding them and an external, social characterisation”.⁵

It is important to stress that to treat autonomy as a defining feature of the modernization of art is itself an expression of modernism. The quasi-political narrative of the emancipation of music is not a neutral history but arises from the aesthetics of modernism of Adorno, and of other Frankfurt School figures such as Ernst Bloch. Hanslick’s formalism, though it had proto-historicist aspects, was non-ideological, while in complete contrast, classical Marxists dismissed the emancipation of music as bourgeois ideology and illusion. As Bernstein notes, the art of modernity is characterized by its developing autonomy, and “modernism is that increment in which art becomes self-conscious of its autonomy”.⁶

There is no one thing meant by the claim that art is autonomous, and here I do not discuss all its senses. (The autonomy of aesthetic judgment is a further question.) My aim is critically to assess Adorno’s account, but I believe that he sees the implications of the extraordinary and exotic phenomena of autonomous art and music as no other writer has done. Of course, his account requires qualification. Autonomous art is not as historically time-bound a phenomenon as he would have us believe – relative autonomy has occurred in other ages, before the onset of Western capitalism. Connectedly, his account of the changes in artistic patronage in the decades around 1800 must be debated. First, however, I will trace the origins of the concept of autonomous art in the philosophers that Adorno draws on.

1. Adorno and Kant: art for art’s sake

As with other philosophical works of great complexity and difficulty, Adorno’s *Aesthetic Theory* is best understood in relation to the writers that its author draws on and opposes. This strategy is particularly appropriate

given that Adorno's "Negative Dialectics" operates through a critique of existing systems. Although Kant's primary concern was with the *autonomy of the aesthetic*, the philosophical origins of the autonomy of art are found in his work. But the issue must be handled with care. It is a surprisingly common misconception that Kant regarded artworks as functionless; however, implicit in the *Critique of Judgment* is the fundamental reorientation of art towards purposelessness.⁷

Kant regarded most of the arts as dependent beauties, and ones that were not, notably instrumental music, he believed fell below the level of fine or, as we say, "high" art.⁸ But his account of genius provides reasons for thinking of art as autonomous, while his concept of purposiveness without a purpose was the basis – admittedly rhetorical more than logical – for Adorno's powerful treatment. Later writers took Kant's concept of free beauty – of autonomous aesthetic judgment – as the origins of the doctrine of *art for art's sake*.⁹ Hanslick asserted that music is fully autonomous and self-referential – autonomous in being no longer under the hegemony of a literary model, and in being autonomous from non-art.¹⁰ By stressing the value of music independent of text, dance or scenic action, Hanslick helped to defend its artistic autonomy. Adorno developed this position further, dialectically and historically.

Because Adorno is an heir to its tradition, it is important to say something about aestheticism or art for art's sake. This late 19th and early 20th century cultural movement was associated with modernism, reacting to the ills of modern industrial society by withdrawing from social engagement. Hobsbawm comments that before the failed bourgeois revolutions of 1848, "art for art's sake" could not yet compete with art for humanity's sake, or for the nations' or the proletariats' sake.¹¹ In the decades after 1848, however, the bourgeoisie ceased to be the revolutionary class, and commodification became a prison rather than a liberation for the artist. With "art for art's sake", art withdrew from political action; in the modernist era that followed, progressive art lost its self-confidence and turned against the bourgeois culture which produced it.

There are various possible definitions of art for art's sake and aestheticism:

- (1) *Moderate aestheticism or separatism* = the thesis of the separation of the value spheres: There is a concept of aesthetic value separate from moral and other values.¹²
- (2) *Radical aestheticism* (i) Aesthetic value is superior to moral and other

- values (Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde); (ii) *formalism*: moral qualities are irrelevant to the evaluation of an artwork as an artwork, though so also are non-moral qualities such as representational content or meaning.
- (3) *Contemplation thesis*: The aesthetic is the domain of disinterested, distanced contemplation, involving a special attitude, the preserve of experts or “aesthetes”.
- (4) *Independence thesis*: Art is or ought to be divorced from life. Wilde asserts that Art “has an independent life, just as Thought has, and develops purely on its own lines”.¹³ One implication is that art has its own laws of development.

This article considers (4) in the form of the autonomy of art. It rejects (3), holding that the aesthetic does not involve a special attitude, the preserve of experts or “aesthetes”, but is a ubiquitous and democratic phenomenon. Definitions (1) and (2) are considered elsewhere.¹⁴

2. Adorno and Marx: art as commodity or social fact

To reiterate, Adorno is an heir to the traditions of art for art’s sake, and absolute music, but his adherence is filtered through a distinctive interpretation of Marxian dialectics, which we will now examine. His sociological critique treats art in the context of its situation in industrialized societies. He holds that while autonomous art lacks the direct social purpose of pre-autonomous art, it functions as a commodity; at the same time, he holds, its autonomy is not mere bourgeois ideology but has an essential critical function. Adorno develops or qualifies Kant’s pure autonomy aesthetic through the Hegelian concepts of truth-content and the historical conditioning of artworks, and through the Marxist concept of art’s social determination. Progressive art embodies and exists within late bourgeois culture whilst denying by its truth-content that very culture; it deconstructs late capitalism as a false totality. As Adorno puts it, “truth-content [is] the task of critique”.¹⁵ The central dichotomy in Adorno’s aesthetic theory is therefore between *art as autonomous* (from Kant) and *art as commodity* (from Marx); art has a “double character as both autonomous and *fait social* [social fact]”.¹⁶ Adorno’s key claim is that although autonomy and commodity status are in tension, yet each requires the other – they are in dialectical opposition: “something severs itself from empirical reality and thereby from society’s functional context and yet is at the same time part of empirical reality and society’s functional context”.¹⁷

What exactly does Adorno mean by this "autonomous art" which appears during the later 18th century? His modernist picture, which I find a convincing one, is that Western art before the Enlightenment had largely been tethered to social functions arising from court, aristocracy or church. Music lost its direct social function with the ascendancy of bourgeois culture from the late 18th century; aristocratic and church patronage declined, and a non-functional "art music" developed. Focusing, as Adorno does, on the case of music – which may lead to biases, as we will see – it appears that it was no longer the primary role of composers to write for religious services, military bands or the theatre, or to produce *Tafelmusik* (literally "table-music") for aristocratic banquets. If artists no longer work for specific patrons in church or court, and offer their work for sale to those whose identities are not fully specified in advance – that is, they begin to function within the market – it becomes easier for them to produce works that embody their own values rather than those of their patrons, thus increasing their autonomy.¹⁸ Growing autonomy therefore goes hand-in-hand with the commodification of artworks; as Jacques Attali pithily put it, "The artist was born at the same time as his work went on sale".¹⁹ It is not such a paradox that capitalism emancipates, as Marx of course recognized. It emancipates from feudalism, but forges new chains of its own.

The dialectical development of autonomy and commodification involved various processes in different artforms, in which, until the mid-19th century, music lagged behind the other arts. These included, in the visual arts, the development of an art market and the creation of art galleries and museums for public viewing; in literature, the development of a bourgeois reading public for the novel and other high art literary forms; and in music, the appearance of public concerts, often involving payment by subscription, and later, after 1800, the mass publication of works for the bourgeois amateur. The 19th century music publisher is the equivalent of the 20th century record company in mediating between artist and audience. Though the term "sheet music" has connotations of 20th century popular song, its suggestion of the culture industry as filtering mechanism applies to the 19th century too. Beethoven and Chopin had suffered, or sometimes profited, from the appearance of rival editions, but the development of copyright further helped to secure a precarious economic independence for composers. Adorno's picture is that as composers and artists gained independent social status and tenuous economic power in Europe's burgeoning capitalist market of the late 18th

and early 19th centuries, the liberal, “bourgeois” art exemplified by Beethoven celebrated the class it represented, and epitomized the socially and artistically progressive.

Adorno does not say that works of art “ought” to become autonomous; for him, the autonomization of the work of art is an inevitable historical process. Though they may embrace the fact, reject it, or appear unaware of it, socially autonomous works also have no choice but to be commodities. Like his successor – and critic – Peter Bürger, however, Adorno does not clearly distinguish, and presumably does not wish clearly to distinguish, descriptive and prescriptive claims about autonomy.²⁰

Adorno’s account is suffused with Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism, according to which the principle of exchange is now the dominant principle of social relationships. Like other products of labor under capitalism, Adorno argues, artworks hide the work that has gone into them and appear to have a life of their own; since they are without uses, they inspire an almost superstitious reverence. There therefore question a society where all is subject to the principle of exchange. Their fetish character is not mere delusion, as orthodox Marxism claims, but a condition of their truth, including their social truth. Adorno’s key dialectical thesis is that autonomous art’s (indirect) social functions arise precisely because of its apparent (direct) functionlessness; just as it is only through commodification that art can become autonomous. These indirect functions can be both progressive – social critique – and conservative or regressive.

