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**Domination and Disintegration:
Adorno and Critical Social Theory**

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Ph.D Thesis

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Abstract

The central claim of my thesis is that Theodor Adorno's social theory harbours important insights which can bring to light significant deficiencies and weaknesses in the works of contemporary critical theorists. In order to substantiate this claim, I argue that Adorno's philosophical and sociological writings embody a coherent and systematic version of critical social theory. I then attempt to place Adorno's version of critical social theory in critical and constructive dialogue with the successors to the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory (Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth). This is achieved by reconstructing and reinterpreting Adorno's key theses through insights developed in contemporary social theory. Part One demonstrates, firstly, how Adorno's critical social theory developed from out of the problems of the earlier social-theoretic 'paradigms'. In chapter two, I argue that Adorno, in *Negative Dialectics*, develops a conception of critical theory as a 'critical dialectic of concepts', derived from a synthesis of the Durkheimian sociology of knowledge, and Hegelian dialectic. Chapter three attempts to substantiate and develop this thesis, and also shows how Adorno develops a theory of linguistic reification. In chapter four, I attempt to expound the social theory underlying the philosophical arguments of *Negative Dialectics*. In Part Two, I deploy the insights derived from the analysis of Adorno's work in order to furnish a critique of Habermas's critical theory, concerned with its failure to develop an adequate critique of class- and group-specific domination (chapter five) and problems stemming from its formal/abstract conception of moral-practical reason (chapter six). I then turn, in Part Three, to the critical theory of recognition. It is argued that, by returning the concept of social struggle to the centre of the analysis, the theory of recognition is able to theorize structures of domination and oppositional praxis far more adequately than the Habermasian account. However, I argue that this theory needs to integrate insights deriving from Adorno's thesis of integration through domination. I argue that the concept of symbolic power provides for a plausible reconstruction of Adorno's integration thesis, by interpreting integration through domination as occurring at the symbolic rather than the psychic level. In the final chapter, I draw upon contemporary social theory in order to furnish an interpretation of Adorno's social theory as articulating a twofold distortion of instrumental reason, which I characterize as a dialectic of increasing integration through domination, and intensifying lifeworld disintegration.

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Abbreviations and a Note on References and Translations

The following abbreviations have been used for Adorno's works:

MM: *Minima Moralia* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1951).

E: *Eingriffe: Neun kritische Modelle* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1963).

ND: *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 1973); German: *Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1966).

DE: *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. J. Cumming (London: Verso, 1979); German: *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1969).

St: *Stichworte: Kritische Modelle 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1969).

ME: *Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

ÄT: *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

P: *Prismen: Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).

Published Lectures:

Ph. T I, II: *Philosophische Terminologie*, vols. 1 and 2 1962-3 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973).

3 St: *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. S. Weber Nicholson (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1993).

ESoz: *Einleitung in die Soziologie* 1968 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1993).

PM: *Probleme der Moralphilosophie* 1963 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996).

Met: *Metaphysik: Begriff und Probleme* 1965 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998).

Note on References and Translations

In the cases of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectics*, I have provided the English page references followed by the German, thus: (ND 178; 179). I did not use abbreviations for Adorno's sociological essays, preferring to cite the essays individually in the footnotes.

Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. I have, however, made direct use of Weber-Nicholsen's translation of *Hegel: Three Studies*, as this appears to be an eminently reliable translation. Readers with no German should be mindful of the fact that the Ashton translation of *Negative Dialektik* contains serious errors.

Introduction

Why a Return to Adorno?

Thirty years after his death, the legacy of Adorno's philosophy continues to be a subject of intense debate. Adorno's thought is claimed both as a precursor of the postmodern and as an extension of the Marxian Heritage.¹ This partially reflects the broad spectrum of his work, ranging from an investigation of the psychological bases of fascism, sociological critiques of twentieth century capitalism, and an attempt to expound a post-Hegelian form of dialectical philosophy, which reached its climax in *Negative Dialectics*. It is also reflective of the disparate influences which are visible, at one point or another, in Adorno's work, from German Idealism and Marxist currents, to Nietzsche, life philosophy, the early sociologists (Durkheim, Weber, Simmel), and Freud. One significant lack in the wealth of contemporary Adorno scholarship, however, and the central motivation for writing this work, is that Adorno's thought has not been productively and critically developed and explored in relation to that 'tradition' in which it would seemingly be most at home, namely, Frankfurt School Critical Theory. The motives for this are complex and difficult to entangle, but it is possible to identify the most significant factors. Among these, the most important is undoubtedly the influence of Habermas's charge that Adorno's critical theory was fatally flawed

¹See, for example, A. T. Nuyen, 'Adorno and the French Post-Structuralists on the Other of Reason', *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 4 (1990) 310-22; and Max Pensky, introduction to *The Actuality of Adorno: Critical Essays on Adorno and the Postmodern* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1997). On Adorno as a Marxist thinker, see Fredric Jameson *Late Marxism: Adorno, or the Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 1990).

through Adorno's commitment to an antiquated critical paradigm. Habermas saw this paradigm as characterized by presuppositions central to the philosophy of consciousness, to which he opposed a conception of critique constructed from the perspective of communicative reason.² Habermas has, in fact, continually argued that Adorno's work comprised not merely an incomplete, or partial version of the project of critique. It was rather a *false turn* in critical social theory. Hence whereas Habermas has attempted to build constructively on alternative traditions, such as pragmatism (Mead), developmental psychology (Piaget and Kohlberg), and speech-act theory (Austin and Searle), his approach with regard to Adorno's work has largely comprised an effort of demarcation: Adorno's work is approached with great caution and reservation, as though the importance of avoiding the seductive power of Adorno's errors far outweighed any possible gains to be derived from a more constructive approach to Adorno's work. Equally as significant as Habermas's demarcation strategy, however, is that so-called 'third-generation' Frankfurt School theorists, most notably Axel Honneth and Albrecht Wellmer, have tended to accept at face value Habermas's account of the necessity of a 'paradigm change' in critical theory. In the case of Honneth, his acceptance of the Habermasian critique is partially deceptive since, as I shall try to show, his own work exhibits an affinity with Adorno's efforts to ground critique in a substantive notion of negative experience, and is premised on a critique of Habermas's narrowed focus on the formal structures of communication. Habermas's call for a paradigm change in critical theory has certainly not gone unchallenged in recent years, however. Nonetheless, the critiques of the interpretation of Adorno's work underlying the call for a paradigm change have tended to be of a largely defensive variety, and

²Habermas develops this critique most explicitly in the essays in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. F. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

hence cannot be said to have provided the basis for a genuinely constructive dialogue between these different approaches to critical social theory.³

A further significant factor is that discussions of Adorno's major post-war writings, *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory*, have tended to approach these works in abstraction from wider questions concerning how the theses developed therein might have evolved as a response to problems that Adorno perceived as afflicting the project of critical social theory. *Aesthetic Theory*, for example, has been read as a self-contained account of the structure of aesthetic experience, a reading which, whatever important insights it might elicit, effectively brackets the question of how Adorno's focus on the aesthetic is linked to the search for a theoretical discourse in which social conflicts and antagonisms can be expressed.⁴ This approach obscures the connection between Adorno's more explicitly philosophical works and his sociological texts, making it difficult to perceive a coherent social-critical project underlying Adorno's writings. This tendency has been even more pronounced in discussions of *Negative Dialectics*, where, under the implicit influence of post-structuralist themes, an interpretation has developed according to which Adorno is developing a critique of the 'violence' of conceptuality. If this is not blatantly wrong, it is certainly a violently distortive misrepresentation, which should become evident from even the most cursory

³See, for example, Gerd Kimmerle, *Verwerfungen: Vergleichende Studien zu Adorno und Habermas* (Tübingen: edition Diskord, 1986); Friedhelm Löwenich, *Paradigmenwechsel: Über die Dialektik der Aufklärung in der revidierten kritischen Theorie* (Würzburg: Königshausen, 1990); Claudia Rademacher, *Versöhnung oder Verständigung? Kritik der Habermasschen Adorno-Revision* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 1993). A highly significant exception here is Jay Bernstein's *Recovering Ethical Life* (London: Routledge, 1995), which furnishes a lucid critique of the communicative paradigm from an Adornian perspective.

⁴See, for example, Christoph Menke's *The Sovereignty of Art: Aesthetic Negativity in Adorno and Derrida*, trans. N. Solomon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

examination of the Marxist-Hegelian background informing the idea of a negative dialectic. One of the guiding insights behind Marxist-Hegelian thinking, the influence of which on Adorno came most directly from the work of Georg Lukács, was derived from a critique of the Kantian view of conceptual synthesis, and the dualisms of subject/object, concept/thing, underlying the Kantian approach. According to this critique, simply expressed, concepts were not to be seen as atemporal mental categories, but were rather theorized as products of social-historical practice. The categories through which matter was given coherent form were not to be seen as existing in the heads of subjects, and brought to bear in subjective acts, but were objective structures continually re-enacted within the everyday practices which make up social reality. Hence, when Adorno continually refers to the exchange process in his elucidation of 'identity thinking' in *Negative Dialectics*, he intends this process to be understood as an objective conceptual structure, and identity thinking is the *philosophical articulation* of this process: it is not 'compared' with this process, nor is it simply 'derived' from it. For to speak of comparison or derivation would be to risk reintroducing once again the Kantian dualism of an aconceptual object and a purely subjective-mental donation of conceptual intelligibility. But now, if concepts are to be theorized as objective structures, then it makes no sense to speak of a 'violence' of conceptuality, when this is seen as something done by a 'subject' to an 'object'. If concepts are conceived, according to the Marxist-Hegelian thesis, as active, structuring forms within social reality, then the critique of the concept must embody an articulation of social processes. Now, however, it becomes clear that the reading of *Negative Dialectics* as a critique of conceptual violence, executed by a subject against an object, rests upon a fundamental misunderstanding of dialectical philosophy. Adorno's conception of dialectic, as I will attempt to show, turns centrally on the idea that the interpretation of conceptual structures

provides philosophical access to fundamental social conflicts and antagonisms. The 'critique' of concepts is not an analysis of violent forms of mental synthesis, it is the self-articulation of what Adorno continued to speak of as social 'contradictions'. Because it misunderstands dialectic, the interpretation focussed on the violence of conceptuality robs *Negative Dialectics* of its social-critical intent.⁵ Here, as in the case of *Aesthetic Theory*, the relation of Adorno's explicitly philosophical works to his sociological writings becomes, at best, obscure, the latter usually being ignored altogether. The upshot of these developments is that precious little attempt has been made to develop Adorno's insights productively within the context of critical social theory. Critical theorists have either taken Habermas at his word that Adorno has nothing constructive to add to social theory, or have sought for fragmented insights within his works, obtainable independently of an understanding of the deeper structures of Adorno's model of critical theory as a whole.

In Part One of this work, I will try to show that there is a coherent critical project in Adorno's work, one version of which is put forth in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and which is then later developed and amended in *Negative Dialectics* and in the post-war sociological writings. I will claim that Adorno's critical social theory centres on the critique of a twofold distortion of intersubjective relations, which Adorno derives from the dual structure of the exchange principle. Adorno conceives the exchange principle, as we shall see, as encompassing both a structure of social

⁵This distortion can be seen to be implicit in Martin Jay's reading of the Adornian critique of 'identity thinking'. In his *Adorno* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), Jay focusses on the 'conceptual imperialism' that Adorno discerned in his critique of both positivism and idealism. Jay's reading of nonidentity as denoting a 'non-antagonistic, nonhierarchical pluralism' (p. 100) makes the typical error of hypostasizing nonidentity as a self-subsistent utopian figure, rather than tracing its working as a moment of dialectical logic. My own, opposed reading of nonidentity will be spelled out in chapter 3. Jay repeats this error in his *Force Fields: Between Intellectual History and Cultural Critique* (London, New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 26-7.

domination, and a principle of cultural rationalization. For Adorno, therefore, critical social theory must be capable of responding to two distinct types of pathological development within the social world. On the one hand, it must be capable of constructing a critique of forms of social domination. On the other hand, it must be capable of elucidating pathologies of meaning and experience deriving from the infiltration of the logic of the exchange principle into the sphere of cultural meaning. It is on the basis of this analysis that I will attempt to develop a constructive dialogue between Adorno's critical theory and the communicative paradigm developed by Habermas (in Part Two), and the critical theory of recognition (in Part Three), developed more recently by Axel Honneth and others. My approach, in attempting to bring Adorno's insights to bear on critical social theory, will be primarily reconstructive. I will draw widely on contemporary social theory in order to elucidate Adorno's social theoretic insights. My justification for this approach is twofold. On the one hand, the insights embodied in the disparate intellectual sources, which Adorno's work culled into unique synthesis, may be seen to have been productively developed in many of the major currents of contemporary social theory. Thus the work of reconstruction attempts to re-situate these insights within the context of critical theory, by developing them within the framework provided by the central presuppositions of the Frankfurt School 'tradition'. On the other hand, and perhaps more fundamentally, my preference for a reconstructive approach stems from a belief that it is vital not to let Adorno's negative dialectic 'harden' into a fixed doctrine. This would violate the central presupposition of critical theory that thought must think out of its own social context. The danger of sticking closely to Adorno's works as quasi-sacred texts with all the answers, is that one risks becoming closed to experience, hence violating the very search for what Adorno called 'unregimented experience' which defines dialectical philosophy. In order to situate the analysis,

then, I want to outline briefly what I take to be the major, defining elements of the tradition of critical social theory.

What is 'Critical Theory'?

One central dimension of Frankfurt School critical theory derives from the critique of domination inherited from Marxist thought. Critical theorists took over that defining unity of the critique of social relations of domination within Marxism, which can perhaps best be described as the conjunction of a science of domination and a logic of emancipation.⁶ Crudely expressed, the Marxian view holds that the analysis of structures of domination allows for the identification of that normative perspective within the present which is brought to bear in critical-revolutionary activity. For Marx, these components were conjoined by means of the concept of labour, which was both the ground of the analysis of alienation and reification, and the ground of that potential of self-expression and self-development which was to be set free by critical-revolutionary activity. From this conjunction definitive of Marxian critique, there developed that aspect fundamental to the project of Frankfurt School critical theory, namely, the search for an effective way of theorizing the unity of theory and practice. The unity of theory and practice is not a presupposition of critical theory, however. It is rather one of its defining problems. The relation of theory and practice emerged as a problem through the insights of Frankfurt School theorists into the acute difficulties which had beset Marxian historical materialism. Essentially, all theorists working within the

⁶I borrow this characterization from Axel Honneth, 'Domination and Moral Struggle', in *The Fragmented World of the Social* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995).

Frankfurt School tradition, from Horkheimer and Adorno, to Habermas through to Honneth, have seen that the type of unity of theory and practice theorized in historical materialism was reductivist and determinist. Its being 'reductivist' meant that practice was reduced by historical materialism to the status of the execution of a pre-defined theoretical logic, just as, in classic forms of philosophical dualism, the body serves as a vehicle for the execution of a disembodied will. Its being 'determinist' meant that historical materialism saw emancipatory practice as determined by a logic embedded in the development of social structures. If one could discern this logic, one could predict the nature and forms of emancipatory practice, just as the behaviour of natural objects is discernible from the knowledge of scientific laws. The problem of theory and practice, which is constitutive for critical social theory, is thus the problem of finding a way of theorizing the interplay between theory and practice which can avoid the reductivism and determinism of historical materialism. This meant, in effect, re-conceiving the distinctive unity of Marxist critique on a new basis.

All Frankfurt School theorists attempt to retain this unity in one form or other. Critical social theory sets out to articulate a critical perspective on social reality which, at the same time, seeks a social location for the normative perspective underlying this critique. To avoid the reductivist and determinist elements of historical materialism, however, critical theorists have sought to re-contextualize theory and to uncover the potential for theoretical insight *within* social practice. This intention is discernible in Adorno's attempt to undermine the opposition of constitutive subject and formless object in *Negative Dialectics*, and in Habermas's exemplary account of the mutual implication of validity and meaning, and hence the unity of philosophy and sociology, in volume one of *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Adorno's critical theory, I will argue, conceives the social location for that theoretical insight into structures of domination, which is articulated

philosophically through dialectical critique, in terms of the idea of critical-negative experience. To avoid the reductivist and determinist errors of historical materialism, then, critical social theory needs to conceive of a *dialectical interplay* between the theoretical analysis of domination and critical-negative experience. Negative experience informs the direction of theory, the insights of which, in turn, are able to be taken up as insights at the level of practice, and thus inform and direct, in turn, the critical-negative experience of the social order accessible to social agents.

The Marxian critique of domination, and the typical problems it posed, was not the only major theoretical influence on the development of critical social theory, however. A second defining influence, I want to argue, can be found in the work of the early sociologists (Durkheim, Weber, Simmel). The work of these thinkers, which, at least in the cases of Weber and Simmel, was heavily indebted to Nietzsche, theorized typical pathologies emerging in the transition from ‘traditional’ to ‘modern’ societies, or what Ferdinand Tönnies described as the transition from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft*.⁷ The early sociologists, however, were not focussed on questions of domination and social struggle. They were rather essentially preoccupied with problems deriving from the perceived loss of objective structures of moral meaning - whether in Weber’s account of the ‘iron cage’, which theorized the loss of the religious-metaphysical background which furnished an overarching and transcendent sense of social practice, in Durkheim’s account of ‘anomie’, or in Tönnies’ reading of the weakening of the bonds of *Gemeinschaft*. In all these cases, the problems afflicting modern societies were seen fundamentally as problems of (moral) *disintegration*.

⁷As in the case of the Marxist critique, the influence of the early sociologists was also filtered through Lukács, whose ‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’, in *History and Class Consciousness* (trans. R. Livingstone [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971]), attempts an exemplary synthesis of Marx and Weber.

At first glance, there would seem to be grave problems for any attempt to unify this analysis with the critique of domination stemming from Marxism. The latter stresses the actuality of social conflict, and portrays society as a domain of struggle between groups. For the Marxian critique, the analysis of society is not meant to uncover processes of disintegration within the social order. Its intention might almost be said to be the reverse, since the analysis of domination conceives society as held together by what one might call structures of 'false integration'. This denotes an ideological semblance of justice and inequality, which hides the deeper reality of domination which structures the social order. Focussed on promoting social change rather than securing social order, the Marxian critique is suspicious of the ideological character of the frameworks of meaning which hold together the different groups within the social world, and harmonize what are seen to be their inherently antagonistic interests. The Frankfurt School theorists, however, were not concerned with phenomena of disintegration in the context of the problematic of social order, and this is why their interest in the problems diagnosed by the early sociologists did not clash with their commitment to the presuppositions of Marxian critique. As I will try to show, the Frankfurt School theorists saw in the phenomena of disintegration theorized by the early sociologists the problem of a potential loss of the cultural accessibility of the symbolic tools of critique. Thus the focus on the erosion of cultural frameworks of meaning dovetailed with Marxist critique because the point of the former was to explain the disappearance within culture of the context-transcending force attaching to the ends of reason.

In order to see how this transformation of the problematic of the early sociologists was achieved, we need to grasp how Frankfurt School theorists transplanted Marxian insights concerning society as structured by deep conflicts and antagonisms, into the debate concerning cultural meaning.

This led them to criticize the view that the frameworks of moral meaning, which the early sociologists saw as under threat, were to be theorized as expressive of social solidarity, or moral consensus. Rather, they argued, *the conflicts and antagonisms which dirempt the social body would find their counterpart at the level of meaning in the form of symbolic tensions, or 'contradictions'*. These tensions could be decoded as harbouring unrealized or suppressed possibilities, demands which were unfulfilled, and thus were seen as embodying that type of context-transcendent force which would make possible a critical-negative experience of the social order. In short, the moral meanings which had been portrayed as guaranteeing the cohesion of the social order were seen by Frankfurt School theorists as making accessible a critical-negative insight into the oppressive structures of the social world in which they emerged. 'First generation' Frankfurt School theorists tended to speak of this critical potential attaching to symbolic forms in terms of the Hegelian idea of 'determinate negation'.⁸ The most fundamental normative categories of the present order - 'justice', 'equality', 'democracy', etc. - contain a transcendent dimension: the fulfilment of their very sense 'demands' the negation of the existing order. Thus, contra a reductionist theory of ideology, the normative categories integral to the self-understanding of modern capitalist societies are not only pure semblance. They express, through their own internal meaningfulness, the conflicts and antagonisms of this social order in the form of a demand for their negation. On the basis of this reading, Frankfurt School theorists are able to theorize disintegration as a process of the rigidification of meanings, in which the ends of reason lose their capacity to function as the immanent negation of social antagonisms, and thus lose their critical, context-transcending force.

⁸See, for example, Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974), p. 36; Th. W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 231; 230.

Yet the problem of a loss of the cultural location for the critical-negative potential of reason is not as foreign to the problematic of the early sociologists as my description of their work as focussed on the maintenance of social order might suggest. In fact, Weber's notion of the force of the 'extraordinary' (*das Außeralltägliche*) attaching to charismatic authority, and Durkheim's description of 'collective effervescence', can both be seen as concepts which stand for the accessibility of normative transcendence as an item of social experience.⁹ All one has to do (what, I shall argue, Adorno does do) in order to theorize a process of an internal distortion of cultural meaning, is to read the Weberian account of the 'waning' of charisma, and Durkheim's account of the 'dying' of former gods and call for new forms of collective creativity, from the perspective of a critical-dialectical theory of social change. The problem of disintegration can then be seen in terms of the need to identify those social processes and structures which prevent the transcendent force attaching to normative categories from becoming accessible as a critical-negative experience of the present social order.

The problem of disintegration, understood as the erosion of critical-transcendent possibilities within structures of cultural meaning, constitutes, besides the critique of domination, the second central dimension of Frankfurt School critical theory. Adorno, as I will try to show, theorizes the problem of disintegration in terms of the idea of linguistic reification.¹⁰ This essentially denotes a

⁹The common feature of both terms is that they articulate an extreme form of self-distanciation from ordinary experience; individuals are, as it were, transported beyond themselves. See Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), pp. 140-2; Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. K. E. Fields (New York: The Free Press, 1995), pp. 218-20.

¹⁰I borrow this term from the work of Albrecht Wellmer (in his 'The Dialectic of Modernism and Postmodernism', in *The Persistence of Modernity*, trans. D. Midgley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991); and also, more directly, from Christoph Demmerling, in his

rigidification of linguistic meanings, as a result of which reason becomes unable to function as an articulation of the critical-negative experience of the social order. Adorno, I will argue, attempts to make processes of linguistic reification accessible to critique by theorizing their origin in the extension of the logic of the exchange process into cultural meaning. Adorno is therefore able to conceive the 'Marxian' problem of domination and the 'sociological' problem of disintegration as resulting from a twofold distortion of the exchange principle. This is responsible for both the reproduction of a structure of domination, and, when it infiltrates the sphere of cultural meaning, for phenomena of linguistic reification. Yet the same dual heritage of critical social theory is present in Habermas's work, most clearly in the distinction between pathologies concerned with a 'loss of freedom', and those centred on 'cultural impoverishment'.¹¹ Thus, in arguing for the importance of Adorno's critical theory, my central claim will be that his work furnishes insights into structures of domination and phenomena of disintegration which can show up important inadequacies and errors in the work of Habermas and his successors. On the other hand, and in sound dialectical fashion, Adorno's work will itself show up through this critical encounter as harbouring errors, and moments of insufficient reflection, which will necessitate an extensive reconstruction of his account of the dual pathologies of the modern capitalist order.

This work was born of an intuition that Adorno has important insights to offer contemporary critical social theory, which, however, for the reasons outlined at the beginning, have not been

Sprache und Verdinglichung Wittgenstein, Adorno und das Projekt einer kritischen Theorie (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994). However, I will argue that both of these authors fail to grasp Adorno's social-critical intent, in that they understand linguistic reification, à la Wittgenstein, as a philosophical error, rather than as rooted in social processes.

¹¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), pp. 325ff.

adequately brought to bear on current debates. When Adorno's 'social theory' is discussed at all, it is more often that not only in order to confirm its obsolescence, as inseparably bound to the context of the critique of German fascism, or as an anachronistic form of modernist critique. I will try to show, however, that Adorno's work provides the basis of a constructive, alternative approach to the central problems that are the concern of critical social theory. I believe that contemporary critical social theory could attain to a greater awareness of its shortcomings through this constructive dialogue with Adorno's work. My hope is that the present work will contribute something towards this end.

Part One

Adorno's Critical Theory

Beginnings: From Philosophy of History to Critical Genealogy

The transformation of Frankfurt School critical theory from its original incarnation as an interdisciplinary research program, directed towards an understanding of the possibilities for the translation of social contradictions into political action, to a philosophical critique of the rational structures underlying the operation of late-capitalist societies, represented a decisive break with the classical Marxist philosophy of history. The connection between contradictions within society and the transformative potential of collective praxis could no longer be established by a determinist logic of historical change, of the sort articulated in the preface to Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*.¹ Theory and social practice, therefore, could no longer be tied together through a theoretical elucidation of contradictions arising in the core structure of society, which would somehow be translated into a revolutionary practice by oppressed groups acting as the agents of history. Thus one problem which became central for Frankfurt School theorists, from the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* onwards, was the need to rethink the relation between theory and practice on a non-determinist basis. In this chapter, I want to trace the breakdown of the Marxist philosophy of history, as a paradigm for critical theory, to central tensions in Max Horkheimer's 1937 essay,

¹In *Marx und Engels Werke*, vol. 13 (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1961), pp. 7-11.

‘Traditional and Critical Theory’.² This difficulty for critical theory, I shall argue, soon became compounded by a second problem. Horkheimer and Adorno, under the influence of Georg Lukács’ description of phenomena of cultural reification in his *History and Class Consciousness*, soon became preoccupied with new forms of domination associated with processes of cultural rationalization. These phenomena were seen as forms of ‘indirect’ domination, in that they did not directly concern the operation of economic and political power, but rather had to do with the *experiential* consequences of the generalized operation of instrumental logics. Horkheimer and Adorno saw as a distinctive feature of late capitalism the increasing reorganization of social life according to the demands of the value-neutral criteria (efficiency, effectiveness, etc.) that had come to be characteristic of the operation of modern economic and administrative-bureaucratic institutions. Lukács had been able to unify the critique of cultural reification and economic/political domination through a dialectical theory of class consciousness, in which the process of the total commodification of the working class is seen to lead inexorably to the formation of class subjectivity. Because they could no longer accept the Marxist-Hegelian philosophy of history underlying this thesis (the proletariat as the ‘identical subject-object’ of history), the Lukácsian solution became unavailable to Horkheimer and Adorno. The consequence of this was that phenomena of cultural reification came to constitute a distinct problem area for critical theory, which could no longer be subsumed under the critique of domination by means of an overarching historical logic of emancipation. I want to suggest that Horkheimer and Adorno began to theorize cultural reification as a *problem of critical experience*. Cultural reification, that is to say, was seen as eroding the basis of that type of negative experience of the social world

²in *Critical Theory*, trans. M. J. O’ Connell (New York: Continuum, 1995).

which could form the ground of an oppositional praxis. Both of these issues, the loss of faith in a Marxist philosophy of history and the increasing awareness of the experiential effects of cultural reification, posed radical problems for the question of the social location of critical theory. In the final part of this chapter, I will show how *Dialectic of Enlightenment* attempts to provide a unified critical perspective on problems of social domination and cultural reification through the deployment of a *critical genealogy*. However, I will argue, this solution proved unable to sustain a perspective for effective social-critical analysis. Adorno's later works, as we shall see subsequently, can be seen as an attempt to reconstruct the critique in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* on a social-theoretic basis.

Traditional versus Critical Theory

Horkheimer begins his essay 'Traditional and Critical Theory' with the question 'What is "theory"?'³ 'Traditional' theory conceives theory as a sum total of propositions which divides up given facts in a way which is useful for the manipulation of physical nature. The characteristic features of this form of theory are the subsumption and classification of empirical items within conceptual schemes. This leads to the formulation of law-like generalizations. In traditional theory,

there is always, on the one hand, the knowledge that is formulated in thought, and on the other, a content to be subsumed under it, and this subsumption, this establishment of a relation between mere perception or verification of a

³'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 188.

fact and the conceptual structure of our knowledge is called its theoretical explanation.⁴

This type of theory, suggests Horkheimer, is geared towards the gathering of useful knowledge for practical application in the production process. This version of theory, which Horkheimer calls 'traditional theory', is therefore part of a more embracing social process. However, argues Horkheimer, this type of theory has been 'absolutized'. It has been portrayed as if it were the inner nature of knowledge.⁵ It is the self-misconception of traditional theory which necessitates that we raise the question: 'What is "theory"?'.

Horkheimer's charge against traditional theory is that it has become a 'reified ideological category'.⁶ Certain specific mental operations (e.g. classification, abstraction, generalization) having a particular role in social processes are perceived as if they were the essence of theory. Theory assumes that the world naturally conforms to these categories, rather than perceiving their limited use in the developing work process. As a result, theory erroneously believes that it can explain theoretical change through purely 'immanent' factors. Horkheimer, borrowing from the early Marx's critique of idealism,⁷ argues that changes in theory can only be properly understood by re-locating it in the context of real social processes. Thought forms, suggested Marx, are inextricably related to all other forms of human activity, and do not undergo an independent development. This idea is the basis

⁴'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 193 (translation altered).

⁵'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 194.

⁶'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 194.

⁷'Consciousness does not determine life, rather life determines consciousness', Karl Marx, 'Deutsche Ideologie', p.349, in *Die Frühschriften* (Suttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1953).

of Horkheimer's suggestion that the victory of Copernicanism over traditional astronomy cannot be made comprehensible through examining the immanent properties of each, such as consistency or explanatory range, but only through situating it in the context of the growing social prominence of 'mechanistic thinking'.⁸ The ground of scientific progress, for Horkheimer, is social change. Scientific knowledge is not self-sufficient, but is an aspect of the way in which society as a whole interacts with physical nature.

Horkheimer's complaint against traditional theory is that it does not recognize its own constitutive context.⁹ Traditional theory cannot understand that the manner of its contact with reality is shaped by the stage of development of the forces of production. Whereas traditional theory conceives the theoretician as a passive observer of physical nature, subject and object are, in fact, mutually determined from the beginning through the productive activity of the species.¹⁰ If the object is pre-formed through the work process, however, then Horkheimer can argue that scientific research is subordinate, in a cognitive sense, to productive labour. Consequently, he is able to establish society as a quasi-transcendental subject. What traditional theory takes to be external 'facts' found in nature are the result of the productive activity of society as universal subject. On this point, in fact, Horkheimer is again essentially echoing the early Marx's critique of idealism. The construction of reality

⁸'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 195.

⁹Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, trans. K. Baynes (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p.7.

¹⁰'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 200.

through the synthesizing activity of the transcendental subject is re-conceived by Marx as the result of material synthesis through productive labour.¹¹

The demonstration that traditional theory serves certain practical purposes in the production process which it cannot itself comprehend establishes critical theory as *cognitively superior* to traditional theory, since only critical theory can grasp the character of theory as a social process. Traditional theory operates in accordance with a constitutive misrecognition concerning the *social conditions* of its own possibility. In Hegelian fashion, Horkheimer asserts that the cognitive gain afforded by critical theory is a gain in *self-knowledge*. Theory must understand itself as a component of praxis, or more specifically, as a reflexive reconstruction of praxis,¹² praxis itself being, up to this point in Horkheimer's essay, identical with the process of productive labour. By identifying itself with the labour process, a new form of knowledge, understood as a gain in reflexivity which is inaccessible to traditional theory, now becomes available to critical theory. Essentially, as we saw, traditional theory is directed primarily to the manipulation of nature. The knowledge it provides is instrumental, in the sense that it serves the further development of the control of nature, and hence increases the capacity of the production process. That critical theory must be more than this is evident from the normative thrust of Horkheimer's essay, which often presents itself as possessing a privileged standpoint for the condemnation of current social arrangements. Horkheimer chides the economic organization of current society for not being

¹¹'Deutsche Ideologie', p. 351-53.

¹²See Christoph Menke, 'Critical Theory and Tragic Knowledge', in D. Rasmussen (ed.), *The Handbook of Critical Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) p.60. See also Thomas McCarthy, 'The Idea of a Critical Theory', in S. Benhabib, W. Bonß, and J. McCole (eds.), *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 135.

consciously directed towards a general goal.¹³ His explicit criticism of traditional theory's lack of self-awareness does not appeal to instrumental grounds, in terms, say, of its stifling the technical progress of production, but as 'nonhuman and irrational'.¹⁴ This suggests that, as the reflexive reconstruction of the labour process itself, critical theory gains access not to the means of its further progress, but to the *ends* of the labour process itself. Critical theory, therefore, establishes itself as an awareness of the possibilities of human freedom inherent in the production process, which is conceived as the process of gaining increasing control over nature.¹⁵ The idea of a 'reasonable organization of society', says Horkheimer, although 'immanent in human work', is not correctly grasped by the common understanding.¹⁶ The awareness of the reasonable organization of society as the end of the labour process itself is the cognitive gain of critical theory over traditional theory, and the basis of the privileged normative standpoint of the critical theorist vis à vis current society.¹⁷

We can see, then, that Horkheimer's distinction between instrumental and non-instrumental forms of cognition relies upon the identification of praxis with production. If

¹³'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 203.

¹⁴'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 210.

¹⁵Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, pp.10-11.

¹⁶'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 213.

¹⁷Horkheimer's construction of a normative basis for critique in terms of the ends of production seems to be overlooked by Couzens Hoy, who argues that there is a 'methodological problem' with critical theory's desire to make general claims and its suspicion of 'totalizing' claims to an undistorted, or impartial view of the whole, or, that is to say, between the search for impartial grounds for critique and the thesis of the social situatedness of thought (*Critical Theory*, D. Couzens Hoy and T. McCarthy [Oxford: Blackwell, 1994]), p.112. Horkheimer *can* reconcile the two through the identification of ends transcending the social present within the production process. But the problem is what follows from the idea that praxis is reducible to production.

the possibilities for human freedom inherent in production are to be realized, therefore, society must organize the work process such that the social world will appear as a creation of free and cooperative productive activity. Horkheimer makes this point through an ideology-critical encounter with Kantian idealism.¹⁸ Kant sees the synthesizing activity of productive activity in the 'idealist form of a consciousness-in-itself, that is a purely intellectual source'. The activity of society thus appears to be a 'transcendental power'. The ideas at work in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* are not simply false, however, but an ideological repetition of the way society appears as alien to its members.¹⁹ Kantian idealism *appears* to establish human productive activity as the origin of the experienceable world, yet on the other hand, Kantian concepts have a certain 'obscurity, unknownness and impenetrability'. The productive activity of the Kantian knower appears to operate outside of his control. Given Horkheimer's close adherence, up to this point, to a Marxist philosophy of history organized around the concept of production, it is no surprise that he uses the term 'alienation' to describe the conditions in which the organization of the work process stifles free, self-expressive activity, and is not consciously directed toward human ends.²⁰ The task for critical theory, in this case, must be to examine the preconditions for translating the social

¹⁸'Traditional and Critical Theory', pp. 202-4.

¹⁹Menke, C., 'Critical Theory and Tragic Knowledge', p.62.

²⁰In the 1844 Paris Manuscripts (in *Marx und Engels Werke*, Ergänzung I [Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968]) pp. 510-518, Marx identifies four distinct forms of alienation: i) alienation from the product of one's labour; ii) alienation with regard to the activity (*Tätigkeit*) of labour; iii) alienation from oneself as a species being; iv) alienation from other persons. Horkheimer's argument suggests that it is the first application which is his main concern.

contradictions uncovered by a philosophy of history into collective action directed at reorganizing production to express individual freedom through self-creation.

This formulation, however, leaves Horkheimer's theory open to a telling objection. Namely, how can Horkheimer turn the future projections of a philosophy of history into prescriptions for collective action without turning critical theory into another version of traditional theory? If the ends of production are pre-given through the social analysis of a philosophy of history, collective action is reduced to a means for bringing about pre-determined ends. Horkheimer's reliance on a Hegelian-Marxist philosophy of history seems to push him towards a form of economic determinism that perceives oppositional praxis as *caused* by changes in the economic-technical infrastructure. But laws of social development can only be developed and formulated from a standpoint *external* to social praxis, and its inner motivations and meanings. Thus critical theory appears to lose that very reflexivity that was supposed to distinguish it from 'traditional' theory. Horkheimer's suggestion that the theoretician be conceived as forming a 'dynamic unity with the oppressed class' so that his presentation of societal contradictions 'is a force within society to stimulate change', leaves wholly unclear how the findings of theoretical analysis are to be translated into norms of collective action.²¹ What is missing from Horkheimer's account, as Axel Honneth has indicated, is an account of social action in which interpretations of everyday experiences can take place against the background of a normative framework embedded in culture. This would permit collective action to be presented as 'social struggle', understood as the attempt by social groups to realize norms of action, acquired through the experience of suffering

²¹'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 215.

injustice, in the 'normative structures of social life'.²² In other words, Horkheimer needs a conception of culture as a sphere of social practice which is able to interpret the ends of philosophical reason (freedom, justice, etc.) in concrete and substantial terms. This would allow the unity of theory and praxis to be conceived as a form of dialogic mediation. Horkheimer does, in fact, begin to outline such a conception at one point in the essay, describing critical theory as 'critical activity' intent on problematizing existing normative structures and their stifling of individuals' free creative activity.²³ However, a more detailed elaboration of this view would begin to conflict with Horkheimer's reduction of praxis to the intensification of the control over nature in the production process. There is no place *within* the sphere of social life for Horkheimer to locate the practice of critical activity.

The difficulties of reading off the possibility of emancipatory practice from a classical Marxist philosophy of history are readily apparent in Horkheimer's essay. This is visible in Horkheimer's unwillingness to identify the social position of the proletariat as a guarantee of its possession of the truth about current society.²⁴ This fact renders problematic the possibility of an unambiguous link between the theorizing of social contradictions and their translation into collective praxis. Horkheimer is clearly moving towards a formulation of the position of Georg Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness*, who, against the Marxism of the Third International, argued that, in order to achieve a correct apprehension of its emancipatory role, the proletariat requires the mediation of theoretical activity. Horkheimer inveighs against the idea that the intellectual ought simply to adapt himself to

²²Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p.29.

²³'Traditional and Critical Theory', pp. 205-6.

²⁴'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 213; 214.

the 'creative strength' of the proletariat. This, he argues, constitutes an 'evasion of theoretical effort' which can only make the masses 'blinder and weaker'. The genuine role of theoretical activity is to be a 'critical, promotive factor' in the development of the masses.²⁵ But it is precisely here that the problems of Horkheimer's essay appear in their starkest form. For without a normative conception of culture, conceived as capable of translating the *ends* of productive activity, identified by theory, into goals of collective social practice, critical theory will possess the same external relation to its object - emancipatory practice - as does traditional theory to the realm of immediate facts. The inadequacies of this formulation of the project of critical theory led the early Frankfurt School to reject the idea of founding critical theory on a philosophy of history. At the same time, however, it was becoming clear that the 'critical attitude', of which Horkheimer speaks, could not be simply and unproblematically re-situated in the cultural interpretation of experiences of injustice. This was because the breakdown of the critical paradigm founded on a philosophy of history left critical theory with *two distinct problems*. The phenomena of cultural reification which, as the last stage of the alienation of human beings in capitalist society, were seen by Lukács as the condition of class consciousness, would now have to be theorized on an independent basis. 'First generation' theorists took up this problem by focussing attention on the erosion of cultural meaning brought about by processes of cultural rationalization. Alongside this, a new understanding of the relation between social domination and cultural reification was required, which would be independent of the theoretical framework of a philosophy of history.

²⁵'Traditional and Critical Theory', p. 214.

Cultural Reification and Domination

By identifying theory as the extension of the work process, Horkheimer was led towards the idea that the overcoming of domination is extensionally equivalent to the transformation of relations of production in line with productive forces; when, that is, intellectual and physical means for the mastery of nature are employed for the benefit of the whole community. However, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the characterization of domination in terms of capitalist class relations was no longer entirely satisfactory. This was for two reasons. Firstly, power was becoming more pervasive and mediated in twentieth century capitalism, and the objective of deriving these mediated forms from the economic structure was becoming increasingly problematic. Secondly, and allied to this, cultural rationalization seemed to be eroding the cultural frameworks of meaning within which the ideals of freedom and justice had once acquired their significance and motivating force for individual lives.²⁶ The analysis of these troubling developments within modern society had constituted the problematic of the early sociologists. The erosion of cultural frameworks of meaning had been described by Ferdinand Tönnies as the transition of community (*Gemeinschaft*) to society (*Gesellschaft*). With these oppositional terms, Tönnies describes a process in which customs and religious understandings, which provide a structure of meaning for individual activity in forms of community, give way to the 'conventions' of society, which provide purely external constraints, backed by sanctions, on individual activity.²⁷ The 'substance of

²⁶See Jay Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life* (London: Routledge, 1995) pp.22-3.

²⁷Tönnies, Ferdinand, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1963), pp. 249-51.

the common spirit' has become so thin, and the bond connecting the free individual to others has become so weak in society, claims Tönnies, that it is extinguished from view.²⁸

The emergence of forms of institutional power had been given significant attention by Max Weber. Weber argued that bureaucratic authority (*Herrschaft*) was an 'authority in virtue of [the possession of] knowledge', a type of authority integrally linked to the process of cultural rationalization.²⁹ Since bureaucratic domination seemed, to Weber, to constitute *the* inherently rational form of administration, it seemed irrefutable that a *rationaly* organized socialist society would also have to be administratively ordered in this way. This seemed to necessitate a pulling free of the critique of domination from an exclusive focus on economic structures. However, what is most significant about Weber's reading of modernity, from the standpoint of critical theory, is that it furnishes the perspective for a reading of cultural rationalization as both a process of disenchantment, in which the illusion of a cosmological sense for social action is extinguished, *and* as a process that creates the cultural and psychological basis for an extension of institutional coercion.³⁰ These two ideas are united in Weber's description of the 'waning' (*Schwinden*) of charismatic authority.³¹ Weber here argues that, in the course of cultural rationalization, charismatic authority becomes objectified (*versachlicht*) as cultural discipline, and thus forms the subjective basis for the unquestioning obedience to bureaucratic authority. Thus the waning of charismatic

²⁸*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 242.

²⁹*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1980), p. 129.

³⁰See Jeffrey Alexander, *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), pp. 79ff.

³¹*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 681ff.

authority constitutes a 'decline of the extent of influence of individual action'.³² The rationalization of the political and economic procurement of needs, Weber argues, proceeds together with the 'unstoppable expansion of discipline as a universal appearance, and increasingly limits the significance of charisma and of individually differentiated action'.³³ Weber is thus able to theorize a new form of 'impersonal' domination that arises in the process of cultural rationalization. This is conceived as a structure of discipline, which is all that remains of the bond to innovative charismatic leaders. It is this idea that lies behind Weber's depiction of the fate of ascetic Protestantism in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. The reference to modern subjects of rational discipline as 'specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart' suggests that what is left behind after the charismatic phase of puritanism is the habit of strict obedience.³⁴

There is a further aspect to Weber's depiction of the waning of charisma, however, which is vital for understanding why the form that cultural rationalization had taken in Western societies came to be taken up as a problem for critical theory. Weber distinguishes charisma from other forms of authority by means of the conceptual contrast of 'extraordinary' and 'ordinary'. Charisma constitutes the 'specifically "creative" revolutionary force (*Macht*) of history'. Charismatic authority is capable of inducing a radical transformation - a *metanoia* - of convictions and beliefs, and thus represents the 'internal subordination under what is not yet present (*das noch nie Dagewesene*), the

³²*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 681.

³³*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 687.

³⁴Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (London: Unwin, 1930), p. 182. See Jeffrey Alexander, *Rethinking Classical Sociology*, p. 84.

absolutely unique, thus holy'.³⁵ Charisma, for Weber, is therefore a type of meaning revelation that answers to those needs and hopes which cannot be adequately satisfied within everyday structural forms of authority.³⁶ This suggests that Weber reads cultural rationalization as bringing forth a structure of rational discipline that displaces, or suppresses the creative force of the extraordinary, which was maintained in the type of meaning revelation unique to charismatic authority. This argument, as we shall see, was taken up and applied by Horkheimer and Adorno to the dominant positivistic strand of Enlightenment rationalism, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Horkheimer and Adorno reinterpret the loss of the extraordinary force of charismatic authority as a suppression of the possibility of a critical-negative experience of the everyday, due to the dominance of a positivistic mentality that restricts thinking to the ordering and classification of facts. Horkheimer and Adorno root this critical-negative experience in the *original critical-dialectical nature of language*. For Horkheimer and Adorno, it is the charismatic quality attaching to reason - its ability to reveal an idealized future in the form of an immanent, negative presentation of the present - that is threatened by the dominance of the positivistic mentality. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, do not perceive this process as an *inevitable* outcome of disenchantment. In fact, as we shall see, when Enlightenment is understood exclusively in terms of its modern positivistic variant, it is incorrect to speak of a process of 'disenchantment' at all. Horkheimer and Adorno take up the idea of a potentially distorting process of the 'objectification', or what Weber also refers to as the *Veralltäglichung* (becoming-ordinary), of a certain creative-

³⁵*Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 658.

³⁶See Wolfgang Schluchter, *Die Entstehung des modernen Rationalismus: Eine Analyse von Max Webers Entwicklungsgeschichte des Okzidents* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), p. 247.

revolutionary force in the course of cultural rationalization. But rather than perceiving this from the standpoint of Weber's pessimistic diagnosis, Horkheimer and Adorno will attempt to trace the historical roots of this suppression of an 'extraordinary' critical force, in order to reveal both its contingency and its entwinement with dominant social interests.

It is, in fact, with Georg Lukács' joining of Marxian political economy and Weberian sociology in the essay 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', the central essay in *History and Class Consciousness*, that a critique of capitalist society is first joined with a critique of rationalization processes. Lukács' essay turns Marx's economic analysis into a form of social theory through posing the question of the consequences of the universalization of the characteristics of commodity exchange. How far, he asks, is commodity exchange able to influence the 'total inner and outer life of society?'³⁷ For Lukács the deformation of rationality appears as a process of commodification. Just as the appearance of objects in the realm of economic exchange destroys their qualitative and material character, that is, their use value, so, through the rationalization of social life by means of modern bureaucratic institutions, 'all issues are subjected to an increasingly *formal* and standardized treatment and . . . there is an ever-increasing remoteness from the qualitative and material essence of the 'things' to which bureaucratic activity pertains.'³⁸ For Lukács, reification, the process by which a relation between people takes on the illusory appearance of objectivity, is the key to understanding the operation of ideology in the modern world. The link between the two, however, meant that ideology could no longer be conceived as a body of subjectively held beliefs, since reification was an aspect of the

³⁷'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', p.84.

³⁸'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', p.99.

objective structure of capitalism. Ideology no longer hovers above the world as a set of subjective beliefs. Rather, the object is 'distorted in its objectivity' through the process of reification.³⁹ The flip side of the objectification of ideology was its internalization. Ideology, Lukács claims, comes to sink ever more deeply and definitively into human consciousness.⁴⁰ It is evident that, shorn of its Hegelian-Marxist theory of class consciousness, Lukács' diagnosis would pose grave problems for the possibility of locating a critical, emancipatory force *within* society itself.

Lukács clearly states that the structure of reification is founded on a 'principle of rationalisation' based on the notion of calculation.⁴¹ Rationalization produces a false opposition between purely formal laws and irrational content, rendering problematic the possibility that a theoretical prescription, an 'ought', might be able to modify existence. Thus reality appears to individuals as an unchangeable given. For Lukács, as for Horkheimer, the solution to this problem is the adoption of the standpoint of praxis, which renders accessible a cognitively superior understanding of subject and object as involved in a complicated process of mediation, in which the critical demands which thought makes of its objects

³⁹'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', p. 93. Also, p. 85: 'the commodity structure . . . penetrate[s] society in all its aspects'. Also, see the insightful discussion in Stanley Aronowitz, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), ch. 2. Ideology, Aronowitz claims, is no longer conceived as an imposition from without, but is produced as a moment of the 'lived experience' of capitalism itself (p. 41).

⁴⁰'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', p. 93. Thus the proletariat, claims Lukács, makes its appearance as the 'product of the capitalist order', sharing with the bourgeoisie the reification of every aspect of its life (p. 149).

⁴¹'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', p. 88. See also p. 91. Lukács is here following Simmel, whose interpretation of cultural rationalization I will discuss in chapter 4.

appear as the ‘*structural principles and the real tendencies of the objects themselves*’.⁴² The central insight which rendered Lukács’ solution problematic, and which would be partially definitive of the problematic of critical theory from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* onwards, was that there seemed to be no grounds for positing a direct link between the overcoming of ‘economic’ reification - the adoption of the standpoint of praxis as the conscious transformation of nature through productive activity - and ‘cultural’ reification. Lukács’ solution rested upon the thesis that the latter can be conceived as an effect of the former.⁴³ However, and as Weber’s analysis had implied, the idea that a reified rationality reduced to processes of calculation and emptied of value might recover its fundamental connection to human ends through the abolition of capitalist class relations seemed deeply suspect. Horkheimer and Adorno saw that phenomena of cultural reification had effectively twisted free of their roots in the production process, and now had to be analyzed as the effects of an autonomous cultural logic of abstraction. Whereas the problem posed by economic institutions was one of injustice, the consequences of cultural reification were primarily to be seen in terms of a marginalizing or suppression of a certain type of experience - that in which the social world is revealed negatively. In order adequately to address phenomena of cultural reification, it would be necessary to break with the base-superstructure schema of orthodox Marxism.

Rethinking Immanent Critique

⁴²‘Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat’, p. 155.

⁴³See Christoph Demmerling, *Sprache und Verdinglichung*, p. 40.

From this perspective, we can already see what is wrong with the accusation which has been consistently brought against *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, namely, that it is an abandonment of a critical project directed towards social emancipation. Among those who have underwritten this accusation are Axel Honneth, Seyla Benhabib and Joseph McCarney.⁴⁴ For McCarney, the problem is that, as a result of conceiving history as the progressive mastery of nature, Horkheimer and Adorno cannot hold together the two central planks of critique, namely, that it is both immanent, that is, having a foothold in social reality, and emancipatory. As a result, critique confronts social reality as an abstract *Sollen*.⁴⁵ Seyla Benhabib argues that, by denying an 'immanent logic to the actual that is emancipatory', Adorno undermines the conceptual presuppositions of successful immanent critique.⁴⁶ We must make a distinction here, however, between a concept of immanent critique, and a theoretical logic of emancipation. I will attempt to show in later chapters that Adorno *does* possess a coherent concept of immanent critique. But the notion of a pre-defined theoretical logic of emancipation, of which social agents are the executors, is an idea which Adorno could not possibly adhere to, and for the very reasons that led to the failure of Horkheimer's original delineation of critical theory. This latter notion, in which the possibilities of societal transformation are read off from a logic of history, leads inexorably back to a deterministic account of practice. Cornelius Castoriadis, perhaps the most acute

⁴⁴In, respectively, *Critique of Power*, ch.2; *Critique, Norm and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p.169; *Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 30-31.

⁴⁵*Social Theory and the Crisis of Marxism*, p. 30.

⁴⁶*Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 173.

critic of this theoretical error, articulated the consequences of this perspective in particularly lucid fashion,

What the classes do, what they have to do, is necessarily spelled out in each case by their situation in the relations of production, which they can do nothing about, for this situation precedes them causally as well as logically. In fact, the classes are simply the instrument in which the action of the productive forces is embodied. If they are actors, they are so in exactly the same sense as actors in the theatre who recite a text given to them in advance and who make predetermined gestures, and whether they play well or poorly, they cannot prevent the tragedy from moving on to its inexorable conclusion.⁴⁷

If the idea of an 'immanent', 'emancipatory' logic of social practice is not to fall back into a form of economic determinism (which is in essence a thinly disguised positivism), it is essential that the possibilities of a creative transformation of social institutions ought not to be seen as potentialities that can be read off (and whose actualization can be predicted) from the developmental logic of social structures. The possibilities of social transformation must be seen to depend upon the (creative) attempt to work through the social meanings and interpretations which establish the meaningfulness of emancipatory ends for individual life projects. Theory, according to this view, is able to guide and inform the process by which experiences of injustice are developed into an oppositional perspective, but it cannot express this process as the execution of a pre-determined social logic. This suggests that a non-

⁴⁷Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987), p. 29.

deterministic theory would approximate the form of a critical hermeneutic of everyday negative experiences, in which theory offers its formulations and interpretations to the social world as a possible truth of social experience, yet whose *making true* is dependent upon the creative acts of everyday practical interpretation. According to this view, social theorists cannot be seen as possessing a privileged insight into the operation of social laws, which lay actors merely execute in a blind fashion. Social theory is itself a situated practice, and social actors are themselves social theorists whose creative interpretations and insights are capable of transforming the formulations offered by professionalized theory into social truth.⁴⁸

If this is a plausible description of critical social theory, then it is clear that the critiques of Benhabib and McCarney are premature. In the first place, it cannot be the task of theory to legislate on the precise character of the emancipatory logic attaching to the social process, since this can only be determined by the creative interplay between theoretical formulations and the original insights and interpretations of everyday practice. Theory, therefore, cannot be seen as presenting in logical form a process that is present within social reality as a potential-to-be-realized, and whose realization depends solely on social actors executing the logical movement fixed by theory. The formulation of emancipatory ends is rather a constructive and creative process, in which theory guides practice through its interpretive offers to the social world, and practice, in turn, guides theory

⁴⁸This follows from what Anthony Giddens has called the 'double hermeneutic' at work in social science. Social theory is an attempt to establish the meaning of a process that is itself organized and constituted by structures of meaning, and hence is *already theory-laden*. Thus the 'truth' of a theoretical formulation is partially dependent upon its being assimilated into the universe of meaning of lay actors. The 'self-fulfilling prophecy' is only one minor example of this process. See the introduction to Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

through its everyday interpretations of negative experiences. Typically, however, critiques of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an 'abandonment' of the critical project have been informed by a simplistic two-step theory of immanent critique. In the first step, theory is seen as articulating, independently, an immanent social logic of emancipation. Then, in the second step, theory has the task of identifying, or 'pointing to' the social actors who are charged with executing this logic. This is wrong, because neither the immanent emancipatory logic nor the relevant social actors can be identified *prior* to the creative hermeneutic interplay in which theoretical interpretations are *transformed* into social truths.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, I will argue shortly, Horkheimer and Adorno are moving towards an understanding of critical theory as a critical hermeneutic of negative experience. What is ordinarily taken to be a retreat into 'cultural criticism' is in fact a deeper awareness of the problems posed by phenomena of cultural reification. The critique of cultural distortions is an analysis of the process which prevents the translation of social domination into forms of negative experience. Cultural reification could only come to light as an independent problem once the determinist notion of theory had been abandoned, since, from within the perspective of the latter, it is the inherent structural logic of society that determines where and when oppositional praxis will emerge. Thus there can be no independent problem of the accessibility of cultural meanings and interpretations, these issues being subsumed under a theory of ideology, as a semblance projected by the base structure. On the critical-hermeneutic view of critical theory, however, it is the meanings and interpretations that are created in the interplay between theory and practice which are the precondition of that type of insight into domination which can serve as the basis of an oppositional praxis. This critical-negative insight is not reducible to the execution of a

structural logic, but neither, for Horkheimer and Adorno, can the Lukácsian solution of a spontaneous dialectical transition of total commodification into class subjectivity any longer claim any degree of plausibility.⁴⁹ Following from Lukács' thesis of the extension of the logic of the commodity form into the cultural realm, however, Horkheimer and Adorno came to perceive that the decisive problem posed for the dialectical interplay of theory and practice was the operation of forms of reification that undermine the *experiential ground* of critique. A central task of critical social theory, therefore, now must be to gain critical access to the forms of cultural reification that prevent structures of domination from becoming accessible as a form of negative experience. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to achieve this through a critical genealogy - *not* of Enlightenment *tout court*, but of its positivist variant. Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to tie together the theses concerning the persistence of social domination, and the problem of cultural reification, by uncovering the common root of both in an *original collective repression*. In this way, Horkheimer and Adorno are able to organize the critical hermeneutic according to a Freudian schema, whereby the insights 'offered' to the social world concern the social operation of mechanisms of repression that block the possibility of a true insight into the structures of domination that pervade the social whole. It is to this theory that I now turn.

Dialectic of Enlightenment: The Turn to Critical Genealogy

⁴⁹Economic determinism and Lukácsian voluntarism are, of course, two sides of the same coin. The only effective way of avoiding these errors is through a form of critical theory that is able adequately to take into account the creative interplay made possible by the social situatedness of theory and the theory-ladenness of practice.

Dialectic of Enlightenment is the beginning point of the new preoccupation of critical theory with the distortions inherent in the process of cultural rationalization that Lukács had theorized in terms of the idea of cultural reification. Horkheimer and Adorno were looking for a theoretical basis on which to link together social-structural injustice, occurring through the domination of individuals by abstract exchange relations, and the problem of cultural meaning, occurring via the quantifying abstraction distinctive of rationalized social institutions, which regulate substantive human ends in terms of the value-indifferent criteria of efficiency, effectiveness, and order. Contemporary discussion of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* has tended to focus on Jürgen Habermas's suggestion that the authors are guilty of a 'performative contradiction', in their attempt to condemn rationality whilst using the very means of rational argument.⁵⁰ Habermas's fundamental claim was that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* represents a totalization of ideology critique. Reason here turns back upon itself, casting suspicion over the very rational criteria which had previously done the work of ideological unmasking. Habermas had also suggested in *The Theory of Communicative Action* that Horkheimer and Adorno make the critique of cultural reification unworkable, by projecting reification 'back behind the capitalist beginnings of the modern age into the very beginnings of hominization'.⁵¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, Habermas argues, no longer see capitalist society as the ground of cultural reification. It is rather instrumental reason that is

⁵⁰Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, chapter 5. Critiques which largely accept Habermas's reading, yet which challenge the ascription of performative contradiction to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be found in A.T. Nuyen, 'Habermas, Adorno and the Possibility of Immanent Critique', *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 66 (1992) 331-40, and Martin Morris, 'On the Logic of the Performative Contradiction', *Review of Politics* 58 (1996), 735-60.

⁵¹Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, trans. T. McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p. 366.

at the basis of the reified consciousness, and this is generalized both temporally (to apply to the entire history of the species) and substantively (to apply to cognition in the service of self-preservation and the repression of instinctual nature).⁵²

Whilst it is entirely possible to defuse the charge of performative contradiction, whilst remaining largely within the bounds of Habermas's interpretation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the real reasons why this critique fails, I want to argue, lie deeper than this. This becomes clear if we see how *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be understood as a form of critical genealogy. Horkheimer and Adorno use genealogy in order to generate a critical perspective on a positivistic variant of rational thinking that defines itself as rational thinking *per se*. In fact, positivistic Enlightenment is precisely that same theoretical form that Horkheimer had termed 'traditional' theory. Cognition takes the form of a registering and classification of facts within mathematized formulas, which serves productivity through an increased potential of control over natural processes (DE 4; 10). Horkheimer and Adorno understand positivism to be the philosophical expression of that structure of knowledge which is concerned with the technically useful. What is being criticized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is the process whereby this structure of thinking comes to conceive of itself as the entirety of legitimate rational thinking. In 'Traditional and Critical Theory', as we saw, Horkheimer had sought to ground the possibility of an alternative, critical-negative stance towards the social world by identifying critical theory with the emancipatory ends that become intelligible through a comprehension of the historical logic of the labour process. Given the awareness of the shortcomings of the philosophy of history that underlies this approach, Horkheimer and Adorno do not pursue this thesis in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

⁵²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 379.

Instead, Horkheimer and Adorno turn to a critical-genealogical approach, the purpose of which is to undermine the self-understanding of positivist Enlightenment as the totality of rational knowledge, and to make apparent an alternative conception of rational thinking as *a repressed historical possibility* of enlightened thought. The genealogical approach enables Horkheimer and Adorno to deploy the repressed possibilities in the history of positivist Enlightenment as the critical standard with which to judge the latter. In uncovering the origins of positivistic thinking in mythic fear, Horkheimer and Adorno attempt to unmask positivist Enlightenment as founded, not on a thirst for knowledge, but on a repression of a type of critical-negative experience in the realm of rational thinking. Once we take into account its genealogical nature, we can see what goes wrong with the Habermasian reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The intention of Horkheimer and Adorno is not to cast a suspicion over rational thinking as such, nor to extend reification back to the beginnings of history. Habermas here clearly misreads *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an attempt to construct an ontological thesis concerning enlightened reason. In fact, however, genealogy is only intelligible as a self-conscious critical-strategic intervention, which aims to write a history of the present that will question and undermine its self-representation. The purpose of critical genealogy is thus to furnish a *distanciating perspective* on the present. The function of history in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is to reveal the present as an object of critical-negative experience, through the very presentation of the dominant contemporary structure of rational thinking as founded on a repression of alternative possibilities. The thesis of a 'domination of nature' does not seek to generalize cultural reification into a philosophical anthropology. It attempts, rather, to uncover the *contingent, extra-rational origins* of the restriction of thought to the determination of the technically useful, through

a diagnosis of the act of collective repression that founds the restricted rationality of positivist Enlightenment. The following analysis will attempt to substantiate this thesis through a reading of the first chapter of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: 'The Concept of Enlightenment'.

The self-definition of positivist Enlightenment is that it comprises a liberation from fear, and the establishment of the sovereignty of human thought. This was thought to have become possible through the substitution of knowledge for the imaginary representation (*Einbildung*) of mythic thinking (DE 3; 9). The fear of nature which is expressed in mythic representations, is allegedly overcome by the technical superiority of scientific thinking, which abolishes the anthropomorphizing of natural processes inherent in myth. It is this self-presentation of positivist Enlightenment that the critical genealogy of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* intends to undermine. The hinge of this critique is the well-known dialectical reversal deployed by Horkheimer and Adorno, which states that Enlightenment regresses to myth in the very attempt to separate itself from the mythic. One aspect of this argument which is regularly missed, however, yet which is essential to the critical intention of the whole, is that Horkheimer and Adorno want to uncover a *common root* for positivist and mythic thinking which will reveal the cognitive strategies of myth and positivism as superficially different responses to the same problematic. Horkheimer and Adorno want to undermine the positivist representation of the anthropomorphic character of mythic thinking as founded on an intellectual error. This argument is derived from a critical encounter with Freud's reading of mythic thinking in his *Totem and Taboo*. Freud had questioned the reading of ethnologists that animistic beliefs were founded on an intellectual reflection on certain natural processes, such as sleep and death, which allegedly provided grounds for the notion

of spirits as existing independently of bodies. Primitive human beings, Freud asserts, were not 'impelled to the creation of their first world system through a purely speculative desire to know'.⁵³ In the essay 'Tabu and Ambivalence of Feelings', Freud suggests that the projection which defines animism can be traced back to an original psychic conflict - involving contradictory feelings of affection and hostility - that becomes intense with the death of the object towards which those feelings are directed.⁵⁴ The projection of hostile feelings onto external objects leads to the resolution this conflict. Horkheimer and Adorno, however, deny that myth originates in projection. The principle of *mana*, which is the origin of animistic beliefs, 'is no projection, but the echo of the real supremacy of nature in the weak souls of primitive men' (DE 15; 21). The origination of a spiritual in distinction from a material component within natural processes occurs *not* through a form of projection, it is fixed rather by the 'cry of terror' (*Ruf des Schreckens*) which accompanies the experience of the unknown. The animistic system of mythic thought, therefore, represents from the beginning 'the transcendence of the unknown in relation to the unknown'. However, since the unknown is experienced as a frightening superior power, the spiritual-sacred element of transcendence comes to be equated with the 'shudder' (*Schauer*) by which it is identified (DE 15; 21).

It is to this original entwinement of the transcendent with fear of the unknown, as we shall see, that Horkheimer and Adorno will trace the suppression of critical-negative experience in mythic and positivist thinking. We can see already see, however, why

⁵³Sigmund Freud, *Totem und Tabu* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1940), p. 89.

⁵⁴*Totem und Tabu*, p. 73.

Horkheimer and Adorno would want to criticize Freud's anachronistic reading of the developed animistic system of thinking as founded on the 'unshakeable trust in the possibility of world domination'.⁵⁵ Horkheimer and Adorno subvert Freud's schema, according to which a naive faith in the power of thought, which purportedly finds expression in the influence ascribed to magic, is modified in the 'mature stage' of Enlightenment by the reality principle. Thus Freud had seen animism as corresponding to the narcissistic stage of development. For Horkheimer and Adorno, however, the 'over-valuation of ideas in relation to objects', of which Freud speaks, comes into being only with the 'objectification' (*Verselbstständigung*) of thoughts in relation to objects, which is first achieved by the reality-adjusted ego (DE 11; 17). The principle of magic, however, is, like science, directed towards the control of natural processes, but magic attempts to procure this through 'mimesis - not by progressively distancing itself from the object' (DE 11; 17). The point of the critique of modern representations of mythic thinking in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is to show that myth provides neither a negative nor a positive contrast with positivistic Enlightenment. Whereas the negative view of mythic thinking can be seen in the positivist view of myth as founded on an intellectual error, or on Freud's equation of myth with the narcissistic stage, the opposite error was revealed in Ludwig Klages' account of mythic sacrifice as reflecting a type of transparent social relation. For Horkheimer and Adorno, the principle of substitution in sacrifice already embodies the mediation of commodity exchange.⁵⁶ Thus there is no age of 'mythic innocence', in relation to which Enlightenment would be a

⁵⁵*Totem und Tabu*, p. 101.

⁵⁶See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 28ff.

regression, but neither is the relation between the two conceivable as a progress from mythic 'barbarism'. Enlightenment, in its positivist form, is simply an *intensified form* of myth.⁵⁷

The critical genealogy of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* undermines the self-understanding of positivistic thinking by uncovering a type of repression underlying the thought structures of both myth and positivist Enlightenment. In order to reconstruct this argument, we need to return to the account of the origin of animism. Horkheimer and Adorno trace the origin of symbolism back to the separation of the spiritual and the material that, as we saw, is seen to arise from the terror in the face of the unknown. In this, Horkheimer and Adorno would appear to be close to Weber, who emphasized the role of magic in giving rise to symbolic forms. With the belief system of magic, Weber argues, things and processes can first appear as signs for something else, as emanating from a world of souls, demons and gods, which can only be influenced by symbolic means.⁵⁸ For Horkheimer and Adorno, however, what is revealed in this origin of symbolism is the *original critical-dialectical nature of language*,

When the tree is no longer approached merely as a tree, but as evidence for an other, as the location of *mana*, language expresses the contradiction that something is itself and at the same time something other than itself, identical and not identical. Through the deity, language is transformed from tautology into language. The concept, which some would define as the sign-unit (*Merkmalseinheit*) of whatever is comprised under it, was rather from the

⁵⁷This, of course, leaves open the thought that a 'genuine' Enlightenment, free from myth, could emerge through a reflection on the possibilities discernible in the historical account of the dialectical entwinement of myth and Enlightenment.

⁵⁸Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 248.

beginning the product of dialectical thinking, in which each thing is only what it is, in that it becomes that which it is not (DE 15; 21).

The notion of concepts as 'sign-units' is, of course, the defining feature of positivist thinking. Horkheimer and Adorno are suggesting that language originally comprised another possibility, namely, a critical-dialectical deployment of concepts, that is distinct from the technical-instrumental function of cognition served in the ordering and classifying of facts. The critical-dialectical potential of language enables it to identify existent things as possessing immanent possibilities. Each item is understood in terms of the determinations and potentials that it acquires through its being cast into an historical process. It is through the meanings and possibilities revealed in this historical process that existing things are able to acquire determinations that 'contradict' what they appear to be. The origin of symbolism demonstrates that this potential to 'overshoot' the object is an essential component of language itself.

Having identified this critical possibility of language, Horkheimer and Adorno now need to pinpoint the grounds of the repression of critical-dialectical thinking in mythical and positivist thought systems. The basis for this argument is the origination of the transcendent in the 'cry of terror'. The pre-animistic origin of the spiritual other, according to Horkheimer and Adorno, reveals an ur-repression of critical-dialectical thinking, which arises from the original identification of the transcendent as a source of *Angst*. *Thus, the potential for articulation of the non-identity of things that 'overshoots' the existent is stifled (repressed) by a primordial fear of the unknown.* The dialectic between concept and object, therefore, 'remains impotent to the extent that it develops from the cry of terror (*Ruf des Schreckens*) which is the duplication, the tautology, of terror itself' (DE 15-16; 22). By means of this

argument, Horkheimer and Adorno have identified, in the emergence of symbolism, the primordial structures of the critical *and* the ideological forms of language.⁵⁹ The opposition of the material and spiritual, fixed in the encounter with the unknown, enables items to *stand for* something other than themselves, to point beyond themselves, and hence to ‘overshoot’ their existent forms. *Mana*, which is the origin of symbolism, already gives expression to this transcendent force of language, its capacity to articulate ‘that which transcends the confines of experience; whatever in things is more than their previously familiar existence (*ihr vorweg bekanntes Dasein*) (DE 15; 21). Language thus possesses an original critical-dialectical component, in which a thing is identifiable as both ‘itself and not itself’. However, the critical-dialectical component is corrupted from the beginning by the identification of otherness, of outsideness, as a source of *Angst*. *The origin of ideology, therefore, lies in a primordial fear of the unknown*. The origin of the transcendent in a cry of terror sets up from the beginning an ideological barrier to the critical-dialectical deployment of language. The unknown, the otherness or non-identity of the existent, must be repressed in order to quell fear.

On the basis of this interpretation, Horkheimer and Adorno are able to construct an account of both myth and positivist Enlightenment as thought structures founded on a repression of critical-dialectical experience. The animism of mythic thought objectifies the fear of the unknown in the form of gods and demons. The fear that attaches to the constructions of animism is not, *pace Freud*, due to their being a projection of hostile feelings. It is rather the result of their being an objectification of the fear of what lies outside

⁵⁹We will encounter this idea again in the discussion of *Negative Dialectics* where, I will argue, Adorno reconstructs the entwinement of the critical and ideological components of language through an interpretation of Hegel’s theory of the judgement.

ordinary experience. Hence the gods and demons of animism enforce and execute punishment for the transgressions of the order of ordinary experience. They bear the sign of retribution for acts which rupture the order of the everyday world, and establish the unsanctioned and the extraordinary as a prohibition. This, Horkheimer and Adorno argue, is why myths represent the return to immanence. The restoring of immanence in the wake of a transgression of order is represented by myth as the workings of fate, an irresistible force that repairs the rupture of ordinary experience (DE 16; 22). Mythical animism, however, is unsuccessful in its attempt to quell the fear of the unknown: the gods and demons of myth 'bear the petrified sound of fear as their names' (DE 16; 22). It is the attempt to extinguish mythic fear which then determines the 'course of demythologization' of Enlightenment, which 'compounds the animate with the inanimate, as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate' (DE 16; 22). The anti-animist strategy of positivist Enlightenment cannot escape from myth because it is impelled by the mythic fear of the unknown. Positivist Enlightenment attempts to abolish mythic fear by removing all traces of animism, since animism can only objectify this fear without freeing human beings of its effects. Thus positivist Enlightenment is simply 'mythic fear turned radical': it is merely another strategy to quell the fear of the unknown that marked the primordial encounter with the transcendent by constructing a world of 'pure immanence'. For positivist Enlightenment as for myth, 'nothing at all may remain outside, because the mere representation (*Vorstellung*) of outsideness is the source of fear' (DE 16; 22).

This argument grounds Horkheimer and Adorno's genealogically constructed diagnosis of positivist Enlightenment. The rejection of critical-dialectical thinking which defines the positivist mentality is seen to derive from the unconscious workings within

positivist Enlightenment of an original prohibition which was the origin of mythic fear. The genealogical critique deployed by Horkheimer and Adorno, therefore, reveals positivist Enlightenment as founded on a repression of critical-negative experience. To understand this critical strategy more precisely, we need to see that Horkheimer and Adorno are in fact attempting to apply Freud's reading of taboo, in *Totem and Taboo*, as a social-critical thesis by identifying a type of collective repression taking the form of a repression of critical-negative experience. I will now turn to this aspect, and then reconstruct more fully the account of positivist Enlightenment drawn from this social-critical thesis.

Positivism as Collective Repression

In his essay 'Tabu and the Ambivalence of Feelings', Freud discusses the thesis of ethnologists that the notion of 'taboo' is a form of prohibition that originates in the fear of demonic powers. In the course of time, taboo then becomes detached from its origins, and remains as a source of power - 'simply because it was such' - due to a form of psychic persistence.⁶⁰ Freud attempts to get beneath animistic thinking in order to ground it in a projection resulting from a prior psychic conflict. On this basis, Freud interprets taboo as originating in the ambivalence of feelings.⁶¹ In opposition to this idea, as we saw, Horkheimer and Adorno trace the origin of animism to the fear of the unknown, which is objectified (in the form of gods and demons) in the 'cry of terror'. Thus, they are able to trace the origin of taboo to the fear of what lies beyond the context of immanence constituted

⁶⁰*Totem und Tabu*, p. 32.

⁶¹*Totem und Tabu*, p. 78.

by ordinary experience. It is this taboo that is then objectified in animistic thought systems which represent the unknown and unfamiliar as a prohibition. The significance of this reinterpretation is that it enables Horkheimer and Adorno to reconstruct Freud's reading of the internalization of taboo as a social-critical thesis concerning positivistic Enlightenment. Taboo originates, Freud argues, in an 'ancient prohibition' that is imposed externally (*von außen*).⁶² In due course, however, the function of guaranteeing the prohibition is displaced from an external source to internal psychic mechanisms, which effect a repression of the desire for transgression. Freud states,

As a result of the repression which has taken place, which is bound up with a forgetting - amnesia - the motivation of the prohibition which has become conscious remains unknown, and all attempts to replace it intellectually must fail, since these do not find the point at which they could get an effective purchase.⁶³

Horkheimer and Adorno take up this thesis of a sublimation of an external prohibition into internal mechanisms of repression, and apply it to positivist Enlightenment. Positivist thinking thus appears as a rationalized form of the repression of the unknown and unfamiliar that is at the basis of the mythic belief system. *In positivism, the original mythic fear of unknown powers is sublimated into a rationalized repression of the transcendent in thinking.* The 'pure immanence' that results from the positivist extirpation of animism is itself 'nothing other than, so to speak, a universal taboo' (DE 16; 22). The 'cry of terror'

⁶²*Totem und Tabu*, p. 42.

⁶³*Totem und Tabu*, p. 37-8.

accompanying fear of the unknown thus persists as a coercive mechanism in the collective consciousness of the modern positivist world.

We can trace, further, how Horkheimer and Adorno apply the idea of the extension of the repressive mechanism to ever new objects,⁶⁴ in order to depict the compulsive manner in which positivist thinking goes about eliminating animistic traces, the last remnants of mythic fear. Enlightenment discerns the remnants of mythic fear ‘not merely in unclarified concepts and words, as demonstrated by semantic language-criticism, but in any human assertion that has no place in the purposive context (*Zweckzusammenhang*) of self-preservation’ (DE 29; 35). The elimination of ‘unclarified concepts and words’, which the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle had presented as a methodical approach to knowledge acquisition, is seen by Horkheimer and Adorno as a rationalized form of the taboo erected against the transgression of ordinary experience. Just as myth represents the eternal return of what has always already been, so positivist thinking outlaws any kind of experience that transcends the factual. This argument had been foreshadowed in Horkheimer’s 1941 essay, ‘The End of Reason’,

Reason, in destroying conceptual fetishes, ultimately destroyed itself. . . .
None of the categories of rationalism has survived. Modern science looks upon such of them as Mind, Will, Final Cause, Transcendental Creation, Innate Ideas, *res extensa* and *res cogitans* as spooks, despising them even more than Galileo did the cobwebs of scholasticism. Reason itself appears as a ghost that has emerged from linguistic usage. . . . The name of reason is

⁶⁴See *Totem und Tabu*, p. 38.

held to be a meaningless symbol, an allegorical figure without a function, and all ideas that transcend the given reality are forced to share its disgrace.⁶⁵

The methodology of positivist thinking is, therefore, in reality a repressive mechanism, the function of which is to extinguish all possible constructions through which thinking could give rise to a form of critical-negative experience. In operating in this fashion, positivism extends the prohibition against the transgression of ordinary experience, deriving from fear of the unknown, into the realm of thinking,

For positivism, which represents the court of judgement of enlightened reason, to digress into intelligible worlds is no longer merely prohibited (*verboten*), but counts rather as meaningless prattle (*sinnloses Geplapper*). It does not need - fortunately for it - to be atheistic, because objectified thinking (*versachlichtes Denken*) cannot even raise the problem. . . . In both the pregnancy of the mythical image and the clarity of the scientific formula, the eternity of the factual (*die Ewigkeit des Tatsächlichen*) is confirmed and mere existence pure and simple expressed as the meaning which it blocks (*versperrt*) (DE 25, 27; 32-33).⁶⁶

In arguing that positivist Enlightenment is characterizable in terms of a compulsion to eliminate the unknown, and the unfamiliar from the realm of rational thinking,

⁶⁵Max Horkheimer, 'The End of Reason', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science* 9 (1941) 366-88, p. 367.

⁶⁶Adorno makes a similar point in his discussion of the law of contradiction in *zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*, pp. 86-7. The law of contradiction, Adorno argues, has a prohibition for its content: 'do not think in a dispersed manner, do not let yourself be diverted by unarticulated nature, but hold fast to the unity of what is meant as if it were a possession'.

Horkheimer and Adorno are in fact following exactly Weber's description of scientific rationality, in his essay 'Science as a Vocation'. Scientific rationality could be understood in terms of a process of 'disenchantment', since its founding presupposition was a denial of the animistic beliefs. The governing thesis of scientific rationality is that 'there are in principle no *mysterious, incalculable powers at work*, but rather that one could in principle master everything through *calculation*'.⁶⁷ On the basis of their critical genealogy, however, Horkheimer and Adorno are able to subvert Weber's reading of this process as a movement from an 'enchanted' to a 'disenchanted', from a mythic to a genuinely 'enlightened' standpoint. This critique is ironically stated in the assertion that, for scientific rationality, '[t]here is to be no mystery, but also no wish for its revelation' (DE 5; 11). In fact, the 'disenchantment' that is supposedly effectuated by the positivist attempt to eliminate all animistic traces from language is, for Horkheimer and Adorno, not a genuine process of disenchantment at all, since the end result of the elimination of all traces of the unknown and unfamiliar can only be an enchantment of the present,

To the scientific attitude (*Gesinnung*), the separation of thought from the business of adjusting the factual, the departure from the enchanted circle of existence (*Bannkreis des Daseins*), is just as insane and self-destructive as, for the primitive magician, is the departure from the magic circle that he has prepared for the invocation, and in both cases the transgression of the taboo will result in the offender's ruin (DE 26; 32).

⁶⁷Max Weber, 'Science as a Vocation', in P. Lassmann and I. Velody (eds.), *Max Weber's 'Science as a Vocation'* (London: Unwin, 1989), p. 13.

In its attempt to repress all traces of the unknown and the familiar in order to eliminate mythic fear, positivism ends up by rendering the existing as sacred and critical thought as profane: '[u]nder the title of brute facts, the social injustice from which these facts arise is as assuredly sacred as a realm to which access is eternally barred, as the medicine man was sacrosanct under the protection of his gods' (DE 28; 34). The extirpation of animistic traces, when it intensifies into a compulsion to eradicate the unfamiliar and the obscure from words and concepts, ends up by eliminating all possible linguistic traces of critical-negative experience. Positivist thinking replicates the pure immanence of myth - the eternal return of what is eternally the same - through its enchantment of the everyday. Hence 'the subjection of all reality to logical formalism, is paid for by the obedient subjection of reason to what is directly given' (DE 26; 33). The anti-animistic strategy of positivist Enlightenment, by means of which it attempts to suppress all traces of the mythical fear of the unknown, does not result in a genuine escape from mythical enchantment. Positivism represents simply a rationalized intensification of the prohibition originating in fear of the unknown, which is objectified in mythical animism.

Horkheimer and Adorno deploy this critical genealogy in order to attempt to explain the emergence of structures of domination and phenomena of cultural reification. The division of labour is said to derive from the division in mythic religion between magical power and obedience, which gradually came to be ascribed exclusively to different social groups. The obedience of the subordinate groups was at this stage secured by the capacity of the dominant to remove fear through their intercourse with the gods. In the developed social division of labour, however, the fear of nature which grounds mythic inequality is

sublimated into a form of social pressure. 'The shudder (*Schauder*) that is objectified as a fixed image' in animism thereby 'becomes the sign of the solidified domination of the privileged' (DE 21; 27). The fear of nature which had been the ground of mythic inequality is now sublimated into a 'social coercion (*Zwang*)', which is expressed in universal concepts as fear was expressed in mythic images. Here, Horkheimer and Adorno appear to be articulating the outlines of a theory of symbolic power, where the specific determinations attaching to conceptual forms are revealed, through genealogical critique, as embodying the symbolic sublimation of relations of domination,

Even the deductive form of science reflects hierarchy and coercion. Just as the first categories represented the organized tribe and its power over the individual, so the whole logical order, dependency, connection, progression, and union of concepts in the corresponding relations of social reality, namely, the division of labour (DE 21; 27-8).

This idea of a modeling of conceptual forms on social relations is borrowed by Horkheimer and Adorno from the Durkheim school.⁶⁸ The same idea is also employed by Horkheimer and Adorno as an ideology-critical reading of philosophic constructions that fail to reflect on the social conditions of conceptual determination (DE 22; 28-9). These ideas remain in fragment form in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, however. The central point of the Durkheimian thesis here, in line with the critical-genealogical framework, is to establish the connection between mythical and modern forms of the social division of labour. The claim is that the modern

⁶⁸In the next chapter, I will argue that the thesis of the social origin of the categories, in a modified form, forms one of the two central planks of Adorno's later critical project centered on a critical dialectic of concepts.

social division of labour is a rationalized form of mythic inequality founded on the fear of nature.

The same argument can be seen to underlie the critique of bourgeois justice. Horkheimer and Adorno read the principle of equivalence underlying bourgeois justice as a rationalized form of the mythic principle of fate, which expresses the return to immanence. Just as mythic fate represents the reparation of a transgression in the natural order, so bourgeois justice represents 'guilt and atonement, happiness and unhappiness' as the two sides of an equation (DE 16; 22).⁶⁹ As a rationalized form of the principle of fate, justice continues to be determined by a fear of the unknown. Hence natural conditions continue to exercise their power, no longer immediately, however, but 'through the consciousness of human beings' (DE 17; 23). As a rationalized form of the prohibition against the unfamiliar and the unknown, positivist Enlightenment cannot actualize the true social-critical potential of justice. Justice 'goes under (*geht unter*) in law' (DE 16; 22).⁷⁰ As a rationalized intensification of mythic fear, positivist thinking removes all traces of a critical-negative charge attaching to the concept of justice, which would enable it to point beyond ordinary experience. Justice becomes a form of the verdict: 'what would be different is made the same', which 'critically establishes the limits of possible experience' (DE 12; 18). Bourgeois justice, just like mythic fate, is the guarantor of the order of pure immanence.

⁶⁹The influence of Nietzsche is apparent here. Nietzsche had traced the concepts of guilt and retribution to the contractual relation of creditor and debtor. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, trans. C. Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 43, 49.

⁷⁰The notion of *Untergang* is a Hegelian term for the dialectical transition, where the truth of a thing is revealed as its transition into an other.

We can see here how Horkheimer and Adorno deploy their critical genealogy in order to theorize the phenomena of cultural reification identified by Lukács on a different basis. *Forms of cultural reification are derived from the process of the compulsive elimination of animistic traces in positivist Enlightenment.* The reifying abstraction of human qualities in the work process, the transformation of the worker into a ‘mechanical part’, which Lukács had derived from the extension of the logic of the commodity form, is seen on the critical-genealogical reading to derive from the process whereby positivist thinking sets out to eliminate all non-mathematizable features of subjectivity. The ‘objectification (*Versachlichung*) of souls’ in modern industry derives from the rationalized intensification of the taboo concerning the unknown and unfamiliar (DE 28; 34). Phenomena of cultural reification are thus traced by Horkheimer and Adorno to the rationalized repression that is a sublimation of mythic fear. The consequences of cultural reification are interpreted in terms of an ‘impoverishment’ (*Verarmung*) of thought and sensuous experience,

The more complicated and precise the social, economic and scientific apparatus with whose service the production system has long harmonized the body, the more impoverished the experiences (*Erlebnisse*) which it can offer. The elimination of qualities, their conversion into functions, is translated from science by means of the rationalized modes of labour to the experiential world of nations. . . . The regression of the masses today is their inability to hear the unheard-of with their own ears, to touch the unapprehended with their own hands - the new form of delusion which deposes every conquered mythic form (DE 36; 43).

We can see clearly at this point why Habermas's charge that Horkheimer and Adorno 'generalize' the theory of reification into a negativist philosophy of history is mistaken. Structures of reification are 'unmasked' by critical genealogy as deriving from a rationally systematized repression of critical-negative experience. The purpose of this account is the very opposite of the intentions that Habermas ascribes to Horkheimer and Adorno. The genealogical account of the origins of cultural reification is intended to demonstrate the contingent and non-necessary nature of the reified structures of the modern world. The history of positivist Enlightenment is thus employed precisely to secure a critical perspective on the experiential distortions that had come to be associated with modern capitalist societies.

The critique of the present that is afforded by Horkheimer and Adorno's critical genealogy becomes clearer if we focus on the important concept of 'self-reflection' (*Selbstbesinnung*) (DE 40; 47). With the idea of self-reflection, Horkheimer and Adorno intend to denote the possibility of a conscious awareness of the historical process that has determined the form of positivist Enlightenment. The critical-liberatory potential of self-reflection is here organized according to the Freudian schema, in which it refers to the *rendering conscious of the prohibition that had been forgotten through its transformation into a form of rationalized repression*. It is precisely this idea, in fact, which is being expressed in the well-known reference to the 'mindfulness of nature in the subject' (*Eingedenken der Natur im Subjekt*) (DE 40; 47). The fulfilment of this mindfulness reveals the 'unacknowledged truth of all culture'. Now we can see how *Dialectic of Enlightenment* deploys a critical genealogy to reinterpret the Freudian thesis concerning instinctual repression in the context of a critical social theory. *Selbstbesinnung* here takes the form of

a critical reflection on the natural processes that have operated as unconscious determining forces in the course of Enlightenment. As a critical genealogy, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* attempts to lift the taboo on critical-negative experience by bringing the origin of rationalized repression to collective consciousness. As we saw, Horkheimer and Adorno trace the prohibition on critical-negative experience to the fear that accompanies the primitive encounter with the unknown and the unfamiliar. In its compulsive elimination of animistic traces, positivist Enlightenment is driven by the unconscious workings of this original fear. Hence 'the subordination to nature (*Naturverfallenheit*) consists in the domination of nature' (DE 39; 46). Genuine freedom from the blind determination of nature would only be achievable if thought could reflect on its own coercive mechanism (*Zwangsmechanismus*), which is the mechanism of repression, as 'nature that has forgotten itself' (*ihrer selbst vergessene Natur*) (DE 39; 45-6). In lifting the prohibition taken over from pre-history through the process of self-reflection, Enlightenment may become able to recover a critical-negative experience of existing social forms.

The downside to Horkheimer and Adorno's reliance upon a critical genealogy, of course, is that it renders problematic the possibility of a social-critical focus on specific historical and cultural contexts. By tracing cultural reification to an ur-repression, Horkheimer and Adorno seem to render the analysis of social processes irrelevant to both reification and emancipation. A similar critique has been suggested by Herbert Schnädelbach, in his essay 'The Actuality of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment"'.⁷¹ Schnädelbach, however, wrongly characterizes *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a form of

⁷¹Herbert Schnädelbach 'Die Aktualität der "Dialektik der Aufklärung"', in *zur Rehabilitierung des animal rationale* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).

totalizing social myth, which presents the truth *of* history in mythic form, as a 'narrative explication of the historical world'.⁷² I have argued instead that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is best understood as critical genealogy, which deploys history in order to generate a distancing perspective on the present. Its purpose is not, and cannot be, to present the 'rationalizing standardization of each and all' as an 'unavoidable cultural fate'.⁷³ Nonetheless critical genealogy would seem to share certain of the shortcomings of social myth, in that it cannot relate the critical history, characterized in terms of repression, to social-cultural processes and institutions which are both the bearers of reification and, potentially, furnish the conditions in which self-reflection could emerge. In order to form the basis of a critical social theory, the genealogy of the suppression of critical-negative experience would have to be translated into a theory capable of tracing the connection between experiential distortions and social processes. In the following chapters, I will attempt to reconstruct such an account through an analysis of Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*, and his postwar sociological writings. These works, I will argue, provide the basis on which the idea of a repression of critical-negative can be grounded through a social theory. The key to this will be Adorno's reading of the dual distortion wrought by exchange logic, as both a structure of domination and a mechanism which generates cultural reification. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno furnishes the means for reconstructing the concept of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) in social-theoretic terms, as a reflection on the structures of domination that inform conceptual construction. Thus the idea of a forgetting resulting from the rationalized repression of mythic fear can be reconstructed, on the one hand, in terms of the collective misrecognition

⁷²'The Actuality of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment"', p. 240.

⁷³'The Actuality of the "Dialectic of Enlightenment"', p. 245.

of social relations of domination as 'natural'. On the other hand, I will argue, Adorno is able to reconstruct the critique of cultural reification in terms of a theory of *linguistic* reification, which is intended to explicate the consequences of the extension of exchange logic into the realm of culture.

The Critical Project of *Negative Dialectics*, I

All attempts to comprehend the writings of philosophers as poetry have missed their truth content. Philosophical form requires the interpretation of the real as a binding nexus of concepts. Neither the manifestation of the thinker's subjectivity nor the pure coherence of the work determines its character as philosophy. This is, rather, determined in the first place by the degree to which the real has entered into concepts, manifests itself in these concepts, and comprehensibly justifies them. The interpretation of philosophy as poetry is opposed to this. By tearing philosophy away from the standard of the real, it deprives it of the possibility of adequate criticism

Philosophy is distinguished from science not so much as the supreme science that systematically unifies the most universal propositions of subordinated sciences. Rather, it constructs ideas that illuminate and apportion the mass of the simply existing; ideas around which the elements of the existing crystallize as knowledge.

These ideas present themselves in dialectical concepts.¹

In these lines from the beginning of his first major published work, Adorno makes a number of claims about philosophy which will come to be definitive of his later efforts to re-think social critique from out of the problematic situation of philosophy. What distinguishes philosophy from poetry and science, Adorno suggests, is its access to a particular truth content. Furthermore, the capacity of philosophy to elucidate this truth content is dependent upon its attaining to a proper awareness of its relation to the 'real'. The real, Adorno stresses, is not something which philosophy only manages to reach in a second, subsequent step out of immanent conceptuality, whereby a validation of pre-formed conceptual constructions would take place through a comparison with actual social processes. Rather, conceptual constructions are always already shot through with, co-determined by, the substantive content of the real. It follows from this point that philosophical interpretations which focus on immanent aporias of conceptual construction are also disclosing something about the real, that is, the social processes always already taken up into philosophical concepts. From his earliest writings, then, Adorno held to a conception of philosophy as self-critique, whereby the capacity of philosophy to articulate its distinctive truth content is seen to be dependent upon its ability to reflect upon the social content immanent within conceptual constructions. The intellectual inspiration for this idea of philosophical truth content was undoubtedly Siegfried Kracauer, with whom Adorno would read Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* during his student days. Adorno once wrote that it was under Kracauer's guidance that he learnt to

¹Th. W. Adorno, *Kierkegaard: Construction of The Aesthetic*, trans. R. Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), pp. 3-4.

read the first critique *not* as 'pure epistemology, as an analysis of the conditions of scientifically valid judgements, but as a sort of encipherment from which the historical situation of the mind [*Geist*] could be read, with the vague expectation that with it something of the truth itself was to be won'.² In reading philosophical texts, the goal was to interpret the forms of experience which were hidden within the work's explicit truth content, and which were the conditions of possibility of the latter. This conception of philosophy as the interpretation of social experience is evidently much indebted to Dilthey's notion of hermeneutic understanding. For Dilthey, the experience sedimented in spiritual productions derived from the pre-conceptual level of life, and the task of hermeneutic understanding was to reconstruct the meaning of the life-context that had been objectified in spiritual objects. The life-context was sedimented even in the most seemingly 'pure' works of conceptual abstraction,

[C]oncepts, universal judgements, and general theories, are not hypotheses concerning something which we put in relation to external impressions, but rather the offspring of experience (*Erleben*) and understanding. And as in the latter the totality of our life is always present, so the fullness of life resounds in the most abstract propositions of these sciences.³

Adorno, however, was able to deploy the Diltheyan notion of hermeneutic understanding as a social-critical principle by developing the insight that, more important in a philosophical work than its

²*Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 388-9. I have borrowed the translation of this passage from Robert Hullot-Kentor's preface to his translation of *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic*, p. xv.

³Wilhelm Dilthey, *Der Aufbau der geschichtlichen Welt in den Geisteswissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1981), p. 141.

systematic unanimity and conceptual coherence were the breaks and unresolved tensions in the work, since the latter moments could be read as the form in which conflict and tensions at the level of real social processes were taken up within conceptual constructions. The idea that social antagonisms are reflected within philosophy as immanent tensions of conceptual construction would prove to be absolutely central to the critical strategy of *Negative Dialectics*. ‘The aporetic concepts of philosophy’, Adorno states in the latter work, ‘are marks of what is objectively unresolved, not just of what is unresolved in thought’ (ND 153; 156).

In the first section, I will argue that Adorno’s notion of dialectic must be understood in terms of his reading of concepts as congealed forms of social experience. Following this, I will interpret Adorno’s understanding of a critical dialectic of concepts through a combination of Durkheimian and Hegelian themes. In the final section, I will show how the concept of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) functions in the critical dialectic of concepts as a reflection on the structures of domination that are taken up within conceptual construction.

Dialectic as Critical Experience

Adorno’s thesis that social antagonisms can be understood as immanent in conceptual construction involves a radical rejection of the Kantian understanding of conceptual synthesis. Synthesis, understood in an Kantian sense, implies an external union of a constituting concept, and pre-given material which is to be constituted as an object. The union is ‘external’ because both moments are conceived as self-subsistent terms outside of the relation of synthesis. That is to say, the meaning and determination of a concept is logically independent of the act of synthesis, and likewise the

material is conceivable as leading an independent existence outside of its constitution by thought categories. It is a critique of conceptual synthesis, understood in this sense, that Adorno has in mind when he declares in the preface to *Negative Dialectics* that his central purpose is to 'break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity with the power of the subject' (ND xx; 10). *Negative Dialectics*, I want to claim, breaks through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity by radically undermining the dualism of form and content; and by subverting the opposition of constituting forms and constituted material. The insight guiding this strategy can be expressed as the thesis that social experience co-determines the form and structure of concepts. Adorno often expressed this in Hegelian terms, as the thesis of the 'mediation in the mediating subject'. By speaking of 'social' experience, I mean to suggest that the mediating moment, that without which the element of form in conceptual synthesis is unthinkable, is not primordial receptivity, but the collective experience which is actively formed by the practices which make up social reality. Adorno's understanding of dialectic is premised on this rejection of the thesis that concepts are classificatory-subsumptive forms. Negative dialectic must be understood as the practice of a form of cognitive experience, in which the central intention is to interpret or, to use Adorno's metaphors, to 'decode' or 'unlock' the experience which is the forming moment in conceptual synthesis.

Adorno's thesis that social antagonisms were immanently taken up into conceptual constructions required, then, on the part of critical philosophy a 'method' geared towards sustained, concentrated interpretation, capable of 'unlocking' the truth content sedimented in philosophical works. In his 1931 inaugural lecture at Frankfurt, Adorno described the work of philosophical

interpretation as the decoding of ‘riddles’.⁴ Because this idea required withholding the appeal to evaluative criteria external to the work, and implied, rather, that the critical standpoint would emerge from the internal contradictions of the work itself, Adorno saw that the only plausible critical perspective was one which denied any distinction between method and subject matter, precisely that perspective which characterized Hegelian immanent critique. This is the standpoint that Hegel refers to in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as ‘pure looking on’ (*das reine Zusehen*).⁵ The theorist does not bring any presuppositions to the examination of the object in question, but simply ‘looks on’ as the object begins to articulate its own contradictions such that it is eventually able to judge its own inadequacy. This means, however, that neither for Hegel nor for Adorno is ‘dialectic’ really a method at all. This is why Adorno claims that it is the subject matter (*Sache*) rather than thought that necessitates dialectic (ND 144; 148). Dialectic is not imposed by thought, but demanded by the subject matter itself because of its own inherently contradictory nature. The ‘priority of immanent critique’, Adorno argues, has absolutely nothing to do with method. Its priority is defined simply by its ability to ‘give itself’ to the object, and through this attunement to enable the object to articulate its truth (Ph. T II, 316).⁶ If Adorno can make good on this claim, then the charge that his work is outdated because social conditions have rendered the

⁴‘Die Aktualität der Philosophie’, in *Die Frühschriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 334.

⁵*Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), p. 72.

⁶See also the critique of the separation of method and object in *Einleitung in die Soziologie*, pp. 123 ff. As we shall see, Adorno’s critique of Hegel picks up on those places in Hegel’s texts where Hegel deviates from the attunement to the object integral to immanent critique, thereby prioritizing method against his own explicit injunctions. Adorno states this in *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 27-8.

logical structure of dialectic obsolete, is redundant.⁷ This charge simply reintroduces the distinction between method and subject matter explicitly denied by dialectic. Dialectic, in fact, has no logical structure at all, if by this is meant a definable theoretical procedure. All the 'structure' it has, according to its own self-definition, comes from the subject-matter, and the attunement of dialectics to the object embodies a commitment to painstakingly trace the contours of the object as it begins to articulate itself in thought. This is why Adorno can define dialectics as thought's 'self-yielding' (*Entäußerung*) (ND 27; 38).⁸ All dialectic needs in order to function as immanent critique is the claim that social reality is antagonistic, and that such antagonism is a forming moment within conceptual construction. The dialectical 'method' then consists in nothing other than a sustained interrogation of the object in order that, as Adorno puts this, through this intervention 'what is waiting in the objects' can 'come to speak' (ND 29; 39).⁹

Rather than being a method, dialectic is, for Adorno, a form, or model for a type of critical-negative experience. Its goal is to articulate the dissonant or negative nature of the experience which is taken up within concepts. To the model of cognition as classification and systematization, dialectic opposes the practice of interpretation and articulation,

It is not up to philosophy to exhaust things according to scientific usage, to reduce

⁷This, of course, was Jean-François Lyotard's claim in his 'Adorno as the Devil', *Telos* 19 (1974) 127-137.

⁸Hence, the goal of dialectical philosophy is that the 'accounting for what one does becomes superfluous in that one does it'. The *concept* of dialectic is inseparable from its execution (ND 48; 58).

⁹It is highly doubtful that Lyotard's claim was that social conditions have changed such that social reality is no longer antagonistic. In any case, this would have been strenuously denied by Adorno. Lyotard's critique, then, reduces to the classic mistake of blaming method for the fault of the subject matter (ND 5; 17).

the phenomena to a minimum of propositions. . . . Instead, philosophy wants literally to immerse itself in what is heterogeneous to it, without bringing it under pre-prepared categories. It wants to cling to the heterogeneous as closely as the program of phenomenology and that of Simmel once desired, in vain, to do; philosophy aims at undiminished self-yielding (*ungschmälerte Entäußerung*). The philosophical content is only to be grasped where philosophy does not impose it (ND 13; 24).

Adorno defines the changed philosophy made possible by this practice as ‘full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection’ (ND 13; 25). When concepts are ‘disenchanted’, they are no longer seen as pure, constituting forms but as compositions of social experience; dialectical analysis has the task of revealing, by interpretation, the truth congealed in that experience. This practice of interpretation-articulation is defined as the ability to see ‘more in a phenomenon than what it merely is, and solely because of what it is’ (ND 28; 38-9). In the true self-yielding of thinking, Adorno asserts further, objects would begin to speak ‘under the lingering eye of thought’ (ND 27-8; 38). Dialectic is therefore to be understood as that form of critique in which cognition takes the form of the articulation of the experiential content of concepts. In the following section, I want to show how Adorno is able to deploy this notion of dialectic as the basis for a critical philosophy by means of the conjunction of two theses: the first is that of the social conditionedness of concepts; the second is the idea that conceptual contradictions have their ground in the antagonisms constitutive of social experience. Because of the immanent entwinement of social experience and conceptual construction, Adorno holds, conceptual forms are bound to reflect the disfigured, fragmented shape of experience. As we shall see later, this situation means that,

within antagonistic society, the 'truth' of a philosophical work will emerge precisely from its failure. By 'failure' is meant here the structuring of a work through internal contradictions, which prevent it from achieving its claims to consistency, coherence and unanimity. It is these contradictions, as we shall see, which mark the immanent infiltration of conceptual construction by the social experience forged within antagonistic society. The 'truth' which a work articulates concerns the critical reflection on social antagonisms. This is made possible, as we shall see, by the inherently critical-dialectical nature of language. The upshot of its dependence on social experience is that philosophy will be shot through with immanent contradictions for just so long as society is antagonistic, and those contradictions are both the marks of philosophy's 'failure' and the ground of the critical self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) which maintains the link between philosophy and emancipation.

If Adorno is right, then we can expect that philosophy will only be able to reveal the content of a reconciling reason in negative form, and that precisely as the sign of its own untruth.¹⁰ Because philosophy necessarily takes up the alienated structures of social experience into conceptual construction, the only means for disclosing the contours of a reconciling reason is the self-critique of philosophy - the project of negative dialectic. To take a more direct route would be to deny once again the inextricable entwinement of conceptual construction and social experience, and thus to seek to legislate a reconciling reason into being from within the realm of an allegedly pure sphere of conceptual truth. The self-critique of philosophy rests on the idea that philosophy can

¹⁰ If this is the case, then, internally at least, Adorno's refusal to articulate a comprehensive picture of reconciled reason would appear to be fully justified. Given that social experience is at present antagonistic, any theoretical projection of the emancipatory logic of the present would necessarily also replicate existing antagonisms within its structure, thus generating its ultimate failure

only express the emancipatory content of reason aporetically, that is, by simultaneously betraying it through the social conditionedness of its categories. This is why Adorno can define philosophy as the striving 'to say what will not let itself be said' (ND 9; 21).¹¹ The 'simple contradiction' of this challenge, Adorno asserts, is that of philosophy itself, and it is the insurmountable character of this contradiction which necessitates dialectic - philosophy as self-critique. As dialectic, philosophy rescues the truth content of a philosophical work in uncovering the immanent contradictions which caused it to fail, contradictions which are due to the social antagonisms taken up within it, not to a 'subjective error of thought' (ND 151; 154). *The content of a reconciling reason is thus preserved in the distance between the truth claim of a philosophical work and its (necessary) failure.*¹²

The Social Constitution of the Categories

Adorno's approach to epistemology, as Simon Jarvis has shown, can be characterized by the term 'metacritique'.¹³ Adorno titled his book on Husserl 'Metacritique of Epistemology', and the section on Kant in *Negative Dialectics* is subtitled 'On the Metacritique of Practical Reason'. Adorno

¹¹'Philosophy is the permanent and always also desperate striving to say that which will not actually let itself be said' (Ph. T I, 82).

¹²I take this idea to be equivalent to the Hegelian claim that the truth of a work emerges in its *Untergang*, its 'going under'. The truth of a philosophical work, for Hegel, is only discernible when one has already gone beyond it: the work, one could say, sacrifices itself for the sake of the truth that is expressed within it. One of the clearest expressions of this can be found in the transition from substance to the concept in the *Science of Logic* (trans. A. V. Miller [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1969]), pp. 577ff.

¹³See his *Adorno*, pp. 153-7.

intends the idea of 'metacritique' to be understood in relation to the Kantian 'critique' of reason. Kant conceived the idea of critique as a means of avoiding the errors of rationalism and empiricism. Whereas the former had considered concepts to be capable of disclosing the nature of reality, the latter had perceived them merely as extrapolations from sensible experience. Kant's critique aimed at a way out of this dilemma through a 'transcendental' inquiry which would focus on the conditions of the possibility of experience. The critique of pure reason, Kant held, would preserve both the rationalist insistence on the universality and necessity of cognition - only now with the insight that these qualities are the contribution of the thinking subject and not the nature of the object, and the empiricist claim that knowledge itself must be restricted to the sphere of possible experience. Adorno's idea of metacritique takes this notion of critique, as an inquiry into the conditions of experience, as its starting point, and proceeds to ask a further question about critique itself. Metacritique asks 'not only "what are the conditions of the possibility of experience?"', but "what are such a transcendental inquiry's *own* conditions of possibility?"'.¹⁴ Adorno argues that the 'conditions of possibility' of the transcendental subject, as a representation of conceptual activity, is denoted by a particular form of social experience, rendering that subject a social-historical product. The claim of metacritique vis à vis transcendental inquiry, is that there is no way of breaking out of the totality of mediation to establish a relationship of constituting and constituted, founding and founded; social experience is synthesized by categories that are themselves a result of the social-historical process which, in turn, is itself constituted by categories themselves arising in a *prior* structure of social experience, and so on. The force of this claim lies in the implication that there are no cognitive structures, nor logical laws, which can be entirely purified of social

¹⁴Simon Jarvis, *Adorno*, p. 155.

experience. On the other hand, the social-historical process is *always already conceptual*: cognitive synthesis is always already taking place ‘objectively’, independently of the cognitive acts of the thinking subject.

‘The real life process of society’, Adorno states in *Against Epistemology* (*Zur Metakritik der Erkenntnistheorie*), ‘is not smuggled into philosophy through a sociological assignment, it is rather the core of the content of logic itself’ (ME 34). What is being expressed here is the entwinement of logical forms and particular social conditions, and it is this entwinement which metacritique seeks to uncover by reflecting on how social processes are taken up immanently within conceptual construction. I want to argue that this idea points towards social practice as the locus of the form-determination of the categories. Christoph Demmerling has expressed this in terms of the claim that ‘the forms of our thought are mediated through our activities and the modes of our social organization’. Every theory, each universal proposition, and thought itself, argues Demmerling, must be seen to ‘refer back to the way and mode in which we organize our life’.¹⁵ Demmerling finds support for this idea in Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language. The essence of Wittgenstein’s use theory of meaning, he argues, is a ‘constitution theory of meaning’, which stipulates that ‘meanings constitute themselves in human praxis’.¹⁶ The purpose of the private language argument, on this view, is to accentuate the social-intersubjective nature of linguistic praxis. It can be understood as a critique of a particular form of abstraction, where ‘abstraction’ refers not to the picking out of formal qualities from a multiplicity of object determinations, *but the severance of conceptual determination from the social-practical contextual connections which condition its meaningful*

¹⁵Christoph Demmerling, *Sprache und Verdinglichung*, p. 24.

¹⁶*Sprache und Verdinglichung*, p. 50.

employment. It constitutes a critique of the ‘reification’ of language, that is, its deployment in abstraction from the practical contexts which determine its meaningful use,

The process of meaning constitution can only take place within a common practice, and is not the work of an individual. Wittgenstein’s expositions concerning the concept of rule, and his argument against the possibility of a private language, demonstrate that the sociality of language and its intersubjective dimension enter constitutively into our linguistic acts and linguistic understanding. Without it, speech would not be possible.¹⁷

It is in this sense that concepts cannot be ‘pure’ forms, since their intelligible employment presupposes their historical and social contextualization. It is because of this necessary mediation that concepts necessarily bear within them, as a forming moment, a collective, experiential content. From this, it follows that ‘abstraction’ is to be understood as an ‘enchantment’ of concepts. This constitutes, for Adorno, a fetishism of concepts similar to the logic of commodity fetishism identified by Marx. When concepts are enchanted, the work of social-historical contextual connections in determining conceptual meaning is occluded by the *Schein* (semblance) of conceptual determinations as attaching ‘naturally’ to concepts. Hence Adorno’s claim that the ‘[d]isenchantment of the concept is the antidote of philosophy’ (ND 13; 24).

Adorno’s conception of the immanence of social processes within conceptual construction is revealed with particular clarity in his critique of Husserl’s ‘logical absolutism’. Husserl’s theory of logic is said to be ‘absolutist’ because it denies the dependence of logical laws on being as such, as a condition of its possible meaningfulness (ME 77). Adorno does not intend here to criticize

¹⁷*Sprache und Verdinglichung*, p. 51.

Husserl's attack on the thesis of the psychological genesis of logical laws. Husserl correctly articulates the transcendence of logical laws vis à vis individual experience, yet his logical absolutism simultaneously distorts the truth contained in this insight, namely, that which concerns 'the priority of society over against the individual' (ME 83). Husserl's inability to articulate this truth derived from his neglect of the social conditions of the possibility of conceptual construction. Adorno draws on Durkheim at this point to criticize Husserl,

The implicit genesis of logic is not at all psychologically motivated. It is a social comportment (*Verhalten*). According to Durkheim, logical propositions have embedded within them social experiences, such as the ordering of kin and property relations, which claim priority over the being and consciousness of the individual. At the same time binding and alienated from the interests of the single individual, these social experiences always stand opposed to the psychological subject as something valid in itself, coercive, and yet at the same time contingent, just the same as happens to the 'propositions in themselves' in the case of Husserl, and against his will. The authority (*Gewalt*) of logical absolutism over the psychological justification of logic is borrowed from the objectivity of the social process which subordinates individuals to itself and is at the same time impenetrable to them (ME 83).¹⁸

Adorno accuses Husserl of transfiguring the objectivity of the 'unpenetrated social process' into an ideal 'truth as such', thus negating the possibility of a critical appropriation of that process. It was

¹⁸The Durkheimian thesis of the social basis of logical universality is also explicitly affirmed by Adorno in *Three Studies on Hegel*, p. 63.

with Durkheim, Adorno here asserts, that the objectivity of society was first uncovered as an immanent moment of logical validity. Durkheim had developed this insight into a sociology of knowledge, where conceptual categories are said to express a 'logical' consensus, at the basis of which, however, lies a 'moral' consensus - founded on forms of social solidarity.

Adorno, I want to argue, is able to deploy the Durkheimian thesis concerning the social conditions of categorial synthesis in the context of a critical-dialectical philosophy by modifying the Durkheimian account through a basic Marxian insight: the processes that are the ground of the social construction of the categories are not expressive of solidarity, but rather of a fundamental antagonism of interests. Now, however, Husserl's logical absolutism must appear in a different light. The 'moral' consensus, the authority of society which, Adorno claims, Husserl is giving expression to in his argument for the irreducibility of logical laws, is in fact the basis of a structure of domination. Husserl's transfiguration of social objectivity into logical ideality therefore systematically blocks the possibility of critical access to the relations of domination that enter into conceptual construction. The central task for a critical dialectic of concepts must then be to make accessible a form of critical self reflection on the forms of antagonistic social experience that are taken up within concepts. In the analysis to follow, I want to look in depth at Durkheim's account of the social origin of the categories, through collective religious practices, in his *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. I will then show how Adorno is able to employ the Durkheimian thesis as a component of the critical dialectic of concepts.

Durkheim: The Social Ground of Categorical Synthesis

Before embarking on the discussion of Durkheim, the reading which I advocate must be clearly demarcated from other readings, and from what Durkheim himself believed he had ‘proved’ by means of thesis of the social constitution of the categories. It is clear that Adorno would reject the possibility of an *Aufhebung* of metaphysics in sociology, which is the implicit claim guiding the Durkheimian sociology of knowledge. For Adorno, concepts embody an independent truth claim vis à vis society, and it is this which enables philosophical concepts to take on a critical function. A more substantive difficulty is that, as Steven Lukes has shown, Durkheim himself seems to have been unclear about the specific nature of the claims put forth in a sociology of knowledge concerning the relation between concepts and social reality.¹⁹ At times, Durkheim appears to be making the point that concepts operate within forms of life, and derive their meaning through their embodiment in forms of collective practice. Yet at other times this thesis expands into a claim concerning the *causal* relation between structural, morphological or institutional features of the social order and forms of conceptual classification. Thus the concept of space would reflect the organization of groups in different physical locations. This latter claim is unconvincing, since social classification *itself* presupposes the ability to classify, and so cannot be conceived as the structure from which conceptual classification is itself derived.²⁰ Instead of positing a causal relation between

¹⁹See Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim. His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), pp. 436ff.

²⁰Steven Lukes, *Émile Durkheim*, p. 447. Durkheim’s sociology of knowledge, in other words, attempts to break out of the totality of mediation in order to establish society as constituting/founding and conceptual categories as constituted/founded.

social morphology and conceptual classification, then, I will read Durkheim's account as arguing for the dependence of categorial synthesis on the constitution of meaning within human praxis. Forms of conceptual classification are not seen as 'modelled on' social structures. Rather, conceptual forms are re-contextualized by Durkheim in both social and historical terms. Therefore the categories are to be understood in terms of two elements: they are forms of cognitive comprehension and (and because they are) expressions of dimensions of social being.²¹

Three features of Durkheim's account are suggestive of significant similarities with Adorno's critical project. The first point concerns the significance of Durkheim's guiding assumption that 'there are no religions that are false', and hence that sociology must proceed on the basis that all religions 'are grounded in and express the real'.²² Religions, then, are not to be dissolved as mere errors - *Hirngespinnste*, as in simplistic forms of ideology critique, but are to be approached on the assumption that they faithfully express the content of collective experience. Religions 'contain their own truth, which must be uncovered'.²³ This, in fact, is precisely how Adorno reads the Kantian subject. The transcendental subject, for Adorno, is not mere error, but is rather an accurate recapitulation of social processes in symbolic-conceptual form. In both cases, spiritual objects are conceived as constructions of social experience which cannot become conscious of their social origin. Secondly, Durkheim, like Adorno, reads the distinction between the necessary and permanent, and the contingent and fleeting aspects of cognition as a distinction between the

²¹This is also the view of Donald Nielson, in his *Three Faces of God: Society, Religion, and the Categories of Totality in the Philosophy of Émile Durkheim* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998).

²²*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 2.

²³*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 439.

collective (society) and the individual. As we saw, Adorno perceives this insight to be expressed, in distorted form, in Husserl's critique of the psychological genesis of logical laws. Durkheim's account of the social origin of the categories resists both dissolution (empiricism) and reification (Kantianism), and considers the categories as products of social practice which impose themselves as necessary structures of experience. The link with Adorno's 'metacritique', then, can be seen if we understand Durkheim as looking for the forms of collective experience which are the conditions of possibility of logical categories themselves. The third significant similarity, which I hope to justify through the following analysis, is that both Adorno and Durkheim orient their investigations of the relation of the categories to collective practices towards the delineation of a creative concept of the social.

By 'religion', Durkheim intends specifically those social rituals and beliefs by and through which a collectivity represents itself, and the relations which constitute it, to itself.²⁴ Religious symbolism is the means by which a society gives a tangible form to collective experience.²⁵ It is through the collectively sustained practices and beliefs of a social order that the principal categories originate. Durkheim expresses this idea in the following passage,

Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups

²⁴See *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 227.

²⁵'So long as scientific analysis has not yet taught him, man is well aware that he is acted upon, but not by whom. Thus he had to build out of nothing the idea of those [social] powers with which he feels connected. From this we can begin to perceive how he was led to imagine those powers in forms that are not their own and to transfigure them in thought', *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 211. See also p. 223, where Durkheim discusses the forms of transference definitive of totemism.

and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or recreate certain mental states of those groups. But if the categories are of religious origin, then they must participate in what is common to all religion: They, too, must be social things, products of collective thought.²⁶

The categories of transcendental logic can therefore be seen as dependent upon the processes, beliefs and practices of collective life. The categories emerge from social practices saturated with intersubjective meaning. This can be understood in terms of the claim that the effective operation of logical thought is parasitic upon the meaning-constituting processes of social practice. A good example of this can be gleaned from Durkheim's discussion of the category of causality. Durkheim's guiding presumption is that each historical-empirical form of the notion of causality can be correlated with a type of social order and the type of thinking it makes possible.²⁷ Durkheim traces causality back to the principle of 'contagion' characteristic of mimetic rites, which form the basis of magic.²⁸ The central precept of these rites is the idea that 'like produces like'. Rather than considering this principle in its 'abstract form', Durkheim argues that it must be reinserted into its 'moral milieu' in order to be properly understood. In this way, it can be seen that the principle originates through a cognizance of the effectivity of rites which mimic the totemic species with regard to the *remaking* of the moral community, the totemic clan itself.²⁹ The 'moral power'

²⁶*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 9.

²⁷Donald Nielson, *Three Faces of God*, p. 93.

²⁸*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 360ff. Durkheim is here borrowing from the researches of Hubert and Mauss on magic.

²⁹*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 362.

(*l'efficacité morale*) of the rite subsequently undergoes a 'spontaneous generalization' and, in magic, becomes a 'law of nature'.³⁰ What holds true of the precept which founds mimetic rites, Durkheim suggests, will also hold true of causality. Thus the latter too must 'arise from social causes', it must have been 'fashioned by groups with collective ends in view', and be expressed by 'collective feelings'.³¹ The effective power, or active force, implied in the causal relation, Durkheim argues, has its social basis in the ideas by which the collective force of society was 'objectified' and 'projected into things', namely, 'mana' or 'wakan'.³² The causal relation, then, emerges from the constitution of impersonal forces through the practices of collective life. What is most significant in Durkheim's account, in terms of the theory of the entwining of logical categories and social experience, is the way he uncovers *within* the principle of causality itself the traces of original meanings constituted within and through collective life,

[T]he idea of force bears the mark of its origin overtly. It in fact entails an idea of power that does not go without those of ascendancy, mastery, domination - and, correspondingly, of dependence and subordination. The relations that all these ideas express are eminently social. It is society that has classified beings as superior and subordinate, as masters who command and subjects who obey; it is society that has conferred on the first that singular property that makes command efficacious and constitutes *power*. So everything tends to show that the first powers the human mind conceived are those that societies instituted as they became organized. It is in their

³⁰*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 364; 366.

³¹*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 367.

³²*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 367.

image that the powers of the physical world were conceived.³³

Categories, on Durkheim's reading, bear within them the marks of societal organization, and take up immanently within their construction the pre-logical principles which structure social practice. This is also true of the notion of category itself, which is parasitic upon the fundamental frameworks of hierarchical classification originally constituted through religious practice. Religious classification systems, with their notions of hierarchy, superiority, subordination and equality, formed the social basis for the very idea of categorial subsumption itself. 'Society', Durkheim asserts, 'furnished the canvas on which logical thought has worked'.³⁴ Implicit in this analysis is the idea that causality could become an autonomous principle of scientific explanation only under certain historical conditions. To determine what made this possible would mean investigating transformations in the aims and purposes of collective practice.

It is the dependence of the categories on the meaning-constituting force of collective experience which renders intelligible the Adornian thesis that a deep interrogation of logical concepts is capable of revealing fundamental truths about society. Categories always already contain, within themselves, sedimented collective experience, and therefore always and ineliminably bear within themselves a reference to society. Durkheim expresses this in the following passage,

Not only do [the categories] come from society, *but the very things they express are social*. It is not only that they are instituted by society but also that *their content is various aspects of the social being*. The category of genus was at first indistinct from

³³*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 369-70. The idea of categories as modelled on social morphology seems to creep in again here.

³⁴*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 149.

the concept of the human group; the category of time has the rhythm of social life as its basis; the space society occupies provided the raw material for the category of space; collective force was the prototype for the concept of effective force, an essential element in the category of causality.³⁵

It is collective experience, Durkheim argues, which is at the basis of conceptual thought itself. The stability, impersonality and universality which conceptual thought typically possesses - the ground for an idea of truth *sub specie aeternitatis*, are in fact the defining features of collective representations. What conceptual thought expresses, then, 'is the manner in which society as a whole conceives the objects of experience'.³⁶

Hegel: The Contradictory Essence of Concepts

The turn to a social-critical deployment of the Durkheimian thesis concerning the categories in Adorno's work, I want to argue, rests on the insight that relations of power and domination are operative, structuring principles of social practices, and, therefore, conceptual forms will themselves be partially structured by these relations. This was already stated in a discussion of the Durkheimian thesis in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where it is claimed that the social character of thought

³⁵*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 441 (my italics). For Kant, of course, time and space were not, strictly speaking, categories, but rather conditions of the synthesis of sense impressions. However, they were conceived of as categories by the neo-Kantian Charles Renouvier. On the influence of Renouvier on Durkheim, see Donald Nielson, *Three Faces of God*, pp. 37ff.

³⁶*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 436. Also: '[concepts] correspond to the way in which the special being that is society thinks about the things of its own experience'.

categories expresses not social solidarity, but the 'impenetrable (*undurchdringlich*) unity of society and domination' (DE 21; 28). Thus, according to the social-critical employment of the Durkheimian thesis, the authority of the collective must always be seen to embody the entrenchment of a particular structure of social domination. Contra Durkheim, then, the social experience which is the condition of possibility of the categories encompasses relations of domination as a central, structuring moment. It is Adorno's understanding of society as constituted by antagonistic relations which permits him to employ the idea of the origin of the categories in collective experience in the context of a critical social theory. Adorno achieves this, I now want to argue, by conjoining the Durkheimian thesis of the social origin of the categories with the Hegelian thesis that the categories are essentially contradictory. The essential idea which enables Adorno to conjoin the Durkheimian and Hegelian theses, is that the antagonistic relations (i.e. relations of domination) that structure the categories are amenable to a dialectical interpretation which reveals those antagonisms in the form of immanent, *conceptual* contradictions. Conceptual forms can be 'decoded' to reveal a truth about social experience which is normally hidden, or is ordinarily inaccessible to everyday understandings. The rigorous interpretation of conceptual forms thus makes manifest the latent truth concerning the antagonistic structure of society. *By this means, Adorno is able to transform the Durkheimian sociology of knowledge into a critical dialectic of concepts.* Critical-dialectical philosophy can be distinguished from the sociology of knowledge by the fact that its concern with conceptual contradictions forces it to take a critical stance with regard to the social content taken up within concepts, and thus to raise transcendent truth claims vis à vis the social world.³⁷ Conceptual

³⁷It is the fact that it takes seriously the transcendent truth claims, raised immanently by conceptual constructions, that centrally distinguishes the critical dialectic of concepts from Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge. In *Ideology and Utopia* (trans. L. Worth and E. Shils [San

contradictions are not to be understood as the mere replication of social antagonisms. Adorno's argument, as we shall see, is that the very transposition of antagonisms into symbolic-conceptual form introduces a moment of critical judgement, which is grounded in the inherently critical-dialectical nature of conceptual thought.³⁸ When they are articulated in the form of conceptual contradictions, therefore, social antagonisms become possible objects of critical-negative experience, because they are now able to be judged within the normative horizon furnished by the transcendent truth claims of conceptual thinking.

For Adorno, then, the Hegelian thesis provides a means of getting critical access to the antagonisms, or the forms of domination that structure concepts. Hegel's notion of the contradictory nature of the categories thus allows Adorno to assert, contra Durkheim, that society is an (antagonistic) structure of mediation, rather than a self-subsistent moral force. The notion that the categories are forged within collective experience, however, allows Adorno to assert, contra Hegel, that the contradictory nature of the categories is founded on *social* contradictions, that is, the antagonisms of social practice, and is not an insight into the essential nature of logical thought. Durkheim had identified the constitution of the categories with processes of moral integration, in which the moral authority of society, rather than the transcendental subject, is seen as the guarantor of their universality and necessity.³⁹ For Adorno, this was a mystification which simply displaced

Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1936]), Mannheim, in contrast, attempted to transform ideology critique into an objective science by *reducing* philosophic truth claims to the social-historical conditions of their origin.

³⁸This argument will be developed in the following chapter.

³⁹*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 371-2.

the sacredness of religion onto society.⁴⁰ Society, Adorno asserted, is rather to be conceived as a relational category, and as a dynamic concept, whose constituting power derives from its objective, structuring relations. Those relations, in turn, embody forms of domination. Definitive of the structuring relations of late capitalism, Adorno argued, was the exchange relation, which operated by way of processes of abstraction constitutive of social interaction (ESoz 57ff.). Society is already in itself *conceptual*, prior to theoretical understanding, insofar as it constitutes social practice according to a certain structure of antagonistic relations.⁴¹ Adorno argued that the exchange relation could be essentially understood as a form of categorial subsumption governed by the logic of equivalence.

As dynamic concepts, then, the fundamental categories determine the course of a social *process*, the contradictory structure of which is to be uncovered by critical theory. This step in Adorno's argument clearly owes a significant debt to the left-Hegelian interpretation of Hegel's logic, whose essential point was perspicuously formulated by Lukács,

The great advance over Hegel . . . lay in [the] refusal to see in the categories of reflection a 'permanent' stage of human knowledge and in [the] insistence that they were the necessary mould both of thought and of life in bourgeois society, in the reification of thought and life. With this came the discovery of dialectic in history itself. Hence dialectic is not imported into history from outside, nor is it interpreted

⁴⁰See 'Einleitung zu Emile Durkheim, "Soziologie und Philosophie"', in *Soziologische Schriften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972), p. 252.

⁴¹'Thus abstraction does not lie here in the abstracting thought of the sociologist, but such an abstraction is found within society itself or . . . there is found within society, as an objectivity, already something like "concept"' (ESoz p. 59.)

in the light of history (as often occurs in Hegel), but is *derived* from history made conscious as its logical manifestation at this particular point in its development.⁴²

Lukács point about dialectic being ‘derived’ from history is what Adorno essentially has in mind when he characterizes dialectic as the ‘ontology of the false condition’ (ND 11; 22). This is meant to caution against the temptation to essentialize dialectical logic, rather than perceiving dialectical contradiction as *imposed* by the antagonistic structure of social experience. Dialectic, on the Adornian-Lukácsian reading, can only ever claim to be the ‘logical manifestation’ of the structure of society at a particular point in that society’s history.

The claim against Hegel, therefore, is that, just as Kantian critique had to become ‘metacritique’, so Hegelian logic has to lead to ‘metallogic’, which can reflect on the *social conditions* of the contradictory nature of the categories. Because the logical categories are dependent upon the structures of collective practice, their contradictory nature is parasitic upon the character of social processes. This entails a denial of Hegel’s assertion that logic, the *logos*, is determinable as the ‘realm of pure thought’.⁴³ Because of its dependence on structures of social experience, logic necessarily bears within it a *social* content which is itself unveiled in the dialectical unfolding of the categories of logic. Adorno’s ‘metallogic’, then, carries one step further Hegel’s critique of Kant’s transcendental dialectic. In his discussion of the antinomies, Hegel argued, Kant had merely turned the conflicts of reason into ‘something *subjective*’.⁴⁴ Hegel had insisted that the conflict was *real*, in that it was an articulation of the essential contradictory structure of conceptual thought.

⁴²Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 177.

⁴³*Science of Logic*, p. 50.

⁴⁴*Science of Logic*, p. 191. See also pp. 46-7.

Adorno adds to this that thought's very contradictoriness has certain social conditions of possibility, and hence that the structure of logic (*logos*) articulates a social truth.

It is in the logic of essence, the second book of the *Science of Logic*, that Hegel furnishes the conceptual means for describing reality as a process determined by relations of contradiction. In the 'determinations of reflection' of the logic of essence, Hegel argues that the logical categories of identity, difference and opposition presuppose contradiction. These categories only operate by means of the principle of contradiction, which reveals itself as their truth,

If, now, the first determinations of reflection, namely, identity, difference and opposition, have been put in the form of a law, still more should the determination into which they pass as their truth, namely, *contradiction*, be grasped and enunciated as a law: 'all things are in themselves contradictory', and in the sense that this law in contrast to the others expresses rather the truth and the essence of things.⁴⁵

Contradiction, Hegel asserts, is 'the negative as determined in the sphere of essence', and 'the principle of all self-movement'.⁴⁶ Thus contradiction is the organizing structure of a process in which all things are in a 'state of negativity'.⁴⁷ If this thesis was read in terms of social processes, argued Marcuse, it would mean that,

. . . as a rule crisis and collapse are not accidents and external disturbances, but manifest the very nature of things and hence provide the basis on which the essence

⁴⁵*Science of Logic*, p. 439.

⁴⁶*Science of Logic*, p. 440.

⁴⁷Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (New York: Humanities Press, 1954), p. 148.

of the existing social system can be understood. It means, moreover, that the inherent potentialities of men and things cannot unfold in society except through the death of the social order in which they are first gleaned.⁴⁸

The chapter on the determinations of reflection, then, can be read as the form in which the antagonistic structure of society at a particular point in its history is taken up within conceptual construction. As expressive of a social logic, the thesis of the primacy of contradiction is the reflection within thought of the prevailing negativity of the existing social order. 'Dialectical contradiction', as Adorno puts this, is 'experienced in the experience of society' (*an der Gesellschaft erfahren*) (3 St 78). That society becomes a totality only through its contradictions, Adorno argues, implies that society is integrated via antagonistic structural relations (3 St 79). Now we can see more clearly why dialectical contradiction is in no sense a philosophical method. Dialectical contradiction is imposed on philosophy by the conflictual character of social experience, which is taken up within conceptual construction. In order to form a coherent and unified system, philosophy would have to suppress the antagonisms hidden within its categories. This, as we shall see, is the basis of Adorno's critique of Kant and Hegel. We can summarize, then, by saying that it is the thesis of the social origin of the categories which permits Adorno to claim that conceptual constructions reveal society, and it is the thesis of the contradictory nature of the categories which permits the claim that the revealing of society is simultaneously the *critique* of society, since what is thereby revealed is that society is fundamentally riven with conflict.

It is plausible to read Durkheim's sociology of religion as developing an alternative to

⁴⁸*Reason and Revolution*, p. 148.

Marxist materialism, which stresses a normative rather than an instrumental conception of social order. Jeffrey Alexander has argued that Durkheim's later sociology of religion represents a substantive break with the mechanistic functionalism which Durkheim himself had appeared to endorse in his earlier *Division of Labour in Society*.⁴⁹ Durkheim, Alexander argues, came to conceive social institutions as crystallized emotions rather than material forms, thereby developing a 'subjective' structuralism which represented the 'theoretical antithesis' of Marxist 'objective' structuralism.⁵⁰ This is evidenced by Durkheim's insistence on the independence of the collective consciousness from its material base. The feelings, ideas and images which arise within religious practices 'follow their own laws once they are born'.⁵¹ Durkheim does, further, often give the impression that the purpose of his sociology of religion is to displace a conception of social order as constituted solely by constraint, or coercion, with an account which would be capable of conceptualizing society as a normative order founded on moral integration.⁵²

Whatever the merits of this account, however, it is also possible to see Durkheim's sociology

⁴⁹See Jeffrey Alexander, 'Rethinking Durkheim's Intellectual Development: On the Complex Origins of a Cultural Sociology', in *Structure and Meaning: Rethinking Classical Sociology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989).

⁵⁰Jeffrey Alexander, 'Rethinking Durkheim', p. 146. In this regard, see the discussion of 'moral influence' in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 208ff, and also the definition of religious forces as 'objectified feelings', p. 422.

⁵¹*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 426.

⁵²This is most clearly expressed in a revealing footnote: 'Because I have made constraint the *external feature* by which social facts can be most easily recognized and distinguished from individual psychological ones, some have believed that I consider physical constraint to be the entire essence of social life. In reality, I have never regarded constraint as anything more than the visible, tangible expression of an underlying, inner fact that is wholly ideal: *moral authority*', *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 210 (fn. 6).

of religion as serving a social-critical purpose, which is typically lost sight of when Durkheim's work is discussed solely in terms of its contribution to the problem of social order. As Hans Joas has persuasively argued, Durkheim's sociology of religion can be read as an inquiry into the conditions of societal transformation, and more specifically, into the conditions of the constituting and institutionalizing of new values and ideals.⁵³ In stressing how those structures which categorize the world, and which organize social life, emerge from collective, expressive and extraordinary (*außeralltätlich*) action, argues Joas, Durkheim is developing a theory of the 'creative character of sociality' which can reveal 'society as the ground of origination [*Entstehungsgrund*] of its own ideals'. Thus moral frameworks and social institutions are no longer grasped as 'fixed forms', but are rather related, in Durkheim's account, to the process of their formation.⁵⁴ It is this focus on the conditions of societal transformation which is revealed in Durkheim's exhortation to the creation of new collective ideals towards the end of *Forms*,

[T]he former gods are growing old or dying, and others have not been born. . . . A day will come when our societies once again will know hours of creative effervescence during which new ideals will again spring forth and new formulas emerge to guide humanity for a time. . . . [T]he [French] Revolution⁵⁵ instituted a whole cycle of celebrations in order to keep the principles that inspired it eternally young. If that institution quickly perished, it is because the revolutionary faith lasted

⁵³Hans Joas, *Die Kreativität des Handelns* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 77.

⁵⁴*Die Kreativität des Handelns*, p. 95.

⁵⁵'Nowhere', Durkheim says in a previous section, 'has society's ability to make itself a god or to create gods been more in evidence than during the first years of the Revolution', *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 215.

only briefly . . . But although that work miscarried, it helps us to imagine what might have come to be under other conditions; and everything leads us to believe that the work will sooner or later be taken up again. There are no immortal gospels, and there is no reason to believe that humanity is incapable of conceiving new ones in the future.⁵⁶

A similar critical intention, I suggest, can be discerned in Adorno's critique of the Kantian 'block'. In Durkheimian terms, Adorno wants to demonstrate the origination of the 'block', the theory of the limits of cognition, in a particular structure of collective experience, in order that the block can be revealed as a social product, and thus as changeable by collective creativity. Kant's understanding of the 'block', which legislates an absolute separation between what is knowable and what is thinkable, rests upon a fundamental form-content dualism. The moment of form is the unchanging framework of categorial subsumption, which determines the structure of all possible cognition. If the categories are themselves grounded in a particular structure of collective experience, however, then they must themselves be the bearers of a determinate social content. The form-content dualism is therefore ultimately untenable, and consequently, the block cannot be taken as legislating what is knowable for all future experience,

[T]he forms are not that ultimate that Kant described. In virtue of the reciprocity between them and the existing content, they also develop themselves on their part.

That, however, is unreconcilable with the conception of the indestructible block.

⁵⁶*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, pp. 429-30. This concern with the conditions of societal transformation is reflected in Durkheim's discussion of the state as a possible agent of social change in his lectures on civil morals, translated as *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, trans. C. Brookfield (London: Routledge, 1957), pp. 87-8, 94.

Once the forms are . . . moments of a dynamic, their positive form (*Gestalt*) can no more be stipulated for all future cognition than can any one of the contents, without which they are not, and with which they transform themselves. Only if the dichotomy between form and content were absolute could Kant claim that the dichotomy forbids any - non-material - content derived solely from the forms. If the material moment lies within the forms themselves, then the block is revealed as created by that very subject that it inhibits (ND 386; 378-9).

The thesis of the immanence of materiality within conceptual forms undermines the distinction between the active, constituting subject and the inert, constituted object.⁵⁷ When the supposed a priori structures of thinking are traced to an empirical genesis, the mediation of subject and object must be seen to go ‘all the way down’: there is no form of subjective constitution which does not bear within it the traces of objective processes, and there is no object which is not pre-formed by transcendental structures of thinking, which are *themselves* the historical product of objective processes. Thus the division between the realm of sense and the understanding, the core of Kant’s theory of the block, is itself a ‘product of society’ (ND 389; 382). In this sense, although it is semblance (*Schein*), the theory of the block accurately replicates certain social conditions, namely, that ‘the organization of the world, in spite of all arrangements to the contrary, fails to satisfy [the realm of sense]’ (ND 389; 382). Adorno’s materialism, then, rests on the idea of the immanence of social content within categorial forms, which allows the distinction between what is knowable and thinkable to be conceived as itself conditioned by present social experience. Similar to Durkheim,

⁵⁷On this, see Helga Gripp, *Theodor W. Adorno: Erkenntnisdimensionen negativer Dialektik* (München: Paderborn, 1986), pp. 72ff.

Adorno's thesis of the social basis of the categories serves a critical purpose. In showing how the block is dependent on the structure of collective practice, Adorno is furnishing theoretical space for the possibility that what is *now* only thinkable could become, through collective creativity, a feature of future social experience. In one sense, Adorno can be interpreted as carrying out more thoroughly Kant's critique of 'dogmatism', and as showing that such a critique can only be completed by a metacritique of critique itself, which reflects within conceptual thought the social conditions of its possibility. This reflection on the conditionedness of conceptual categories, however, serves within Adorno's theory the critical intention of making accessible what Kant conceived as ideas of reason having a regulative use, as the ground of a collective, creative project, and thus as a possible future form of social experience.⁵⁸

The argument concerning the Kantian block demonstrates the logic of emancipation that animates Adorno's social-critical employment of dialectic. This turns on overcoming the misrecognition of prevailing social relations and social forms as 'natural', 'self-evident', and as immediately attuned to 'reality'. By revealing those forms as creations of human sociality, the forms of domination underlying them are revealed as contingent at the same time. The critical dialectic of concepts, then, affords a *critical-negative experience* of the social order by, firstly, uncovering the relation between conceptual structures and social relations of domination. Thereby, secondly, overcoming the misrecognition of social forms and practices as natural and self-evident (rather than as serving dominant interests). The critical-negative experience in dialectic, therefore, is made

⁵⁸Within Kant's work itself, Adorno argues, two contradictory motifs concerning the ideas criss-cross one other. On the one side, they are conceived as '[something] lying in infinity and therefore never able to be fulfilled', on the other side, there remains 'the hope, that they might nevertheless be fulfilled' (Ph.T II, 306).

possible by the *distanciated reflection on the conceptual structures which naturalize social forms embodying domination as forms of truth which represent 'reality'*. Adorno calls this critical-negative experience 'self-reflection' (*Selbstbesinnung*). Now we are in a position to see how *Negative Dialectics* provides for a social-critical re-deployment of this concept, which we encountered earlier in the critical genealogy of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In the critical dialectic of concepts, critical self-reflection denotes an awareness, not of the persistence of a mythical fear of nature, but rather of the structures of domination which enter the social constitution of conceptual forms.

In his lectures on sociology, Adorno identifies the experience of society as a central element in the 'dialectical theory of society'. What is *experienced* concerning society through the dialectic is that society itself is the force which determines and structures collective practice.⁵⁹ Society, Adorno argues, is not immediately accessible to experience, since it is not an existent 'thing', but rather an *antagonistic relation* between individuals. The social totality, Adorno argues, is not held together through solidarity, through a social total-subject, but rather through the 'antagonistic interests of human beings' (ESoz 78). This denotes a significant point of difference with Durkheim, since it is this (for Adorno, antagonistic) relation that Durkheim had conceived as a type of second-order substance. Contra positivism, however, society is not reducible to a mere agglomeration of individuals, and this irreducibility of society to individuals is the hidden truth in Durkheim's ascription of so-called 'emergent properties' to social forms. Although the concept of society does not denote a 'fact', society is 'actual in the highest degree', but still it eludes the concretion of sense perception (ESoz 89). In contrast to Durkheim, then, dialectical theory does not reveal society in the form of a pre-given thing possessed of a pseudo-independence vis à vis individuals, but rather

⁵⁹My argument here draws on *Einleitung in die Soziologie*, pp. 88ff.

as an antagonistic, structural relation. Society, for Adorno, is essentially a category of mediation. The experience of society, or, as Adorno also expresses this, *Gesellschaft als Erfahrung* (society as experience), is engendered in dialectical theory by the disclosure of 'system-immanent' limits that constrain social action *precisely in order that the antagonistic structure can be prevented from becoming explicit, and thereby antagonistic society itself be preserved*.⁶⁰ *Gesellschaft als Erfahrung* is thus 'that which one comes up against and which one recognizes at the same time as the condition of the criticized and inadequate moments (inadequate even in an entirely plain, immanent sense), but which then also prevents these moments from being actually and effectively altered' (ESoz 91). For Adorno, it is precisely this experience of society as a structure of mediation which is rendered inaccessible by a positivist approach to social theory. It is for this reason that Adorno strenuously defended, against positivism, the importance of 'unregimented experience'.⁶¹ In critical sociology, as in epistemology, the articulation of critical-negative experience plays a central role.

When social theory confines itself to the conceptual classification of facts according to pre-ordained methodological rules, it can never attain to the experience of society. This is essentially because society does not, and cannot become accessible to experience as a fact, but rather reveals itself only through the coercive limits it sets on social action in order to maintain itself. One encounters the actuality of society, Adorno argues, in the experience of 'banging one's head against a brick wall', where one comes up against the invisible limits imposed on agents by the social

⁶⁰Adorno's own example of this concerns the pervasive ideology of neutrality in political education, in which, for example, groups occupying different positions in the production process are referred to as 'social partners', with all reference to structural opposition being denounced as 'political propaganda'. See *Einleitung in die Soziologie*, pp. 88-9.

⁶¹See 'Einleitung zum "Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie"', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, pp. 342-3.

system (ESoz 90). Dialectical theory sets out to explain why, within society in its present form, such experience is a necessary feature of society's self-preservation. It is significant that Adorno relates this experience of society to the possibility of the experience of the 'new', that is, the possibility that social experience might be otherwise than it is,

It is probably also the case with the concept of experience itself . . . that it only gains an indescribable normative significance today because, on the one hand, in the world in which we live genuine experience, namely, experience of the new, of what is not already present (*eines nicht schon Dagewesenen*), does not occur, and because, on the other hand, through the regulation and through the rule system that it imposes on cognition, science basically does not at all permit such an experience (ESoz 90).

The link between the experience of society and the experience of the new is that the former, made accessible in dialectical theory, reveals antagonistic relations as an outcome of the structures of current social experience, thereby stripping them of the illusion of necessity. The coercive limits on collective action, in other words, are revealed as the constitutive limits of current social experience, and thus not the sole possible structuring form of collective life.

Self-Reflection and the Transcendental Subject

We have seen how, by combining the thesis of the social origin of the categories with the idea of their essentially contradictory nature, Adorno is able to render plausible the thesis that an interpretation of forms of conceptual construction can reveal the actual antagonistic nature of society. The categories necessarily bear within them a social content, and because society is

structured by relations of domination, philosophy will not be able to express the structure of social experience as a unified, harmonious whole. The lack of unity and coherence within philosophical reason is therefore not contingent, but a necessary outcome of its dependence on social processes determined by conflict. It was of course a fundamental insight of Kant that the contradictions in which reason becomes embroiled when it strives for unity and totality are not the result of confused thinking, *not a theoretical mistake*, but are rather *necessary* illusions, which for Kant reflect the limitations of what is knowable. Once the distinction between the knowable and the thinkable is itself seen as the reflection of a certain social content, however, the contradictions of reason must themselves be understood as possessing social conditions of possibility.

For Adorno, Kant's transcendental logic is simultaneously both true and a mystification. The transcendental subject, that is to say, is both an accurate conceptual articulation of social processes of categorial subsumption and yet also a mystification of those processes,

As the extreme limit case of ideology, the transcendental subject comes close to truth. The transcendental universality is no mere narcissistic self-elevation of the I, not the *hubris* of the autonomy of the I. Its reality lies in the domination that prevails and perpetuates itself by means of the principle of equivalence. The process of abstraction, which philosophy transfigures and which it ascribes to the knowing subject alone, is taking place in the factual exchange society (ND 178; 180).

The transcendental subject, therefore, is an expression of the universality and necessity of the structures which organize social practice *within* exchange society. But Kant's reading of objective processes of categorial subsumption as the work of a transcendental *subject* - 'a non-existent which is nonetheless to act, a universal which is nonetheless to experience particulars' (ND 177; 178) -

simultaneously disguises the dependence of transcendental categories on collective practice.

In his discussion of the transcendental subject, Adorno deploys the concept of *Selbstbesinnung*. In reducing objectivity to the subject, he argues, philosophy, labouring under a lack of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*), ‘forgot the mediation in that which mediates, in the subject’ (ND 176; 178). The thesis of transcendental constitution implied that the subject mediates material content by subsuming it under its categories, yet can itself be defined as self-subsistent and free of mediation. The transcendental subject stands outside society and outside history. If the transcendental subject were itself mediated, that is, if its immanent constitution was itself marked by forms of material content, then it would itself be a product of history and susceptible to change. The mediation in the subject, then, expresses the immanence of social content in the very categorial forms which the subject takes as the sign of its independence vis à vis experience. ‘The subject’s essentiality’, Adorno asserts, ‘is an existence [*Dasein*] raised to the second potency, and . . . presupposes the first potency: facticity. Facticity is a condition of the possibility - even though negated - of essentiality’ (ND 176; 178). The transcendental subject, Adorno is claiming, replicates the organization and structure of a particular social process, which it then represents as the work of an exclusively mental operation. It is interesting that Adorno describes the transcendental subject in terms that are compatible with Durkheim’s account of religion. ‘The transcendental subject’, Adorno claims, ‘can be deciphered as the society which is unconscious of itself’ (ND 178; 179). Just as, for Durkheim, religion is the form in which a society represents itself to itself symbolically, so, for Adorno, the transcendental subject is disclosed as processes of social constitution in symbolic form. Adorno asserts further, however, that its very structure bears the marks of social conflict, which is a necessary consequence of its mediation by material content. The strict separation of form

and content, as constituting and constituted, itself gives expression to the hierarchy implicit in the division of mental labour and physical labour, command and obedience, which forms an organizing principle of modern production (ND 177-8; 179). The transcendental subject, Adorno asserts in the essay 'On Subject and Object', expresses faithfully the abstractly rational relations (*Beziehungen*) which are detached from individual human beings and their relationship (*Verhältnis*), and which have their model in exchange. Where the 'authoritative structure of society' is the exchange form, its rationality 'constitutes human beings' (St 155). Adorno goes on to claim that the transcendental subject expresses the truth about the prevailing historical condition in inverted form, a truth which would only be theoretically negated through a 'second Copernican turn'. By this idea, Adorno intends the reflection which reveals what are taken as timeless mental operations as susceptible to the constituting operations of social experience. Because it encapsulates the prevailing horizon of social experience, then, the transcendental subject is true. In a section of 'Subject and Object' which explicitly refers to Durkheim's sociology of religion, Adorno articulates this dual character, as both social-historically conditioned and objectively valid, as a defining paradox of conceptual forms,

The reflection of the subject on its own formalism is the reflection on society, with the paradox that, in accord with the meaning of the later Durkheim, the constitutive forms have a social origin, but on the other hand, which current epistemology can insist upon, they are objectively valid; they are already presupposed in Durkheim's argumentation, in each sentence which demonstrates their conditionedness. The paradox would have to be one with the objective captivity of the subject within itself. The function of cognition . . . for its part, emerged. It consists essentially in those forms; so long as there is cognition, it must be executed according to them, even

where it looks beyond them (St 166-7).

The thesis of the social origin of the categories does not relativize them, nor does it render them contingent. Any effective critique of conceptual forms must therefore operate immanently within these forms themselves, and cannot claim access, in the present, to a form of experience which would be outside of them.

Adorno states that, because of a lack of reflection on its conditionedness, the transcendental subject cannot truly fulfil its claim to be a 'subject' at all, 'As though to punish it, the subject will be overcome by what it has forgotten. It no sooner turns into an object of epistemological reflection than it will share that objective character whose absence it so often cites as giving it precedence over the factual realm' (ND 176; 178). This gives an important insight into what Adorno takes to be definitive of being a 'subject' in the genuine sense. It is clear that a subject cannot be defined in terms of its capacity of conceptual synthesis. As we have already seen, Adorno sees the primary forms of categorial synthesis as dependent on and derived from social processes, and thus as 'objective', rather than primally mental, operations. The distinguishing feature of the subject, Adorno believes, is that self-reflection which can reflect *critically* on those forms of social-material content which are sedimented within conceptual thought. Because the mental always already harbours the material within it, or in other words, because the subject is always already object, it is only as the critical self-reflection on its own conditionedness - which means reflection on the structuring operation of forms of domination - that thought achieves the independence considered to be the characteristic feature of what the 'subject' is. This is why Adorno tends to link together, in a peculiarly strong fashion, the possibility of emancipation and 'reconciliation' with nature. The Habermas-Honneth-Wellmer account is wrong to see in this the figure of a 'utopian-messianic'

model of emancipation, conceived as embracing both relations between subjects and relations with 'nature'.⁶² It is fundamentally mistaken to conceive the critical aspirations of Adorno's thought in terms of the exclusionary opposition of conceptual thought and mimesis, since its dependence on social conditions renders conceptual thought always already in itself 'mimetic'. Mimesis, *pace* Wellmer and Habermas, is not the 'Other of rationality', but calls attention to the very *conditionedness* of all conceptual thought on forms of collective practice. Mimesis, for Adorno, is not a utopian form of cognition *opposed* to the conceptual, but is a necessary feature of how all conceptual thought operates.⁶³ Mimesis is not, then, a figure of the utopian reconciliation of subject and object. Rather, the mimetic element of thought is what thought becomes aware of in its self-reflection, and far from sublating conceptual opposition in a primordial unity, this self-reflection is the very condition of thought's *distance* from the object, and thus the condition of what it is to be a 'subject' in the genuine sense.⁶⁴

Adorno gives a particularly insightful account of the thesis of the independence of the subject as self-reflection on its dependence, in his 1963 lectures on moral philosophy. Adorno formulates this thesis in terms of a critique of Kant's 'two-worlds' doctrine. Adorno, as we should by now expect, does not simply dismiss the 'two-worlds' theory as false. The theory is said to

⁶²See Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity*, pp. 13ff.

⁶³Simon Jarvis makes this point in his *Adorno*, ch. 7.

⁶⁴It is not misleading to say, in fact, that what is theorized in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* under the figure self-preserving, 'instrumental' reason is really the result of *too much* mimesis, since what is in question is the inability of conceptual thought to reflect critically on the categorial forms which merely replicate ('mimic') corrupt and unjust practice. This is why Adorno and Horkheimer can claim that 'The *ratio* which suppresses mimesis is not simply its opposite. It is itself mimesis: mimesis of what is dead' (DE 57; 64).

possess a distinctive truth content which must be explicated by dialectical theory. Further, as should also be familiar, Adorno suggests that this truth content can be uncovered by asking after the 'experiential core' of Kant's 'two-worlds' theory. The experiential core refers to those 'material contents' (*Sachverhalte*) which Kant had 'perceived, thought and noticed', and which inspired him to maintain this 'peculiarly contradictory and dualistic conception' (PM 152). Adorno locates this experiential core in the implicit awareness that although the mind (*Geist*) refers back to nature both genetically (as itself a result of nature) and in terms of content, it is not exhausted by what is natural, since it possesses a moment of free disposal over all natural contents and representations. Thus the mind can represent natural contents in other contexts, or represent what is not yet the case (PM 153). This is not explicable, Adorno claims, in terms of the contradictory logic of 'either-or', as with Kant, but rather requires the 'dialectical logic, in which that which has emerged, is not equal to that out of which it emerged' (PM 154). What this implies is captured in the following important passage,

But now, this extruding moment [*dieses Entragende*], this small part of our nature which is not nature, is - in opposition to the delusion [*Verblendung*], which is just simply the category of submissiveness to nature [*Naturbefangenheit*] - *actually one with self-reflection* [*Selbstbesinnung*]. *We are actually no longer ourselves a part of nature in that moment in which we notice, in which we recognize, that we are a part of nature* Delusion is actually nothing else than [that] which is not at all capable of the principle of self-reflection, and which, precisely because it does not recognize itself in its natural conditionedness [*Bedingtheit*], falls victim to this natural conditionedness through the mere pursuit of immediate ends, of arrangements of

immediacy (PM 154 [my italics]).

In fact, the 'domination' of nature, the principle of self-preserving reason, is itself primarily determined by its *submissiveness* to nature in exactly the sense which Adorno has in mind here. Hence it is misleading to refer to the domination of nature by a *subject*, as though a primordial division of subject and object was really the problem, since the domination of nature is a figure for that type of relation in which the subject is not yet truly a subject. 'The suppression of nature for human ends', Adorno asserts, 'is a mere relation of nature, which is why the supremacy of nature-dominating reason and its principle is a semblance' (ND 179; 181). The subject is here not a subject in a genuine sense because it cannot reflect critically on the way its own modes of operation have been dictated and structured by relations of social domination within history. The principle of the domination of nature can only be surpassed by the 'self-reflection [*Selbstreflexion*] of nature in the human' - not the recovery of a primordial unity, but rather the awareness that conceptual thought will necessarily replicate social-historical conditions, and hence is itself *already* 'natural' (PM 156).⁶⁵

'That which transcends nature', Adorno claims, 'is nature which has become aware of itself' (PM 155). We will see later in what sense Adorno intends this transcendence of nature to be the figure of a reconciled reason, but it is worth noting here the particularly close conjunction which is implied between genuine subjectivity and the critical perspective on social conditions. Adorno argues that philosophical formulations which attempt to purge themselves of social content do *not* achieve a genuine, critical stance to social forms of domination, but are condemned merely to

⁶⁵The 'self-reflection of nature in the human' is, again, deeply reminiscent of the 'mindfulness of nature' in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

blindly reproduce existing conditions. Adorno expresses this in the following passage,

The subject takes a part in semblance in an epistemological-metaphysical sense, when it proclaims itself as the Baconian master and finally the idealistic creator of all things. In the practice of its domination, it becomes a part of that which it means to dominate, it succumbs like the Hegelian master. It makes apparent how much, in consuming the object, it is beholden to it. What it does is the spell of that which the subject believes to have captured in its own spell. Its desperate self-elevation is the reaction to the experience of its powerlessness, which hinders self-reflection [*Selbstbesinnung*]; the absolute consciousness [is] without consciousness (ND 180; 181).

It is in reflecting on itself as nature, Adorno believes, that what it takes over from social-historical conditions loses its binding force for the subject, and ceases to constrain future practice. Just as reason is only reason as the critique of social experience, the subject is only a genuine, independent subject in the moment of self-critique whereby it reflects on its conditionedness. This is the reflection on the antagonistically ordered social practices which structure thought categories. *The subject, therefore, becomes a subject in overcoming the misrecognition, generated by conceptual forms, of domination as 'natural' or as imposed by 'reality'.*

It was in virtue of the immanence of social experience within conceptual construction that Adorno was able to conceive philosophical analysis as a furtherance of critical theory. Adorno was able to deploy the dialectical critique of concepts as a means of obtaining theoretical access to the constitutive antagonisms of social experience. I have argued that this was made possible in Adorno's work by means of a fusion of Hegelian and Durkheimian themes concerning the categories. In the

following chapter, I want to flesh out this argument by looking more closely at Adorno's philosophical analyses themselves.

The Critical Project of *Negative Dialectics*, II

The dependence of philosophy on social conditions, Adorno believes, means that, in non-alienated form, the truth content of philosophical reason will bear the form of the critique of society. Hans-Ernst Schiller has argued that it is this element of Adorno's conception of philosophy as self-critique which puts Adorno's thought very close to Marx's idea of an overcoming (*Aufhebung*) and realization of philosophy. With this idea, as Schiller stresses, Marx did not intend a renunciation of theory, nor a renunciation of interpretation, but rather a thinking which would no longer 'eternalize the contradictions of reality and furnish them with a higher meaning', but would rather 'stand in service of the practical removal of these contradictions in pointing to their genesis and surmountability'.¹ As embedded within social reality, philosophy has both specific social pre-conditions, such as the overcoming of immediate physical need and the exemption from material labour, and a specific social content which, when un-self-reflective, philosophy projects in its

¹Hans-Ernst Schiller, 'Übertreibung: Philosophie und Gesellschaft bei Adorno', in *Soziologie im Spätkapitalismus: zur Gesellschaftstheorie Theodor W. Adornos*, ed., G. Schweppenhäuser (Darmstadt: Wissenschaft Buchgesellschaft, 1995), pp. 203-4.

categories as ‘universal principles of being’.² Conceptual forms can thus be seen as naturalizing social relations of domination. This lack of self-reflection is discernible, for example, in Plato’s cosmological hierarchy, which cannot critically reflect on its conditions of possibility in the social divisions of the Greek *Polis*,³ as well as in Hegel’s doctrine of logic, in which social processes appear divinized as ontological principles. It is misleading to read the Marxian *Aufhebung* as a call for the abolition of philosophy. It is philosophy *itself*, for Marx, which demands its own *Aufhebung*, and the necessity of this can be demonstrated strictly within philosophy itself. Self-critique is the only philosophical form which can do justice to philosophy’s *own* demands for transcendence. Hence, ‘[i]t is as philosophy’s self-critique that the dialectical movement stays philosophical’ (ND 153; 156).

One clear implication of my argument thus far is that my reading differs sharply from the common interpretation of the critical project of *Negative Dialectics* as centrally concerned with a distinction between the ‘violent’, ‘oppressive’ operation of conceptual thought, and nonconceptual, mimetic type of thinking which operates by means of a non-repressive attunement to the object.⁴ My misgivings about this interpretation concern its failure to articulate the connection between the critique of the concept and forms of domination rooted in social processes. As a result, it leans

²‘Übertreibung: Philosophie und Gesellschaft bei Adorno’, pp. 218-19.

³‘Plato’s doctrine of ideas, itself a power step towards demythologization, repeats the myth: it eternalizes the relationships of domination, which have passed over from nature to human beings and are practised by the latter, as essentialities’ (ND 180; 181).

⁴Examples of this approach can be found in Y. Sherratt, ‘Negative Dialectics: A Positive Interpretation’, *International Philosophical Quarterly* 38 (1998) 55-66; and Shane Phelan, ‘Interpretation and Domination: Adorno and the Habermas-Lyotard Debate’, *Polity* 25 (1993) 597-616.

towards a reification of conceptual thought itself, portraying it as the non-changing ground of domination in history, thereby falling prey to the same error of abstraction which characterizes concept fetishism. In consequence, Adorno's critical strategy, the critical dialectic of concepts, is transformed into an *external critique* of conceptual thinking, and simultaneously shorn of its social-critical intent. The domination of the object by the concept is not the basis of domination, as the interpretation criticized here claims. The notion of concepts as independent, classificatory-subsumptive forms is a philosophical misunderstanding of the relation between conceptual thought and social experience which is itself grounded in a *real* contradiction of social experience.⁵ We will see in a later chapter that Adorno's critique of the concept can only be properly understood in terms of the thesis of a dialectic of cultural rationalization, defined as the increasing operation of concepts according to the logic of exchange processes.

The first part of this chapter will furnish textual support for the theses of the previous chapter, primarily through a close reading of a number of sections of *Negative Dialectics*. The analysis will explore what Adorno intends with the centrally important idea of the 'nonconceptual in the concept'. The following sections will focus more directly on Adorno's idea of philosophy as self-critique. I will argue that there is a coherent critical strategy at work in *Negative Dialectics* which runs parallel to that of *Aesthetic Theory*, but is independent of the normative claims articulated within the latter. I will then attempt to explicate Adorno's understanding of the critical-dialectical nature of conceptual identification, which Adorno draws from Hegel's theory of the

⁵It is similarly mistaken to locate the utopian moment of Adorno's thought in the 'non-identical', as that which is suppressed by 'violent' conceptuality. Following Hegel, Adorno deploys the notion of non-identity primarily as a moment of dialectical logic. This will be explored in what follows.

judgement in his *Science of Logic*. Finally, I will introduce Adorno's theory of linguistic reification. Adorno, I will argue, conceives linguistic reification as rooted in an objective process of abstraction, which threatens to 'neutralize' the critical-dialectical workings of language, and thus to block the possibility of a critical self-reflection on the social conditions of conceptual construction.

The Nonconceptual in the Concept

Adorno states the central idea and critical intention of the reflection on the nonconceptual in the concept as follows,

The insight into the constitutive character of the nonconceptual in the concept would dissolve the compulsion of identity which the concept brings with it in the absence of such arresting reflection. Its self-reflection [*Selbstbesinnung*] on its own meaning leads out of the semblance of the being in itself of the concept as a unity of meaning (ND 12; 24).

This passage occurs in an important section of *Negative Dialectics* entitled 'Disenchantment of the Concept'. In this section, Adorno claims that the 'semblance of being in itself' is conferred on concepts by the 'movement which exempts them from reality' (ND 11; 23). Concepts themselves, Adorno claims, are moments of the reality which 'requires their formation'. The semblance of the concept's being in itself is thus a form of concept fetishism in which concepts are considered to be determinable independently of their *relation* to a meaningful content. Just as in Marx's critique of the fetishism of the commodity form, the determinations that attach to a concept through contextual connections appear as 'natural', inherent determinations of the concept. This fetishism, according

to Adorno, takes the form of a reifying inversion, through which the internal relation of meaningful content and conceptual form is transformed into an external subsumptive relation. Thus concepts come to be seen as self-subsistent classificatory schemata which are 'insulated' from the non-conceptual whole. (ND 12; 24). This difference is in fact essential to understanding the critical strategy of negative dialectic. The transition from the first to the second (fetishized) sense is described in terms of an incapacity to reflect on the concept's 'mediation by the nonconceptual' integral to the concept's meaning (ND 12; 24). Once this transition has taken place, concepts become conceivable as atemporal mental categories which come upon reality only in a subsequent step, that is, in that relation in which conceptual synthesis occurs. Adorno presents the dependence of concepts on content in terms of Kant's 'emptiness' thesis, which holds that unless the concept is a concept of something (*etwas*) it is empty.⁶ In fact, Adorno is radicalizing Kant's thesis into the claim that the real content which it subsumes is in fact integral to the form-determination of the concept, so that, just as the concept constitutes the object, according to the notion of transcendental logic, concepts are themselves constituted by the content which they express. The mediation of the concept and the nonconceptual goes all the way down. This argument aims to effect a fundamental change in the way concepts are thought of as 'referring' to nonconceptual items. As already 'entwined with a nonconceptual whole', the very structure of concepts is constituted by the reality which concepts are considered to synthesize in independent cognitive acts. Adorno deploys the same argument, as a radicalization of Kant's emptiness thesis, in a different section of *Negative Dialectics*, which derives this radicalization from what is implied in the dependence of cognition

⁶ 'Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind', *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), p. 98.

on sensation (*Empfindung*),

If sensation were strictly required in order that the form, the transcendental subject, could function, that is, in order that it could make valid judgements, the transcendental subject would be quasi-ontologically tied not only to pure apperception but also to its counterpart, to its matter (*Materie*). That would undermine the entire doctrine of subjective constitution to which, according to Kant, matter cannot be traced back (ND 137; 141).

When sensation is seen as constitutive of the concept, concepts can no longer be seen as constant in contrast to changeable, transient matter. Sensations themselves, Adorno claims, are ‘conditions of the possibility of cognition’.⁷ The thesis guiding this radicalization of Kant, I want to claim, is that *the structure and operation of concepts is dependent upon the empirical meaningfulness of what is to be comprehended by means of concepts*. Adorno’s argument concerning the non-conceptual is intended as a critique of the external subsumption-classification model of conceptual thinking. Concepts, Adorno is arguing, embody an experiential-expressive component: they are congealed structures of empirical meaning waiting to be articulated and interpreted. Adorno takes pains to argue for this understanding of concepts because it is vital for the coherence of his critical strategy. If it is the case that the structure of concepts incorporates empirical meaning, then the critique carried out by dialectic, through its immanent unfolding of the contradictoriness of concepts, will be coextensive with the revealed (negative) meaning of an antagonistic form of social experience.

Significantly, Adorno’s claim that the insight into the constituting role of the nonconceptual

⁷ Ashton’s translation misreads this passage as the claim that *forms* are ‘conditions of the possibility of cognition’. That forms function thus, of course, is nowhere in dispute in the argument, and so cannot possibly be Adorno’s point here.

is accessible through the concept's 'self-reflection on its own meaning' implies that the falsity of concept fetishism can be demonstrated *philosophically*. The insight that social content is immanent in conceptual thought does not require a sociology of knowledge, but can be demonstrated by an immanent philosophical interrogation of the concept. 'The insight that philosophy's conceptual essence [*Wesen*] is not the absolute of philosophy', Adorno claims, is 'mediated by the nature of the concept. It is not a dogmatic thesis, much less a naively realistic one' (ND 11-12; 23).