For Adorno, high art’s claims of autonomy – an artwork’s implicit claim to be more than a mere thing, to have a non-exchangeable dignity – are strictly illusory. From the social perspective of commodification, the autonomy of music is a kind of illusion, and vice versa – each position is false from the terms of the other. They are not two sides of one coin, but are irreconcilable. In seeming to recognize the truth in each position, Adorno’s dialectical standpoint is both more subtle, and more elusive, than either art for art’s sake or orthodox Marxism. He regards art aesthetically (as autonomous) and sociologically (as product) simultaneously. In positing any position, Adorno holds, its opposite is also present through its exclusion. His *Negative Dialectics* constitute a rejection of what he terms “Identity Thinking”.²¹ The relation between autonomy and commodity, Adorno maintains, is dynamic, and two apparently contradictory features stand in a reciprocal or symbiotic relationship.²² Music is not simply a reflection of society, and aesthetic values are not simply subordinated to

social and economic ones in the manner of classical Marxism. That at least is Adorno's account. He shows how the development of autonomous art is not of merely sociological interest, but has fundamental philosophical implications. It is a process whereby art seems to be freed from narrowly didactic and merely pleasurable purposes, as moralizing, propaganda and mere entertainment. The "social" autonomy of art fosters an individualist as opposed to social taste and aesthetics, and thus the development of the "aesthetic" autonomy of art. For instance, composers of the first Viennese School – Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven – aimed to subvert the listener's expectations in a way that their predecessors, more subservient to a social aesthetic, did not. However, when we come to examine criticisms of it, we will see how difficult it is to keep Adorno's picture in focus.

3. Progressive and regressive indirect functions of autonomous art

I have defined autonomy as lack of *direct* social function, since in his characterization of art as social fact, Adorno recognizes that all art has a social function in some sense – the dialectical opposition of autonomy and commodification reflects this fact. Commodification implies an economic function – the artist acquires a means of living in exchange for their artistic labor. Particular concerts, for instance, will have various social functions; the Adornian claim under consideration is that in general they have no *intrinsic* or *direct* social function of the kind that characterizes heteronomous music. (I am putting Adorno's claim in my own terms, trying to make sense of it without, I hope, distorting it too much.)

I referred earlier to how autonomous art has social functions that are both progressive and regressive. First, we will examine what for Adorno is the principal social function of autonomous art in the era of modernism: social critique. He holds that it is only through becoming socially autonomous, that art becomes self-conscious and socially critical. For Adorno, the key representative of art's growing autonomization was Beethoven:

*If he is the musical prototype of the revolutionary bourgeoisie, he is at the same time the prototype of a music that has escaped from its social tutelage and is aesthetically fully autonomous...His work explodes the schema of a complaisant adequacy of music and society.*²³

This “complaisant adequacy” is the hallmark of heteronomous art, which serves society rather than challenging it. For Adorno, autonomous art’s critical role arises with the growing concentration on form which arises with autonomy, of which Beethoven’s music is a model.

Since it no longer fulfils a direct social function, the autonomous artwork can create its own inner logic, which does not refer to anything external. In its consistency and total integration, form and content become identical; the work is its idea. Heteronomous art, in contrast, imitates, represents, or expresses things outside itself. Since it arises in virtue of the artwork’s form not its content, autonomous art yields more than the superficial social critique offered by political or propaganda art that appeared with modernism – “[what is] social about art is its immanent movement against society, not its manifest opinions”:

*Art...is social not only because of its mode of production...nor simply because of the social derivation of its thematic material. Much more importantly, art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art.*²⁴

Adorno stresses that through its dynamic, organic form – the thoroughgoing development of thematic material exemplified for instance by the opening movement of his 5th Symphony – Beethoven’s music epitomises socially progressive forces. This dynamic form constitutes a truth-content that is critical of *ancien régime* aristocratic society:

*The kinship with that bourgeois libertarianism which rings all through Beethoven’s music is a kinship of the dynamically unfolding totality. It is in fitting together under their own law...that his themes come to resemble the world whose forces move them; they do not do it by imitating that world.*²⁵

There are broader reasons why autonomous art functions as social critique: “In a society that has been functionalized virtually through and through, totally ruled by the exchange principle, lack of function comes to be a secondary function”. Something which by the standards of ordinary life is useless, is for Adorno a salutary violation of the Enlightenment principle of universal functionality, and thereby acquires an “irreplaceable dignity”:²⁶

*By crystallising in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as ‘socially useful’, it criticises society by merely existing...through its refusal of society, which is equivalent to sublimation through the law of form, autonomous art makes itself a vehicle of ideology.*²⁷

It is precisely though their refusal of social function that, according to Adorno, autonomous music and art acquire a critical function. By standing apart from society, autonomous art becomes more genuinely critical than political art. It is a model of emancipation, of life lived under non-oppressive conditions; as Bernstein puts it, it "[emblematises] the possibility of real individuation in opposition to social heteronomy".²⁸ This is the most one can expect from art in the present age – the only glimmer of hope from Adorno, who is a thoroughgoing pessimist but not a Marxist cynic.

For Adorno, as Zuidervaart puts it, bourgeois society produces artworks "whose primary functions have not been the accomplishment of purposes directly served by other institutions, whether economic, political, religious or academic". Zuidervaart adds that the primary functions of such works have been rather unique to art: "maintaining an image of humanity, expressing 'irrational' needs and desires, satisfying aesthetic contemplation...".²⁹ Although these functions are not unique to high art – anything at all can satisfy aesthetic contemplation – they are peculiarly satisfied by it.

While for Hegel, art affirms the society to which it belongs, Adorno stresses its critical role. These positions may be consistent, because bourgeois art is progressive when it affirms nascent bourgeois values, and regressive when later it affirms them when they are long-established.³⁰ Autonomy is modernist art's resource against administered society, but as Bernstein puts it, it is a heavily qualified one, thoroughly conditioned by what it opposes, verging on emptiness, complicit despite itself, and indefinitely vulnerable: "If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others".³¹ (Though Adorno thinks that it is not entirely "harmless".) Modernist art, though presented to an audience, is uninterested in their reaction – which is discomfiting for them. Unlike functional art, it confronts and challenges the audience, and its artistic success does not depend on their appreciation. (Though I would argue that it does in the fullness of time – the test of time and artistic value constitute a holism of interdependent concepts.) While modernist works become ever more difficult and hermetic in avoiding appropriation by the culture industry, they may also become empty. A "false reconciliation" with society has "paved the way in the sphere of radically abstract art: Non-representational art is suitable for decorating the homes of the newly prosperous".³² Adorno's concern is that the history of autonomous art is drawing to a close, with the systematic reduction of all art to the status of entertainment.

The negative function to which autonomous art is vulnerable, exploitation or co-option by the capitalist marketplace by which it “cedes its autonomy” as Bernstein puts it, is illustrated by corporate hospitality events at Carnegie Hall or the Tate Modern, which trade on the perceived social value of functionless art. It is precisely because of its dignity as functionless that artworks acquire the cachet that makes them worth appropriating for such causes. A work might function as social critique and yet also have a regressive function – these are matters of degree. If the Tate Modern were totally dominated by corporate hospitality events, the autonomy of the artworks displayed there would be undermined. A vivid example of civic appropriation of art is Dubai’s agreement with New York’s Guggenheim Museum in 2007 to create a “world-class” art museum; it is also negotiating to build a “Louvre”: “Dubai already has giant shopping malls, beach hotels and skyscrapers. What it lacks is culture”, reports *The Economist*. “So [it] has stolen a march on its rivals by buying a good chunk of such stuff – off the shelf”. Dubai’s rulers seek the prestige that arises from art’s functionlessness. The aim of Middlesborough’s more modest Institute of Modern Art, in a former industrial region of North-East England, is the more concrete one of economic regeneration, while the Los Angeles’ Music Center, which includes Frank Gehry’s remarkable Disney Hall, is a key element in the Downtown renovation programme.³³ In these last cases, somehow, the arts are meant to function as an economic magnet or generator through their mystique.

These functions of autonomous artworks are related to Bourdieu’s analysis of them as cultural capital and expression of social status.³⁴ Knowledge is power, and knowledge of the arts can both impress and oppress. However, one cannot infer from these sociological truths that the classics are inherently a bourgeois category, and that an alternative “people’s art” is required. For by the same token, “street credible” knowledge of popular music is power also – intimate knowledge of hiphop is cultural capital too. The classics are not a merely a bourgeois category, and it is not elitist to say this.³⁵

4. Direct and indirect social function

Not all functions of art are social. The representational or depictive function of painting, while serving social functions such as enhancing an aristocratic patron’s prestige, is not itself social. The kris, a ceremonial sword

from South-East Asia, originally had a practical function, but now its social or religious function predominates. But for Adorno, the loss of social function has special significance in the development of art.

What is direct or primary, as opposed to indirect or secondary, social function? A direct or primary social function, I would argue, is one which has to be grasped in order to have any understanding at all of the event or process in question. Until I understand that a certain event is a religious service rather than a university graduation ceremony – both, for instance, are held in Durham Cathedral – I will not be in any position to know what secondary functions, such as expression of national or civic pride, or oppression of the working classes, it may have. Such events are defined by their function. The direct function of a graduation ceremony is to graduate the students; of a religious service, to worship God, or remember the dead. If the ceremony did not have the function of graduating students, it would not be a graduation ceremony; if it did not have the function of worshipping God, it would not be a religious ceremony. "What is this event?" "It is an exercise in civic pride/corporate image-building/employment-creation". One cannot even understand, let alone assess, such claims if one does not already know that the event in question is a concert, a church service, a graduation ceremony, or a political rally.