Another significant feature of Adorno's analysis is the implication he draws for the very possibility of epistemology. 'The concept of nonconceptuality', it is argued, 'cannot stay with itself, with epistemology; epistemology obliges philosophy to be substantive [*zur Sachhaltigkeit*]' (ND 137; 141). Within the very attempt to construct a pure epistemology, philosophy is forced to reveal the dependence of the constituting categories on social-historical content. What is shown, immanently, to be unsustainable here is the very opposition of form and content, of the a priori and the empirical. If this distinction breaks down, then social experience must be internal to the structure of a theory of knowledge. This is well expressed in Adorno's lectures on Hegel,

[A] merely formal theory of knowledge, such as epistemology sets forth, negates itself; it is not possible. In order to attain the cogency epistemology yearns for, philosophy must break epistemology open. Hence a philosophizing focussed on content, one that tries to formulate experiences in their necessity and cogency, is brought about precisely by the self-reflection of a formal philosophizing that had rejected it and prohibited it as dogmatic. With this transition to content, the separation of the a priori from the empirical world . . . is abolished. . . . Philosophy acquires the right and accepts the duty to appeal to material moments originating in

the real life process of socialized human beings as essential and not merely contingent (3 St 66-7).

Concrete social processes, then, are conditions of the possibility of concepts. This is revealed philosophically in the disclosure that the 'ontical element', which epistemology wants to eradicate from conceptual construction, is encountered 'in the interior of supposedly pure concepts and of their truth content' (ND 138; 141-2). Adorno's argument, which operates strictly within conceptual thought, asserts that the very idea of a philosophical truth which does not possess social conditions of possibility, breaks down from within. It is not *philosophically* conceivable.

The thesis that moments of the real life process actively structure conceptual forms undermines the tendency of conceptual constructions to naturalize social relations of domination. It is when the social-historical conditions of conceptual construction are ignored that philosophy becomes incapable of a critical appropriation of social experience, and thus tends to slide easily into ideology. Adorno's discussion of dualism provides an example of this. The social conditions of possibility of dualism can be described in terms of the social constitution of meaning within social practices, primarily alienated labour, in which objects appear as indifferent means for subjectively posited ends. When philosophy fails to reflect on its social conditionedness, a form of subject-object dualism takes hold through the operation of a reifying inversion: philosophical dualism appears as an explanation, and hence justification, of why social processes are structured in a particular way,

Every concept, even that of being, reproduces the difference between thinking and what is thought. The difference was burned into theoretical consciousness by the antagonistic constitution of reality; insofar as it expresses this antagonistic constitution, the untruth of dualism is truth. Separated therefrom, the antagonism

would become the philosophical excuse which explains why it is eternal (ND 175; 176-177).

Adorno is here repeating the point that the reference to social experience is immanent in philosophical concepts. It is the lack of reflection on its conditionedness that deters thought from functioning critically. It is only as *self-critique* that thought attains to an awareness about itself, and this, in turn, is only possible as a critical reflection on the relations of domination that thought takes over from social processes,

Only the social self-reflection [*Selbstbesinnung*] of cognition accords to the latter objectivity, the objectivity that it misses as long as it obeys the social forces which prevail within it, without itself reflecting upon them [*ohne sie mitzudenken*]. Critique of society is the critique of cognition and vice versa (St 157-8).

Adorno's thesis that the lack of self-reflection falsifies and, potentially, ideologizes thought is also apparent in his persistent critique of Heidegger. Heideggerian philosophy is in fact, for Adorno, an archetype of that form of thinking whose falsity is due precisely to its lack of reflection on its relation to social processes. Although Heidegger acutely perceives the problematic status of central philosophical categories, such as subject and object, his consistent failure to reflect on the dependence of thought on social conditions meant that Heidegger would continually seek to transfigure aporias of social experience into problems of ontology. Heidegger continually takes categories which would seem to have an ineliminable social reference, such as anxiety (*Angst*) and treats them as exclusively ontological. In consequence, Heidegger can proceed as though concepts such as anxiety were capable of disclosing an ontological truth which would *not* also be a truth

about the social world in which such categories structure experience.⁸

The social-historical contextualization of conceptual constructions renders the relations of domination immanent in social experience accessible to critique. This contextualization is not relativistic, however, insofar as conceptual constructions are able to maintain a critical relation to experience, a relation which harbours a transcendent or 'emphatic' truth claim. Adorno discusses this in the essay 'Wozu noch Philosophie?',

Philosophy would have to no longer perceive itself as capable of the absolute, for which alone it would, after all, have to answer for. It would have to forbid the thought of that, in order not to betray it, and nevertheless let nothing divert it from the emphatic concept of truth. This contradiction is its element. It determines philosophy as negative (E 14).

Philosophy, Adorno claims, has always asserted its emphatic truth claim through a critical relation to social experience. Thus Descartes had deployed the notion of certainty critically, to convict scholasticism of the 'dogmatization of mere opinion [*des bloßen Meinens*]' (E 14). All major philosophical thinkers 'had their own truth in critique' (E 15). Philosophy's capability of a critical relation to social experience is dependent upon its recognition that it already bears the non-conceptual within it, that it depends on the object right down to its 'internal composition', and its 'immanent truth' (ND 4; 16). Unsealing the nonconceptual with concepts refers to the conceptual articulation which follows the structure of the object in order to reveal it as suppressed and

⁸'*Angst*, that supposed "existential", is the claustrophobia of the society which has become system' (ND p. 24; 34-5). See also Adorno's discussion of *Angst* in *Einleitung in die Soziologie*, p. 130.

disfigured.⁹

Thus far, we have seen how the reflection on the non-conceptual in the concept calls philosophy to a reflection on its conditionedness, that is, on the constitutive antagonisms taken over from social processes that are naturalized within conceptual construction. I have also hinted that dialectical philosophy can combine this reflection with the operation of an emphatic concept of truth which is revealed negatively, in the failure of a work to achieve a non-contradictory unity and coherence. That failure reveals antagonism as the truth about the social content taken up within conceptual construction. It is centrally important to note, however, that the linking of conceptual contradiction and social antagonism is not an arbitrary idealist postulate. This is a criticism which is often levelled against Adorno. Herbert Schnädelbach has argued that Adorno's critical strategy must rest either on an ontologizing of logic, which is only justifiable under the premises of absolute idealism, or the unity of method and thing is simply a 'logical metaphor'.¹⁰ Adorno is accused of confusing logical contradiction and 'antagonisms, ambivalences, tendencies of self-destruction, aporias'. If we recall the argument of the current section, however, a refutation of this critique can be easily constructed. Adorno does not arbitrarily ontologize logic, but, as we have seen, he demonstrates from within the sphere of the concept the necessary dependence of conceptual construction on the nonconceptual. This claim is that concepts are not pure, constituting categories,

⁹'The cognitive utopia would be to unseal the nonconceptual with concepts, without making it equal to concepts' (ND 10; 21).

¹⁰Herbert Schnädelbach, 'Die Aktualität der "Dialektik der Aufklärung"', in *Zur Rehabilitierung des animal rationale: Vorträge und Abhandlungen 2* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992) 231-250; p. 246.

but experiential-expressive forms which include social content as a forming moment. *If this argument goes through, then there can be no ultimate distinction between immanent philosophical problems and social antagonisms.* It is because Schnädelbach does not engage with Adorno's arguments in *Negative Dialectics* that he fails to notice that Adorno's critical strategy is founded on an immanent demonstration of the impossibility of logical purity. It is rather Schnädelbach, then, who arbitrarily postulates the independence of conceptual thought, and thus perpetuates the 'semblance of the being in itself' of the concept (ND 11; 23). Adorno's argument is that pure concepts are not only empty, but also unthinkable without reference to real experience.¹¹ But, as we saw with the discussion of Adorno's notion of 'metacritique', this means that social experience figures as the condition of the possibility of concepts. The metacritique of epistemology stipulates that there can be no ultimate distinction between epistemology and social theory. The structure and operation of cognitive forms is dependent upon real, social processes of object constitution. Adorno does not ontologize logic, as the charge of idealism suggests. Rather, he demonstrates that logic contains within it, and is unthinkable without, a reference to a certain structure of social experience. 'Without the "something" [*ohne das Etwas*]', Adorno asserts, 'formal logic cannot be thought. It cannot be cleansed of its metalogical rudiment' (ND 135; 139). This dependence on the nonconceptual is exactly what Adorno's oft misunderstood account of the mimetic element of cognition is seeking to articulate. In the next section, we will see in what sense the disclosure of philosophical contradictions can function as social critique.

Truth and Contradiction

¹¹See Simon Jarvis, *Adorno*, pp. 159ff.

A central thesis of *Negative Dialectics* is that the self-critique of philosophy, which is the form in which philosophy 'lives on', reflects on and renders explicit the necessary failure of philosophy's emphatic truth claim in the antagonistic state of collective life. Because of its dependence on social conditions, that failure is not contingent. It discloses a fundamental truth about social processes. Dialectic, as Adorno puts this in his book on Husserl, exacts the truth from philosophy 'through the confession of its own untruth' (ME 14). In striving for consistency and coherence, a philosophical work embodies an emphatic truth claim. But because the work embodies contradictions, the realization of that truth claim requires the work's own *Untergang*. It is in 'going under' in its truth claim, that a work reveals the social antagonism taken up within its construction. Because it holds on to that truth claim, philosophy maintains its link with metaphysical transcendence, but it can only reveal that truth claim as what is impossible in the present, and thus in the sign of philosophy's very failure. *Metaphysical truth shows up negatively, as both necessary and inaccessible, in the demonstration of the failure of philosophy in the present.* In his critique of Kant and Hegel in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno demonstrates how the social antagonisms that inform their philosophical constructions lead to the failure of the claim to coherence, consistency, unity and unanimity embodied in their philosophical works themselves. Because this failure reflects the dependence of philosophy on social processes, it cannot be corrected philosophically.

I want to try to explicate this thesis by means of a comparison with *Aesthetic Theory*. Art expresses the truth about social experience through the failure of aesthetic reconciliation within it. This is a claim I shall defend shortly. Philosophy expresses an equivalent truth through the contradictoriness of its conceptual categories. Neither art nor philosophy, therefore, can truly 'succeed', and in this, they articulate the truth about social experience. If my argument is correct,

then the critical strategies embodied in *Negative Dialectics* and *Aesthetic Theory* must be seen as running parallel to each other. It is significant that those who have defended the communicative turn as a solution to the aporias of first generation critical theory have consistently tended to miss this parallelism, and have almost always made the subsequent error of assuming that what Adorno says about mimesis in *Aesthetic Theory* is the *normative basis* on which he is ‘criticizing’ conceptual thought in *Negative Dialectics*.¹² From this mistake, it is but a short step to the claim that Adorno had overemphasised the ‘objectivizing’ function of conceptual thought, and had therefore ‘failed to see’ that a mimetic component was already implicit in the domination-free interaction constitutive of intersubjective communication.¹³ The central importance of mimesis in the critical function of art derives from its making possible a form of non-subsumptive judging, which challenges the universal domination of the exchange principle in the name of an ends-directed reason attuned to the particularity of particulars.¹⁴ Just as conceptual thought is necessarily mimetic, so mimesis harbours a cognitive component, which results from the meaningful configuration of

¹²Hence, according to Albrecht Wellmer, Adorno is arguing in *Negative Dialectics* for the self-transcendence of the concept, which is the process by which conceptual thought acquires a ‘mimetic’ quality. See his ‘Truth, Semblance and Reconciliation’, in *The Persistence of Modernity*, p. 4. Naturally, Wellmer claims that mimetic forms of behaviour are those which are distinctively aesthetic. In a similar vein, Axel Honneth argued that Adorno identified conceptual thought with instrumental rationality, and could only find an alternative to this in the ‘mimetic knowledge reactivated in the form of artwork’, ‘Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas’ Critique of Adorno’, *Telos* 39 (1979) 45-61; p. 50.

¹³See Albrecht Wellmer, ‘Truth, Semblance and Reconciliation’, p. 13; Axel Honneth, ‘Communication and Reconciliation’, p. 54.

¹⁴See Jay Bernstein’s essay, ‘Constellations of Concept and Intuition’, in his *The Fate of Art: Aesthetic Alienation from Kant to Adorno and Derrida* (Cambridge: Polity Press; 1991).

elements in the artwork.¹⁵ Art is rationality, Adorno argues, ‘which criticizes rationality, without withdrawing from it’ (ÄT 87). The ‘telos of cognition’ which, Adorno argues, is served by mimesis, is critique, the determinate negation of existing society (ÄT. 86-7). I want to argue that the type of cognition made accessible by art is *not* a critique of conceptual thinking, but a critique of those same antagonisms of social experience which dialectical philosophy uncovers through the analysis of concepts. Adorno saw the principal cause of these antagonisms as the exchange principle.¹⁶ The critique of the exchange principle in alienated art runs parallel to that critique of the exchange principle which is articulated *conceptually* in terms of the dialectic of identity and non-identity. Philosophy and art, Adorno asserts, ‘converge in their truth content: *the progressing, self-unfolding truth of the artwork is no other than that of the philosophical concept*’ (ÄT 197 [my italics]). In its critique of the neutralization of the concept, that is, its reduction to pure classification, *Negative Dialectics* does not draw upon normative criteria borrowed from the aesthetic realm, but rather constructs this critique through an immanent articulation of the experience taken up in concepts. It is deeply mistaken, as we shall see, to portray Adorno as identifying the instrumental reason embodied in the exchange principle with conceptual thought, since it is a central aim of *Negative Dialectics* to show that philosophical reason is *inherently critical*, and even in its disfigured form, this critical potential cannot be entirely eliminated. Thus whereas, in art, it is the cognitive component of mimesis which enables art to function as critical reason, it is the mimetic component

¹⁵‘Enduring mimesis, the nonconceptual affinity of what is subjectively produced to its non-positing other, determines art as a form of cognition, and to that extent on its part as “rational”’ (ÄT pp. 86-7).

¹⁶‘Artworks are placeholders of the things which are no longer distorted by exchange, which are no longer prepared by profit and the false need of devalued humanity’ (ÄT 337).

of cognition which makes philosophical truth claims work - not as the critique of the concept - but as the critique of society.

The central structural similarity between art and philosophy concerns the fact that artworks, like philosophical concepts, are congealed structures of (antagonistic) social experience. This experiential content, which, prior to interpretation, is taken up within philosophy as contradictions of conceptual construction, occurs in art as problems of form,

Artworks are real as answers to the query-form (*Fragegestalt*) of what comes to them from outside. Their own tension is cogent in relation to the external one. The basic strata of experience which motivate art, are related to the objective world from which they shrink back. The unresolved antagonisms of reality return in artworks as immanent problems of form. This, and not the insertion of objective moments, is definitive of the relation of art to society (ÄT 16).

Artistic materials, like concepts, are already shot through with social content (ÄT 512). Thus the relation between form and content cannot be one of external synthesis. Because the content taken up in the artwork is a bearer of empirical meaning, form must be conceived as the expression-articulation of this content. Art, Adorno suggests, enables social antinomies to become a 'dialectic of forms', and - just as is intended by the 'self-yielding' of the concept - through the synthesizing frame of the artwork to 'help them to speak' (ÄT 345). Adorno strenuously denies that the social-critical role of art is determined by the extent to which it explicitly adopts a political position. The political stance of an artwork is an 'epiphenomenon', which can only detract from its social truth content (ÄT 344). What counts for the functioning of an artwork as social critique is not the content, or subject matter of a work. Its social-critical element is determined solely by the way in which

social antagonisms are taken up within artistic synthesis, and articulated as immanent problems of aesthetic coherence and unity. Like philosophical concepts, the materials deployed by art embody sedimented social and historical experience, and it is the antagonistic nature of that experience which generates problems of form. Because it does involve a synthesis of elements, art is *begriffsähnlich ohne Begriff* (concept-like without concepts) (ÄT 148).

The aporetic character of the artwork in society is determined by its being both autonomous and *fait social* (social fact) (ÄT 16). The artwork appears as a self-subsistent, autonomous entity, a pure being in itself. But the artwork is also necessarily a process, in which social content is congealed. Thus the independence of artworks is semblance or *Schein*. The thesis of the impossibility of art's autonomy recalls the undermining of conceptual purity within philosophical reason. Just as the search for conceptual purity leads philosophy ever more surely to a replication of existing social conditions, the abstract assertion of its autonomy would render art heteronomous. Art becomes a social item in the same movement whereby it becomes autonomous, which is achieved through art's opposition to society (ÄT 335). The autonomy of art is realized solely in the manner in which aesthetic synthesis permits a critical reflection on what the artwork takes over from social experience. The illusory separation of the conceptual and the nonconceptual, which is undermined by the immanent critique of the concept, recurs in art as the dichotomy of rationality and sensuousness. Art, Adorno argues, 'must work against that separation [i.e. of rationality and sensuousness] through the critique which is posed objectively within it in effigy'. The untrue, against which art is directed, is 'not rationality, but the stiff opposition of rationality to the particular' (ÄT 151). Because art is a sedimentation of social content, it resists the distinction

between purely logical/conceptual forms and empirical content.¹⁷ Adorno expresses this by saying that art embodies ‘an archaic integration of logic and causality’ (ÄT 207). Both art and philosophy proclaim the dependence of modes of subsumption on socially structured meaning. Just as there is no conceptual cognition without the nonconceptual which brings in social content, there can be no aesthetic unity without the meaningful particular which bears social mediation within it. The unthinkability of concepts without the nonconceptual has its counterpart in aesthetics in the form of the dependence of determinate on reflective judging. Reflective judging, the attunement between mind and world prior to categorial classification, renders subsumption dependent upon a pre-given donation of sense. This reflective attunement is a condition of the possibility of meaningful subsumption, not a call for a different or ‘complete’ reason. In the artwork, as the ‘refuge of mimetic behaviour’ (ÄT 86), the dependence of determinate on reflective judgment is explicitly thematized through the attempt to construct an internal meaningfulness among the work’s elements, thereby allowing form to emerge as the sedimentation of content, rather than through the subordination of content to external (e.g. social and political) categories. That the reflective attunement to the object is a condition of subsumptive judging is something which Kant appeared to recognize in the *Critique of Judgement*. Adorno’s argument concerning the nonconceptual in *Negative Dialectics* is that the conditionedness of the concept undermines the very distinction between a priori forms of conceptual classification and empirical meaningfulness. The concept is unthinkable, not merely empty, without a donation of sense from the object. The artwork allows the always already cognitive potential of reflective attunement, or mimesis, to come to expression. In philosophy, it is the always already mimetic nature of cognition which is thematized. This point, as

¹⁷See Jay Bernstein, ‘Constellations of Concept and Intuition’, p. 202.

we shall see, is integral to understanding why art and philosophy must 'go under' in the realization of their truth content.

Artworks become semblance through the demand for aesthetic unity. At the same time, it is only through the claim to unity and coherence that art is able to function as a 'determinate antithesis' of experience (ÄT 235). In order to achieve the unity required for aesthetic authenticity, the artwork must establish a cohesive order among the social antagonisms which infiltrate it as problems of aesthetic synthesis. This unity is semblance, but it is only as semblance that art is able to adopt a critical relation to social experience. Lambert Zuidervaart argues that this involves artworks in a dialectic of double illusion and double revelation,

Though required for authenticity, unity makes artworks doubly illusory. It lets artworks pose as integral and autonomous entities, even though they have absorbed heterogeneous moments, and it lets artworks suggest that contemporary society is not antagonistic, even though it is. Aesthetically meaningful works feign a unity that cannot be fully achieved so long as society remains antagonistic. At the same time, however . . . [t]he unity in authentic works reveals and criticizes the divisive unity of an administered society. Because of the disunity within artistic unity, unified works disclose true unity as a possibility rather than as something actually achieved.¹⁸

Here we see clearly how the determinate negation embodied in artworks can be conceived as parallel to that which occurs in philosophy. The truth claim of philosophy, as we saw, is maintained

¹⁸Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory: The Redemption of Illusion* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 179.

in its holding fast to unity and coherence, which brings to full articulation the immanent contradictions which render that claim untenable. Hence success for immanent critique, Adorno argues, is not the construction that reconciles contradictions through a deception of harmony, but that which ‘expresses negatively’ the idea of harmony, in that it presses contradictions, purely and intransigently, into its innermost structure (P 23). It is this negative expression of harmony that constitutes the transcendent truth claim of philosophy against antagonistic society. Similarly, each artwork, Adorno argues, must give the impression (*vorgaukeln*) of possessing an ‘undiminished unity’, but ‘confronted with antagonistic reality’, any claim to aesthetic unity will be revealed as *Schein*,

[A] more penetrating analysis will actually uncover fictions within aesthetic unity, whether it be that the parts do not willingly submit themselves to that unity, that such a unity is imposed on the parts, or whether it be that the moments are tailored to unity in advance, and are not at all truly moments. The many in the artwork is no longer what it was, but is prepared, as soon as it enters the space of the artwork; aesthetic reconciliation is thereby condemned as aesthetically unsound (ÄT 160-1).

Whereas the unity and coherence claimed in philosophical works are negated philosophically, in terms of conceptual contradiction, the aesthetic unity claimed by artworks is negated according to immanent aesthetic criteria (as ‘aesthetically unsound’). The ‘success’ of an artwork *as* determinate negation, is dependent upon its ability to articulate, to bring to full expression, the dissonant moments within it. And art achieves that expression only as the implacable striving for unity. In a ‘profound artwork’, argues Zuidervaart, antagonisms are brought to the surface and placed in the horizon of a possible reconciliation. By virtue of a ‘nonrepressive synthesis’ of antagonisms,

artworks ‘oppose a world where antagonisms are forcibly integrated’.¹⁹ Albrecht Wellmer has described this characteristic of art in terms of an antinomy at the heart of aesthetic synthesis. Art can only be true to reality in that it shows reality as unreconciled, antagonistic and divided against itself. But it is only able to bring the antagonistic state of reality to full expression by generating the semblance of reconciliation, that is, by the ‘non-violent aesthetic synthesis of disparate elements’.²⁰ This means that the way in which art recapitulates the ‘spell of reality’ allows it to claim a certain freedom from that spell, and this freedom enables the spell of reality to be judged negatively according to an aesthetic truth claim: ‘the spell which art lays around the *membra disiecta* of reality through unity, is borrowed from reality and transforms reality into the negative appearance of utopia’ (ÄT 196). Because its truth content emerges in determinate negation, the demonstrated impossibility of aesthetic reconciliation in the present, the artwork itself ‘goes under’ in its truth content (ÄT 199). In its determinate negation, the semblance of the artwork is ‘rescued’ as the semblance of truth (ÄT 198).²¹

In the same way that the truth of a philosophical work emerges where the subjective intention of the philosopher ‘goes under’, Adorno stresses the distinction between the truth content of an artwork and the ‘consciousness and will’ of its creator (ÄT 193). The articulation of the truth

¹⁹Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, p. 200.

²⁰Albrecht Wellmer, ‘Truth, Semblance and Reconciliation’, p. 9.

²¹An exemplary account of how the failure of aesthetic reconciliation expresses a truth about society has been given by Jay Bernstein in his essay *Fragment, Fascination and Damaged Life: “The Truth about Hedda Gabler”*, in M. Pensky (ed.), *The Actuality of Adorno* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997). Bernstein’s essay is an interpretation of Adorno’s reflections on Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*, in *Minima Moralia* (MM § 58). Adorno’s reading of *Hedda Gabler*, Bernstein argues, depicts aesthetic beauty as revealed negatively through the denunciation of the *real* negativity of the social world.

content of art requires the intervention of 'interpreting reason' (*deutende Vernunft*). Theoretical engagement with the artwork is demanded by the fact that works are 'riddles': artworks both 'say something' and, in the same breath, 'hide' what they say (ÄT 182). It is because of this entwinement of truth content and semblance that the truth content can only be articulated and comprehended by critique (ÄT 194). This depiction of the critical, theoretical engagement with art as the interpreting of riddles, is strongly reminiscent of the conception of philosophical interpretation which Adorno expounded in his 1931 essay 'Die Aktualität der Philosophie'. The 'answer' to riddles furnished by philosophical interpretation, Adorno insisted in this essay, does not give the 'meaning' of the riddle, rather it sublates the questions contained in the riddle itself, such that the truth of the riddle emerges in its determinate negation.²² Hence philosophical interpretation, Adorno asserts, is only possible as dialectic, in which the hidden, inner contradictions of a work are brought to full expression. Interpretation uncovers the antagonisms which lie beneath the work's professed claim to unity and coherence. The truth of a riddle emerges in that moment in which the riddle is simultaneously lit up in a flash and sublated (*aufgehoben*).²³ It is significant in this context that Adorno claims that the truth of the artwork is both commensurable with philosophical interpretation, and coincides, according to its idea, with philosophical truth (ÄT 197). Further, the opposition of art to the concept itself requires concepts (ÄT 148, 201). Art, that is, can only work as determinate negation insofar as its truth content can be articulated theoretically. Art requires theory, and theory is understood as the articulation of the experience stored within the artwork (ÄT 185). In order to elucidate its truth content, aesthetic experience 'must become philosophy' (ÄT 197). This demonstrates clearly why

²²'Die Aktualität der Philosophie', p. 338.

²³'Die Aktualität der Philosophie', p. 335.

it is fundamentally mistaken to divide up Adorno's treatment of philosophy and art as a critique of the 'violence' of conceptual thought and the rescue, through the aesthetic, of the salvific, reconciling power of mimesis.²⁴ I suggest that philosophy and art, can be understood, instead, as parallel forms of critique, in which the entwinement of cognition and mimesis makes the truth claims of both forms of discourse work as the critique of social experience. Art does not furnish the normative ideal which is missing in conceptual thinking. Rather, like philosophy, it uncovers social antagonisms within the horizon of a transcendent truth claim, thus allowing for a critical-negative experience of the social order of which it is a part.

'Models' of Dialectical Critique

1) Kant: The Antinomical Structure of Freedom

I have argued that there is a parallel between contradictions within philosophical works and the failure of aesthetic reconciliation within the artwork. The dependence of both philosophy and art on social meaning, means that the articulation of philosophical and aesthetic truth claims is dependent upon the meanings made available within social experience. Within antagonistic society,

²⁴This is brought out further in the fact that Adorno emphasises that there is a strategy of *Wiedergutmachen*, 'making up for' what each discourse does to the 'other', 'nonidentity', in both art and philosophy. In art, *Wiedergutmachen* is effectuated by the inclusion of crude materials which are not aesthetically prepared (ÄT 383). In philosophy, *Wiedergutmachen* is linked to the critical reflection on social content within concepts (ND 19; 31). In both cases, what is 'made up for' is the *social disfigurement* of the object through the potential of a critical stance to that disfigurement.

I argued, the emphatic truth claims of philosophy and art can only be affirmed negatively, through the very failure of the work to achieve an aesthetic reconciliation or philosophical unity and unanimity. I want now to flesh out this thesis by looking in greater detail at the ‘micro-critiques’ in *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno’s intention here is to show how the contradictions within philosophical works disclose antagonisms within social experience. Philosophical contradictions, Adorno is suggesting, are not ‘false’, they are both necessary and objectively true. *Through its contradictions, the philosophical work reveals its truth content as the critique of society.* That Adorno focusses on the truth content of philosophical works should make abundantly clear why he cannot be said to be formulating a sociology of knowledge. As Adorno continually stressed, the sociology of knowledge fails to take the truth content of philosophy seriously. The sociology of knowledge, as for example in Karl Mannheim’s *Ideology and Utopia*, attempts to explicate the social basis of philosophical categories whilst overlooking the critical relation to social experience which is immanent in philosophical truth claims. The notion of ideology, Adorno argues, makes sense only in relation to truth or untruth (ND 197; 198). It cannot be reduced to the scientific function of the social classification of beliefs. This is also Durkheim’s error. Cognitive categories are not *merely* expressions of dimensions of social being, they also harbour an emphatic truth claim which permits a critical relation to social experience. Because ideology is inextricably linked to truth, it always discloses a truth *about* society - more specifically, about society’s untruth - and hence truth is not reducible to various forms of truth *within* society. The determination of the ideological nature of philosophical systems, then, demands a philosophical inquiry into their truth. As Adorno puts this, ‘[i]t is only possible to pass over [*übergehen*] philosophically into social categories through the deciphering of the truth content of philosophical categories’ (ND 198; 198). It is exactly this

transition (*Übergang*) which Adorno is seeking to accomplish in the philosophical critiques in *Negative Dialectics*.

The chapter on Kant in *Negative Dialectics* is subtitled 'On the Metacritique of Practical Reason'. Metacritique, as we saw earlier, is concerned with the social conditions of possibility of concepts. This chapter draws together a seemingly disparate collection of meditations on Kant's concept of freedom. All of Adorno's arguments, however, are unified around a common, underlying theme. Adorno intends to show that the contradictions and aporias within Kant's concept of freedom disclose a truth about the antagonistic nature of society. Adorno's arguments include the familiar claims for the nonconceptual in the concept, which, I shall argue, prevents the drawing of an ultimate distinction between intelligible freedom and social freedom, and arguments concerning the objective truth of the third antinomy. Kant had argued that the contradictions in which reason becomes embroiled when it tries to think the unconditioned were *necessary*, not a mistake of thinking. He termed dialectic, which was to unfold these contradictions, a 'logic of semblance [*Schein*]'.²⁵ Kant argued that *Schein* was a result of the failure to distinguish between the regulative and constituting functions of cognition. It originates when a subjective necessity (the need to think the unconditioned) is taken for an objective necessity, that is, as a determination of things in themselves.²⁶ Adorno's argument is that a rigorous interpretation of *Schein* will show it to be *objectively* true. *Schein* is objectively true in the sense that it is the necessary form in which social antagonisms infiltrate conceptual construction. This means that the distinction between the regulative and the constitutive, and hence the possibility (or impossibility) of a coherent

²⁵*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 308.

²⁶*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 310.

philosophical articulation of the unconditioned, will be revealed from the perspective of metacritique as resting on social conditions of possibility.

The chapter on Kant in *Negative Dialectics* is premised on a refusal to treat concepts as atemporal, mental categories. At work in Adorno's arguments is both what I called the Durkheimian view, that is, the thesis that concepts are forged within, and express dimensions of collective experience, and the Hegelian thesis that concepts are in a contradictory relation with one another, and that contradictory relation derives from the objective contradictoriness of things. Adorno begins by tackling the positivist attempt to reduce the thesis of the possibility of free will to the realm of 'pseudoproblems'.²⁷ The seeming intractability of the problem does not lessen the need to raise it, nor can there be a satisfactory answer which merely glosses over its 'either-or' character. However, the 'thesis of the pseudoproblem' also harbours an important truth. This is that the concept of freedom always embodies a reference to the social conditions in which freedom could be ascribed to concrete agents,

As soon as the question of free will is asked in terms of the decision of the individual, as soon as the question detaches these decisions from their context, the individual from society, it is subservient to the fallacy of the absolute, pure being in itself: limited subjective experience usurps the dignity of what is most certain (ND 213; 213).

What is 'most certain', is that individuals are *not* free in society in its present form. The claim that the question of free will cannot be asked about the empirical subject in isolation, essentially because

²⁷The positivist charge, in simple terms, is that philosophical problems which cannot be translated into verifiable statements are, in effect, meaningless.

subjects are always already socially mediated, immediately suggests that the question of free will necessitates a reflection on social conditions. Adorno's strategy vis à vis the question of free will is to attempt to retain its urgency and inescapability, whilst locating it historically and socially. Reflection on the question of free will, he argues, does not abolish the question, but leads it towards the philosophy of history, turning it into a question of the form: 'why have the two theses "the will is free" and "the will is unfree", become an antinomy?' (ND 218; 217). It did not occur to Kant that freedom itself might be essentially historical, not merely as a concept, but in terms of its 'experiential content', and that it could once again be 'wholly extinguished' (ND 218; 218).

We can already see here the Durkheimian and Hegelian strands of Adorno's argument at work. Adorno deploys the two as part of a unified argument, but they can be analytically separated as follows. In a first step, freedom is de-reified, and located, as a social-historical category, within a particular structure of social experience, within which freedom comes to appear as a frame for human action. In a second step, freedom is seen to be not a self-subsistent concept, but constituted through an antithetical relation with other elements of the social whole. To understand what freedom is, it is necessary to comprehend the relations of tension which link it to other concepts. These are not purely conceptual relations, but are articulations of constitutive social antagonisms. The relation of tension in which freedom stands means that it can only be conceived in determinate negation, 'in accordance with the concrete form of unfreedom' (ND 231; 230). Freedom is not an anthropological constant, but rather denotes the possibility of a critical perspective on unfreedom.²⁸ It turns concrete 'in the changing forms of repression, as resistance to these forms of repression'.

²⁸ Adorno says elsewhere that freedom is the 'polemical counter-image' to suffering wrought by social coercion (ND 223; 222).

Hence there has been as much free will, 'as human beings wanted to free themselves' (ND 265; 262). The concepts of freedom and unfreedom are furthermore not static but exhibit a movement, underlying which is a real social process. Adorno describes this process as the abolition of freedom by integration,

The process of the becoming self-subsistent [*Verselbstständigung*] of individuals, a function of the exchange society, terminates in the abolition of that self-subsistence through integration. What produced freedom transforms into unfreedom. The individual was free as the economic bourgeois subject, insofar as autonomy was demanded by the economic system for its functioning. The subject's autonomy is thereby already potentially negated in its origin (ND 262; 259).

The concept of freedom is forged within a particular form of social experience, whose antagonistic structure establishes freedom in a conflictual relation with other categorial features of the whole. Further, the conceptual order is transformed as these conflicts are worked through at the level of social processes.²⁹

The nonconceptual in the concept of freedom, Adorno argues, is revealed in Kant's famous 'fact of reason'. The consciousness of determination through the objective form of law, Kant argues, 'forces itself upon us [*sich für sich selbst uns aufdringt*]' as a synthetic, a priori proposition.³⁰ What Kant has described here, Adorno argues, is simply the 'fact of conscience', the coercive character (*Zwangscharakter*) by which norms appear to agents as unavoidable (PM 121, ND 271; 267-8). It

²⁹See also, in this regard, the discussion of the transformations in the concept of causality (ND 267-8; 264-5).

³⁰*Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), pp. 141-2.

is the psychological phenomenon of conscience, the internalization of the authority of society, that is the basis of our consciousness of the moral law. The normative structure of Kant's moral law is thus dependent on the *empirical givenness* of the fact of obligation. What *makes* this givenness appear as unavoidable, as a 'fact of reason', is the organization of society. And hence, only insofar as society is 'well organized' will the moral law be given as a 'fact' (PM 122-3).

It is in the third antinomy that Kantian philosophy most perspicuously discloses a truth about the antagonistic nature of society. Adorno argues that Kant cannot resolve this antinomy, which is in fact an objective antinomy, by means of the distinction between the intelligible and the empirical. Kant claimed to have resolved the problem through the conception of freedom as a 'pure transcendental idea', whose object could not be given in experience. Causality through freedom is said to be possible when an action is seen from the point of view of the intelligible realm, yet as an appearance in the world of sense, any action will also be attributed a determinate material cause.³¹ But significantly, Kant's very formulation cannot avoid building into freedom the *social experience of unfreedom which is constitutive of life within bourgeois/civil society*. Kantian freedom, that is to say, is *inherently contradictory*, and it is in his failure to construct a non-contradictory concept of freedom that Kant articulates a truth about society. It is because society is antagonistic that Kant is unable satisfactorily to resolve the third antinomy, and hence the truth content of Kantian philosophy will be rescued in the uncovering of the social processes which determine the contradictory formulation of that philosophy.

In spite of his claims to have resolved the third antinomy, Adorno argues, Kant's philosophy remains antinomical, in that, in accord with the total scheme, the concept of freedom cannot be

³¹*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, pp. 489, 492.

presented otherwise than as repression (ND 256; 253). What this refers to is the way that Kantian freedom is conceived in opposition to the sensuous, and is contrasted with the satisfaction of material needs. Given this opposition, any autonomous action will possess a coercive character (*Zwangscharackter*), because it cannot be effectuated without a repression of sensuousness (PM 121). Hence all the concepts by means of which Kant attempted to fill the chasm between the free will and material human beings - law, constraint, duty, respect - themselves bore the marks of repression (ND 232; 231). Within the concept of freedom itself, therefore, there is articulated its mediation with unfreedom which prevents any genuine freedom within antagonistic society. Adorno gives a great deal of attention to the seemingly paradoxical formulations of freedom given by Kant, such as the claim in the first critique that freedom is a 'particular type of causality', and the claim of the second critique that we become conscious of practical laws as prescriptions incorporating 'necessity'.³² It is precisely through these formulations that Kant articulates the contradictory entwinement of the concepts of freedom and causality, and hence furnishes the key for unlocking the antagonistic structure of society. Kant's concept of freedom seems to apply to the subject 'the very same law which as an expanded causal category becomes determinism' (ND 264; 261). The substance of the freedom of the autonomous subject 'is as one with the "must", with the law, with absolute domination'. Kant 'construes even freedom as a special case of causality' (ND 250; 248). That Kant cannot even formulate the concept of free action without drawing upon notions derived from causality and legality reflects the social experience of unfreedom with bourgeois/civil

³²See respectively *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 429; *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft*, p. 139.

society.³³ Kant's work registers a truth about the impossibility of freedom within this society. The enormous influence of Kant's critique of reason far beyond its epistemological content, Adorno claims, can be ascribed to the 'faithfulness' with which Kant's work registered the state of the 'experience of consciousness' (ND 381; 374). The experience (*Erfahrung*) which Kant's work registers concerns the suppressed tensions of the practices of bourgeois/civil society, in which the surface veneer of formal freedom coexists with an underlying structure of generalized social coercion. Whatever freedom is ascribed to individuals is rendered ineffectual through the operation of abstract laws over which individuals have no control. That freedom, on Kant's own admission, is never to be historically experienced, but rather only postulated, registers the coexistence within bourgeois/civil society of the formal, but ineffectual, freedom of legal personality, and the genuine unfreedom wrought by social and economic relations. The third antinomy is the form in which antagonistic social experience, the *real* contradiction between particular (the possibility of self-realization) and universal (social and economic structures) is taken up within conceptual construction (ND 264; 261). Kant's 'solution', the distinction between the intelligible and empirical character, registers the negativity of freedom within this society, that is, that freedom can only be exercised in opposition to the way individuals are shaped and structured within society. Individuals' empirical identities are not 'their own', ones they can freely affirm, shape and create. Against Kant's intentions, the intelligible character gives expression to the absolute incompatibility of freedom with the social processes determining the lives of individuals within bourgeois/civil society.

It is vital to note here that Adorno is not illicitly bringing in a social content from the outside

³³In his lectures on moral philosophy, Adorno refers to the 'contradiction which is difficult to comprehend', that 'in moral philosophy, in morality, which is defined by Kant precisely as the realm of freedom, nevertheless the talk is always of legality' (PM 120).

as a way of illuminating Kant's work. It is not simply the claim that Kant's work is really 'about' the conflicts of bourgeois/civil society. Rather, given that reason is always already mimetic, social experience will always inform the construction of philosophical categories. Kantian philosophy is already shot through with the experience of unfreedom constitutive of bourgeois/civil society, and it is the task of dialectic to demonstrate that this makes a philosophical work unable to resolve its contradictions. Kant's third antinomy, therefore, articulates a real conflict between the concepts of freedom and causality within social reality. Freedom can only be exercised negatively, in resistance to the way empirical identities are structured within society. Because concepts are always already mediated, we cannot draw an ultimate distinction between what appears in philosophy as an antithetical relation of concepts and what appears in social reality as a conflict between dimensions of social existence.

It is also necessary to note, however, that in its very failure to resolve its internal contradictions, Kantian philosophy is able to assert an emphatic truth claim which functions as a determinate negation of the unreconciled state of social reality in the present. Kant's relegation of the moral to the 'sober unity of reason' was thus Kant's 'bourgeois sublime' in spite of the reification of the will, insofar as it emphatically maintained the idea of morally pure action in the midst of false society, and the coercion exercised on subjects within that society (ND 239; 237). Kant 'rescues' positive freedom as an aporetic concept. It is 'thought up to conserve a spiritual being in itself in the face of nominalism and scientization' (ND 252; 249-50). It is the rescue of a 'residue'. But the ineliminability of this residue is all Kant needs in order to maintain freedom as a possibility, and hence as the ground for a critical stance to the coercive structure of social reality. Freedom is not revealed positively, but rather in negative form, as the possibility of resistance within

a non-free totality. The potential of freedom is maintained as an emphatic truth claim in the rigorous articulation of the contradictions which denote the failure of a consistent and unified philosophical theory of freedom in the present.

2) Hegel: The Irreconcilability of Universal and Particular

Adorno's critique of Hegel turns on those moments in Hegel's work where he deviates from the path of dialectic as immanent critique. The unity of method and *Sache* (thing/subject matter) presupposed by Hegelian dialectic postulates that dialectical thinking is to rigorously follow the structure and determinations of the object in its current form. The contradictions articulated by thought are the immanent contradictions of the object, and denote those points at which the object can only realize itself by transforming itself. Adorno's critique picks up on those points where Hegel deviates from the unity of method and *Sache* by essentializing contradiction, *thereby turning it into a postulated universal principle of explication which disguises the genuine antagonism of the contradictory*. In general terms, Hegel's deviation from the intentions of dialectic can be said to result from his separation of contradiction from social-historical mediation at a determinate point in the social-historical process. The 'force of the whole' that works in every single determination appears in Hegel as absolute spirit, rather than as 'itself the negative, the untrue', that is, as false society (ND 142; 145). Because it is the articulation of a socially and historically determinate structure of social experience, 'the philosophy of the absolute, total subject is particular' (ND 142; 145). Dialectical contradiction, in Hegel, is *infinitized* in the name of conceptual unity and coherence, and cannot function as a critique of the antagonistic nature of social processes. In

criticizing Hegel's infinitizing of what is socially and historically conditioned, Adorno reasserts the dependence of dialectical thinking on the changing structure of the object: '[d]ialectical reason's own essence has become and is transitory, like antagonistic society' (ND 141; 145). Hegel deviates from dialectic in his transforming of the negative revelation of truth in dialectic, as the critical reflection on society at a particular historical moment, into truth *an sich* - contradiction as the world's essence.

Kantian philosophy, as we saw, articulates social antagonisms in its failure to construct a concept a freedom which is not coercive. In his discussion of Hegel, Adorno focusses on those moments where the reconciliation between particular and universal within objective spirit fails. Hegel's philosophy attains its truth content in its admission that the particular must encounter the universal as coercive. It is where reconciliation proves impossible to carry through that Hegel's conceptual constructions articulate the constitutive antagonisms of civil society. It is the work's striving to 'succeed' as a conceptual formulation of positive reconciliation which enables it to bring these antagonisms to full expression, and thereby enables it to express deep social truths through its very failure.

The coercive nature of the reconciliation within objective spirit can be gleaned from the treatment of individual experience within Hegel's political philosophy. In stark contrast to the project of a 'science of the experience of consciousness' - the subtitle of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's justification of the political structures of ethical life fails to take individual experience seriously, treating its experience of the dominant universal instead as an 'unreconciled evil' (ND 307; 302). Hegel was 'oddly inconsistent' when he ascribed contingency and limitedness to individual experience - the 'stage of spiritual experience which animates his work' (ND 45; 55).

This is explicable only by the desire to ‘disempower’ the critical moment which is linked to the individual spirit. In its particularization, Hegel felt the contradictions between the concept and the particular. Hegel’s aversion to the truth content of individual experience is untenable, given his own affirmation of the extent to which the universal resides within the individual. Hence ‘individual consciousness is almost always, and *with good reason* [*mit Grund*] the unhappy consciousness’ (ND 45; 55 [my italics]). The expression *mit Grund* in this passage refers to what Adorno takes to be Hegel’s own implicit admission in the *Philosophy of Right* that the individual is justified in its experience of alienation vis à vis the universal. In his critique of Fries’ sentimentalism in the preface to the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel identifies its distinguishing feature as the ‘hatred of law’. Hegel goes on to say that the law is

mit Grund regarded as what is most hostile by that feeling which reserves its own discretion, by that conscience which identifies right with subjective conviction. The form of right as a *duty* and a *law* is felt to be a *dead, cold letter*, and a *shackle*; because it does not recognize itself in the law and thereby recognize its own freedom in it, because the law is the reason of the thing [*Sache*] and reason does not allow feeling to warm itself in the glow of its own particularity [*Partikularität*].³⁴

Had Hegel taken individual experience seriously, Adorno is arguing, he would have had to take into account the truth that is expressed about the universal in individuals’ experience of it as an alien, coercive force. The standpoint which Hegel is attacking here is the standpoint which later reappears at the end of the ‘Morality’ section in the guise of ‘conscience’. What characterizes conscience is

³⁴G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. R. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 17. Translation altered.

essentially the idea that subjective conviction is the 'sole determinant of the ethical nature of an action'.³⁵ Hegel goes on to argue that true ethical action is determined by the extent to which the individual has incorporated the law into its conviction. But what Hegel's critique of conscience does not consider, is *why* the law is encountered as alien, as a 'dead, cold letter' within individual experience, and what this expresses about the inadequacy of law itself. There is no genuine dialectic of experience here. The particular *as* particular is simply presumed to be in the wrong.³⁶ In his admission that the individual conscience, *mit Grund*, cannot recognize itself in the universal, in 'the actual world of right and the ethical', Hegel is asserting that the experience of alienation is *not* a mistaken or confused subjective apprehension that can be overcome in a dialectic of experience. It is expressive of a structural contradiction between universal and particular within antagonistic society, and hence conscience can only be *coerced* by law, it cannot be sublated, *aufgehoben*. In his own articulation of this, Adorno argues,

Hegel concedes that the reconciliation, the proof of which is the content of his philosophy, did not take place. If the legal order [*Rechtsordnung*] were not objectively alien and external to the subject, the antagonism which for Hegel is unescapable, might be placated by better insight; but Hegel had far too thoroughly experienced its implacability to put his trust in that possibility. Hence the paradox, that he teaches the reconciledness of conscience and the legal norm [*Rechtsnorm*]

³⁵*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 177.

³⁶This is the central difference between Hegel's treatment of conscience here and in the earlier *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where it is not discussed in an explicitly political context. The question, then, is why conscience must appear as 'evil' from the point of view of political structures.

and disavows it at the same time (ND 310; 305).

Hegel's work itself gives expression to the coercion that prevents the transfiguration of the false totality into the culmination of the *Weltgeist*. To effect this transfiguration, Hegel is forced to shift the negativity of the whole onto the shoulders of the 'ones who must obey it' (ND 304; 298). It is the individual conscience, that is, which is perceived as 'evil', rather than the coercive legality of bourgeois/civil society. The hypostasis of *Weltgeist* in Hegel, which Marx had critiqued as 'mystification', has its experiential content in the predominance of the whole, in the 'untransparent and irresistible' character of the universal (ND 304; 299).

Hegel's political philosophy recognized the antagonistic character of civil society, including the fact that the mechanisms of wealth production tend to produce an increasing 'rabble' (*Pöbel*) which cannot be integrated into the system of production.³⁷ By proposing the state as the solution to these antagonisms, Adorno argues, Hegel is expressing the insight that the contradictions of civil society cannot be resolved by its own self-movement (3 St 28). The state, Adorno claims, is 'appealed to in desperation as a seat of authority beyond this play of forces' (3 St 29). Hegel's philosophy of the state suspends the dialectic by *imposing* a positive unity on the antagonistic forces which constitute civil society. It is in this step that Hegel departs from the essential meaning of dialectic as critique. The 'transition into untruth', however, which Hegel's system makes by following its own logic, is not simply a judgement on Hegel, but is a 'judgement on reality' (3 St 29-30). In asserting an imposed unity, not one which follows from a genuine reconciliation of antagonistic forces, Hegel gives expression to the fact that there can be no reconciliation in the present which will not be experienced as coercion. The suspension of the dialectic was necessary,

³⁷*Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, § 245.

in order that objective spirit could be presented as a positive unity, in the reconciled whole of ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). But if Hegel had followed the critical claim of dialectic to its conclusion, he would have articulated the process whereby 'the contradiction becomes absolute', rather than 'the contradiction becoming alleviated in the absolute' (3 St 31).

The political primacy of the state, which embodies the coercion of the universal, is taken up within conceptual construction as a logical primacy of the universal. Just as the individual conscience is simply 'evil' (*böse*), a mere 'nothing' when it diverges from the political universal, so in logic the undetermined character of the particular outside of the universal is taken for the ground of its reduction outside of that determination to a $\mu\eta\ \delta\upsilon\nu$, a non-being (ND 328; 322). The identification of the particular with its mediation by the universal - the collapse of the particular into particularity - replicates the social-political reduction of the particular to a category, which only 'counts' as functional for the realization of universal needs. Both logically and politically, particulars are 'mere executive organs of the universal' (ND 343; 336). Thus, Hegel is able to integrate the political structures of *Sittlichkeit* so effortlessly with the categories of logic because logic has itself been constructed on the basis of a suppression of the antagonism between universal and particular. *Thus the untruth of the logical categories in which Sittlichkeit is expressed is one with the untruth of society.*³⁸ The truth of Hegel's political philosophy is a negative truth about society, and this is articulated in the impossibility of a reconciliation, rather than a suppression, of

³⁸The most conspicuously undialectical element of Hegel's thought, Adorno argues, is the figure of the negation of the negation as affirmation. It is by means of this logical figure that Hegel is able to postulate a positive, reconciled social-political unity. It is this principle, and Hegel's employment of it to construct a harmonious whole from the movement of contradiction, which is all the difference there is between the thesis that 'the whole is the true' (Hegel), and the thesis that 'the whole is the false' (Adorno).

the antagonism between particular and universal.

But, as we also saw with Kant, in and through its very falsity, Hegel's work maintains an emphatic truth claim, which functions as a determinate negation of the *real* unreconciled state of social reality. Even the false claim that the world is nonetheless a good world, Adorno asserts, 'contains within it the legitimate demand that the empirical world become a good and reconciled world, not merely in the Idea that is its opposite but in the flesh' (3 St. 30). The failure of the philosophical articulation of a positive, reconciled unity reveals existing social reality as negative, and hence 'judges' that reality from within the normative horizon of a possible reconciliation.

Transcendence: Metaphysics as Critique

I argued earlier that the truth concerning social experience is revealed in the inability of a philosophical work to resolve its internal contradictions. Through a comparison with the critical strategy of *Aesthetic Theory*, I argued that a critical relation to social experience is maintained in the distance between the failure of a work to resolve its contradictions and the emphatic truth claim which is nonetheless asserted within the work itself. My reconstruction of the analyses of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy in *Negative Dialectics* was intended to furnish a concrete demonstration of this thesis. I now want to link this argument with a discussion of what Adorno called 'identity thinking' (*Identitätsdenken*). In opposition to the view that Adorno is 'criticizing' identity thinking by contrasting it with another form of thinking which does not strive for identity, I will argue that identity thinking itself embodies the principle of critical reason. *It is only as the striving for identity*

*that thought can be critical.*³⁹ To make sense of this, what will need to be borne in mind is the deep entwinement of the truth and ‘failure’ of a philosophical work. Adorno takes over from Hegel the idea that the truth of a philosophical work emerges in the work’s *Untergang*, whereby it is shown that the work cannot redeem its truth content without negating itself. As we saw in the discussions of Kant and Hegel, a philosophical work reveals the truth about social experience in *negative form*, in and through the very failure of the work to resolve its internal contradictions. Thus far, I have been speaking of the striving of a work to resolve its contradictions in terms of the search for unity, unanimity, consistency and coherence. I suggested that it is through the search for unity that a work brings to full articulation the antagonisms of social experience taken up within conceptual construction. I now want to suggest that this ‘striving’ for resolution is what Adorno means by identity thinking. The critical standard by which identity thinking judges its failure is not another form of thinking, *but the very principle of identity itself.*⁴⁰ ‘Nonidentity’ denotes the *failure* of identity in the present, that is, it is itself the utopian claim of identity, expressed in the present in negative form. It is here, I believe, that the constitutive error of readings which locate the critical potential of negative dialectic in mimesis can be discerned. Mimesis is not the other of the conceptual, a different and distinct form of knowing, but rather denotes that type of affective attunement to objects which enables concepts to work as the critical-negative articulation of social

³⁹According to my reading, nonidentity must be understood in terms of the negative self-reflection of current social experience afforded in dialectical critique. The opposition to instrumental-ideological thinking, therefore, is achieved through the workings of dialectical critique as a whole, as it undermines the false self-conception of conceptual thinking, and *not* by positing a non-conceptual principle of critique.

⁴⁰This gives some indication of how grave the error is which equates identity thinking with purposive rationality. I will take this up in a subsequent chapter.

experience. Mimesis, I suggest, is to be understood as a moment of a critical strategy, according to which concepts are made to work to reveal the negativity of social experience.

In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno articulates the deeply aporetic structure of language. At times, Adorno seems to be asserting that critique is built into the very nature of language itself. At other moments, he appears to assert that the essence of language is ideology. We saw that this same idea of the dichotomous structure of language is central to the argument of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where the critical and the ideological components of language are uncovered through genealogical critique.⁴¹ I want to suggest that these two theses, in *Negative Dialectics*, form part of a unified critical strategy. Simplifying, we can say that the implicit thesis of Adorno's account of thinking and language is that *there is no ideology which is not accessible to critique, and there is no critique which is not the critique of a particular ideology*. The moment of ideology in thinking is often described by Adorno in terms of *Schein* (semblance). Hence 'the *Schein* of identity is inherent in thought itself' (ND 5; 17). Elsewhere, Adorno claims that 'identity is the primal form (*Urform*) of ideology' (ND 148; 151). It is lines such as these which, when read in abstraction, have been taken as proof that Adorno is assimilating conceptual thought to domination. This is clearly one-sided, since Adorno also clearly stresses the immanent negativity of conceptual thinking, and thus the impossibility of its *reduction* to ideology. Hence thought is said to be characterized by 'resistance', it is 'negative already' as a 'revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing'. Thought forms 'tend beyond that which is merely present (*bloß vorhanden*), is merely "given"' (ND 19; 30). Here, Adorno hints at the idea that the necessary failure of identity is implied in the very nature of conceptual thinking itself, and it is this which enables thought to work

⁴¹See chapter 1 of this work.

critically. Thus ‘critical germs’ are contained in the forms of judgement and syllogism, whose determinateness is always the ‘exclusion of that which they do not reach’ (ND 19; 30). At times, this expands into the strongly Hegelian claim of a critical dialectic built into language itself, as for example in the claim that the movement towards the absolute, the unconditioned, is already ‘involuntarily claimed in each succinct individual judgement’ (ND 20; 32). Adorno is here articulating at the level of language what we have already seen at work in the substantive critiques of *Negative Dialectics*. What we saw there in terms of the critical relation to social experience engendered in the failure of the claim of a philosophical work to unity, unanimity and coherence, is grounded here in the inherently critical nature of language, *which upholds a critical relation to the given in the very failure of a claim to identity expressed in the proposition*. The ideological element of conceptual thinking is equiprimordial with its critical element, since in asserting a claim to identity, thinking must also embody the recognition of the falsity of that claim: ‘The force that explodes the semblance of identity’, Adorno asserts, ‘is the force of thinking itself: the use of the “it is” of thinking shatters its nonetheless indispensable form’ (ND 149; 152). Adorno derives this notion of an inherently critical nature of language, as we shall see, from Hegel’s reading of the judgment (*Urteil*). Adorno takes from Hegel’s theory of the judgement an idea of critique *as founded on a tendency of ideology to undermine itself by way of its very self-articulation in language*. What will emerge in this analysis, is that the critical moment within philosophical works which is upheld in their very failure to resolve their contradictions, what I have been calling the emphatic or transcendent truth claim of a work, will be seen to be grounded in an *ought-to-be* (*Sollen*) which is shown to be ineliminable from the assertion of identity in the judgement. The emphatic truth claim, therefore, is rooted in a moment of transcendence within language - the need

for the absolute, the unconditioned - that is upheld in the failure of the claim to identity. In order to criticize identity thinking, then, dialectical critique does not need to step outside of it, nor does it need to go beyond it or supplement it with something else. All that it has to show is that identity thinking, in its very self-articulation, maintains an emphatic truth claim which is not reducible to the forms of identification of which thought is currently capable. Dialectical critique 'complies in principle' with the striving for identity, in order to show that the 'closed structure' claimed by a philosophical work cannot be sustained (ND 147; 150-1).

On what grounds, then, does Adorno assert that ideology, and the potential for the critique of ideology, is always already built into the operation of conceptual thinking? Adorno describes the moment of ideology in thinking in terms of a *Sollen* (ought) within the implicit identifying force of the copula: 'The copula says: It is so, not otherwise. The act of synthesis, for which the copula stands, indicates that it ought not to be otherwise - else the act would not be performed. The will to identity works in each synthesis' (ND 147-8; 151). In the section on 'World Spirit and Natural History', Adorno furnishes the ideological moment of thinking with an anthropological grounding in the principle of self-preservation. Self-preservation is the concrete social form of ideology, and is defined by the refusal of critical self-reflection on what exists. The content of self-preservation, Adorno asserts, is 'the tautology of identity: what ought to be is what is anyway' (ND 349; 342). What unites the ideological moment of identity and self-preservation is that thinking is reduced to a means for the satisfaction of material needs, and becomes incapable of a critical reflection on what exists. Adorno indicates that the ideological operation of identity can be linked to the purposive-rational imperatives of the system of production, and its 'fixation of the means as ends', and in

which 'life' figures as an end in itself.⁴² In the section 'Idealism as Rage' (ND 22-4; 33-5), the ideological moment in thinking is depicted in terms of the sublimation of an anthropological schema - the 'belly which has become mind' (*Geist*). Again, Adorno contrasts this with 'self-reflection' (*Selbstbesinnung*), in which thinking comes to reflect critically on its own operation, and hence opposes its reduction to a means for prevailing needs.

Adorno's account of the critical moment of conceptual thinking, that is, the perpetual possibility of undermining the claims to totality of ideology, draws heavily on Hegel's discussion of the inadequacy of the propositional form for the expression of what he called speculative truths. Hegel's discussion of the speculative proposition in the *Science of Logic* begins by evincing a suspicion concerning the identifying force of the copula in a simple judgement.⁴³ At the level of sense (*Sinn*), the proposition appears to deny the difference of subject and predicate, and to assert that both terms cannot be distinguished. But at the same time, at the level of the *form* of the proposition, the difference, or nonidentity, between subject and predicate is upheld. As Hegel puts this in the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, the form of a proposition itself contradicts a judgement of simple identity, since it 'promises' a distinction between subject and predicate.⁴⁴ By referring to the proposition as 'self-contradictory', Hegel means that it encompasses both identity and nonidentity. Judgement, Hegel argues, is inherently unstable. The identifying force of the copula posits not an

⁴²Adorno's argument here recalls Marx's analysis of the denigration of the *Gattungsleben* of human beings, i.e. productive activity, through its reduction to a means to the satisfaction of material needs. See the Paris Manuscripts, *Marx Engels Werke*, Ergänzung I (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968), p. 516.

⁴³*Science of Logic*, pp. 90ff.

⁴⁴*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 237.

external conjoining, but rather an internal union of subject and predicate. The copula ‘indicates that the predicate belongs to the *being* of the subject, and is not merely externally combined with it’.⁴⁵ But the copula also ‘promises’ the emergence of something different from the subject. Thus the type of belonging-together in question cannot be a simple, or abstract identity. Speculative thought accounts for the nonidentity within identity by reading the function of the copula as a movement of transition (*Übergehen*), as a being-becoming (*Sein-Werden*).⁴⁶ The judgement, Hegel suggests, embodies a demand, a *Sollen*, that the subject become identical with its predicate. The proposition as judgement (*Urteil*), when understood speculatively, can be seen already to possess the seeds of the critique of identity. The proposition ‘the actual is rational’, or ‘the actual is universal’ does not assert a positive identity. Nor does it simply assert that the predicate ‘inheres’ in the subject as one of its properties, or that the predicate subsumes (i.e. classifies) the subject under a universal determination. None of these notions can properly grasp the duality of unity and difference, of identity and nonidentity within the judgement. Hegel argues that what is asserted in the judgement is the dialectical movement which is the becoming-other of the subject, as the passing-over (*Übergehen*) into its truth.⁴⁷ What is already implied in a judgement of identity, but only intelligible when that judgement is understood in a speculative sense, is that the being of something lies in its

⁴⁵*Science of Logic*, p. 626.

⁴⁶This has been brilliantly argued by Michael Theunissen, in his *Sein und Schein: Die kritische Funktion der Hegelschen Logik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978), pp. 124ff; p. 431.

⁴⁷Identity in Hegel’s theory of judgement, argues Theunissen, takes the form of the ‘process/event (*Geschehen*) of truth as the passing over (*Übergehen*) of reality into its concept’, *Sein und Schein*, p. 439.

becoming.⁴⁸ The contradiction which animates the judgment, therefore, is that within it, *identity is expressible solely through nonidentity, as a Sollen*. This *Sollen* has its locus in the copula, as the passing over (*übergehen*) of the subject into its concept, and thus into its truth.

Adorno draws heavily on this account in his reading of the implicit critical force in a judgement of identity. In the simple judgement, 'a man is free', Adorno uncovers elements of identity and nonidentity which parallel the roles of sense and form in Hegel's discussion of the self-contradictory nature of the proposition.⁴⁹ The element of identity in the proposition, the identifying force which Adorno equates with the ideological moment of conceptual thinking, is depicted in terms of the necessary referential component of the concept. Adorno discusses this with regard to Kant's concept of 'humanity' (ND 258; 255). Just as the concept of humanity possesses an ineliminable empirical content, the reference to the totality of existing human beings, so the concept of freedom takes up within it the features of current practices which characterize them as 'free'. The relation of subject and predicate here appears as a simple (predicative) identity. However the element of nonidentity in the judgement, its critical moment, is depicted in terms of the capacity to point to a condition beyond the present, whereby in the judgement that 'a man is free', 'something impossible' is ascribed to him, that is, a quality which reveals as impossible the identity asserted in

⁴⁸A perfect illustration of this is given by Marx's reading of the contradictory essence of the proletarian class. The proletariat can only be what it is, that is, realize its essential determination, by abolishing the conditions of its own existence, conditions which are equivalent to those of a capitalist form of production. The proletariat is thus a living form which holds together within itself the two elements of identity and nonidentity, which can only be expressed in propositional form as abstract and opposed. Because it must become nonidentical with itself in order to achieve identity, the identity of the proletarian class can only be articulated as a *Sollen*.

⁴⁹The passage in questions occurs in *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 150-1; 153-4.

the judgement (ND 151; 154). The concept of freedom, as Adorno puts it, 'lags behind itself' as soon as one tries to apply it empirically. It both expresses and exceeds its empirical content in one and the same moment. Hence, 'it is not what it says' (ND 151; 154). This denotes the operation of the second, non-ideological *Sollen* within the judgement, in the demand that the subject ought to become equal to its concept.⁵⁰ This *Sollen* is not brought in from outside the judgement, but is imposed by the demand of the copula that the predicate adequately express the concept of the subject. The 'more' of the concept, the nonidentity within identity expressed by this *Sollen*, is the 'negativity' of the existing individual (ND 151; 154). In other words, the identity of the individual with its concept - freedom - is only determinable as becoming: the excess of the concept in relation to the individual is equally the nonidentity of the individual with itself. In order to be what it is, the individual, the empirical referent of the concept of freedom, must actualize the excess of the concept.⁵¹ Similarly, the concept of 'humanity' - in the formulation of the categorical imperative which states that humanity is to be treated as an end, and never merely as means - is both immanent and transcendent. It both takes up a determinate content (the totality of human beings), and at the same time judges this content negatively, through articulating its identity in terms of the possible 'realization of a concept of the human' (ND 258; 255). Because it can only assert identity as unrealized in the present, the being-as-ought-to-be expressed in the copula, the judgment takes on

⁵⁰The first, ideological *Sollen* in the judgement is that noted above, namely, the force in the copula which equates 'it is so' with 'it ought not to be otherwise' (ND 148; 151).

⁵¹This is what Hegel has in mind when, in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, he argues that it amounts to the same thing whether we take the object as the critical measure, the in itself, and 'test' our cognition in terms of its ability to grasp it, or whether we take the *concept* as the in itself of the object, and 'test' the object in terms of its ability to match up to the concept. The insufficiency of the object vis à vis its concept, is at the same time the *self-inadequacy of the object*, its nonidentity with itself. See the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. 71.

a critical relation to its empirical content through the demonstration of the failure of the ideological identity claim - the collapsing of *Sollen* into *Sein*. Here we see how, for Adorno, the emphatic truth claim maintained in the *Untergang* of a philosophical work is rooted in the very structure of conceptual thinking. Concepts contain the seeds of their own critique, and dialectic only has to follow the self-articulation of concepts in order to draw out this critical potential.

What is at stake in the 'speculative' reading of the judgement, for both Hegel and Adorno, is a critique of the view of concepts as subsumptive-classificatory forms. This is the way in which concepts are seen to operate in the Kantian notion of synthesis, which represents an external conjoining of a conceptual form and the material of intuition. Where synthesis is determined in this way, the *relation* of both terms in the conjunction is *external to the determination* of both terms. Or, that is to say, concept and nonconceptual item are in a state of mutual indifference. The concept, on this picture, is simply the 'common element' (*Merkmaleinheit*) abstracted from a number of individual things (ND 150; 153). According to the speculative understanding, however, the concept expresses the *negative self-relation of the subject*. Hegel expresses this as the diremption of the subject in the 'problematic' judgement, a form of the final stage of judgement, the judgement of the concept. The identity of the subject now becomes expressible as a relation between its existence as a particular (the 'subject' of the judgement) and its correspondence to its *Sollen* (the predicate of the judgement),

[T]he *subject* itself is differentiated into its universality or objective nature, its *Sollen*, and the particular constitution of its being-there (*Dasein*). Thus it contains the *ground* of whether it *is such* as it *ought to be*. In this way, it is equated (*ausgeglichen*) with the predicate. - The *negativity* of the problematic [element],

insofar as it is directed against the immediacy of the *subject*, accordingly means only this original partition (*ursprüngliche Teilung*) of itself, which is already *in itself* a unity of the universal and particular, *into these its moments*, - a partition (*Teilung*), which is the judgement (*Urteil*) itself.⁵²

With the diremption of the subject, the judgement expresses the being of the subject as its becoming-adequate to its concept, and hence articulates the internal, constitutive relation between its *Sein* and its *Sollen*.

Herbert Schnädelbach has criticized Adorno's treatment of identity thinking on the grounds of its untenable equation of the appearance of forms of nonidentity within judgements of identity with contradictions. Schnädelbach ascribes this to a confusion of 'identifying as', which keeps open the possibility of different determinations of the subject other than that ascribed to it in the predicate, and 'identifying with'. Adorno, argues Schnädelbach, claims that all forms of speech which do not transgress the logical principle of identity are characterizable as examples of identity thinking, and gathers them together, as mere assertions of identity, under the generalized suspicion of tautology. But even if it were the case, Schnädelbach claims, that declarative propositions represent identifications of something with something, they nevertheless do not *only* express identity.⁵³ Hence the 'more' of identity in the difference between subject and predicate, the logical distance between universal concept and individual thing, the discrepancy between reality and possibility, and so forth, do not provide the support for the necessity of dialectic, as a thinking in

⁵²G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 661.

⁵³Herbert Schnädelbach, 'Dialektik als Vernunftkritik: Zur Konstruktion des Rationalen bei Adorno', in *Vernunft und Geschichte: Vorträge und Abhandlungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1987), pp. 184-5.

and through contradictions. Even less do they provide the ground for the linking of the contradictory nature of substantive thought with social antagonisms.⁵⁴ Hence according to Schnädelbach's argument, we should conclude that Adorno confuses the 'is' of predication (identifying *as*), with the 'is' of identity (identifying *with*). It should already be evident from what has been said why this argument falls short. Neither Hegel nor Adorno 'confuse' the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of predication. The argument, in both cases, is that *predication is itself inherently unstable*. And it is unstable, essentially, because *concepts embody social-historical contextual connections which subvert the 'external conjunction' model of synthesis on which predication rests*. We can think of this subversion, I suggest, as a narrativization of the force of predication, which introduces a social-historical dimension into conceptual identification. For instance, when the concept of freedom is contextualized, the assertion that 'a man is free' judges the subject (man) *in terms of the historical possibilities that are built into the concept of freedom*. The concept of freedom embodies social-historical possibilities of being human that 'overshoot' the assertion of predicative identity. Hence predication can only express the being of the subject as its becoming-other. When it is thought through, the very idea of predication, as an external conjoining of thing and concept, proves unsustainable at the deepest level of the operation of thinking, and its articulation in language. Predication *itself* embodies the claim that the predicate express the concept of the subject. It is predication itself which gives the lie to its own appearance form as an external conjoining of terms. Hence, *pace* Schnädelbach, it is not the fact that a predicative identity of concept and thing arbitrarily leaves out forms of nonidentity that makes it contradictory. It is that 'the external conjunction of subject and predicate is broken through within the judgement itself by the

⁵⁴'Dialektik als Vernunftkritik', p. 201.

identification of the subject with the historical possibilities embodied in the concept of freedom. Predicative identity cannot be asserted, cannot be articulated in the judgement, without bringing about its *Aufhebung* in an identity as the becoming-other of the thing, or as its passing over into its concept. Conceptual identification of the thing thus incorporates the thing's diremption, its nonidentity with itself, a nonidentity which marks the self-inadequacy of the object. Kant's concept of humanity, Adorno argues, both expresses the 'thing' (the totality of existing human beings) and transcends it through the unredeemed historical possibilities of the concept: it marks the nonidentity of the thing with its conceptual identification, and hence expresses identity as the becoming-other, the becoming-adequate-to-its-concept, of the thing (ND 258; 255). Schnädelbach makes the typical error of equating nonidentity with what is left outside by any conceptual determination, rather than as the negative self-relation of the thing, and hence as *already implied* in the conceptual identification of the thing. The 'more' of the object, Adorno asserts, remains as 'what is pressed out of it [*das aus ihm Verdrängte*], as immanent to it. To this extent, *nonidentity would be the thing's own identity against its identifications*' (ND 161; 164 [my italics]). When Adorno speaks of the tautology of identity thinking, he has in mind the elimination of the thing's nonidentity with itself, which is not expressible in the distinction between 'identifying with' and 'identifying as', since its purpose is precisely to render untenable the very distinction between the 'is' of identity and the 'is' of predication.⁵⁵

It is because pure identity - an identity which would not embody an ought-to-be - is

⁵⁵To say that the contradiction of the concept is also a contradiction within the thing - its identity expressible solely as its nonidentity with itself - is, of course, also to claim that philosophical contradictions are immanent articulations of social antagonisms. Hence, 'concept and reality are of the same contradiction-laden essence' (ND 58 [This sentence is missing from the English translation of *Negative Dialectics*]).

impossible, that there is a critical moment inherent in conceptual thinking. In the same moment that conceptual thinking implicitly asserts identity (the ideological moment) it shows that identity to be presently unattainable: the emphatic truth claim of conceptual thinking is maintained in the distance between the striving for identity inherent in conceptual thinking and the constitutive presence of the nonidentity within identity. The tension between these moments, as we have seen, is expressed in the proposition by the identifying force of the copula as a being-becoming, or a *Sein* from which a *Sollen* is ineliminable. Now we can see that the failure of a philosophical work, in terms of its striving for unity, unanimity, coherence and consistency, is determinable as the failure of identity thinking. The failure of identity, the concrete forms of which are describable as forms of 'nonidentity', is not a denunciation of identity, nor is it an exhortation to another, nonconceptual form of thinking. Rather, the critical principle in terms of which empirical content is judged, the emphatic truth claim of conceptual thinking, is none other than the principle of identity itself. Thought can only assert identity as positive - pure *Sein* rather than *Sollen* - by suppressing its immanent critical moment. The ambivalence of the identity principle, and indeed the ambivalence of conceptual thinking itself, is well expressed in this passage,

The supposition of identity is indeed the ideological element of pure thought, all the way down to formal logic. But hidden in it is also the truth moment of ideology, the pledge that there should be no contradiction, no antagonism. In the simple identifying judgement, the pragmatist, nature-controlling element already joins with a utopian element. "A" ought to be what it is not yet. Such hope is contradictorily tied to that by which the form of predicative identity is broken through (ND 150-1; 152-3).

It is in showing contradiction and antagonism to be inevitable, and in maintaining their abolition as an emphatic truth claim, that conceptual thinking is able to work critically in relation to current social experience. It is essential to note that, for Adorno, the ideological moment and the critical moment of conceptual thinking are not two independent, separable components. The critical moment is parasitic upon the ideological, identifying force of thinking. It works by showing that the reconciliation of thought and being implicitly postulated by identity thinking is impossible in current social conditions. In philosophical works, Adorno argues, what breaks through the form of predicative identity (i.e. the identifying force of the ideological moment of thinking) is given the name 'ideas'. The ideas are 'the untruth of all attained identity', and thus 'the inverted form of truth' (ND 150; 153). In claiming that the ideas are neither *χωρίς* nor an 'empty sound', that is, neither a pure thought construction with which the given is to be 'compared' nor a contingent denunciation of the present, Adorno understands them as the appearance form of the emphatic truth claim (which we have seen to be grounded in the *Sollen* inseparable from identity) that emerges from the inherent negativity of the present. *The ideas are therefore the philosophical formulations of the failure of identity.* As the nonidentity within identity, they are 'negative signs' (ND 150; 153). That is, they are the form in which the present represents to itself the reconciliation that is denied, suppressed by current social experience. The possibility of experiencing this negativity as a normative claim on the present is the central question which animates the final section of *Negative Dialectics*, 'Meditations on Metaphysics'. The critical distance toward the existing is integral to all that Adorno says in this section concerning the possibility of 'metaphysical experience'. The assertion that the ideas are 'negative signs' must be read in the light of the claim in this section that 'metaphysics may originate (*entstehen*) only with the realization of what has been thought in its sign' (ND 404; 396).

The ideas are the central formulations of metaphysical experience, the experience of the disfigured form of current social experience.

Philosophy, as we have seen, serves as a placeholder for critical reason - that is, a reason which judges the present negatively in the light of a possible reconciliation - by the aporetic presentation of its emphatic truth claim. A reconciling reason is revealed in philosophical works, through their internal contradictions, as both necessary and inaccessible. My discussion of identity thinking sought to demonstrate that the possibility of a critical stance toward the given is, for Adorno, integral to conceptual thought itself.⁵⁶ In a fundamental sense, the standpoint of critical reason is not an option for philosophy, for it is already implicit in what it means to think conceptually. Because pure identity is impossible in antagonistic society, any ideological assertion of social unity, insofar as it is articulated conceptually, will contain the seeds of its own untruth immanently within it. Critical reason operates in the work by means of the distance between the work's striving for identity and its failure to redeem that claim. Because that failure is attributable to the antagonistic social content taken up within conceptual construction, the striving for identity in the philosophical work is able to function as social critique.

⁵⁶The implications of the failure to grasp this connection can be seen in the work of two prominent historians of the Frankfurt School, Martin Jay and Rolf Wiggershaus. Both Jay and Wiggershaus miss the structure of the critical dialectic of concepts that animates *Negative Dialectics*, and consequently, neither is able to see the potential basis of a social theory in *Negative Dialectics*. Jay and Wiggershaus draw upon familiar reading of identity thinking as a critique of the suppression of heterogeneity and otherness. This causes them to miss the social-critical force of Adorno's dialectical critique, deriving from the way in which the philosophical articulation of social antagonisms is able to judge those antagonisms, negatively, in the context of an emphatic truth claim harbouring the idea of a reconciled society. See Martin Jay, *Adorno*, pp. 68-9; also, see his *The Dialectical Imagination* (London: Heinemann, 1973). See Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance*, trans. M. Robertson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), p. 602.

Linguistic Reification

Negative Dialectics, I have argued, embodies a critical dialectic of concepts, made possible by the twin theses that relations of domination structure concepts, and that those relations can be ‘decoded’ as ‘contradictions’ within conceptual determinations. The discussion of Hegel’s theory of judgement demonstrated, further, that this contradiction essentially concerns the discrepancy between the subject of conceptual determination (e.g. man, totality of human beings) and the historical possibilities embedded in the concept (freedom, humanity). As we saw, the ‘excess’ of the concept is not simply a form of nonidentity external to predication because it is already implicated in the very attempt to subsume the object under its concept. Predication cannot ‘pick out’ the object without at the same time narrativizing the force of identity in the judgement, rendering the excess of the concept as the *ought-to-be* of the subject. In order to work as the critical self-articulation of social experience, therefore, negative dialectic needs to latch on to the social-historical possibilities sedimented in concepts.

I suggested earlier that Adorno grounds the possibility of a critical dialectic of concepts through a critique of abstraction, which is to be understood in the Wittgensteinian sense, as the severance of conceptual determination from social and historical contextual connections. The critical dialectic of concepts is grounded by a critique of the reification of linguistic praxis which is brought about by this process of abstraction. Most interpretations of Adorno have tended to arrest the argument at this point, concluding that Adorno is criticizing a false application of language, and

hence interpreting *Negative Dialectics* as the call to a more reflective language use.⁵⁷ I want to argue that this reading short changes the social-critical intent of *Negative Dialectics*, by transforming a form of reification that Adorno sees as grounded in social processes into a purely 'philosophical' mistake. Adorno does not understand linguistic reification as a philosophical error, but rather as forming the basis of a social thesis. To make this idea plausible, we need to see that negative dialectic reformulates the Wittgensteinian notion of a reification of linguistic practice in the terms of Marxian social critique. According to this reformulation, *the reification of linguistic praxis is a 'thought' contradiction which is rooted in a 'real' contradiction of social practice*.⁵⁸ We must recall here that the argument concerning linguistic reification rests on an understanding of social practice as the ground of the meaning-constitution of concepts.⁵⁹ Now, my argument is that taking the truth claim of this thesis seriously requires us to understand linguistic reification in the terms of the Marxian reformulation given above. If the thesis about the social meaning-constitution of concepts is valid, then there must be dimensions of social processes corresponding to the process of abstraction which characterizes linguistic reification. The severance of conceptual determination from social-historical contextual connections, that is, *must be rooted objectively in a specific distortion of meaning constitution occurring at the level of social practice*. According to the thesis

⁵⁷Exemplary of this approach are Christoph Demmerling, *Sprache und Verdinglichung*; Albrecht Wellmer, *The Persistence of Modernity*, chapter 2; there are also resonances of this approach in Jay Bernstein's essay 'Fragment, Fascination, Damaged Life', in Max Pensky (ed.), *The Actuality of Adorno* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1997).

⁵⁸The philosophical inspiration for this reformulation, of course, is to be found in thesis four of Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach' (in *Die Frühschriften* [Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1953], p. 340), where Marx asserts that religious alienation that forms the object of Feuerbach's theory has a *social* basis in the self-diremption and self-contradictions of the social world.

⁵⁹Christoph Demmerling, *Sprache und Verdinglichung*, p. 50.

of the social meaning-constitution of concepts itself, then, linguistic reification is only intelligible as an objective process.

I want to argue that Adorno conceived the ‘objective’ contradiction which is responsible for the reification of linguistic praxis in terms of the extension of the dominance of *Tauschwert*, the logic of exchange value, into the cultural sphere. This logic is rooted in, but no longer confined to, economic and bureaucratic institutions.⁶⁰ Exchange logic, Adorno argues, embodies the same constitutive abstraction which characterizes the reification of conceptual forms (ME 76). Through the operation of exchange logic, value (as exchange value) is constitutively abstracted from the meaningfulness of things within human experience. The value of a thing thereby becomes determinable independently of its particular, sensuous qualities (its use value), which determine its worth for human needs. As an exchangeable item, the thing as commodity assumes a value which is *logically independent* of its social meaning. The distortion of meaning occurs when use value, the sensuous qualities of the objects, comes to be generally experienced in instrumental terms, as an indifferent means to the maximization of exchange value. For when this occurs, exchange logic begins to ‘devalue’ the sensuous qualities of things, rendering them irrelevant to the determination of a thing’s worth, and thereby blocking the convertability of exchange value and use value.

It is the social ground of linguistic reification that Adorno is articulating when he claims that ‘objective abstraction’ takes place in the ‘universal execution’ of exchange, prior to scientific reflection. That objective abstraction disregards ‘the qualitative constitution of producers and

⁶⁰That Adorno perceives the expansion of administrative institutions in terms of the increasing dominance of exchange relations is clear from his essay ‘Kultur und Verwaltung’, in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 125.

consumers, the mode of production, even need, that the social mechanism satisfies as an afterthought. Profit is given primacy'.⁶¹ This process brings about in practice the 'objective' negation of the Wittgensteinian thesis about meaning constitution. Or, to put this in terms of the possibility of a 'disenchantment of the concept', Adorno's thesis is that concepts are *objectively* enchanted by the extension of exchange logic into culture. That is, they are objectively produced as embodying the *Schein* (semblance) of being determinable outside of their relation to a meaningful content. It is in thinking through the implications of this objective contradiction that it becomes apparent what, exactly, the critical-negative experience, which is revealed in the critical dialectic of concepts, has to be. In fact, it is here that the critical dialectic of concepts reveals itself as paradoxical (*not* contradictory) to the core. The strategy of the critical dialectic, as we saw, turns on the possibility of articulating the deep contextual connections within concepts. But now, if the process of enchantment which severs conceptual determination from context is not merely a thought mistake but, so to speak, an objectively realized truth, that critical strategy would seem to be cut off at the roots. It is this theme that Adorno is touching on in the final part of *Negative Dialectics*, with the question of the possibility of 'metaphysical experience'. It is metaphysical experience that Adorno sees as secured, for example, in Kant's concept of the intelligible world. We can understand metaphysical experience, broadly, as the articulation of the given within the horizon of a possible reconciliation, hence as the expression of the immanent negativity of present social forms. It is the objective process of abstraction that has made the possibility of metaphysical experience problematic, however, since it is that process which prevents conceptual determination from articulating the given in terms of its social-historically defined possibilities. It follows that the goal

⁶¹'Gesellschaft', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 13.

of the critical dialectic of concepts must be to 'decode' the experience congealed within conceptual forms as the *experience of the loss of metaphysical experience*. The revealed experience is to be that of its own impossibility. This is still a revealed *experience*, however, and in that experience the social domination of exchange logic is uncovered as the 'truth' about the social order. The paradox is, then, *that a critical-negative stance is made possible by making accessible the impossibility of metaphysical experience as an experiential form*. Negative dialectic articulates this experience, the experience of the impossibility of metaphysical experience, by remaining faithful to the *real* abstraction of conceptual forms. Hence the 'impoverishment of experience by dialectic' is not due to an obscure method. Rather, it articulates the 'abstract monotony' of the world'. Dialectic, Adorno claims, is 'the world's agony raised to a concept' (ND 6; 18).

With the generalized reification of linguistic praxis, Adorno believes, language loses its ability to function as the critical self-articulation of social experience, and becomes confined to the classification of abstracted empirical items. In arguing that this process occurs objectively, through the extension of exchange logic to the realm of culture, Adorno is drawing on Lukács' reading of the extension of the logic of the commodity form to social and academic institutions in his *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács described this as a process of cultural reification, in which human experience became increasingly quantified and fragmented. The commodity form breaks free from its confinement in the work process, and gradually 'stamps its imprint upon the whole consciousness of man'.⁶² Adorno captures an important dimension of the process of cultural reification with the

⁶²Georg Lukács, 'Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat', in *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 100.

theoretical figure of 'neutralization' (ND 393-398; 386-91).⁶³ With this term, Adorno intends the cultural ground of the unavailability of emancipatory possibilities within philosophy and art. What gets 'neutralized' in neutralization, Adorno claims, is spirit or *Geist* (ND 394; 387). This process results in the maiming of the critical claims of art and philosophy. The former is transformed into a form of 'disinterested pleasure', which simultaneously transfigures and debases it by robbing it of its truth content (ND 394-5; 387). Philosophy, having become incapable of representing the transcendent claims of reason within experience, confines itself to procedures of classification, the operations of *Verstand*. This is not a subjective decision on the part of philosophy, and hence reversible by appropriate theoretical insight, but is generated objectively by the generalized operation of exchange logic. It is the inaccessibility of social-historical possibilities that is denoted in Adorno's assertion that '[w]hat according to a highly unideological understanding ought to be the most urgent concern of human beings vanishes' (ND 395; 387). The result of cultural reification, then, is that *philosophical concepts come to be conceived as self-given classificatory schemata operating independently of social practice*. This semblance, in which conceptual construction is held to take place independently of the structures of social experience, is on Adorno's view itself a reflection of the practices characteristic of exchange society. The problem this poses for the possibility of critique, is that language is no longer able to articulate social experience as its *Übergehen* (transition) into its truth. This possibility, we saw, was the basis of the Hegelian theory of judgment. Conceptual determination comes to reflect the operation of exchange logic when the cognition of an object comes to be determined exclusively by modes of classification/subsumption,

⁶³ An extensive close reading of this important section of *Negative Dialectics* can be found in Axel Hutter, 'Adornos Meditationen zur Metaphysik', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 46 (1998) 45-65.

thereby undermining the possibility of the articulation of the self-inadequacy of an experiential item. The cognition of an object becomes logically separable from the situating of the object within the horizon of a possible reconciliation. The latter moment, according to the Hegelian picture, represents the immanent normative judging within language, the *Sollen* which emerges in the very self-articulation of a form of being as its revealed truth. The notion of a reification of linguistic praxis, therefore, implies the thesis of a *reification of normative categories*. The *Sollen*, as the critical moment within language, falls prey to the process of abstraction when the social-historical possibilities sedimented in concepts fail to inform conceptual determination. The *Sollen* within language now becomes purely logical: it no longer denotes the immanent *Untergang* (going under) of a shape of experience, and becomes defined instead in terms of formal-procedural criteria whose relation to the object is one of external subsumption.⁶⁴ For Adorno, this is a form of objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) which corresponds to the abstraction of value in exchange logic. Value, whether economic or normative, ‘brackets’ empirical meaningfulness, and thus neutralizes the moment of articulation, of saying ‘what something is’, as distinct from ‘what it comes under’ (ND 149; 152). The unity of the ideological and the critical moments of language now becomes severed into, on the one hand, self-subsistent criteria of validity (abstract *Sollen*), and on the other, an inert experiential base (pure *Sein*).

The reduction of cognition to operations of subsumption-classification counts as a form of reification, for Adorno, in that conceptual determinations become historically and socially frozen. That is, they are disembedded from the social-historical process of their formation. It is this process which is responsible for the rigidification of linguistic meanings. In its reified form, language

⁶⁴I will take up this point again in my critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason.

becomes systematically desensitized to the processual character of experience. Concepts such as 'good', 'justice', and 'right', are severed from the historical process of their formation, and, because they are no longer able to judge objects in terms of their immanent social-historical possibilities, they lose their normative-critical charge. Adorno takes up the critique of this rigidification of meanings through the idea of the constellation (ND 162-3; 164-6). The constellation sets out to overcome the abstraction in linguistic reification by *recontextualizing concepts*. The meaning of conceptual determinations is thereby rendered dependent on contextual connections. Constellations

by themselves represent, from outside, what the concept has cut away from within, the 'more', that it wants to be just as much as it cannot be it. By gathering around the thing that is to be known, concepts potentially determine its inner, achieve in thinking what thought necessarily eradicated from itself (ND 162; 164-5).

The 'more' of the concept of which Adorno speaks here, concerns the social-historical possibilities that are severed from conceptual identification through the process of linguistic reification. Adorno affirms the connection with the Marxian-Wittgensteinian critique of abstraction when he asserts that the 'concrete' is to be understood as the *context* of the thing, not its 'pure selfhood' (ND 162; 165). The identification of things through a constellative use of concepts is able to incorporate their nonidentity as an unredeemed social-historical claim that is 'embedded' in the object, and that is determinable as its self-inadequacy. What Adorno calls the 'process stored in the object' can only be unlocked by its contextualization, which takes account of its social mediation and uncovers its historical possibilities (ND 163; 166).

It becomes apparent from this analysis that the predominance of what Adorno calls the ideological element in conceptual thinking, which understands the force of 'it is' as 'it ought not

to be otherwise' (ND 148; 151), is not implicit in what it means to use concepts, but rather derives from a process of linguistic reification. In this process, concepts lose their processual character, and come to operate instead as self-subsistent forms. Thus they become incapable of articulating the given from out of its social-historical possibilities. To articulate the critical-negative component in the statement that 'a man is free', for instance, one would have to trace the emancipatory possibilities attaching to the historical content of the concept of freedom. Those emancipatory possibilities would comprise an ideal of self-determination that subvert, by narrativizing, the assertion of predicative identity, allowing for the inclusion of nonidentity as a constitutive element of conceptual identification. Under the pressure of the reification of conceptual categories, however, the statement that 'a man is free' becomes purely descriptive, losing its normative import. The connection between subject and predicate is now transformed into one of subsumption-classification: a self-subsistent sense-object is subsumed under a self-subsistent thought-object. Because it becomes decontextualized in this process, the concept gets severed from the social-historical content (i.e. the emancipatory possibilities attaching to 'freedom'), which would allow it to express the deepest aspirations or strivings of the object (in this case, 'man'). This particular content, which on the critical-dialectical reading embodies the historical struggle of the object to realize itself, can now only attach to the object externally, as a content which it 'has' or does not have, rather than immanently as a process in which it realizes itself.

The problem which the reification of linguistic praxis poses for critique, I suggest, can be understood in terms of a *de-narrativization of normative categories*. Normative categories cease to be informed by the social-historical process of their becoming, and are transformed into logical-procedural forms. Under the pressure of cultural reification, moral 'value' is constitutively

decontextualized. That is say, moral cognition is established as validity which is severed from the moral content embedded in social-historical experience. This is akin to saying that moral categories become 'enchanted', in that they are seen as possessed of determinations outside of their relation to a meaningful content. As emptied of their social-historical, processual character, and thus de-narrativized, normative categories are no longer able to function as the critical-negative self-reflection of social experience.

A number of the issues at stake here are explored by Adorno in his 1968 lectures on sociology. In the final lecture, Adorno expresses the importance of the historical dimension for the comprehension and critique of society. The Marxian theory of society, Adorno claims, is essentially also a historical theory. This can be expressed, Adorno argues, by the idea that the *Wesen* (essence) of social phenomena, on the Marxian reading, is 'nothing other than the history that is stored in phenomena'. This grounds the centrality of interpretation (*Deutung*) in the theory of society,

The dimension of interpretation [implies] that history has stored itself within phenomena that seemingly rest within themselves [*innehalten*], that are seemingly a given, a possibly momentary occurrence. The interpretive capacity is essentially the capacity of becoming aware of the having-become, or the dynamic in phenomena that has been brought to a standstill (ESoz 244).

I want to suggest that the critical perspective, that Adorno sees as being opened up by the inclusion of a historical dimension in social theory, essentially involves two components. Firstly, the uncovering of the social determination of the form of the object reveals the structuring operation of social power. Social relations of domination are shown to be implicated in the object's having become what it is. Secondly, the unredeemed emancipatory possibilities of the object become

apparent, in the 'contradiction' between the sense of the object, as read out of its historical process, and the current state of the object within society. Adorno puts this latter point by saying that 'only that which has become, reveals itself from the outset in such a way that its possible transformation also comes into view' (ESoz 245).

Adorno illustrates this thesis through an analysis of the historical dimension attaching to the concept of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*). Adorno suggests that the concept of the public sphere was gradually 'hollowed out', as a result of the effects of processes of capitalist modernization. The concept was shorn of its affiliation to the idea of a common human reason, by means of which a fully developed public sphere had been demanded as a 'condition of democracy among autonomous and responsible human beings', and came to be identified with 'the more or less freely given opinions of all'. The public sphere became increasingly monopolized and manipulated by the extension of the commodity form in capitalist modernization, itself eventually turning into a 'commodity', used and deployed as an instrument in the process of the accumulation of capital. The inclusion of the historical dimension here enables social theory to uncover a 'contradiction' between the *concept* of the public sphere, and its alienated form in late-capitalist modernity,

The contradiction that constitutes itself between the concept of the public sphere and that which it has become is, on its part, an essential organ of a critical theory of the public sphere; and when one neglects the historical moment, then something like a critique of the public sphere today or the conditions of a public sphere is not at all possible. . . . The medium of social critique, which the dominant sociology neglects, is essentially to be sought for precisely in the constitutive character of history for society (ESoz 248).

It becomes clear in this passage that, for Adorno, it is the social-historical possibilities attaching to the concept that make possible a critical stance to the relations of domination that determine its current social form. At this point, we can see clearly the dangers posed to the possibility of a critical theory of society by the process of linguistic reification. *Through the process of the abstraction of conceptual forms from social-historical contextual connections, the emancipatory content that is locked in the historical possibilities of the concept is rendered inaccessible to social-theoretical critique.*⁶⁵ Once that emancipatory content is rendered inaccessible, the tendency to naturalize the relations of domination that have infiltrated the determination of conceptual forms increases exponentially. Adorno sees this tendency at work in the idolization of the concept of the ‘fact’ (*Tatsache*) in social theory. As a consequence of this, concepts become reduced to tools for classifying facts. What ‘in actuality has become’, is absolutized into a ‘being-thus-and-not-otherwise’. This has the ‘monstrous consequence’ that, in that its genesis disappears, ‘it [what has become] appears at the same time as something natural, and for that reason also . . . something no longer changeable in principle’ (ESoz 249). It is this naturalization of relations of domination, of course, which is reflected in the reduction of the force of predication to its ideological dimension: the ‘it is so’ as ‘it ought not to be otherwise’. To reiterate, this is *not* something that arises from the innate instrumentality, or objectivizing function, of conceptual thinking. It is a result of the process of the reification of linguistic praxis. It is this objective process of abstraction which leads to an impoverishment of experience, by which Adorno understands the theoretical inaccessibility of the social-historical possibilities of the concept. Hence a social theory that neglects the dimension of

⁶⁵The same equation of the transcendent dimension of concepts with their historical sense figures strongly in Horkheimer’s critique of ‘subjective’ reason. See his *Eclipse of Reason*, pp. 21-3, 30.

'having-become' of concepts is *Erfahrungslos* (without experience) (ESoz 250). In a significant passage, Adorno argues that the constitutive de-narrativization of conceptual categories, which is engendered by linguistic reification, blocks the possibility of a critical access to social relations of domination,

The elimination of the historical dimension [is] an essential instrument for the purpose of sanctioning, and justifying, that which exists [*das je Seiende*], that which lies before us. With the disappearance of the having-become of phenomena, from which abstraction should be made, there disappears also, at the same time the perspective on what can become of phenomena [*was aus den Phänomenen werden kann*] (ESoz 249).

Linguistic reification, then, *blocks the possibility of a critical access to forms of domination by 'neutralizing' the symbolic tools of critique*. In being decontextualized, and thus de-narrativized, *the conceptual categories of moral-practical reason lose the normative charge which would allow them to be deployed as an immanent critique of the present*. The social-historical experience which carries that normative charge is cut away from the meaning of concepts in the constitutive abstractions wrought by the reification of linguistic praxis.

On the basis of this critique of linguistic reification, Adorno is now able to construct a critique of positivism from a social-theoretic perspective rather than, as in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, through the deployment of a critical genealogy. The defining ideas of positivist thinking, such as the claim that concepts are reducible to concrete descriptions, or that meaningful statements are reducible to an aggregate of descriptions of elementary facts, are now seen as derived from the constitutive abstraction definitive of the logic of the exchange process. *Positivism*,

therefore, expresses what concepts have become through the process of linguistic reification. The evisceration of experience, through the rigidification of linguistic meanings, is thus the social content, or the 'social truth', of the positivist consciousness. Positivism is therefore the philosophical form in which the evisceration of experience is rendered as a conceptual truth. This is the ground of Adorno's claim that positivism is the 'spirit of the times'.⁶⁶ It is the conceptual expression, in its most perspicuous form, of the true nature of current social experience. But, of course, because positivism is incapable of reflecting on the social-historical contextual basis of conceptual construction, it cannot itself 'decode' the social content expressed within its conceptual categories. In this respect, it becomes ideological as a naturalization of its social-historical basis,

In positivism, there is documented a historical constitution of spirit, which no longer knows experience, and for that reason has extinguished its rudiment as well as offering itself as its replacement, as the sole legitimate form of experience. The immanence of the system, which virtually insulates itself, neither tolerates a qualitative other that would let itself be experienced, nor does it render the subjects that are adapted to it capable of unregimented experience.⁶⁷

Positivism is, for Adorno, an exemplar of the failure of *Selbstbesinnung* (self-reflection), which results in the naturalization of social processes through the force of the ideological charge attaching to conceptual forms. Positivist thinking is itself the archetype of the ideological form of identification, in which the force of 'it is' equates to 'it ought not to be otherwise'. This ideological

⁶⁶'Einleitung zur "Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie"', p. 343.

⁶⁷'Einleitung zur "Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie"', p. 342.

reduction of the possibilities of identification stems directly from the constitutive failure of positivist thinking to reflect on the social-historical conditions of conceptual construction. As a result of this failure, theoretical forms are bound to re-present socially structured forms of domination as necessary structures of cognition. This entails, as we have seen, the extinguishing of the normative-critical possibilities of conceptual identification. We have seen in this chapter that, for Adorno, self-reflection, as the critical access to the relations of the domination embedded in social forms, requires the uncovering of the social-historical possibilities sedimented in conceptual forms. At this point, the critique of domination in Adorno's theory becomes entwined in a complex way with a *crisis of experience* thesis: processes of linguistic reification *neutralize the critical operation of conceptual forms by disembedding them socially and historically*. We have seen that this process, for Adorno, occurs as a result of the extension of exchange logic into the sphere of cultural meaning. I argued that this cultural distortion can be understood in terms of a rigidification of linguistic meanings. In the next chapter I want to show how the philosophical analyses of *Negative Dialectics*, encompassing both the self-reflection on domination and the theory of linguistic reification, are themselves rooted in a social theory.

Adorno's Social Theory: Reification, and Integration through Domination

Adorno's critical dialectic, as we saw, conceives philosophy and art as 'placeholders' of critical-negative experience, in virtue of their capacity to function as the critical self-reflection of the 'neutralized' social totality. Philosophy and art make accessible what I referred to as the 'experience of the loss of metaphysical experience': they present *as* a form of critical-negative experience the 'truth' about the social world as a critically 'anaesthetized', coercively integrated whole. In this chapter, I want to provide a reconstruction of the theory of society that underlies the critical project of *Negative Dialectics*. Following from the analysis of Adorno's critical philosophy, it is clear that there are two central tasks for any attempted reconstruction of Adorno's social theory. The first can be deduced from the notion of a critical dialectic of concepts, as this was wrested from a synthesis of a Durkheimian sociology of knowledge and a Hegelian theory of conceptual contradiction in the second chapter. The critical dialectic of concepts attempts to generate a self-reflection on the structures of domination that are taken up within conceptual forms. This sets for social theory the task of constructing a theory of domination. The second task can be seen to follow from the thesis

of linguistic reification, discussed in the previous chapter. I argued that Adorno does not conceive linguistic reification to be explicable merely in terms of an unreflective use of language. It is not a purely 'philosophical' mistake, but is rather grounded in an objective process of abstraction. Corresponding to the thesis of linguistic reification, social theory is given the task of explicating pathologies of cultural meaning and experience. I will argue that Adorno's social theory allows these problem areas to be conceived in terms of the *twofold distortion of the social operation of the exchange principle*. Adorno understands late capitalist society in terms of the concept of *Tauschgesellschaft* (exchange society). Society, for Adorno, can be conceived theoretically neither as a self-subsisting 'thing', nor, in reductivist fashion, as a mere agglomeration of individuals. It is, rather, essentially a process of abstraction. The process of abstraction that characterizes exchange society comprises two essential dimensions: it is a *structure of integration* and a *principle of cultural rationalization*. As a structure of integration, the exchange principle organizes a process of *integration through domination*. This idea grounds Adorno's analysis of the 'subsumption' of subordinated classes into the structures of late capitalism, and the neutralizing of oppositional perspectives within society. As a principle of cultural rationalization, exchange logic operates as a form of subsumption with regard to cultural meaning, thus generating forms of linguistic reification. The features which define the operation of exchange logic as a rational principle are abstract equality, commensurability, substitutability, fungibility. Operating as an end-indifferent structure of subsumption, exchange logic effectively rigidifies linguistic meanings, severing them from social-historical contexts and their unredeemed possibilities, and also renders them increasingly desensitized to the types of everyday experience that form and inform their meaning. In both dimensions of the social operation of the exchange principle, Adorno perceives processes at work

which hinder or subvert the possibility of a critical-negative experience of the social order. In the case of integration through domination, it is Adorno's interpretation of ideology which is intended to explain how integration bars the possibility of that type of critical-negative insight into the social order which could form the basis of an oppositional praxis. As a principle of cultural rationalization, exchange logic threatens to rigidify the normative categories which are to form the basis of a critique of the social order. In their non-reified form, normative categories can be seen as furnishing a framework for the articulation of meaningful ends, which allow experience to be revealed and interpreted within a cultural context permeated by emancipatory possibilities. As a result of a process of cultural rationalization structured by exchange logic, however, the *experiential basis* of critique is systematically dirempted from the cognitive-rational structures through which it is normatively organized and articulated. The result of this process, I will argue, is that experience is more and more able to be revealed solely from a technical-instrumental, rather than a normative-critical perspective.

I will argue that Adorno's reading of integration through domination is untenable as it stands. Adorno does not successfully substantiate the thesis that structures of domination and their ideological supports are able efficiently to stifle the emergence of critical-negative experience within the social world. If this social thesis is faulty, however, then Adorno's philosophical strategy must also become partially open to doubt. If we can reconstruct the basis for a form of critical-negative experience *within* the social world, then philosophy need no longer confine itself to the role of placeholder for critical-negative experience. Adorno, as we saw, perceives the specialist discourses of philosophy and art as making accessible a type of critical-negative experience, taking the form of an alienation from the totally alienated context. But if we can detect a form of critical-

negative experience emerging within the social world, philosophy may take on the constructive-theoretical form of an articulation of the normative perspective arising *within* social reality. This will provide the basis for the encounter with the critical theory of Jürgen Habermas, and the critical theory of recognition developed by Axel Honneth and others, in subsequent chapters. Both of these versions of critical theory will, however, be seen to possess serious weaknesses, in virtue of their marginalizing of problems concerning ideology and domination. A central task for subsequent chapters, therefore, will be to show how Adorno's integration thesis can be reconstructed in a non-totalizing form. I will develop the concepts of symbolic power and systemic domination, as central to this reconstruction. In this chapter, I will also provide an interpretation of Adorno's reading of cultural rationalization by drawing on Simmel's cultural sociology. I will then suggest a possible social-critical reconstruction of this thesis. This argument will form the basis for an immanent critique of Habermas's concept of communicative rationality, which I will develop in chapter 6. Adorno's theory of the infiltration of exchange logic into culture provides the groundwork for a theory of a *dialectic* of cultural rationalization, in terms of which Habermasian communicative rationality will be revealed as an intensification of the experiential distortions wrought by the exchange process.

The Integration Thesis

Adorno argues that social integration in late capitalist societies is structured by the exchange principle, operating as a mechanism of abstraction. As the basis-logic of society, exchange generates a form of self-expanding systemic integration which, at the same time, generates social relations of

domination.¹ The exchange process expands from the realm of the economic, narrowly defined, and comes to determine processes of bureaucratization, scientization and technicization.² The idea of exchange as a structure of integration is expressed most clearly in Adorno's 1968 sociology lectures. Here, in response to Hans Albert's critique that the dialectical theory of society reduces to the triviality that 'everything hangs together with everything else', Adorno lays out an interpretation of the exchange process as an *objective structure* of society, which mediates all specific social phenomena,

[S]ociety, the societalized society, is precisely not merely such a functional context between societalized human beings, but is rather essentially, as a presupposition, determined through exchange. That which actually makes society into something social [*zu einem Gesellschaftlichen macht*], that by which it is, in the specific sense, constituted conceptually as well as constituted in reality, this is the exchange relation, which virtually synthesizes [*zusammenschließt*] all human beings who share this concept of society (ESoz 57).

In contrast to the positivist account which perceives society as a collection of facts, Adorno stresses that society is a structure of mediation. Thus the very categories which the Kantian account of conceptual synthesis perceives as mental forms are in fact active, structuring principles *within* the social world. It is for this reason that Adorno refers to the 'conceptual character of the objective structure' (ESoz 60). Adorno perceives the exchange relation as the central structuring principle

¹See Christian Thies, *Die Krise des Individuums: zur Kritik der Moderne bei Adorno und Gehlen* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997), pp. 146-50.

²See Adorno's essay 'Kultur und Verwaltung', in *Soziologische Schriften I*.

within late capitalist society. The exchange relation is to be conceived essentially as a process of abstraction that brings about an integration *through a mediation of antagonistic interests*,

The totality in which we live, and which we can feel with each step and in each of our social actions, is not conditioned through an immediate being-with-one-another that embraces all of us, but is rather conditioned through the fact that we are separated from one another, as this occurs through the abstract exchange relation. It is a unity not only of what is separated, but a unity that first actually brings itself into being, first constitutes itself, through the mechanism of separation or abstraction. .

. . The wholeness, or the totality of society does not preserve itself solidaristically, by means of a social total subject, but rather only through the antagonistic interests of human beings (ESoz 77-8).

Adorno reads the expansion of the exchange principle, as a principle of integration, throughout social structures as bringing about a stifling of the dynamic of class conflict theorized in Marxist social critique. This is expressed in his 1942 essay 'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie' (Reflections on the Theory of Classes). Adorno here argues that the Marxian immiseration thesis, which postulated that the increasing poverty of the working classes would lead necessarily to the formation of an oppositional class consciousness, so that immiseration itself would become the 'motor of revolution', has been effectively neutralized under late capitalism by the abolition of the social presuppositions of free competition, and the increase in material well-being of the working class. This did not mean, however, that dehumanization had ceased. Rather, a new form of dehumanization had come on the scene, which took the form of economic and political

powerlessness.³ Adorno characterized this transition in the terms of a thesis of *integration through domination*: the continued existence of the present social order was held to be secured by the administrative incorporation of the oppressed into the system, which secured their standard of living but, at the same time, brought about their immediate identification with the needs of the system. Hence the reproduction of the system now also reproduces the powerlessness of the worker.⁴ 'Dehumanization' was, therefore, no longer describable in terms of the brutalization of the oppressed, their de facto exclusion, but now took the form of the 'immanence of the oppressed in the system'.⁵ This idea is brought out with particular clarity in Adorno's critique of the understanding of integration in Durkheim and Spencer in his 1968 sociology lectures. Whereas these social theorists had conceived integration in terms of the increasing connectedness of the different sectors of society, through which these sectors become increasingly interdependent, Adorno points to a darker meaning already implicit in the structuring operation of this concept within the social order, which gives the lie to any attempt to deploy it in a normatively neutral way,

If on the one hand one views the concept of integration as the 'becoming surveyable' (*Überblickbarwerden*) and the rational formation of ever greater unities, so there lies just as well in the concept of integration itself, from the beginning, the tendency to fit human beings, the more they are integrated, ever more perfectly and ever more

³'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, pp. 383-6. On Adorno's reading of late capitalism more generally, and as distinguished from Friedrich Pollock's notion of 'state capitalism', see Deborah Cook, 'Adorno on Late Capitalism: Totalitarianism and the Welfare State', *Radical Philosophy* 89 (1998) 16-26.

⁴'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie', p. 390.

⁵'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie', p. 391.

completely into the system, and to form them according to the logic of adaptation and to actually make them into microcosmic copies of the whole (ESoz 74).

Adorno argues that the effective dynamic of social integration has shown the thesis of an unproblematic link between increasing integration and individual differentiation to be false. Adorno grounds this critique here in the empirical observation that the ever-increasing division of labour has in fact resulted in an ever greater *similarity* of the tasks performed, thus refuting the Durkheim/Spencer view that qualitative differentiation occurs across the division of labour. What has actually occurred through increasing social integration, Adorno suggests, is a 'de-differentiation of society' (ESoz 76).

Integration through domination, for Adorno, constitutes, in an important sense, a more profound form of dehumanization than immiseration, since it curtails political and economic freedom and, at the same time, abolishes the autonomous perspective on the process which, at least, was rendered possible by exclusionary dehumanization. As Adorno puts it, the misery of the oppressed today is that 'they can no longer get out [of the system]'.⁶ This point is expressed more forcefully in Adorno's 1965 essay 'Society' (*Gesellschaft*),

The adaptation of human beings to social relations and processes which constitute history, and without which it would be difficult for human beings to continue to exist, has become sedimented within them in such a way, that the possibility of breaking out of it without unbearable instinctual conflicts dwindles. Human beings are - a triumph of integration! - identified right into their innermost behaviour with what is done with them. In a mockery of the hope of philosophy, subject and object

⁶'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie', p. 391.

are reconciled.⁷

What is significant in the essay 'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie', is that Adorno here refers to individuality as a 'socially produced concept', tied to the 'autonomy of the market economy' and the cultured bourgeois individuality sustained within it.⁸ Individuality is said to presuppose an 'autarchy of the contexts of motivation' within the individual. Having identified the sphere of individuation with the competitive market, the next step clearly follows from Adorno's analysis of late capitalism: media manipulation and bureaucratic capitalism must be theorized as destroying the very conditions of individual autonomy itself. Adorno states this thesis concerning individuality as a disappearing historical category in his essay 'Individuum und Organisation',

As the free market economy suppressed the feudal system and had need of the entrepreneur as of the free wage labourer, these formed themselves not only as professional but also as anthropological types; concepts such as that of responsibility for self, of foresight, of the individual sufficient unto himself, of the fulfilment of duty, but also of the stiff coercion of conscience, the internalized bond to forms of authority, came on the scene. . . . Today competition and the free market economy are more and more diminishing in significance in comparison with the accumulated large conglomerates and the collectivities which correspond to them. The concept of the individual, a historical emergence, reaches its historical limit.⁹

⁷'Gesellschaft', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 18.

⁸'Reflexionen zur Klassentheorie', p. 389. See also *Minima Moralia* § 97.

⁹'Individuum und Organisation', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 450.

Adorno theorizes late capitalism, therefore, as a structure of integration through domination that brings about the destruction of the social basis of individuality. There are three central dimensions to this process of the destruction of individuality.¹⁰ Firstly, the bourgeois state is transformed in late capitalism into an administrative apparatus of domination. This occurs together with a society-wide process of bureaucratization that limits the space for individual, autonomous action, and subordinates individuals to administrative imperatives. Adorno speaks in this regard of an 'organizational hardening of the world' which transforms individuals into 'cogs in the machine'.¹¹ Secondly, the economy becomes increasingly hierarchically structured, and controlled by monopolistic conglomerations, undermining those dimensions of autonomous activity and thought which were requisite to free-market capitalism. The third and final dimension of the destruction of individuality concerns the culture industry, which penetrates into ever more areas of social life. Adorno perceives the culture industry as an ideological structure which creates an illusion of a satisfaction of human needs and, thereby, prevents individuals from becoming conscious of the oppressive character of the social order. This thesis, which is central to Adorno's reading of the apparent impenetrability, for individuals, of the true nature of the social order as a structure of integration through domination, will now be analysed in more depth.

Adorno's writings on the culture industry, most notably in the chapter in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, subtitled 'Enlightenment as Mass Deception' (*Aufklärung als Massenbetrug*) set out to explain how the culture of capitalism transforms the working class from a potentially

¹⁰My analysis draws on Thorsten Bonacker, 'Ohne Angst verschieden sein können: Individualität in der integralen Gesellschaft', in D. Auer, T. Bonacker, S. Müller-Doochm (eds.), *Die Gesellschaftstheorie Adornos: Themen und Grundbegriffe* (Darmstadt: Primus, 1998).

¹¹'Individuum und Organisation', p. 444.

revolutionary subject into an aggregation of atomised, passive consumers, thereby bringing about an integration of oppositional forces into the system of domination and effectively stifling resistance. The purpose of the 'undescribable power' (*unbeschreibliche Gewalt*) exercised by the mass media over individuals, Adorno argues in 'Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre' is to bring about the identification of the masses with the norms and relations which, whether conceived as operating 'anonymously' behind the productions of the culture industry, or as directly propagated by it, ensure the dominance of particular social interests.¹² Adorno's reference to the 'undescribable power' of the culture industry presupposes a certain transformation in the mechanisms of identity formation in twentieth century capitalism, whereby the mediating role of the father is obliterated by the direct penetration of the forces of civil society, and the mass media, into the private sphere. With the direct socialization of the psyche through the cultural and civil sphere of modern capitalism, genuine individuality and autonomy are eclipsed by standardized, manufactured forms of self-expression afforded by identification with the products of the culture industry.¹³ A revealing depiction of this process is given in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in a passage which refers to Kant's theory of schematism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Schemata, Kant argues, are mediating representations which are made use of by judgment to ensure the correct subsumption of intuition under concepts.¹⁴ The schematizing function of the understanding might be perceived as a critical capacity which 'checks' or verifies the adequacy of a particular subsumption generating cognition, by providing the

¹²'Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 476.

¹³On this, see Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), p. 138.

¹⁴See *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, p. 187.

space for a form of judgement which stands in judgement on the rules of subsumption. If so, then the theory of schematism might be understood as giving expression to a certain critical autonomy of the subject in relation to the raw material of cognition, whereby the subject is able to assert itself as the authority on the adequacy of a particular subsumption. The passage in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* suggests that the autonomy denoted by schematism has been extinguished by the transference of this process to the culture industry itself,

The contribution which the Kantian schematism had still expected of subjects, namely, to refer sensuous multiplicity to fundamental concepts, is taken away from the subject by industry. The latter carries out the schematism as its first service to customers. A secret mechanism was thought to work in the soul, which had already prepared immediate data in such a way that they could be fitted into the system of pure reason. Today, the secret is deciphered. As the mechanism is planned by those who serve up the data, i.e. the culture industry, and is forced upon the latter by the power (*Schwerkraft*) of society, which is irrational in spite of all rationalization, so the fateful tendency is craftily transformed in its course through the commercial agencies into a reflection of their own intentions. For the consumer, there is nothing more to classify, nothing which would not already have been anticipated in the schematism of production (DE 124-5; 132-3).

Whereas the Kantian subject represented itself to itself as possessed of a certain cognitive autonomy, Adorno argues that this autonomy has been extinguished under modern capitalism by the schematizing function of culture, which takes place through the organizing of production in terms of simplistic formulas or codes. The stereotyped and standardized productions of the culture

industry, in effect, leave no room for an exercise of critical autonomy beyond the assignment of categories in accordance with prefabricated formulas. Schematism, as a process occurring within culture, and industrial production more generally, acts as a censoring mechanism which blocks awareness of the antagonism between societal structures and the 'experience of the individual' (DE 84; 91). The result is a seemingly harmonious form of social integration, the very harmoniousness of which, however, rests on the oppressive exclusion of individual autonomy. In 'Individuum und Organisation', the culture industry is described as shoring up the last remaining chinks in the wall of integration, where something akin to a critical-negative perspective on the social world could emerge,

The rational ordering of the public world is only representable when, in the other extreme, in individual consciousness, resistance is awakened against the at the same time overbearing and incomplete organization. Only in the, as it were, backward realms of life, which are still free of the organization, does the insight into the negativity of the administered world, and thereby the idea of a more humane world come to fruition. The culture industry takes care of the business of not letting things get to that stage, of binding and clouding consciousness. What would be necessary besides everything else is the emancipation from those mechanisms which reproduce, this time consciously in each individual, the blindly, socially produced stupidity.¹⁵

By means of the ideological products of the culture industry, Adorno argues, conformity is exercised right in 'the most subtle impulses of the mind'. The culture industry thus solidifies the 'rigidity

¹⁵'Individuum und Organisation', p. 455.

bereft of experience [*erfahrungslose Starrheit*] of the prevailing thinking in mass society'.¹⁶ It is clear that Adorno perceives the culture industry as a central aspect of those social processes which erode the critical-dialectical potential of language, thus reducing language to its ideological function. The ideology of mass culture, Adorno asserts, represents a parody of the sentence 'become who you are!', as 'an exorbitant doubling and justification of the already existing state of affairs, with the inclusion of all transcendence and all critique'.¹⁷

I now want to show how Adorno's social theory, according to which society takes the form of a structure of integration through domination which, at the same time, undermines the subjective-autonomous basis of critique, gives rise to *a particular social-theoretic employment of the concept of self-reflection (Selbstbesinnung)*. As we saw, Adorno deploys this term in his negative dialectic to denote the possibility of a reflexive awareness of the forms of domination that structure conceptual thought. Given his adherence to the integration thesis, according to which late capitalism is perceived as a smoothly functioning mechanism of the reproduction of domination, Adorno is only able to conceive *Selbstbesinnung* in social-theoretic terms as an *external perspective* on the administered world formed by an oppressive bureaucracy, an hierarchical-monopolistic economy, and an ideological culture industry. Adorno attempts to theorize this external perspective in terms of the idea of 'non-conformism'. In order to sustain this idea, I will suggest, Adorno is forced to introduce a Kantian distinction between subjective autonomy and social heteronomy.

¹⁶'Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre', p. 476.

¹⁷'Beitrag zur Ideologienlehre', p. 476.

Dimensions of Non-conformism

In the first two lectures of his 1963 lecture series on moral philosophy, Adorno discusses the consequences, for a normatively justified praxis, of the modern impossibility of understanding the norms of the good life in terms of 'ethics', as *ethos* (habit, custom). What has now become radically questionable is that the possibility of the good life is already pre-given and present in current social forms, and that the 'substantiality of custom (*Sitte*)' is itself a reliable guide to ethical action (PM 22). Also now radically questionable is the assumption generating the self-assurance of bourgeois thinking concerning the moral, at the end of the eighteenth century, namely, that an adequate understanding of moral praxis follows directly from insight into the interests and concrete ideals of an emerging social class (PM 14-15). The loss of self-certainty of the moral, and its diremption from real interests, denotes, for Adorno, the problematic nature of moral categories in existing society. One immediate result for contemporary critical thinking is that any espousal of a unity of theory and praxis can only appear as a 'blind dogma', whose effective outcome can only be to cut short theoretical reflection (PM 14). It is this situation - the problematic status of the moral within contemporary society - which Adorno sees as forcing a refocusing of the moral domain on self-conscious reflection. It is at this point that moral philosophy becomes capable of articulating the definitive problem of the moral, namely, the relation of the singular individual to the universal, a problem which cannot be raised from the perspective of ethics as *ethos* (PM 23, 30). Adorno describes this relationship as a 'relation of tension (*Spannungsverhältnis*)' (PM 29). The tendency to violence and repression cannot be reduced to only one of these terms, implying that it is the character of the *relation* between them which determines the form of a just society (PM 34). This

becomes clear if we think of the types of social forms likely to be generated through the prioritizing of one term or the other. A faith in immediately given social forms as expressive of a moral universal, as though *ethos* were still a reliable guide to praxis, would now only appear as a form of 'provincialism', given the radical problematizing of custom (*Sitte*) by moral reflection. On the other hand, to believe that merely following the dictates of individual authenticity provides a justifiable normative basis for action immediately lapses into 'pure illusion', or turns into 'pure ideology', since this perspective shows itself wholly incapable of articulating the basis of normative structures which would govern the relationships between authentic selves (PM 23). Hence the determination of the moral now must be concerned with the quality of the relation between the two moments.

In the final lecture, Adorno returns to the problems posed by the radically questionable moral status of existing social forms, this time explicitly deriving from the analysis a notion of moral praxis as resistance (*Widerstand*). Adorno here takes up a Weberian account of the loss of a transparent, theoretical justification of existing, 'positive' forms of morality. Adorno traces this deficit to a 'hollowing out' of prevailing social forms of morality, occurring through their definitive severance from the frameworks of meaning once furnished by religion and philosophy (PM 252). In consequence, the forms of morality which are universally valid within society take on the character of 'evil' and 'repression'. Social forms of morality now become 'fetishes', which are held on to as necessary even though their 'substance' has ceased to exist. The point where the moral begins, so Adorno concludes, can now only be 'the fully resolute resistance, without compromise, against all manifestations of this [objective] spirit' (PM 253). Otherwise expressed, 'the justified life (*das richtige Leben*) today would consist in the form of resistance against the forms of a false life, penetrated and critically dissolved by the most progressive consciousness' (PM 249). Given

that, under contemporary social conditions, the concrete determination, and moral ground of resistance against the forms of 'false life' cannot follow from immediate identification with the interests of a particular social class, the question then becomes one of the standpoint which makes resistance possible. Or, to put this otherwise, the question is one of the nature of the standpoint attained by the subject in possession of the 'most progressive consciousness', and, specifically, of the nature of the resource which enables the subject to take a critical perspective on the forms of 'false life'. It is clear from Adorno's comments elsewhere that he conceives that form of critical self-reflection on social forms which makes moral resistance possible, in terms of Kant's concept of autonomy.¹⁸ In Kant's determination of morality as self-legislation, Adorno perceives an anti-conventional moment which can serve as a source of resistance.¹⁹ This is clearly expressed in the following passage, from Adorno's 1956/7 lectures on moral philosophy,

The moment of resistance is [in Kantian moral philosophy] also posited, insofar as all conventional moments - that which is not, in the strictest sense, determined by the subject itself, is excluded by Kant as the ground of right of the ethical. To give oneself the law, means not to receive the law from external reality, but rather to overcome the law in resistance against reality. . . . That, with Kant, the thought of resistance is already also thought in the concept of autonomy, requires a limitation insofar as, for him, the thought of autonomy falls together unproblematically with that of universality. It did not occur to him that reason, which leads to justified

¹⁸This is Gerhard Schweppenhäuser's thesis, in his *Ethik nach Auschwitz* (Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1993), pp. 191ff.

¹⁹Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz*, p. 193.

action (*richtiges Verhalten*), could stand in contradiction not only to institutions, but also to all that which is universally held for rational as such, and that thereby precisely the universality with which he is concerned, can be maintained in individualization without hope (*hoffnungslose Vereinzelung*).²⁰

Adorno's intention, then, is to hold on to the Kantian concept of autonomy whilst rejecting the supposition of harmony between the interests of classes and the interests of individuals, an identity which Kant's reading of autonomy represents in the form of the priority given to universality.²¹ It is this Kantian concept of autonomy which is implicitly at work in Adorno's thesis that the critical moment of oppositional praxis has now slipped into theory, into the sphere, that is, 'of the renewed deliberation on the possibility of justified action (*eines richtigen Verhaltens*)' (PM 13). Adorno expands on this thesis of the potential for resistance within theory a little later, suggesting that it originates in a standing back from false praxis, in order to furnish a space for considering what is 'essential'. At this point, Adorno introduces the concept of non-conformism. Practical resistance is here identified with the 'moment of non-conformism (*Nicht-Mitmachen*) in relation to the dominant non-essence (*Umwesen*)', which because it constitutes resistance against 'something stronger', also possesses, in each instant, the 'moment of hopelessness' (PM 18).

Adorno, therefore, elucidates the possibility of a self-distanciation from the administered totality, and its rigidified forms of thought and experience, by re-conceiving self-reflection along the lines of the critical possibilities inherent in Kant's concept of autonomy. Because, however, the autonomous potential of self-reflection is bereft of a social basis, its social expression can only

²⁰Quoted in Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz*, p. 194.

²¹*Ethik nach Auschwitz*, p. 194.

appear as a *Nicht-Mitmachen wollen* (refusal to conform), as an (intellectual) refusal of the conditions of dehumanization. This reading is supported by the introduction to *Minima Moralia*, where Adorno defines the standpoint of critical self-reflection in terms of the perspective of subjective autonomy which eludes the grasp of the dominant order. It is from this perspective that Adorno undertakes to produce a series of micro-critiques of alienated, or damaged life. Adorno makes clear, however, that because the social basis of autonomy has been obliterated in the integrated order of late capitalism, critique is undertaken from a perspective which, in social terms, has effectively ceased to exist,

In the present phase of historical movement, whose overpowering objectivity consists above all in the dissolution of the subject, without another, new one having sprung up out of it, individual experience is necessarily based on the old subject, the historically condemned subject, which is still for itself, but no longer in itself (MM 8).

We can see, at this point, that Adorno intends the notion of non-conformity as the social-theoretic complement to that type of distanced reflection on the social order that is made accessible in the discourses of art and critical-dialectical philosophy. Adorno's critical dialectic of concepts, I argued, attempts to generate an *experience of alienation* from the conditions of modern life. Philosophy and art are specialist discourses that are able to generate a critical-negative experience with regard to the social content taken up within concepts and artworks. The name given to this experience in *Negative Dialectics* is *das Schwindelerregende* (lit. 'that which excites dizziness') (ND 31-33; 42-3). The 'shock of the open' (*Schock des Offenen*) is a form of self-distanciation with regard to the integrated whole, and the accompanying *doxa* which assumes that the manufactured, regimented

and compartmentalized freedom - the *Scheinbefriedigungen* (illusory satisfactions) (MM 74) - afforded within modern society and its culture really amounts to an autonomous life. The hyperbolic denouncements of modern society ('The whole is the false') do not betray an aporetic concept of reason. Rather, such assertions are intended to alienate the reader from the - *actually* - alienating conditions of modern social existence. Negative dialectic draws upon the emphatic truth claims inherent within philosophical concepts in order to make accessible that autonomous distance on the social which is the perspective of critique. The critical negativity of thought thus generates an experience of alienation - the awareness that the identifications on which current society rests fail to live up to the utopian potential to which they lay claim. The notion of non-conformity, therefore, represents what we might call the social appearance form of the distanced perspective on administered society. The possibility of the non-conformist standpoint depends upon that type of critical-negative insight into the social world that Adorno perceives as afforded through art and critical-dialectical philosophy.

However, Adorno himself is at the same time very aware of the danger accompanying the strategy of non-conformism, its potential assimilability and administrability: 'For he that does not conform, the danger exists that he holds himself to be better than others, and [that he] misuses his critique of society for his private interest' (MM § 6). The same self-doubts are raised in the introduction to *Minima Moralia*, here with an implicit reference to the 'Virtue and the Way of the World' section of Hegel's *Phenomenology*,

There attaches to the subjective viewpoint, even though it is critically sharpened against itself, [something] sentimental and anachronistic: something of the complaint about the way of the world, a complaint which would not be rejected on account of

its goodness, but because the complaining subject threatens to harden in his being so-and-so, and thus again to fulfil the law of the way of the world' (MM 8).

The standpoint of 'Virtue' in Hegel's account has a significant feature in common with the standpoint of the autonomous subject - the standpoint of critique in Adorno's account: both are defined by the loss of a social ground for the critique directed against current society, and it is this which causes critique to appear as 'sentimental' and 'anachronistic', as an 'empty sound'.²² The complaints of the autonomous subject, like those of the standpoint of virtue, seem to articulate a perspective which does not belong to the present, and hence the likelihood exists of its being met with bewilderment, or, simply, indifference. Adorno's critical strategy attempts to counter this possibility by provoking a reflection which alienates from what is intuitively certain, or from sound common sense. From within the present and its alienating social forms, transcendence cannot be generated by a seamless dialectical progression from within those alienating forms, but can only appear as an external impulse (*Anstoß von Außen*), a 'qualitative leap' which breaks the immediate identification, on the part of subjects, of ersatz forms of satisfaction with genuine freedom (ND 182; 183). Interestingly, Adorno uses the term 'spontaneity' to depict the capability of the subject to break from the identification with the present. Adorno intends this term in a way which both affirms Kant's notion of cognitive autonomy - where spontaneity denotes the free activity of the subject in forming what is given in sense impressions, and hence its freedom from immediacy - and denies its naturalization in Kant as an immanent capacity of the subject, rather than as socially produced and, therefore, vulnerable to extirpation within the forms of alienated life.

The fact that critique appears within alienated life as an abstract negation, however, has

²²G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 280.

important consequences for the attempt to conceive the possibility of autonomy within the administered world, and it is here that the real danger of Adorno's critical method becomes apparent. The conception of resistance as non-conformity - *Nicht-Mitmachen wollen* - which is figured as the social expression of autonomy within inhuman conditions, risks sliding into a representation of all forms of political struggle as *a fortiori* hopeless. To misuse one's critique of society for the sake of private interest, which Adorno himself identifies as the danger of the strategy of the *Nicht-Mitmacher*, might mean, in these circumstances, to be unable, or unwilling, to avert the slide from outer-directed resistance into a preoccupation with one's own virtuous character: the collapse into the inner-directed self-reassurance that, despite all existing inhumanity, everything *I* do is untainted by the repressive totality. There exists, in short, the danger of preoccupation with the quality of one's own will, precisely that aspect of a Kantian ethics of conviction which Adorno elsewhere staunchly rejects.²³ A deeper worry is that the conception of critique in terms of abstract negation of the false, generates an (equally abstract) opposition for human action between adaptation and resistance; submission and non-conformism, which *itself* belongs to the ideological forms of alienated life, and the articulation of which within critique thus merely *confirms* the 'way of the world'. The danger exists that the absence of a theoretical frame for a notion of the productive potential of resistance may itself be part of the *Schein* (semblance) of a repressive totality.²⁴ The 'hardening' of the complaining subject, which leads to the unavoidability for this subject of

²³Exemplary here is Adorno's discussion of the figure of Gregors Werle in Ibsen's play *The Wild Duck*. The play figures the potentially evil, immoral consequences which follow from a pure ethics of conviction. See *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, lecture 16 (pp. 233-247).

²⁴Ulrich Kohlmann has articulated this worry about Adorno's notion of praxis, in his *Dialektik der Moral: Untersuchungen zur Moralphilosophie Adornos* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 1997), pp. 202-3.

confirming the way of the world, might then be seen as the tendency to hold on to the absolute opposition between adaptation and resistance, rendering both of these terms abstract in a way which excludes the progressive and productive moment of resistance. If this is the danger which accompanies Adorno's depiction of critique, then we ought to have cause to question Adorno's too easy identification of non-conformism with the moment of 'hopelessness' (PM 18). We ought to ask, further, whether there are forms of non-conformist praxis which are, potentially, constructive and emancipatory, and capable of breaking down the abstract opposition of subjective autonomy and alienated life.

Resistance to Socialization

In his attempt to convey the social import of non-conformity, as a form of resistance against the totally integrated society, Adorno, I now want to argue, draws upon a conception of resistance as *resistance to socialization*. This idea follows from the conception of integration through domination, which theorizes social structures as generating a pressure to conform to established modes of thought and experience, a pressure which takes on an explicitly ideological form in the productions of the culture industry. The administrative incorporation of the oppressed within the integrated totality of late capitalism meant that resistance would now have to be conceived in terms of an active negation of the institutional structures and cultural forms which generate conformity. Adorno finds a model for this conception of resistance, in his lectures on moral philosophy, in the action of the 20th July movement against the third Reich. By means of this model, Adorno develops a view of resistance as an attempted transformation of that which is unbearable (*ein*

Unerträgliches). The fact that resistance was here an emphatic rejection of the prevailing structures of socialization, and its implicit model of rational action, meant that it would necessarily be marked by an 'irrational moment', as a manifestation of the 'seemingly absurd' (PM 19). Yet this moment of irrationality or absurdity was not due to faulty reasoning, but followed directly from a penetrating theoretical insight into the repression, violence and corruption that characterized the third Reich.²⁵ Adorno attempts to generalize this model through an account of moral action as a resistance to the structures of thought and experience that have been uncritically imbibed as a result of the socializing pressures of 'false life'. The moral life, therefore, now implies

the determinate negation of what has been critically penetrated [*des Durchschauten*]
and therewith the power of resistance against all that has been imposed on us,
against that which the world has made of us, and still to an infinitely larger extent
wants to make of us. Something other than the reflection on this, and the attempt
from the outset to struggle against it in the consciousness of one's objective
powerless, is not available to us; and this resistance against that which the world has
made of us is under no circumstances merely a distinguishing over against the
external world . . . but this resistance would in any case have to prove itself within
ourselves against all that wherein we are inclined to 'play along' [*mitzuspielen*] (PM
249).

²⁵The conclusions that Adorno attempts to draw from this model are strikingly similar to those which Zygmunt Bauman draws from his critique of bureaucratic action, in his *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989). Bauman argues that '[i]n the aftermath of the Holocaust, legal practice, and also moral theory, faced the possibility that morality may manifest itself in insubordination towards socially upheld principles, and in an action openly defying solidarity and consensus' (p. 177). I return to Bauman's critique of bureaucratic action in the final chapter.

The presupposition of resistance is thus a generalized suspicion with regard to the structures of ordinary experience. Significantly, Adorno concludes from this that the moment of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) has now become the 'true heir of all that which once went by the name of moral categories'. Only in the critical reflection on the 'rigid and relentless [*jenem Starren und Unerbittlichen*], that wants to establish itself within us', and hence the self-distanciation from the oppressive structures of the administered totality, is anything like moral action possible (PM 251).

At this point, we can see clearly how Adorno's conception of *Selbstbesinnung* as a distanciated perspective on an alienated context, follows directly from his reading of exchange society as an impenetrable structure of integration through domination. Given the integration thesis, *Selbstbesinnung* cannot have a location within the world of social experience, but must rather take the form of a critical reflection on all that stands 'inside' the social world. Adorno must conceive the standpoint of critical autonomy as an external perspective with regard to the heteronomous forms of determination imbibed from socialization. But here, however, one evident weakness of the integration thesis becomes clear, in that it prevents the drawing of any meaningful distinction between totalitarian states and those with even a minimum of liberal-democratic freedoms. Adorno's conception of a moral responsibility for resisting socialization, in fact, leads to a theory of critical self-reflection that is strikingly similar to the parameters of that critical faculty that Hannah Arendt termed judgement.²⁶ In her report on the Eichmann trial, Arendt had depicted judgement as a capacity to discriminate right from wrong which would be capable of resisting the socializing pressures of totalitarian states,

²⁶ Arendt modelled her notion of judgement on Kant's account of reflective judgement. Arendt uses this model to outline a form of critical insight that is independent of socially sanctioned modes of thought.

What we have demanded in these trials, where the defendants had committed “legal” [viz. socially sanctioned] crimes, is that human beings be capable of telling right from wrong even when all they have to guide them is their own judgement, which, moreover, happens to be completely at odds with what they must regard as the unanimous opinion of all those around them. . . . Since the whole of respectable society had in one way or another succumbed to Hitler, the moral maxims which determine social behaviour and the religious commandments . . . which guide conscience had virtually vanished. Those few who were still able to tell right from wrong went really only by their own judgements, and they did so freely; there were no rules to be abided by, under which the particular cases with which they were confronted could be subsumed. They had to decide each instance as it arose, because no rules existed for the unprecedented.²⁷

Like Adorno’s *Selbstbesinnung*, which claims to be the ‘true heir’ of moral categories, Arendt’s notion of judgement is intended to delineate a vision of moral conduct in a situation in which social forms of morality have become embodiments of oppression and corruption. The suspicion arises here that Adorno’s notion of resistance would in fact only be entirely appropriate to the historically specific case of totalitarian states. This will become clearer when we look at the problematic status of Adorno’s account of the production of ideological conformity. Before addressing this, however, I want to look briefly at how Adorno tries to seek out everyday experiences which serve as ‘micro-insights’ into the administered whole.

²⁷Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin, 1963), pp. 294-5.

I have argued that, for Adorno, the point of focus for the possibility of resistance will necessarily be the capacity of the subject to attain the autonomous perspective which 'sees through' the repressive character of the administered whole. However, given the ideology-critical reading of Kantian autonomy, as socially produced rather than as a pre-given capacity, Adorno cannot presuppose critical self-reflection, as a potential simply waiting to be actualized by the relevant theoretical insight. Adorno's critical strategy responds to this problem by seeking to uncover those - almost undetectable - traces of negative experience within the present, those moments which have not been entirely obliterated by repressive social structures, and which can therefore serve as the social basis of critical autonomy. Seyla Benhabib has given an excellent characterization of this strategy. The task of the critic here, she argues, is 'to illuminate those cracks in the totality, those fissures in the social net, those moments of disharmony and discrepancy, through which the untruth of the whole is revealed and glimmers of another life become visible'.²⁸ As definitive of this strategy, Benhabib notes in particular Adorno's locating of the 'conflict potentials of society' in everyday gestures like laughter, rather than collective protest and struggles, in his essay 'Anmerkungen zum sozialen Konflikt heute'.²⁹ The point of this strategy is not, however, to delineate an alternative to forms of collective struggle. Adorno focusses on 'everyday gestures' like laughter because they are primordial experiential events, whose spontaneity exceeds the mechanisms of administrative integration, and its regulation and ordering of needs. In the essay 'Kultur und Verwaltung (Culture and Administration)', Adorno describes an 'internal tension'

²⁸Seyla Benhabib, 'The Critique of Instrumental Reason', in S. Žižek (ed.), *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso, 1994), p. 88.

²⁹In *Soziologische Schriften I*.

between administration and culture, deriving from the fact that there inheres, in culture, a spontaneous moment which opposes rational regulation. Adorno draws out this spontaneous element through an analysis of the cultural festival (*Fest*),

There resides within the idea of a festival, also within an artistic festival, even if it be ever so secularized and weakened, the claim of the unique, the non-fungible, of the emphatic moment. One should celebrate festivals as they fall; not arrange them in order and guard against clashes. Administering reason, which seizes hold of the festival and rationalizes it, dissolves its character as festival.³⁰

Adorno thus reads the administrative reification of culture - its transformation into a series of planned, regulated events - as a process of neutralization, in which culture loses its relation to possible praxis.³¹ In its subsumption under administration, culture loses precisely that spontaneous moment which allows it to generate experiences that are not assimilable into the purely functional ends served by administration.

In the same way, the importance of spontaneous and non-regulatable experiences such as laughter, for Adorno, derives from the fact that they are without a social function; *these experiences cannot be seamlessly integrated into the functional mechanisms by which society reproduces itself*. It is therefore within these types of spontaneous experiential events and gestures that the traces of a form of critical-negative experience, capable of judging the integrated whole *as* a context of alienation, would have to be found. These everyday experiences, for Adorno, are not seen as replacing collective protest. Rather, they afford precisely that type of critical-negative insight into

³⁰'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 133.

³¹'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 132.

the administered world which would be capable of guiding collective protest towards emancipatory possibilities. This is why, for Adorno, the theoretical comprehension of forms of conflict, and critical-negative experience necessarily form a unity

If experience would once more be able to attain what it was once capable of, that of which it is deprived in the administered world: to penetrate theoretically into the unregistered [*Unerfaßte*], it would have to decode, right into the most fadingly insignificant aspects, forms of colloquial speech, postures, gestures, and physiognomies, to bring the rigidified and the silenced to speech, the nuances of which are just as much traces of violence [*Gewalt*] as they are ciphers of possible emancipation. When theory and experience depart from one another, both become open to critique.³²

Unless it is capable of articulating the antagonisms revealed in everyday, micro-forms of critical-negative experience, the theoretical analysis of social conflict will become blind to emancipatory possibilities. A central task of theoretical analysis, therefore, is to overcome the 'incapacity to experience' that characterizes the administered whole.³³

By focussing on spontaneous, non-regulatable forms of experience, Adorno wants to uncover the micro-traces of a possible social location for self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*), which would be capable of a critical-negative insight into the oppressive nature of the administered world. Adorno

³²'Anmerkungen zum sozialen Konflikt heute', pp. 193-4.

³³'Anmerkungen zum sozialen Konflikt heute', p. 194. This is why Adorno claims that the irreconcilability of the theoretical cognition of society and empirical sociology is the 'expression of the antagonistic structure'. The emptiness of theory and the blindness of empirical analysis is not the result of errors at the level of thought, it is rather traceable to a social process which dirempts theory and experience.

uncovers here a primordial realm of experiences that cannot be assimilated by the functional logic of administration. Everyday forms of spontaneity thus provide a possible location for an experience which perceives the administered world as if from the outside, and thereby, they make possible a critical awareness of the structures of administrative integration.

We are now able to see how Adorno is able to recover something akin to the account of the dynamic interaction of theory and practice that was outlined in the first chapter. I argued there that the role of theory cannot be to construct a theoretical logic of emancipation, since any such theory inevitably pushes towards a deterministic account of praxis, as the 'execution' of the developmental logic of social structures. The uncovering of a potential for critical-negative insight into the social world in spontaneous, non-regulatable experiences, I want to argue, enables Adorno to conceive the critical self-reflection of the social world afforded in critical-dialectical philosophy and artworks as the 'theoretical' components of a critical hermeneutic of everyday experience. *The purpose of critical-theoretical discourses is to re-awaken, within the remaining micro-traces of non-administered experience, an experience of alienation in the present.* This is a type of dynamic interaction between theory and practice that Adorno characterizes, in *Stichworte*, as a 'qualitative recoil', where each component is informed by the insights available to the other, as opposed to a conception of theory as the 'passing over' into praxis, or its 'subordination' (St 190). The interplay between critical-negative experience and theoretical critique is to be conceived as an interaction across a field of tension, and not as a one-way translation of thought into the act. The critical discourses of philosophy and art have to draw on the way the administered world is revealed in those moments of spontaneous experience, and similarly, the productive articulation of experience is dependent upon the insights of theory.

One thing we ought to conclude from this is that, if there is a 'negativism' to Adorno's social thought, it derives from the social analysis of late capitalism, and not from a purported 'renunciation' of the project of critical theory. Adorno's focus on spontaneous, fleeting experiential events does seem, as Seyla Benhabib notes, an especially thin basis on which to ground a project of emancipation.³⁴ Yet, as we have seen, this was not due to a theoretical pessimism on Adorno's part, but followed directly from his analysis of the structure of integration through domination definitive of late capitalism. It is for this reason that subsequent critical theorists such as Habermas have attempted to undermine Adorno's integration thesis, through delineating alternative or complementary structures of socialization that are non-reducible to the functional mechanisms of administration. In this way, theorists have sought to uncover a more substantive social basis for the emancipatory project. In the next section, I want to discuss the critique of Adorno's integration thesis that establishes the plausibility of these alternative theories.³⁵

Re-conceiving the Social: The Critique of the Integration Thesis

Adorno's reading of the culture industry is pivotal to his account of the incorporation of

³⁴'The Critique of Instrumental Reason', pp. 87-8.

³⁵As we will see in due course, however, there are problems with the manner in which critical theorists have attempted to modify Adorno's integration thesis. In particular, Habermas, and others who have taken up his transformation of critical theory, have tended to sideline questions of ideology and power altogether from the analysis of structures of integration. Significantly, however, other theorists, notably Alain Touraine, André Gorz, and Alberto Melucci, have recently developed the idea of administrative incorporation as a form of domination, and have reconstructed a critique from the perspective of a non-administered subjectivity. I employ these theories in my critique of Habermas's and Honneth's critical theory in chapters 8 and 9.

subordinated classes in late capitalism. The ideological messages of the culture industry are seen to effect a direct socialization of the psyche, which brings about an identity of individual needs with the functional imperatives of administrative apparatuses. The culture industry transforms individuals into acquiescent pawns of the mechanisms of the functionally ordered social system. Adorno frames the idea of a loss of individual autonomy by drawing on a *historically specific* model of the autonomous subject, founded on the particular social conditions of a competitive market economy and patriarchal private sphere. This model is deployed as the privileged critical standpoint for judging the alienating social structures of late capitalism. By drawing on this historically specific form of the autonomous subject as the standpoint of critique, Adorno presents the social transformations occurring in the transition to late capitalism as processes of *subject dissolution*, whereby the potential for autonomy is gradually, but inevitably, eclipsed by destructive processes of integration.³⁶ This idea becomes open to question when we look more closely at Adorno's account of how the mass media are able to produce ideological conformity.

Adorno's efforts to show that the culture industry is able to bring about a psychic adaptation of individuals to administrative imperatives are in fact marked by a persistent theoretical error: Adorno attempts to draw conclusions concerning the *level of reception* of media messages from an *analysis of their contents*. From the fact that the content of a film is ideological, Adorno concludes that this ideological message will be transposed into a conformist attitude in the psyche of the individuals who receive it. That this thesis is implausible has been decisively shown by the insights of the approach of cultural studies to the mass media. Cultural studies has unearthed the ever-

³⁶See Mark Poster's account in his *The Second Media Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press 1995), p. 10.

present potential of a contestability of ideological meanings by focussing on the various interpretive strategies deployed by media audiences. According to the cultural studies approach, individuals draw upon the stock of meanings, interpretations, and interests furnished by their specific social-cultural milieu in order to construct their own readings of media messages.³⁷ Adorno's critique of the culture industry, therefore, fails to ground the idea of a dissolution of individuality that is presupposed by the integration thesis.

Axel Honneth has drawn on the insights concerning individuals' use of culturally based strategies of interpretation in the reception of media messages in order to criticize Adorno's theory of socialization. Honneth argues that Adorno's account of socialization processes entirely overlooks 'subcultural orientation-horizons', which are the result of 'interpretive praxis based on the ongoing experience of social groups', and which act as a mediating mechanism between the psyche and the interpretation of social reality.³⁸ It is because Adorno's account of socialization entirely overlooks everyday acts of interpretation occurring at this level that the displacement of the structure of individuation characteristic of competitive capitalism can be cast as the obliteration of the potential for autonomy, with socialization now being conceived as virtually equivalent to integration. What is essentially missing in Adorno's account is the *cultural level of symbolic mediation*, where collective interpretation of everyday experience generates 'group-specific value orientations' that 'guide the individual in working through the flood of media information'.³⁹ On this basis, Honneth

³⁷Exemplary of this approach are John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Methuen, 1987); and Paul Willis, *Common Culture* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1990).

³⁸See Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p. 80.

³⁹*Critique of Power*, p. 80.

charges that Adorno's identification of socialization with administrative integration is marred by a *reductivist account of social action*.⁴⁰ Adorno's reading of the dissolution of individuality in late capitalism entirely overlooks the significance of group-based processes of interpretation for the formation of individual identities. The realm of the social is, for Adorno, exhausted by the twin extremes of a manipulative, effectively all-powerful system of functional administration, and the level of individual socialization complementary to it, which Adorno models on a psychoanalytic theory focussed on the socialization of individual drives.⁴¹

It is significant that Adorno himself came to doubt his own earlier analysis of how the culture industry produces ideological conformity, in a number of his latest writings. This is apparent in the 1968 sociology lectures, where Adorno's later reservations concerning the accomplishments of the culture industry as a force of integration are lucidly expressed,

In this thesis [of the power of the culture industry to shape and form identities] there is actually something of the dogmatic and unexamined. . . . One cannot just automatically assume this identity of objective stimuli and objective structures of consciousness - which have also shaped human beings - and the behaviour [*Verhaltensweise*] of human beings. And so it would really be the most important task . . . of empirical social research today, for once to determine in earnest to what extent human beings are actually such, and think in such a way, as they have been

⁴⁰*Critique of Power*, pp. 95-6..

⁴¹Adorno, it could be argued, employs the same theory of socialization as Parsonian functionalist sociology, with the sole difference that Adorno adopts an ideology-critical perspective on the process of the internalization of social norms within the personality structure of individuals. Hence Adorno can read the reproduction of social order as the reproduction of domination.

formed by these mechanisms (ESoz 255).

Adorno's later doubts concerning the total correspondence between objective structures and subjective attitudes were prompted both by the results of emerging empirical research into how individuals assimilate media messages, and by the forms of student protest which had broken out by this time.⁴² In his 1968 essay 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?', Adorno refers to both of these factors. Empirical researches, he argues, indicate that, 'subjectively, in terms of their consciousness of reality', the classes are not at all as 'levelled out' (*nivelliert*) as is suspected.⁴³ Adorno also refers here to 'traces of a counter-tendency' to the dissolution of individuality within distinct groups of youth. This counter-tendency encompassed 'resistance against blind adaptation, freedom for rationally chosen ends, revulsion of the world as a fraud and fabrication (*Vorstellung*), mindfulness of the possibility of transformation'.⁴⁴ It is plausible to suggest, on this basis, that, had he had the opportunity, Adorno himself would have sought to modify his social theory in a way that could take account of the limitations to administrative integration.

Adorno's reading of a totalizing structure of integration through domination, as we saw, forces him locate the possibilities of a critical self-reflection on domination on the very thin ground of non-regulatable, spontaneous experiences. Adorno is unable to show how such a form of critical-negative experience is could lead to a form of oppositional praxis which would be both constructive and collective. If Adorno's integration thesis is questionable, however, it would seem plausible to seek out an alternative basis for critical self-reflection *within* forms of socialization that exceed

⁴²Christian Thies, *Die Krise des Individuums*, p. 178.

⁴³'Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft?', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 360.

⁴⁴'Spätkapitalismus oder Industriegesellschaft?', p. 368.

administrative imperatives. Critical theory might then be able to rediscover a ground of resistance to forms of domination that would be both intersubjective and normative. Precisely this idea, of course, underlies Jürgen Habermas's attempt to demarcate a 'lifeworld' of linguistically mediated interaction from forms of functional integration that are ascribed to the workings of economic and administrative 'subsystems'. Habermas uncovers a form of communicative socialization, understood as the linguistic basis on which the lifeworld of social groups reproduces itself. Habermas can thus argue that the norms implicit in linguistically mediated interaction provide the basis for a critique of administrative integration.

Habermas's general approach has been taken over by Axel Honneth, but with significant differences. Honneth, like Habermas, has focussed on a certain structure of normative expectations which is perceived as constitutive of forms of social interaction. For Honneth, the persistent violation of these normative expectations can become the basis for resistance when oppressed groups are able form their normative intuitions, through group-specific practices of interpretation at the cultural level, into a coherent oppositional perspective. A major intellectual inspiration for this idea has been the work of a group of historians drawing on Gramsci's insights concerning ideology and class consciousness. A significant achievement of this approach was the uncovering of forms of culturally-based resistance occurring in the epoch of transition from feudalism to capitalism, and which were interpreted in terms of a class-struggle analysis. Edward Thompson's work, for example, has uncovered an oppositional 'plebian culture' in pre-industrial England, located within 'a working environment of exploitation and resistance to exploitation', which served as a normative resource for resistance to the rationalizations and innovations of capitalist

modernization.⁴⁵ In a similar vein, George Rudé has spoken of the ‘inherent beliefs’ of the lower classes in early industrial society, formed from ‘direct experience, oral tradition or folk-memory’, which function as an interpretive frame for the development of normatively based resistance to the consequences of capitalist modernization.⁴⁶ A variety of terms emerged from these researches, such as ‘moral economy’, ‘popular ideology’ and ‘*mentalités*’, which attempted to capture the normative expectations rooted within the popular culture of the lower classes. Honneth, as we will see later, has attempted to systematize these ideas through developing the idea of resistance as a ‘struggle for recognition’, in which oppressed groups attempt to make socially effective the normative possibilities sustained within forms of social interaction.

One significant difference between Honneth’s approach and that of Habermas, however, is that Honneth has attempted to construct an account of how the normative expectations rooted in social interaction become accessible to individuals as a form of critical-negative experience. Honneth suggests that the typical feelings - of shame, indignation, or disrespect - deriving from the violation of normative claims to social recognition, form the basis on which a negative experience of the social order can become available to individuals. These moral feelings make available to individuals an insight into the forms of injustice that pervade the social order. By following through on this idea, Honneth argues, critical theory would be able to link up with a form of critical-negative experience which was immanent and intersubjective. Unlike Adorno’s focus on everyday spontaneous gestures and experiences, which would seem to be fleeting and, for the most part, non-

⁴⁵See the introduction to his *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* (New York: The New Press, 1993).

⁴⁶In his *Ideology and Popular Protest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), p. 22.

shareable, the critical-negative experiences deriving from the violation of claims to recognition could become the basis of a collective, group experience through practices of cultural interpretation, which show a feeling of moral injury to be generalizable across an entire group.

We will see later the problems that arise in the efforts of Habermas and Honneth to re-ground critical theory in normative expectations immanent in structures of socialization. Before turning to these theories, however, it is necessary to discuss more fully the second dimension of Adorno's analysis of the social operation of the exchange principle. Here, Adorno theorizes exchange logic, not as a form of integration through domination, but as a principle of cultural rationalization.

Real Abstraction and Intellectual Abstraction

Exchange logic, for Adorno, does not only form the basis for a structure of social domination. Exchange logic also penetrates into the realm of cultural meaning, and in this form it is responsible for a specific type of distortion within the process of cultural rationalization. I described this earlier as a process of linguistic reification, understood as a rigidification of linguistic meanings. As a result of this process, language loses its capacity to function as the critical self-articulation of social experience, a capacity that, as we saw, Adorno interprets in terms of Hegel's theory of the judgement (*Urteil*), where a context-transcending *Sollen* is shown to be integral to the work of conceptual identification. As a result of this distortion, on one level, the social-historical possibilities immanent in concepts are no longer able to inform the linguistic articulation of empirical items. On a second level, linguistic reification implies that linguistic forms become

increasingly de-sensitized to the way things are revealed as meaningful within human experience. In order to grasp the social import of this thesis, it is necessary to see the influence upon Adorno of the theory of reification deriving from *Lebensphilosophie*. I shall therefore attempt to draw out Adorno's reading of the experiential distortions deriving from processes of cultural rationalization through a comparison with the *lebensphilosophisch* reading of reification in the cultural sociology of Georg Simmel. I will argue that Adorno, like Lukács, attempts to re-situate Simmel's analysis within the context of a Marxist social critique. But, unlike Lukács, Adorno insists upon the relative independence of the cultural distortions of the exchange principle (which Lukács had theorized as the logic of the 'commodity form') in relation to the economic structure. A second major influence upon Adorno's reading of the exchange principle as a structure of rationalization was the social philosophy of Alfred Sohn-Rethel. I will therefore discuss Sohn-Rethel's theory before embarking upon the analysis of Simmel's cultural sociology.

In the first sentence of the preface to the revised edition of his *Geistige und körperliche Arbeit*, Sohn-Rethel had claimed that his life's work had been dedicated to the explication or deciphering of a semi-intuition: 'the discovery of the transcendental subject in the commodity form'.⁴⁷ Just as, in the cognition of nature, the object is a composite of abstract form and sensuous appearance, so, in the bourgeois economy, the commodity presents itself as a whole composed of exchange value and use value. This guiding insight led Sohn-Rethel to trace the intellectual abstraction (the independence of thought forms from material content) characterizing transcendental synthesis to a *social process of abstraction*, which Sohn-Rethel located in the process of commodity

⁴⁷Quoted in Jochen Hörisch, preface to Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori* (Berlin: Wagenbach, 1990), p. 7.

exchange. The exchange process is thus that form of social practice that grounds the possibility of cognitive abstraction,

The concepts of the understanding (*Verstand*) certainly do not exist otherwise than in human consciousness, *but they do not originate in human consciousness*. It is the social being of humans that determines their consciousness.⁴⁸ . . . The historical ground of explication for the a priori of the understanding is furnished, not by Kant's 'pure apperception' as the 'subject of a transcendental synthesis', but rather by money as the functional bearer of social synthesis in commodity production.⁴⁹

What characterizes the abstract understanding, Sohn-Rethel claims, is the abstraction from all 'perceptible reality', and from all trace of the 'activity of the senses'. In short, it is characterized by its use of 'non-empirical abstractions'.⁵⁰ Sohn-Rethel argues that it is precisely this structure of abstraction that is manifested in the severance of the exchange value of commodities from the 'perceptible reality' attaching to things as items of use (*Gebrauchsdinge*).⁵¹ In the exchange process, things receive a purely social value, derived from the abstract category of social labour time, which is logically independent of the sensuous qualities of things. This, of course, is the structure of commodity abstraction identified by Marx. Sohn-Rethel argues, however, that commodity abstraction is *itself* grounded in a 'real abstraction' (*Realabstraktion*) attaching to the social logic

⁴⁸This is an allusion to Marx's statement in 'Deutsche Ideologie', *Die Frühschriften* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 1953), p. 349.

⁴⁹*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, p. 22.

⁵⁰*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, p. 15.

⁵¹*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, p. 16.

of the act of exchange. Constitutive of the social act of exchange is a pure abstraction of form, which is the social-historical basis of the abstraction definitive of the cognitive categories of the understanding. Sohn-Rethel speaks of the genesis of the concepts of the understanding from out of this 'real abstraction', which he describes in terms of the *non-empirical physicality* of the act of exchange. What characterizes the act of exchange is that it is a 'physical process' which excludes all physical transformation of the commodities to be exchanged,

It is the physicality of the act of exchange, which is concerned with its objects solely with regard to their social, but not to their physical status, which marks that abstractness of exchange that interests us. The physical status of commodities comprises their total empirical nature or perceptible reality, as well as those of the circumstances of their use. The physicality of the act of exchange is thereby of a non-empirical nature and in precisely this sense 'abstract'. An act of exchange as physical process . . . consists of elements of nature such as space, time, motion etc. . . . and these elements are elements of the act of exchange only as stripped of all empirical content and reduced to mere form-abstractions of themselves.⁵²

Because he did not trace commodity abstraction back to its roots in the 'real' abstraction of the act of exchange, Sohn-Rethel argues, Marx could not become aware of the cognitive-theoretic implications of abstraction. Marx, that is to say, could not make the connection between the abstraction attaching to cognitive forms and the abstraction rooted in the social process of exchange.⁵³ The social basis of the non-empirical character of pure concepts only becomes apparent

⁵²*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, p. 29.

⁵³*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, p. 31.

through an analysis of the non-empirical character of the 'real' abstraction that constitutes the act of exchange.

The influence of Sohn-Rethel's thesis on Adorno is clearly shown in the reference, in Adorno's essay 'Society', to exchange as a process of 'objective abstraction' that takes place *prior to* scientific reflection.⁵⁴ Similarly, in his critique of Husserl's logical absolutism, Adorno portrays the exchange process as the social basis of cognitive abstraction,

The reification of logic, as the self-alienation of thought, has for its equivalent and model the reification of that to which thinking relates itself: to the unity of objects, which, for the thought that works upon them, have filtered into identity in such a way that the mere form of their unity can be maintained in abstraction from their changing content. Such abstraction remains the significant presupposition of all logic. It refers back to the commodity form, whose identity consists in the "equivalence" of exchange value (ME 76).

Adorno's deployment of this argument, however, is significantly different from that found in Sohn-Rethel's work. Sohn-Rethel presents his thesis as a genealogy of the understanding, which uncovers the 'historical genesis' of the abstraction attaching to the latter. The social origin of conceptual forms, Sohn-Rethel argues, 'is to the intellectual himself absolutely hidden'. There is a 'blindness' of the understanding in relation to its origin.⁵⁵ For Adorno, however, the specific significance of the

⁵⁴Th. W. Adorno, 'Gesellschaft', p. 13.

⁵⁵*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, pp. 20-2. Sohn-Rethel's project would thus seem to owe a huge intellectual debt to Nietzsche's argument concerning the hidden origins of justice in the contractual relationship. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morality*, p. 43.

identification of exchange as the basis of intellectual abstraction, is that it allows Adorno to theorize the exchange process as the *social ground of linguistic reification*. The logic of the exchange process thus becomes accessible as that form of social meaning constitution to which corresponds reification in the conceptual sphere. Adorno, unlike Sohn-Rethel, deploys the argument concerning the relation between thought forms and the exchange principle in order to explain phenomena of reification. The ‘real’ abstraction that characterizes the exchange process can thus be seen as the social ground of the rigidification of linguistic meaning. I now want to develop this argument by situating Adorno’s social theory in relation to the theory of reification developed in Simmel’s cultural sociology.

The Problem of Experience

Adorno’s reading of cultural rationalization as a problem for social theory draws, in fact, on the sociologies of Max Weber and Georg Simmel, and also on the use which had been made of the work of these theorists by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*. Lukács had drawn substantially upon Weber and Simmel in his critique of cultural reification, which he had understood as the extension of the logic of the commodity form into the sphere of culture, generating an objectifying and quantifying attitude towards lifeworld relations. Together with the formal standardization of social functions, this process generates an objectivating attitude towards the self’s own qualities and attributes. The individual’s activity, Lukács argues, ‘becomes alienated from it, it turns into a commodity which, subject to the non-human objectivity of the natural laws of society, must go its

own way independently of the individual just like any consumer article'.⁵⁶ Lukács relates these distortions of the commodity form to a principle of formal rationality, which is characterized in terms of calculation and quantification. What is immediately striking about this analysis is the deep influence of Simmel's cultural sociology. In his *Philosophy of Money*, published in 1900, Simmel had shown how the form of exchange could be conceived as an autonomous, determining feature of social relations. The themes of alienation and reification, and the critique of the dominance of quantification and calculation within formal rationality, figure prominently in Simmel's cultural sociology. Both Simmel and Lukács see the labour process as characterized by a growing de-individualization.⁵⁷ Both also see the commodification of labour as generating effects of reification.⁵⁸ This influence is unsurprising, as Lukács has attended Simmel's lectures in 1909-10 and participated in his private seminars.⁵⁹ Lukács most distinctive contribution had been to integrate this theory into a Marxist framework by conceiving formal rationality as generated by the economic basis. In this way, he was able to subsume the problem of cultural reification under the problem of justice. Thus the solution to cultural reification is the abolition of capitalist economic relations, and

⁵⁶Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, p. 87.

⁵⁷Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 628ff; Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 87ff.

⁵⁸'The commodification of labour is thus only one side of the wide-ranging process of differentiation, which separates out of the personality its singular contents, in order to set those contents in opposition to it as objects, with self-sufficient determinacy and movement', *Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 632.

⁵⁹What is surprising, however, is the fact that Simmel is only mentioned on one occasion in *History of Class Consciousness*, where Lukács refers to the *Philosophy of Money* as a 'very interesting and perceptive work in matters of detail' (p. 95). Perhaps Lukács had been unaware of just how great an influence Simmel had had upon him.

the organic unity of form and content achieved through the development of a form of productive activity which realizes the 'total personality' (*Gesamtpersönlichkeit*). It was precisely this thesis of the derivative nature of the problem of cultural reification which would be unacceptable to Adorno. Following Simmel and Lukács, Adorno came to conceive the problem of cultural rationalization in terms of the structuring of social experience through the principle of exchange. *Tauschwert* (exchange value) was not simply the key to the structure of integration through domination, but operated, further, as an organizing principle of social experience. However, Adorno could not accept Lukács' thesis that the ground of cultural reification was the economic structure of capitalist society. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia* in particular, Adorno came to focus on a critique of cultural reification in terms of semi-autonomous rationalization processes. Adorno conceived these processes in terms of an exchange logic which had twisted free of the domain of economic practices in which it had emerged. I will now turn to the connection between Adorno's thesis of a crisis of experience and Simmel's cultural sociology.

The two central components of Simmel's cultural sociology are succinctly expressed in his essay 'The Crisis of Culture'. The first concerns the problem of the dominance of means. Simmel related this problem to the increasing technologization of modern life, in which the total control over external nature afforded by technology threatened to frame modern life within a totalizing, instrumental perspective. Simmel argued that the logic of the maximization of means, which are objectified in things, had begun to supplant the ends rooted in spiritual life,

The vast intensive and extensive growth of our technology - which is much more than just material technology - entangles us in a web of means, and means towards more means, more and more intermediate stages, causing us to lose sight of our real

ultimate ends. This is the extreme inner danger which threatens all highly developed cultures . . . in which the whole of life is overlaid with a maximum of multi-stratified means.⁶⁰

According to Simmel, money was the purest form and expression of modern, means-dominated culture. One of the defining features of money, for Simmel, was its capacity to make possible ever increasing chains of instrumental connections between things.⁶¹ A second central idea of Simmel's cultural sociology concerns the becoming-autonomous of reified cultural forms. Objectified artefacts, and institutionalized practices, such as industries, sciences, and arts, which are the 'precipitates of creative life', gradually begin to develop an autonomous logic which is then imposed, as an organizing and structuring form, on the life experience of individuals.⁶² On the basis of this idea, Simmel is able to interpret alienated forms of existence as the result of an internalization of means-directed objective culture. The logic of reified forms thus reacts back on the self and its experience, generating the instrumental, objectifying attitude towards the self and its qualities, the predominance of calculative thinking over spontaneity, and the incapacity to experience values other than as means, which characterizes alienated forms of existence. This idea of a penetration of reified culture into experience is clearly discernible in the *Zeitdiagnose* of the latter sections of the *Philosophy of Money*.

A central intention of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, as noted above, is to describe the

⁶⁰Georg Simmel, 'The Crisis of Culture', in D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture: Selected Writings* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 91.

⁶¹*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 676.