In the case of events or processes which have no direct social function, what has to be grasped is precisely this fact. They are autonomous practices, like religious services. Thus what has to be understood about the direct social function of autonomous concert music is that it does not have one. In contrast, we have seen that if a cultural outsider – an anthropologist from Mars – were to ask, during a church service, "What is the (social) function of this music?", the answer would be: religious, to uplift the spirits of the congregation and turn their thoughts to God, and so on. This heteronomous music subserves the function of the religious ceremony. A corresponding answer could be given for all music with direct social function. Music for dancing or military pageants is part of, or contributes to, the social occasion. These are all cases of art that is not for art's sake, but which is for the sake of any of the things that art can be contrasted with – religion, instruction, commerce, politics, entertainment, advertising. The modernist story is that prior to the separation of the value spheres in the 18th century, all art was for the sake of one of these other things.³⁶

In contrast, if the cultural outsider went to a concert and asked, "What is the (social) function of this music?", no comparable answer could be

given. One could explain that a Bach cantata, performed in concert, was originally composed for church services; but in concert performances, it has no direct social function. To say that the music contributes to the social occasion of a concert is absurd; the music *is* the social occasion. This is the defining contrast between autonomous and heteronomous music, as Adorno conceives it.

The development of autonomous music in the later 18th century mirrors another development at that time, the appearance of the musical work. Indeed, it could be argued that the work-concept – which according to some authorities appears in music only in the later 18th century – just is the concept of autonomous art.³⁷ To talk of the *artwork* is to talk of something that is normally without direct social function. The appearance of the artwork seems especially clear in the case of music, if one accepts that it is contemporary with the separation from performance; but if this view is correct, the appearance of the artwork in painting cannot be so much earlier. The possibility of autonomous music arises only with the distinction between the musical work, and music composed for a particular occasion, whether religious, courtly or military. There are religious or political works which remain heteronomous music, while jazz improvisation, which may be autonomous, does not normally involve works; but these examples do not refute the claim that a distinction between work and performance is required to open up the possibility of autonomous music.

A direct function makes essential reference to participant understanding; it is an aim which is recognized, intended and fully conscious, and clearly pre-theoretical. Sociological or anthropological interpretation may unearth indirect functions some of which are latent in that they are not intended or recognized – though on one influential view, these also must make reference to participant understanding. Indirect function does not have to be latent in the sense of unconscious.³⁸ The direct function of supermarkets is to provide for the needs of the consumer, while their latent function, recognized by some if not all consumers, is to facilitate capital expansion. (A shop that is merely a front for money-laundering will not have either of these functions.)

The phenomenon of the concert has evolved so that not all music performed in public concerts is autonomous, if this was ever the case. Stadium rock is totally commodified entertainment without truth-content or social critique. This is functional music, among other reasons, because the audience are fans who gain their sense of identity from following it.

Pre-18th century music perhaps had a more direct social function than commodified pop music and Hollywood films – “entertainment” is not a direct social function in the 19th century sense. The suggestion that there is a direct function of autonomous music and art, viz. an aesthetic function, is one I will return to on another occasion.³⁹

As we have seen, music originally written with a religious or military function can be performed in the concert hall and still fulfill contemporary secondary functions, for instance as backdrop to corporate hospitality events. Direct social function in the act of performance – music for church services or military pageants – should be contrasted with indirect social function found in political and religious art intended for concert performance or exhibition. Thus Socialist Realist art might achieve its social function both directly by integration in activities not primarily artistic, such as Moscow military rallies, and indirectly through exhibition in art galleries. In the latter case it trades on the credentials of art without direct social function.

6. Autonomous practice: qualifying Adorno’s standpoint

Adorno’s treatment of autonomous art can be criticized on both descriptive and normative levels. Concerning his descriptive claims, it may be argued that autonomy and heteronomy are ideal types present throughout the history of art and music. Karol Berger, for instance, claims that most European music since ancient times falls between these ideals; there is no point at which the era of autonomous music began, rather there is partial autonomy in all music.⁴⁰ Berger sensibly puts the Adornian thesis in terms of the development of an autonomous practice which has aims of its own not derived from other practices. However, he claims that the continuity of music’s “internal aims” allows the inclusion of the works of Josquin, Monteverdi and Bach in the canon of art music despite subsequent changes in their “external functions”.⁴¹

By the “continuity of music’s internal aims”, Berger presumably means that there was always music that was created and appreciated for its own sake, and not just for its contribution to a larger social function – that this was not an 18th century development. This is just the point at issue, however – whether music does continuously have such “internal aims”. Such aims may be expressed in the traditions of “learned music” that flourished

in the Middle Ages, and in the Baroque era – Bach contributed to the latter through such works as *The Art of Fugue*, and *The Well-Tempered Clavier*.⁴² During the later 18th century, music performed for its own sake in private, began to be performed in public as so-called chamber music. As noted earlier, subscription concerts helped composers to become independent, and fostered the development of a bourgeois audience. But private performance of chamber music, which exhibited aesthetic autonomy, pre-dates the public concert, whose appearance as institution may therefore not be quite so central as is often assumed.

Other arts may have achieved significant autonomy, in Adorno's sense, before the 18th century. In China, for instance, a commodified art market existed as early as the Song Dynasty (960-1368), and faking and copying with dishonest intent, corollaries of an art market, became prevalent during the 15th-16th century Ming Dynasty.⁴³ Painters had an artisanal tradition and began to exploit market mechanisms from the 16th century onwards – witness the careers of Michelangelo and Raphael, and especially the studios of Titian and Rembrandt.⁴⁴ Early in the 18th century, Hogarth created art that was both autonomous and socially engaged, and advertised and sold engravings from his paintings in an attempt to break free of patronage.⁴⁵

These considerations qualify rather than falsify Adorno's view, however. Berger's claim that autonomous and functional music are merely "ideal types" is too strong. The developments just cited are relatively marginal compared to the revolutionary developments in the world of the arts at the end of the 18th century. Music was slower than other arts in gaining social autonomy, hence its lower artistic status before the later 18th century. Only then did composers begin to market their products, and it is striking how few composers of art music since Mozart's time, compared to painters or novelists, have managed to make a living as composers; the story of Mozart's death in poverty is not entirely Romanticised.

If the descriptive dimension of Adorno's account requires qualification, so also does the normative dimension. As we have seen, for him, autonomy is a precondition for truth in art, which is the ultimate criterion of its social significance. Adorno has an excessively narrow attitude to non-autonomous art – whether Western political art, or non-Western music and art – and his low valuation of it is a defect of his treatment. Two senses of "heteronomous" should be distinguished: *contingently heteronomous art* consists of artforms capable of autonomy, but which because of their social

function happen to be non-autonomous, such as 18th century music for banquets or military pageants, or their 20th century equivalents, political art and mass entertainment. *Intrinsically heteronomous art* is decorative art with a practical function – ceramics, ceremonial swords, furniture – whose genre is therefore incapable of becoming autonomous. Whether an art-form is capable of autonomy cannot be entirely predicted; but humans would have somehow to lose the need for furniture, before items of furniture could become autonomous art. Even when exhibited in a museum, furniture's functional origins are inescapable.

Even so, autonomy is not a precondition for truth in art, which can apply also to heteronomous art; nor is truth an ultimate criterion for art's social significance.⁴⁶ A work with a practical or social function might still challenge the status quo, or disclose human aspirations. Ruskin argued that Gothic art allowed for the craftsman's autonomy, within a context of heteronomous art. A more contemporary example would be Matsuda Gonroku's lacquerware cabinet with swan design, produced by a master of *maki-e* at the nadir of Japanese fortunes in 1944, is a powerful testament to traditional values, and their loss or corruption.⁴⁷ The post-Romantic concept of art supports Adorno's critique of political art, in that the greatest artists do not lecture, prescribe and proscribe, but rather provoke and encourage thought. However, that is an aim which a humane political art can achieve. The work of Orozco the Mexican muralists, such as "Dive Bomber and Tank 1940", is political art of high aesthetic quality.⁴⁸ The problem with Michael Moore's films is not that they are political art, but that they are bad political art.

I have been dwelling on one dimension of artistic autonomy, the social dimension which so preoccupied Adorno. This dimension illustrates a general truth about art's autonomy, however – that it stands in a reciprocal relation with its functionality or instrumentality. Adorno captures the truth that the negation of functionality is itself a kind of function. To talk of something as an artwork is to separate it from other things, and yet those other things do remain connected with it. This is a paradox, that is, an apparent contradiction that is not a genuine one – just as the liberation of the artist through commodification of the artwork is paradoxical but, since capitalism liberates as well as enslaves, not a genuine contradiction. Adorno's account is one of the most brilliant attempts to explain this disconnection and connection, an account which overcomes the dichotomy between aestheticism and social functionalism.

[I am grateful for comments from audiences at the Critical Theory Conference, John Cabot University, Rome, May 2007; Rhodes University Philosophy Department Seminar, July 2007; and to Lydia Goehr, for her generosity in allowing me to address her Aesthetics Seminar at Columbia University, September 2007. Thanks also to Jason Gaiger, Brian Kane, Thijs Lister, Max Paddison, Roger Squires and Pedro Tabensky. This article is a development – but still an inadequate one – of some of the ideas in Ch. 6 of my book *Aesthetics and Music*.]

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1 See for example Geuss (2005), p. 161.

2 Bernstein (2004), p. 142.

3 Adorno (1997), p. 227. Here, it is understood that "work of art" = "autonomous work of art".

4 As Zuidervaart puts it, for Adorno, "the autonomy of the work has a social character and the social character of the work is itself autonomous" (Zuidervaart (1990), p. 64).

5 Bernstein (2004), p. 146.

6 Bernstein (2004), p. 146.

7 Geuss, in his otherwise persuasive (2005), seems to be led into this misinterpretation through neglect of non-formalist features of Kant's aesthetics; for instance, "autonomy and formalism are not a priori properties of all art and of all artistic experience, as Kant thought" (p. 178). Haskins (1989) rightly comments that Kant "never speaks of art...as autonomous in the third *Critique*" (p. 43).

8 Dependent (as opposed to free) beauty makes essential reference to artworks' perfection in terms of some concept or function. Thus aesthetic judgment of a painting must consider its function of creating life-like representations. Kant places purely instrumental music, together with designs *à la grecque* and foliage on the borders of wallpaper, under the contrasting heading of free beauty. Free beauty – with its insistence on the possibility of autonomous aesthetic judgment – was the novel idea, dependent beauty the traditional concept.

9 Constant makes the first recorded use of "art for art's sake" in 1804 – see Haskins (1989), p. 52 n2, and Hamilton (2007), Ch. 3, concluding sections.

10 The contrasting senses of autonomy are the autonomy of one art (for instance music) from other arts, and the autonomy of art in general from non-art. Music's 19th century rise in status involved both. The ideal of absolute music equates primarily with the first – though the two kinds of autonomy interact, since if one art is subordinate to another, it cannot be high art. When Romanticism liberated music from a literary or linguistic model, the result was "music for music's sake" – the autonomy of one art from others – though at the same time the arts in general were becoming autonomous in the sense of "art for art's sake". The issue is pursued in Hamilton (2007), Ch.3.

11 Hobsbawm (1962), p. 325.

12 Discussed further in Hamilton (2007), and (in preparation).

13 Wilde (1909), p. 54.

14 Hamilton (2007) and (in preparation).

15 Adorno (1997), p. 194.

- 16 Adorno (1997), p. 5.
- 17 Adorno (1997), p. 146.
- 18 As Berger (1997) notes, p. 6.
- 19 Attali (1985), p. 47.
- 20 Zuidervaart (1990), p. 68. Geuss distinguishes a "sociological" thesis about whether art is established in a certain society as a distinct form of human endeavour, from a thesis about the evaluative criteria for art ((2005), p. 161n).
- 21 Identity Thinking is discussed further in Hamilton (2007), Ch. 6.
- 22 As Fubini puts it, "For Adorno, aesthetic value is not an optional extra which can be added to the social import of the musical idiom...social criticism and aesthetic criticism involve one another reciprocally in a subtle dialectic relation...which is [not] an ordinary relation of cause and effect: music exists within society, and is thus an essential component of society" (Fubini (1991), pp. 445-6).
- 23 Adorno (1976), p. 209.
- 24 Adorno (1997), p. 227; (1976), p. 209. As Bernstein puts it, "nothing truly artistically formed is immediately social" (Bernstein (2004), p. 148). By social derivation of thematic material, Adorno is referring to the way, for instance, that trumpet flourishes in a classical symphony are derived from music for military bands, and movements such as minuet and scherzo originated in dance forms.
- 25 Adorno (1976), p. 209.
- 26 Later he comments on the way that music can function as "the decoration of empty time" (Adorno (1976), pp. 41-43, 47). He continues: "If something simply exists, without a *raison d'être*, and that is enough to console us for the fact that everything else exists for something else...[then this] anonymous solace to the congregation of the lonely, ranks surely not lowest among the functions of music today".
- 27 Adorno (1997), pp. 229, 226-7.
- 28 Bernstein (2004), p. 149.
- 29 Zuidervaart (1990), p. 61.
- 30 For Adorno, the artwork has an unstable identity across different socio-historical conditions.
- 31 Bernstein (2004), p. 150; Adorno (1997), p. 237.
- 32 "The shadow of art's autarchic radicalism is its harmlessness: Absolute colour compositions verge on wallpaper patterns" (Adorno (1997), p. 29).
- 33 "Buying up art and culture", *The Economist*, 10.2.07., p. 61; "Designer Dreams", *The Economist*, 27.1.07., p. 33. Banham (2001), p. 183, describes the Los Angeles project ironically and scathingly as the "Acropolis".
- 34 Bourdieu (1987).
- 35 Elitism is discussed further in Hamilton (forthcoming 2008).
- 36 This separation is discussed in Hamilton (2007), Ch. 1.
- 37 The claim that the work-concept appears at this time is defended by Goehr (1992).
- 38 See Helm (1971), who discusses Veblen's account of conspicuous consumption. Functionalism came to dominate American sociology through the influence of Robert Merton's (1949), "Latent and Manifest Functions", and through the work of Talcott Parsons – see Turner and Maryanski (1988). Functionalism draws on the biological concept of organism, with the harmonious interdependence of parts, and the Hegelian concept of dialectical and spiritual organic interdependence and unity (Lavine (1965)). The concept of latent function draws on Hegel's concept of the cunning of reason – human beliefs are tools of real rational development.
- 39 This is the view of Zangwill (2001).
- 40 See also Wolff (2000), pp. 225-30.
- 41 Berger (1997), pp. 115-6, 153.
- 42 See Ledbetter (2002), p. 34.
- 43 Clunas (1997), Ch. 5, especially pp. 173, 176, 190, 194.
- 44 See for instance Goffen (2004), pp. 19, 44.
- 45 The issue is discussed in Uglow (2002).
- 46 As Zuidervaart (1990) argues.
- 47 Tokyo Museum exhibition of lacquerware, October 2006 .
- 48 Orozco, however, adhered to art for art's sake by insisting, totally implausibly, that his work had no political significance - see Folgarait (1998).

Toward the aesthetics of emancipation? Critical Theory and the new pragmatism

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• Why juxtapose the new pragmatism and Critical Theory? Is there any reason besides paying tribute to a well-established mode of academic production whose essence can be reduced to comparing virtually anything with anything else (which method has the undeniable advantage of delivering unchangingly “surprising” and “significant” results no matter whether what one discovers is similarity or difference)?

There are, I think, at least two such reasons that can be given and the first is included in the answer to the question “What makes an intellectual tradition alive?” It would be quite natural to respond by pointing to its adherents who develop it in a creative way. But although surely a necessary condition, it is nevertheless far from being a sufficient one, since for a tradition to be alive it also needs to constitute a reference point (be it positive or negative) for some other traditions which form the intellectual milieu of a given time; and one does not even have to add that the more powerful these traditions are the more vitality they can lend to others. Since I believe this situation to be perfectly exemplified by the presence of Theodor W. Adorno’s oeuvre in the so-called new pragmatism (without doubt one of the most prominent philosophical currents of our times), I want to devote my essay to this very issue. The second reason is that if Adornian aesthetics is indeed an aesthetics of emancipation¹ then its comparison with those neopragmatist approaches for which the relations between (aesthetic) theory and emancipation are an important object of reflection is at least potentially valuable.

To be precise, the core of my paper will be a discussion of Richard Shusterman’s, Richard Rorty’s and Stanley Fish’s neopragmatist² interpretations of classical Critical Theory (with special emphasis put on their readings of Adorno), but I want to begin with an introduction representing a historical perspective of a slightly different kind, in which I refer to the troubled reception of classical pragmatism in classical Critical Theory, and point to a few similarities between Adorno’s thought and the philosophy of John Dewey (whose continuators both Shusterman and Rorty declare themselves to be).