⁶²'The Crisis of Culture', pp. 91-2.

effects of the money economy (*Geldwirtschaft*) on everyday behaviour and social life.⁶³ This is taken up in the second, 'synthetic' section of the work, where Simmel examines the workings of the money economy on 'the feeling of life (*Lebensgefühl*) of individuals, on the linking of their fates, on the universal culture'.⁶⁴ Two significant features stand out as distinguishing Simmel's account of the *Geldwirtschaft* from Lukács' theory of capitalist reification.⁶⁵ Firstly, Simmel suggests that the relation of the *Geldwirtschaft* to individual freedom is deeply ambiguous. It both enhances individual freedom by abolishing relations of direct dependence, yet also threatens it by the growth of impersonal and quantitative forms of regulation. It both separates human beings from nature, but also first makes possible an authentic, aesthetic relation to nature.⁶⁶ The second feature concerns Simmel's reading of the problem of reification in terms of life philosophy, rather than in the terms of the Marxist tradition. This meant that Simmel did not rely on the idea of a one-sided relation of dependence between the economic and the cultural. The forms of cultural reification that Lukács saw as grounded in the economic basis were for Simmel rooted metaphysically in a dualism of life and form. For Simmel, although it was right for historical materialism to stress that cultural phenomena must be explicated in terms of economic contexts, there existed a more fundamental

⁶³A useful introduction to Simmel's work can be found in Werner Jung, *Georg Simmel: zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius Verlag, 1990). Simmel's relation to the social theories of other early sociologists is explored in O. Ramstedt (ed.), *Simmel und die frühen Soziologen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988). On the *Philosophy of Money*, see J. Kintzelé and P. Schneider (eds.), *Georg Simmels 'Philosophie des Geldes'* (Frankfurt am Main: Hain, 1993).

⁶⁴*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 10.

⁶⁵The relation between Simmel and Lukács is explored more fully in Rüdiger Dannemann, *Das Prinzip Verdinglichung* (Frankfurt am Main: Sandler Verlag, 1987), chapter 3.

⁶⁶*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 666.

Unterbau: the deeper metaphysical presuppositions and tendencies underlying economic-cultural forms.⁶⁷ Lukács had seen this *lebensphilosophisch* thesis as a false ontologizing of reification, by portraying it as a quasi-anthropological constant of human interaction.

Several of Simmel's descriptions of cultural reification display a remarkable similarity with the account of the distorting effects of cultural rationalization in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Minima Moralia*. The import of Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the dominance of the 'factual mentality' (*Tatsachensinn*), and the reduction of thinking to method, is apparent in Simmel's account of the 'merciless objectivity' with which things are measured by money, producing a 'structure of objective (*sachlich*) and personal life contents which approaches the cosmos guided by natural laws in terms of its unbroken connectedness and strict causality'.⁶⁸ Horkheimer and Adorno's critique of the exclusion from thought of all that is not reducible to number, quantification, and calculation - the rule of abstract equivalence, is clearly echoed in Simmel's social theory. Simmel argued that the *Geldwirtschaft* generated the 'necessity of continual mathematical operations in everyday interaction'. The life of many human beings, Simmel argued, 'is consumed by such determining, weighing up, calculating, and the reduction of qualitative to quantitative values'.⁶⁹ Just as, for Simmel, the cognitive ideal of the modern age was to perceive the world as a 'huge arithmetic test', so for Horkheimer and Adorno modern, scientific reason was intent on reducing the modern world to a 'gigantic analytic judgement'.⁷⁰

⁶⁷*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 13.

⁶⁸*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 4-5; 10-11; *Philosophie des Geldes*, pp. 593-4.

⁶⁹*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 614.

⁷⁰*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 612; *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 27; 33.

The central significance of Simmel's cultural sociology is that it provides the means for tracing these experiential distortions, concerning the instrumentalizing of personal qualities and the exclusion of spontaneity, to an objective process of abstraction. We can see this in the account Simmel provides of the de-personalization of the self. Horkheimer and Adorno had detected this de-personalization in specific philosophical representations of the self. In scientific reasoning, they argue, the self is extinguished as a qualitatively determined particular, and remains solely as the locus of processes of calculation. This reduction is expressed in the Kantian 'eternally the same / *think* that must accompany all my representations' (DE 26; 32). Simmel is able to trace the disappearance of the concrete personality, and the reification of personal qualities, to the form of abstraction constitutive of the exchange process. Constitutive of the social interactions made possible by the *Geldwirtschaft*, Simmel argued, is the reduction of the person to the 'mere bearer of a function'.⁷¹ Simmel also described the tendency of the *Geldwirtschaft* to reify personal qualities. Values forming parts of the individual personality tend to take on a 'self-subsistent-thingly character', transforming themselves thereby into embodiments of exchange value. Simmel describes this increasing transformation of personal qualities into exchange values as generating a 'loss of substance of the individual life'.⁷²

Drawing on this argument, the experiential distortions articulated by Adorno in *Minima Moralia* can be seen as rooted in the objective abstraction taking place through the generalized social operation of exchange logic. In several places in *Minima Moralia*, Adorno describes the crisis of experience in terms of an objectivating attitude to the content of one's own experiences, and the

⁷¹*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 395.

⁷²*Philosophie des Geldes*, pp. 558, 560.

self which is formed by those experiences. In the realm of mental (*geistige*) experience, 'that which is not reified, that which cannot be counted and measured, drops out'. Adorno describes this in terms of Simmel's idea of an internalization of reified culture. The self begins to apply to itself as a living, experiencing form the same quantifying abstraction that characterizes the exchange process. Reification, Adorno argues, extends itself 'to its own opposite, the life which cannot be immediately actualized; what lives on always merely as thought and memory' (MM § 25). Through this reification, the subject relates to its own experiences as a 'property', thereby transforming its inner life into an external thing (MM § 106). What is at stake here is the loss of a continuous context of experience, in which past experience *forms* the self and *informs* its engagement with the present. Through the same process of reification, the personal characteristics or qualities of the self no longer form, and inform the self and its experience,

Under the a priori of saleability, the living, as living, has made itself into a thing, into a form of fitting out. The ego takes into its service the whole human being as its equipment. Through this reorganization the ego as works manager (*Betriebsleiter*) gives so much of itself to the ego as means of work (*Betriebsmittel*) that it becomes a completely abstract, mere point of reference: self-preservation loses its self. Properties, from genuine friendship to the hysterical attack of rage, become serviceable, until finally they are completely taken up in their deployment in a manner appropriate to the situation. With their mobilization they transform themselves. They remain only as weightless, stiff and empty husks of impulses, material transportable at will, devoid of their own traits. They are no longer subject, rather the subject directs itself towards them as its internal object (MM § 147).

Adorno often related this objectivating attitude towards the self to the increasing technologization of spheres of life. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno makes this connection through the discussion of the experiential significance of micro-changes in social artefacts.⁷³ Adorno's intention is to interpret this objectivating attitude, and its consequences, from out of the experiential content of social artefacts. This form of culture critique, which Adorno executes to full effect in *Minima Moralia*, is much indebted to the Diltheyan idea that cultural artifacts can be understood as the expressions of the *Geist* of a culture. In this case, the cultural *Geist* which Adorno teases out of the micro-analyses of artifacts is characterized in terms of the 'dying of experience' (MM § 19). Adorno traces this to the 'law of usefulness', in which things take on a form which reduces the encounter with them to mere handling (*Handhabung*). The subject cannot bring its own experiences to inform the encounter, nor can the object appear as a possibility for the enrichment of experience. It is this same process of the internalization of reification that Adorno is articulating in *Aesthetic Theory*, where he claims that the most developed processes of material production and their organization, radiate in spheres of life lying far from them, and penetrate deeply in the 'zones of subjective experience'. Art, according to its mode of experience, and as the 'expression of the crisis of experience', absorbs what has been brought about by 'industrialization under the prevailing relations of production' (ÄT 57).

Simmel's cultural sociology provides a helpful model for thinking through the problem of cultural rationalization because his inquiry into money as an organizing principle of social relations

⁷³ 'What does it mean for the subject, that there are no more casement windows whose sides can be opened, but only panes to be coarsely pushed outward, no delicate door handles, but knobs to be turned, no forecourt, no threshold against the street, no wall around the garden?' (MM § 19). A further example is the discussion of the transformation of luxury from a qualitative to a quantitative concept in mass transport (MM § 77).

furnished a frame for analysing cultural forms in terms of an underlying process of rationalization.⁷⁴ Money is, for Simmel, the middle term linking cultural transformation and rationalization, as 'both the effect and a condition of the existence of rationalisation'.⁷⁵ In the *Philosophy of Money*, the analysis of the money economy serves to lay bare the effects on human experience of this process of rationalization. Money originally emerges as the reified form of a process of interaction, but becomes detached from this context and takes on a determining role vis à vis cultural forms. Simmel makes explicit the connection between money and rationalization when he argues that the 'energy of the soul' which is borne by the specific appearances of the *Geldwirtschaft* is the understanding (*Verstand*).⁷⁶ Characteristic of *Verstand*, Simmel argues, is the dominance of intellectual abstraction over emotional engagement, and the predominance of rational calculation and quantification.⁷⁷ At the level of cultural forms, this process leads to the predominance of an attitude of measurement and calculation within social relations, and the exclusion of spontaneous and emotional patterns of behaviour.⁷⁸ Simmel also speaks of the development of an attitude of 'indifference', with regard to

⁷⁴See Brian Turner, 'Simmel, rationalisation and the sociology of money', *The Sociological Review* 34 (1986) 93-114, p. 105.

⁷⁵Brian Turner, 'Simmel, rationalisation and the sociology of money', p. 106. This is reminiscent of Sohn-Rethel's thesis that money is the 'mediating element' (*Vermittlungsglied*) between 'social reality' and 'conceptual ideality' (*Das Geld, die bare Münze des Apriori*, p. 17).

⁷⁶*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 591.

⁷⁷Simmel's depiction of the 'reorientation of culture towards intellectuality' (*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 171) informs Weber's account of the defining characteristic of bureaucratic authority: 'the exclusion of love, hate, and all purely personal, above all irrational elements of feeling which exceed calculation, from the carrying out of official duties', *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, p. 563.

⁷⁸Simmel speaks of '[t]his measuring, weighing, arithmetically exact being of the modern age' (*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 613).

the particularities and distinctions of objects-cum-commodities. This derives from the tendency of the *Geldwirtschaft* to assign value according to a common, quantitatively defined standard.⁷⁹ Also, as we have seen, Simmel draws attention to the increasing transformation of all spheres of life into means. The components of life are framed in terms of purely rational connections, which are modelled on the notion of causality. With the sidelining of ends comes the exclusion of 'instinctive colourings and decisions'. Simmel names as a feature of the modern age the 'characteristic flattening out of the life of feeling (*Gefühlsleben*).⁸⁰ A further significant consequence which Simmel ascribes to the rationalizing force of the *Geldwirtschaft* is the indifference to concrete personality. Money brings about an 'objectification' of social relations, reducing those relations to meanings which are compatible with money.⁸¹ Simmel also hints at a tendential de-ethicizing of human relations in interactions mediated by money.⁸²

Simmel's *lebensphilosophisch* premises lead him to conceive cultural reification in terms of the dominance of objective over subjective culture. The crisis of experience, on this reading, would be conceived in terms of the disjuncture between the weight or density of rationality embodied in cultural forms, and the possibilities of subjective experience. This *lebensphilosophisch* analysis rests on the thesis that the problem of cultural reification concerns the impossibility of

⁷⁹*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 497. See also Rüdiger Dannemann, *Das Prinzip Verdinglichung*, p. 68.

⁸⁰*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 595.

⁸¹*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 664. Simmel also perceives a positive side to this process, however, concerning its making possible an internal sphere for personal development.

⁸²See *Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 664. At one point, he also refers to the 'elimination of care', in the relations of the *Geldwirtschaft* (*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 400).

subjectively integrating, or making subjectively meaningful, the massive objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) of spiritual contents in modern cultural forms.⁸³ This analysis was not entirely foreign to Adorno, and his readings of cultural reification occasionally display a deep affinity with this *lebensphilosophisch* notion. The affinity is perhaps most clearly expressed in the account of subjective experience in warfare in *Minima Moralia*, where Adorno discusses the growing disjuncture between authentic experience, dependent on the situatedness of the body, and the demands made on individuals by the technological complexity of modern warfare (MM § 33). I want to argue, however, that Adorno, like Lukács, rejected Simmel's ontologizing of reification, where reification is seen to derive from the dichotomy of objectification and subjective living form. On the other hand, Adorno developed a theory of reification different from the Lukácsian analysis, which derives cultural reification from the economic structure. Adorno sought instead to derive reification from a process of abstraction that is actualized in the rationality of social forms. Adorno, I want to argue, is able to re-situate Simmel's analysis in the context of a critical social theory by deriving cultural reification from the workings of social forms of instrumental rationality. Instrumental logics, embedded in bureaucratic, economic, and technological complexes, generate reification by way of a process which I will refer to as the 'bracketing' or 'neutralization' of experience. The problem that Simmel described as a crisis of subjective experience vis à vis objective forms can therefore become accessible from the perspective of a *critique of instrumental reason*, and of the institutions through which it is actualized within social reality.

Adorno's reading of the experiential distortions deriving from the process of cultural rationalization, therefore, provides the basis for a critical reconstruction of the theory of cultural

⁸³*Philosophie des Geldes*, pp. 621ff.

reification. The central idea, which I will draw out more fully in due course, is that institutions operating according to instrumental logics, when they penetrate into the world of cultural meaning, effectively 'neutralize' important dimensions of human experience, most notably, as we shall see, *moral* experience. One tendential effect of this process is the erosion of the *experiential basis* of normative categories. It is to this process, as we shall see, that Adorno traces the generation of forms of lifeworld disintegration.

Now we are in a position to elucidate the social-diagnostic import of Adorno's reading of a twofold distortion of the exchange principle. On the one hand, as a structure of integration through domination, the exchange process reproduces relations of domination. On the other hand, as a principle of rationalization, exchange logic determines a process of *lifeworld-experiential disintegration*. Simmel's notion of an internalization of reified culture is thus reinterpreted by Adorno as the structuring of social experience by social forms operating according to instrumental logics, thereby producing a 'reified form of life'. I will attempt to reconstruct this argument more fully in the final chapter. I want to turn now, however, to an analysis of Habermas's critical social theory. In the next chapter, I will present the outlines of the Habermasian project, and will also argue that Habermas's theory falls short as a theory of domination, and hence cannot claim to be an entirely successful overcoming of Adorno's integration thesis. The following chapter will return to the problem of the experiential distortions of exchange logic through an immanent critique of Habermas's reading of moral-practical reason. Habermas's failure to address the problem of linguistic reification will prove to be a grave problem for the theory of communicative rationality.

Part Two

Habermas's Critical Theory

From Reconciliation to Communication:

Habermas's Critical Social Theory

The argument in the previous chapter suggested that Adorno's social theory takes a wrong turn in cashing out the idea of self-reflection in terms of a dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy. Adorno is consequently misled into interpreting society as a closed system, in which a false integration is achieved and reinforced by the ideological products of the culture industry. Integration is mistakenly portrayed as purely systemic integration. By reducing integration to the coercive unity generated by the exchange process, Adorno is forced to represent the standpoint of critique in terms of a perspective external to the administered whole. In this chapter, I want to examine Jürgen Habermas's attempt to correct this deficit through the delineation of the idea of linguistically mediated integration. Focussing largely on his major work in social theory, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, I will examine how Habermas grounds the need for a paradigm change in critical theory through the uncovering of 'action-theoretic deficits' in earlier Frankfurt School critical theory. My contention will be that Habermas's action-theoretic extension of the concept of integration only partially succeeds in rendering accessible for critical theory the questions of social

struggle and social justice, which had threatened to disappear from sight in the totalized form of Adorno's administered world thesis. To anticipate: I will argue that Habermas fails to do justice to the insights of the Marxian strand of critical social theory, which emphasizes that the social world is characterized by a struggle over norms among social groups. A later chapter will attempt to rethink the problematic of social justice in terms of the Hegelian idea of a struggle for recognition. Although superior to Habermas's normative ideal of communicative understanding, this theory, I will argue, needs to be complemented by a renewed focus on power and ideology, as those forces which constitute blocks on collective resistance. This argument will take up the insights of Adorno's stress on ideology as a component of integration whilst avoiding the inherent problems of Adorno's social reductionism. Adorno's account of societal rationalization as systemic integration, that is to say, must give way to a more nuanced account of the interplay of power and practical-critical activity rooted in collective group experience. The groundwork for this argument will be laid in the critique of Habermas's communication theory.

The argument in this chapter will unfold in two stages. In the first part, I will sketch the contours of the Habermasian transformation of critical theory, with the intention of delineating its relation to, and critique of, earlier Frankfurt School social theory. The following sections will focus on Habermas's attempt to reconstruct the standpoint of critique in terms of processes of communicative understanding. This will lead into the question of social struggle.

The Basis of Critique: From Epistemology to Communication

Beginning with Horkheimer's essays in the 1930's, an abiding concern of critical social theory has

been to resist the positivist, or more broadly scientific reduction of cognition to the relationship between a pre-given realm of facts and a systematizing and classifying, external knowing subject. This conception, Horkheimer argued, would have to claim a permanent disjunction between knowing and acting; theory and practice. The theorist is an autonomous subject for just so long as he or she is not identifiable *within* the world that he or she is seeking to know. Yet as soon as the theorist becomes an active agent intervening in the world, his or her behaviour is subject to the same external process of classification which subsumes that behaviour under general social laws.¹ It is this same problematic, governed by a need to carve out a space for critical theory in opposition to the totalizing claims of the scientific standpoint, which forms the framework for Jürgen Habermas's 1968 work, *Knowledge and Human Interests*.² In this work, Habermas follows Horkheimer in asserting the situatedness of theory, and its necessary entwinement with social-practical interests. Habermas, however, explicitly and methodically sets out to ground the standpoint of critical theory epistemologically, by interpreting interests as quasi-transcendental structures which form the horizon within which cognition takes place. The different practical interests, Habermas argues, have their basis in the natural history of the human species. Habermas defines interests as 'the basic orientations rooted in specific fundamental conditions of the possible reproduction and self-constitution of the human species, namely *work* and *interaction*'.³ This hints at a deep entwinement of knowledge-constitutive interests, anthropologically fundamental forms of action (i.e. work and

¹See Max Horkheimer, 'The Latest Attack on Metaphysics', *Critical Theory*, pp. 154-5.

²Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.

³*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 196.

interaction), and specific social types of rationality.⁴ On the basis of this theoretical innovation, Habermas can circumscribe the area of validity of that epistemological horizon opened up by the 'technical' interest - which is the counterpart to that form of cognition that Horkheimer termed 'traditional' theory - and argue for the existence of a complementary knowledge-constitutive interest which functions as the quasi-transcendental frame for a differently structured form of cognition. Habermas roots this second constitutive interest in the action system of interaction, and drawing on the hermeneutic sciences, defines it as the interest in the preservation and expansion of mutual understanding. This constitutes the 'practical' cognitive interest, as opposed to the 'technical' interest, which is rooted in the action system of labour.⁵ The basis for conceiving the action systems of labour and interaction as wholly separate spheres of cognition is the incompatible logics of problem solution in these two areas. Habermas perceives that ruptures in the sphere of communicative agreement cannot be solved by a cognitive approach governed by the interest in technical improvement. Rather, ruptures in the intersubjectivity of communicative agreement can only be approached from within the frame of the hermeneutic orientation to the understanding of meaning, in which the possibility of consensus among agents is presupposed.

At this point, however, Habermas has not yet opened a space for the epistemological grounding of critical theory. This becomes clear when we compare the orientation of the hermeneutic sciences to mutual understanding with the social interest of critical theory as defined by Horkheimer. In contrast to what Horkheimer called the 'critical attitude', whose orientation was one of generalized suspicion towards existing social rules, certainties and understandings, the goal

⁴See Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p. 208.

⁵*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 310.

of mutual understanding appears to adopt a conservative attitude towards existing social meanings. Its goal is the preservation and extension of existing meanings, and not the uncovering of latent forms of social domination within them. The hermeneutic approach to meaning would seem incapable of gaining a critical purchase on existing configurations of social understanding, and thus cannot represent the transformative interest of critical theory. It is for this reason that Habermas attempts to ground critical theory epistemologically in a third, independent cognitive interest. Habermas relates the interest in emancipation of critical theory to the idea of 'self-reflection', which 'emancipates the subject from dependence on hypostatized powers'. Critical theory thus coincides with 'the human interest in autonomy and responsibility'.⁶ Instead of the hermeneutic sciences, it is critical social science which serves as a model for the third cognitive interest,

A critical social science . . . is concerned with going beyond [nomological knowledge] to determine when theoretical statements grasp invariant regularities of social action as such and when they express ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed. To the extent that this is the case, the *critique of ideology*, as well, moreover, as *psychoanalysis*, take into account that information about lawlike connections sets off a process of reflection in the consciousness of those whom the laws are about. Thus the level of unreflected consciousness, which is one of the initial conditions of such laws, can be transformed.⁷

With the notions of critique of ideology and psychoanalysis, Habermas has in mind the models of

⁶*Knowledge and Human Interests*, pp. 310-11.

⁷*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 310.

critical social science developed by Marx and Freud. However, Habermas sees a serious problem in Marx's own account of how ideology critique was to proceed. Essentially, Habermas argues that, because Marx reduced the process of species reproduction to the framework of labour, he was unable to conceive ideology critique as an independent mode of reflection, aiming at the dissolution of the reified structures through which the labour process is institutionalized in the social world. Marx cannot comprehend ideology critique as the reflection on forms of domination (*Herrschaft*) embedded within the structures of symbolic interaction.⁸ In Marx's analysis, therefore, material interests and the critical abolition of ideologies; or instrumental action and revolutionary practice, are collapsed into the single horizon of the species' self-reflection through labour.⁹ The result is that Marx is unable to develop a conception of the human sciences as a reflection on the process of the 'self-generation of the social subject', and instead regards 'human natural science' as the form of knowledge adequate to the institutional framework of social orders.

The importance of Freud for Habermas's idea of a critical social science, concerns Freud's insight that the possibilities for freedom opened up by the expansion of the forces of production could only be released by overcoming the institutionalized repression of instincts. This meant that the replacement of repression by autonomy and responsibility would not depend on technological development alone, but would require a critique of the forms of institutionalized repression which serve to sustain a particular system of social labour. By bringing about a rigid reproduction of behaviour that is removed from criticism, institutionalized power relations secure the perpetuation of existing norms by converting open force into a form of inner compulsion. From the perspective

⁸*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 42.

⁹*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 42.

opened up by Freudian psychoanalysis, ideology can be read in terms of the 'systematic distortions of communication that remove from criticism the interpretations of life and the world on which the rationalizations of the existing order are based'.¹⁰ Habermas attempts to derive a model of critical social science from psychoanalysis by extending the idea of unconscious, repressed conflicts, and the emancipatory power of recollection and linguistification, from the life history of the individual to the life history of the species. Self reflection at the level of the human species thus takes place as a critique of forms of rigidified life, in which constellations of power and ideology have prevented deep social conflicts from becoming subject to communicative interpretation. At the species level, Habermas asserts, the movement of reflection takes place as 'self-formation through critical-revolutionary activity'.¹¹

It is significant that the project of ideology critique which Habermas lays out for critical theory bears a strong resemblance, in certain respects, to Adorno's version. We saw earlier that Adorno's reading of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) points to a critical theory of experience, in which critique becomes the articulation of antagonisms constitutive of forms of social experience. Just as, for Adorno, philosophy becomes immanent critique, as the articulation of the negative experience stored within concepts, so, for Habermas, the 'heritage of philosophy passes over [*geht über*] into the critique of ideology'. Hence, 'outside of critique', Habermas asserts, 'philosophy retains no rights'.¹² What is common to both accounts is the notion of philosophy as the locus of the

¹⁰Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1978), p. 86.

¹¹*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 55.

¹²*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 63 (translation altered).

critical self-reflection of existing social forms. For Adorno, philosophy is not the sphere of 'pure' truth, but rather the realm in which existing structures of social experience show up negatively, that is, as inadequate to a criterion which is immanent to the process of philosophical articulation itself. Negative dialectic reveals structures of domination as the social conditions of conceptual construction. Whereas the illusory standpoint of pure theory is incapable of reflecting on those conditions, the goal of dialectical critique is to articulate structures of domination as the experiential content of concepts. Habermas's attack on pure theory, however, follows a different line of argument. Whereas Adorno's metacritique had radicalized Kant's argument concerning the 'emptiness' of concepts without intuition into an argument for the experiential conditions of conceptual construction, Habermas grounds the attack on pure theory through a thesis of quasi-transcendental constitution through natural interests. He achieves this by means of a critique of the 'theoretical attitude' which assumes that cognition can be purified of the transcendental frame furnished by the 'natural interests of life'.¹³

Furthermore, it would seem at first sight that there is a deep connection between Habermas's assertion that the autonomy and responsibility linked to the interest in emancipation are 'posited with the structure of language', and Adorno's claim that critique is built into the nature of language.¹⁴ Adorno's argument, in *Negative Dialectics*, rested on a thesis of the dialectic of identity and nonidentity within the propositional form, drawn from Hegel's notion of the speculative proposition. Habermas, however, points not simply to an ideology-critical axiom, but to a *normative principle* embedded in the formal-logical structure of language - the 'intention of universal and

¹³*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 303.

¹⁴*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 314.

unconstrained consensus'.¹⁵ Already here, there is the germ of what will become, in the development of Habermas's work, a significant difference in the reading of domination between Adorno and Habermas. Habermas's thesis asserts that domination (*Herrschaft*) is to be understood principally in terms of distortions and blockages in the sphere of communicative life, which can only reproduce itself on the basis of processes of mutual understanding. The emancipatory interest that is co-posed with language thus furnishes the normative structure which guides the process of critical self-reflection. Consequently, it would now be possible to furnish a procedural account of this normative structure by focussing on the structural conditions for the preservation and expansion of communicative forms of life. But taking this line would mean developing the concept of self-reflection in a Kantian direction, such that self-reflection as reflection on the conditions of knowledge would no longer be bound to a movement of reflection as the immanent articulation of negative experience. This would mean that the standpoint of critique was no longer coextensive with the revealed meaning of social experience. A different set of issues is also raised with the reinterpretation of domination in terms of distortions of communicative forms of life, concerning the Marxist paradigm of the social as characterized by class struggle. These issues, as we shall see, become particularly acute in the development of Habermas's social theory.

The Communicative Turn

In his essay 'Technology and Science as Ideology', Habermas develops a critique of the 'technocratic consciousness', which legitimates the extension of production imperatives which

¹⁵*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 314.

follow purposive-rational rules into spheres of life which can only be communicatively reproduced. By turning practical questions which require communicative resolution into technical questions amenable to purposive-rational solutions, this new ideology does not merely represent the interest in domination of a particular class, but threatens the 'emancipatory interest of the species as such'.¹⁶ Technocratic consciousness functions in Habermas's account as the sociological complement to positivism, and its extension of the 'technical' interest to an encompassing validity over all domains of human cognition.¹⁷ At the sociological level, positivism, as technocracy, implies a failure to take into account complementary processes of social rationalization. Habermas's task, therefore, now becomes that of making plausible the idea of a process of social rationalization occurring within the action system of interaction - the complement to the 'practical' interest. Habermas speaks in this essay of a process of rationalization occurring as an 'expansion of communication' within the institutional framework by means of symbolically mediated interaction, which is incommensurable with rationalization occurring through the development of the forces of production.¹⁸ The process of communicative rationalization, then, is the sociological complement to the spheres of hermeneutic and critical knowledge. By taking this step in his critique of the technocratic consciousness, Habermas expands the distinction between labour and interaction into an account of a dual process of social rationalization, occurring in both purposive-rational and communicative dimensions. A theory of social rationalization now becomes central to the grounding of the standpoint of critical social theory.

¹⁶*Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), p. 89.

¹⁷Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p. 249.

¹⁸*Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie*, p. 98.

Two problem areas emerge here with this grounding of critical social theory through a critique of technocratic consciousness. In the first place, it is questionable to what extent the distinction between labour and interaction, or between purposive-rational and communicative action, can be explicitly related to the independent and separate development of different social domains. Habermas, as many interpreters have pointed out, seems with this argument to be reifying an analytic distinction among action types by assigning those forms of action to distinct social spheres.¹⁹ This creates the illusion that the imperatives of the sphere of production bypass communicative understanding entirely, rather than needing to be institutionalized as practical-social rules within the social domain. It is this which leads to the second problem, for now it appears that domination is being read in terms of a conflict between the logics (purposive-rational or communicative) of different social domains, a conflict which seems to occur, in principle, independently of the relations between particular social groups. It is clear that Habermas has here veered sharply towards a Weberian account of domination, and away from a Marxian account. The problem this poses is that Habermas now lacks the basis on which to conceive the mediation between the two domains. On a Marxian account, this mediation would be read in terms of the need to institutionalize the dominant status of certain groups within the production process through the organization of interaction in terms of class specific norms and rules. This would allow the sphere

¹⁹This continues to be a problem in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, although here Habermas speaks of different forms of action *coordination*. On this problem, see Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, pp. 255-6; Hans Joas, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Hermeneutics and Functionalism', in Honneth and Joas (eds.) *Communicative Action*, trans. J. Gaines and D. Jones (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Johannes Berger, 'The Linguistification of the Sacred and the Delinguistification of the Economy', in Honneth and Joas (eds.) *Communicative Action*; Nicos Mouzelis, 'Social and System Integration: Lockwood, Habermas, Giddens', *Sociology* 31 (1997) 111-119.

of communicatively organized action to be understood as a struggle among social groups concerning the appropriate norms for organizing the sphere of production. Taking this step would mean ascribing to social struggle the capacity to bring forth expansions of social rationalization in the communicative sphere. Because Habermas's reifying distinction between labour and interaction has the result of emptying social development of any trace of struggle, however, his account of communicative rationalization effectively extinguishes all elements of the dynamic of repression and emancipation.²⁰

The Theory of Communicative Action is the culmination of Habermas's efforts to ground an alternative conception of critical social theory. The central elements of his earlier work, such as the distinction between labour and interaction, and the delineation of dual processes of social rationalization, are expanded and refined in a social-theoretic frame. This work incorporates a particularly rich mix of themes and arguments, ranging from a development of the idea of universal pragmatics, which Habermas had begun to develop in the 1970's, to a theory of social evolution, and an inclusion of the insights of systems theory into the development of a dual-level social theory.²¹ The overarching goal of this work is to explicate and justify the perceived need for a change of paradigm within critical social theory.²² The is to supplant the 'negativism' of earlier Frankfurt

²⁰My argument here draws substantially on Axel Honneth's thesis, in his *Critique of Power*, ch. 8. I will discuss this more fully below.

²¹It is not possible here to discuss these theses in any great depth. I will confine myself to comments on the central innovations, and on those aspects which will be important to my own argument in the rest of this chapter.

²²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 366.

School social theory by replacing the idea of a *dialectic* of Enlightenment with the notion of a *paradox* of social rationalization. Habermas, consequently, tends not to employ the Marxian language of 'social contradictions', but prefers the Durkheimian notion of 'social pathologies'.²³ The purpose of this terminological change is to transform the understanding of the *relation of mutual implication* between rationalization processes and the systemic distortions which endanger the freedom of the social world. The thesis of a dialectic of modern reason asserts that social rationalization and systemic distortions are intelligible only in terms of their relation to one another. Systemic distortions can be comprehended in terms of immanent contradictions *within* the concrete social logic of rationalization processes. They are thus explicable in terms of the logic of rationalization itself. By speaking of pathologies rather than contradictions, Habermas is suggesting that systemic distortions can be understood as *side effects* of rationalization processes, rather than as explicable in terms of the internal logic of those processes. The 'irresistible irony of the world-historical process of Enlightenment', is that rationalization 'makes possible' the type and degree of systemic complexity which endangers freedom.²⁴ The effect of speaking of a 'pathology' or 'irony' of social rationalization, then, is that a relation of logical entailment is supplanted by an *empirical* connection. For to speak only of rationalization 'making possible' systemic distortions is to suggest that the two developments are, in principle, separable. Whether, and how systemic distortions occur cannot be gleaned from the internal logic of social rationalization. Consequently, Habermas is now able to argue that the direction of a non-distorted process of rationalization is accessible theoretically, which is then able to guide the critique of empirically discernible 'pathological'

²³*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 327.

²⁴*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 155.

developments within this process.

Given his explicit intention of undertaking a 'critique of critical theory',²⁵ it is easy to lose sight of the deep continuity which allows Habermas's work to lay claim to being a continuation, not an annulment, of Frankfurt School critical theory. A central continuity can be seen in the way that Habermas has sought to rethink the unity of theory and practice in terms of the complementarity of philosophy and sociology. The philosophical component takes the form of a theory of rationality, which Habermas defines in procedural terms as the possibility of providing reasons for one's actions or assertions under suitable circumstances.²⁶ However, the theory of rationality must begin from an investigation of historically and socially situated forms of rationality, and the general social processes in which they are embedded.²⁷ The philosophical theory of rationality, therefore, presupposes a theory of social rationalization. The flip side of this thesis, which is in fact a central component of Habermas's social theory, is that sociology (or more specifically, theories of social action) presupposes a theory of rationality.²⁸ Habermas grounds this thesis in the idea that the effort

²⁵This term is used by Herbert Schnädelbach in his critical review of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 'Transformation der kritischen Theorie', in *Vernunft und Geschichte: Vorträge und Abhandlungen*.

²⁶*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 17. This view of rationality is very similar to that of Karl Popper, in virtue of its strong linkage of rationality and modes or procedures of justifying beliefs, statements and actions. What makes a statement or belief rational, for Habermas, does not concern the content, but rather the procedures which can be used to test it.

²⁷'We would not be able to ascertain the rational internal structure of action oriented to reaching understanding if we did not already have before us - in fragmentary and distorted form, to be sure - the existing forms of a reason that has to rely on being symbolically embodied and historically situated', *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. xliii.

²⁸*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 106; p. 136.

to understand the meaning of social action necessarily draws the theorist into an evaluation of the rationality of action. Habermas justifies this assertion by postulating a strong linkage between validity and meaning: in order to understand the meaning of a speech act oriented towards understanding, one has to know the conditions under which it would be valid.²⁹ This allows Habermas to assert the social situatedness of theory and the theory-ladenness of practice. Just as the theorist cannot avoid being drawn into the evaluation of social action, so the lay actor cannot avoid being pulled towards rational critique,

If the social scientist has to participate virtually in the interactions whose meanings he [or she] wants to understand, and if, further, this participation means that he [or she] has implicitly to take a position on the validity claims that those immediately involved in communicative action connect with their utterances, then the social scientist will be able to link up his [or her] own concepts with the conceptual framework found in the context of action only in the same way as laymen themselves do in the communicative practice of everyday life. He [or she] is moving within the same structures of possible understanding in which those immediately involved carry out their communicative actions. However, the most general structures of communication . . . also simultaneously provide the critical means to penetrate a given context, to burst it open from within and to transcend it.³⁰

Rather than being a construct of 'pure' theory, the standpoint of critique is rooted in the very

²⁹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 115. This thesis has certainly not gone undisputed. For an insightful critique, see Herbert Schnädelbach, 'Transformation der kritischen Theorie', pp. 247ff.

³⁰*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 120.

structure of communicative action, and is thus an unavoidable component of social practice itself. With this thesis, Habermas has managed to reconcile a social theory directed towards interpretive understanding (*Verstehen*) with the requirements of a rational critique of situated meaning. Habermas puts this in terms of the question of how the 'objectivity of understanding' can be maintained in view of the dependence of social theory on pre-constituted meaning.³¹ The solution to this is that rational critique is found within the general structure of action oriented to reaching understanding, and thus the same structures which make understanding possible also provide for a degree of 'reflective self-control' of the process of reaching understanding.³² As for Horkheimer, then, critical theory represents, for Habermas, a form of transcendence within the immanence of social reality. Significantly, however, Habermas locates this critical potential within the unavoidable presuppositions of communicative action, rather than in the ends of the production process.

This connection with earlier critical social theory is coupled with a fundamental difference, concerning the increasing emphasis on a Kantian model of the grounds of critique. *The Theory of Communicative Action* completes the turn to a Kantian model of self-reflection, thus breaking with the identification of philosophy and ideology critique originally proposed in *Knowledge and Human Interests*. This 'Kantian turn' takes shape as the development of a universal pragmatics, which focusses on a reconstruction of the universal and unavoidable presuppositions of possible processes

³¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 112.

³²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 121. For a more detailed discussion of this subject, see Kenneth Baynes, 'Rational Reconstruction and Social Criticism: Habermas's Model of Interpretive Social Science', *The Philosophical Forum* 21 (1989) 122-145.

of linguistic understanding.³³ This allows for a reformulation of transcendental analysis in terms of a reconstruction of the 'deep' structures of human speech, the rules which we must have always already presupposed when we employ language for the purpose of reaching understanding. Universal pragmatics, which explicates the conditions that make linguistic understanding possible, provides the normative-theoretical basis for reflection in the 'Hegelian' sense of a critical dissolution of unacknowledged or unconscious structures of domination sedimented in forms of life.³⁴ This Hegelian notion of critique is now watered down into a theory of social evolution, which provides a diachronic analysis of the stage-like development of communicative reason, thereby furnishing a phylogenetic complement to the normative-theoretical grounding of critique given in universal pragmatics.

In *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas replaces the distinction between labour and interaction with a distinction between different forms of action coordination. The process of understanding is now no longer opposed to purposive-rational action, but rather stands as one way of coordinating purposively conceived aims,

[T]he teleological structure is fundamental to *all* concepts of action. Concepts of *social action* are distinguished, however, according to how they specify the *coordination* among the goal-directed actions of different participants: as the interlacing of egocentric calculations of utility (whereby the degree of conflict and cooperation varies with the given interest positions) [viz. teleological action]; as a

³³For the fuller explication of this theory, see 'Was heißt Universalpragmatik?', in *Vorstudien und Ergänzungen zur Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1984).

³⁴See Thomas McCarthy, *The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas*, pp. 100-1.

socially integrating agreement about values and norms instilled through cultural tradition and socialization [viz. normatively regulated action]; as a consensual relation between players and their publics [viz. dramaturgical action]; or as reaching understanding in the sense of a cooperative process of interpretation [viz. communicative action].³⁵

Drawing upon speech act theory, Habermas describes the coordination of plans of action through communicative understanding in terms of the intersubjective recognition of 'validity claims'. The speaker can rationally motivate the hearer to accept an assertion when the hearer accepts the speaker's guarantee that the speaker could, if necessary, provide justificatory reasons for the validity of the claim raised in the speech-act. The intersubjective agreement which arises with the acceptance of a speech-act offer comprises three components: the hearer accepts the *content* of the speech-act offer; the hearer also accepts the *guarantees* (the claim to possible justification) immanent in the speech act; and thirdly, the hearer accepts the *obligations* arising from this intersubjective agreement which are relevant to the context of interaction.³⁶ Action coordination by means of reaching understanding can therefore be distinguished from a purposive rational coordination of action through its reliance on communicative agreement rather than external influence or force.³⁷

Habermas develops this idea by drawing on Austin's distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary force. Whereas an illocutionary aim follows from the meaning of what is said, the

³⁵*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 101.

³⁶*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 296.

³⁷*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 287.

perlocutionary aim operates through the *effects* produced on the hearer. The latter are, on Habermas's reading, the speech-act-theoretic equivalent of forms of strategic action, which aim to procure the success of privately conceived plans of action by influencing the behaviour of others.³⁸ Illocutionary aims, by contrast, comprise a communicative intent which initiates a process of reaching understanding. In communicative action, the illocutionary binding force of speech-acts is the linguistic mechanism for the coordination of action. Speech-acts oriented to understanding, Habermas asserts, simultaneously raise three validity claims. These are claims to truth, to normative rightness and truthfulness. These three claims correspond to three world-relations: in relation to the objective world, the communicative actor assumes an objectivating attitude of a neutral observer towards something happening in the world; in relation to the social world, the communicative actor assumes a norm-conforming attitude to a world of interpersonal relations; and in relation to the subjective world, the communicative actor assumes an expressive attitude to his or her own private experiences.³⁹ By building normative assumptions into the idea of a process of reaching understanding, such as that it excludes the use of force and external influence, Habermas is able to make reaching understanding (*Verständigung*) function in the critical role which was previously attributed to the idea of *Mündigkeit* (autonomy and responsibility). The twin cognitive interests of understanding and critique, or practical and emancipatory knowledge, are here replaced by the

³⁸In fact, perlocutions form the class of what Habermas calls 'concealed strategic action', since the actor must behave according to an orientation to success whilst giving others the impression that the conditions of communication have been fulfilled. The very success of strategic action rests upon its being latent rather than explicit. This is why Habermas asserts that the instrumental use of language is parasitic upon its communicative use. See *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 288.

³⁹See *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 309.

single concept of understanding laden with normative presuppositions.

In the second volume of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas introduces the distinction between system and lifeworld as the social-theoretic correlate to the action-theoretic distinction between purposive-rational and communicative action. The lifeworld represents an internalist perspective on social action, and gives expression to the idea that the process of reaching understanding always takes place within an intersubjectively recognized framework. Habermas's own description of the role of the lifeworld hints at a strong connection between this concept and the role of Gadamerian 'prejudgements'. The lifeworld is said to comprise the 'horizon' in which processes of reaching understanding take place. Because understanding always takes place within a '*preinterpreted* domain of what is culturally taken for granted', communicative actors cannot put the lifeworld itself in question.⁴⁰ The lifeworld is composed of three structural components. The first, 'culture', stands for the 'stock of knowledge' (*Wissensvorrat*) which is drawn upon in constructing interpreting in processes of reaching understanding. The second, 'society', denotes the legitimate regulation of the interaction of social groups. The third, 'personality', stands for the competencies which make a subject able to take part in processes of reaching understanding.⁴¹ Habermas derives these components from three functions of language which give rise to three forms of lifeworld reproduction. The three functions of language are those of reaching understanding, coordinating action, and socialization. The functions of language, in turn, are derived from three components of speech-acts: the propositional, the illocutionary, and the intentional-expressive

⁴⁰*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 125. Also, '[i]n the situation of action, the lifeworld forms a horizon behind which we cannot go; it is a totality with no reverse side' (p. 149).

⁴¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 138.

components.⁴² The three forms of lifeworld reproduction corresponding to the structures of the lifeworld are thus the transmission and renewal of cultural knowledge (culture); social integration and the establishment of solidarity (society); and the formation of personal identities (personality).⁴³

In contrast to the notion of the lifeworld, the system-theoretic perspective takes an externalist perspective on social action, and conceives society as *systemically integrated* via mechanisms (i.e. money and power) which 'reach through' action orientations, effectively bypassing processes of reaching understanding. This, the second level of Habermas's social theory, is said to be necessitated, in the first instance, by the complexity of processes of material production.⁴⁴ Systems theory is adopted to account for what Habermas perceives to be a constitutive feature of modern societies, namely, that certain economic and administrative functions must be given over functionally specified domains of action which cannot be integrated through linguistic understanding. At the system level, social orientations and actions are examined not from the point of view of the actors involved, but rather from the point of view of the system and its requirements for maintenance and reproduction. Actions are coordinated not via linguistic understanding, but via steering media which operate, so to speak, behind the backs of social agents.⁴⁵ One of the primary motivations for Habermas's turn to systems theory is that it allows for the theorizing of supra-

⁴²See *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 62ff.

⁴³*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 137.

⁴⁴*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 150-1; 232-3.

⁴⁵Habermas does not, of course, mean to imply that actions mediated by money and power are executed *without* language, but rather that the binding effect of such actions does not rest on the illocutionary force of criticizable validity claims. See Simone Dietz, *Lebenswelt und System* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1993), p. 138.

subjective processes without resorting to a totalizing representation of society as a macro-subject. Systems theory, that is to say, allows for the theorizing of a 'new type of non-random social order without turning it into the equivalent of objective spirit'.⁴⁶ By speaking of forms of systemic integration, Habermas is able to theorize forms of non-random social order which do not rest on consensus without recourse to metaphysically conceived collective entities.

With this reading of the internalist vs. externalist perspective on social processes in terms of the distinction between social and systemic integration, Habermas has produced a particularly insightful reconstruction of critical theory's critique of 'positivist' sociology. In his essay on the *Positivismusstreit*, Adorno had referred to the externalist perspective as the treatment of society as 'object', whereas the internalist perspective took account of society as the 'self-determining subject'. By treating society exclusively as an object, the positivist perspective 'objectifies that which causes objectification, and that through which objectification is to be explained'.⁴⁷ Critical theory, in contrast, is oriented towards 'the idea of society as subject'.⁴⁸ By treating society as an object, the positivist perspective replicates in cognition the process of reification generated within society by the 'self-expanding commodity form' (ESoz 230). On Habermas's account, the perspective of society as subject is replaced by the notion of the lifeworld of social groups, which can only be understood by an internal perspective on the symbolic structures which constitute it. The inner logic of symbolic reproduction, Habermas asserts, generates 'internal limitations' on the

⁴⁶James Bohman, 'Habermas and the Problem of Holism', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 15 (1989) 381-401, p. 396.

⁴⁷'Der "Positivismusstreit" in der deutschen Soziologie', *Soziologische Schriften* I, p. 316.

⁴⁸'Der "Positivismusstreit" in der deutschen Soziologie', p. 317.

reproduction of societies via systemic processes.⁴⁹ The process of reification, which Adorno ascribed to the expansion of the exchange structure, can therefore now be read in terms of what Habermas calls 'colonization', which occurs when systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social integration, where a consensus founded on linguistic understanding cannot be replaced.⁵⁰

In his description of the 'uncoupling' of lifeworld and system, however, Habermas reintroduces the same reification of types of social action which had been apparent in the prior distinction between labour and interaction. From the fact that lifeworld and system can be analytically distinguished according to the type of action coordination prevalent in each, Habermas infers that both must be seen as constituting independent social spheres. This is expressed in terms of the double sense of the uncoupling of lifeworld and system. Habermas asserts that 'it is not only qua system and qua lifeworld that they are differentiated; *they get differentiated from one another at the same time*'.⁵¹ That this second sense of uncoupling is meant to denote the becoming-autonomous of systemically integrated structures is clearly expressed in the suggestion that subsystems congeal into the 'second nature' of a norm-free sociality. Habermas asserts,

The uncoupling of system and lifeworld is experienced in modern society as a particular kind of objectification: the social system definitively bursts out of the horizon of the lifeworld, escapes from the intuitive knowledge of everyday communicative practice, and is henceforth accessible only to the counterintuitive

⁴⁹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 151.

⁵⁰*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 196.

⁵¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 153 (my italics).

knowledge of the social sciences developing since the eighteenth century.⁵²

The result of interpreting the lifeworld and system distinction in this way is that Habermas appears to be committed to the idea that there are no economic or political lifeworlds. The externalist perspective would thus be the sole appropriate perspective for economic and political subsystems, and the internalist perspective confined to the study of the lifeworld. However, as Nicos Mouzelis has pointed out, the prevalence of non-steering media such as industrial relations negotiations *within* the economy and polity demonstrates that the viability of an internalist or externalist perspective would seem to be more an empirical question resistant to the neat formulations of theory construction.⁵³ Thomas McCarthy has raised this criticism specifically in relation to the political system. He argues that the ratio of power to agreement in the actual operation of administration seems to be 'a thoroughly empirical question which allows of no general answer'.⁵⁴ This suggests that the organizational structures of economic management and political administration must be seen as institutional embodiments of both purposive rational *and* political practical principles.⁵⁵ These criticisms point towards the idea that, by turning the methodological distinction between the internalist and externalist perspectives into a substantive distinction between social domains, Habermas suppresses the fact that norms and values, and therefore communicative consensus, are

⁵²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 173.

⁵³See Nicos Mouzelis, 'Social and System Integration', p. 115.

⁵⁴Thomas McCarthy, 'Complexity and Democracy: The Seductions of Systems Theory', *New German Critique* 35 (1985) 27-53, p. 40.

⁵⁵See Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, pp. 298-9; Johannes Berger, 'The Linguistification of the Sacred and the Delinguistification of the Economy', p. 176.

integral to the maintenance and reproduction of systemically conceived domains themselves.⁵⁶ We will see in the next section that this necessitates a rethinking of the relation between communicative reason and social struggle - a relation that Habermas has largely neglected.

Justice and Recognition

Adorno's integration thesis asserts that capitalist modernization results in society becoming ever more increasingly structured and organized by the exchange mechanism, with the outcome that human freedom diminishes. Adorno sees the capitalist modernizing process as eroding the specific social conditions of autonomous subjectivity. This leads him towards a social-theoretic reconstruction of the critical-dialectical principle of self-reflection (*Selbstbesinnung*) in terms of a dichotomy between social heteronomy and subjective autonomy. Consequently, Adorno identifies the standpoint of critique with the principle of 'non-conformity' (*Nicht Mitmachen wollen*). Critique now becomes an unceasing struggle to preserve autonomy in the face of the encroachments of administrative integration. Adorno is thereby drawn to a model of resistance which is individual rather than collective, and which is negative (i.e. directed towards the prevention of the encroachments of autonomy by administrative integration) rather than positive (i.e. directed towards social change). The end result of Adorno's integration thesis is that he becomes unable to develop a constructive concept of social struggle.

⁵⁶Habermas appears to recognize this when he states that 'the externalization of lifeworld contexts cannot be carried through without remainder, as the informal organization upon which all formal organization relies amply demonstrates. . . . The lifeworlds of members, never completely husked away, penetrate here into the reality of organizations', *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 311.

In his reconstruction of the social theories of Mead and Durkheim in *The Theory of Communicative Action*,⁵⁷ Habermas develops the idea of communicative reason in a way which is intended to reveal the deficits of Adorno's integration thesis. Drawing upon Mead's theory of symbolically mediated behaviour and Durkheim's account of the *conscience collective*, Habermas constructs an account of linguistically mediated understanding as a form of social integration, in which language serves in the threefold role of achieving understanding among subjects, coordinating goal-directed activities, and functioning as a medium of socialization. This thesis is arrived at through the idea of a 'linguistification' (*Versprachlichung*) of the normative binding force which Durkheim attributes to the sacred principle. The simultaneous 'rapture and terror', or love and fear, which binds social members to the sacred is replaced by the binding power of the illocutionary force attaching to criticizable validity claims.⁵⁸

The linguistification thesis allows Habermas to reconstruct Weber's notion of disenchantment as the condition for the release of the potential of communicative rationality and the reformulation of normative integration on a linguistic basis, rather than as the erosion of the religious-metaphysical supports of practical reason. Habermas is therefore able to oppose the totalizing of administrative integration via the exchange mechanism, by reading the process of disenchantment as making structurally possible a type of social integration taking place through the intersubjective recognition of validity claims raised in speech acts. Adorno's integration thesis led him to seek for the traces of the autonomous subject in spontaneous gestures, which were signs of the potential for self-reflection that the process of integration in capitalist modernization had failed

⁵⁷Vol. 2, pp. 1-111.

⁵⁸*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 77.

to subsume. Habermas, in contrast, detects a grounding for normative critique within social reality, in the communicative structures of the lifeworld. These structures are thought to furnish the basis for moral claims and expectations. In this way, Habermas believes, he can cash out Adorno's normative ideas concerning reconciliation and freedom in social-theoretic terms.⁵⁹ The normative force of the ideas of reconciliation and freedom can now, therefore, be transferred to the structures of intersubjective recognition.

With this thesis, Habermas appears to have the best of both Hegelian and Kantian worlds. The grounding of critical theory in a quasi-transcendental universal pragmatics is retained together with a notion of institutionalized forms of communicative freedom as progressing through changing social structures of intersubjective recognition. The idea of recognition is to be cashed out in terms of a consensus achieved by means of language. 'Coming to an understanding', Habermas asserts, means that 'participants in communication reach an agreement [*Einigung*] concerning the validity of an utterance; agreement [*Einverständnis*] is the intersubjective recognition of the validity claim the speaker raises for it'.⁶⁰ Habermas, however, combines this notion of recognition with a thesis of moral learning processes as taking place through the interaction of the independent logics of system maintenance and lifeworld reproduction. The result of this is to suppress an important feature of Hegel's account by displacing the idea of moral conflict, in favour of a confrontation between institutional forms organized purposive-rationally or according to the structures of communicative reason. On Habermas's view, colonization, rather than occurring together with the institutionalization of a class-specific morality which would provide an ideological justification for

⁵⁹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁰*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 120.

existing inequalities, '*drive[s] moral-practical elements out of private and political-public spheres of life*'.⁶¹ What gets lost here is the Hegelian insight that domination is institutionalized as relations of asymmetrical recognition between social groups. In Hegel's well-known master-slave dialectic, the moral knowledge which drives emancipation emerges from the experience of misrecognition, which takes the institutionalized form of a relation of domination and subordination. The emergence of reciprocal recognition takes the negative path of the progressive abolition of forms of misrecognition, in which domination always appears in the concrete social form of a distorted intersubjective relation. For Hegel, therefore, domination is not to be conceived as the displacement of the intersubjective relation by the logic of differently structured social domains, *but rather as a distorted, incomplete form of the intersubjective relation itself*. Structures of recognition are themselves shot through with forms of social power, and thus recognition is institutionalized as the domination of certain social groups over others. Habermas is unable to account for this because of his reification of the system-lifeworld distinction. Habermas reads the interplay between these domains as a conflict between the 'norm-free reality' of purposive-rational subsystems and a *domination-free communicative infrastructure*.⁶² He therefore eliminates the concept of social struggle by conceiving conflict as taking place between purposive-rationally and communicatively organized domains, and *not* between the norms and values which are to structure intersubjective recognition, and whose class-specific forms generate asymmetrical recognition by institutionalizing purposive-rational domains in a way which entrenches the structures supporting social domination. As I argued earlier, it is plausible to see the institutional embodiments of political and economic

⁶¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 325 (my italics).

⁶²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 327.

subsystems as incorporating both purposive rational and political-practical principles. The latter would thus have the function of institutionalizing subsystems in a class-specific way, by appealing to norms which entrench forms of asymmetrical recognition. If this argument holds, then Habermas would have to complement the normative idea of intersubjective recognition with a picture of the communicative domain as a struggle over social norms.

Axel Honneth has argued that the idea of the social as constituted by a struggle among social groups, and the reading of history as a 'dynamic of class struggle', was implicit in Habermas's reading of Marx in *Knowledge and Human Interests*.⁶³ Rather than, as he later came to do, reading the species' evolution as a phylogenetic complement to theories of cognitive development, Habermas here reconstructs the logic of this development from the moral dynamic found within the struggle among social classes. Here, I want to suggest, the Marxian conception of the social had not been entirely subordinated by a Weberian account, and in consequence, Habermas's early social theory is able to furnish a theoretically superior reading of the complex entwinement of recognition, domination, and struggle in the logic of social development.

Arguing against Marx's reductionism, Habermas makes a distinction in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, between the possibilities for emancipation generated by the growth of 'technically exploitable knowledge' within the transcendental frame of instrumental action, and the reflexive comprehension of the repressive social forms - which Habermas refers to as 'rigidified' forms of life - which allows this emancipatory potential to be taken up at the level of the institutional framework of society.⁶⁴ The institutional framework, Habermas asserts, embodies repression as the

⁶³See Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, pp. 269ff.

⁶⁴*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 52-3.

‘force of social dependence and political power, which is rooted in prior history and tradition’. Habermas is therefore able to define emancipation as a dual-level process, involving both increases in instrumental rationality and a critique of class-specific forms of repression,

A society owes emancipation from the external forces of nature to labour processes, that is to the production of technically exploitable knowledge. . . . Emancipation from the compulsion of internal nature succeeds to the degree that institutions based on force are replaced by an organization of social relations that is bound only to communication free from domination. This does not occur directly through productive activity, *but rather through the revolutionary activity of struggling classes* (including the critical activity of reflective sciences).⁶⁵

Habermas refers to the constitution of the species taking place in the dimension of the ‘struggle of social classes’, as a ‘process of oppression and self-emancipation’.⁶⁶ Habermas also speaks here of struggle as ‘mediating’ two ‘partial subjects’ of society, which take the form of two ‘social classes’.⁶⁷ Here, Habermas is clearly committed to perceiving repressive social structures as institutionalized forms of misrecognition, which provide a normative framework for the organization of material production that is the expression of the interests of the dominant class. The communicative infrastructure is clearly not being understood here as power-free. Rather, Habermas takes account of the fact that domination infiltrates, and distorts, the structure of communicative relations. The results of the class struggle, Habermas argues, ‘are always sedimented in the

⁶⁵*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 53 (my italics).

⁶⁶*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 54.

⁶⁷*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 55.

institutional framework of a society, in *social form*'.⁶⁸ The 'social self-formative process' must therefore be seen as the progressive overcoming of the entwinement of power and intersubjective recognition. This process is marked 'by stages of reflection through which the dogmatic character of surpassed forms of domination and ideologies are dispelled . . . and communicative action is set free as communicative action'.⁶⁹

Bringing to bear these insights on Habermas's subsequent social theory allows us to correct the problematic consequences of the reifications implicit in the latter, which postulated a realm of domination-free communication and a systemic domain of norm-free power. For what is suggested in *Knowledge and Human Interests* is an understanding of the social sphere as 'a *struggle* between social groups for the *organizational form* of purposive rational action'.⁷⁰ Under conditions of class domination, communicative action will take the form of a conflict concerning the legitimacy of norms. In the process of struggle, dominated groups bring to bear the insight that existing norms institutionalize the demands of systemic domains in a form which generates class-specific types of repression. The existing norms which are the subject of conflict are theorized from this perspective as those which support class and group inequalities, since they represent purported legitimations of hidden relations of domination that structure collective practice. The process of struggle therefore rests on an implicit claim to render transparent the operation of power *within* communicative practice.

On the model advanced here, Habermas's notion of a moral learning process which is

⁶⁸*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 61.

⁶⁹*Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 55.

⁷⁰Axel Honneth, *Critique of Power*, p. 269.

realized by the species as a whole must be reformulated. The motor of moral progress must now be sought for in the *negative experiences* which motivate the practical struggle of oppressed social groups. It is the struggle for recognition itself which is the embracing medium of the moral learning process.⁷¹ The end point of a sphere of communicative sphere free from domination would be approached only by means of a series of negations, on the basis of the experience of oppression which social groups bring to bear in the process of social struggle. The social domains in which processes of communication take place would be seen as infiltrated, from the beginning, with the operations of power rooted in class antagonisms and directed towards the legitimation of class privileges.

Struggle within the Communicative Sphere

The critique of the notion of a power-free sphere of communication can be broadened into an ideology-critical approach to the idea of communicative rationality. From this perspective, Habermas's own representation of normative critique can be seen to have class and culture-specific presuppositions built into its very construction. The forms of conflict for which Habermas's communication theory is seeking to provide a normative-theoretical underpinning, are confined to a specific problem domain and a specific group of social actors: namely the quality of life issues addressed by the 'new politics' of the new middle classes, which took on the form of protest in the

⁷¹This is Axel Honneth's thesis in his 'Moralische Entwicklung und sozialer Kampf: Sozialphilosophische Lehren aus dem Frühwerk Hegels', in A. Honneth, T. McCarthy, C. Offe, A. Wellmer (eds.), *Zwischenbetrachtungen im Prozeß der Aufklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

social movements organized around ecological, anti-nuclear and anti-technocratic themes.⁷² This narrowing of focus tends to render Habermas's account insensitive to the hidden forms of exclusion which deform consensus-oriented communication from within. On Habermas's account, the only types of distortions on the process of reaching understanding that are given consideration are those which arise from the invasion of systemic media into communicatively reproduced domains. What Habermas fails to acknowledge, and the point I want to argue here, is that the preconditions for communicative rationality, as Habermas conceives them, are *cultural acquisitions*. Habermas simply fails to recognize that the very capacities of systematization, abstraction and dispassionateness underlying communicative rationality are culture-specific attributes, embodying the typical mode of discursive interaction of the educated, white male middle class. Communicative rationality thereby implicitly builds *informal mechanisms of exclusion* into the standpoint of normative critique. It is plausible to believe that since the day to day interaction of groups at the lower end of the class structure simply does not give rise to the pressures to systematize moral intuitions or abstract from concrete contexts, those groups will express their moral intuitions in a manner incompatible with Habermas's model of the process of reaching understanding.⁷³ This point has also been convincingly argued by theorists arguing from a feminist standpoint. Iris Marion Young has argued that Habermas's model of deliberative democracy

tends to assume that deliberation is both culturally neutral and universal. A theory of communicative democracy that attends to social difference, to the way that power

⁷²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 392ff.

⁷³This is Axel Honneth's thesis in his essay 'Moralbewußtsein und soziale Klassenherrschaft', in his *Die zerrissene Welt des Sozialen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990). I will return to this point in my discussion of Honneth's critical social theory.

sometimes enters speech itself, recognizes the cultural specificity of deliberative practices and proposes a more inclusive model of communication. . . . [T]he norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people.⁷⁴

Among the culture-specific presuppositions in Habermas's model of communicative rationality, Young notes its stress on assertive and confrontational modes of expression, its privileging of formal and general speech, and its favouring speech which is dispassionate and disembodied, rather than speech which is tied to emotional engagement in situations. She argues that these components reflect the cultural acquisitions of educated, white middle class men.⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Nancy Fraser has alluded to the mechanisms of exclusion operating at the level of informal rules and norms of discursive interaction, in the classical liberal bourgeois public sphere which was *formally* open to all members of society. She argues that Habermas's reading of the liberal public sphere fails to grasp the operation of social power through 'protocols of style and decorum that were themselves correlates and markers of status inequality'. These informal mechanisms of exclusion functioned 'to marginalize women, people of color, and members of the plebian classes and to prevent them from functioning as peers'.⁷⁶ This suggests that any attempt to delineate a power-free model of communication will inevitably entrench existing structures of domination and subordination.

It is noteworthy in this regard that Habermas's more recent book on legal theory, *Faktizität*

⁷⁴Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy, and Policy* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 63.

⁷⁵*Intersecting Voices*, pp. 64-5.

⁷⁶Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 78.

und Geltung, has reintroduced the notion of the public sphere, and reinterpreted it through the idea of civil society (*Zivilgesellschaft*), as the locus of spontaneous movements and organizations, which bring the problems and perspectives of the lifeworld to the attention of the political system.⁷⁷ What is striking, however, is that Habermas fails to address the consequences of the class- and culture-specific conditions of effective participation in civil society, and the barriers to the employment of its communicative channels. Habermas is certainly acutely aware of the potential disfiguring of public communication by tendencies of the mass media, concerning its personalizing of subject matters, the blending of information and entertainment, and the fragmentation of contexts.⁷⁸ But the argument concerning the operation of social power through culture-specific, informal mechanisms of exclusion is neutralized by referring all asymmetries in participation to the 'contingent unequal distribution of individual capabilities'. The relevance of certain capabilities is not seen as determined, say, by informal cultural judgements. Instead, the inequality that pervades civil society comes under the category of '*unavoidable* moments of inertia'.⁷⁹ The problem with this formulation, which follows directly from the formalism of Habermas's approach - that is, its exclusive focus on the formal structures of the institutional framework - is that it risks naturalizing the forms of social power that generate substantive inequality.⁸⁰ By identifying barriers to entry into the public sphere exclusively with *formal* barriers to unlimited inclusion and equality, Habermas's

⁷⁷Jürgen Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), p. 443.

⁷⁸*Faktizität und Geltung*, pp. 454ff.

⁷⁹*Faktizität und Geltung*, p. 396.

⁸⁰See the critique of Konstantinos Kavoulakos, 'Constitutional state and democracy: On Jürgen Habermas's *Between Facts and Norms*', *Radical Philosophy* 96 (1999) 33-41, pp. 38ff.

account becomes blind to the question of class- and culture-specific preconditions of access. Habermas unwittingly reintroduces a liberal-individualist ideology of equal opportunity under the cover of a theoretical formalism.⁸¹

Struggle within Systemic Domains

The problems mentioned above can be attributed to a failure, on Habermas's part, to bring to bear the consequences of the notion of society as constituted by a struggle among social groups on the theory of communicative action. This leads to an untenable representation of the liberal public sphere as immune to the exclusionary mechanisms of social power. I want to argue now that Habermas's tendency to downplay social struggle within the lifeworld, and his vision of the latter as integrated exclusively through consensus, is reflected in a simultaneous extraction of any trace of social conflict from systemically ordered domains. I want to argue here, against Habermas's reading, that the forms of domination arising through social struggle within the lifeworld are *reproduced and entrenched through the operations of systemic logics*. The integration that is procured through systemic complexes therefore, at the same time, comprises the reproduction of structures of domination. Habermas's deployment of systems theory, as several critics have pointed out, excludes the possibility of conceiving systemic domains as internally constituted by a conflict concerning the norms which are to organize system reproduction. Communication in the public sphere is prevented from calling into question the logic governing decisions made within the

⁸¹Peter Dews raises a similar suspicion in his 'Faktizität, Geltung und Öffentlichkeit', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 41 (1993) 359-64; p. 362.

economic system, since these decisions are said to reflect systemic needs, not group interests. Habermas, in a telling passage, argues that any attempt to interfere with the ‘obstinate modes of operation’ of functional systems is prone to the myth of a ‘society which organizes itself as a whole’. Civil society is not permitted to ‘step *into the place* of a macro-subject which is characterized in terms of a philosophy of history’.⁸² What is excluded from the outset by this overblown contrast is the possibility of an analysis of the operation of social power within the economic system. This would involve an analysis of how dominant interests *actively shape the operation of mediatized domains by determining the context in which they operate*. Habermas’s failure adequately to theorize the operation of class-specific forms of power in systemic domains follows from his uncritical acceptance of the technocracy thesis, which postulated an independent, self-governing frame of purely ‘technical’ action. As a result, Habermas discounts from the beginning the possibility that technical action, and its ‘rational’ development and application, *is infiltrated from the start with the specific interests of dominant social groups*. If this is the case, then the imperatives of mediatized domains which enter the lifeworld must be seen as embodying the imperatives of dominant interests.

I will show in the final chapter how we can conceive of systemic domains as structured by hegemonic interests. Here, I only want to claim that it is deeply implausible to exclude group conflict from the internal workings of systemically ordered domains. This becomes clear when we look, for example, at how, in the economic sphere, deep-rooted normative conflicts come to the surface during fundamental economic transitions. What becomes visible at these moments is the process by which dominant social groups attempt to impose an *interest-driven vision of reality* as

⁸²*Faktizität und Geltung*, p. 450.

'natural' or 'unavoidable', thus re-presenting a class-specific interest in the form of a technical-neutral decision. This has been brought out in ethnographic studies on the process of de-industrialization in the USA, where the strategy of dominant economic groups was seen to comprise the redefinition of political interests as a 'neutral', economic rationality. Hence the removal of de-industrialization from democratic debate, and the perception of this process as an unavoidable economic necessity, was only possible on the basis of the successful efforts of dominant groups to define the *meaning* of de-industrialization in a manner which supported their group-specific interests.⁸³ In this case, Habermas's claim that subsystems embody an autonomous, technical-neutral logic can only have the effect of naturalizing exercises of social power. As Andrew Feenberg has argued, in order to gain critical access to structures of domination within mediatized domains, we need to adopt an ideology-critical perspective on the social functioning of media. Feenberg asserts that

media design is shaped by the hegemonic interests of the society it serves. Markets, administrations, technical devices are biased and embody specific valiative choices. These designed-in biases leave a mark on the media even in those domains where they appropriately regulate affairs. Therefore, critique cannot cease at the boundary of the system but must extend deep inside it; it must become design critique.⁸⁴

⁸³See Kathryn Marie Dudley, *The End of the Line: Lost Jobs, New Lives in Postindustrial America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). Drawing on elite theory, Dale Hathaway has argued for the importance of the concept of cultural hegemony in explaining why the divide between the economic and political was established in a way which supported the interests of dominant groups. See his *Can Workers have a Voice? The Politics of Deindustrialization in Pittsburgh* (University Park, Pa: Penn State University Press, 1993).

⁸⁴*Questioning Technology* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 174. See also his *Critical Theory of Technology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1991).

It is, then, the possibility of a critique of the social interests and purposes that are incorporated into the logic of subsystems that is excluded by Habermas's naturalization of spheres of purely purposive-rational action. Habermas can allow only variable institutional arrangements as factors affecting the historical forms of systemic domains. There is no place in his account for social power as a constitutive element of technical action.

My argument suggests that Habermas's representation of normative critique in terms of the conflict between independent logics of communicatively and purposive rationally organized spheres is incapable of gaining theoretical access to the workings of power, and thus the reality of social struggle, within communicative domains themselves. Habermas's attempt to supplant Adorno's integration thesis through a dual-level social theory focusses on communicative and purposive-rational structures of interaction, seems to leave no place for an adequate theoretical account of the reproduction of social relations of domination. My account of forms of struggle in both communicative and systemically ordered domains above, was intended to show that dominant interests are able to play an active, structuring role in the reproduction of both social lifeworlds and systemic complexes. There is no communicative realm, nor any purposive-rationally ordered institution which is free from the infiltration of social power. In order to theorize the reproduction of domination within lifeworlds and subsystems, I will argue, critical theory needs to develop a theory of symbolic power, and a theory of systemic domination. I will develop this argument subsequent to the discussion of the critical theory of recognition. I will claim that, by developing the concepts of symbolic power and systemic domination, it is possible to construct a non-totalizing version of Adorno's idea of integration through domination.

I now want to turn, however, to the problem that Habermas, drawing on Weber, identifies

as a 'loss of meaning'. Habermas attempts to interpret Weber's loss of meaning thesis as denoting a form of 'cultural impoverishment' (*Verarmung*), caused by the 'splitting-off' of expert discourses from the realm of everyday communicative practice.⁸⁵ I will argue that this process is more accurately described as a rigidification of linguistic meaning. The pathological effects of 'cultural impoverishment' are not the result of the inevitable side-effects of cognitive specialization, but must be understood instead in terms of the infiltration of exchange logic into the realm of cultural meaning. Focussing on Habermas's more recent accounts of moral-practical reason, I will argue that the symptoms of linguistic reification, involving a systematic de-sensitization to the revelation of moral meaning within human experience, are discernible in the interior of communicative rationality itself. This will furnish the basis for the claim that the infiltration of exchange logic into moral-practical reason gives rise to forms of moral disintegration, which can be analysed in the form of pathologies of meaning and experience.

⁸⁵See *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 327.

The Dialectic of Cultural Rationalization

In this chapter, I will explore further the Weberian, rather than the Marxian, strand of critical social theory. My intention here will be to oppose to Habermas's reading of cultural rationalization the idea of a *dialectic* of cultural rationalization, which brings into focus the internal distortion of processes of cultural rationalization wrought by the infiltration of the logic of exchange into the sphere of cultural meaning. The previous chapter suggested that, in taking up the Marxian emphasis on social struggle and justice, critical theory is obliged to develop a theory of recognition, with a concomitant focus on the problematic of social power and ideology. In this chapter I will argue that, in taking up the Weberian suspicion concerning the freedom-enhancing potential of cultural rationalization processes, critical theory is obliged to focus on pathologies of meaning and experience. I take both arguments to constitute a refutation of Habermas's suggestion that the theory of communicative action can adequately take up the burden of explicating the notions of freedom and reconciliation integral to Adorno's critical social theory.

The Change of Paradigm in Critical Theory

Habermas's justification for the paradigm change in critical social theory follows from his detection of aporias in the commitment of Horkheimer and Adorno to the 'philosophy of the subject'. The philosophy of the subject, according to Habermas, reduces reason to two possible relations of a subject towards objects, both characterizable in terms of the subject's adoption of an objectivating attitude, directed towards control, in relation to entities in the world. The twin relations are the representation of objects, and action upon them in pursuit of subjectively given ends. These two functions of representation and action, Habermas asserts, are fundamentally connected: representations are framed in terms of possible practical interventions, and successful action requires knowledge of the causal nexus given in representation.¹ It is because of their commitment to this structure that Horkheimer and Adorno cannot render cognitively meaningful the utopian content of their philosophy. This utopian content, which Habermas equates with the idea of mimesis, can only be unlocked by leaving behind the objectivating attitude characteristic of subjective reason, for the more encompassing idea of communicative rationality, and its focus on intersubjective understanding. The standpoint of communicative rationality displaces the objectivating attitude with the performative attitude of participants in interaction. On this basis, the ideas of reconciliation and freedom central to Adorno's philosophy can be 'deciphered as codes for a form of intersubjectivity, however utopian it may be, that makes possible a mutual and constraint-free understanding among individuals in their dealings with one another'.² The

¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 387.

²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 391.

utopian content of the ideas of reconciliation and freedom which Adorno had tried, but failed, to articulate, are on Habermas's reading seen to be built into the structural pre-conditions of linguistic understanding. By this means, the theory of communicative action can make good on the failure of justification that marred the contributions of earlier critical theorists.

Habermas's strategy, in relation to earlier critical theorists, is to argue that they *were* committed to the normative model of constraint-free understanding, but the limitations of their philosophical approach rendered them unable to articulate and to justify that content in theoretical terms. Hence the theory of communicative action makes a claim to being the realization of the aspirations of earlier critical theory, as the genuine redemption of its normative ideals. But it is not hard to see that Habermas's justification of the need for a change of paradigm rests upon a serious misreading of Adorno's negative dialectic. I want to claim that it is only as a result of his misreading of Adorno that Habermas is able to claim that the theory of communicative action redeems without loss the normative ideals guiding earlier critical theory. The most serious error is Habermas's claim that what Adorno calls 'identity thinking' is equivalent to Weberian purposive rationality. It is only because of this identification, in fact, that Habermas is able to claim that Adorno reduces reason to subjective reason - the representation and control of objects. It also follows from this that the utopian content of critical theory must appear as the excluded other of conceptual thinking, since conceptual thinking is itself identical to instrumental reason. But in the first place, as we have seen, mimesis, in Adorno's work, does not denote an excluded other to conceptual thinking, but rather functions as part of a critique of the subsumption model of concepts. Concepts are *always already* mimetic, insofar as they embody sedimented forms of social experience. The normative content of Adorno's work does not lie in mimesis, but rather in the form of the critical-negative

experience afforded by a dialectical critique of concepts. Secondly, Adorno's attack on the subsumptive-classificatory model of concepts itself embodies a critique of the very subjective-instrumental reason to which Adorno is allegedly reducing conceptual thinking. The intention of Adorno's critique of the constituting consciousness, which is said to be central to the critique of ideology, is to demonstrate that the reduction of conceptual thinking to the instrumental appropriation of objects is *impossible*, when the implications of what it means to use concepts are thought through.³ The primacy of the subject, which is presupposed by the constituting consciousness, is itself shown to be an unsustainable illusion, whose untruth reveals itself in the inevitable regression of the subject to an 'object' - the uncritical adaptation to what is dictated by social conditions. A third major error is that Habermas misreads the internal dialectic of identity and nonidentity in Adorno's account of conceptual thinking, and interprets these two terms, identity and nonidentity, as standing outside one another in a reified opposition. It is for this reason that Habermas overlooks the point that it is the dialectic of identity and nonidentity *within* concepts - and *not* between concepts and an excluded other - which is the critical measure being employed to demonstrate the impossibility of the reduction of conceptual thinking to subjective-instrumental reason.⁴ Nonidentity is not conjured up as a critical standard outside the conceptual sphere. Adorno's immanent critique of identity thinking demonstrates rather that it is *unthinkable* without nonidentity. The untruth of identity is immanent in identity thinking itself. Because concepts must strive for identity, and will necessary fail, conceptual thinking can work critically in relation to social formations, and it is this critical operation of concepts which

³See *Negative Dialectics*, p.148; 151.

⁴See Claudia Rademacher, *Versöhnung oder Verständigung?*, p. 45.

is articulated by dialectic. Reversing Habermas's charge of performative contradiction, it can be said that it is Adorno who removes the ground from beneath the feet of the ideological employment of thought, by demonstrating that this employment is contradicted by the inherently critical nature of conceptual thinking. Evidence that Habermas's misreading derives from a fundamental misunderstanding of dialectical critique can be gleaned from the fact that Habermas blithely accepts the claim that aporias of thought represent 'pure', logical contradictions.⁵ It is only on this ground that Habermas can claim that the 'aporias' in Adorno's theory - which for Adorno are the immanent antagonisms of social experience - provide a justification for a 'paradigm change' at the level of theory.

These arguments would not in themselves show that fundamental insights of Adorno's critical project become lost in Habermas's work, if it could be shown that the guiding normative-theoretical standpoint remains the same, or is perhaps even articulated in a more appropriate fashion, in Habermas's version. But it is this point which I now want to question. As a first approximation, we might say that Adorno's counter-concept to the cognitive-instrumental attitude of the philosophy of consciousness would not be definable in terms of the notion of communication, but would have to be expressed in terms of the idea of experience. The central aim of the critical project of *Negative Dialectics*, as we saw, is to make possible a form of critical-negative experience. The basis of this project is the critique of the 'neutralization' of concepts, which takes place through their reduction to classificatory-subsumptive forms. When conceptual thinking is understood, in contrast, as the articulation of the social content stored

⁵For a critique of this Habermasian move sympathetic to Adorno, see Claudia Rademacher, *Versöhnung oder Verständigung?*, pp. 37, 46; see also Friedhelm Löwenich, *Paradigmenwechsel*, pp. 57-8.

within concepts, it is able to engender a form of utopian experience, in which existing forms are judged in terms of their immanent possibilities. This utopian experience emerges through the dialectic of identity and nonidentity within concepts, which allows one to see 'more in a phenomenon than it is - and solely because of what it is' (ND 28; 38-9). The claim that conceptual articulation is to reveal the immanent possibilities of the object, as that which stakes a normative claim on the object 'solely because of what it is', means that the critical moment is coextensive with the revealed meaning of the object of experience. It is precisely this feature of the workings of critique as 'unregimented experience', which will allow us to see why Adorno's notion of reconciliation cannot be translated into the Habermasian paradigm of linguistic understanding.

The central point of the argument concerns the interpretation of cultural rationalization. Adorno perceives cultural rationalization as marked by an internal distortion, generated by the infiltration of exchange logic into the sphere of cultural meaning. As a result of this infiltration, Adorno believes, the process of cultural rationalization begins to generate a particular type of distortion within the lifeworld, which takes the form of a rigidification of linguistic meaning. This process is to be understood in terms of the severing of validity from the work of meaning constitution within everyday practice, resulting from the increasing formalization and decontextualization of the categories of thought. In consequence, the standpoint of critique is now cut loose from its relation to experiential meaning. The problem this poses is that the critical articulation of structures of domination is no longer able to work immanently, as the revealed negativity of social experience. The normative charge attaching to critique, that is to say, no longer works as a transcendence within immanence, becoming instead a purely formal, external transcendence.

Habermas conceives cultural rationalization in terms of the differentiation of the three cultural value spheres, corresponding to the complexes of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic rationality. Each of these rationality complexes now liberates itself from the unifying force of 'traditional knowledge', furnished by religious-metaphysical world views, and operates solely according to an internal logic of justification specified by a particular validity claim. Habermas perceives this process as the setting free of communicative rationalization. The next step of Habermas's strategy involves demarcating lifeworld distortions from this process of rationalization, as side effects not derivative from the internal logic of this process itself. There are in fact two forms of lifeworld distortion which Habermas mentions. The first derives from a 'one-sided rationalization or reification of everyday practice', by means of the incursions of cognitive-instrumental reason into the moral-practical and aesthetic-expressive domains. The second is Habermas's reinterpretation of Weber's loss of meaning thesis, as signifying a process of 'cultural impoverishment'. According to Habermas, this takes place through the 'splitting off' of 'expert cultures' (i.e. the professionalized treatment of cognitive-instrumental, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive rationality complexes) from the realm of everyday practice. Hence 'cultural rationalization brings with it the danger that a lifeworld devalued in its traditional substance will become impoverished'.⁶

The counter-argument to this reading, drawing upon Adorno's thesis concerning cultural rationalization, must be that linguistic reification is already implicit in the strict formalization and decontextualization of thought procedures that Habermas accepts as inevitable consequences of the process of rationalization. Communicative reason cannot take up the burden of explicating

⁶*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 326.

the normative content of reconciliation because it intensifies those same processes which generate the crisis of experience. The deep issue involved here is Habermas's acceptance of the price to be paid for a formal, procedural concept of reason, in terms of the unreconcilable dualisms that this concept inevitably generates: meaning and validity, justification and motivation, moral and ethical selves, knowledge and convention. As we shall see, each of these dualisms must be seen from Adorno's standpoint as symptoms of the linguistic reification. What emerges from this is that the very 'objectivating attitude' which Habermas identifies as characteristic of the purposive-rational, will prove to be inexpugnable from communicative reason itself, as Habermas defines it. This will show that any attempt to explicate the content of Adorno's notion of reconciliation must engage more substantially with the inner logics of the process of cultural rationalization, and its relation to the disfigurement of human experience.

Reification as Decontextualization of 'Value'

In the previous chapter, I criticized Habermas's reification of action types, whereby those action types are said to be correlated with distinct spheres of social action. This model pushes Habermas towards a deeply problematic reading of colonization as the invasion and capture of communicatively reproduced spheres by social domains which are integrated by purposive-rational logics,

In place of "false consciousness", we today have a "fragmented consciousness" that blocks enlightenment by the mechanism of reification. It is only with this that the conditions for a *colonization of the lifeworld* are met. When stripped of their ideological veils, the imperatives of autonomous subsystems make their way

into the lifeworld from the outside - like colonial masters coming into a tribal society - and force a process of assimilation upon it.⁷

This image causes profound difficulties because, following from the reification of social domains, it reads colonization exclusively as the *capture* of communicative domains by systemic forms external to them, and thus excludes from the outset the possibility of reading colonization as an *internal subversion* of the logics of communicative reproduction. Habermas has to presuppose here something akin to an idealized, pure form of the communicative relation in the shape of the 'uncolonizable kernel' of the lifeworld, which stands opposed to systemic domains both logically, and in social space.⁸ The view of colonization as 'capture' is unconvincing because the growing dominance of the media of money and power cannot occur without an *internal* reorientation of lifeworld practices which reorganizes those practices according to the demands of systemic media and restructures motivation.⁹ Colonization is only intelligible as a process of *infiltration*, by means of which social integration takes place *as* systemic integration.¹⁰ From this perspective, it becomes clear why, for Adorno, critical theory cannot accept a distinction between a concept of cultural rationalization benign in itself, and distortions of

⁷*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 355.