The common opinion about the attitude of Critical Theory toward pragmatism is that it can be reduced to the charges of, in James T. Kloppenberg's words, "elevating expedient, novel, narrowly individualistic, instrumental, and technocratic considerations above truth and goodness as revealed by philosophy, art, or theology." This opinion may, of course, be supported by quotations from the works of critical theorists themselves, such as the well-known and jaundiced (given the complexity of the Deweyan metaphysics of experience)⁴ remark of Adorno from *Minima Moralia* which accuses Dewey's "strenuous" pragmatism of betraying the real spirit of dialectics by conceiving it in terms of the "sense of proportions" or common sense.⁵

Nevertheless, at least in Adorno's case, it can be said that the relation in question was more nuanced and ambiguous, and this claim in turn could be supported by his words such as: "In principle, philosophy can always go astray, which is the sole reason why it can go forward. This has been recognized in skepticism and in pragmatism, most recently in Dewey's wholly humane version of the latter,"⁶ not to mention the fact that he did not hesitate to count the author of *Experience and Nature* among „important" thinkers.⁷ Obviously, given their common Hegelian root, there are many convergences between Critical Theory and Dewey's pragmatism one can think of, and some of them seem to be overshadowed by the superficial reading of Dewey on the critical theorists's part. Again, it would be hard to decide if this lessens Critical Theory's 'guilt' or rather makes it look even worse, but as Hans Joas has argued, it only followed a traditional pattern of German reception of pragmatism which could be aptly called "a history of misunderstandings" and whose actors were also Georg Simmel, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger and Ernst Casirrer.^{viii} All these historical peculiarities aside, it must be stressed that, as Paolo Ghirardelli has put it,

...it was a serious mistake of some in the critical theorist movement to dismiss Dewey's pragmatism as an unreflective promoter of technology for its own sake. Dewey, like critical theorists, was vitally concerned to design the political environment that would best provide for the autonomous empowerment of intelligent citizens.⁹

To continue with the foundations of the philosophies of Adorno and Dewey, it is also emphasized that both mourned the fragmentation of human experience and subjectivity, accompanied by the compartmentalization of the social world under the reign of capitalism.¹⁰ What is interest-

ing, though, is that, according to Richard Shusterman, in their treatment of the social they present very similar diagnoses, yet the prognoses, the conclusions they arrive at, are so different that it might be tempting to explain this divergence with a simple psychological factor. Namely that one of them is pessimistic (Adorno, of course) and the other optimistic.¹¹ This formula, however, should be taken *cum grano salis* since Dewey's faith in the possibility of establishing a better form of democratic life in some near future (nearer at least than the secularized theologico-millennarianist perspective presented by Adorno and Horkheimer)¹² could rather be traced to his presumption, accentuated, e.g., by William C. Lewis, that "cultural formations" are not completely determined by the "modes of production" (the capitalist economy in particular);¹³ that the system is not ubiquitous and incorrigible from the inside, as in turn Horkheimer and Adorno, following Marxist functionalism, would tend to have it.¹⁴ Hence, there is naturally something more to the differences in the political aspects of their thought than just a background emotion underlying their thinking. In fact, rather than insisting on the term "optimism" (which connotes an easy complacency), Shusterman eventually chooses to describe Dewey's approach as a "meliorism" which, contrary to Adorno's total rejection of the present realities, tries to "maximize the goodness and happiness that [already] exists in life" and does not in any way ignore the negative aspects thereof, but rather faces them with a simple: "we can make things better and let's concentrate on doing that".¹⁵

Independently of whether the genesis of pragmatist political stance can or cannot be reduced to psychological matters, its specificity makes it understandable that "[t]o later Marxist critics like Theodor Adorno, pragmatism was hopelessly wedded to the status quo; they saw it as little more than a rationale for America's ruthless and amoral business civilization".¹⁶ The same words could equally be applied to the way Dewey's heir Richard Rorty is seen among the thinkers on the left today,¹⁷ and to evoke yet another historical perspective, pragmatism must have been for critical theorists what "bourgeois socialism" was for Marx and Engels, and thus their revulsion could also not be less.

As interesting as these problems may be, I now turn to aesthetics, in which realm, I must stress, Adorno's opinion of Dewey is no less confusing for interpreters, since he generally (and wrongly) counts Dewey among the representatives of a mistaken empiricism which is organically unfit to theorize art, while simultaneously distinguishing him as "a truly

free” thinker.¹⁸ This praise is based perhaps not only on the correlations between their approaches toward the political role art plays in society, but also between their basic presumptions concerning the methodology of aesthetics (see *AE* 155, *AT* 176, 353-355), as well as ontology of art and singular artworks.

Let me begin with an observation made by Shusterman that both Adorno and Dewey conceived the essence of the work of art in immanently processual terms, as something which exists in experience (or action) only (*AE* 9-10, *AT* 99-100, 175-177), and thus atrophies when fetishized (*AT* 99-100, 267-168). However, as Shusterman does not hesitate to underscore, Adorno was more sympathetic of “the reification of art into objects” than Dewey, “because high art’s sacralized objects help sustain the compartmental conception of art and because, in sharp contrast to Dewey, he is keen on preserving this notion of art as a domain which remains separated from life and thus more effectively free to criticize life’s impurities” (*PA* 290, n34). Partly as a natural corollary to their thesis linking art and action, both philosophers professed a kind of historicism vis-à-vis the work of art, believing that its value and meanings are always determined by the socio-historical context and thus change in the course of time (*PA* 26-27), though maintaining enough identity for us to talk about the same work (something which Shusterman calls “referential,” in contrast to “substantial”, identification – *PA* 58). These socio-historical issues lead us to Dewey’s diagnosis of the dialectic of culture and barbarity. To put it short, Dewey was well aware that art as “the beauty parlor of the civilization,” (*AE* 346) serves to disguise this very civilization’s barbarity, barbarity which for him equaled “class snobbery, imperialism, and capitalism’s profit-seeking oppression, social disintegration and alienation of labor” (*PA* 20).

If this sounds familiar for anyone acquainted with Critical Theory,¹⁹ then the picture is completed by Dewey’s insistence on the emancipatory potential of art and his strict distinction between art meant as a cultural product, facilitating human experience and communication, and the propaganda understood as an “easily digestible lie that comfortably fits into the crust of conventionalized consciousness”.²⁰ This is a distinction which obviously precludes any narrow and directly political usage of art,²¹ something Adorno too had a strong distaste for, as it is evident, e.g., in his approach to Socialist Realism.²² The significance of the art/propaganda dichotomy in the thought of both thinkers even became the topic of a whole study by William C. Lewis, who notes some important differences in this regard, but

the divergence which interests me the most is one he does not mention. Namely, the fact that Adorno would wholesale count among the products of propaganda practically all works of popular art, while, as Richard Shusterman argues, this was not the case with Dewey who, unlike most of his philosophical predecessors, recognized the value of popular culture and entertainment.²³ And if this is something we might naturally expect from an American philosopher, as one could argue, then it should not surprise us that the reception of Adorno's thought in America is significantly marked by condemnation of his approach toward the popular arts.²⁴ Moreover, there should be no doubt that Adorno's scorn for mass culture is troubling or shameful even for many followers of Critical Theory, who either try to justify it somehow, suppress it as something marginal or find it so unbearable as to eventually turn away from Adorno's philosophy and Critical Theory as such. And the latter is exactly the case of Richard Shusterman, who explains his conversion to pragmatism by means of the following narrative:

[In 1988 at Temple University] I taught an aesthetics seminar to a very mixed and lively audience of graduate students in Philosophy and dance ... I had originally intended to use Dewey as a foil to what I then regarded as the far superior theory of Adorno (which I still greatly admire). But by the end of semester, having scrutinized the different arguments in class and tested some issues on the dance floor, I could not help but trade Adorno's austere, gloomy and haughtily elitist Marxism for Dewey's more earthy, upbeat and democratic pragmatism. (PA, xvii)

To put it more precisely, these events, as Shusterman confessed in an interview, made him realize that Adorno's "global critique of popular culture was humiliating rather than empowering the underprivileged."²⁵ Henceforth, it is understandable why for Shusterman one of the most pressing tasks of today's cultural theory is not the aesthetic *denunciation*, but rather *legitimization* of popular art.

Although popular art may now seem to be socially recognized, even in the academic discourse, its artistic value is still questioned, which is a constant cause of the following problems:

- popular art is "deprived of artistic care and control" which could protect it against the negative influence of the market, and, as a result, it often becomes "brutally crude in sensibility" (PA 168);
- satisfactions provided by this kind of art cannot be full since they are diminished by a sense of humiliation which is induced in its audience by the official art institutions' explicit disapproval of popular art forms.

- this situation in turn “intensifies painful divisions in society and even in ourselves”²⁶ as the distinction between the high and low (popular) art has not only been shaped by hierarchical divisions and class differences structuring our society, but also reinforces them.

A sincere advocate of popular aesthetics, Shusterman nevertheless carefully distinguishes his position from one-sided apologetics²⁷ and he would rather characterize it as “meliorism” which “recognizes popular art’s flaws and abuses but also its merits [while holding] that popular art should be improved because it can and often does achieve real aesthetic merits and serve worthy social ends.”²⁸ Putting this meliorism into practice, Shusterman seeks to win aesthetic legitimization for popular art in two ways: (a) he promotes the definition of art as experience, assuming that it could “effect the artistic legitimization” of popular art (e.g., “rock music”), which in turn could lead to democratization of the realm of art as such, and he also provides counterarguments against the most powerful and influential criticisms of popular art, presented by the likes of Allan Bloom and Adorno.²⁹

But to fully understand Shusterman’s treatment of Adorno, one needs first to consider the former’s metatheoretical views on aesthetics and philosophy of art. Inspired by Arthur C. Danto’s seminal book *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art*, Shusterman argues that the whole philosophical tradition of theorizing art has suffered up to this day from the original sin for which he blames Plato.³⁰ To clarify this claim, Shusterman provides a genealogical narrative, in a way similar to that presented in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and to Adorno’s remarks on Plato in *Aesthetic Theory* (AT 238),³¹ which highlights that the latter invented his philosophy of art when ancient Athens constituted an arena of constant battles between artists and philosophers over who would spiritually lead the Athenian people. In this context, Plato’s art theory can be seen as a tactical move in an ideological conflict – it was simply meant to denigrate art by defining it in terms of mimesis, which practically amounted to accusing it of being doubly removed from the truth and, most importantly, compartmentalized from the praxis of life and thus useless. In this way, to put it very simply, all subsequent philosophers, having accepted the philosophical framework of defining art set by Plato, with its basic presumption that art is something separated from the other spheres of human existence, have ever since been uncannily taking part in a project of depreciating art, even though they might not have consciously shared Plato’s negative approach. There

is no need to follow the historical narrative of aesthetic theory, as it is told by Shusterman up to this day. For it is already clear that Adorno's thread can be neatly weaved into the whole story which helps explain his, as Fredric Jameson put it, "rather astonishing 'resolution' to the problem" of art's political value. Namely, "his proposal, to see the classical stage of high modernism itself as the very prototype of the most 'genuinely' political art".³² In the light of what has just been said, this 'conceptual equilibristic' (despite all the subtleties of Adorno's notion of artistic autonomy)³³ may be seen as a dramatic effort on the part of a faithful and devoted art theorist to reconcile the demands of the disciplinary tradition with his dearest political yearnings and aesthetic taste.

Shusterman, however, is not to be understood as saying that the philosophy of art had been blind to the facts up to the moment he came and took the scales from his colleagues' eyes. In fact, he admits that at some point it simply reflected the changes taking place in the realm of art itself which imploded into *beaux arts* with the emergence of modernity. As if this were not enough, the process of shrinking obviously continued further with the development of the inner circle within fine art's domain, i.e. *avant-garde*, high art which came to be identified with the true art, ever more esoteric, intellectualized, self-obsessed and alienated from the interests, tastes and experience of the masses. As it is usually claimed, Adorno, along with the likes of Ortega Y Gasset, were apostles of this kind of art in the realm of theory, waving the flag of elitism, specialization and sophistication, and delegitimizing the more popular arts and their, less cerebral, modes of appreciation. And due to this delegitimization, Shusterman argues, "rather than uniting human society with its communicative power, art comes to divide it into privileged appreciators of true art and the blind masses who besot themselves with its sham substitutes" (*PA*, 51). It is not surprising then that he finds it so important to obliterate the hiatus between high and popular art, and why for him philosophical aesthetics can no longer remain in an ivory tower of formal speculation, and must change its goal from the pursuit of truth for truth's sake (which often results in theoretical justifications for art's harmful autonomy and the denigration of supposedly "dependent" popular art) to transforming the institution of art itself. And to achieve this, as he believes, we must first clear the field by refuting arguments challenging the artistic value of popular art that are posed by its most powerful critics, such as Clement Greenberg and Adorno.³⁴

One of the arguments Shusterman discusses claims that aesthetic pleasures (any pleasures, in fact) granted by popular art to its audience are

simply false. Adorno, joining the univocal verdict of critics from left to right, dismisses these pleasures as illusionary or “washed-out,” and supports his judgment by pointing out that the consumers of popular art enjoy it only because they do not have any other choice (in which they resemble a “prisoner who loves his cell because he has been left nothing else to love”).³⁵ Shusterman tries to disarm this argument by highlighting that it can also be very easily used against high art, since the latter in fact owes its formative power to the support of the educational system which has presented its works to so many and for so many years as the only alternative, and “it is precisely because the mass media now provide an alternative system of dissemination and education that the exclusive adoration of the classics inculcated by the traditional scholastic system has been largely undermined by interest in the popular arts” (*PA*, 181). But the most crucial feature of Shusterman’s critique is perhaps not his defense of popular pleasures, but his question: if these pleasures are false, then what constitutes the real pleasure for thinkers such as Bloom, van der Haag and Adorno? The answer he finds is that for all of them the true satisfaction cannot be found in this sublunar reality and has to be sought in some otherworldly realm, be it the Christian heaven for van der Haag or a “Marxian utopia” for Adorno. Shusterman is of course aware that in the latter’s case it is a natural corollary to his thesis that this false world can give us only false *hedone* (*AT* 13), since false (and forced) needs can only generate false satisfactions. Nevertheless, he does not hesitate to claim that “the critique that popular art provides only spurious pleasures is less a defense of real pleasure than a mask for the wholesale denial of all worldly pleasure, a strategy adopted by ascetic minds who fear pleasure as a dangerous diversion from their transcendental goals or simply as a discomforting threat to their fundamentally ascetic ethos” (*PA* 182). Even if this general charge of “asceticism” is not fully justified in Adorno’s case, there is no doubt that the author of *Minima Moralia* indeed has an overall negative approach toward careless fun, or “shallow entertainment,”³⁶ since “fun” is not only unjustifiable, given all the suffering of this world, but also unable to meet the demands of authentic aesthetic reception, properly serious and concentrated on the artistic truth (see, e.g., his “Analytical Study of NBC *Music Appreciation Hour*” where he remarks that “it is more essential for the listener to please the Beethoven symphony than for the Beethoven symphony to please him”).³⁷ Yet again this is something unacceptable for Shusterman, who inscribes Adorno in “the dominant trend in German philosophy to denigrate the entertainment function of art”; the trend which carries in itself the “Hegelian inheritance privileging truth over

pleasure (and even over beauty)" and must be rejected as it presupposes an essential contradiction between entertainment and serious understanding which Shusterman finds mistaken, supporting this claim, e.g., with the authority of T.S. Eliot's views on poetry.³⁸

There is not space here to recount all of Shusterman's arguments,³⁹ let me then stress once again that he is not to be understood as an uncritical apologist of popular art. His main point is that popular art deserves serious aesthetic analysis (accompanied by sociopolitical reflection, albeit not reduced to it) which is supposed to lead both to aesthetic legitimization of this art, as well as to the improvement of its aesthetic quality. And given the reciprocal relations between the spheres of aesthetics and politics, this kind of aesthetic reform might actually facilitate a political one⁴⁰ which is a possibility not to be ignored. Moreover, exactly in this place does Shusterman see the role for aesthetic education and philosophical critique of popular, as well as high, art, a critique whose core idea he borrows from Adorno's argument for the necessary interconnection of the immanent understanding of the work and its external criticism.⁴¹ To sum up, one could say that what Shusterman inherits from Adorno, despite all the significant differences, is his belief in the importance of philosophical analysis for aesthetics oriented toward emancipation, and in the general importance of philosophical aesthetics for art and its proper understanding. But it is this very element for which he is criticized by another pragmatist thinker, Richard Rorty, who, while responding to Shusterman's plea for enlarging the scope of aesthetics beyond the traditional modernist paradigm (to include, e.g. popular art, somatic practices and art of living), expressed his simple "skepticism about aesthetics as a field of inquiry":

This has always struck me as another of Kant's bad ideas – of a piece with the bad idea (to which I think Habermas unfortunately prone) of splitting culture into three spheres, one for each of the three Critiques. Some good books have been written about painting, others about literature, others about music, others about sex, and still others about birdwatching. But I have never read a book that succeeded in saying something interesting about what all these have in common. [...] [And] I am not sure that we need an aesthetic theory or an aesthetic programme, at all.⁴²

All of this might sound as if Rorty opposed only the general concept of aesthetic, leaving room for philosophical reflection on particular forms of art, but his distaste for theory goes much further and embraces the whole idea of basing any activity other than philosophy itself on philosophical (even pragmatist) foundations (this is why his stance should be distin-

guished from the position criticized by Adorno in the “Draft Introduction” to *Aesthetic Theory*, namely that philosophical discourse is an inadequate tool to analyze art since the latter, as a domain of pure feeling, naturally abhors any logical examination – AT 335-336). For example, in one of his interviews he derides, with his usual *désinvolture*, the idea of philosophically grounded literary criticism:

*I think that philosophical presuppositions are just clothes that you drape over your initial attitude. You get into literary criticism because you have certain favourite poets, and certain poets you can't see the point of—ditto for certain novelists, essayists, and so on. But if you're sufficiently gullible you will look around for philosophical reasons for saying that these are good poets and others aren't. But I think that the better critics don't bother with this attempt to put a philosophical frosting on their elective affinities.*⁴³

In Rorty's view, although indeed a very noble activity, philosophy is hardly a necessary substrate of other areas of human life,⁴⁴ and to think otherwise usually means to fall prey to a *theoretical* illusion which, alas, can be *practically* dangerous. Thus, even though he appreciates Adorno and Horkheimer's account of the bankruptcy of the Enlightenment's concept of reason, he thinks they were wrong to conclude from that premise that the social life-form initially intertwined with this rationalistic ideal, i.e. liberal democracy, must also fail. What they should have done instead was to join John Dewey in thinking up the ways in which the emancipation from bad metaphysics may facilitate the improvement of liberal institutions, which are after all the best social institutions we can imagine.⁴⁵