⁸Friedhelm Löwenich, *Paradigmenwechsel*, p. 38.

⁹Asher Horowitz has made this point in his critique of Habermas's notion of colonization. Horowitz argues that '[the abstract steering media of money and power] are anchored in a life-world saturated with the norms appropriate to their existence: a vocational ethic with its own relatively ascetic commitment to purposive rationality, negative individual freedom and formal equality, ethical pluralism and the necessary indifference or neutrality with respect to the concrete ends of others that follow', "Like a tangled mobile": reason and reification in the quasi-dialectical theory of Jürgen Habermas', *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 24 (1998) 1-23, p. 9.

¹⁰Friedhelm Löwenich, *Paradigmenwechsel*, p. 38.

communicative reproduction in the lifeworld attributable to the side-effects of overbearing systemic complexes. The expansion of the instrumental logic of systems can only be made accessible to critique by an analysis of the infiltration of the logic of cultural rationalization by the logic of the exchange process.¹¹

The thesis of a dialectic of cultural rationalization signals a process in which *the infiltration of meaning constitution by the logic of exchange generates a decontextualization of value*, which is responsible for the reification of moral and cultural meanings. The decontextualization of value denotes a process of abstraction (in the Marxian-Wittgensteinian sense), in which the determination of value is severed from the constitution of meanings within human practice, and from situated experience. This process leads to an internal distortion of communicative (discursive) reason, which is observable at both the macro-level of social practice, and the micro-level of subjective experience. At the micro-level, language loses its affective attunement. Reason, as discursive reason, becomes equivalent to processes of formal-procedural subsumption characterized by an indifference to the sensuous qualities of things. That is to say: reason establishes the value of things as their validity *independently of the meaningfulness of things within, and for human experience*. Jay Bernstein has argued that the infiltration of exchange logic into processes of meaning constitution can be understood in terms of the idea of 'syntactical trumping'.¹² The basis of this idea is that economic practices generate

¹¹Before beginning this analysis, it is worth emphasising again that many of the aspects I point to below as manifestations of a distortion of communicative reason would not be denied as such by Habermas, but accepted as the consequences of the limitations of reason in 'post-metaphysical' conditions. What has to be shown, then, is that aspects such as the severance of justification from motivation, or the impossibility of rational meaning disclosure, are describable as manifestations of linguistic reification.

¹²Jay Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life*, p. 169.

value through the operation of laws of exchange operating independently of intersubjective sense. This means that the exchange value of a thing is detachable from its use value or, that is to say, the exchange value of a thing is *indifferent to* its use value. Bernstein suggests that we can understand the process of the infiltration of exchange logic into meaning constitution in everyday language, if we model the relation between syntax and semantics on the relation between exchange value and use value. The incursions of exchange logic into the communicative speech of the lifeworld can then be understood as the domination of pragmatic semantics (meaning constitution) by syntax. The locus of value - what makes an item valid, the criteria which justify it - now becomes severed (de-contextualized) from the empirical meaningfulness of things. Syntactical trumping, therefore, occurs through a process whereby empirical predicates are subsumed within a structure which 'detaches their potential for meaning from both intersubjective practices and their referential objects'.¹³ The rational structure of validation and justification becomes logically separable from experiential meaning.

The domination of pragmatic semantics by syntax can be seen as an expression of the structure of linguistic reification. This term, as we have seen, indicates the severance of concepts from the contexts of their formation, and from the process of their constitution in human practice.¹⁴ As reified items, concepts begin to operate as self-subsistent, rigidified forms cut off from the ground of their formation in experience. From this perspective, it becomes possible to see a clear connection with Adorno's thesis concerning the 'disenchantment' of the concept. By questioning the 'semblance of the being in itself of the concept as a unity of meaning', the

¹³*Recovering Ethical Life*, p. 169.

¹⁴Christoph Demmerling, *Sprache und Verdinglichung*, p. 136.

disenchantment of the concept opposes the movement which ‘exempts [concepts] from reality’, and reinstalls them as ‘moment of the reality which requires their formation (*Bildung*)’ (ND 11-12; 23-24). Adorno’s argument concerning the nonconceptual in the concept ‘disenchants’ the concept by establishing the dependence of conceptual formation on experiential content. Attentiveness towards the nonconceptual in the concept is therefore, for Adorno, a way of resisting the bracketing of empirical meaningfulness occurring through the operation of concepts as content-indifferent, self-subsistent forms. The notion of linguistic reification allows us to see Adorno’s thesis concerning the nonconceptual in the concept as an argument against the decontextualization of value wrought by the infiltration of exchange logic into discursive reason.

At the micro-level, then, the infiltration of exchange logic produces a bracketing of the empirical meaningfulness of sensuous items. At the macro-level, there occurs a generalized bracketing, or suspension of the value or significance of practices for agents. This latter argument takes up a point first levelled by Hegel against Kant’s procedural-formal conception of practical reason. Hegel realized that the determining of normative worth in terms of a content-indifferent, subsumptive procedure presupposed that lifeworld practices are *already* perceived by individuals as bereft of normative weight, as *merely* conventional. Procedural-formal law-testing reason, Hegel argued, signified

. . . the moving of the unmovable, and the insolence [*Frevel*] of a knowledge that argues itself free of absolute laws, and takes them for an alien arbitrariness (*fremde Willkür*). [Law-testing reason] is a negative relation to the substance, or to the real spiritual being; or substance does not yet have its reality within it. Consciousness contains it still in the form of its own immediacy, and substance is first only a *willing* and *knowing* of this individual, or the *ought* of an non-

actual command and a knowing of formal universality.¹⁵

Hegel's argument here is that it is the representation of the standpoint of critical reason as external, as the work of a procedural logic indifferent to the content of the practices being judged, which *transforms* social practices into *fremde Willkür*. It is from the perspective of a practical reason conceived in procedural terms that social practices become *mere* conventions. This gives us a first insight into a genuine *dialectic* of cultural rationalization occurring at the macro-level. It is the type of validation or justification which is demanded from the standpoint of procedural reason which generates the generalized bracketing of the rational content of social practices. In opposing the idea of an 'eternal law' which is 'in and for itself' to the law which has its ground in the 'will of an individual', Hegel is not opposing the standpoint of critique to an accommodating acceptance of a given life form. He is arguing against a representation of critique as external to the point and purposes of social practices. Hegel perceived that when moral worth comes to be *defined* in procedural terms, the locus of critique is displaced to a form of rational justification grounded on individual assent, and it is *this* displacement which transforms the level of social practice into an inert, prima-facie non-rational substance. The argument ought not to be understood as asserting that formal-procedural critique sets up a standard so demanding that it could not possibly be satisfied. It is that formal-procedural critique cannot operate without breaking the entwinement of validity and meaning that enables the claims of moral reason to be felt as the claim to self-realization of a concrete social form. By breaking this entwinement, it brings about a reification of moral categories: they are simultaneously de-practicalized and de-historicized, and take on the appearance of self-

¹⁵G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 310.

subsistent logical forms.

The distorting force of cultural rationalization, through which practices become devalued *in principle* as heteronomous, is exerted by the binary opposition definitive of formal-procedural reason - of the complex justification-validity-knowledge to motivation-meaning-convention. Adorno's critique of constitutive subjectivity, his strategy of 'disenchanted' the concept, forms part of a sustained attempt to undermine these very oppositions. The argument concerning the nonconceptual in the concept ties discursive procedures to empirical meaningfulness, such that the logic of validation and justification is integrated with how normative items are experienced as meaningful. Such an achieved integrated would embody exactly what is meant by the 'full, unreduced experience in the medium of conceptual reflection' (ND 13; 25). Negative dialectics, as a critical project, is the striving for a critical standpoint in which the rational judgement on the social order - the moment of justification-validity-knowledge - will coincide as far as possible with the revealed meaning of social experience. Adorno saw that this would require a concerted, unceasing resistance to the tendencies, embedded in rationalization processes, that pull these moments apart. This resistance is brought to bear at the micro-level by the 'immersion' in the object, the sustained 'self-yielding' of thought that prevents conceptual subsumption from operating as indifferent to empirical content. At the macro-level, it takes the form of the attempt to draw the criteria for rational critique from out of the immanent articulation of the social experience of a form of life, through the forms in which this experience is sedimented in concepts. In the following section, I will develop this critique of cultural rationalization more specifically in relation to Habermasian critical theory. My fundamental claim will be that, in accepting the consequences of these binary oppositions imposed by the dialectic of cultural rationalization, Habermas unwittingly builds into communicative reason the

very objectivating attitude supposedly confined to systemic rationality, in the form of an objectivating attitude toward self, and an objectivating attitude toward society.

Moral-Practical Reason in Habermas

Subsequent to the publication of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas developed his reading of moral-practical reason into a discourse ethics.¹⁶ In these works, Habermas retains the fundamental diremption between validity and meaning, in the form of a founding distinction between the 'moral' and the 'ethical'. This distinction has, significantly, been one of the most strongly disputed aspects of Habermas's recent work. Ethical discourse takes the form of processes of 'self-clarification'. Self-clarification 'draws on the context of a specific life history and leads to evaluative statements about what is good for a particular person'.¹⁷ The question 'what should I do?' is here answered by reference to the tradition, collective identity, and life history shaping the individual. Because it draws upon this background to answer the question of what is 'good for me', however, it does not fully break with the egocentric perspective. Moral discourse is defined as an idealizing extension of perspective which breaks with the boundedness to a particular tradition and life history characteristic of ethical discourse. Moral discourse responds to the question of what course of action would be equally in the interests of all participants, and thus represents the 'ideal extension of each individual communication

¹⁶See *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); *Justification and Application*, trans. C. Cronin (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

¹⁷'On the Employments of Practical Reason', in *Justification and Application*, p. 11.

community from within'. In moral discourse, 'only those norms proposed that express a common interest of all affected can win justified assent'.¹⁸ Moral discourse does not concern the conditions for the realization of a personal or collective life project, but rather has to do with the legitimate regulation of interpersonal conflict. What is most striking about Habermas's depiction of the level of moral discourse, however, is that it ties together the ideals of critique and autonomy in a particularly uncompromising, and deeply Kantian fashion. It is in moral discourse, Habermas argues, that a critical standpoint vis à vis the particularities of traditional life contexts can be attained. This is not conceived, however, as a form of critical self-reflection by which thought frees itself from hidden forms of domination by bringing them to conscious articulation. Rather, the critical standpoint is that of an achieved autonomy, *from the perspective of which traditional life contexts and particular life histories are universally bracketed as heteronomous*. In these lines from his recent work, we can see how far Habermas has developed his original idea of an 'emancipatory' cognitive interest in a Kantian direction, and the deeply problematic consequences of this development,

... In the light of these norms which are justified under the moral point of view, those contingent goals, preferences and value orientations, which otherwise compel the will from outside, allow themselves to be brought under a critical evaluation. Even the heteronomous will lets itself be determined by reasons to place itself under maxims, but the binding of self remains tied (*verhaftet*) to interest situations and value orientations dependent on context which are given through pragmatic and ethical reasons. Only when these reasons have been tested

¹⁸'On the Employments of Practical Reason', p. 13.

under the moral point of view in terms of their compatibility with the interests and value orientations of others, has the will freed itself from heteronomous determinations.¹⁹

What is problematic about this way of conceiving the critical standpoint is assuredly not the distinction between tradition and critique, unreflective acceptance and reflective appropriation as such. The question concerns *why* individual life contexts and collective histories *must* appear as heteronomous from the perspective of individuals concerned to act autonomously. Curiously, Habermas's - now strongly 'Kantianized' - perception of critique appears to nudge him toward an uncomfortable intimacy with Adorno's ill-fated dichotomy of subjective autonomy and heteronomous integration. Habermas, of course, gives an intersubjective twist to the perspective of autonomy. It is no longer, as for Adorno, the (modernist) subject that is the ground of the critical standpoint, but the intersubjectivity of the ideal communication community. What is striking, however, is that in both cases, the critical perspective can only appear as external to the social forms which shape individual and collective identities.

Interestingly, the move that Habermas makes here mirrors the account of the transition from the 'authority of the holy' to the 'authority of an achieved consensus' in *The Theory of Communicative Action*. The transition is accompanied by a generalized bracketing of the cognitive claims of cultural traditions. These latter, which previously furnished a normatively

¹⁹*Die Einbeziehung des Anderen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 48. Also, 'The categorical ought of moral commands is directed to the autonomous *will* [*Wille*] of actors who allow themselves to be rationally determined, through insight into that which all could will. In contrast to arbitrary will [*Willkür*] and the power of resolution [i.e. pragmatic and ethical discourse], this will is freed from the heteronomous traits of contingent interests and value orientations, particularly of cultural life forms and identity-forming traditions', *Faktizität und Geltung*, p. 202.

secured form of collective identity, are now transformed into 'cultural knowledge', which is to be employed as a means in the process of reaching consensus.²⁰ Here, Habermas seems to equate the linguistification of the sacred with the generalized suspension of the normative weight of social practice. The effect of this interpretation is to reintroduce a distinction between the disengaged observer and the unreflective participant at the heart of the theory. Habermas is led to this position by his tendency to read the linguistification of the sacred according to the logic of the decontextualization of (moral) value, that is, as the detachment of the locus of value from the work of meaning constitution within intersubjective practice. The contrast with Durkheim is here particularly significant. Durkheim's sociology of religion attempted to affect a transposition of the ground of values through the analysis of the creative power of sociality. The dissolution of ritual forms of practice was not to be achieved by opposing it, as convention, to the cognitive potential of justified consensus, but rather by the *internal transformations* of ideals and institutions brought about by the dramatic innovations of extraordinary-collective action.²¹ But Habermas's strong Kantianism commits him to an absolutized diremption of moral-practical reason from social practice, as equivalent to the division between (individual) autonomy and (social) heteronomy.

It is not hard to find the presence of all of the significant diremptions which, for Adorno, are symptoms of a destructive dialectic of rationalization, as founding moments of Habermas's discourse ethics. Habermas insists on a particularly strong separation of 'custom and tradition'

²⁰*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 88-9.

²¹Hans Joas, *Die Kreativität des Handelns*, pp. 96ff. See also the discussion of Durkheim in chapter 2 of this work.

from the realm of moral knowledge.²² 'Mere' conventions bind in a 'groundless fashion' by custom alone, whereas duties rest on norms of interaction and are based on reasons. This leads Habermas to a strong definition of autonomy as *contrasted with, or opposed to* custom/tradition,

We do not adhere to recognized norms from a sense of duty because they are *imposed* upon us by the threat of sanctions but because we *give* them to ourselves. . . . It is not because recognized norms are *certified* by custom and tradition that we observe them from a sense of duty but because we take them to be *justified*.²³

But is this distinction between what is self-given and what is imposed, between certification and justification, ever as absolute as Habermas is claiming? Or is it rather a formal-procedural reading of autonomy which *makes* custom look like an inert substance, as, to use Hegel's phrase, *fremde Willkür*? Habermas effectively eliminates any middle, or mediating ground between custom and critique, and hence can only conceive the standpoint of autonomy as an ideal communication community which breaks free of the dull inertia of custom. Yet the need for mediation seems essential, if we consider that tradition and custom does not merely incorporate the dead weight of institutions, which are to be remade in the image of communicative freedom. It is also the level of concrete identity, the culture which shapes the particularity of persons - their deep-seated interests and personality-forming desires. If an objectivating attitude is not to be reintroduced between autonomy and concrete cultural identity - with concrete identity figuring as inert matter for the legislative work of the ideal communication community - a way

²²'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', *Justification and Application*, p. 41-2.

²³'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 42.

has to be found for the standpoint of critique to link up, as part of an *internal transformative process*, with concrete identities shaped by desires and interests.

Habermas articulates the distinction between validity and meaning in his critique of Charles Taylor. Habermas argues that Taylor overtaxes philosophy by demanding that it furnish an answer to the question 'why be moral?'. 'Existential' questions of the meaning of life are, in post-metaphysical conditions, relegated to the level of ethical discourse, as the process of reaching an individual self-understanding or the ethical-political clarification of a collective self-understanding. However, 'philosophers can no longer provide on their own account *generally binding* directives concerning the meaning of life.'²⁴ Here, Habermas inaugurates a division of labour between philosophical discourse, concerned exclusively with questions of rational validation, and religion and art, which are tasked with furnishing a meaning for the question 'why be moral?'. What should give cause for concern here is the implicit instrumentalizing of the work of meaning disclosure in this analysis. The fact that aesthetic and religious discourses generally do not take themselves to be functional complements to normative validity should at least render this division of labour problematic. But we can also make this point by asking the question: is discourse ethics itself intelligible aside from its serving as a meaningful disclosure of the moral content of the democratic ideals of modernity? Seyla Benhabib has convincingly argue that the conditions of universality, symmetry and reciprocity which Habermas claims to derive from the pragmatic presuppositions of argument *überhaupt* are in fact inseparable from the moral commitments of a modern democratic-universalist culture. Thus the pragmatic presupposition which stipulates that every agent capable of speech and action can participate in

²⁴'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 75.

discourses 'already presupposes a strong universalist-egalitarian commitment to consider as irrelevant from a moral standpoint all those natural and cultural characteristics among human groups which distinguish them from one another'.²⁵ Benhabib notes that for the ancient Greeks, the non-Greeks, the βάρβαροι, were those who were ἄλογος - those who did not 'speak', but merely 'babbled'. Thus the extension of *logos*, speech-reason, to the speakers of any natural language, is a product of the moral *Bildung* of the Enlightenment, and its undermining of the ontological basis of human inequality. Hence the validity of discourse ethics, as an extrapolation of what argumentative speech commits us to, is parasitic upon its character as an *articulation* or *disclosure* of the ideals of modern universalist culture, and of the moral meanings constitutive of this culture.

A similar point has been made by Charles Taylor, in his essay 'Language and Society'.²⁶ Taylor argues that moral discourse always embodies a component of *self*-articulation, whereby what is disclosed in moral discourse is an understanding of who 'we' are as concrete subjects. Taylor grounds this idea in an expressivist notion of language,

Language plays an indispensable role as an expressive medium in the overall domain of practical reason. We express our moral ends and our understanding of ourselves as humans by at the same time understanding and justifying our ends: we articulate the implicit understanding which comprises the background of our social norms, customs and institutions, and which is closely bound up with our

²⁵Seyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 306.

²⁶In A Honneth and H Joas (eds.), *Communicative Action*.

understanding of moral ends.²⁷

Because of the character of language as self-disclosure, Taylor argues, the articulation of moral ends always also embodies a certain presentation of self. That is to say, it incorporates a conception of how we conceive ourselves as concrete subjects, and how we perceive our relations to others. By excluding the moment of self-presentation from moral cognition, Habermas deflates the moral import of questions of authenticity and self-realization, and at the same time effectively prevents moral categories from operating as disclosive of moral meaning.

The separating of justification and motivation is present in the form of a distinction between duties that 'bind' the will and affective responses which 'bend' it'. Duties 'point the will in a certain direction and give it orientation but they do not compel it as impulses do; they motivate through reasons but lack the impulsive force of purely empirical motives'.²⁸ For Habermas, the problem of motivation reduces to the problem of 'weakness of the will'.²⁹ The reference to 'impulses' and 'impulsive force' is itself strongly suggestive of the Kantian dualism of *Pflicht* and *Neigung*. Habermas, however, is careful to distinguish this view from Kant's notion of moral insight as resting in a 'catharsis of a will purifying itself of all earthly impurities'.³⁰ But this does not affect the central point that the rational force attaching to moral commands is now seen as logically - not merely contingently - independent of the affective attunement which enables norms to be felt as binding within the context of experience. Nor can

²⁷Charles Taylor, 'Language and Society', p. 34.

²⁸'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 41.

²⁹'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 75, p. 80.

³⁰'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 34.

Habermas's cautionary note obviate the fact that along with this Kantian baggage there inevitably returns, in full force, the entire problematic of a metaphysical tradition which dissects impulse and insight; desiring and knowing; flesh and spirit; carnal compulsion and rational mastery. Habermas believes he can evade these metaphysical dualisms by distinguishing his account from the Kantian grounding of freedom in the nature of noumenal selves. But this is effectively a distinction that makes no difference, since it is in the absolute distinction between 'binding' and 'bending'; between purely rational and purely empirical motives, that the essence of the Kantian dualism lies.

As Adorno saw, it is in its account of the transition to the act that this dualism reveals its true purposive-rational form.³¹ Once the distinction between binding and bending - the insight which convinces and the impulse which merely pushes - is absolutized, we can only conceive the moral act as though 'an other [than reason] were added to rationality' (ND 229; 228). We can see the serious consequences of this distinction at two levels of Habermas's theory, which roughly correspond to the micro- and macro-level distortions I identified above as generated by the dialectic of cultural rationalization. Here, we will see that these distortions give rise within Habermas's theory to an objectivating attitude to self, and an objectivating attitude to society.

Objectivation within Communicative Reason

In his discussion of Lukács in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Habermas describes the

³¹This is the point of Adorno's discussion of the 'addendum' in *Negative Dialectics*. Adorno's intention is to demonstrate that any reduction of the impulse to the 'extra-mental', and hence to the non-rational, renders moral reason blind as well as empty. See *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 226ff; pp. 226ff.

objectivating attitude that emerges when social relations undergo a process of reification,

As acting subjects switch to exchange-value orientations, their lifeworld shrinks to the format of the objective world; they assume toward themselves and others the objectivating attitude of success-oriented action and thereby make themselves into objects to be “handled” by other actors. . . . [Lukács] conceives of the reification of lifeworld contexts, which sets in when workers coordinate their interactions by way of the de-linguistified medium of exchange value rather than through norms and values, as the other side of a rationalization of their action orientations.³²

Habermas argues that the transition to the paradigm of communicative reason allows for a critical stance toward the distortions of the objectivating attitude. The possibility of such a stance was excluded for ‘subjective’ reason, since it represented reason wholly in terms of the objectivating attitude, in theoretical terms as the representation of objects and in practical terms as the control of objects.³³ The analyses above of the consequences of the radical bisections fundamental to communicative reason should at least give us cause to doubt whether the problems of subjective reason can be successfully addressed in these terms. Habermas’s strong separation of justification and motivation risks reintroducing an objectivating stance in the relation between the autonomous self and the affective, embodied self, with the latter appearing from the perspective of the former as a means for the execution of moral imperatives. Because procedures of justification are not logically tied to affective attunement, which discloses the

³²*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 359.

³³*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 387.

experiential content of moral phenomena, the impulse which motivates can only appear from the perspective of communicative reason as the pre-rational addendum tacked on externally to it - the mechanical prod which transforms decision into act. What is significant to note, is the consequence that this has on the relation of the affective-experiencing self to the autonomous-reasoning self. Now, the embodied self, the self as *sinnlich*, is disclosed as an *object*, which is to be brought to conformity with communicative autonomy by technocratic means.³⁴

I want to argue that what is effected here by communicative reason is a form of the decontextualization of value, in which the moment of affective attunement, which ties validity to empirical content, is cut away from the sense of norms. Once normative worth is defined in purely procedural terms, norms begin to operate as content-indifferent, reified items, and the *moral significance* of the empirical content disclosed by affective attunement is effectively bracketed. Adorno's term for the empirical content that gets bracketed in this way is 'suffering physical' (*Leid physisch*) (ND 202-4; 202-4). Adorno's argument here can be read as the claim that this empirical content is ineliminable from the *meaning* of moral terms. The disclosure of the moral domain within experience, as 'suffering physical', is a *forming* moment within normative validity. This ought not to be understood as the claim that the logic of justification is reducible to an expression of what is already disclosed in moral experience. It is not a claim concerning rival versions of justification, *but a claim about how discursive justification has to operate if it is not to bracket or 'neutralize' the moral nature of the experiential content disclosed by affective attunement.* Adorno's argument concerning the moral import of 'suffering

³⁴See Gerd Kimmerle, 'Vom kategorischen Imperativ des gebrochenen Begehrens', in *Vorschrift and Autonomie*, G. Gamm and G. Kimmerle (eds.) (Tübingen: Ed. Diskord, 1989), p. 110.

physical' is intended to work against the rigidification of linguistic meaning, in which this becomes de-sensitized to the 'rational pull' of moral experience. It is this bracketing or neutralizing of the normative import of what is affectively disclosed, I want to suggest, which is revealed in Habermas's work in the reading of the impulse as a morally indifferent means for the execution of normative rules. The consequence of this is that an objectivating stance is reintroduced in the relation between the autonomous and the sensuous self.

We can see exactly the same problem emerging at the macro-level of social institutions. The position of the impulse, as that which is bracketed or neutralized as morally insignificant, is here taken by the concept of socialization. What Habermas achieves by means of this concept is a sociological translation of the Kantian reading of moral action as embodying a coercive relation between moral reason and sensuousness.³⁵ This is clearly expressed in the following passage,

[U]nless discourse ethics is undergirded by the thrust of motives and by socially accepted institutions, the moral insights it offers remain ineffective in practice. Insights, Hegel rightly demands, should be transformable into the concrete duties of everyday life. This much is true: any universalistic morality is dependent upon a form of life that *meets it halfway*. There has to be a modicum of congruence between morality and the practices of socialization and education. The latter must promote the requisite internalization of superego controls and the abstractness of ego identities. In addition, there must be a modicum of fit

³⁵The influence of Parson's account of the internalization of norms in the personality structure of individuals is crucial here. See *The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 208.

between morality and socio-political institutions.³⁶

Significantly, Habermas intends these remarks to be read as a concession to Hegel's critique of the *Entweltlichung* (de-worlding) of norms occurring through the operation of a purely procedural concept of normative validity. Hegel, however, is not merely a sociologically enlightened version of Kant, and so it is unsurprising that this theoretical move simply intensifies the problems that Hegel saw as caused by the relation of law-testing reason to ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*). For in these remarks, Habermas reverts to a positivist-sociological conception of social practice, in which the practices and activities which form and shape substantive ethical identities are conceived as functional complements to an idealized realm of normative validity, thus devoid of moral worth in themselves.³⁷ From the standpoint of normative validity, the substance of ethical life *can* only appear as emptied of moral value, in the form of conditions for the execution of moral imperatives. Here, again, Habermas's critical theory comes dangerously closely to assimilating that same technocratic ethos so characteristic of his functionalist opponents. This impression is only intensified by passages like the following, where Habermas speaks of the internalization of social controls and the work of meaning disclosure as functional equivalents,

A good will is awakened and fostered not through argumentation but through socialization into a form of life that complements the moral principle. A

³⁶'Morality and Ethical Life', in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, pp. 207-8.

³⁷In *Faktizität und Geltung*, it is the law as action system which comes to take on the role of functionalist complement *par excellence* (*Faktizität und Geltung*, pp. 144ff.). The legal system is said to compensate for the weakness of *entgegenkommende Sozialisationsprozesse* (p. 146).

*comparable effect may also be produced by the world-disclosing power of prophetic speech and in general by those forms of innovative discourse that initiate better forms of life and more reflective ways of life - and also the kind of eloquent critique that enables us to discern these indirectly in works of literature and art.*³⁸

From the Hegelian perspective, it is the move to a purely procedural determination of normative validity itself which *makes* the internalization of behavioural controls and attachment to moral meaning appear as exchangeable equivalents. Once norms become procedural, all that is encompassed by the concrete identity of persons becomes heteronomous from a moral point of view. It is when the moral becomes detached from ethical identity that the latter comes to be framed as an exchangeable means to the execution of moral imperatives.

The effect of Habermas's reintroduction of an objectivating attitude at the level of social institutions is a pervasive instrumentalizing of the social bond.³⁹ One point where we are able to pick up this instrumentalization is in Habermas's exploitation of the subtle ambiguity in his depiction of ethical identity and ethical discourse.⁴⁰ Habermas has consistently maintained that the distinction between ethical discourse and moral discourse lies in the contrast between a discovery of what is 'good for me/us' and of what is 'good for all'.⁴¹ To speak of what is 'good for me/us' can, on the one hand, be understood as the articulation of an egocentric perspective.

³⁸'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 79 (my italics).

³⁹Jay Bernstein has argued this point in his *Recovering Ethical Life*, chapter 4.

⁴⁰My argument draws on Hans Joas's critique, in his *Die Entstehung der Werte* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), pp. 286ff.

⁴¹For a recent formulation, see *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, p. 321.

That is to say, my/our interest or well-being is the standard by which the goodness of something is being judged. On the other hand, what is good 'for me/us' can imply my/our belief in the independent value of something, which *for that reason* demands our attention. 'Good for me' in this sense implies the *claim on the self* which originates from an experience of ethical value. In this case, I/we am/are no longer the standard used in the judgement, but simply the agent(s) that does the judging. By drawing on the first sense, Habermas conflates the distinction between the moral and the ethical with the distinction between the universalistic and the particular; the impartial and the egocentric. It is only by means of this slippage, whereby the second sense of 'good for me/us' is eclipsed by the first, that Habermas is able to deny outright the possibility of a universal moral content attaching to ethical ideals, and thus is able to portray them as constitutively incapable of regulating relations among 'strangers' as opposed to those who share an ethical perspective.⁴² This is clearly a gross distortion, since a model of impartial and just dealings with strangers, as opposed to those belonging to the 'us', is often to be found *within* ethical ideals themselves.⁴³ A more immediately troubling effect of this reading, however, is that it supports and provides momentum for a Hobbesian representation of the social bond by rooting self-interest deep in ethical-social identity.⁴⁴ Habermas's representation of moral discourse can then only appear as a last ditch effort to arrest this destructive dialectic short of the Leviathan. The problem, however, as Hegel well knew, is that once the moral has been shorn of its ethical

⁴²*Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, p. 315.

⁴³Consider, for example, ethically rooted principles such as the Christian notion of charity, or the idea of Tzedakah in Judaism, both of which might be seen as embodying an ideal of moral relations with strangers.

⁴⁴See Jay Bernstein, *Recovering Ethical Life*, chapter 4.

substance, there is nothing left for the notion of 'good for all' to latch onto beyond the instrumental interest in cooperation of hyper-individualized selves.

The price Habermas pays for his reading of the critical standpoint as an idealized autonomy that brackets the substance of ethical identity as heteronomous, is a formalized and eviscerated representation of transcendence. *Habermas effectively divests transcendence entirely of an experiential ground in the social world.* The cognitive insight into the forms of injustice pervading the social world supposedly made accessible in moral discourse is too weak to give rise to a form of critical-negative experience. Clearly, it is the notion of moral autonomy which takes up the burden of explicating and justifying the idea of the critical self-reflection of a form of life in Habermas's recent work. Yet because critical self-reflection is entirely deracinated from anything which might fall under the notion of collective self-realization, there is little left for this notion of autonomy to represent, other than a temporary confluence of conflicting interests. It is this tension between a critical intent and the ineluctable consequences of a formal and procedural notion of autonomy, that Seyla Benhabib conveyed in terms of the conflict between a legal-juridical representation of public life and a democratic-participatory ethos in Habermas's work.⁴⁵ Whereas the legal-juridical notion represents little more than a procedure for compromise formation, the democratic-participatory view would subvert the distinction between the moral and the ethical, since it would require that agents' interpretations of their interests, and hence their ethical identities, themselves become open to criticism from the perspective of moral discourse.⁴⁶ On this reading, the concept of a generalizable interest is held

⁴⁵*Critique, Norm and Utopia*, p. 310.

⁴⁶The latter, democratic-participatory reading appears, in fact, as the sole plausible one, when we consider that how we understand and interpret moral principles is determined

to require the *critical* appropriation of the interests fundamental to ethical identities, which are held to be of universal worth. The critical standpoint can be represented, on this view, as a *moral-transformative process*, in which the discovery of the partiality and ideological biases of interests and the ethical identities underlying them becomes part of the essential work of moral autonomy.⁴⁷ But the a priori severance of the moral and the ethical - as the impartial versus the egocentric - prevents the critical standpoint from getting a critical-transfigurative purchase at the level of everyday interests and understandings. The moral can only function as an external limit on ethical self-understandings, it cannot internally transform them. Because Habermas deracinates autonomy, he is forced to assume the objectivating stance of a positivist sociology to processes of ethical identity formation and transformation, by falling back on the idea of socialization.

Illocutionary Force and Affective Disclosure

I argued that the infiltration of purposive-rational logic into communicative reason takes place as a decontextualization of value, a process through which the rational structure of validation and justification becomes logically separable from experiential meaning. The effect of this at

by deeply held cultural and ethical values. Hence to prevent the critical appraisal of ethical and cultural interests and values at the level of moral justification only shifts the level of disagreement to interpretations of how norms are to be applied. Habermas's attempt to close this gap with a theory of discourses of application aiming at matching up norms and concrete features of the case is wholly inadequate for dealing with this problem. On this issue in Habermas's work, see Georgia Warnke, 'Communicative Rationality and Cultural Values', in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 129ff.

⁴⁷See *Critique, Norm and Utopia*, pp. 312-13.

the micro-level, I argued, is that language loses its affective attunement, and thereby becomes incapable of disclosing the transcendent normative claims within language in the form of a critical-negative experience of the social order. The loss of affective attunement can be located in the peculiarly circumscribed nature, within Habermas's theory, of the binding force embodied in language - what Habermas, drawing on Austin's speech-act theory, calls its illocutionary dimension. Habermas's reading of illocutionary force, I will argue, builds into communicative reason precisely that neutralization of critical-negative experience which derives from the process of linguistic reification. I will draw upon Dewey's account of language in order to show that Habermas's account represents a distortion of the possibilities of normative transcendence attaching to language.

Habermas employs the idea of illocutionary acts in the first 'Intermediate Reflection' of *The Theory of Communicative Action*, in order to explain what it means to use language with a communicative intent. The idea of an illocutionary force attaching to speech-acts explicates how the notion of linguistic understanding can function as a form of action coordination. With the acceptance of the offer contained within the speech-act, speaker and hearer enter an interpersonal relation that is effective for action coordination. The acceptance of the offer can be said to be rationally motivated, Habermas argues, because of the speaker's assumption of the warranty (*Gewähr*) to provide convincing reasons in support of the validity claim raised in the speech-act. Where the illocutionary component of language embodies a validity claim, 'the place of the empirically motivating force of sanctions (contingently linked with speech-acts) is taken by the rationally motivating force of accepting a speaker's guarantee for securing claims to

validity'.⁴⁸ The first, most pressing question which arises here is why, for Habermas, it is taken as self-evident that the contribution of human communication to social integration is specifiable exclusively in terms of its role in action *coordination*. Is it immediately obvious that communication *can* be defined in exclusively *functional* terms, as a component of action coordination? Or could its action-coordinating function be more properly perceived as a derivative aspect of its capacity to disclose a concrete form of shared intersubjectivity?⁴⁹ That is to say, is the action-coordinating role of communication parasitic upon its (non-functional) capacity to disclose a common experience and shared meaning?⁵⁰

Before tackling these questions, I want to argue that they have become doubly acute in Habermas's post-*Theory of Communicative Action* work, because of a growing pessimism on Habermas's part concerning the weight of the binding/bonding that is being expressed through the 'illocutionary force' of language. The quote above, in which Habermas asserts that the rational force accompanying a validity claim *takes the place* of the coercive force of sanctions, suggests that linguistically mediated interaction is able to bear the full weight of the binding-bonding expressed by the Durkheimian notion of the sacred. The suggestion is rendered explicit in the following passage,

From a genetic standpoint, the performative attitude can be understood, perhaps, as the result of a secularization and generalization of that emotionally ambivalent attitude towards sacred objects that originally secured the recognition of moral

⁴⁸*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 1, p. 302.

⁴⁹Hans Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, p. 184. I return to Joas's account below.

⁵⁰I argued for this point in my critique of the validity-meaning distinction above.

authority. This transformation becomes necessary to the degree that the illocutionary components of speech-acts are released from their symbiotic entanglement with archaic institutions and differentiated so that assertoric and expressive sentences are also endowed with illocutionary forces, and in this way modalized and incorporated in communicative actions.⁵¹

Here, Habermas interprets the linguistification of the sacred in such a way that the illocutionary force embodied in communicative acts takes up the simultaneous love and fear; rapture and terror that Durkheim has ascribed to relations with the sacred. Habermas appears confident at this point that a rationalized form of social integration *can* retain the unity of rational binding force and affective bonding embedded in the demands of the sacred. It follows that, on this reading, the linguistification of the sacred is seen to imply a recognition of the *quasi-sacral power of human communication*, expressible in terms of its ability to secure a form of affective dependence among partners to interaction. Illocutionary force would then not merely embody a claim to rational validation, something an interaction partner could not *rationally refuse*, it would at the same time express the shared intersubjectivity binding interaction partners to one another in a common life, and thus would constitute an affective disclosure of moral transcendence. As a linguistified form of the sacred, the affective bonding within the illocutionary force of human communication would *not* be merely a form of sanction, but a disclosure of the moral domain itself, *as the affective expression of what it is that we find rationally compelling*. Now if Habermas had pursued and developed this idea, he would have

⁵¹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 75-6. Also, p. 77: 'The aura of rapture and terror that emanates from the sacred, the *spellbinding (bannende)* power of the holy, is sublimated into the *binding/bonding (bindende)* force of criticizable validity claims'.

realized that the action-coordinating function of communication could not be seen as self-sufficient, but would have to be seen as a derivative feature of the power of communication to disclose the dependencies of a common life. But it is, instead, the disappearance of this confidence that the illocutionary force embodied in communicative acts can replace the binding/bonding force of the sacred, that has become one of the most conspicuous transformations in Habermas's more recent works. It is the bisection of affective disclosure and rational force that we find expressed in the central diremptions of Habermas's account of moral-practical reason. With the progressive deepening of those diremptions throughout his recent works, Habermas has definitively closed off the possibility of grounding the functional role of communication in its ability to disclose the dependencies of a shared life and shared experience. The key term which expresses this waning confidence in Habermas's recent works is the reference to the 'weak power' of rational motivation.⁵² In stating that the motivating power of communicative reason is 'weak', Habermas is asserting that the binding power of communication is reducible to its functional role in action coordination.⁵³

I want now to argue that the illocutionary dimension of communication cannot, in fact, be separated from its affective bonding force in the way that Habermas intends, and hence that the conception of discourse as a formal procedure of argumentation is a distorted, foreshortened way of representing the nature and type of the shared intersubjectivity made possible by human

⁵²*Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, p. 51; *Faktizität und Geltung*, p. 19; 'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 33.

⁵³It was to law, as action system, that Habermas eventually turned to secure support for the 'weak power' of communication. The affective bonding expressing the dependence of self on other was now to be supplanted by external force: the coercive power of legal institutions. This is most clearly expressed in *Die Einbeziehung des Anderen*, p. 51 (fn. 50).

communication. Hans Joas has argued that an alternative account of communication, which maintains the possibilities of affective bonding and the disclosure of experiential meaning, is to be found in the work of John Dewey.⁵⁴ Dewey does not, like Habermas, approach communication from the point of view of its functional role in securing action coordination. Rather, Dewey is interested in the capacity of human communication to generate a form of 'shared experience', which explodes the self's egocentric standpoint, and brings about an affective bond to the interaction partner through the experience of the value of conversation itself. The capacity of communication to produce an affective binding of the self to a larger collectivity and to transcendent ideals, together with its intrinsically non-functional character, is drawn out fully in this passage,

Communication is . . . an immediate enhancement of life, enjoyed for its own sake. The dance is accompanied by song and becomes the drama; scenes of danger and victory are most fully savoured when they are told. Greeting becomes a ceremonial with its prescribed rites. Language is always a form of action and in its instrumental use is always a means of concerted action for an end, while at the same time it finds in itself all the goods of its possible consequences. For there is no mode of action as fulfilling and as rewarding as is concerted consensus of action. It brings with it the sense of sharing and merging in a whole.⁵⁵

Dewey, argues Joas, seeks to make the transition from the interpersonal relation to the value of

⁵⁴Hans Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, pp. 162ff.

⁵⁵John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (La Salle and Chicago: Open Court, 1925), p. 152.

community and democracy not, as in Habermas, by means of the justification of democratic principles in an idealized discourse, but rather by means of the emergence of a bond to the value of the praxis of communicating, which is rooted in the *experience* of communication itself.⁵⁶ It could also be said, in fact, that Dewey rewrites the Durkheimian notion of collective experience, in terms of the shared intersubjectivity and the possibilities of self-transcendence made possible by communication. Dewey achieves this reformulation by building on the account of the de-centring of self, implicit in Mead's theory of communication. Dewey expresses the intersubjectivity of communicative interaction in terms of the distinction between an 'ego-centric' and a 'participative' standpoint.⁵⁷ However, Dewey wants to uncover a further significant dimension of human communication, beyond the role of shared symbols in regulating forms of human interaction. This further dimension is the transfigurative power of shared experience, in which the self binds itself to a value beyond the self. Thus, for Dewey, the praxis of communicating itself takes on a quasi-sacral form,

Letters, poetry, song, the drama, fiction, history, biography, engaging in rites and ceremonies hallowed by time and rich with the sense of the countless multitudes that share in them, are also modes of discourse that, detached from immediate instrumental consequences of assistance and cooperative action, are ends for most persons. In them discourse is both instrumental and final. No person remains unchanged and has the same future efficiencies, who shares in situations

⁵⁶Hans Joas, *Die Entstehung der Werte*, p. 187.

⁵⁷*Experience and Nature*, p. 147.

made possible by communication.⁵⁸

The finality of communication, for Dewey, resides in its character as a 'sharing', whereby 'meanings are enhanced, deepened and solidified in the sense of communion'. Through participation in the praxis of communication, Dewey argues, 'man is lifted from his immediate isolation and shares in a communion of meanings'.⁵⁹

In the bond to the other, and the bond to the collective created in the praxis of communication, Dewey finds a secular equivalent for the role that Durkheim ascribed to religion.⁶⁰ The Deweyan account, therefore, would represent a genuine 'linguistification' of the sacred. Genuine because within it, the rational binding force of democratic ideals and the bonding of the self to the common life, thus the conjoining of logical force and affective dependence, would be preserved. This reading would not have been available to Habermas, because Habermas limits communication to the role of a mechanism for the coordination of teleological, or 'goal-directed' plans. By giving overriding prominence to this aspect, Habermas

⁵⁸John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, p. 168.

⁵⁹*Experience and Nature*, p. 169. Compare this with Durkheim's account of the transfigurative power of public speaking: '[the language of a man speaking to a crowd] becomes high-flown in a way that would be ridiculous in ordinary circumstances; his gestures take on an overbearing quality; his very thought becomes impatient of limits and slips easily into any kind of extreme. This is because he feels filled to overflowing, as though with a phenomenal oversupply of forces that spill over and tend to spread around him. Sometimes he even feels possessed of a moral force greater than he, of which he is only the interpreter', *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 212.

⁶⁰Dewey's search for a secular reformulation of the sacred also emerges as a strong theme in his *A Common Faith* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1934). Here Dewey detaches the idea of religious experience from its typical referent, and interprets it as the experience of the binding force of ideal ends which unify the self and project possibilities for transformative practice. Dewey understands this secularized form of religious experience as incorporating the simultaneous binding/bonding of the sacred - in the form of the claim of ideal values and the moment of self-transcendence.

in effect reduces communication to a means of stabilizing conflict. Already implied in speaking of communication in the context of action 'coordination', or social 'cooperation', is that the linguistically mediated bond to the other cannot effect a form of self-transcendence, in the Deweyan sense. The communicative encounter with the interaction partner, and hence illocutionary force, is arbitrarily robbed of one of its senses, expressible in terms of the transfigurative power of shared experience. The notion of illocutionary force now gets reduced to the purely logical criterion of universalizability, as a means of negotiating the clash of conflicting private interests.⁶¹

The result of Habermas's eviscerated representation of illocutionary force, is that the transcendent validity claims embodied in language are no longer capable of generating a negative experience of the social world. This is centrally because Habermas's reduction of validity to a purely logical bond arbitrarily weakens the normative pull of language, rendering it incapable of affecting that experience of self-distanciation, which Dewey had seen in its capacity to induce forms of 'shared experience'. The shared experience that Dewey finds in communication, Hans Joas argues, represents an 'breaking apart of the centeredness of self'.⁶² Communication is here seen as generating a distanciation of the self from the everyday world, which is the precondition of the possibility of critical-negative experience. The central question, therefore, must be whether, in accepting the 'weak power' of motivation as the sole possibility of moral-cognitive transcendence, Habermas is giving expression to the essential structure of

⁶¹Here it becomes apparent that the Deweyan account of communication represents a concretizing of what Seyla Benhabib calls the participatory-democratic reading of discourse ethics. Habermas's constricted, legal-juridical reading of discourse ethics derives in large part from the elimination of a transfigurative moment from communicative interaction.

⁶²*Die Entstehung der Werte*, p. 184.

moral-practical reason, or, on the other hand, whether the diremption of the logical and affective dimensions of moral-practical reason represents rather its pathological disfigurement. From the latter perspective, the incapacity of the normative transcendence embodied in language to affect a negative experience of the social world must be traced to a process of linguistic reification, in which the normative force of language is systematically de-sensitized to forms of the disclosure of moral meaning within social experience.

The Diremptions of Moral-Practical Reason: An Adornian Critique

We can find in Adorno's notion of dialectical critique a way of resisting the separation of affective attunement and rational validity within language at the micro-level. Adorno achieves this by making rational insight operate through a saturation with the experience of objects. In this way, rational judgement is rendered dependent, as far as possible, upon the concrete experiential content of what is being judged. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno expounds this idea as the entwinement of 'argument' and 'thesis',

To think dialectically means . . . that the argument should acquire the solidity of the thesis, and the thesis should acquire the fullness of its justification within itself. All bridging concepts, all connections and supplementary logical operations which are not in the subject matter (*Sache*) itself, all secondary conclusions, and those which are not saturated with the experience of the object, must fall away (MM § 44).

Adorno traces this idea to the Hegelian thesis that mediation is integral to the being of objects themselves, and not something first imposed by the connective operations of thought processes.

Hence thought, for Hegel, is obliged to follow the immanent mediations of things rather than drawing connective determinations from logical structures external to the object. In Adorno's work, this Hegelian idea is employed as a form of resistance to the bracketing of empirical meaningfulness at work in the process of linguistic reification. A motif which pervades Adorno's work and structures his writing, is the sustained attempt to enable the validity claims within language to work as the *self*-articulation of fragmented and disfigured experience. This emerged in Adorno's usage of Hegel's theory of the judgement. The context-transcending normative claim is revealed as coextensive with the immanent inadequacy of the aspect of social experience that is being judged. The experience which is being judged by rational criteria, in effect, judges itself, since the negativity of an experiential content is disclosed through the articulation of its immanent mediations,

Cognition is only capable of being extended where it remains with the individual (*Einzelne*) in such a way that through this persistence its isolatedness collapses.

That, of course, presupposes a relation to the universal, but not that of subsumption, rather almost the opposite. Dialectical mediation is not the recourse to what is more abstract, but rather the process of the dissolution of the concrete within itself (MM § 46).

Adorno's dialectical critique harbours an ideal of transcendence as self-decentring, which is similar to that which we saw in Dewey's theory of communication. For Adorno however, the moment of self-transcendence works through the self-articulation of disfigured experience in dialectical critique. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno refers to this moment as the 'qualitative leap' (*qualitativer Sprung*) (ND182; 183). It is the moment within dialectic that 'explodes' dialectic

itself, insofar as dialectic is tied to the immanent context of experience.⁶³ A similar intention is expressed in Adorno's reflections on *das Schwindelerregende* (literally, 'that which excites dizziness', the 'vertiginous'). This term conveys the experience of alienation from current, disfigured forms of social experience which is generated by dialectical critique. The transcendence within dialectic is a form of self-distanciation, made possible by an achieved rupture with the everyday that allows it to be experienced as alien. A cognition which 'throws itself' to the objects, Adorno asserts, generates the 'shock of the open', which necessarily appears as negative to the classifying urge of *gesunde Menschenverstand* (healthy human understanding) (ND 32-3; 43). In *Prisms*, Adorno describes the de-centring generated by dialectic as an 'explosion' that 'rips apart' the objective system and subjective experience, in order to light up momentarily, as if from outside, the disfigured social world that is formed by the false unity of subject and object (P 87-8). The de-centring of self in dialectic is intelligible, on the one hand, as the rational insight into the failure of current experience to meet its own claims to validity. But, on the other hand, this insight does not derive from a procedural testing. It emerges, rather, through the concrete articulation of disfigured forms of experience, thus producing a form of self-transcendence which is simultaneously rationally binding and disclosive of experiential meaning.

I argued above that an Adornian critical theory could not accept communicative reason as a solution to the distortions generated by the objectivating attitude integral to subjective reason, because the constitutive diremptions of communicative reason (knowledge-validity-

⁶³*Philosophische Terminologie* II, p. 284. This is what Adorno has in mind with the idea of the 'self-reflection of dialectic' (ND 405-8; 397-400). In its self-reflection, dialectic applies the principle of dialectical mediation to itself, and hence appears to itself as 'transition into an other' (*Übergehen in einem Anderen*).

justification vs. convention-meaning-motivation) reinforce and intensify a destructive dialectic of cultural rationalization that operates, according to the process of abstraction constitutive of exchange logic, as a generalized decontextualization of value. Habermas's efforts to pull free of subjective reason, I argued, only intensifies the objectivating attitude in relation to self and society. Habermas's misreading of Adorno, furthermore, causes him to miss both the depth of Adorno's insight into these problems, and the nature of Adorno's critique of the dialectic of cultural rationalization inaugurated by subjective reason. Adorno's strategy is to undermine subjective reason from within. This is achieved through a series of arguments which deflate the seemingly compelling logical force of the process of abstraction that leads to the decontextualization of value. With regard to the distortions of moral-practical reason, Adorno attempts to resist the bracketing of the moral content of experience, occurring through the tendency of the procedural logic of validity/justification to become indifferent to experiential content, and its claims to moral attention.

The first place I want to pick up this strategy is in Adorno's essay on the *Positivismusstreit*, in the context of a discussion of Weber's notion of *Wertfreiheit*, where Adorno makes a claim about the essential social-historical index of normative questions. In this case, Adorno is attempting to undermine the diremption of procedural universalizability from the claims to moral attention of concrete social-historical situations. 'Normative problems', Adorno argues, 'emerge out of historical constellations, which at the same time from out of themselves, demand their transformation mutely (*stumm*), "objectively". . . . Values, upon which that demand emerging from the situation is projected, are the thin dregs of that demand, which

largely falsify it'.⁶⁴ The argument here points to an internal relation between moral insight and the social-historical inscription of norms, the latter moment standing for their appearance within social experience as a practical demand for transformation. This is expressed in the assertion that 'the moment of value . . . lives in the practical summons (*Aufforderung*), which is to be read out of the situation'.⁶⁵ The relation between moral insight and social-historical inscription is therefore to be understood as an internal dialectic, in which moral insight is always inseparable from the binding force *within* experience, of a practical demand (*Verlangen*) for the transformation of repressive social conditions. In this case, a resistance to the decontextualization of moral validity is effected by reading moral norms as a projection from the negativity of experience. By asserting the integral function of social-historical inscription, Adorno is able to theorize moral validity as a conjunction of the binding force of rational conviction, and the experience of an immanent ('ethical') self-transcendence expressed in the practical demand for transformation. This thesis can be read as a 'disenchantment' of the procedural logic of moral-practical reason. By resisting the diremption of that logic from social-historical inscription, Adorno is seeking to preclude the bracketing or suspension of the moral content of experience through the becoming-self-subsistent of procedural validity. The intention is to reinscribe experiential content as a *forming* moment within moral-practical reason.

One of the most persistently recurring arguments in Adorno's attempted 'reversal' (*Umwendung*) of the subjective reduction that triggers the dialectic of cultural rationalization, consists in an attempt to show, from *within* the sphere of the (reified) concept,

⁶⁴'Der "Positivismusstreit" in der deutschen Soziologie', *Soziologische Schriften* I, p. 347.

⁶⁵'Der "Positivismusstreit" in der deutschen Soziologie', pp. 347-8.

that the *affective component* of norms, and rational validation are not logically separable. This takes us back to the critique of Habermas's diremption of illocutionary force into the independent moments of logical acceptability and (non-rational) empirical coercion. Adorno formulates this critique in terms of the indissoluble entwinement of the somatic and the cognitive, which rehabilitates, in both cognitive-theoretic and moral-philosophical terms, the moral content of sensuous-bodily experience.⁶⁶ As such, of course, it is also an essential aspect of the 'disenchantment' strategy of *Negative Dialectics*, which opposes the operation of concepts as subsumptive-classificatory, content-indifferent forms. For Adorno, as we saw, concepts necessarily harbour an experiential-expressive moment on account of the immanence of the nonconceptual, as a forming moment within them. The moral-philosophical import of this thesis is revealed in Adorno's suggestion that philosophy is definable as the attempt to 'translate/transpose (*übersetzen*) pain (*Schmerz*) into the medium of the concept' (Ph.T I, 83). Were this to be achieved, the illocutionary force expressed in logical validity would be co-extensive with the affective disclosure of the moral content of experience. In Adorno's work, it is his theory of the 'impulse' that functions as a critique of the suspension of the normative force attaching to the affective component of norms.⁶⁷ Assertions such as 'There should be no

⁶⁶Ulrich Kohlmann, *Dialektik der Moral*, p. 162. The cognitive-theoretic argument can be found in the section 'Transition (*Übergang*) to Materialism' (ND 192-4; 193-4), where Adorno argues that the relation of the 'somatic moment' to cognition cannot be reduced to that of the subsumption of content under conceptual form.

⁶⁷Recent scholarship has focussed on the significant point that Adorno's theory of the impulse undermines the absolute separation of rational reflection and aesthetic experience. Central here is the work of Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Ethik nach Auschwitz* (Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1993), pp. 198-209; Claudia Rademacher, 'Schön und Gut!', in G. Schweppenhäuser and M. Wischke (eds.), *Impuls und Negativität* (Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1995); see also Martin Seel, 'zur ästhetischen Praxis der Kunst', *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 41 (1993) 31-43.

torture', Adorno argues, harbour an experiential component that is integral to the question of the validity of the norm expressed in the assertion,

The lines [there should be no torture; there should be no concentration camps] are true as an impulse, when it is reported that somewhere torture has taken place. They must not be rationalized; as an abstract principle, they would fall straight away into the bad infinity of their deduction and validity. . . . The impulse, the naked physical fear and the feeling of solidarity with what Brecht called "tormentable bodies" (*quälbare Körper*), which is immanent in the moral attitude, would be denied through the striving of ruthless rationalization; the most urgent (*Das Dringlichste*) would again become contemplative, mocking its own urgency (*Dringlichkeit*) (ND 285-6; 281).

The reference to the bracketing of the moral force of *das Dringlichste*, suggests that the theory of the impulse is a part of the critique of the phenomenon of neutralization. What gets neutralized is the normative import of affective attunement, resulting in the diremption of normative validity from how an item or event is experienced as morally meaningful by the subject. Here, we can trace the decontextualization of value in terms of Kant's distinction between determinate and reflective judgement. What happens when the normative import of affective attunement is bracketed, is that the entwinement of determinate and reflective judgement in moral cognition is broken: the criteria by which an item is normatively judged (subsumptive rules) become severed from the way that item is constituted as experientially meaningful ('solidarity with tormentable bodies'), with the result that the affective component is eliminated from the illocutionary force of the norm. The framing of the motivation problem as a problem of empirical coercion emerges as a consequence of the elimination of the affective

component from normative force, as it is sensuous-bodily experience itself that is the 'unrest' that 'makes cognition move' (ND 203; 203). Once it is neutralized through the formal-procedural delimitation of normative force, that experience can be morally relevant only from a purposive-rational perspective - as the motor response activated by appropriate socialization.

Arne Vetlesen has produced a critique of Habermas's discourse ethics which addresses many of the issues that are at stake in Adorno's attempted rehabilitation of the normative import of the impulse.⁶⁸ Vetlesen's critique of the formal-procedural determination of moral validity is based on the thesis that moral insight encompasses emotionally laden perception. Vetlesen defends this thesis in terms of the Kantian claim that emotional engagement *constitutes* the domain of that which commands moral attention.⁶⁹ Without the perceptual disclosure of moral phenomena afforded by emotional engagement, he argues, it is impossible to determine a particular situation as morally relevant. The emotions, or empathy, thus determine how an item is experienced as morally meaningful by the subject. Vetlesen draws on this idea to criticize Habermas's account of the purely 'cognitive' nature of moral judgement (that is to say, the possibility of determining moral validity in exclusively procedural terms). Vetlesen argues that emotion, through the affective-expressive work of disclosure of the faculty of empathy, is a

⁶⁸Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Perception, Empathy, and Judgement: An Inquiry into the Preconditions of Moral Performance* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania University Press, 1994). The critique of Habermas is in chapter 6 of this work.

⁶⁹See *Perception, Empathy and Judgement*, chapter 4. This way of putting it, of course, conflicts with the Adornian strategy, which consists in undermining the distinctions of form-content, and constituting-constituted, which govern the formal-procedural determination of norms. However, the difference does not pose a problem in the present context.

forming moment within the determination of moral validity.⁷⁰ Vetlesen's account, I want to suggest, gives us a further insight into the distorting force of the decontextualization of value, as this applies to moral-practical reason. Here, a process of moral de-sensitization, resulting from a bracketing of emotionally laden perception, appears as a potential consequence of the neutralization of the normative import of affective attunement. It is essential to stress again here, that affective attunement is not being read as an alternative mode of establishing moral validity. The argument is, rather, that discursive justification risks becoming morally indifferent when it brackets, or neutralizes the subjective experience of the morally meaningful.

The third and final argument of Adorno's on which I want to focus, occurs in the final section of *Negative Dialectics*. Once again, Adorno is formulating a critique of the breaking of the entwinement of normative validity and experiential content. In this case, the argument takes the form of an analysis of the 'new categorical imperative' given to humankind by the event bearing the name of Auschwitz.⁷¹ Adorno's intention here is to articulate a form of moral universality that is disclosed through the revealed meaning of a *particular* and *unique* historical event. A universally binding categorical imperative is seen to derive from the experiential content of this event. The imperative commands

that mankind will arrange their thought and action so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, that nothing similar will happen. This imperative is as stubbornly

⁷⁰*Perception, Empathy and Judgement*, p. 216.

⁷¹Gerhard Schweppenhäuser has stressed the centrality of this passage to Adorno's critique of moral theory. See his *Ethik nach Auschwitz*, pp. 185-91; 'kritische Moralphilosophie als negativer Universalismus', in G. Schweppenhäuser (ed.), *Soziologie im Spätkapitalismus: zur Gesellschaftstheorie Theodor W Adornos* (Darmstadt: Wiss. Buchgesellschaft, 1995), pp. 251-2.; 'Über Universalität und Historizität in der Moralphilosophie', *Hegel-Jarhbuch* (1996) 179-184, p. 181.

impenetrable to justification (*widerspenstig gegen seine Begründung*) as once was the givenness of the Kantian imperative. To treat it discursively would be a sin: *within it, the moment of the addendum within the ethical [am Sittlichen] lets itself be felt in bodily form*. In bodily form, because it is the horror-become-practical before the unbearable physical pain, to which the individual is exposed, even as individuality, as a form of mental [*geistig*] reflection, is about to vanished. Only in the unvarnished materialistic motive does morality survive' (ND 365; 358 [my italics]).

What Adorno calls the 'moment of the addendum within the ethical' stands for the experiential content integral to the concept of moral universality. In this 'new categorical imperative', the context-transcending force of moral-practical reason is bound to the revealed meaning of a concrete form of human experience - the event of Auschwitz. The universality of affective attunement announced in the new categorical imperative appears to be akin to the universality possessed by Kantian reflective judgement. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant refers to this universality as founded on a *Gemeinsinn* (common sense).⁷² *Gemeinsinn* refers to a pre-conceptual universality rooted in feeling (*Gefühl*), and founded on a principle which is 'subjective-universal'. For Kant, this is the universality possessed by a judgement of taste. Kant argued, however, that such a judgement could not be a cognitive judgement, since it did not provide any knowledge of objects by means of concepts, but represented simply the relation of the presentation of the object to the subject.⁷³ Adorno had argued against this segregation of the

⁷²I. Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), § 22.

⁷³*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, § 6.

subjective-universal - as a non-discursive, non-logical claim - in *Aesthetic Theory*. This argument is essential for understanding the import of the new categorical imperative. Adorno argued that a cognitive moment was inherent in the judgment of taste itself, in virtue of its nature as a universal claim, and not simply a report of subjective experience. That universality rendered the artwork susceptible to logical judgement (ÄT 148-9). Thus there is a cognitive-rational moment integral to the non-discursive, mimetic structure of the artwork. The mimetic rationality of the artwork opposes the puristic and rationalistic division of concept and intuition stemming from the dichotomizing of rationality and sensuousness (ÄT 151). The new categorical imperative, similarly, embodies a subjective-universal, rooted in affective experience, which harbours a moral-cognitive content. It is this cognitive content that gets neutralized or bracketed when moral-practical reason is given a purely formal-procedural determination. The meaning of moral universality disclosed to affective experience ceases to guide the determination of moral-practical validity. When this transformation has occurred, moral-practical reason does not merely become empty, it also becomes blind in a significant and troubling sense. For with the absolutized diremption of procedural validity from experiential content, the non-discursive, cognitive content disclosed to affective attunement can only appear from the moral point of view in the form of an inert facticity, which awaits the results of a procedural mechanism for the determination of its moral value. Moral-practical reason becomes 'blind', therefore, because the determination of moral validity is *systematically* de-sensitized to the cognitive content revealed to affective attunement. The de-sensitization is systematic, because it is not the appropriateness of particular procedures that is in question. The problem derives from the generalized bracketing, or neutralizing of moral experience that occurs when the experiential content of norms is dirempted from the determination of their validity.

The Experience of the Extraordinary

Habermas reads the central diremptions of which I have been speaking as limitations to be accepted by reason in its post-metaphysical form. I have argued, in contrast, that there is an alternative Adornian account of what is at stake in these transformations, in terms of a dialectic of cultural rationalization driven by the penetration of exchange logic into spheres of cultural meaning. What is announced in the diremptions of moral-practical reason, on the Adornian account, is the neutralization of metaphysical experience, the appearance of moral-practical ideals as a form of transcendence within immanence, which simultaneously bind and bond the self to a project of self-transfiguration. I now want to suggest that, in a number of his recent essays, Habermas come close to recognizing that the limitations of 'post-metaphysical thinking' are its central defect, and hence that the transcendence articulated by moral-practical reason is vacuous without the possibility of the accessibility of transcendence as a form of negative experience. In his essay 'The Limits of Disenchantment', Peter Dews identifies a 'significant tension' emerging in Habermas's recent work.⁷⁴ The tension in question is that between a tendency to exclude processes of meaning disclosure from normative thinking, and a simultaneous appeal to the existential orientation furnished by a sense of contact with *das Außeralltägliche* (the extraordinary), or *das Unbedingte* (the unconditioned). Dews traces this tension to Habermas's essay on Max Horkheimer, where access to *das Unbedingte* is said to be possible 'without recourse to metaphysics', through a philosophical explication of the normative presuppositions of communication. And yet, Habermas stresses, this unconditionality is not to

⁷⁴Peter Dews, 'The Limits of Disenchantment', *New Left Review* 213 (1995) 61-75, pp. 69-70.

be confused with an unconditional meaning that offers consolation'.⁷⁵ Here, a moment of unconditionality, and thus transcendence, is asserted as possible without metaphysics, and apart from the work of meaning disclosure. But Habermas seems keenly aware of how vulnerable and impotent formal-philosophical transcendence becomes as a result of this bisection. He has increasingly hinted at the need for a division of labour between religion and art on the one side, as meaning-disclosive discourses, and philosophy on the other, to compensate for the 'curious dependence of a philosophy that has forfeited its contact with the extraordinary (*das Außeralltägliche*)'. Religion and art are called upon to prevent the possibility that an everyday life rendered profane will become immune to the 'shattering-subversive intrusion of extraordinary events', and are said to be indispensable for 'normalizing contact with the extraordinary'.⁷⁶ But given that the meaning-disclosive work of these discourses is seen as possessing no cognitive value, it is difficult to envisage how they could fulfil the role they are called upon to perform. For the binding-bonding claim on the self of the extraordinary surely implies a recognition of the cognitive merit of the ideal thus disclosed. The renewed focus on *das Außeralltägliche* expresses a profound sensitivity on Habermas's part to the danger posed by a linguistification of the sacred that dirempts meaning-disclosure and the formal transcendence of validity claims - the drying up of the sources of moral meaning that energize democratic ideals and install them as unconditional claims within human experience. This emerges with particular clarity in the following lines, where Habermas warns of the dangers of

⁷⁵'To Seek to Salvage an Unconditional Meaning without God is a Futile Undertaking: Reflections on a Remark of Max Horkheimer's', *Justification and Application*, p. 141, 146. Quoted in Peter Dews, 'The Limits of Disenchantment', pp. 70-1.

⁷⁶Jürgen Habermas, *Nachmetaphysisches Denken* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 60.

a stiffened, demobilized, and routinized political culture,

The inevitable banalization of everyday life in political communication also poses a danger for the semantic potentials on which such communication must draw. A culture without a thorn in its side (*eine Kultur ohne Stachel*) would be absorbed entirely by compensatory functions. . . . Even that moment of unconditionality which is stubbornly expressed by the transcending validity claims of everyday communication is not sufficient. *Another* kind of transcendence is stored in the undefused force [*das Unabgegoltene*] that is disclosed by the critical appropriation of identity-forming religious tradition, and yet *another* in the negativity of modern art. The trivial must be allowed to shatter against the sheerly alien, abyssal, uncanny [*das schlechthin Fremde, Abgründige, Unheimliche*] which resists assimilation to what is already understood, although no privilege can now install itself behind it.⁷⁷

This passage reveals just how weak rational motivation and its formal transcendence have become, in a theory which accepts and intensifies the diremptions of moral-practical reason. Habermas has now thoroughly left behind the belief that a justified consensus could replace the role of the sacred. The formal transcendence of rational consensus is now seen as effectively powerless against the potential banalization of political life, a process which can only be halted by the capacity of quasi-sacral meaning contents to de-centre the self vis à vis everyday experience. It is impossible to miss the pathic ring in this last ditch acknowledgement of the

⁷⁷‘Volkssouveränität als Verfahren’, in *Faktizität und Geltung*, pp. 630-1. Quoted in Peter Dews ‘The Limits of Disenchantment’, p. 72. The phrase *Kultur ohne Stachel* echoes Adorno’s critique of the fascist transformation of culture into ideology: ‘[the fascists] imagined themselves as healers of culture, and removed from it the thorn of critique’ (P 10).

dependencies of communicative reason, as though communicative reason were the dirempting agent in a process of the causality of fate, and now, aware of its own dependence on the other that has been made alien, seeking a reconciliation with injured life. But there is also something slightly disingenuous in this last gasp recognition of dependence, after the dialectic of exclusion has been intensified by the strict privatizing of ethical ideals, the devaluing of social convention before formal-procedural knowledge processes, together with the demotion of the work of meaning-disclosure to a pre-rational status and the instrumentalizing of the affective self. How, one wants to ask, is transcendence within immanence supposed to 'shatter' the weight of the trivial when it is deprived of cognitive force? And when the social and experiential bearers of that transcendence themselves become trivialized - the dull, inert custom; the egocentric existential question; the mechanized response that passes for moral action? The appeal to *das Außeralltägliche* to offset banalization suggests, at the least, that Habermas is now less sanguine concerning the possibility that the release of the potential of communicative rationality can figure as a solution to the problematic that Weber had theorized under the concept of 'disenchantment', encompassing the emasculation of the common life given the loss of the binding power of religious-metaphysical supports. *Das Außeralltägliche* was for Weber, of course, that type of meaning-disclosive transcendence distinctive of charismatic authority. Charismatic authority was theorized by Weber as a transfigurative power carried by innovative individuals. Charismatic authority is said to represent an internal transformation of values, orientations, and beliefs, and thus revolutionizes 'from the inner to the outer' through the attempt to reconstitute the social order on the model of the revolutionary will.⁷⁸ Adorno's theory

⁷⁸Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, pp. 657-8.

of linguistic reification attempts to make the displacement of extraordinary force, and thus the meaning-destructive workings of disenchantment, accessible from a social-critical perspective, by relating certain pathological effects of this process to an objective abstraction embedded in social processes. My arguments against Habermas's diremption of logical validity and empirical force might be seen as an attempt to find within social experience, in secular-democratic form, an alternative to the type of meaning-revelatory transcendent force that Weber finds in the 'extraordinary' quality of charismatic figures. I suggested that Habermas's reading of moral-practical reason systematically blocks this possibility by neutralizing the cognitive force of moral experience. As a result, communicative reason is rendered incapable of generating that type of self-alienation and self-distanciation which could give rise to a form of critical-negative experience. Adorno, I argued, works against the neutralization of moral meaning-disclosure through a strategy of micro-resistance to the tendential decontextualization of moral-practical reason. By this means, Adorno uncovers micro-forms of metaphysical experience, in which the context-transcending force of moral-practical reason is bound to a *self*-transcendence, activated by the de-centring power of moral experience.

My argument in this chapter has sought to provide a critique of the Habermasian diremptions of moral-practical reason, and has traced an alternative perspective critical of the distorting force of the logic of cultural rationalization. We saw this in Dewey's account of the transfigurative power of communicative praxis, which resists the severance of illocutionary force into logical validity and empirical force, and in Adorno's strategy of resistance to the bracketing of empirical meaning and the functionalizing of affective attunement. These arguments point to the need for a substantive transformation of communicative rationality. At this point, the argument links up with the analyses of the previous chapter, and now we can see that this

substantive transformation must be twofold. On the one hand, the formal critique of domination represented by an idealized discursive procedure must be substantivized in the form of a theory which can accommodate the Hegelian insight that domination is socially instituted in the form of asymmetrical relations of recognition. This will lead to an examination of Axel Honneth's critical social theory. On the other hand, the dialectic of cultural rationalization thesis calls for a critical analysis of those processes and institutions which are the 'carriers' of the neutralization of moral meaning at the social level. This latter analysis will form the argument of the final chapter.

Part Three

Reconstructing Critical Theory

The Theory of Recognition

A central deficit in Habermas's work was seen to lie in its failure to develop an adequate account of social struggle. The conflict-riven nature of the social world is effectively excluded from view by Habermas's efforts to delineate a realm of linguistic consensus insulated from the instrumental imperatives of subsystems. Although, as we saw, the possibility of a theory of social struggle was alluded to in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas is unable to develop this account in *The Theory of Communicative Action*, where the social world is instead presented as a 'conflict' between two principles of integration, rooted in subsystems and the lifeworld respectively. Habermas therefore becomes unable to theorize the operation of class- and group-specific interests both within the communicative sphere, as informal mechanisms of exclusion, and within systemically ordered realms, in which dominant interests are disguised as technical imperatives. In his efforts to surmount the one-sided view of the social world represented by Adorno's integration thesis, Habermas abandons altogether the insights of critical theory concerning the mediation of dominant interests and the logic of structures. In the light of these problems the demands incumbent upon a reconstructed critical theory can be clearly discerned. What is required is a theory which is able to locate a normative basis for oppositional praxis within the social world, whilst retaining the insights

into the operation of class- and groups-specific forms of domination found in earlier critical theory. This necessitates that the normative basis of critical theory become accessible as a principle of social struggle, which is brought to bear by subordinated groups in the opposition to dominant social norms.

One influential theory of social struggle in recent years has been drawn from an interpretation of Hegel's Jena 'social theory', and the idea of a *Kampf um Anerkennung* (struggle for recognition) that is articulated therein. Employed as a social theory, Hegel's theory of recognition promises to surmount the problems which were seen to follow both from the excessive formalism of Habermas's account, and from its neglect of the centrality of social conflict within modern societies. In respect of the first point, the theory of recognition makes a claim to be able to *substantivize* the normative potential that Habermas detects within the structures of linguistic understanding, thus allowing for a critical analysis of social institutions as inadequate instantiations of normative principles. As regards the second point, the theory of recognition returns to the Marxian insight that social struggle is the bearer of normative progress within the social order. The 'normative potential' that is the basis of the critique of the present order is brought to bear by social groups who are struggling for the social institutionalization of normatively-laden forms of recognition. At the same time, the theory of recognition preserves the insights contained in Habermas's critique of Adorno's integration thesis, in that it allows for the detection of a *normative structure of socialization*. Individual identity is seen as developing in interaction with social forms and institutions. The latter are theorized as providing the essential basis of self-affirmation, which in turn is essential to the development of autonomy. The structure of the interaction between individuals and institutions is seen as harbouring a normative potential of social recognition that

exceeds its realization in existing social forms, and hence claims to recognition can be critically upheld against prevalent social institutions. Recognition is thus already constitutive of the social order, but is also seen to make possible idealizing normative claims against the present order. The theory of recognition, then, intends to outline an alternative normative basis to social integration which can serve as the social ground of a critical social theory.

The first three sections of this chapter will trace the development of the theory of recognition in the works of Ludwig Siep, Andreas Wildt, and Axel Honneth respectively. I will concentrate on the specific innovations which each theorist contributed to the interpretation of Hegel's 'original idea' of a struggle for recognition, and in the case of Honneth, I will show how this idea can be employed as a critical social theory. The final section of this chapter, however, will return to Hegel's Jena works in order to call into question certain aspects of the interpretation of Hegel that has been developed by the above mentioned thinkers. I will argue that the structure of Hegel's dialectic of crime embodies insights concerning domination that are neglected in these more recent interpretations. This will prepare the ground for a critical encounter with Axel Honneth's critical theory in the following chapter.

Ludwig Siep: Recognition as Unification and 'Release'

In the last twenty years, a reading of Hegel's unpublished manuscripts and lecture notes from his Jena period has developed which focusses on Hegel's use of the concept of recognition, and in particular, on the purposes for which he deploys the idea of a 'struggle' for recognition. Certain features of the struggle for recognition come to light in these works which are less apparent in the

later *Phenomenology of Spirit*, due to the subsumption of the struggle for recognition under Hegel's epistemological concerns in the latter work. This has made possible the theoretical formulation of a Hegelian conception of social struggle far richer than that based exclusively on a reading of the infamous Master/Slave section of the *Phenomenology*, which typically linked the idea of liberation through struggle to the self-transformative power of human labour.¹ In the earlier Jena works, it is the social-theoretic aspects of the concept of recognition that are foregrounded.²

Perhaps the most influential interpretation of Hegel's idea of a struggle for recognition as furnishing the basis for a critical theory of social institutions has been that developed by Ludwig Siep. In a well-known essay, originally published in 1974, Siep began to explore the roots of Hegel's idea of a struggle for recognition in Hobbes' notion of the struggle for self-preservation.³ What

¹Most famously in the hugely influential reading of Alexandre Kojève, in his *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

²Unfortunately, the discovery of a broader 'social theory' in the young Hegel has been accompanied by the development of a simplistic caricature of the 'later' (post 1802/3) Hegel as replacing a social-theoretic model founded on the transformations of elementary forms of intersubjectivity through social action, with one founded on a formative process (*Bildungsprozess*) conceived as the reflective stages of a monologically conceived subject as *Geist*. This reading was originally proposed by Jürgen Habermas in his essay 'Arbeit und Interaktion', in *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), and uncritically taken up by Axel Honneth in his *Struggle for Recognition*, trans. Joel Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995). Critiques of the Habermas/Honneth view can be found in Ludwig Siep, 'Die Bewegung des Anerkennens in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*', in D. Köhler and O. Pöggeler (eds.), *G.W.F. Hegel: Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998); Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 13ff.; see also Michael O' Hardimon's review of Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition*, in *Journal of Philosophy* (1997) 46-54.

³Ludwig Siep, 'Der Kampf um Anerkennung: zu Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit Hobbes in den Jenaer Schriften', *Hegel-Studien* 9 (1974), pp. 155ff. This essay has been published in English as 'The Struggle for Recognition: Hegel's Dispute with Hobbes in the Jena Writings', tr. Charles Dugas, in John O'Neill (ed.), *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1996).

emerges from this is that, by re-interpreting 'honour' (*Ehre*) as recognition, and, secondly, re-conceiving the struggle as a struggle *for* recognition, rather than as the negation of it through the revelation of an absolute *Unsittlichkeit* (an-ethics), Hegel, unlike Hobbes, is able to theorize struggle as part of a process of societal integration, whereby 'natural' freedom is sublated by 'ethical' freedom.⁴ Struggle, for Hegel, is therefore able to play a mediating role between the state of nature and ethical life by means of its 'ethicalizing' (*versittlichende*) function. The struggle for recognition is thus able to reveal the intersubjective structure of individual identity through a transformation of self-understandings. This transformation occurs, Siep argues, through an immanent contradiction arising within the actual process of the struggle for recognition itself. Hegel develops this idea most perspicuously in the Jena system fragment on the philosophy of spirit of 1803/4. The struggle is here theorized as the attempt by two consciousnesses to obtain recognition from the other as a 'singular totality' by excluding the other from (one's own) life and possessions.⁵ Drawing implicitly on the Hobbesian thesis of the necessary escalation of conflict in the state of nature, Hegel argues that each consciousness can only assure itself of the exclusion of the other by driving the conflict to the point of death. It is here that the immanent contradiction within the struggle arises, since the need to secure the death of the other cancels the possibility of recognition which was the goal of the struggle in the first place. What is significant, however, is the way that Hegel emphasises the productive function of struggle in engendering within individuals'

⁴See 'The Struggle for Recognition', p. 282.

⁵In psychoanalytic, rather than Hegelian terms: the self here seeks to assure itself of its 'omnipotence', where everything, including other subjects, can be experienced as an extension of its own power. This reading has been developed by Jessica Benjamin in her *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

understandings a transformed conception of freedom, through the very contradiction within the attempt to secure recognition of oneself as a 'negative, absolute individuality' by demonstrating one's ability to exclude the other. Hegel describes this transformation of consciousness in the following passage,

This, [which is] what we know, that the recognized totality is only consciousness insofar as it sublates itself [i.e. insofar as it gives up its notion of freedom as exclusion of the other], *is now a cognition of this consciousness itself*, it, itself, makes this reflection of itself in itself, that the individual totality, in that it wants to be, to preserve itself as such, absolutely sacrifices itself, sublates itself, and thereby does the opposite of that which it aims at.⁶

What essentially emerges from the struggle is the knowledge that individual freedom requires a particular set of social structures for its realization, which Hegel here conceptualizes in terms of the structures of the *Volk* (people).

In his major work on recognition, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, Siep develops from Hegel's work the basis for a critical theory of institutions through a reading of socialization as the 'teleological realization of recognition'.⁷ The struggle for recognition, at this level, is conceived as a conflict between individuals and social institutions, by means of which individuals seek to re-structure social institutions in such a way that they can recognize themselves through their relations with those institutions as free, self-realizing beings. Recognition itself serves

⁶G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe I* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), p. 221 (my italics).

⁷*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie* (Freiburg/Munich: Alber, 1979), p. 234.

as the critical standard in this process for judging the adequacy of particular institutional structures as embodiments of human freedom.⁸ Siep outlines four institutional forms, which serve as the preconditions for the achievement by individuals of a 'rational self-understanding'. These are, firstly, institutions in which the individual achieves recognition as a 'self-standing' unity of its contexts of action, free from all particular determinateness; secondly, institutions through which the individual can recognize its contexts of action as the expression of a 'common will'; thirdly, institutions through which individuals can recognize this common will as independent of all individuals and groups, and as a 'self-standing subject'; and finally, those institutions which, by furnishing the individual with a consciousness of its identity with this self-standing subject, enable it to recognize itself as free from its particular roles and functions.⁹ 'Institutions' themselves, in Hegel's work, are said to comprise three particular kinds of social structures: firstly, mutually coordinated behaviour, through which social relations are initially generated (labour, family, duel (viz. struggle)), secondly, actual regulations which denote the coming into existence, or the execution of a common will (property, contract, laws of punishment, legal proclamations), and, thirdly, institutions of a community and its groups which bring to expression its self-understanding with reference to the common form of life and the resolution of common tasks (the action regulations of estates and means of execution, government, etc.).¹⁰

There are two fundamentally important features of Hegel's early works which render them a promising starting point for developing a theory of this sort. Firstly, following from his rejection

⁸*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 264.

⁹*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 249-50.

¹⁰*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, pp. 224-5.

of the abstract opposition of ‘real’ social forms and ‘ideal’ normative principles, Hegel does not set out first to construct a sequence of fundamental principles of reason or morality, from which legitimate institutions could then be ‘deduced’, or with which existing institutions could then be ‘compared’. Hegel’s critical method depends essentially upon allowing the standards which serve as the basis of critique to develop immanently, through the experience of the insufficiency, or inadequacy, of the forms of freedom afforded within each developed structure of institutions.¹¹ The second feature concerns the consequences of Hegel’s social-theoretic transformation of Fichte’s theory of recognition. Rather than conceiving recognition as an a priori structure of consciousness, Hegel’s reading understands it primarily as a process, comprising a series of concrete forms of practical life.¹² Thus, the family, legal relations, labour, and economic exchange all function, for Hegel, as concrete, social forms of recognition. As a result, these institutions can be said to be more or less imperfect embodiments of the principle which is serving as the ground of critique. It follows that the normative ground of the critical opposition to social institutions, an opposition which Hegel theorizes in terms of a transformed account of Hobbesian struggle, can now be said to be implicit in the experience of individuals *through* their everyday social action within those social institutions themselves.

Siep reconstructs the normative content of the principle of recognition in terms of two components, namely, harmonious unity and distance, the instantiations of which within social

¹¹*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 224.