But paying too much attention to philosophy is perilous not only because it makes us blind to certain features of the world, but also because it may give us a relaxing feeling that by performing philosophical acts aimed at unmasking things such as the order-creating invariance of concepts, or “phallogocentrism,” etc., we thereby achieve something politically important,⁴⁶ while what we in fact achieve is yet another article, dissertation, or a book, none of which, at least in our present reality, can do any harm to any system, power, or practically anybody besides our colleagues whose opinion they question. One obvious *ad hominem* counterargument to this line of reasoning denounces it as self-refuting and claims: If this is so, then why does Rorty make so much of the whole pragmatist movement which is after all a *philosophical* movement? To this he would most probably respond with a variation of ‘Wittgenstein's ladder’ argument, portraying

pragmatism as a "medicine which dissolves the old medicines" circulating in the bloodstream and then dissolves itself, or he might just put it that pragmatism's only value lies in its ability to topple absolutist, foundationalist "towers" erected in academia.⁴⁷ And here it becomes clear that besides his basic disagreement with Critical Theory he at least lays his hope in self-critical consciousness that was so crucial for Adorno, and seems to believe that once we get rid of our totalizing blinkers, once we become aware that "no vocabulary can remain final,"⁴⁸ we will metamorphose into emancipated subjects and potentially better, that is more flexible and prone to dialogue, human beings. This, however, is a point which another neopragmatist ('neo-neopragmatist' as Susan Haack calls him),⁴⁹ Stanley Fish, rejects⁵⁰ with all the rhetorical power which won him the name of the contemporary Sophist.⁵¹ Fish, who just like Rorty does not believe that theories have political consequences (not that they do not have any such consequences at all – they may indeed – but these can only be contingent, not logically necessary as the radical theorists usually believe), in his essay *Critical Self-Consciousness, Or Can We Know What We're Doing?* sets off to demolish the whole project of Critical Theory, along with the aesthetics of emancipation inherent to it.⁵² In a nutshell, Fish's aim is to prove that Critical Theory's basic tenet, namely that all our thinking is objectively mediated through, or (to use a different formulation) determined by the dominant social framework, must be deadly for Critical Theory itself. As it is reconstructed by Fish, proponents of this stance claim that if our reason remains unreflective, uncritical or "reified" (ND 95), then as a natural consequence of the aforementioned presumption it is also doubly blind to: (a) the fact that it is unfree, inautonomous even if it thinks otherwise (and for that very reason, too), (b) that the prevailing reality is not necessary or "eternal" and can be transformed (CSC 444). Thus the task of Critical Theory is twofold: first, at the negative stage, it un.masks all truths which appear to be natural and neutral as merely correlates of "man-made structures of domination and suppression" and then, embodying what Fish calls its "positive" dimension, it has to project and bring about the new reality of truly autonomous subjects (CSC 446). The problem which emerges here, recognized by critical theorists themselves, is that the vision of the future emancipated society falls under the *Bilderverbot*, since although we can indeed criticize the present categories of our reason, these categories are imprinted in it so thoroughly that without them any act of thinking, even (or especially) of thinking about the reality in which we can think without them, is as impossible as baron Münchhausen's most famous trick. And if this is so, Fish asks, how

can we ever know that our critical endeavor leads us in the right direction? The answer given by Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse is that the very fact that we are self-conscious and self-critical enough to expose the structures of domination immanent to our rationality means that we are on the path of emancipation (*ND* 17), but Fish again adds another troubling question: What if the very notion of enslavement we presuppose, and thus our notion of freedom, is determined by the dominant structures of thinking? And provides the answer himself: "It would then be the case that reflection would constitute not a *break* from current conditions, but a modification of those conditions in a direction they themselves make possible" (*CSC* 448) and hence it would not represent the universal emancipatory interest of human kind, but rather some other local interest, i.e., inevitably, just another form of enslavement by some particularity with universalist aspirations.

An important attempt at a solution to this problem made by critical theorists was to identify some already existing phenomenon as "a small-scale model of the future state of emancipation" (*CSC* 449), and one such phenomenon they found especially suitable was the so-called authentic art. In Adorno's words, this art rejects "the guilt of a life which blindly and callously reproduces itself," and insists "on independence and autonomy, on separating from the prevailing realm of purposes"⁵³ while its "great works" "even in an age when they fall silent [...] express hope more powerfully than the traditional theological texts" (*ND* 196, cf. *AT* 34, 39-40, 57-61). But, as Fish argues, if one starts his/her theoretical enterprise with the premise that *everything* is dominated by "ungodly reality," then invoking one impossible entity (that is, in this case, the art which somehow mysteriously escapes "the prevailing realm of purposes") to ground the possibility of another impossible entity (free reflection or free subject) would be of no real help. Fish's conclusion is as clear as it is devastating, at least in his eyes, for Critical Theory, which then has but two possible options to choose: it can either confess to being no less bound by the structures of power and thus no more emancipatory than all the other possible ways of thinking, or admit that it merely gropes in darkness, hewing desperately to the hope that the consequent negation and resistance will eventually lead it to some promised land which it knows nothing about, besides that we will all become free there. This second option (which is indeed the only option Critical Theory can choose to save face), as Fish argues, is perfectly epitomized by Adornian "anguished" negative dialectics, whose procedure according to its own rules, openly declared by the author of *Minima*

Moralia, can never "rest in itself" (ND 406), because otherwise it will crystallize into another form of identity thinking. But contrary to what some commentators believe, negative dialectics does not (and cannot) widen our consciousness or loosen the grip of the totalizing conceptual framework, since the hope Adorno put in this content-deprived and "restlessly negative" operation is "without substance", as it finally boils down to the hope "for some (unimaginable) force that will burst in upon it" (CSC 457). And here again Fish does not hesitate to draw what he takes to be the ultimate consequences of critical thinking: if it can really *lead* us anywhere it is *only* from one set of totalizing beliefs to another. Obviously, for some it could sound like an elegy for freedom and a good reason to fall into nihilism, apathy or something even worse, but it certainly does not sound that horrible to the ears of Stanley Fish, for whom the impossibility of a totally unconstrained human condition is the very ground of the possibility of human freedom itself:

[O]ur freedom is a function of – in a sense of being dependent on – some other structure of constraint without which any action of any kind would be impossible. This may seem counterintuitive to those who are accustomed to identify freedom with the absence of constraints, but, in fact, such a state, if it could be achieved, would produce not free actions, but no actions. An action is only conceivable against a background of alternative paths, a background that is already a constraint in that by marking out some actions as possible it renders impossible others that might emerge as possibilities against a different background. [...] It follows, then, that it makes no sense to imagine conditions of no constraint, and it follows, too, that there can be no continuum which differentiates institutions or structures as being more or less constrained, more or less free, because freedom, in whatever shape it appears, is another name for constraint. [...] [Then] [w]hat the critical theorists call liberation or emancipation is nothing more (or less) than the passing from one structure of constraint to another; a passing that will always be attended by "the discovery of new possibilities," but of possibilities that will be no less (or more) constrained than those that have been left behind. (CSC 459-460)

Whether these enunciations are a nail in Critical Theory's coffin or just a perfect example of the enslaved consciousness perversely blessing its own chains, I do not have sufficient time to reflect upon. For the same reason I cannot discuss here Terry Eagleton's *reductio ad absurdum* argument that Fish's stance is like "claiming that since swanning around the Savoy all day is quite as shaped by social convention as labouring in a salt mine, guests at the Savoy are no freer than miners".⁵⁴

Leaving these questions open I would like to conclude that if the aforementioned discussions show some unresolved tensions within Critical Theory, they no less disclose a bifurcation in the new pragmatism which divides into one branch whose basic presumption, true to Dewey's thought, is the importance of philosophy in effecting social change, and another branch denouncing the poverty of philosophy in this and other dimensions. We have seen that for Shusterman, Adorno's idea of an aesthetics of emancipation is a worthy enterprise, unfortunately spoiled by the latter's myopic denigration of popular art and snobbish preference for artistic autonomy; while to Rorty and Fish the true aesthetic of emancipation is the one which simply does not exist. To be exact, it cannot and should not exist (at least in the present sociocultural circumstances) since if, as Barnett Newman remarked, aesthetics is for artists "what ornithology must be like for birds",⁵⁵ it remains so also for the public which is to be emancipated, and it must be equally irrelevant, if not hampering, for social reformers.