¹²*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 128.

structures are conceived in terms of 'love' and 'release' (*Freigabe*) respectively.¹³ Since the time of his early Frankfurt theological writings, Hegel had conceived love as a universal power of unification, as reconciliation (*Versöhnung*), in which the moment of self-renunciation in a greater unity constitutes the central theoretical element. What is renounced in love is one's own being for self in the sense of difference, or distinctness with relation to the other.¹⁴ Hegel stressed, however, that what was at stake in love was not a loss of self, but rather a finding of oneself in the other, in which one comes to recognize the other as constitutive for one's own sense of being a self.¹⁵ 'Precisely in that each knows itself in the other', as Hegel puts this in the 1805/6 philosophy of spirit, 'it has renounced itself'.¹⁶ Within this unity, Hegel stresses, each loses its self-standing character (*Selbständigkeit*).¹⁷ Using a formula which he will repeat in the Master/Slave section of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel argues that each party, as being for other, is now *außer sich* (external to itself). Each self can now only come to know about itself by knowing how it stands in relation to the other. This idea is expressed in Hegel's terminology as the sublation of the distinction between being for self and being for other. In simpler terms, this means that the *relation* in which one stands to the other is now fully integrated into one's own sense of what it means to be the self

¹³Essentially, these two principles can be understood in terms of a dialectic of sameness and difference. The notion of 'release' brings to bear the assertion of difference, in order that unity can encompass ever more variegated forms of otherness whilst still acknowledging the dependence of otherness on the affirmation of the other.

¹⁴*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 57.

¹⁵My account draws on Ludwig Siep, *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, pp. 56ff.

¹⁶G. W. F. Hegel, *Jenaer Systementwürfe III* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1987), p. 192.

¹⁷*Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, p. 193.

that one is. Hegel can thus present love as part of that process by means of which the self becomes aware of the *always already intersubjectively constituted character of selfhood*, and in love, that intersubjective constitution takes on the form of an opposition-less unity in which each gains recognition from the other as a 'natural' individual with needs.

From the time of his Jena period, however, under the influence of the English economists and aware of the increasing independence of the sphere of economic activity, Hegel came to perceive the inadequacy of love as a principle of social integration. It was broadly from this experience that there emerges that aspect of Hegel's work from which Siep derives the second normative component of recognition. What now emerges as constitutive for the formation of an individual self-consciousness is a moment of distance through the insistence upon the self-standing character and distinctness of individuality, which breaks apart the opposition-less unity of love and the immediate solidarity of the family.¹⁸ Siep argues that it is this idea which Hegel radicalizes into the struggle for recognition. In a reversal of the first moment, each tries to make itself count in the struggle as self-standing, as having its 'essence' within itself, and relating only negatively to the other.¹⁹ In the very effort to exclude the other, however, as we saw previously, each comes to an awareness of its dependence on the other for its knowledge of itself as 'self-standing'. Hence there occurs the revelation of the intersubjective status of self-identity. But what is of central importance is that the struggle does not simply for this reason return us to the previous opposition-less unity of love. Rather, what emerges from the struggle is that the demand of each to know itself as 'released' from an immediate unity with the other must now be incorporated into the organization of social

¹⁸ *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 63.

¹⁹ *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, pp. 67-8.

structures, as a governing principle of the relations between individuals. In effect, what is demanded here is that social structures sustain for individuals the possibility of making their distinctness count in relation to others, and at the same time, that others are able to recognize the value of this distinctness, without immediately subsuming it under the substantive unity of love. In a more recent essay, 'Recht und Anerkennung', Siep provides a reading of the legal relation as a type of social structure which embodies in exemplary fashion the logic of recognition as 'release'.²⁰ Here, the opposition of the early Hegel's social theory to both the Adornian thesis of integration through domination, and to functionalist accounts of social institutions becomes visible. Siep argues that the legal relation must be understood as a relation of recognition, and specifically, as an essential presupposition for one's being able to present oneself as a 'self' in relation to others. Because the element of dependence on the other is equally as essential here as in love, the moment of unification is not simply cast aside. Rather, the legal relation comprises *both* unification with the other *and* the moment of self-distanciation from the other. The legal relation therefore possesses the complex structure of 'self-overcoming unification, distanciating self-assertion, and reciprocal release'.²¹ In simpler terms, each renounces the immediate effectuating of its will in favour of a unity with the universal will for the reconciliation of demands in institutionalized procedures; each asserts the claim to be bringing forth a 'responsible expression of its self-understanding'; and each gives to the other the freedom to define and maintain its otherness.²² Through the common definition and

²⁰L. Siep, 'Recht und Anerkennung', in H. Girndt (ed.), *Selbstbehauptung und Anerkennung* (Sankt Augustin: Akademie Verlag, 1990).

²¹'Recht und Anerkennung', p. 170.

²²'Recht und Anerkennung', p. 170.

recognition of 'limits' in the legal relation, within which each can make its *own* self-definition count, each is able to find social space for making a demand on the other for the confirmation of that which each knows *itself* to be. In contrast to love, what is encapsulated in the demand is the content of a 'being for me', which is gained in self-appropriation and defended from injury by others.²³ In this way, it becomes possible to understand the legal relation as a social structure which embodies and brings to expression the respect for individuality as 'pure self consciousness' that has an absolute value in itself.²⁴ The legal relation, then, is conceived as archetypal of those institutions which overcome the 'loss of self' occurring in the natural unity with the other (love), and thus make possible a community of free, self-standing beings.²⁵

Siep bases the account of struggle as a process of distancing primarily upon a number of important passages in Hegel's 1805/6 philosophy of spirit. Of central importance here is Hegel's suggestion that the struggle which first institutes social structures is initiated by the 'excluded [party]', that is, the party excluded from 'being' by the other's appropriating activity. The excluded party understands this activity as an indifference towards its own distinct needs and interests. Hence the excluded party is said to be '*being for self* [*für sich seiend*], because he is not for the other',²⁶

²³'Recht und Anerkennung', p. 169.

²⁴'Recht und Anerkennung', p. 171. In the *Phenomenology*, the demand for confirmation of oneself as self-standing, and self-defining occurs at the level of interpersonal recognition (I - I) in the Master/Slave section, and becomes transformed later into the *epistemically superior* form of recognition mediated through social structures (I - We), since this demand can only be satisfied when recognition becomes substantialized in social institutions. See Ludwig Siep, 'Die Bewegung des Anerkennens in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*', p. 112.

²⁵*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 124.

²⁶*Jenaer Systementwürfe III*, p. 201.

which Siep reads as meaning essentially that the excluded party is 'thrown back upon himself'.²⁷ The fact that each wants its own self-definition to count for the other is encapsulated in Hegel's assertion that the excluded party, in 'injuring' the possession of the other, 'posits its excluded being for self within it, its *mine* [Mein]; it spoils something thereby . . . in order to give itself its feeling of self'.²⁸ What becomes apparent is that the struggle is essentially concerned with gaining from the other a recognition of oneself as 'self-standing' and distinct, and it is for this reason that Hegel perceives the struggle as beginning with 'an insult, a humiliation - an attack on one's own feeling of self'.²⁹ The result of the struggle, Hegel argues, is that the 'immediate unity' of love is complemented by the recognition of each as a 'free self'.³⁰

In his essay 'Der Freiheitsbegriff der praktischen Philosophie Hegels in Jena',³¹ Siep argues that the two complementary conceptions of freedom as 'autonomy' - in the sense of being 'self-standing', and as release - both gain in significance in Hegel's Jena period as against the conceptions of freedom as unification and self-overcoming, which were central to the early theological writings. Siep here distinguishes three different senses of freedom as 'release', which are all deployed in the

²⁷ *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 64.

²⁸ *Jenaer Systementwürfe* III, p. 201. Also, p. 202, 'for each, the end is the intuiting of itself in the other'.

²⁹ *Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 65.

³⁰ *Jenaer Systementwürfe* III, p. 203. Here, as in the philosophy of spirit of the 1803/4 system, the transition to universal structures which embody the recognition of individual freedom occurs via the familiar figure of the contradictory and hence self-sublating nature of the demand for recognition as 'excluding individuality'.

³¹ In Ludwig Siep, *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992).

Jena works. The first concerns the relation of individuals to one another, the second of the parts to the whole, and the third concerns the relation of consciousness to the spirit of the people (*Volksgeist*).³² The first sense is most clearly embodied in Hegel's account of law (*Recht*), which gives 'self-distanciation' its due as against the *immediate* unity of 'loving devotion'. In the respect for property, each affirm the 'particular will' of the individual. The second sense receives expression in Hegel's account of the relation of the state to the individual 'powers' (labour, production, the legal order, administration and the military). In accordance with the idea of freedom as release, 'self-administration, division of labour, and the pluralism of powers appear thus as the embodiment of freedom'.³³ The third sense concerns the free space given to the 'absolute being in itself' of the individual in relation to the existence of the spirit of the people. Here, the notion of self-overcoming in an immediate unity is augmented by a more sophisticated sense of diremption (*Entzweiung*) as an essential component of freedom itself.³⁴

Siep's readings of Hegel's Jena works enables us to see clearly the importance of Hegel's early social-theoretic accounts of recognition in uncovering the implicit normative basis of social

³²'Der Freiheitsbegriff . . .', p. 166.

³³'Der Freiheitsbegriff . . .', p. 167.

³⁴'Der Freiheitsbegriff . . .', p. 167. In the 1805/6 philosophy of spirit, Hegel compares the 'beautiful freedom' of the Greeks to the 'higher diremption' (*höhere Entzweiung*) of modern times, in which 'each returns completely into himself, know his *self as such* as the essence . . . ' (*Jenaer Systementwürfe* III p. 239). Siep's reading is similar to Christoph Menke's account of Hegel's notion of social reconciliation in modern society. Distinctive of Hegel's view, Menke argues, is the idea that reconciliation in the modern world must take the form of a reconciliation *with* the fact of *Entzweiung*, rather than an *overcoming* of *Entzweiung*. Menke uses the term *freies Preisgeben* rather than *Freigabe* to denote the process of differentiation of social spheres. See his 'On the Concept of Recognition: Hegel's Early Theory of Social Differentiation', *Praxis International* 12 (1992) 70-82.

integration - understood in the broad sense as that totality of structured interactions within social institutions which makes possible self-consciousness as a free, self-realizing individual. The possibility of a critical theory of institutions emerges insofar as institutions are conceived as stages of a 'teleologically self-developing structure of recognition'.³⁵ This presupposes a view of institutionally structured forms of interaction as forms within which individuals seek the affirmation of others and of the community with regard to their own individually worked out self-understanding.³⁶ For individuals to be able to gain affirmation as autonomous and 'self-standing', social institutions must embody the logic of recognition as 'release', in which individuals are given the space to develop and assert their uniqueness against others. Thus the importance of Hegel for contemporary practical philosophy can be said to lie, on the one hand, in the extension of recognition to include forms of solidarity-encompassing affirmation of the well-being and personal identity of the other, and on the other hand, in the idea of an integrated, structured pattern of 'affirmation, delimitation and release'.³⁷

Crime, Legality, and Solidarity

In his work on Hegel's Jena writings, Andreas Wildt uncovers a critique of the identification of legality and morality in the name of non-legal forms of moral obligation, which are encompassed

³⁵'Zur Dialektik der Anerkennung bei Hegel', in *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus*, p. 180.

³⁶See 'Recht und Anerkennung', p. 175.

³⁷'Die Bewegung des Anerkennens in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*', p. 121.

by the term ‘solidarity’.³⁸ Hegel’s philosophy, Wildt argues, provides the basis for the development of the idea of a ‘specifically ethical, that is non-legally structured (*nichtrechtsförmig*), non-litigable, non-institutionalizable morality’.³⁹ Hegel’s idea of an ‘ethical morality’ beyond legal institutions, Wildt argues, is an important starting point for a theory of the aspects of moral life which go beyond the phenomena of right and duty.⁴⁰ Wildt traces this idea back to the young Hegel’s opposing of reconciliation (*Versöhnung*) to the structure of (Kantian) legality in his early theological writings at Frankfurt. Here, where Hegel conceived reconciliation in terms of love, Kantian law was castigated as the ‘subjugation of the individual to the universal’.⁴¹ ‘Ethical morality’ thus requires the (re-)structuring of social institutions, such that those institutions which embody the principle of legal equality do not subjugate other, ‘ethical’ forms of mutual affirmation, and the types of individual self-realization which they promote.

An aspect of Wildt’s account which is highly significant for the prospects of reading Hegel’s theory of recognition in terms of a critical theory of institutions, is his interpretation of Hegel’s discussion of crime in the Jena works as a reformulation of the critique of the externality of law, which Hegel developed in his earlier Frankfurt writings. However because, by this time, Hegel had ceased to conceive of reconciliation according to the model of the harmonious unity of love, the

³⁸ *Autonomie und Anerkennung: Hegels Moralitätskritik im Licht seiner Fichterezeption* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1982).

³⁹ *Autonomie und Anerkennung*, p. 111. See also Wildt’s essay ‘Hegels Kritik des Jakobinismus’, in O. Negt (ed.), *Aktualität und Folgen der Philosophie Hegels* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

⁴⁰ *Autonomie und Anerkennung*, p. 134.

⁴¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Die Frühschriften* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), p. 299.

diremption which occurs through the dominance of legality is no longer counterposed to a model of organic unity. Rather, the focal point of the critique of legality is its repression of the possibilities for the affirmation of the free, self-realization of individuals. The notion of crime which Hegel here develops, Wildt suggests, can be understood as an attack on the actual injustice at work within legally sanctioned, developed processes of (economic) exchange.⁴² There can therefore be said to be a *moral basis* for the act of destruction that Hegel theorizes as 'crime'. Crime embodies the (moral) claim to a right which is grounded in the 'particularity' of the person, and hence goes significantly beyond the right to contingent appropriation, extending to the claim to a right to equal freedom of action for the fulfilment of one's own particularity.⁴³ It is the *constitutive indifference* of legal equality to the conditions necessary for the realization of the particularity of the person which itself generates crime, and hence crime takes on the form of a moral critique of legality. Wildt bases this reading on a highly significant, although perplexing passage in the discussion of crime in the 1805/6 philosophy of spirit. 'The inner source of crime', Hegel states here, 'is the coercion of law (*Recht*)'.⁴⁴ A little further on, Hegel claims that the 'inner self-justification' of the criminal concerns 'the restoration of his individual (*einzelnen*) will for *power*, for validity, for being recognized; he wants to be someone (like Herostratus)[,] not exactly renowned, but that he has carried out his individual will in defiance of the universal will'.⁴⁵ This account of crime occurs directly after Hegel has introduced that form of social recognition embodied within the formal

⁴²*Autonomie und Anerkennung*, pp. 100ff.

⁴³*Autonomie und Anerkennung*, p. 101.

⁴⁴*Jenaer Schriften* III, p. 215.

⁴⁵*Jenaer Schriften* III, p. 215.

structure of economic contracts. The mode of being recognized (*Anerkanntsein*) in contract is said to imply the 'indifference against existence (*Dasein*) and against time'.⁴⁶ Wildt's account suggests that crime is a response to this very indifference of legal equality, and that it is through crime that Hegel conceives the individual as raising a claim against the destruction, or unnecessary limitation, of 'possibilities of individuation' through the dominance of social structures founded on the principle of legality. Crime, therefore, can be said to constitute a form of struggle in which individuals make demands for the institution of forms of social relations permitting more extensive forms of recognition than that afforded in formally structured legal relations, and specifically for the institution of those social relations through which the will can realize its individuality.⁴⁷

Hegel's account of crime suggests the thesis that, insofar as it is a form of resistance against the 'abstract domination' of law, crime is legitimate *even under the presupposition that the laws are just or fair*.⁴⁸ This is intelligible under the assumption that what provokes the moral indignation whose practical expression Hegel theorizes as crime, is not the *content* of law but the constitutive indifference which is built into the very *form* of law itself. It is the inadequacy of the formal structures of law with regard to those social conditions which would be necessary to sustain and support self-realization which provokes the response of crime. Christoph Menke has described this structure of domination which afflicts the very form of law itself as 'normalization'.⁴⁹ Because the

⁴⁶*Jenaer Schriften* III, p. 211.

⁴⁷*Autonomie und Anerkennung*, p. 102.

⁴⁸*Autonomie und Anerkennung*, p. 191.

⁴⁹See his *Tragödie im Sittlichen: Gerechtigkeit und Freiheit nach Hegel* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 11.

operation of law necessarily abstracts from forms of individual uniqueness and particularity in order to generate prescriptions for individuals *as such*, it clashes with the demands of individual self-realization, or 'authenticity'.⁵⁰ Law, that is to say, cannot recognize the moral worth of *singularity* (*Einzelheit*) which gets expressed in the claims of authenticity. Further, because the abstraction from individual uniqueness is constitutive of law, the clash between law and self realization, or authenticity, cannot be resolved *within* law itself, but demands a perspective which is capable of suspending the claim to absolute validity of both terms.⁵¹ The criminal's response, therefore, to the 'violence of normalization' implicit in the form of law, can be interpreted as representing the claims of suppressed authenticity in the form of a demand for the transformation of social structures. The criminal opposes to the 'formality, in terms of content, of the laws of right' the claim to recognition of a 'right to realization' of the individual as such, which incorporates the principle of the actual (*faktisch*) equal possibility of freedom of action and satisfaction of needs.⁵²

The Normative Basis of Struggle: Axel Honneth

Axel Honneth's reading of the struggle for recognition draws quite considerably on the work of Siep and Wildt discussed previously, yet also goes significantly beyond those accounts to develop a

⁵⁰*Tragödie im Sittlichen*, p. 12.

⁵¹Menke terms this perspective 'sovereignty', which constitutes a reflexive awareness of the conflictual nature of the two components. An exemplary form of this, he argues, is grace, as the renunciation of the deployment, or the claiming of a (legal) right. See *Tragödie im Sittlichen*, pp. 307ff.

⁵²Andreas Wildt, *Autonomie und Anerkennung*, pp. 364-5.

systematic reconstruction of Hegel's idea of struggle which is intended to demonstrate the worth of this model for the tradition of critical social theory. A central claim in Honneth's reading is that the struggle for recognition, in Hegel's early Jena works, represents that 'medium of social action' through which the relations of subjects to one another assume a more 'morally demanding' form.⁵³ The struggle for recognition thus represents the reciprocal claim of individuals to the recognition of their identity, a claim which already inheres within society as a 'normative tension'. Hegel, according to Honneth's reconstruction, deploys the idea of a struggle for recognition as the comprehensive medium of the process of ethical formation (*sittlicher Bildungsprozeß*) of spirit. By means of the 'negative path' of a struggle which recurs in stages, social life gradually assumes the form of a 'communicatively lived freedom'.⁵⁴ This allusion to the normative content of Habermasian critical theory should not divert attention from the highly significant critique of the Habermasian perspective which is already implicit in Honneth's starting point. This becomes clearer when we look at the way that both have differentiated their positions from Marxian historical materialism. In the introduction to his book on historical materialism, Habermas criticizes Marx for reducing evolutionary learning processes to the singular dimension of 'objectifying thought, technical and organizational knowledge', or, that is, to the level of the forces of production.⁵⁵ Habermas's claim is that the evolutionary learning process in fact occurs along two dimensions with entirely distinct logics. The *rationalization of action*, Habermas argues, occurs both at the level of forces of

⁵³'Moralische Entwicklung und sozialer Kampf', *Zwischenbetrachtungen*, p. 550.

⁵⁴'Moralische Entwicklung und sozialer Kampf', pp. 550-51.

⁵⁵See Jürgen Habermas, *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1976).

production, *and* at the level of normative structures. Rationalization occurring within the second dimension, which is that of communicative action, concerns not technical knowledge, but intersubjectively valid norms. At this level, rationalization implies the 'elimination of relations of power' within the communicative structures of the social world, and is therefore not reducible to that type of rationalization process which occurs by means of the solution of technical tasks.⁵⁶ Whereas that type of rationalization occurring through an increase in technical knowledge concerns the developmental stages of the forces of production, rationalization occurring at the level of communicative action concerns the separate logics of the developmental stages of forms of social integration. Therefore, systemic problems occurring at the level of material production cannot by themselves account for the rational structure of evolutionary transformations occurring at the level of social interaction. Habermas's thesis is that, because Marx failed properly to distinguish the two dimensions, his account of the relation between technical-organizational advance and class struggle remained insufficient, if not confusing.⁵⁷

At first glance, Honneth's critique of the Marxian account appears simply to affirm Habermas's analysis. Honneth argues that Marx reduced the struggle of social classes to the sole signification of a conflict of economic interests, without being able to take into account its 'more extensive moral content'. Marx, Honneth suggests, never systematically pursued the idea that

⁵⁶Habermas refers to these relations of power as relations of 'systematically distorted communication', in *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus*, p. 34.

⁵⁷*Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus*, pp. 30-1. At one point, Habermas goes so far as to suggest that evolution occurring at the level of normative structures is itself the ground of technical advance, since the implementation of available forces of production, as well as the generation of new ones, is itself dependent on transformations at the level of social integration (p. 35).

disputes over moral norms could also be at work in forms of social conflict, norms which would have to regulate the relations of reciprocal recognition among the members of a society. Echoing Habermas's charge concerning the deficiencies in Marx's reading of class struggle, Honneth argues that Marx was never able to 'anchor the normative presuppositions of his own theory within that same social process which he continually had in view under the category of "class struggle"'.⁵⁸ However, already implicit within this is a critique of Habermas's account, since Honneth's thesis is that transformation at the level of the normative structures of social interaction occurs *through* the process of social struggle. This idea, as we saw, was hinted at by Habermas in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, yet disappeared from view in the subsequent development of the theory of communicative action. It is this idea of normative progress as occurring through social struggle, however, which Honneth finds in Hegel. According to the model of Hegel's early theory of recognition, Honneth argues, moral learning processes must be referred back to the 'negative experiences of a practical struggle', which subjects engage in for the sake of the legal and social recognition of their identity.⁵⁹ The deficiency in Habermas's reading is that, although it correctly distinguishes the independent normative logic of the developmental stages of social integration, it fails to give a satisfactory theoretical account of moral learning processes *as rooted in the concrete experience of moral injury on the part of subordinated social groups*. Habermas, that is to say, failed to connect moral learning processes to those normatively charged 'negative experiences' which arise precisely through interaction with social structures riven with domination and power, structures, that is, of 'systematically distorted communication'. The central, motivating role of experiences of

⁵⁸'Moralische Entwicklung und sozialer Kampf', pp. 571-2.

⁵⁹'Moralische Entwicklung und sozialer Kampf', p. 551.

injustice, and the forms of struggle which they generate, is exactly what gets severed from Habermas's account when he sets out to model the moral learning process on Kohlberg's theory of cognitive development.⁶⁰ For from this perspective, struggle ceases to be the scene of a moral learning process, and becomes merely the contingent historical agent of a pre-given structural logic of societal rationalization.

Central to Honneth's account is the idea that dispensing with the economic functionalism of historical materialism, that is, its figuring of non-economic domains of action as expressions of or functional elements for the sphere of economic action, does not imply the necessity of dispensing altogether with the link between struggle and emancipation. Honneth argues that the central theoretical elements of Marxist critique can be maintained intact if the notion of class struggle is divorced from the functionalist framework of strategic conflict over the acquisition of goods or forms of power, and reconfigured in the terms of the idea of a struggle for recognition, in which the goal is the attainment of the 'social conditions for mutual recognition among subjects'.⁶¹ Under this conception, Honneth claims, the normative basis of struggle comes clearly into view, since struggle can now be theorized as a form of social action which drives a developmental process of moral progress at the societal level, by demanding the creation of those social conditions necessary for the respect and recognition of individuals. Honneth's strategy then, in sum, is to divorce the class struggle/revolutionary action component of Marx's work from the Marxist philosophy of history which theorizes historical transformation as driven solely by economic interests. Consequently, it

⁶⁰See 'Moralentwicklung und Ich-Identität', in *Zur Rekonstruktion des historischen Materialismus*, pp. 63ff.

⁶¹Axel Honneth, 'Domination and Moral Struggle', in *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1995), p. 13.

becomes possible to replace Marx's utilitarian model of social action, where economic interests are revealed as the final determining ground of struggle, with a theory of action which focusses on the normative claims, as claims to recognition, articulated by oppressed groups.⁶² The systematic link within Marxist theory between struggle, as the process of emancipation, and the analysis of current society can be maintained, Honneth argues, if forms of social organization are describable in terms of relationships of 'damaged recognition', rather than, in reductivist fashion, as structured along the single dimension of antagonistic economic interests.⁶³ By conceiving forms of alienation and reification in the present as structures of damaged recognition, struggle can be conceptualized as a moral critique against the forms of dehumanization uncovered by the analysis of society, a moral critique which is catalysed by negative feelings of injured self-respect, themselves generated by those very structures of damaged recognition. The moral critique of the present embodied within the struggle for emancipation is therefore grounded by the analysis of the alienated structure of current society in a manner characteristic of the systematic intentions of Marxist theory.

In light of this analysis, Honneth's decision to focus exclusively on Hegel's pre-*Phenomenology* Jena works can be seen, in part, as the desire to break with the typical Hegelian-Marxist focus on the role of labour in the formation of emancipatory consciousness, derived through bestowing large theoretical weight on the Master/Slave dialectic of the *Phenomenology*. Here, Hegel focuses on the process of *Bildung* generated within conditions of domination characterized by the

⁶²See the critique of Marx's utilitarianism in Hans Joas, *Die Kreativität des Handelns* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 158ff. Joas demonstrates that, in his political writings, Marx makes a strict distinction between the subjective (ideological) perspective through which historical actors understand themselves, and the scientific perspective which uncovers economic interests as the final determining ground of revolutionary action.

⁶³'Domination and Moral Struggle', p. 14.

expropriation of labour. The two central formative elements are here the fear of death which, contra Hobbes, Hegel perceives as possessing a productive, formative role in preparing individuals for ethical life, and labour, which allows natural drives to be channelled through non-instinctually given goals and purposes.⁶⁴ In accord with the systematic intentions of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel's focus here is primarily upon the epistemological dimension of recognition. The central question concerns *how consciousness can come to know itself as free*, and labour is figured as a form of experience which is essential to the logical formation of a particular form of self-knowing, which Hegel terms 'absolute knowing'. When Hegel describes this process as the transformation of the in-itself into the for-itself, of substance into subject, he means to depict the process of experience in the *Phenomenology* as that process by means of which consciousness attains to the truth about what it is, namely, spirit or *Geist*.⁶⁵ Honneth's claim, his own statements about 'Idealist assumptions' in the *Phenomenology* untenable under conditions of 'postmetaphysical thinking' notwithstanding, must therefore be that the earlier Jena works, namely the *System of Ethical Life*, the 1803/4 philosophy of spirit and the 1805/6 philosophy of spirit, deploy the concept of recognition in a way which makes clear its potential worth for a social theory focussing on the normative basis of conflict and

⁶⁴Hegel refers to labour as 'restrained desire' (*gehemmte Begierde*), *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952), p. 149. The same stress on *Bildung* implicit within the twin processes of fear of death and labour can clearly also be found in the account of the struggle for recognition in the 1830 *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), §430-35.

⁶⁵*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 558.

resistance, and that its importance in this regard is obscured in Hegel's later works by a shift in his concerns towards the nexus of experience and (self-)knowing.⁶⁶

In *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth locates the significance for social theory of Hegel's earlier Jena works in the delineation of the sphere of social action through a critique of 'atomism'. Hegel, Honneth argues, rejects the atomist view that a philosophical understanding of society can proceed by way of a focus on the acts of isolated subjects, and proposes instead that theory must begin with intersubjective structures, the 'framework of ethical bonds . . . within which subjects always already move'.⁶⁷ Explaining the transition to ethical life (*Sittlichkeit*), therefore, must mean accounting for the way in which these intersubjective structures take on a more demanding and encompassing moral form; it is not the Hobbesian problem of explaining the emergence of community *überhaupt* from isolated self-interest. Having elucidated this implicit critique of the Hobbesian model of social theory, Honneth discusses how Hegel transforms the Aristotelian notion of an ethical form of life by means of the deployment of a de-transcendentalized version of Fichte's account of recognition. By rewriting Fichte's notion of recognition in terms of forms of social practice which structure relations of mutual recognition, Hegel can conceive ethical relations as

⁶⁶See *Struggle for Recognition*, trans. J. Anderson (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), p. 1. As I mentioned earlier, the claim about untenable 'Idealist assumptions' is a critique which Honneth takes from Habermas, and serves as a convenient tool to justify studying a number of Hegel's unpublished fragmentary essays in abstraction from Hegel's 'system'. Even if this reading of the later Hegel is wrong, however, it remains valid to concentrate exclusively on these Jena manuscripts provided it can be shown that abstracting them from the rest of Hegel's oeuvre does not render them inconsistent or incomplete. One might argue, however, that this approach is problematic precisely because of the centrality of the epistemological dimension to any coherent, defensible Hegelian account of recognition. I will take up this point in the critique of Honneth in the next chapter.

⁶⁷*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 14.

forms of 'practical intersubjectivity',⁶⁸ that is, communicative forms of life constituted by the 'complementary agreement' and 'necessary mutuality' of opposed subjects.⁶⁹ Now, however, Hegel is able to dispense with the Aristotelian grounding of ethical life in a teleological concept of nature, conceiving it instead as emerging from an 'internal tension' contained constitutively *within* social relations of recognition themselves. This internal tension becomes explicit in the outbreak of a social conflict, which is understood as ethically motivated insofar as it is directed towards the qualitative moral development of social relations by means of the intersubjective recognition of dimensions of human individuality.⁷⁰ Through this concept of the social, Honneth argues, Hegel inaugurated an 'epoch-making new version of the conception of social struggle', by means of which practical conflict could be understood as an ethical moment occurring within social life itself, driving social life via a series of recurring negations to a more morally developed form. The principle of movement is therefore no longer natural teleology, but the contradictions within social relations, which become explicit in the practical form of conflicts.

Within Honneth's broader theoretical intentions, this reconstruction of the social theory of the young Hegel serves as a systematic presentation of ideas and insights which were present only in germ form in *Critique of Power*. In that book, Honneth wanted both to affirm the normative content of Habermas's theory of communicative action, and at the same to retain the Foucaultian idea of the social as essentially marked by conflict, and riven with structures of power. Drawing on

⁶⁸Honneth takes this term from Hans Joas, *Praktische Intersubjektivität: Die Entwicklung des Denkens von G. H. Mead* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1989).

⁶⁹*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 16.

⁷⁰*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 17.

Hegel's early social theory, Honneth wants to integrate these seemingly incompatible perspectives by developing a view of the social as an arena both of communicatively constructed identities and yet also, inherently, an arena of potential conflict structured by the implicit operation of forms of power. It is Hegel's idea of the struggle for recognition which permits Honneth to synthesize these two perspectives, by providing a framework for the theorizing of social action as normatively-based resistance to distorted and hierarchical social relations. *Contra* Adorno, then, Honneth can affirm that the normative basis of resistance is present as a structuring moment of forms of social integration, insofar as these forms are intelligible as relations of recognition. And, *contra* Habermas, Honneth can assert that this normative potential is realized socially in a class- or group-specific form, and thus it is (partially) suppressed by forms of social power.

Now we are in a position to see more clearly how the theory of recognition provides for a conception of resistance which overcomes the central aporias in Adorno's model. The difficulties in Adorno's theory, as we saw, derive essentially from the fusing of a strong version of the integration thesis, which postulates the elimination of the social conditions of autonomy in late capitalism, with a view of the autonomy of the subject in relation to the structures of alienated life, as the resource enabling forms of resistance. The works on Hegel's theory of recognition discussed in this chapter all challenge the integration thesis by alluding to the normative expectations acquired in everyday interactions within social institutions. *On this basis, the critical-negative experience of the social order which is attained by subordinated groups can be understood as the awareness of a moral injury.* The basis of critical-negative experience is here conceived as emerging through a disappointment of the normative expectations attaching to forms of social interaction that take the form of practical structures of recognition. These expectations, it is suggested, can then potentially

be brought to bear against existing structures through forms of struggle. Essentially, these normative expectations are conceived as demands for the recognition of particular dimensions of individuals' identity. Social struggle is therefore a demand for the transformation of social structures in view of the conditions necessary for supporting an autonomous life. Social integration, on this view, occurs together with developing expectations of more demanding conditions for personal self-realization. Underlying this argument is the idea that social institutions (family, labour, economic exchange, etc.) are themselves concrete, social forms of recognition, or forms of 'practical intersubjectivity' (Honneth). This allows integration to be conceived in terms of the broadening, or the extension of the implicit normative basis of those primary forms of social interaction. On the basis of this idea, social integration can be theorized in normative terms as the generation of those social structures which support and enable individual self-realization.

Crime and Misrecognition

The theories of Siep, Wildt, and Honneth, as I have shown, furnish a conception of recognition as the normative basis of social struggle. Social actors are seen as bringing to bear the normative potential that is already present, in suppressed or distorted form, within social relations. The motive of struggle concerns the negative experiences of social actors on the occasion of the disappointment of their moral expectations concerning recognition. I now want to suggest, however, that there is a further important aspect to Hegel's theory of struggle, which is not given sufficient attention in the theories discussed above. I will argue that, in his 1802/3 manuscript, *The System of Ethical Life*, Hegel develops a theory of social relations not merely as characterized by incomplete forms of

recognition, but rather as constituted by structures of *misrecognition*. Significantly, the concept of misrecognition has no systematic place in the works discussed above.⁷¹ But it is this concept which enables Hegel to deploy the idea of crime in the context of an ideology-critical reading of social structures. I will now show how Hegel develops this reading through an immanent critique of Kantian ‘critical philosophy’.

Hegel’s depiction of Kantian ‘critical philosophy’, as Gillian Rose has shown, represents it essentially in terms of a series of unresolved dichotomies, such as finite/infinite, reason/nature, unity/multiplicity, freedom/necessity. In the *System of Ethical Life*, Hegel finally settles on the dichotomy between concept and intuition, as ‘shorthand’ for critical philosophy.⁷² Each of these conceptual dichotomies is structured in terms of a lack of identity, or ‘relation’, such that one of the two elements can only assert itself by ‘dominating’ or ‘cancelling’ the other. In the Natural Law essay, Hegel argues that it is this dominating relation between reason and nature which is expressed in Kant’s idea of practical reason, as the realization of reason within nature. Because, on the Kantian scheme, reason and nature, or infinity and finitude can only be conceived as opposed to one another, practical reason takes the form of a ‘nullification’ (*Vernichtung*).⁷³ This follows, Hegel believes, from the fact that the ‘critical philosophy’ makes the external opposition of these terms essential

⁷¹Honneth, in fact, tends to speak of the opposite of recognition as ‘disrespect’, rather than ‘misrecognition’.

⁷²See Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (New York: Athlone Press, 1982), p. 63.

⁷³G. W. F. Hegel, ‘Über die wissenschaftliche Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts . . .’, in *Jenaer Schriften 1801-1807* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), pp. 454-5.

to their conceptual determination: the 'real' is 'essentially posited' as external to reason.⁷⁴ In other words, reason, the infinite, and freedom, are each essentially defined by the critical philosophy as an external other of nature, finitude, and necessity respectively. It was in thinking through the problems of the 'critical philosophy' during his time at Jena, that Hegel became aware that the aporetic structures of critical philosophy were expressive of certain deep-rooted understandings within social practice. This meant that the insights of the critical philosophy must also be accessible in terms of a certain structure of social experience, an experience which this philosophy articulates and systematizes through philosophical categories. In the 1801 'Differenzschrift', Hegel adopted the term *Entzweiung* (diremption) to characterize that form of social experience which was systematized in the external oppositions of the critical philosophy. The organizing of the social experience of diremption into a system was carried out by the understanding (*Verstand*). Hegel opposed to this perspective the 'interest of reason' (*Vernunft*), whose defining task was the 'sublation of oppositions'.⁷⁵ From the time of the Natural Law essay, Hegel came to focus more explicitly on the types of social relations which were re-presented in the constitutive oppositions of critical philosophy. In the final part of this essay, Hegel sets out explicitly, for the first time, the structure of bourgeois property relations, which he here identifies as 'relative ethical life', or the 'system of reality'.⁷⁶ Hegel describes the structure, whereby the diverse and conflicting interests of the system of reality are unified by the 'sphere of law', as a form of 'relative identity'.

⁷⁴ 'Über die wissenschaftliche Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts . . .', p. 456. Hegel makes the same point about infinity and finitude in the 'Differenzschrift': '[the infinite], for itself as rational, expresses only the negating of the finite', in *Jenaer Schriften 1801-7*, p. 21.

⁷⁵ 'Differenzschrift', p. 21.

⁷⁶ 'Über die wissenschaftliche Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts . . .', p. 482.

‘Indifference’, or unity, is here present merely as an ‘external, formal equality’.⁷⁷ Now Hegel could begin to articulate how the coercive structure of the relation between the oppositions of the critical philosophy (accessible to philosophical critique), affords an insight into the coercive nature of the relation between law and individual needs constitutive of the ‘system of reality’ (itself accessible pre-philosophically as the experience of diremption).⁷⁸ The structure of bourgeois law can now appear in its true guise as the ‘domination’ or ‘cancellation’ of individuals’ needs. Because bourgeois law is constitutively indifferent to individuals’ needs, the formal freedom of the legal ‘person’ coexists with real coercion, and concrete inequality.

The central idea governing Hegel’s critique is that the constitutive aporias within the Kantian and Fichtean theories of freedom are disclosive of *real social structures of misrecognition*. The external oppositions between freedom and necessity, unity and multiplicity, reason and nature, disclose an important truth about how individuals can only recognize one another within the structures of bourgeois property relations as ‘competing, isolated, “moral” individuals who can only relate externally to one another’.⁷⁹ Kant’s theory of practical reason itself now appears as the articulation, in ‘ideological’ form, of particular social conditions of unfreedom, namely, those conditions constitutive of bourgeois property relations. It was in the *System of Ethical Life* that Hegel began fully to develop the connection between philosophical dichotomies and social relations.

⁷⁷‘Über die wissenschaftliche Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts . . .’, p. 482.

⁷⁸At one point, Hegel makes this connection between the lack of identity in Kantian and Fichtean philosophy, and social relations explicit by referring to the ‘ethics (*Sittlichkeit*) of the bourgeois or the private human being’ (‘Über die wissenschaftliche Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts . . .’, p. 506). The structure of moral action within the critical philosophy is thus seen to be expressive of a particular organized system of social relations.

⁷⁹Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 56.

What appeared as the ‘system of relations’ in the Natural Law essay is here dealt with as the second level of ‘Natural Ethical Life’, which is the first part of the manuscript. As before, Hegel is here concerned to delineate those social relations of which a particular theoretical structure (here expressed in terms of the relation between concept and intuition) is the philosophical articulation. Importantly, it is in the *System of Ethical Life* that Hegel begins to theorize the link between crime and domination, relating this to those social forms articulated through Kantian moral freedom and Fichtean legal freedom.

Hegel’s conviction that the Kantian and Fichtean theories of freedom were disclosive of social relations of domination is expressed in a revealing passage in the 1802 essay ‘Faith and Knowledge’, which pre-empt the insights of more systematic inquiry into this connection in the *System of Ethical Life*. As in the Natural Law essay,⁸⁰ the philosophies of Kant, Jacobi and Fichte are characterized in terms of the ‘absolute opposition’ of the finite and infinity, unity and multiplicity. Hegel also uses that same formula for theoretical reason in the critical philosophy which he will use in the Natural Law essay, namely, as the ‘positive’ form of the concept, through which a ‘relative identity’ is constituted by the domination of the ‘real and finitely appearing’ by the concept.⁸¹ The corresponding account of practical reason, however, refers to the social relations of domination disclosed by the theorizing of freedom in terms of its absolute opposition to necessity. Within practical reason, Hegel argues, ‘the subjectivity of individuals is present in empirical form, and domination does not occur through the understanding, but as a natural strength and weakness

⁸⁰*Faith and Knowledge* appeared in the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*, which Hegel co-edited with Schelling, in the edition preceding that in which the first part of the Natural Law essay appeared.

⁸¹‘Faith and Knowledge’, in *Jenaer Schriften 1801-1807*, p. 294.

of subjectivities against one another'.⁸² Hegel's thesis, expressed here in its most radical form, is that the *social truth* of Kant's theory of freedom is social domination. Hegel believes that this thesis is *already* expressed within the critical philosophy, for reasons which we can summarize as follows: Kant held that freedom could never be an object of experience, and hence that it could never be fully determined whether a particular act had been carried out in accordance with practical reason, or for selfish motives. All human actions, nonetheless, *are* essentially determinable as objects of experience falling under the laws of causality. Within the social sphere, this means that all actions, as objects of experience, will be essentially characterizable as attempts to influence others for private ends, and thus as 'causal', non-reciprocal relations. The social truth which Kant's theory of freedom expresses, then, is that the freedom of one individual can only be actualized at the expense of the domination of others - precisely that structure of social relations which Hegel, in the *System of Ethical Life*, terms that of Master/Slave. The explicit intention of Kant's idea of practical reason, to determine the possibility of that form of autonomous action in which others are treated as ends, conflicts with the social truth revealed by the theoretical structures at the foundation of the critical philosophy itself.

The *System of Ethical Life* reconstructs those social relations of recognition which are expressed in the practical philosophy of Kant and Fichte, in terms of the concept of the 'person'. Hegel depicts these relations in terms of the structure of the domination of concept over intuition, and treats them as presupposed by the institutions of property and exchange, themselves previously

⁸²'Faith and Knowledge', p. 294.

derived from the standpoint of the isolated individual.⁸³ In those social relations constituted by the recognition of others as persons, the value or worth of individuals is expressed in terms of a formal equivalence derived by way of a constitutive abstraction from what Hegel calls the 'determinateness' (*Bestimmtheit*) of the individual. This might be thought of as predicating a certain autonomy to the individual, namely, its capacity to 'stand back' from any particular identification it finds associated with itself and to redefine itself according to a self-given 'determinateness'. What is distinctive about Hegel's account is that, rather than treating this capacity as an anthropological or cultural fact, Hegel derives it from the form of intersubjective recognition established by the social structures constituted within property and contract.⁸⁴ What characterizes this form of recognition is the indifference to the particularity of the individual. Just as the transformation of surplus production into money comprises the abstraction from the qualitative particularity of what is exchanged, so the 'person' is constituted by those social relations in which the particularity of individuals is a matter of indifference. What is 'recognized' in contract is the individual as representative of any individual as such. The interest that individuals have for one another in contract, that is to say, does not extend beyond their mutual identification as contingent owners of a particular item of property.

⁸³The movement from property, to contract, to social relations corresponds to the three subdivisions of the second section of 'natural ethical life'. See *The System of Ethical Life*, trans. T. M. Knox and H. S. Harris (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1979), pp. 116ff.; German: *Jenaer Schriften* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1972), pp. 449ff.

⁸⁴Christoph Menke, focussing on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, has shown how Hegel's 'genealogy' of the person (i.e. its emergence from the constitutive conflict of Greek tragedy) in that work can be understood as an ideology critique of the appeal to the person as a pre-given 'fact' within political theory. See his *Tragödie im Sittlichen*, ch. 5.

Hegel describes the identity constituted by recognition as a person as the possibility of being 'the opposite of oneself in relation to a determinateness'.⁸⁵ Within this freedom, Hegel states, the possibility of 'non-freedom' and of 'non-recognition' is also posited. This possibility, Hegel believes, arises logically from the contradictory nature of the 'person' itself, that is to say, it is a possibility constitutive of being a person. This follows, Hegel argues, from an inward reflection of the abstract identity of the person: as the possibility of being the opposite of itself, the possibility exists of being determined as the opposite *of* the person, that is, of being determined as an object of use for the ends of others. Hegel describes this more concretely in terms of the constitutive abstraction of the structure of recognition as a person from the 'unequal power of life'.⁸⁶ It is this inequality which makes the dominant subject able to act as the 'cause' of the other, as its 'soul' or 'spirit'. It is at this point that Hegel repeats the reference in the 'Faith and Knowledge' essay to the 'greater strength and weakness' of one party against the other, which fixes and determines one party in 'difference' and leaves the other free. This form of subordination, which emerges from the determination of the person, is central to understanding the transition to crime in the second section of the *System of Ethical Life*. Hegel understands the relations constitutive of the legal 'person' as comprising a structure of domination, which is characterized in terms of a particular type of abstraction. This structure of domination is, however, 'misrecognized' in the conception of law as universal equality.

It is as a form of opposition to relations of misrecognition that we must understand crime. 'The indifference of the non-free', Hegel claims, 'is his inner, formal [aspect], not brought

⁸⁵*System of Ethical Life*, p. 124 (German, p. 458).

⁸⁶*System of Ethical Life*, p. 125 (German, p. 458).

out explicitly [*nicht Herausgehobenes*], and [that which] nullifies difference [*die Differenz Vernichtendes*].⁸⁷ Within the master/slave relation, in which the 'indifferent and free' has power over the 'different', the freedom of the slave can only express itself as the 'nullification' of difference, specifically, of that difference, or determination, in which the slave is fixed through its relationship to the master. Freedom, in other words, can only express itself here destructively, as an attack on the relations which structure social domination. The inequality of power which constitutes the master/slave relation does not emerge merely contingently within the structures of property and exchange. Hegel is suggesting that it is the (necessary) social truth of the structuring of social relations according to the - formally free - recognition of each by others as a 'person'. Hegel articulates this distinction between formal freedom and real, social unfreedom in terms of 'ideality' and 'reality',

This relation [of master and slave] is posited immediately and absolutely with the inequality of the power of life; no right and no necessary equality are to be thought herewith. Equality is nothing other than the abstraction, and the formal thought of life, of the first [level], a thought which is merely ideal and without reality. In reality by contrast the inequality of life is posited, and therewith the relation of master and slave; for in reality there is form, individuality and appearance, thus difference of potence [*Potenz*] or of power; or the relative identity, according to which the one individual is posited as indifferent, the other as different.⁸⁸

⁸⁷*System of Ethical Life*, p. 125 (German, p. 459).

⁸⁸*System of Ethical Life*, p. 125 (German, p. 459).

'Negative' or destructive freedom can, on this basis, be understood as the way in which freedom *appears*, when social relations are structured according to 'relative identity'. It is precisely here that we see the deeper, social truth of Kant's dichotomizing of freedom and necessity; finitude and infinity. For what is expressed in these dichotomies is that freedom can only assert itself in opposition to, and by means of the transgression of real social relations. It cannot be actualized *through* them. By defining freedom in terms of a negative relation to necessity (in Hegel's terms, *Vernichtung*, or 'nullification'), the critical philosophy had *already*, implicitly, recognized crime as the appearance of freedom within unfree social conditions.

Further evidence for this thesis can be found in the terms Hegel uses to characterize crime in the second section of the *System of Ethical Life*. Crime, Hegel suggests, maintains the opposition between 'indifference' and 'relative identity', but simply asserts the other side of this opposition (i.e. indifference), in its independence from the relative identity. As such, crime is the determining of 'the real' through 'pure freedom' (*reine Freiheit*).⁸⁹ This is the same term that Hegel uses for the 'negative absolute' of Kantian and Fichtean philosophy in the Natural Law essay.⁹⁰ The negative absolute never gets beyond the abstract opposition between ideality and reality, and thus can only conceive practical reason as a destruction, a negative relation to reality. Hegel also describes the criminal as positing himself as 'negative indifference', a formula which he also uses in the Natural Law essay for the conception of freedom as external to relative identity.⁹¹ This furnishes grounds for the thesis that Hegel is conceiving crime - through an ideology-critical reading of Kant - *as the*

⁸⁹*System of Ethical Life*, p. 130 (German, p. 465).

⁹⁰'Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts', p. 479.

⁹¹'Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts', p. 478.

way in which practical reason appears within the realm of 'necessity'. Practical reason appears as the assertion of the freedom *from* oppressive social relations of unfreedom. This is a significant point, since the discussion of crime in the *System of Ethical Life* has, typically, been understood as the self-interested assertion by the individual of its pre-social 'natural', or *Hobbesian* freedom.⁹² What gets lost on this reading is the possibility of postulating a justificatory link between the social relations which Hegel depicts as master/slave relations, and the acts of destruction figured in the account of crime in the second part of the manuscript.⁹³ When crime is formulated as the realization of Kantian practical reason as 'nullification', however, we are able to establish this link: *crime now appears as the assertion of freedom of the 'slave', through the destruction of those relations of recognition structured through deep inequalities of power*. In order to understand this idea, we need to see that Hegel is reading that specific relationship of recognition definitive of bourgeois economic practices, which constitutes the 'person', not merely as an 'incomplete' shape of socially actualized normative forms of recognition, but rather as a relationship of domination which is constituted socially as a form of misrecognition: the *real* relations of power within bourgeois economic practices are hidden from view under the guise of the equality of the 'legal person'. This gives ground for the thesis that Hegel is conceiving crime as the social component of the critical self-

⁹²See, for example, Andreas Wildt, *Autonomie und Anerkennung*, p. 322. This is also implicit in Siep's statement that the transition from crime to ethical life occurs through a renunciation of a self-identity as 'excluding individuality' (*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 68).

⁹³The necessity of such a justificatory account has been perspicuously articulated by Gillian Rose. She suggests that the forms of crime in the second part of the *System of Ethical Life* can be understood as inversions of the master/slave relation. See her *Hegel Contra Sociology*, p. 68.

reflection on social structures of domination, those structures which constitute forms of misrecognition in the present.

Axel Honneth's account, as we saw, represents crime as the moral claim to the institution of forms of 'qualitative recognition', which are to take their place alongside forms of social recognition founded on need and the respect of 'persons' embodied in law. Yet the way that Hegel actually carries through the dialectic of crime in the *System of Ethical Life* strongly suggests that a more profound transformation of recognition relationships is taking place, rather than simply their qualitative extension. What emerges through the dialectic of crime, in fact, is a standpoint of justice beyond the abstract opposition of normative law and criminality. This is pre-figured by Hegel's reference to his earlier 'causality of fate' doctrine, from 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate'.⁹⁴ The stages of crime which Hegel discusses in the *System of Ethical Life*, beginning with theft and ending in the struggle for honour, represent in concrete, practical form the process of the increasing sublation of the externality of law. This sublation of the transcendent status of law can be understood in terms of the idea that the concrete negation of misrecognition generates an insight into the contingent (i.e. 'nonnatural') status of social structures, and the forms of recognition which they constitute. At the stage of the struggle for honour, normative justice can no longer be figured as a standpoint external to the outcome of the struggle itself,

One cannot talk of the justice of the occasion for such a struggle [i.e. the struggle for honour]; when the struggle as such begins, justice is on both sides, for the equality of danger is posited, and indeed that of the most free [danger], for the [person as a] whole is at issue. The occasion, that is, the determinateness, which is posited as

⁹⁴See *System of Ethical Life*, p. 124 (German, p. 467).

taken up into indifference and as personal, is absolutely [*schlechthin*] nothing in itself, and for itself, precisely because it is only something as personal, and each can as such be taken as posited in innumerable ways; no exclusion nor limit can be posited.⁹⁵

By the stage at which the struggle for honour has become a war between families, each defending the honour of one of its members, the ‘aspect of right’, and of ‘necessary subsumption’ vanishes. War represents that stage at which the ‘difference of the relation of subsumption’ has vanished, and now equality counts as dominant.⁹⁶

What Hegel is articulating in practical form here, is a conception of ethical life as that form of social community which is reflectively conscious of the fact that the ultimate ground of its normative structures and beliefs is intersubjective recognition. Normative ideals, such as the ‘person’ and its concomitant autonomy, are finally revealed as themselves grounded in particular forms of intersubjective practice, rather than as normative constructions which independently ground social practice. This opens up the possibility of conceiving ethical life as marked by a *constitutive* tension between intersubjective recognition, and crime, or transgression. The subsumptive relation between normative law and crime - a unidirectional relation where law always stands in judgement on crime, is supplanted in ethical life by the relation between intersubjective recognition, standing in for the normative commitments of current practice, and crime or transgression as a normative claim for the *creative transformation* of intersubjective recognition. When law is de-reified, that is, dissolved into relationships of recognition, the final ‘court of appeal’

⁹⁵*System of Ethical Life*, p. 138 (German, p. 473).

⁹⁶*System of Ethical Life*, p. 141 (German, p. 477).

for transgression as a claim for collective transformation, is simply the ‘we’, the self-understanding of the ethical community itself. Because the ground of intersubjective recognition, so to speak, is simply intersubjective recognition, justice becomes perpetually open to creative transformation through transgressive action. In effect, this means that the ethical community takes *responsibility* for its normative ideals as contingent (i.e. alterable) creations of its own practice. In ethical life, this fact becomes reflectively articulated, and the practical realization of this taking responsibility is the refusal to subsume transgressive action under law: the transgressor is engaged with as embodying a call to ethical transformation which cannot be negated simply on account of its conflict with what current practice commits us to (or, in Hegel’s terms here, ‘justice is on both sides’). Ethical life, then, does not simply abolish law as such, but law is reconfigured as a contingent, historical instantiation of a common project of intersubjective freedom. In this way, that form of domination intrinsic to the law becomes transformable through collective practice.

I want to suggest, finally, that the conception of ethical life in terms of a reciprocal relation between transgressive action and intersubjective recognition corresponds closely to the themes which Hegel addresses in the dialectic of conscience in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.⁹⁷ Ludwig Siep has argued that the dialectic of conscience provides a model for the reciprocal ‘release’ of the ‘I’ and the ‘We’, the individual and universal structures which, as we saw, Hegel fails to articulate in his explicit theorizing of the state. In the dialectic of conscience, Hegel conceptualizes reconciliation in terms of ‘forgiveness’, through which *both* the ‘acting’ and the ‘judging’ consciousness renounce their unconditionedness, or the absolute validity of their standpoint vis à

⁹⁷My argument here draws on Jay Bernstein’s essay ‘Conscience and Transgression: The Exemplarity of Tragic Action’, in G. K. Browning (ed.), *Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit: A Reappraisal* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1997).

vis the other.⁹⁸ The reciprocal 'release' occurring in forgiveness is therefore the renunciation by both parties of a right to subsume the other under its own normative categories. But this renunciation also requires an acknowledgement of mutual dependence: conscience must accept the responsibility of articulating its claim to self-realization in universal terms, as valuable to the ethical community as a whole, not merely as its own priority over the universal.⁹⁹ The judging consciousness, on the other hand, which is to become universal, socially constituted recognitional structures, must come to recognize that the validity of recognitional structures is dependent upon their capacity to sustain successful forms of self-realization.

The dialectic of conscience, then, can be understood as spelling out the consequences for a conception of ethical life, of Hegel's earlier accounts of crime. 'Conscience' re-figures crime as a form of transgression which embodies a claim for the creative transformation of normative structures. Crime now loses its abstract opposition to law, and becomes conceivable as that form of *particular* self-creation through which a normative claim to *collective* transformation is articulated. Ethical life is then that form of communal life which is reflectively conscious of this constitutive tension between normative structures and the creative claims of transgression, and in which the frozen oppositions of normative justice become transformed into the self-conscious, self-renewing creative project of justice-as-critique.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸*Anerkennung als Prinzip der praktischen Philosophie*, p. 122.

⁹⁹In Hegel's terms, this means that the action is a 'being for other', and hence the truth about the action depends ultimately on how it is recognized by others, not merely on what the self *feels* about it. See *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 456-57.

¹⁰⁰I borrow this distinction between 'normative justice' and 'justice as critique' from Jay Bernstein, 'Conscience and Transgression....', p. 89.

We are now in a position to be able to summarize the significance of this interpretation of Hegel's theory of crime for a reconstructed critical social theory. Hegel's ideology-critical reading of the Kantian critical philosophy leads him, as we saw, to decipher the categories of the critical philosophy as social relations of domination. The opposition of freedom to necessity within Kantian philosophy can therefore be re-interpreted as the expression of the negativity of crime, which, as the appearance form of freedom within the world of 'necessity', can only take the form of a nullification (*Vernichtung*). Hegel's theorizing of crime as the opposition to relations of misrecognition, I want to suggest, displays a deep sensitivity to the workings of ideology and power, which is, for the most part, simply discarded in the works of Siep, Honneth and Wildt. The early Hegel is aware that the struggle for recognition must also comprise a moment of critical self-reflection with regard to the ideological content of current, imposed forms of misrecognition. Thus, the legal relation is theorized in *System of Ethical Life* as a social institution in which a structure of interests is misrecognized as disinterested universality.¹⁰¹ The radicality of this account, vis à vis the work of the recent theorists of recognition, is that it enables Hegel to understand crime as that process which brings about the demystification of the ideological forms which constitute the present order. In the next chapter, I will attempt to draw out the importance of the notion of misrecognition through constructing a theory of *symbolic power*. This will serve to illuminate important problems with Axel Honneth's critical theory of recognition.

¹⁰¹This ideology-critical reading of the legal relation is encompassed neither by Wildt's reading of legal recognition as marked by indifference, nor by Menke's view, in which is appears as a form of 'normalization'. Nor, of course, is it encompassed by Siep's view of legal recognition as exclusively agency-affirming.

Recognition and Symbolic Power

A central deficit of Habermas's critical social theory was seen to lie in its failure to incorporate an understanding of the social world as constituted by conflict among social groups. The dimension of social conflict is shorn of theoretical significance in Habermas's dual-level social theory. Between *purely* purposive-rationally integrated subsystems and a hyper-consensual lifeworld, there is no place for an adequate theoretical account of the process of institutionalization of class- and group-specific interests. Consequently, Habermasian critical theory is incapable of developing a theoretical framework that can formulate and comprehend the oppositional praxis of oppressed social groups. My reconstruction of the 'recognition model' of critical theory in the previous chapter demonstrated that this approach is able to theorize the social world as a site of struggle. Social actors are seen as engaging in struggle in order to gain social recognition of their normative self-understandings. Further, the recognition model successfully 'de-formalizes' Habermas's reading of intersubjectivity as rooted in communicative speech. The normative content of critical social theory, therefore, can now be articulated in terms of capacity of social structures to institutionalize the recognition of important dimensions of human self-worth. Specific social groups themselves are seen as the bearers of these normative claims to recognition. In this chapter, I want to look more

closely, and critically, at Axel Honneth's reformulation of the Hegelian idea of a struggle for recognition, as a basis for a reconstructed critical social theory. According to Honneth, the idea of a struggle for recognition provides a theoretical perspective that is capable of deciphering the changed logics of social struggle in late modern societies. Honneth's claim is that the diverse and fragmentary forms of struggle, occurring along the multiple axes of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and class, can be brought under the theoretical umbrella of a morally motivated struggle for recognition, in which social actors raise normative claims against social arrangements in which they feel 'disrespected'. In reading the struggle for recognition as motivated by feelings of disrespect, Honneth intends to furnish a democratic and intersubjective reinterpretation of Adorno's focus on negative experience as the ground of oppositional praxis. At the same time, this theory promises to surmount the difficulties following from what I described as the diremptions of Habermas's interpretation of moral-practical reason, since normative critique is here seen to be firmly rooted in the day-to-day experiences of injustice of individuals. I will argue, however, that Honneth fails adequately to theorize relations of social power. In particular, Honneth's theory of recognition does not deal with the problems posed by symbolic domination. I will interpret the idea of symbolic domination as a plausible reconstruction of Adorno's account of ideology, according to which the ideological messages of the culture industry are seen to penetrate directly into the individual psyche. The concept of symbolic domination, I will suggest, allows for a reformulation of Adorno's integration thesis, which theorizes the administrative incorporation of oppressed groups, but also manages to avoid the false totalizations that are implicit in Adorno's account. In the first part of this chapter, I will show how Honneth has attempted to situate the critical theory of recognition in relation to the theories of Horkheimer, Adorno, and Habermas. I will then argue that

the failings of Honneth's theory are due to the lack of an adequate conceptualization of the operation of ideology and social power.

Locating Critical Praxis

In an early essay, entitled 'Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas's Critique of Adorno', Honneth affirmed the necessity of Habermas's efforts to delineate a grounded normative framework for critique, as a way out of the allegedly intractable pessimism and negativism which marked Adorno's philosophy, once the Frankfurt School's original interdisciplinary research program had been rendered obsolete. Essentially, this essay constituted a more or less faithful Habermasian reading of the problems of Adorno's critical project, charging that, having reduced rationality to instrumental rationality, Adorno was forced to locate the potential for reconciliation in the 'mimetic knowledge' of the artwork.¹ Because Adorno does not distinguish between the normative terms of social interaction and the logic of the appropriation of nature, he is forced to deploy an 'overtaxing', 'theological' model of reconciliation. Thus it is only through endorsing Habermas's distinction between the *praxis* of intersubjective interaction and the *poiesis* of engagement with objects that one can recover the possibility of 'theoretically guided political practice'.² Yet also, and importantly, Honneth locates a central failing of Adorno's later work in its inability to formulate any idea of, and theoretical basis for, collective struggle. The immediate penetration into consciousness of the

¹ 'Communication and Reconciliation: Habermas's Critique of Adorno', p. 50. Honneth repeats this charge in *Critique of Power*, p. 68.

² 'Communication and Reconciliation....', p. 58.

ideological products of the culture industry, together with the (alleged) absolute separation between the mimetic knowledge of the artwork and the instrumental rationality prevalent in society, meant that 'the experience of oppression', for Adorno, 'can be formulated only on an individual basis'.³ Adorno no longer expects 'the contradictions of capitalist accumulation' to 'generate class resistance'.⁴ This gives us an insight into the central goal of Honneth's critical project vis à vis Adorno's critical theory. Honneth wants to recover a social-cultural location for the type of critical-negative experience of society that Adorno saw as borne by the isolated and specialist discourses of philosophy and art. Adorno's belief in the smooth functioning of the production of ideological conformity led him to look for placeholders of negative experience in professionalized realms of culture. Art and philosophy are given the task of articulating social antagonisms, and the implicit workings of aesthetic and philosophical truth claims allows that articulation to generate a form of negative experience of the social world. The sole possible social location for negative experience on Adorno's account, as we saw, is in fleeting and private forms of spontaneity which exceed functional mechanisms. Honneth's claim, as we shall see, is that it becomes possible to locate a generalizable, and normatively grounded form of critical-negative experience within the day-to-day social world by focussing on the experiences of social agents on the occasions of injury to their deeply held normative expectations.

It is the combination of a commitment to, firstly, a form of Habermas's distinction between the sphere of normative interaction and the sphere of production, together with, secondly, the perceived need to link the perspective of normative critique with forms of opposition and resistance

³'Communication and Reconciliation....', p. 47.

⁴'Communication and Reconciliation....', p. 56.

emerging *within* social reality itself, which has defined the direction of Honneth's project. However, the commitment to the first of these ideas meant accepting Habermas's break with historical materialism, and consequently rendered problematic the second, since the actors within social reality who might be charged with the task of transforming the established order could no longer be identified through determining their position within the economic structure. Struggle was no longer reducible to *class struggle*. Rather than following Habermas's tendency to bracket the question of critical theory's location within social reality altogether, Honneth has attempted to develop a response to this question in tune with a commitment to the pluralization of the political left, hence breaking the exclusive identification of domination with *economic* domination.

The solution to this problem emerges with an account of the cultural sphere as the location of 'practical-critical activity',⁵ which Honneth begins to develop in *Critique of Power*. Arguing against Horkheimer's early efforts to develop critical theory within the framework of a Marxist philosophy of history, Honneth seeks to uncover a realm of quasi-autonomous cultural activity which, he argues, is suppressed by the identification of the goals of critical activity with the ends of the production process. Such a conception of cultural activity, Honneth argues, would involve the 'cooperative testing and problematizing of interpretations worked out within the group'.⁶ The insight into the injustice of the economic structure *within* the cultural horizon of oppressed groups might then be formulated as an insight which forces group members to 'correct and expand the traditional horizon of interpretation in the face of unmasked reality'. Social struggle might then be theorized

⁵This term originates in Thesis One of Marx's 'Theses on Feuerbach', in *Die Frühschriften*, p. 339.

⁶*Critique of Power*, p. 29.

as the attempt by social groups 'to realize within the normative structures of social life the norms of action acquired in the repeated experience of suffering injustice'.⁷ This potentially critical force of cultural praxis, however, is ruled out by Horkheimer's exclusive stress on the *socializing* function of the cultural sphere - its operation as a superstructure that reflects 'the behavioural constraints of the economic system back upon the individual psyche'.⁸ Consequently, Horkheimer is forced to fall back on a determinist philosophy of history in which the potential for transformative praxis emerges from objective contradictions rooted within the economic structure.

Honneth's reading of Horkheimer and Adorno's 'negativism' as reaching its inevitable conclusion in the abandonment of an emancipatory perspective in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, is clearly indebted to Habermas's interpretation, according to which the failure of Horkheimer and Adorno to ground an emancipatory perspective is ascribable to their failure to recognize the autonomy of the sphere of communicative action. Honneth praises Habermas's theorizing of the sphere of communication for providing critical theory with a normative standard, which allows for the construction of a critical perspective on social structures.⁹ However, Honneth's adherence to Habermas's theory is tempered by a rejection of Habermas's severance of communicative understanding from a relation to the forms of critical activity rooted within social praxis. Honneth believes that Habermas's abstract reading of communicative understanding produces a false opposition between norm-free power and power-free communication - the sphere of conflict and

⁷*Critique of Power*, p. 29.

⁸*Critique of Power*, p. 27. This idea of culture is particularly prominent in Horkheimer's essay 'Authority and the Family' (in *Critical Theory*, pp. 47-128).

⁹'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 259.

struggle, and the sphere of discourse.¹⁰ In effect, the everyday social world is hyper-consensualized by Habermas's reading of the reproduction of the lifeworld, as occurring through symbolically mediated understanding. Thus Habermas cannot comprehend struggle and conflict as constitutive of everyday social relations. On the other hand, by locating the potential for normative critique in the intuitive experiences of injustice of social actors, Honneth is able to avoid the problems in Adorno's portrayal of society as a perfectly functioning integration mechanism that, almost effortlessly, brings about the identification of individuals with systemic needs. The possibility of insight into domination through the interpretation of everyday experiences of injustice is therefore the central element in Honneth's attempt to establish a new basis for critical theory. With this idea, Honneth intends to overcome the errors stemming from Adorno's social-theoretical pessimism, and to avoid the problems inherent in Habermas's purely formal delineation of the normative standpoint, where the ground of normative claims is seen to lie in linguistic structures rather than in individual experience. In his *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth attempts to develop this idea through a theory of *morally motivated* struggle. Before looking at this in greater detail, I shall examine the specifics of Honneth's critique of Habermas.

From Communication to Recognition

In an earlier essay, 'Diskursethik und implizites Gerechtigkeitskonzept', Honneth argues that

¹⁰Béla Kerékgyártó, 'Auf dem Weg zu einem formalen Konzept der Sittlichkeit? Die Reinterpretation der Hegelschen Anerkennungstheorie bei Axel Honneth', *Hegel-Jahrbuch* (1996) 203-207, p. 203. In *Critique of Power*, Honneth develops this idea through a comparison between Habermas and Foucault.

Habermasian discourse ethics must be extended to incorporate a conception of material justice. The basis of this critique is the fact that discourse ethics relies upon a 'dialogue which is to be actually carried out', and as a result, it cannot be indifferent to the conditions which make that dialogue possible.¹¹ What is at stake here, Honneth argues, is the impossibility of interpreting ethics as a procedure of discursive will formation while, at the same time, failing to grant moral worth to the social-structural relations which represent the necessary *social conditions* for the putting into effect (*Inkraftsetzung*) of those forms of will formation.¹² Among these conditions are social structures of intersubjective recognition, through which individuals gain a degree of autonomy permitting them freely to take a position on morally disputed norms. Discourse ethics also presupposes a freedom from all forms of institutional and cultural coercion, and an equal access to social information and cultural traditions of education (*Bildungstraditionen*), such that individuals would possess equal means to set forth their convictions in argument in a convincing manner.¹³

Honneth has also been critical of Habermas's reduction of the sphere of work to instrumental action, with regard to the difficulty it generates for forming a critical perspective on the organization of the work process itself.¹⁴ Since he distinguished the instrumental action characteristic of

¹¹'Diskursethik und implizites Gerechtigkeitskonzept', in *Moralität und Sittlichkeit*, W. Kühnmann, (ed.), (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), p. 189.

¹²'Diskursethik und implizites Gerechtigkeitskonzept', p. 187.

¹³'Diskursethik und implizites Gerechtigkeitskonzept', p. 191

¹⁴Other theorists have also emphasised this problem in Habermas's work. See, in particular, Stanley Aronowitz, *The Crisis in Historical Materialism*, pp. 58-68; Hans-Ernst Schiller, 'Habermas und die Kritische Theorie', in G. Bolte, (ed.), *Unkritische Theorie: Gegen Habermas* (Lüneburg: zu Klampen, 1989); Ben Agger, *The Discourse of Domination* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1992), chapter 10.

productive activity from the communicative action of social *praxis* in his early essay on Hegel's Jena social philosophy,¹⁵ Habermas has had very little to say about the potential of different arrangements and structurings of the work process to promote or suffocate autonomy, or to render work meaningful or monotonous. In his essay 'Work and Instrumental Action', Honneth argues that cutting the Marxian link between social emancipation and the consciousness-forming potential of social labour does not imply the necessity of doing away with a 'critical concept of work' altogether. Rather, we can make an internal differentiation *within* instrumental action according to whether the work process enables independent activity, initiative, and a minimal degree of external control.¹⁶ It is significant that such a distinction would allow for the theorizing of the potential for *moral conflict* within the work process itself. This critique reflects the extent of the influence of the researches of Edward Thompson and Barrington Moore on Honneth's ideas, both of whom, through the notion of 'moral economy' and the postulation of an implicit 'social contract' respectively, furnished the means for an understanding of the struggle between capital and labour as a form of *moral struggle*.¹⁷ More recently, Honneth has argued that the importance of rendering the labour process accessible to moral categories stems from the fundamental connection between work and 'self-esteem'.¹⁸ Since self-identity is integrally bound to the way the significance of one's labour is

¹⁵Reprinted in *Theory and Practice*, trans. J. Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973).

¹⁶'Work and Instrumental Action', trans. M. G. Ash, *New German Critique* 26 (1982) 31-54, pp. 52-3.

¹⁷Edward Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York: Vintage, 1966); Barrington Moore, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (White Plains, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1978). In the essay in question, however, Honneth draws more directly on the findings of industrial sociology.

¹⁸'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 266.

constituted socially, it is necessary that the labour process be organized in such a way that it permits the generation and sustaining of a form of self-respect.¹⁹

Perhaps the most important aspect of Honneth's critique of Habermas has been the charge that Habermas's discourse ethics fails to gain access to the moral claims of underprivileged groups. In his essay 'Moral Consciousness and Class Domination', Honneth argues that Habermas's formulation of moral validity in terms of discursive agreement overlooks class-specific differences in the expression of normative claims. The moral ideals of oppressed groups, Honneth claims, take the form of a 'consciousness of wrong', as a 'highly sensitive sensorium for injuries of moral claims presumed to be just'.²⁰ Since the everyday experience of oppressed groups does not produce the necessity of normative abstraction, the moral intuitions of these groups remain tied to their emotional engagement in particular situations, in a way which resists the systematization of their moral experiences in formal/abstract norms of action.²¹ Habermas's discourse ethics, in seeking to provide a forum for the new found sensitivity of privileged social groups towards material deprivation, unwittingly *de-moralizes* the normative claims of the oppressed by identifying moral claims with universal validity claims raised in public discourse - an arena and a form of expression

¹⁹In effect, this might be understood as a 'middle way' between Marcuse's discernment of the liberatory potential of work through its erotization, and Habermas's exclusion of work from the sphere of emancipatory praxis altogether. Although agreeing with Habermas that Marcuse's idea of the transformation of work into 'play' is untenable, Honneth wants work to be open to normative critique. On Marcuse's view of work, see Uri Zilbersheid, *Die Marxsche Idee der Aufhebung der Arbeit und ihre Rezeption bei Fromm und Marcuse* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1986). Also, see Ben Agger, *The Discourse of Domination*, chapters 10 and 11.

²⁰'Moralbewußtsein und soziale Klassenherrschaft', in *Die zerrissene Welt des Sozialen: Sozialphilosophische Aufsätze*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 187.

²¹'Moralbewußtsein und soziale Klassenherrschaft', p. 188.

which is resisted by the moral intuitions of the oppressed. This gives rise to a subsequent difficulty: through equating the normative potential of social interaction with the 'linguistic conditions of reaching understanding free from domination', Honneth argues, Habermasian critical theory becomes unable to locate a standpoint *within* social reality which corresponds to the normative point of view of the theorist.²² For the idea of the restriction of intuitively mastered rules of language is too far removed from how subjects understand and experience injuries to their moral intuitions to be able to guide, theoretically, experiences of injustice felt by lifeworld actors. Honneth suggests that the everyday experience of injustice should be reconstructed theoretically, *not* as the violation of communicative rules, but as the 'violation of identity claims acquired in socialization'.²³ In this way, the normative content of the idea of communicative action can be transferred to the idea of social recognition, and in consequence, critical theory becomes capable of giving expression to the everyday experience of injustice. By grounding normative critique in everyday forms of negative experience, Honneth is able to avoid the difficulties stemming from Habermas's formal-procedural interpretation of moral-practical reason. We saw previously that Habermas is unable to theorize the possibility of communicative rules linking up with the concrete motivations of lifeworld actors, other than in positivist-sociological terms. Habermas, as I argued previously, has been forced to *instrumentalize* the relation between communicative rules and empirical motivation by conceiving social and institutional structures as a functional complement to normative validity, ensuring the

²²'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 261.

²³'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 261.

compatibility between the moral point of view and structures of motivation by technocratic means.²⁴

Now we can see more clearly how Honneth has endeavoured to maintain critical theory's link with a viewpoint within social reality, whilst accepting the consequence of Habermas's distinction between the independent logics of communicative and productive activity that this critical viewpoint can no longer be read off from the location of actors within the production process. The 'pretheoretical resource' (*vorwissenschaftliche Instanz*) of critical theory is now to be found in the socially transformative potential of experiences of disrespect which arise when culturally sustained understandings and interpretations of justice are violated.

Contemporary Theories of Recognition

Before we turn to Honneth's development of this idea in his *Struggle for Recognition*, it will be helpful to situate Honneth's interpretation of recognition in relation to the use of this concept by other social theorists. A number of social theorists have employed the idea of a struggle for recognition in order to explicate the types of normative claims that are raised in forms of conflict that are primarily culturally based. Thus the concept of recognition has come to be understood as an interpretation of what might be called cultural justice. Typically, the notion of cultural justice is seen as integrally related to those forms of conflict where the understanding of a social-cultural identity (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity) is at stake. The central presupposition of the notion of

²⁴See Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, trans. C. Lenhardt and S. Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 207. This technocratic solution has been justly criticized by Honneth. See his 'The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge of Postmodernism', trans. J. Farrell, in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 305.

cultural justice is that specific types of harm, distinct from those associated with economic domination, are suffered by individuals when the social order reflects back to them a negative conception of their cultural identity. Nancy Fraser has defended the idea that the conflicts centred around cultural identity are irreducible to those which concern economic justice. In the former, Fraser argues, 'group identity supplants class interest as the chief medium of political mobilization. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle'.²⁵ Conflicts centred around cultural identity, therefore, call for the development of a critical theory of recognition which can provide a normative underpinning to the oppositional praxis of culturally based groups. Whereas conflicts concerning socioeconomic injustice are focussed on the political-economic structure, the site of struggles concerning identity is the *symbolic order*. The injustices suffered in the latter case, therefore, must be related to 'reigning social patterns of interpretation and evaluation'.²⁶ According to Fraser, the purpose of oppositional praxis is here to undermine the interpretations and significations which enforce a demeaning conception of the cultural identity of the group in question. One feature that is missing from Fraser's account, however, but which has been picked up on by other theorists, is that there is an intrinsic good to group recognition which is not reducible to its instrumental goal in combatting forms of symbolically constituted inequality. This can be seen in Charles Taylor's account, which stresses a type of claim to recognition that is not focussed as a response to a particular instance of symbolic

²⁵Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the "Postsocialist" Condition* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 11. Fraser does, however, state that 'in practice', economic injustice and cultural injustice are 'intertwined' (p. 15).

²⁶*Justice Interruptus*, p. 18.

discrimination.²⁷ Taylor argues that the increasing importance of the politics of recognition in modern democratic societies is related to the decline of fixed social identities. Because it can no longer be based on social categories that are taken for granted, the recognition of a social-cultural identity becomes something that is claimed through authentic self-presentation.²⁸ Thus there can be a good associated with the public affirmation and the institutionalized recognition of a social group, even though the claim of the group in question may not be a response to a specific form of symbolic injustice. This tends to be the case with nationalist groupings, for instance, insofar as the goal can be said to lie in the recognition of the *distinctness* of the group itself.²⁹ Here, the struggle for recognition is directed towards an affirmation of difference, rather than constituting a response to specific forms of symbolically based oppression. Alberto Melucci has also stressed that the centrality of the concept of recognition in contemporary collective struggles must be related to the changed conditions of identity formation in late modern societies. Identity has increasingly come to be seen as something that is socially produced, as the product of conscious action and the outcome of self-reflection, rather than a set of given or inherited characteristics. However, the fact that identity is formed within social interaction, through reciprocal recognition between ourselves and others, means that there is an 'unresolved and unresolvable tension' between the definition we

²⁷A comparison of the theories of Taylor and Fraser can be found in Lawrence Blum, 'Recognition, Value and Equality: A Critique of Charles Taylor's and Nancy Fraser's Accounts of Multiculturalism', *Constellations* 5 (1998) 51-68. See also the 'Comment on Lawrence Blum' in the same issue by James Ingram (pp. 69-73).

²⁸Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992, pp. 34-5.

²⁹See Taylor's discussion of the case of Quebec, in *Multiculturalism and the "Politics of Recognition"*, pp. 51ff.

give of ourselves and the recognition accorded to us by others.³⁰ Melucci also stresses a further goal of struggle, beyond the overturning of symbolic hierarchy and the public affirmation of distinctness. This is that, in the process of collective struggle, subjects are able to 'be recognized and recognize themselves as subjects of their own action'. The solidarity that is reinforced through collective action itself guarantees and secures the self-identity of subjects as self-determining agents. Contemporary collective conflicts, Melucci argues,

increasingly express a public concern for recognition, making manifest a group-based social struggle to secure recognition of identity at the societal level: they transfer into the public arena a definition of needs and identity which is originally built in everyday life experiences and networks. In so doing, they transform identity issues into visible political stakes and they bring into the field of decision-making and rights the tension . . . between auto-identification and hetero-identification (recognition).³¹

Rather than focussing on the opposition to the self-understandings imposed by dominant social groups, Melucci's analysis conceives the autonomous creation of cultural meaning as a central purpose of the struggle for recognition. This is an aspect that is missing from Honneth's account. As I shall attempt to show below, however, this formulation enables us to gain critical access to one of the central forms of symbolic domination.

Unlike Fraser, on the other hand, Honneth does not see struggles for redistribution as

³⁰Alberto Melucci, *The Playing Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 32.

³¹*The Playing Self*, p. 33.

logically distinct from struggles for recognition. Struggles focussed on the political-economic structure are themselves triggered by experiences of damaged recognition. Thus the Marxian critique of capitalist class society can be reformulated as the claim that 'under the economic conditions of capitalism the process of mutual recognition among human beings is interrupted because one social group is deprived of precisely those preconditions necessary to obtain respect'.³² For Honneth, then, it is the *common moral basis* of the claims raised in culturally based and socioeconomically based struggles - their being directed towards a realization of the social conditions of self-respect - that allows both types of struggle to be subsumed under the idea of a struggle for recognition. This places Honneth's account closer to that of Taylor, where the social recognition of selves is seen as an intrinsic good, as integral to personal self-realization, rather than merely a means for overturning particular symbolic injuries.³³ The problem with this analysis, however, is that it leads Honneth to downplay the issues concerning the possible infiltration of dominant cultural interpretations into processes of identity formation. Fraser's analysis, on the other hand, is well equipped to deal with this issue, as it stresses the need for the active transformation of underlying cultural-valuational structures. With this issue, we have uncovered the second of the main dimensions of symbolic domination. Both of these forms of symbolic domination, identified by Melucci and Fraser, pose problems for Honneth's account. Before turning to this question, I will examine the specifics of Honneth's analysis.

³²Axel Honneth, 'Domination and Moral Struggle', in *The Fragmented World of the Social*, p. 13.

³³This commonality between Honneth and Taylor is due to the fact that both base their account on a Hegelian theory of the intersubjective conditions of selfhood.

Recognition and Ethical Life

In *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth has sought to reconstruct critical theory in a way which renders it more concrete, and attuned to the moral claims of oppressed social groups, by turning to philosophical anthropology, unlike Habermas's attempt to ground critical theory in a theory of language.³⁴ By this means, Honneth hopes to substantivize the normative presuppositions of communicative action by reconfiguring those presuppositions as *social* conditions necessary for a positive relation to self. The basic idea behind this is that persons suffer injuries (conceived as a form of disrespect) to their self-understandings when positive forms of social confirmation of the dimensions of individual identity are lacking.³⁵ Honneth is able to employ this thesis within the context of a critical social theory by conjoining Hegel's account of struggle with a democratic-intersubjective form of Adorno's notion of negative experience. Critical-negative insight into structures of domination is accessible to oppressed social groups in the form of moral experiences that are triggered by the 'violation of intuitive notions of justice'. These notions of justice, in turn, are 'constituted by expectations connected to respect for one's own dignity, honor, or integrity'.³⁶ The moral experiences that are revealed in this way are then articulated in cultural practices of interpretation, which shows them to be intersubjectively shared. Feelings of disrespect can therefore function as a 'pretheoretical fact', on the basis of which 'a critique of the relations of recognition

³⁴This is stated explicitly in 'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 263.

³⁵Honneth draws out the social-psychological dimensions of this thesis in his 'Anerkennung und moralische Verpflichtung', *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung* 51 (1997) 25-41.

³⁶'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 262.

can identify its own theoretical perspective in social reality'.³⁷ By this means, Honneth believes, critical theory can recover the possibility of a type of intramundane transcendence, since that form of experience which is able to reveal the negative and antagonistic nature of the social world need no longer be seen as solely accessible through the mode of critique of specialized cultural discourses (art and philosophy). Rather, negative experience can now be located in the day-to-day experiences of injustice of oppressed social groups.

After filtering the Hegelian account of struggle through the social psychology of George Herbert Mead which, Honneth claims, allows for the draining of the residue of idealism from Hegel's conception, Honneth turns to focus on a reconstruction of the idea of a struggle for recognition through a critique of sociological theories of conflict and philosophical conceptions of the moral point of view.³⁸ The sociological critique concerns the reliance upon a utilitarian model of conflict (the 'interests model') which, following Talcott Parsons, Honneth traces back to Hobbes.³⁹ It is also said to be apparent in Marx's transition to a 'reductionist', 'quasi-utilitarian' view in his systematic writings.⁴⁰ Such theories are capable of conceiving emancipation solely in *distributive* terms, that is, as a question of economic equality and inequality alone.⁴¹ Social theory's

³⁷'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 263.