- 1 Unfortunately I do not have the time to refer to all the problems which inhabit the notion of emancipation and which are underlined, e.g., by Ernesto Laclau. See E. Laclau, "Beyond Emancipation," in E. Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London and New York: Verso 1996).
- 2 Of course, the identity of the contemporary pragmatism is a vexed issue, but I would only like to add here that Fish's case is especially complicated, given that he does not even declare himself to be a (neo)pragmatist, not to mention the fact that the references to the classical pragmatists are less than rare in his works. On the contemporary pragmatism in general, see, e.g., S. Haack, "Pragmatism, Old and New", *Contemporary Pragmatism*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 2004; T. Rockmore, "On Classical and Neo-Analytic Forms of Pragmatism", *Metaphilosophy*, Vol. 36, No. 3, April 2005.
- 3 J.T. Kloppenber, "Pragmatism: An Old Name for Some New Ways of Thinking?", in M. Dickstein (ed.), *The Revival of Pragmatism: New Essays on Social Thought, Law, and Culture*, (Durham: Duke UP, 1999), p. 85. As far as the role of technology in pragmatism and Critical Theory is concerned, see an exchange between Andrew Feenberg and Larry Hickman – A. Feenberg, "Pragmatism and Critical Theory of Technology," L. Hickman, "Revisiting *Philosophical Tools for Technological Culture*," *Techné* Vol. 7, No. 1, 2003, pp. 42-48, and pp. 64-81. I would like to thank Professor Feenberg for drawing my attention to this exchange.
- 4 See, e.g., Chapter 3 of T.M. Alexander's *John Dewey's Theory of Art, Experience, and Nature. The Horizons of Feeling*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987).
- 5 T.W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, (London: Verso, 1981), p. 72.
- 6 T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 14; further referred to as *ND*.
- 7 See T. W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, (Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press, 1993), p. 28.
- 8 See H. Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 79-125.
- 9 P. Ghirardelli, Jr., "Marxism and Critical Theory," in J. R. Shook and J. Margolis (eds.), *A Companion to Pragmatism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), p. 206.
- 10 See R. Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, 2nd Edition, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), p. 12 (further referred to as *PA*); cf. J. Dewey, *Art as Experience*, in

- John Dewey, *The Later Works, 1925-1953*, ed. by J. A. Boydston, vol. 10, (Southern Illinois UP: Carbondale 1987) (further referred to as *AE*), p. 27; cf. *ND*, p. 191, 277, 343.
- 11 See R. Shusterman, "ycie, sztuka i filozofia," an interview translated into Polish by W. Ma[ł]ecki and published in *Odra*, No. 4, 2004.
 - 12 See, for instance, Horkheimer's interesting remarks on the theological aspects of Critical Theory in M. Horkheimer, *Die Sehnsuch nach dem ganz Anderen. Gespräch mit Helmut Gumbert. 1970*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 7, (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag GmbH, 1985).
 - 13 See W. S. Lewis, "Art or Propaganda? Dewey and Adorno on the Relationship between Politics and Art", *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 2005, p. 45-46.
 - 14 Cf. H. Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, p. 80-87.
 - 15 R. Shusterman, "ycie, sztuka i filozofia," p. 50.
 - 16 M. Dickstein, "Introduction" to *The Revival of Pragmatism*, p. 9.
 - 17 Cf. the debate between Ernesto Laclau and Rorty in Ch. Mouffe (ed.), *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, (London and New York: Routledge 1996).
 - 18 T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, translated by R. Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1997) (further referred to as *AT*), p. 335. The fundamental differences between classical pragmatism (including that of John Dewey) and the tradition of British Empiricism are discussed in: R. J. Roth, *British Empiricism and American Pragmatism. New Directions and Neglected Arguments*, (New York: Durham UP 1993).
 - 19 Cf. M. Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research, 1923-1950*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1996), p. 177.
 - 20 W. Lewis, "Art or Propaganda?," p. 51.
 - 21 Cf. *PA*, 289, n25.
 - 22 See T. W. Adorno, "Commitment," in R. Taylor (ed.) *Aesthetics and Politics*, (London and New York: Verso, 1994); cf. *AT* 229-230.
 - 23 See R. Shusterman, "Popular Art and Education," *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, No. 13, 1995, p. 203-204.
 - 24 See M. Jay, "Adorno in America," *New German Critique*, No. 31, 1984, p. 159.
 - 25 R. Shusterman, "ycie, sztuka i filozofia," p. 48.
 - 26 R. Shusterman, "Popular Art and Education," p. 203.
 - 27 Cf. R. Shusterman, "Entertainment: A Question for Aesthetics," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, No. 43, 2003, p. 291.
 - 28 R. Shusterman, "Popular Art and Education," p. 204.
 - 29 See chapter 7 of *PA*. He also engages in the aesthetic criticism of particular genres of popular art and of its concrete works, arguing for the artistic value of rap and country music (in the latter case, his argumentation is partly based on Walter Benjamin's insights): R. Shusterman, "Affect and Authenticity in Country Musicals," in *Performing Live*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); "The Fine Art of Rap" in *PA*; "Art in Action, Art Infraction. Goodman, Rap, Pragmatism (New Reality Mix)," in *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life*, (New York: Routledge, 1997); "Rap Aesthetics: Violence and the Art of Keeping it Real," in D. Darby, and T. Shelby (eds.), *Hip Hop and Philosophy: Rhyme 2 Reason*, (LaSalle: Open Court, 2005).
 - 30 See R. Shusterman, "Art in a Box: Danto" in *Surface and Depth. Dialectics of Criticism and Culture*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002).
 - 31 M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (London and New York: Verso, 1997).
 - 32 F. Jameson, "Reflections in Conclusion," in R. Taylor (ed.), *Aesthetics and Politics*, p. 208-209.
 - 33 See, e.g., J. Harding, "Historical Dialectics and the Autonomy of Art in Adorno's *Ästhetische Theorie*", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 50, No. 3, Summer 1992.
 - 34 Cf. G. Markus, "Adorno and Mass Culture: Autonomous Art against the Culture Industry," *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 86, No. 1, 2006; M. Schoolman, "The Next Enlightenment: Aesthetic Reason in Modern Art and Mass Culture," *Journal for Cultural Research*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2005.
 - 35 T.W. Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening," in T.W. Adorno, *Culture Industry*, (Florence, USA: Routledge, 2001), p. 40.
 - 36 T.W. Adorno, "Free Time," in T.W. Adorno, *Culture Industry*, op.cit., p. 193.
 - 37 T.W. Adorno, "Analytical Study of NBC *Music Appreciation Hour*," *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No.

- 2, Summer 1994, p. 355; cf. AT 243-246.
- 38 R. Shusterman, *Entertainment...*, p. 299-300. Shusterman actually devoted a whole chapter of his last book to what may seem rather extravagant, namely the comparative analysis of Adorno's and T.S. Eliot's work; see chapter 8 of *SD*.
- 39 I would only like to add that although Shusterman's arguments (which can be found, e.g., in chapter 7 of *PA*) do expose some serious limitations in Adorno's thought, they are unfortunately not entirely free from the two major mistakes made by many critics of the latter's views on popular culture, i.e., as Miriam Hansen put forward, limiting oneself to "a rather well-trod and narrow basis of texts," and "neutralizing [...] historical distance"; M. Hansen, "Mass Culture as Hieroglyphic Writing: Adorno, Derrida, Kracauer", *New German Critique*, No. 56, Spring-Summer 1992, p. 43. Furthermore, it would be hard to agree with Shusterman's general thesis to the effect that Adorno is an advocate of high art understood as some well-established cultural institution.
- 40 Cf. R. Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy*, (New York and London: Routledge 1997), chapter 3.
- 41 See *PA* 148, *SD* 155-6, cf. AT 345-350.
- 42 R. Rorty, "Response to Richard Shusterman," in: M. Festenstein, S. Thompson (eds.), *Richard Rorty. Critical Dialogues*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001).
- 43 R. Rorty, "Worlds or Words Apart? The Consequences of Pragmatism for Literary Studies: An Interview with R. Rorty", [conducted by E.P. Ragg], *Philosophy and Literature*, 2002, Vol. 26, No.2, p. 377.
- 44 See, e.g., R. Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, London: Penguin Books 1999, p. 19. Cf. his "Does Academic Freedom Have Philosophical Presuppositions?," in L. Menand (ed.), *The Future of Academic Freedom*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).
- 45 See R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP 1989), p. 56-57. Cf. R. Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics, Philosophical Papers, Vol. 4*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007), p.148.
- 46 Cf. R. Rorty, "Worlds or Words Apart?", p. 380.
- 47 *Ibidem*, p. 374, 385
- 48 R. Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 113.
- 49 See S. Haack, "Pragmatism, Old and New", p. 30-33.
- 50 Cf. Fish's "Almost Pragmatism: The Jurisprudence of Richard Posner, Richard Rorty and Ronald Dworkin", in his *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech... and It's a Good Thing, Too*, (Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1994).
- 51 It is the label he owes to Roger Kimball's invention, *Ibidem*, p. 281.
- 52 S. Fish, "Critical Self-Consciousness, Or Can We Know What We're Doing?," in S. Fish, *Doing What Comes Naturally. Change, Rhetoric and Practice of Theory in Literary and Legal Studies*, (Durham-London: Duke UP, 1989). Further quoted as *CSC*. See also Fish's critique of Marcuse's views on tolerance – S. Fish, "The Trouble with Tolerance," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Vol. 53, No. 12, November 10, 2006, p. B8.
- 53 T. W. Adorno, *Prisms*, London: Neville Spearman, 1967, p. 32.
- 54 T. Eagleton, "The Estate Agent: Stanley Fish and His Trouble with Principles," in G. A. Olson, and L. Worsham (eds.), *Postmodern Sophistry: Stanley Fish and the Critical Enterprise*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 2004), p.185.
- 55 Barnett Newman in *Painters Painting: The New York Art Scene, 1940-1970*, directed by Emile de Aotnio, quoted in AT, p.367 n1.