³⁸In *Struggle for Recognition*, chapters 8 and 9.

³⁹*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 161.

⁴⁰*Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 147-9.

⁴¹See the discussion in J. Alexander and M. Pia Lara, 'Honneth's New Critical Theory of Recognition', *New Left Review* 220 (1996) 126-36.

fixation on interests, Honneth claims, 'has so thoroughly obscured our view of the societal significance of moral feelings that today recognition-theoretic models of conflict have the duty not only to extend but possibly to correct [the interests model]'.⁴² What characterizes the 'recognition-theoretic' model is the claim that motives for social resistance are not reducible to physical needs, but are integrally related to moral feelings of indignation and disrespect, and are formed 'in the context of moral experiences stemming from the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition'.⁴³ These expectations 'are internally linked to conditions for the formation of personal identity'.⁴⁴ Among those who have helped to uncover this 'moral grammar' of social conflict, Honneth claims, are Edward Thompson and Barrington Moore, who have shown that motivations for engaging in resistance cannot be related solely to questions concerning levels of economic provision, but must be interpreted in terms of the 'moral expectations' which are implicit in a particular social situation.⁴⁵ Honneth argues that by focussing on the feelings of disrespect which arise through the violation of claims to recognition, the normative point of view articulated by theory can draw upon a critical process occurring within society which, so to speak, already has morally motivated claims built into it.

In the final section of *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth offers a 'theoretical justification'

⁴²*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 166. The qualifier 'possibly' is here significant. As we shall see, Honneth has yet to formulate a coherent account of the relation between an interests model of conflict and a 'recognition-theoretic' model.

⁴³*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 163.

⁴⁴*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 163.

⁴⁵*Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 166-7.

for the 'normative point of view' which, he claims, is implicit in the moral claims raised in forms of social struggle.⁴⁶ The goal is to render explicit the moral logic implicit in forms of social conflict, which are to be understood as part of a process of moral development. This, the philosophical component of Honneth's analysis, attempts (all too briefly) a synthesis of the Kantian and Hegelian traditions of political thought through the delineation of what Honneth calls a 'formal' conception of ethical life. The key to this is the idea of social-structural conditions of individual self-realization, through which the universalism of Kantian ethics is rendered substantial in terms of the social and institutional conditions for self-worth, or self-respect, which constitute a prerequisite of individual self-realization.⁴⁷ Honneth grounds this analysis in the Hegelian idea of the intersubjective structure of personal identity. He takes this to imply the dependence of a positive relation to self on the ways in which one finds one's identity confirmed in different forms of recognition constituted through lifeworld structures. The three forms of recognition which, according to Honneth, serve as preconditions of self-realization are love, rights, and solidarity, to which correspond three forms of positive self-relation: self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. Whereas love concerns recognition as a needy being, rights are secured through legally guaranteed autonomy, and solidarity is sustained through an encompassing value horizon, in terms of which individuals are valued for their particular abilities and traits.⁴⁸ Fundamental social antagonisms can therefore be understood as structures of damaged recognition. On the basis of this argument, Honneth sets as a task for social

⁴⁶*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 171.

⁴⁷*Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 172-3.

⁴⁸*Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 176-8.

theory the identification of pathologies of recognition.⁴⁹

Resistance and Integration

We have seen how, by arguing that cultural resistance has a normative logic, Honneth attempts to mediate Habermas's Kantianism with a reading of collective struggle located at the cultural level, such that the formal normative structure of Habermas's communication theory can be re-inscribed, via the focus on the day-to-day negative experience accessible in feelings of disrespect, as a form of inner-social transcendence. This perspective also allows Honneth to make a decisive break with the 'theory of manipulation' central to Adorno's simplistic reading of the effectiveness of the culture industry in generating the unreflective conformity of underprivileged groups. Adorno, as Honneth rightly points out, overlooks the significant point that ideological messages propagated by the culture industry are always mediated through the subcultural horizon of interpretation, which offsets any direct and automatic reproduction of ideological messages in the personality structures of the individual.⁵⁰ By overlooking the cultural level, Adorno was led to conceive the individual as a 'passive victim' of directed techniques of domination.

⁴⁹See his introduction to *Pathologien des Sozialen: Die Aufgaben der Sozialphilosophie*, A. Honneth (ed.), (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1994).

⁵⁰See *Critique of Power*, chapter 3. It is evident that the capacity of ideology to reach immediately into the instinctual structure of individuals is also presupposed in Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964). Hence, 'false needs' are described as a form of 'introjection' producing the 'immediate identification' of the individual with society (p. 10).

The worth of Honneth's analysis as a critique of the simplistic model of the stifling of resistance in the work of 'first generation' theorists is unquestionable, and chimes with the insights of social reproduction theorists into the autonomous logic of the cultural. Exemplary among the latter works is Paul Willis's landmark ethnographic study, *Learning to Labour*,⁵¹ which demonstrates convincingly that the structural forces bearing upon individuals at the lower end of the class structure are always and necessarily mediated through the meanings and attitudes sustained through cultural practices, which are *potentially* capable of sustaining forms of contestation and resistance. Willis calls this process 'cultural production'.⁵² Thus the consent of individuals to live under conditions of structurally induced oppression can only be understood through an account of *how* and *why* they come to accept their situation in terms of the meanings and interpretations sustained at the cultural level.

To this point, then, Honneth's critique of Adorno and other 'first generation' theorists would appear to be legitimate. But it is not hard to see that, in practice, the relation between negative experience, which discloses the social world as riven with domination, and practices of cultural interpretation, which synthesize this experience in a normative framework making possible social resistance, cannot be so simple as Honneth's analysis appears to imply. The claim that the day-to-day experience of domination is always mediated through group-specific interpretations leaves open the question of the conditions under which 'cultural production' would be capable of constructing

⁵¹Westmead: Saxon House, 1977.

⁵²See *Learning to Labour*, chapter 8.

interpretations which might serve as the basis for social resistance.⁵³ The question at issue here is that, if cultural practices of interpretation *form* and *inform* negative experience, determining in the process how the latter is to be understood and what factors are responsible for causing it, then, under certain conditions, cultural interpretation may *actively suppress* the possibility that negative experience could function as the basis of the normative critique of social structures, by deflecting a true understanding of its origins and causes. One form in which this problem arises concerns the question of the availability *tout court* of cultural interpretations that can direct negative experience towards a normative critique of structures of domination. Stephen Marglin has argued, for instance, that the lack of worker resistance to the capitalist project of gaining control over the work process must be seen as related to a *common cultural conception* of the instrumental status of work, expressed in both Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions. Workers lacked the cultural means necessary to furnish a normative definition of a type of work incorporating worker control, as embodied in the knowledge system of work conceived as *techne*, leaving the way open for the capitalist project of control effectuated through the scientization of the work process. Marglin argues that

classes do not act in history until they are armed by culture, as culture normally finds

⁵³Paul Willis's claim was that the anti-school culture of working class boys itself pushes them towards compliance with structures of domination through its valorizing of patriarchy and its devaluing of mental labour as 'feminine'. Angela McRobbie argued that the same complicity of culture with social control can be seen in the construction of an 'ideology of romance' among working class girls, which valorizes marriage, family life, and beauty. See her 'Working Class Girls and the Culture of Femininity', in Women Studies Group (ed.), *Women Take Issue*, (London: Hutchinson, 1978).

expression in setting the terms of class conflict. Resistance to oppression, like oppression itself, is invariably the union of class interest with cultural justification. The accommodation of the working class to capitalist domination can only be comprehended when we understand the limits of the cultural basis for working-class resistance.⁵⁴

A second problem becomes apparent in the *deflecting operation* of cultural practices of interpretation. In this case, cultural interpretations, rather than directing experiences of disrespect towards a normative critique of social structures of domination, assimilate and interpret these experiences through an *outright rejection* of the dominant value system. A good example of this is the complex cultural construct that Philippe Bourgois has termed 'inner-city street culture'.⁵⁵ Definitive of 'street culture', which is characteristically a construct of racial/ethnic minorities under conditions of intense economic exclusion and ubiquitous racism, is adherence to a set of rebellious practices which often function by *inverting* the dominant, white middle-class value system in a way which permits the pain and humiliation of social exclusion to be lived, at least in the short term, as a form of culturally-defined superiority.⁵⁶ An effect of this inversion operation of cultural practice

⁵⁴Stephen Marglin, 'Losing Touch: The Cultural Conditions of Worker Accommodation and Resistance', in F. A. Marglin and S. A. Marglin (eds.), *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Resistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 225. In the final part of this essay, Marglin attempts to substantiate this thesis through a comparison of the Western cultural understanding of work with that of Indian handloom weavers.

⁵⁵In his *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 8.

⁵⁶Bourgois's study traces the contours of a form of 'street-defined dignity' developed in conditions of immense structural oppression tinged with racism among young Puerto Ricans in

is to prevent the experience of disrespect from functioning as a spur to morally motivated resistance.

Honneth, in fact, is well aware of the specific mechanisms of this process of the deflection of opposition, in which cultural reinterpretations offset resistance by redefining 'respect'. He suggests, in response to this problem, that we focus on how 'a moral culture could be so constituted as to give those affected, disrespected and ostracized, the individual strength to articulate their experiences in the democratic public sphere, rather than living them out in the countercultures of violence'.⁵⁷ This statement of the problem, I want to suggest, is symptomatic of a fundamental weakness in Honneth's social-theoretical framework. In framing the issue in this way, Honneth is implicitly affirming Habermas's thesis that the primary form of social integration is via moral consensus. In affirming this claim, Honneth is at the same time committed to the idea that the absence of integration via moral consensus is intelligible solely as a structure of social *disintegration*.⁵⁸ I now want to argue that it is due to his implicit acceptance of this Habermasian

East Harlem. The same logic, whereby social exclusion plus racism produces a cultural form centred upon an outright rejection of dominant, white middle-class norms is analysed in Herman Tertilt's study of a young Turkish gang in Frankfurt am Main, Germany (*Turkish Power Boys* [Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996]). These studies demonstrate convincingly how cultural forms can block the move from oppression to resistance by *redefining* self-respect through a rejection *tout court* of the norms of the wider society and its dominant groups.

⁵⁷'The Social Dynamics of Disrespect', p. 269.

⁵⁸In the following chapter, I will argue that critical theory must focus on the critique of *both* moral disintegration *and* structures of integration implicated in the reproduction of social relations of domination. My argument against Honneth here is that his perspective can only theorize the former. Honneth's empirically oriented work on contemporary social theory is in fact entitled 'Disintegration' (*Desintegration: Bruchstücke einer soziologischen Zeitdiagnose* [Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1994]). Klaus Roth argues that Honneth is following Habermas in focussing on disintegration as the central form of social pathology, in his 'Neue Entwicklungen der Kritischen Theorie', *Leviathan* 22 (1994) 422-455, pp. 442-3.

thesis that Honneth fails adequately to theorize the operations of social power. This deficit can be traced back to the fact that both Habermas and Honneth rely heavily on Mead's symbolic interactionist account of the social world. Whilst Mead's account does allow for a theory of the intersubjective formation of the self, it tends to see social structures rather one-sidedly, as exclusively agency-enabling. From this perspective, it becomes difficult to account for the constraining nature of social structures. Mead's theory cannot comprehend the generalized Other as a construction of dominant interests. In order to rectify this deficit, we need to theorize the role of social power as a mechanism of social integration. One of the central modes in which social power operates, I want to suggest, is by 'subsuming' forms of oppositional praxis by ensuring the adoption by oppressed individuals and groups of identities and representations of needs that effectively offset the radical questioning of dominant social interests. As opposed to the value-inversions of oppositional subcultures, this problem might be seen as the 'neutralizing assimilation' of forms of oppositional activity. This idea has recently been developed in critiques of 'identity politics'. It has been argued that identity politics represents a particular form of the construction, articulation, and politicization of cultural identity, the effect of which is to deflect culturally based resistance from a critique of capitalist economic structures and bourgeois cultural values. Wendy Brown has suggested that the transformation of cultural opposition into identity politics 'recasts politicized identity's substantive (and often deconstructive) cultural claims and critiques as generic claims of particularism endemic to universalist political culture'.⁵⁹ Other theorists have seen identity

⁵⁹Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 59. For a similar perspective, see Judith Butler, 'Merely

politics as a de-politicized form of assertion of cultural identity that is generated by the commodification of culture in modern mass consumerism. Identity politics, it is argued, represents cultural identity as a 'packaged' lifestyle, hence neutralizing cultural opposition to commodifying forces. Robert Dunn asserts that '[t]he central tendency of commodification is to convert political opposition into alternative lifestyle, rendering threats to the dominant system of consumption relatively harmless by turning potential subversion into new consumer products'.⁶⁰

From the perspective of a focus on social power, Honneth's account places too much faith in the capacity of the 'moral doctrines and ideas' of the wider society to sustain a platform for effective resistance.⁶¹ Further, Honneth's portrayal of how 'hurt feelings' become the basis for collective resistance, through being articulated in an 'intersubjective framework of interpretation' which shows them to be 'typical for an entire group',⁶² relies upon an idealized notion of cultural autonomy, and consequently entirely overlooks how the pressure of liberal ideology, which continually reinforces the tendency of individuals to view their situation in *individualistic* terms, is in many cases precisely what prevents this type of oppositional group formation from taking

Cultural', *New Left Review* 227 (1998) 33-44.

⁶⁰Robert Dunn, *Identity Crises: A Social Critique of Postmodernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), p. 152.

⁶¹*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 164. Also, p. 162: 'The forms of recognition associated with rights and social esteem ... represent a moral context for societal conflict, if only because they rely on *socially generalized criteria* in order to function' (my italics).

⁶²*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 163.

place.⁶³ This is likely to be especially prevalent where the oppression in question concerns, or indirectly intersects with, class. Social reproduction theorists have demonstrated that one function of the construction of the autonomous subject in dominant liberal discourse is to divert attention from domination rooted in the economic structure, and to portray the distribution and positioning of individuals within this structure as the outcome of *individual* effort, thus reinforcing the notion that individuals *as individuals* are responsible for a failure to achieve, and blocking their awareness of the structures which dominate them as a group.⁶⁴

In taking over the Habermasian thesis concerning integration, Honneth becomes incapable of theorizing the workings of *integration through domination*. It was exactly this idea, however, which was given prominence in Adorno's social theory, through an analysis of the ideological

⁶³Lois Weis stresses the tendency to stick with individualistic/private solutions rather than collective action and collective struggle in her account of the emerging feminist identity of working class girls. The girls in Weis's study, although developing an identity which seemingly points towards the need for collective resistance, '*are not conscious of their shared political sexual class identity even though the glimmerings of such consciousness are there*'. Weis stresses that it is only through seeing their problems as shared and as needing collective action that these girls could truly press for substantive change. See Lois Weis, *Working Class Without Work: High School Students in a De-industrializing Economy*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 206.

⁶⁴Jay MacLeod, in his study of two groups of working class youths in the USA, provides an excellent account of how the 'achievement ideology', and the rhetoric of equality of opportunity, effectively blocks collective insight into the constraining structural forces bearing upon working class youths as a group and produces instead a feeling of *personal* responsibility. Arguing against Paul Willis's optimism about the possibility of 'penetrations' of liberal ideology, MacLeod suggests: 'insightful opinions are of little use in isolation; there needs to be an ideological perspective and a cultural context in which their insights can be applied that leads to *positive* and potentially transformative rituals, symbols, territories and political strategies', *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low Income Neighbourhood* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), p. 249.

mechanisms that bring about the conformity of individuals with systemic needs. We saw, however, that Adorno fails to take account of the level of cultural interpretation, and hence can only see the social production of conformity as an impenetrable, smoothly functioning machine. Now, however, it appears that the problem with Honneth's account is that it cannot get critical access to the workings of power at the level of *cultural practices of interpretation*. Honneth's theory, I want to argue, *is blind to the way that dominant interests are able to structure the symbolic order*, preventing the emergence of positively directed and normatively guided forms of social struggle. What is needed, therefore, is a theory of power as operating at the level of cultural practice, which will replace Adorno's simplistic reading of the production of ideological conformity with a theory of *symbolic power*, and thereby, will be able to set Adorno's thesis of integration through domination on a more secure footing.

Symbolic Power

The notion of symbolic power can be understood as theorizing social domination as a structuring force within the 'lifeworld'. Symbolic power brings about integration through domination by co-determining the identities through which social groups can represent themselves, and at the same time defines the political and cultural field in class- and group-specific ways. The purpose of a theory of symbolic power is to account for forms of domination and inequality that are 'the products of cultural logics that are constitutive of the intersubjective relationships that comprise the lifeworld'. The theory analyses 'the structure and function of these symbolic relations of power

and their effects on associational life, and on individual and collective identities'.⁶⁵ In what follows, I want to distinguish two distinct dimensions of symbolic power. The first can be said to derive from the incursions of complex systems into the lifeworld. The second case concerns the role of symbolic power in forming stabilized identities. To these two forms of symbolic domination, I will suggest, there correspond distinct forms and orientations of social struggle.

1) *The Symbolic Power of Complex Systems*

The symbolic power attaching to complex systems can be understood in terms of the idea of *dominant cultural codes which organize the meaning of social action for agents*. Alberto Melucci has argued that the growing importance of symbolic and informational resources (rather than material goods) in modern western societies has led to a need to focus the discussion of domination on the control of 'master codes', those 'symbolic resources' which frame and structure information. Symbolic power is seen as located in those systemic sites which are able to manufacture master codes, such as the world media system, centres controlling the languages of computers and related information technologies, and financial decision-making centres, which move financial resources by means of the production and manipulation of information. All these instances, Melucci argues, are 'new forms of domination, whose power is based not on economic resources as such, nor on the fact that they exert influence or manipulate the local political system'. Rather, 'the principal power

⁶⁵Orville Lee, 'Culture and Democratic Theory: Toward a Theory of Symbolic Democracy', *Constellations* 5 (1998) 433-455, p. 439.

is embedded in their capacity to organize the minds of people'.⁶⁶ Thus, new forms of inequality, and new structures of centrality and marginality, are defined by the privileged control over the production and diffusion of ideas. These master codes are essentially seen as symbolic forms which pre-schematize how individuals experience certain practices and activities,

Consumption, sexuality, education and interpersonal relations are the realms where prescriptions of behaviour are continually spread among the population through the packaging of merchandises, the production of manuals, the counselling activity of experts: here too, behind the actual contents in terms of values or norms, what matters is the hidden operation of symbolic *forms*, patterning people's thoughts, emotions and feelings.⁶⁷

The control over symbolic resources constitutes a form of power which becomes ever more significant with the centrality of the production of information in modern society. It follows from this that a significant form of exploitation is now the 'dependent participation in the information flow, as the deprivation of control over the construction of meaning'. Domination here takes the form of an 'exclusion from the power of naming'.⁶⁸ The notion of master codes allows us to reconstruct Adorno's ideology thesis, by re-conceiving ideology as the 'control exerted over codes

⁶⁶Alberto Melucci, *Challenging Codes: Collective Action in the Information Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 179.

⁶⁷*Challenging Codes*, p. 180.

⁶⁸*Challenging Codes*, p. 182.

and languages'.⁶⁹ This idea, I want to suggest, allows us to avoid the deterministic aspects of Adorno's ideology thesis, where ideological messages are seen as directly penetrating the psyche. Ideology is seen here to work through the *organizing and structuring of the meaning of practices and interactions*, rather than through its infiltration into the psychic constitution of the individual. Thus, although master codes pre-schematize experience, they are open to cultural challenge, as we shall see, by social movements that present alternative possibilities of meaning. Integration through domination is never totally secure, and is always open to challenge 'from within'. On the other hand, this reading allows us to correct Honneth's (and Habermas's) neglect of symbolic power and ideology *tout court*. Social integration is not achieved by the production of psychic conformity, but neither is it exclusively achieved by normative consensus. Rather, it must be seen in part as generated by the symbolic codes that are controlled by certain specific social groups and interests.

The specific form of domination attaching to the symbolic power exercised by complex systems, I want to argue, can be understood in terms of the idea of a *colonization of cultural meaning*. This can be seen most clearly in the type of commodification that is generated by the expansion of capitalist markets. When it begins to penetrate into the process of social-cultural identity-formation, Anthony Giddens argues, commodification begins to fashion a consumerized, packaged form of the 'project of self',

To a greater or lesser degree, the project of the self becomes translated into one of the possession of desired goods and the pursuit of artificially framed styles of life.

⁶⁹*Challenging Codes*, p. 181.

... The consumption of ever-novel goods becomes in some part a substitute for the genuine development of self. ... Not just lifestyles, but self-actualisation is packaged and distributed according to market criteria.⁷⁰

‘Commodification’ is understood here to consist in the deployment of symbolic resources by the economic system in order to ensure the formation of narratives of self that are functional for the needs of the market. The ‘consumer’ is thus a partial product of symbolic power, a ‘commodity produced by the industries of “marketing” and “communication”, a commodity bought by and sold to the manufacturers who seek to conserve or extend their section of the market’.⁷¹ By generating symbolic codes that organize cultural identity around consumer products, the economic system attempts to ‘colonize’ the possibilities of meaningful identity formation and cultural interpretation. Because it is thus *actively produces* cultural self-interpretations (those that are functional for its needs), the symbolic power exercised by complex systems must be seen as generating a form of integration, which takes the form of the integration of cultural identities into the needs of the system. From this perspective, therefore, colonization no longer appears solely as a *disintegration* of lifeworld contexts, but rather their *symbolic re-organization* through linguistic codes that express, in ideological form, the functional needs of complex systems.

Alain Touraine’s concept of a ‘programmed society’ provides a useful way of theorizing the colonization of cultural meaning that is brought about by the symbolic power of economic and

⁷⁰Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991), p. 198.

⁷¹André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesse du possible* (Paris: Galilée, 1997), pp. 220-1.

technical-bureaucratic complexes. Touraine stresses the connection between this idea and the massive production and diffusion of cultural goods in late modern societies. In the type of society in which cultural production becomes ever more central, Touraine argues,

the power of management consists in . . . predicting and modifying opinions, attitudes, comportments, in modelling personality and culture, thus in entering directly into the world of “values” instead of limiting itself to the domain of utility.

The new importance of cultural industries replaces the traditional form of social control with new mechanisms of the government of persons.⁷²

In the areas of education, nurture, and health practices, Touraine argues, the struggle against the symbolic power of complex systems concerns the capacity of defending a certain conception of liberty, the capacity to ‘give meaning (*sens*) to life’. Resistance to the colonization of meaning concerns the possibility of regaining control over the purposes and ends of forms of cultural production. Significantly, Touraine argues that this constitutes a resistance to integration. It is a ‘gesture of refusal’ vis à vis the social roles that embody the functional needs of systemic apparatuses.⁷³ The symbolic power exercised by complex systems, therefore, necessitates a reconstruction of Adorno’s notion of resistance as *resistance to socialization*. When we reject Adorno’s totalizing reading of systemic integration, expressed in the idea of an ‘administered world’, it becomes possible to reformulate this notion within the framework of a theory of social

⁷²Alain Touraine, *Critique de la Modernité* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), p. 284.

⁷³*Critique de la Modernité*, p. 318.

struggle. To achieve this, we need to detect forms of collective resistance that are capable of opposing the symbolic power exercised by complex systems.

Melucci argues that the increasing exercise of the capacity for identity manipulation and regulation exercised by complex systems has given rise to a new form of social conflict, one where 'beyond the more specific objects of contestation, what is at stake . . . is the possibility of reappropriating the meaning and motivation of action'.⁷⁴ The *modus operandi* of social movements in this type of conflict is to present a symbolic challenge to dominant cultural codes, which movements can accomplish by fashioning 'new meanings for social action and serv[ing] as vital engines of innovation'.⁷⁵ Melucci argues that this dimension of struggle can be seen to be at work in the normative claims of youth, feminist, ethno-nationalist, and peace-environmentalist movements. The reassertion of ethnic identity, for instance, responds to the homogenizing forces of a mass culture shaped by anonymous apparatuses. By 'naming the world in a different way', it 'challenges this homogenization and the imposition of standardized codes'.⁷⁶ Melucci perceives a similar orientation at work in the oppositional praxis of environmental and peace movements,

It is through action itself that the power of the languages and signs of technical rationality are challenged. By its sheer existence, such action challenges power, upsets its logic, and constructs alternative meanings. Altruistic behaviour and a

⁷⁴*Challenging Codes*, p. 109.

⁷⁵*Challenging Codes*, p. 203. There is some degree of resemblance here to Giddens' discussion of 'life politics', in his *Modernity and Self-Identity*, pp. 209ff.

⁷⁶*Challenging Codes*, p. 161.

commitment to altruistic action contain this dimension of symbolic challenge, for it sets against the rationality of calculation and the efficiency of technique as a means-end relationship . . . the desire for unmanipulated human communication.⁷⁷

In these types of conflict, Melucci argues, subjects engage in struggle in order to be recognized as autonomous sources of their own action. This is effected by attempting to wrest from complex systems the capacity to define the meaning of social action. In contrast to the commodified forms of identity politics, this type of struggle might be seen as an attempt to assert *authentic* difference, and as a re-politicization of identity that works against the symbolic power of complex systems by reclaiming and reconstructing group-based definitions of experience and self. At stake in these struggles is the striving to 'articulate new forms and modes of identity formation by reconstructing the collapsed social and cultural spaces of consumer society'.⁷⁸ This is one dimension, then, in which resistance is directed against the integrating force of symbolic power, which operates through a colonization of cultural meaning.

2) *Symbolic Power and Culture*

The second major form of symbolic power attaches to the categories that structure civil society, and which make possible forms of group definition within it. In this case, the analysis of symbolic power

⁷⁷*Challenging Codes*, p. 169.

⁷⁸Robert Dunn, *Identity Crises*, p. 148,

is concerned with relations *between* social groups. Dominant cultural norms, institutionalized in the state and the economy, generate a certain status inequality between social groups by implicitly or explicitly devaluing certain forms of social-cultural identity (along the axes of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity). Nancy Fraser's theory of recognition is attentive to this form of symbolic power, as witnessed in her call for 'transformative remedies' to injustices of cultural recognition. Hence she argues that the oppositional praxis of gay and lesbian politics should not aim at institutionalizing a form of affirmation of current power-laden conceptions of gay and lesbian identity, but must rather be directed towards a transformation, or subversion of the prevailing symbolic order.⁷⁹ To substantiate this reading, what is needed is a theoretical reconstruction of the workings of symbolic power within the cultural-valuational structure.

The idea of symbolic power is a central component of Pierre Bourdieu's social theory. Bourdieu understands symbolic power as the power to 'impose the principles of the construction of reality'.⁸⁰ Bourdieu's thesis is that symbolic categories are materialized as structuring principles of social practices which, in turn, reproduce those categories as mental categories of representation.⁸¹ Bourdieu's discussion of the category of the family provides a useful example of this process. The 'family', Bourdieu asserts, is a 'category', a 'collective principle of the

⁷⁹Nancy Fraser, *Justice Interruptus*, pp. 23ff.

⁸⁰Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 165.

⁸¹Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', which is essentially a generative scheme of dispositions, is essential to Bourdieu's non-mechanistic account of how this reproduction occurs. See Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. R. Nice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), pp. 52ff.

construction of social reality'.⁸² It is not, however, a 'pure figment of thought'. Rather, the symbolic category 'family' must be understood as

a common principle of vision and division, a *nomos*, that we all have in our heads because it has been inculcated in us through a process of socialization performed in a world that was itself organized according to the division into families. This principle of construction is one of the constituent elements of our habitus, a mental structure which, having been inculcated into all minds socialized in a particular way, is both individual and collective.⁸³

The symbolic category 'family' is realized as a social truth by a continual symbolic and practical work, comprising 'inaugural acts of creation' (imposition of the family name, marriage, etc.), countless 'ordinary exchanges of daily existence' (exchange of gifts, service, assistance, visits, attention, kindness), and 'extraordinary and solemn exchanges' of family occasions, often 'memorialized by photographs consecrating the integration of the assembled family'.⁸⁴

This process gives rise to what Bourdieu terms the doxic relation to the social world, where the uniformity of objective structures and mental structures generates a *collective misrecognition* of the workings of symbolic power. An everyday understanding of the social world that in fact derives from the working of symbolic power, and is thus arbitrary and conventional, appears to

⁸²Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), p. 66.

⁸³*Practical Reason*, p. 66.

⁸⁴*Practical Reason*, p. 67.

social agents as 'natural'. A precondition of any form of oppositional praxis, therefore, is an insight into the - normally hidden - operation of symbolic power,

It is only when the dominated have the material and symbolic means of rejecting the definition of the real that is imposed on them through logical structures reproducing the social structures (i.e. the state of the power relations) and to lift the (internalized or institutionalized) censorships which it implies, i.e. *when social classifications become the object and instrument of class struggle*, that the arbitrary principles of the prevailing classification can appear as such . . . ⁸⁵

Symbolic power is based on the possession of symbolic capital, in which the power of representation of social reality comes to be invested in certain groups and institutions. This is the result of a monopolization by certain groups of what Bourdieu theorizes as distinct forms of 'capital' (economic, social, cultural). Bourdieu draws upon Durkheim's idea of a 'logical conformism' and 'moral conformism' attaching to collective forms of categorization in order to theorize the social efficacy of symbolic power. Behind the 'logical conformism' that Durkheim sees as guaranteed by the (moral) authority of society, there lies the symbolic power of dominant social groups. The process in which principles of classification become, through acts of institution, taken for granted aspects of social reality, marks symbolic capital as a *quasi-sacred power of transforming the arbitrary into the natural*. Operating as a quasi-sacred force, symbolic power is able to disguise social categories that represent dominant social interests as a 'universal point of view'.

⁸⁵*Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 169 (my italics).

According to Bourdieu, the state has become the main site of symbolic capital in modern society. The state 'imposes and inculcates' all the fundamental principles of classification based on age, sex, and 'skill', etc. Furthermore, it is basis of the symbolic efficacy of the rites of institution underlying the family and the school system. In this way, the state is able to establish and inculcate 'common forms and categories of perception and appreciation, social frameworks of perceptions, of understanding or of memory, in short *state forms of classification*'.⁸⁶ From this perspective, it is clear why any form of oppositional praxis that cannot question the social-cultural structures of identity-formation will be incapable of challenging effectively prevailing forms of social hierarchy.

Mark Neocleous has provided a reading of the state as a site of symbolic power which confirms Bourdieu's thesis, and which demonstrates how the state is able to deploy this power to subvert, deflect, or undermine emancipatory claims raised in social struggle.⁸⁷ This account can be seen as a refutation of Honneth's implicit understanding of social structures, in which they figure merely in the benign role of confirming and institutionalizing normative claims raised by collective actors. Neocleous's account focusses on the incorporation of the English working class by the state in the nineteenth century. He argues that, at the same time as it provided a form of legal and political recognition to the working class, through providing a role to trade unions in administrative and legal decision-making processes, the state was able to effect a *symbolic constitution* of the working class and its representatives, such that existing power structures were effectively untouched by the

⁸⁶*Practical Reason*, p. 54.

⁸⁷In his *Administering Civil Society: Towards a Theory of State Power* (London: Macmillan, 1996).

incorporation of trade unions - the 'legal subjectivity of the working class' - into these processes. Neocleous argues that when the working class gained legal recognition (i.e. 'confirmation') in the nineteenth century as a 'subject of rights', it was simultaneously *symbolically constituted* by the state as an 'object of administration'.⁸⁸ Consequently, the state was able to develop a 'law-and-administration continuum', by means of which the emancipatory claims raised in working class struggle were transformed into regulated and administered disputes through which class antagonism could, in effect, be domesticated and controlled. An example of this was the growing use of industrial tribunals to administer disputes between legal subjects concerning the labour contract.⁸⁹ The same process was at work, Neocleous argues, in the recognition of trade unions as the 'legal subjectivity of the working class'. Legal recognition of trade unions did not merely represent the confirmation of certain freedoms of the working class, such as the freedom to strike, but actually constituted the working class in a particular form congenial to the stability of existing power structures. Hence, a whole series of administrative mechanisms was now put in place which established trade unions in a stabilizing and conciliatory role, and which were implicitly premised on discouraging the idea that the purpose of unions was to strike. The constitution of trade unions through administrative mechanisms was exemplified by the increasing prominence of procedures of collective bargaining, which set unions in a mediating role between the state and the worker and

⁸⁸ *Administering Civil Society*, p. 69; p. 111; pp. 163-4. Central to Neocleous's account is a critique of the idea that the working class was already fully formed before the state 'acted' upon it. Thus the very idea of the 'making' of the English working class necessitates an account of its *constitution*, through its subsumption by power and dominant social interests (pp. 105-7).

⁸⁹ *Administering Civil Society*, p. 69.

thereby effectively subsumed class conflict under administration.⁹⁰ In *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth theorizes the state exclusively as a guarantor of the moral-universalistic potential embodied in legal recognition. But the suspicion with regard to the ‘achievements of modern legal universalism’ that Honneth finds, and criticizes, in Marx, Sorel and Sartre, may perhaps appear as warranted once we focus on the state as a central locus of symbolic power.⁹¹

The value of Bourdieu’s theory, as a critique of theories of the struggle for recognition drawing upon a Meadian conception of the social, clearly lies in its postulation that the struggle for social recognition ordinarily takes place in a situation of collective *misrecognition* of the capacity of dominant social groups to define or impose the symbolic categories that are the object of contention in social struggle.⁹² Therefore, a precondition of a struggle for recognition must be a capacity to question the ‘logical conformism’ that is imposed by the authority of society. However, although Bourdieu manages effectively to uncover the workings of symbolic power, a central problem with his theory, at least from the point of view of a critical social theory focussed on social struggle, is that he does not provide an adequate account of *how* social classifications might become the ‘object and instrument of class struggle’. Bourdieu, in fact, describes the mechanisms of the reproduction of social domination as operating so efficiently that it is difficult to see how, in the terms of his theory, a possibility of critical self-reflection could emerge within social reality. In this

⁹⁰*Administering Civil Society*, pp. 140ff.

⁹¹*Struggle for Recognition*, p. 150.

⁹²I argued that this idea was formulated by Hegel in *The System of Ethical Life*. See chapter 7 of this work.

respect, Bourdieu's social theory seems to be afflicted with the same problem as Adorno's critical theory, in that there seems to be no way of conceiving a possible social location for the insight into structures of domination that is attained through social-scientific inquiry. Bourdieu, like Adorno, appears to close off altogether the possibility of a critical-negative experience rooted in day-to-day social practice.

Hans-Herbert Kögler has suggested how this deficit in Bourdieu's work could be corrected from the point of view of a critical hermeneutics.⁹³ Kögler takes up the thesis of Foucault and Bourdieu that symbolic assumptions, reflective of social power, are reproduced through the initiation into social practices. Through power-laden practices, 'relations of domination become anchored in and . . . embodied in individuals as practically insurmountable structures of social reality, in which the struggle for power is carried out'.⁹⁴ This is achieved through the practical inculcation of a *pre-understanding* of the social world, which takes place as a symbolic constitution of the subject. From this perspective, social power can appear as 'reality-constitutive', as 'form[ing] individuals into determinate social subjects'.⁹⁵ However, Kögler is critical of Bourdieu's elimination of the dialectical mediation between subjective meaning and objective structures in favour of an 'explanatory objectivism' that, in effect, leaves no place for a truth about the social world to emerge *within* social reality. Bourdieu's reading of the reproduction of social power through the generative

⁹³In his *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, trans. P. Hendrickson (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

⁹⁴*The Power of Dialogue*, p. 99.

⁹⁵*The Power of Dialogue*, pp. 98-9.

dispositions that make up habitus, Kögler argues,

makes sense in terms of a theory of power only against the background of the agent's capacity to become conscious of power and hence to overcome at least partially, and to free themselves from, power. By becoming aware of the constraints that socialization imposes on thought, perception, and action, these constraints no longer remain what they were prior to analysis.⁹⁶

Bourdieu, Kögler charges, has no way of linking his conception of symbolic power back to the self-understanding of social agents, and hence Bourdieu *cannot explain how the theoretical insight into structures of power can be taken up into the experiential frame of social agents in their day-to-day practice*. Kögler suggests the idea of critical hermeneutics as an answer to this problem.

Critical hermeneutics is intended to deal with the problem of how a critical self-reflection of relations of domination can be achieved when the symbolic order effects a naturalization of social power relations. Subjects struggling for freedom and recognition are seen as 'still determined by imposed identities, which have become second nature to them through socialization into symbolic orders and domination structures'. Thus the struggle for recognition must encompass a struggle against 'imposed, often deeply internalized symbolic typifications as well as against their material power basis'.⁹⁷ The critical task is thus to lay bare the workings of symbolic power, which pre-structures the self-understanding of individuals. Kögler suggests that this task can be performed by

⁹⁶*The Power of Dialogue*, p. 225.

⁹⁷*The Power of Dialogue*, pp. 243-4.

the *distanciating disclosure of the symbolic order* that is made possible in the dialogic encounter with epochally or culturally distinct meaning systems. Through the dialogic encounter, a type of critical self-reflection becomes possible, which is able to disclose the hidden assumptions behind the categories of one's own symbolic system,

In truth, we require the unsettling effects achieved through dialogue with the other's meaning if, on the basis of our relative distance from another, contrastively unfolded meaning structure, we are to gain a transformed view of our own unquestioned or unconsciously presupposed meaning premises. . . . [O]nly by confronting other discursive formations that, through their foreignness to us, may be disclosed and cognized in their rule structure can we hope to explicate in piecemeal fashion the rule contexts of our own horizon of meaning.⁹⁸

The self-distanciation from the symbolic order achieved through dialogue effects a form of *self-alienation*, in that the self is able to take a critical-negative perspective on the power-laden understandings, ordinarily taken for granted, which structure its perception of the social world. Critical hermeneutics thus employs the encounter with the other in order to produce 'a *different experience of ourselves*'.⁹⁹

⁹⁸*The Power of Dialogue*, p. 199.

⁹⁹*The Power of Dialogue*, p. 212.

Rethinking Critical-Negative Experience

Kögler's theory of distancing disclosure allows us to see the fundamental weakness in Honneth's account of the struggle for recognition. The guiding presupposition of Kögler's theory is that social domination structures, which are sedimented, in symbolic form, in the shape of pre-understandings, are 'co-original' with the concept of conflict. Therefore, a *precondition* of the revolutionizing transformation of these crystallizations of domination is a distanced experience of the symbolic order.¹⁰⁰ It is clear, however, that Honneth's conception of how a negative experience of the social order is acquired - through experiences of disrespect arising from the disappointment of moral expectations - is simply too thin to furnish the requisite degree of distance from the symbolic order. Honneth's theory cannot explain how an *experience of alienation vis à vis* the symbolic categories that structure the social world can occur, and therefore, it fails to provide an adequate democratic-intersubjective representation of the idea of critical-negative experience. The epistemological thinness of the moral experiences on which Honneth attempts to ground the idea of social struggle means that the emancipatory content of such struggles is too easily subsumable by symbolic power. We must recall here that Adorno's conception of critical-negative experience is intended to have a far deeper meaning-revelatory potential than that which lies at the basis of Honneth's theory. For Adorno, as we saw, critical-negative experience is afforded through a *Selbstbesinnung* (self-reflection) on the forms of domination that structure conceptual forms. This

¹⁰⁰*The Power of Dialogue*, p. 236.

is afforded in philosophy through the critical dialectic of concepts. In the ‘failure’ of philosophical works, as we saw, there is revealed an emphatic truth claim which provides for a critical-negative perspective on the social world. Thus negative experience is at the same time an alienation from society, and the symbolic order through which domination structures are reproduced. It is this type of critical-negative experience that Adorno is seeking to express with the notion of *das Schwindeleierregende* (the vertiginous) (ND 31-33; 42-3). The ‘shock of the open’ that Adorno describes here is essentially a de-centring of self, which enables the self to take a distanced perspective on domination structures that are ordinarily unquestioningly assumed to be ‘natural facts’. The failing of Honneth’s account, then, is that it *divorces negative experience from critical self-reflection*, and hence cannot account for that type of self-decentring that would disclose structures of symbolic domination. Adorno, significantly, seeks to preserve the deep epistemological resonances of Hegel’s notion of experience (*Erfahrung*). Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents experience as a process through which the untruth of a social form is disclosed. In critical experience, as Hegel conceives this, the natural consciousness ‘loses its truth’, and this is why experience is a ‘way of despair’.¹⁰¹ The process of experience does not involve the ‘unsettling’ (*Rütteln*) of ‘this or that supposed truth’, it is rather ‘the conscious insight into the untruth of appearing knowledge’. The subject only comes to an objective insight into the nature of its world through the process of the unfolding of the falsehood of its subjective standpoint. Because he focusses exclusively on the social-psychological dimension of recognition, as a need for social

¹⁰¹*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, p. 67.

affirmation of self, Honneth dispenses entirely with the epistemological dimension of self-knowing that animates Hegel's account. But it is only by incorporating the latter that we could conceive the struggle for recognition as a process of the disclosure of untruth, and thus as making accessible that type of experience of alienation that can ground a critical-negative insight into structures of domination.

Kögler captures something of what is implied in Adorno's notion of *Selbstbesinnung* (self-reflection) when he speaks of the need for a *Verfremdungseffekt* (defamiliarizing effect) with respect to symbolic world disclosure.¹⁰² This captures well the idea of an experience of alienation vis à vis everyday experience, which allows for a critical perspective on the everyday world. Adorno seeks to make this experience accessible philosophically through a critical dialectic, in which immanent philosophical truth claims engender a critical reflection on the antagonistic social experience that is taken up within concepts. It is this idea of *Selbstbesinnung* as a self-decentring, in which a genuine form of critical experience becomes possible, that Adorno is seeking to articulate in the final passage in *Minima Moralia*, where he defines philosophy as the attempt to observe things as they would present themselves 'from the standpoint of redemption',

Cognition has no light but that which shines from redemption on the world:
everything else is exhausted by reformulation and remains a piece of technology.
Perspectives must be produced in which the world will reveal itself as self-
dislocated, alienated, with all its fractures and crevices, just as it will one time

¹⁰²*The Power of Dialogue*, p. 245.

appear as needy and disfigured in the messianic light. Thought is concerned solely with the creation of such perspectives, without caprice and violence, wholly through a feeling for the objects. . . . [T]he total negativity, once one stares it in the face, transforms itself into the mirror-writing of its opposite (MM § 153).

I have argued that Honneth's account of negative experience is too insubstantial to provide an adequate democratic-intersubjective re-interpretation of the negative reflection on the social order that Adorno perceives as made accessible through philosophy and art. Though *some* form of this transformation is certainly required for a recovery of the critical location of critical theory. My arguments here have not been intended to show the impossibility of such a reformulation *tout court*, but rather that a type of negative experience capable of grounding an oppositional praxis must possess the possibility of a substantive self-decentring, or self-alienation, which is capable of disclosing the everyday operation of forms of symbolic power. Kögler's critical hermeneutic, which sees distanciation emerging through the dialogic encounter, provides a useful starting point for conceptualizing everyday possibilities of self-decentring. What would now be necessary would be to show how these experiences could be productively synthesized in practices embodying an oppositional symbolic creativity, and how a political perspective could be formed which would be able to guide the experiential insights gained through dialogic distanciation towards the formation of a coherent political ideology.¹⁰³ In the following chapter, I want to extend further the conception

¹⁰³This latter point comprises another issue neglected by Honneth, concerning the historical importance of political ideology for transforming class resentment into political terms. Duncan Gallie has argued for the importance of radical party ideologies in making possible an oppositional praxis in his *Social Inequality and Class Radicalism in France and Britain*

of integration through domination, developed here through the concept of symbolic power, by introducing the idea of systemic domination. I will also attempt to show how the rigidification of cultural meanings that Adorno perceives at work in processes of linguistic reification can be theorized as giving rise to forms of moral disintegration.

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

Integration through Domination and Moral Disintegration:

Re-thinking the Critique of Instrumental Reason

My intention in this chapter is to analyse the ‘wrong’ of instrumental reason from an Adornian perspective, and to give some indication of where one would have to look for a counter-concept to instrumental reason, which would be capable of explicating the normative content of Adorno’s idea of reconciliation. This analysis will extend the critique of Habermasian critical theory given in previous chapters. A guiding thesis of this chapter will be that the ‘wrong’ of instrumental reason, with regard to cultural meaning, is not properly characterizable as a curtailment of communicative interaction, but, rather, must be understood in terms of a neutralization of moral experience. ‘First generation’ critical theorists, especially Marcuse, Horkheimer, and Adorno, used the term ‘instrumental’ reason to describe an objective tendency, rooted in the operational logics of the economy, bureaucratic institutions and modern technology, that turns meaningful items into means for the assertion, and maximization of profit, power, and productivity. The unique and unrepresentable nature of goods is effectively ‘devalued’, as they become exemplifications of profit/power/productivity. I suggested that this process can be understood in terms of the notion of

the decontextualization of value. This is a process of subsumption, I argued, in which the thing assumes a 'value' (according to the logic of profit, power, etc.) that is *logically* independent of its social meaning. I suggested, further, that Adorno conceives this process as the objective ground of a distortion of conceptual thinking, which I described as a form of linguistic reification. My critique of Habermas's account of moral-practical reason was intended to show that the radical bisections of reason, which Habermas accepts as consequences of a post-metaphysical standpoint, are in fact attributable to a *prior* distortion of linguistic praxis - which, in turn, is a consequence of the generalized social operation of instrumental logics. It was argued on this basis that the problems of cultural meaning which Habermas describes in terms of the idea of 'cultural impoverishment', are in fact a result of the infiltration of exchange logic into the realm of culture. It is linguistic reification, as we saw, that is exemplified in Habermas's representation of illocutionary force as a purely logical bond, and the concomitant 'bracketing' of the cognitive force of moral experience. It is also exemplified in Habermas's constricted focus on communication as a form of action-coordination, in which this is held to be logically separable from the disclosure of public meanings possessed of a bonding force. The neutralization of moral experience wrought by linguistic reification, as I will now attempt to demonstrate, gets a foothold *beneath* the distinction between purposive-rational and communicative action, as these are understood by Habermas. We also saw, however, that there is a further problem with Habermas's distinction between communicative action, and the purely purposive-rational logic of systemic domains. The problem concerns the way that this distinction serves to obscure social relations of domination that are located *within* the communicative sphere. I argued that Axel Honneth's reformulation of communicative action in terms of a struggle for recognition is able to deal more adequately with the conflict-riven nature of

the communicative sphere, and helps to uncover the specific biases within Habermas's own depiction of the logic of normative claims. Yet, as we saw, Honneth, like Habermas, fails to provide an adequate theoretical account of the workings of symbolic power, understood as the process by which social relations of domination are naturalized through their re-presentation in symbolic form. The notion of symbolic power, I argued, comprises a plausible reconstruction of Adorno's integration thesis, which avoids the false totalizations built into the latter. In this chapter, I want to extend this account of integration through domination by showing how instrumental logics take on an ideological function. What is at stake here is not the identity-forming effects of symbolic power, but the *disguise* and *concealment* of the exercise of power through the operation of instrumental forms of reasoning. Instrumental logics, I will argue, defuse and offset conflicts and struggles welling up from the lifeworld by concealing domination as technical/neutral decisions. Instrumentally ordered domains are therefore integral to reproducing, and ideologically veiling the forms of domination pervading the lifeworld. The idea of integration through domination will here be shown to be applicable to the inner workings of social forms ordered according to instrumental logics. Thus alongside the pathologies stemming from the infiltration of instrumental logics into cultural meaning, the second substantial 'wrong' of instrumental reason, I will argue, is its role in sustaining the structure of integration through domination. The social operation of instrumental reason, therefore, can be defined as a destructive dialectic of increasing integration through domination, and increasing lifeworld-experiential *disintegration*. The result of this destructive dialectic is a *twofold distortion of intersubjective relations*. In the first place, I will argue, instrumental reason serves as an ideological veil for deeply entrenched relations of domination, permitting those relations to be reproduced under the cover of notions of 'effectiveness',

‘neutrality’, and ‘rationality’. The necessity of the *social contextualization*¹ of ‘purposive rational’ forms of reasoning, I will suggest, means that social relations of domination are able to be reproduced *through* the operation of the specific systemic logics of profit, power, and productivity. Thus dominant social interests are able to infiltrate and structure the lifeworld under the guise of technical imperatives. In the second place, I will argue, the linguistic reification wrought by the penetration of exchange logic into the realm of cultural meaning gives rise to two distinct pathologies of disintegration, which are describable broadly as pathologies of meaning and experience. These correspond, roughly, to the macro- and micro-level distortions that I identified in my critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason.² The macro-level distortion of a loss of meaning takes up the problem of linguistic reification in the form of a loss of critical-negative experience, whereas the micro-level distortion of a neutralization of experience takes up the problem of an undermining of the experiential basis of moral integration. At the same time as the penetration of exchange logic into culture generates problems of lifeworld disintegration, however, the social order is ‘integrated’ by the *suppression* and *marginalization* of lifeworld conflict and dissensus, occurring through the ideological operation of instrumental logics. The components of my analysis can, therefore, be set out as follows:

1) The idea of *systemic domination* will explicate the nature of that form of domination that is established and reproduced beneath the veil of neutrality of social forms ordered according to

¹I borrow this term from Andrew Feenberg, whose critical theory of technology will be discussed below.

²See chapter 6 of this work.

instrumental logics. The operation of ‘subsystems’, it will be argued, is never *reducible* to purely purposive-rational decisions or the execution of systemic ‘needs’.

2) The consequences for critique of the social-historical decontextualization of normative categories is taken up in the idea of a *loss of meaning*. Here, I will reformulate Habermas’s notion of cultural *Verarmung* (impoverishment), in a way which draws out the consequences of my critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason.

3) The thesis of a *crisis of experience* will attempt to draw out in social-theoretical terms the import of Adorno’s critique of linguistic reification. The ‘objective abstraction’ at the root of the rigidification of linguistic meaning will be traced to the re-structuring of the social world by institutionally embedded forms of instrumental reasoning. The Adornian critique of the diremptions of moral-practical reason will thereby be developed into a social theory.

Before moving on to this analysis, I want, briefly, to turn once again to Adorno’s sociological writings. Adorno, I will argue, attempted to rethink the nature of domination, in such a way that the reproduction of class and group inequality, and the generation of experiential and meaning distortions, could be understood as part of a single process. Adorno saw that the entwinement of social relations of domination with the generalized operation of instrumental forms of reasoning necessitated a radical reinterpretation which would be able to integrate the twofold distortion of the objectivating attitude into a unified analysis.

The Domination of 'Society' over its Members

A useful initial orientation to Adorno's interpretation of the transformed structure of domination in late capitalist societies, is provided by the distinction between 'direct' and 'indirect' domination. Adorno argues that modern societies are characterized by the increasing prominence of the latter form. 'Indirect' domination does not necessarily usher in a different set of dominating agents, or a radical restructuring of previous inequalities. What differentiates it from 'direct' domination is that forms of social inequality become subsumed under instrumental logics of profit and efficiency, which then reproduce those forms of inequality *indirectly*, in the process of pursuing independent, instrumentally determined ends (profit, efficiency, etc.). It is this transition that is being articulated in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, where Horkheimer/Adorno claim that 'Enlightenment destroys the injustice of the old inequality - unmediated lordship and mastery - but at the same time perpetuates it in universal mediation' (DE 12; 18).

We can flesh out this account by drawing on Georg Simmel's account of the transition from pre-capitalist to capitalist social relations in his *Philosophy of Money*. The relations that Simmel describes as pre-capitalist embody a form of *personal* dependence: apprentices are bound to a particular master, peasants to a particular feudal lord. The disappearance of this personal element is the defining feature of the purely monetary relations of capitalist social forms.³ The personal element in pre-capitalist social relations points towards two particular characteristics of these relations. Firstly, the particular structure of domination is embedded within the social identities of individuals. These social identities are reproduced in the perpetuation of structures of domination.

³Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, pp. 379, 392-3.

Secondly, as Simmel stresses, the ties between individuals in relationships of personal dependence are infused with moral meaning. The social practices in which domination is reproduced are partly structured by moral obligations. Hence the transition to capitalist social forms consists, in part, in a de-ethicizing of these relationships. Simmel argues,

The slaveholder and the landowner has the personal interest in maintaining his slaves and peasants, subject to socage duty, in good and capable condition; his right over them is transformed to his own advantage into a duty - which for the capitalist in relation to the wage labourer is either not the case, or where it nevertheless is the case, is in no wise always perceived. The freeing of the labourer must be paid for, so to speak, with a freeing of the employer, that is, with the disappearance of care, which the unfree enjoyed.⁴

Following from this analysis, I want to suggest that the transition to forms of 'indirect' domination can be seen to occur where two conditions are fulfilled. Firstly, domination becomes 'depersonalized', to use Simmel's phrase, in that it is no longer rooted in the social identities of agents. The hierarchical ordering of human relations does not disappear, but these forms of inequality are now reproduced by the operation of instrumental logics which systematically abstract from social identities. One consequence of this is that the supposed 'naturalness' of the hierarchical ordering of society can no longer function as an ideological justification for class or group inequalities.⁵ Secondly, the structuring of domination in practical relations that embed moral

⁴*Philosophie des Geldes*, p. 400.

⁵As we will see shortly, it is now the idea of 'pure' systemic logics that takes over this ideological function.

obligations is displaced by the generalization of purposive-rational orientations, and hence the emergence of purely instrumental ties between social agents. Relations of domination therefore become indirect, in that they are mediated by social forms which depersonalize these relations, and render them instrumental by reconfiguring them wholly as means to ends external to them (profit, efficiency, etc.).

In the essay 'Culture and Administration', Adorno hints at the idea that this mediation of domination through instrumental orientations can be understood as a form of 'subsumption'. Adorno argues here that the expansion of administration is rooted in a deeper logic of the exchange relation. This is then characterized in terms of its tendency to turn objects into commensurable items, that is, into instantiations of exchange value. In this way, it establishes 'the subsumability of objects under abstract rules'.⁶ A little further on, Adorno asserts that administration 'is external to the administered. It subsumes it, instead of comprehending [*begreifen*] it'.⁷ This leads to the assertion that administration represents 'the universal against [the] particular'.⁸ Administration, for Adorno, exemplifies the way in which relations of domination are mediated by anonymous structures and abstract relations. This is described in the essay 'Society' as the domination of society over its members, *behind which class- and group-specific forms of domination perpetuate themselves*,

The abstraction of exchange value precedes all particular social division in the form of the domination of the universal over the particular, of society over its members.

That abstraction is not socially neutral, as the logicity of the process of reduction

⁶'Kultur und Verwaltung', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 125.

⁷'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 127.

⁸'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 128.

to unities such as average social labour time deceptively suggests. In the reduction of human beings to agents and bearers of commodity exchange, there is hidden the domination of human beings over human beings.⁹

On Adorno's reading, relations of domination in modern society become integrated into a social process, which is neither characterizable as 'natural', nor intelligible as an intended product of human action. In defining this process as a form of subsumption, Adorno intends it to be understood as a process governed by a non-class-specific logic, that is, a logic that is *in principle* separable from any determinate set of social interests. It is by means of this idea that Adorno is able to reinterpret the Lukácsian idea of an extension of the logic of the commodity form into culture. The logic of abstraction rooted in processes of economic exchange, which subsumes use value under exchange value, becomes autonomous vis à vis the economic sphere, and, as 'subsumption', becomes a structuring principle of social forms more generally. At this point, however, as the domination of society over its members, exchange logic begins to generate a series of cultural distortions. In 'Culture and Administration', Adorno articulates this through a description of the 'antagonism' between administration, which is an exemplification of the exchange relation, and culture. Culture is said to represent 'the perennial complaint of the particular against the universal, as long as the latter is unreconciled with the particular'. Administration evaluates cultural items 'according to norms which do not reside within them, which have nothing to do with the quality of the object, but are solely derived from abstract standards that are brought in from outside'.¹⁰ In this essay, Adorno

⁹'Society', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 128. The fundamental connection between economic exchange and bureaucratic administration, therefore, is that both are founded on a *real abstraction*, whether in the relation of buyer-seller or in that of client-administrative apparatus.

describes the prevailing relation between culture and administration in terms of the neutralization thesis, which we encountered in *Negative Dialectics*. The process of neutralization is here said to consist in 'the transformation of culture into an independent thing, deprived of a relation to possible praxis'.¹¹ In consequence, the antagonism between culture and administration is subdued, and culture becomes a thing subordinate to the functional ends of administration. The 'value' and usefulness of cultural items, therefore, now becomes solely determinable according to a logic that is external to cultural ends. 'What from out of itself claims to be autonomous, critical, antithetical', Adorno claims, 'must atrophy, when its impulses are already integrated into what is heteronomous in relation to it, into what is preconceived from above'.¹² Culture, in consequence, loses its capacity to disclose truth about the social world, and takes on the reified form of a commodity.¹³ This gives grounds for suggesting that the neutralization of culture entails a particular type of distortion of experience. When it transforms itself into the domination of society over its members, exchange logic brings about a neutralization of the critical claims of culture. This neutralization takes shape through the production of what Adorno elsewhere calls *die Unfähigkeit zur Erfahrung* (incapacity for experience).¹⁴ The type of critical-negative experience that marks culture's antagonistic relation to administrative forms is rendered inaccessible through the operation of exchange logic as subsumption.

¹¹'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 132.

¹²'Kultur und Verwaltung', p. 133.

¹³A similar process of commodification is described by Horkheimer, in his *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974), p. 40.

¹⁴'Reflexionen zur Klassenkonflikt heute', in *Soziologische Schriften I*, p. 194.

With the theoretical figure of the domination of society over its members, then, Adorno intends to conjoin both the perpetuation of class- and group-specific forms of injustice as mediated through purposive-rationally organized social forms, *and* the distortions of human experience that follow from the generalized social operation of exchange logic. Both elements - the perpetuation of social domination behind abstract relations, and the 'domination' of cultural meaning and experience - thereby become describable as dimensions of a single process.

Systemic Domination

I suggested previously that Habermasian critical theory fails to grasp the nature of systemic domains as *mediated* forms of class- and group-specific domination. Habermas perceives the problems posed by the expansion of systemic media solely in terms of pathologies for the lifeworld *as a whole*. In contrast to this view, I want to suggest that an internal critique of systemic domains is capable of uncovering their role in perpetuating capitalist-specific forms of social hierarchy. Subsystems bring about domination *as* juridification: the relations of domination within the lifeworld are provided with an ideological veil when they infiltrate the operation of purposive-rationally organized institutions. Habermas sees the monetarization and bureaucratization of labour power and administration as necessitated on account of the 'greater effectiveness and superior level of integration' of the organizational forms that emerge therefrom. The operation of systemically ordered institutions only becomes a problem for critical theory when those institutions extend into private and public spheres, as in that form of 'legal domination' that 'redefines practical questions

as technical ones'.¹⁵ If my analysis is correct, we must perceive this juridifying tendency as a strategy of domination, in which social interests are re-presented in the form of technical imperatives. *The effect of this is to marginalize or suppress deep-seated conflicts pervading the social world.*¹⁶

Habermas fails to gain critical access to the role of purposive rationality in the reproduction of class and group domination because he treats media, such as money and power, as pure forms whose operations are describable independently of their embeddedness within a particular societal context. Habermas, that is, *reduces the functioning of social institutions and organizations to the execution of a structure of interaction that is defined theoretically in abstraction from its specific social embodiments.* But while it is intelligible to speak of 'money' or 'power' 'in itself', there is no such thing as the 'market' or 'administration' 'in itself'.¹⁷ The institutional forms whose interactions are structured by steering media will *also* be shaped by dominant social interests and prejudices. I want to suggest that we need to theorize how, in a hierarchically ordered society, dominant interests are able to assert themselves at the point of the social contextualization of systemic media. This requires taking account of what Andrew Feenberg has called 'the implicit

¹⁵*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, pp. 321, 325.

¹⁶The ideological function of technical imperatives is thus the practical reversal of Habermas's theoretical account of legitimation. Rather than systemically ordered complexes being anchored in the lifeworld via public legitimation, social forms of power are legitimized in practice via the appeal to systemic efficiency/effectiveness, *the re-presentation of class-specific interests as technically rational decisions.*

¹⁷An intuitive example of this can be seen in the difficulties encountered in transplanting capitalist markets into post-communist societies. This proved to be a spectacular failure in many cases, at least in part because it was guided by the assumption of an 'essence' of markets, logically separable from its social-cultural-political contexts.

designed-in normative biases of rationalized institutions'.¹⁸ The types of domination resulting from the contextualization of systemic media are not types of 'direct' domination, as they presuppose the switch-over to depersonalized social relations, and hence are mediated by the general adoption of the objectivating attitude that is demanded by steering media. This mediated form of domination can be characterized in terms of three specific features. Firstly, the power of dominant social groups must become socially effective *through the application of purposive-rational logics*. Discerning how this occurs will involve an internal critique of social institutions structured by steering media. Secondly, the exercise of social power *through* mediatized institutions presupposes the freedom from the forms of moral obligation built into 'direct' domination. That is, it presupposes the switch-over to purposive-rational orientations, in which social relations are rendered instrumental to the maximization of profit, effectiveness, and productivity. Thirdly, purposive-rational logics now come to serve as an ideological veil for the assertion of dominant interests within mediatized organizations and institutions. In 'direct' domination, as we saw, it is the 'naturalness' of social hierarchy that performs this ideological function. Relations of social domination are directly 'built into' social identities, rendering those relations an integral part of a meaningful order. When domination becomes depersonalized - as mediated by institutions structured through steering media and demanding the adoption of an objectivating attitude - it is the assumption of a pure, asocial, purposive-rational logic that takes over this ideological function.

Theoretical support for this latter idea can be gleaned from Alasdair MacIntyre's critique

¹⁸ Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, p. 176.

of managerialism, in his *After Virtue*.¹⁹ Bureaucratic expertise, governed by the criterion of effectiveness, constitutes a social fiction, MacIntyre argues, because the objective claims to knowledge that would justify it cannot be sustained.²⁰ Managers cannot control the social environment in the way that the notion of bureaucratic expertise intimates to be possible. Yet the manager continues to be perceived in the wider culture as possessing the type of knowledge and skills that would permit the ordering of means to ends according to the pure criterion of effectiveness. But if the claims to effectiveness are objectively unsustainable, it is plausible to see the notion of managerial expertise as an ideology, behind which lies hidden the assertion of dominant interests. The, supposedly, objectively grounded claims of managers and bureaucratic experts must be understood, at least in part, as *unreal performances which legitimize the use of power*.²¹ MacIntyre stresses this point in speaking of a 'fetishism of bureaucratic skills', which has come to supplement the fetishism of commodities,

For it follows from my whole argument that the realm of managerial expertise is one in which what purport to be objectively-grounded claims function in fact as expressions of arbitrary, but disguised, will and preference. . . . [I]n the social world of corporations and governments[,] private preferences are advanced under the cover

¹⁹London: Duckworth, 1985. A useful elucidation of this aspect of MacIntyre's work can be found in Peter McMylor, *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1994), chapter 5. For reasons which are obscure, MacIntyre consciously abstains from situating his own work within the tradition of European critical theory. My comments here, I hope, will go some way towards compensating for this.

²⁰Expertise here refers to the ability to formulate accurate law-like generalizations. The reasons MacIntyre gives for this claim, which I cannot discuss here, can be found in *After Virtue*, pp. 93-100.

²¹See McMylor, *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity*, p. 138.

of identifying the presence or absence of the findings of experts.²²

If we substitute 'dominant social interests' for what MacIntyre calls 'arbitrary will' and 'private preferences', it becomes clear how this thesis can be seen as the basis of an ideology-critical reading of purposive-rationally organized institutions and organizations, as sustaining specifically capitalist forms of social domination.²³ The ideology of effectiveness serves within bureaucratic and administrative organizations as a mask for the exercise of social power. We can understand MacIntyre's thesis, I suggest, in terms of the idea that the lacuna between the (unsustainable) objective claim to effectiveness, and the extent of the possible deployment of expertise within bureaucratic and administrative organizations, *provides a space in which dominant social interests can enter, as a structuring moment of supposedly 'purely' purposive-rationally organized institutions*. Dominant interests hide behind, so to speak, the objectivating attitude constitutive of systemically ordered domains. The subsystems of purposive-rational action do not only 'mediate' the lifeworld, as Habermas claims, they *also* provide an ideological veil for the assertion of class- and group-specific interests. The 'fetishism' of bureaucratic skills takes the claims to effectiveness of purposive-rational subsystems at face value, rather than perceiving the operations of social power *within* institutions and organizations.

The private preferences of which MacIntyre speaks, then, can be understood as class-specific

²²*After Virtue*, p. 107.

²³Note, in this regard, that MacIntyre abstains on the question of *whose* interests are served by social fictions: 'If moral utterance is put to uses at the service of arbitrary will, it is someone's arbitrary will; and the question of *whose* will it is is obviously of both moral and political importance. *But to answer that question is not my task here.*' (*After Virtue*, p. 110 [latter italics mine]). If my answer - 'specifically capitalist forms of social domination' - is the most cogent answer to *this* question, then, of course, situating *After Virtue* within the framework of critical social theory will be entirely justified.

interests that get a foothold in the space between the *meaning* of claims to effectiveness and their *social deployment*. In what follows, I want to provide support for this thesis by looking at the operation of systemic domination in three particular areas, namely, the work process, technology, and administration.

1) *The Work Process/Industrial Organization*

Studies on changes in industrial organization have provided substantive evidence for the thesis that criteria such as efficiency and effectiveness, pertaining purely to systemic rationality and independent of specific group interests, cannot by themselves account for fundamental transformations in the reorganization of the work process. Rather, explaining the organization of the work process necessitates an examination of the influence of capitalist interests, such as the need for control over knowledge and the process of production. But there persists an 'official' view, what David Noble has called the 'Darwinian view', which argues instead that creative invention in work organization and design passes through the filters of objective science, economic rationality, and the market, which effortlessly 'select' the most efficient alternative.²⁴ This provides a valuable illustration of how the appeal to systemic rationality is capable of taking on an ideological function - in masking exercises of social power as decisions necessitated by the systemic demands for profit and effectiveness. Systemic rationality can be seen here as a *rationalization* of decisions and developments which were taken and followed, at least in part, on the basis of social and political interests.

Harry Braverman, in his account of the scientific-technical transformation of the work

²⁴David Noble, *Forces of Production* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984), pp. 145ff.

process, argued that social interests played a determining role in the application of purposive-rational thinking to the organization of work. The guiding interest behind this transformation, Braverman argued, was the capitalist interest in control over the work process.²⁵ Hence scientific-technical knowledge was applied to the work process *in such a way that this interest was secured*. Within the social-cultural context of class antagonism, the application of scientific rationality took the form of a transfer of knowledge from the worker to management, with the intention of breaking the element of worker control still afforded in craft culture,

It is in the age of the scientific-technical revolution that management sets itself the problem of grasping the [work] process as a whole and controlling every element of it, without exception. . . . The unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind, which capitalism threatened from its beginnings, is now attacked by a systematic dissolution employing all the resources of science and the various engineering disciplines based upon it.²⁶

Stephen Marglin has suggested that control over knowledge, rather than 'efficiency', can be seen as the dominant factor in a number of innovations in work organization, from sub-product specialization, and, in many cases, the factory system, to 'scientific management', and later in the development of hi-tech agriculture.²⁷ In all these cases, Marglin's analyses suggest, a class-specific

²⁵Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), pp. 169ff.

²⁶*Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 171.

²⁷The first two elements are discussed in Stephen Marglin, 'Losing Touch: The Cultural Conditions of Worker Accommodation and Resistance', in F. A. Marglin and S. A. Marglin (eds.), *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture and Resistance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 220-23. The argument applies to the factory system in those cases where it took place

interest in control came to determine the direction, and the social instantiation of purposive-rational thinking. The interest in control was the social filter through which purposive rationality became historically active. Another illustration of this argument has been furnished by David Noble's social history of industrial automation, in his *Forces of Production*. Arguing against the view that the primary motive in the development of automation was efficiency, in terms of cost reduction, Noble argues that the drive to automate 'has been from its inception the drive to reduce dependence upon skilled labor, to deskill necessary labor and reduce rather than raise wages'.²⁸

A further aspect of Harry Braverman's argument concerns his assertion of capitalist interests was achieved *through* an instrumentalization of work, exemplified in the attempt of F. W. Taylor's 'scientific management' to 'treat the workers themselves as machines'.²⁹ The transformation of the worker into a general-purpose machine, a 'mechanism articulated by hinges, ball-and-socket joints,

without an appreciable change in technology. The role of scientific management is discussed in Marglin's essay 'Knowledge and Power', in F. Stephen (ed.), *Firms, Labour and Organization: Approaches to the Economics of Work Organization* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1984). In his analysis of agricultural systems, Marglin argues that the development of hi-tech agriculture resulted in 'the substitution of the farmer's wisdom, rooted in the experience of working the land, for the knowledge of the plant breeder, chemist, or engineer, rooted in the laboratory or the experimental plot', Stephen Marglin, 'Farmers, Seedsmen and Scientists: Systems of Agriculture and Systems of Knowledge', in *Decolonizing Knowledge: From Development to Dialogue*, F. A. Marglin and S. A. Marglin (eds.) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 220.

²⁸*Forces of Production*, p. 338. Noble supports this thesis through an analysis of the grounds of the eventual success the N/C (numerical control) model of automation, over the R/P (record-playback) model. Whereas N/C lent itself to programming in the office, and management control over the process, R/P built upon workers' skills, and lent itself to programming on the shop floor. Noble argued that the eventual dominance of the N/C model was explicable in terms of the needs and interests of the technical, management, and military communities (which formed the *social context* determining the development of automation) rather than in terms of any superior efficiency (pp. 191ff.).

²⁹*Labor and Monopoly Capital*, p. 173.

etc.’, became entwined with a particular capitalist interest, namely, ‘the displacement of labor as the subjective element of the labor process and its transformation into an object’.³⁰ Purposive rationality, in this case, became historically active as a restructuring of work that served the assertion of technical and bureaucratic control over the work process, typified by the assembly line and the rule book. At the same time, as Stephen Marglin has argued, authority was *depersonalized*, and the class-specific interests underlying this transformation were legitimated by appeal the shared social value of ‘impersonal rationality’, conceived as a ‘transcendent authority’ to which all were subject.³¹ By this means, systemic domination was able to maintain patterns of authority and control without making use of the means of compulsion, rooted in tradition and cultural meaning, that typify direct domination. What is now crucial is the mediation of domination through purposive-rationally organized social forms. Purposive rationality is both an ideological veil for the assertion of dominant interests, *and* a social process within which class antagonisms are ‘subsumed’.

2) *Technology*

Andrew Feenberg has argued convincingly that Habermasian media theory ought to be expanded to include technology as a third dimension, alongside money and power.³² The justification for this argument concerns the communication-replacing function that is taken on by different technological

³⁰*Labor and Monopoly Capital*, pp. 179-80.

³¹‘What the capitalist forgets to mention’, Marglin continues, ‘is that somebody makes the rules, just as somebody sets the speed of the line’, Stephen Marglin, ‘Losing Touch: The Cultural Conditions of Worker Accommodation and Resistance’, pp. 223-4.

³²Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, pp. 166ff.

devices.³³ Following from this claim, and in line with the argument advanced concerning systemic domination, it would make sense to look for the operation of social power within the construction and design of technological devices. It is precisely this move, Feenberg notes, that is excluded by Habermas's employment of systems theory. Habermas cannot criticize the internal structure of any of the media, and treats them instead as 'neutral realizations of a rational logic'.³⁴ Feenberg attempts to correct Habermas's reading, by means of a 'design critique' of technology, which is based on the assumption that alongside natural purposes (such as control over nature), there are always also *social* purposes (such as capitalist control) embedded in technological design, which reflect and entrench dominant social interests. The notion of design critique rests on a social constructionist view of technology, viewing it as a social object, rather than conceiving it in essentialist terms, as describable independently of social, cultural and political contexts. Central to design critique is the idea that the definition of 'problems' and 'solutions' in technological design is not reducible to questions of technical efficiency *in abstraction from the needs and interests of social groups which are at stake in the construction of technical devices*. Rather, technical problems and solutions are partially defined by social needs and interests.³⁵ The roots of the notion of design critique can

³³This is intuitively plausible if we think, for example, of the role of technology in coordinating people's actions within the transportation system (by means of traffic lights, for instance). Feenberg also makes use of Bruno Latour's example of the door closer, which substitutes for the linguistic command "close the door!". See *Questioning Technology*, p. 168.

³⁴*Questioning Technology*, p. 176. Feenberg argues that the Habermasian account is guilty of the essentialist error, as it 'interprets a historically specific phenomenon in terms of a transhistorical conceptual construction' (*Questioning Technology*, p. 15).

³⁵Bijker and Pinch have applied this idea to the development of the bicycle in the late nineteenth century. See their 'The Social Construction of Facts and Artifacts', in W. E. Bijker, T. P. Hughes, T. J. Pinch (eds.), *The Social Construction of Technological Systems* (Cambridge, Ma: MIT Press, 1987).

perhaps be traced to Marcuse's reading of science and technology, which offers the possibility of a critical appropriation of technological systems that is inaccessible from a Habermasian standpoint. Marcuse argued that

[t]he very concept of technical reason is perhaps ideological. . . . 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.³⁶

Feenberg terms that approach which takes into account the embodiment of social, cultural, and political norms in technological devices the 'hermeneutic' approach. This is contrasted with the 'functionalist' approach, in which technological devices are conceived as standing in external relations with social norms and interests. The hermeneutic approach is capable of disclosing the *power-laden pre-understanding* that informs specific instances of technological design and development.³⁷ Feenberg refers to this pre-understanding as a 'technical code' that guides the selection process in technological design.³⁸ This idea enables us to see the ideological function of technocratic rationalization. For once technical codes become embodied in devices, the process of technical development, and the background of interests that partially determine this development,

³⁶Herbert Marcuse, *Negations* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 223-4.

³⁷*Questioning Technology*, pp. 86ff.

³⁸An example of this, Feenberg suggests, is the technical code that privileges deskilling as a strategy of mechanization (*Questioning Technology*, p. 179).

tend to be mystified under the illusion of technical necessity.³⁹ In this way, technocratic rationalization functions as a mask for the exercise of social power.

Feenberg conceives of the mediation of class and group domination with subsumptive-instrumental logics in terms of a distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary' instrumentalization. Primary instrumentalization consists of four reifying moments, which can be understood as roughly articulating what Adorno conceived as that logical structure that establishes the 'subsumability of objects under abstract rules'. By means of this fourfold reification, objects are 1) *decontextualized* (de-worlded), and 2) *reduced* to those qualities that are technically useful. And the subject is 1) *autonomized* (i.e. isolated from the effects of its action), and 2) *positioned* strategically with respect to objects, and hence able to manipulate their hidden properties for subjectively posited ends.⁴⁰ Secondary instrumentalization denotes the social contextualization of the primary technical relation expressed in this fourfold reification. There are four components to this contextualization, comprising 1) *systematization* (the re-embedding of a device in its natural environment), 2) *mediation* through ethical and aesthetic qualities. Also, vis à vis the subject, 3) *vocation* (the integration of the acts of the technical subject into the life process), and 4) the compensating for strategic positioning through various forms of tactical *initiative*. It is because of the necessary underdetermination of technological development, when seen solely from the level of primary instrumentalization, that social interests and values are able to assert themselves at this secondary

³⁹Technical codes, Feenberg argues, come to appear as 'self-evident', and the historical process by which objects are selected by a code reflecting social values disappears from view. Social scientific investigation is therefore called upon to undertake the critical task of uncovering the social interests that are unthinkingly reflected in technological regimes (*Questioning Technology*, p. 88).

⁴⁰*Questioning Technology*, pp. 203-5.

level. By taking account of this second level, that type of technological fetishism can be overcome, in which technology appears 'as a non-social instantiation of pure technical rationality rather than as a node in a social network'.⁴¹ It is because the subsumptive logic of technical rationality operates in a social context that is power-laden, that the social-scientific analysis of this second level takes the form of a hermeneutic critique of power. At the point of social contextualization, therefore, the entwinement of technical rationality and capitalist interests can become visible to social critique.

3) *Administrative Rationality*

In the cases of the work process and technology, we have seen how purposive rationality serves as an ideological veil for the social operation of dominant interests. Alasdair MacIntyre's critique of the claims to expertise of managerialism, as we saw, makes the same point concerning administrative and bureaucratic forms. The purposive-rationally organized knowledge of managers and experts cannot ground the type of expertise that would justify the extent of bureaucratic/administrative power in modern society. Expertise cannot control the social environment such that the action of managers and administrators could be intelligibly understood as the execution of collective goals according to a pure logic of effectiveness. Consequently, social power is able to enter at the point of the social contextualization of bureaucratic/administrative rationality. However, expertise continues to function as a *discourse of legitimation* for decisions that are taken on the basis of class- or group-specific interests. When bureaucratic and administrative decisions are challenged, appeal is made to bureaucratic expertise and 'effectiveness'. In this way, the purposive-rational knowledge of experts functions as a means of marginalizing or suppressing

⁴¹*Questioning Technology*, p. 211.

deeply rooted forms of social conflict.⁴² As in the case of the work process and technology, this points to the need for an internal critique of purposive-rationally ordered social forms, a critique that is able to uncover the operation of social power within them.

An insight into the workings of administrative rationality as a form of ideology can be gleaned from Bent Flyvbjerg's study, *Rationality and Power: Democracy in Practice*.⁴³ Flyvbjerg's study is concerned with the capacity of a social context of power, which filters into administrative institutions, to influence or deflect collective goals. One of Flyvbjerg's guiding theses is that it is either meaningless, or misleading for administrators and researchers to operate with a conception of rationality from which power is absent.⁴⁴ Significantly, Flyvbjerg grounds this thesis in the idea that power constitutes the *social context* of rationality.⁴⁵ In order to understand the operation of administrative rationality, Flyvbjerg argues, one must proceed on the assumption that 'knowledge and power, truth and power, rationality and power are . . . analytically and politically inseparable, leaving the actual relationship between these phenomena open to empirical test'.⁴⁶ Power is understood by Flyvbjerg in broadly Foucaultian terms, as a productive force disseminated in social

⁴²In fact, the ideological function, which was latent in the first two cases, becomes explicit in the case of bureaucratic expertise, given the close link between administration and the political sphere.

⁴³Trans. S. Sampson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). Flyvbjerg's study focusses upon the 'Aalborg project', an urban planning project originating in the town of Aalborg, Denmark, in the late 1970's.

⁴⁴Flyvbjerg explicitly formulates this thesis as a critique of Habermas's theory of communicative rationality, in *Rationality and Power*, p. 227.

⁴⁵'rationality is context-dependent, and . . . the context of rationality is power', *Rationality and Power*, p. 3.

⁴⁶*Rationality and Power*, p. 6.

relations, rather than as located in a centre. Administrative rationality, therefore, must be seen as something that is *produced within* this power-laden social context. Hence the rationality that is allegedly attributable to the neutral analyses of experts is, instead, to be perceived as 'actively formed by the power relations which are themselves grounded and expressed in processes that are social-structural, conjunctural, organizational, and actor related. Conversely, these power relations are supported by the rationality generated'.⁴⁷ Flyvbjerg employs the notion of the '*longue durée*' of power as a way of conceiving this contextualization. In relation to modern institutions and phenomena such as administrative neutrality and rationality, forms of social power can be seen as 'estate' traditions that have consolidated themselves via centuries of daily practice. These consolidated power relations 'have penetrated into the forging of modern institutions'.⁴⁸

Flyvbjerg coins the term *Realrationalität* for that type of rationality that is produced in the context of relations of power. The notion of *Realrationalität* places social conflict at the centre of the study of politics, administration and planning. This notion then leads to the central distinction between 'rationality' and 'rationalization'. The latter term denotes the deployment of rationality by power in the service of specific social interests. Flyvbjerg describes the operation of rationality and rationalization within contexts of power in terms of Goffman's notion of a 'frontstage-backstage' relationship. 'Backstage', beyond public view, power operates as rationalization of decisions. This rationalization is then presented 'frontstage' as rationality.⁴⁹ In Flyvbjerg's case study, the evaluative

⁴⁷*Rationality and Power*, p. 27.

⁴⁸*Rationality and Power*, p. 90. 'In most societies', Flyvbjerg argues, 'entrenched practices of class and privilege form part of the social and political context and limit the possibilities of democratic change' (p. 235).

⁴⁹See *Rationality and Power*, pp. 97-8; p. 228.

criteria for administrative and planning decisions, and the mode in which those criteria are to be applied, are seen to be largely determined by dominant social and political interests. Hence, *administrative expertise functions in large part as the technical rationalization of previously made decisions*. ‘What emerges’, Flyvbjerg argues, ‘is a picture of technical expertise used as rationalization of policy, of rationality as the legitimation of power’.⁵⁰ Linked to this is that characteristic operation of social power which Flyvbjerg terms ‘defining reality’. Dominant interests produce the knowledge that is conducive to the reality desired, and this active operation of social power must be sought for just as much in the *absence* of rational arguments and documentation in support of *certain* actions, as in their presence on behalf of other actions.⁵¹ As in the case of technological design, this points towards the need for a critical hermeneutic of power, that is, a social-scientific investigation that is able uncover the power-laden pre-understanding informing the decisions of administration and planning. The presupposition behind such a critical hermeneutic is that *bureaucratic and administrative expertise rationalizes dominant conceptions of economic and social needs, by re-presenting them in the guise of neutral, technical rationality*. Administrative rationality thereby takes on an ideological function, in transforming a particular conceptualization of economic and social interests into ‘expert knowledge’. A valuable elucidation of this thesis can be found in the work of Benyon, Hudson, and Sadler on the role of management during the decline of two British nationalized industries.⁵² In part two their study, which deals with the decision to

⁵⁰*Rationality and Power*, p. 26.

⁵¹See *Rationality and Power*, p. 27, pp. 36ff, p. 227.

⁵²H. Benyon, R. Hudson, D. Sadler, *A Tale of Two Industries: The Contraction of Coal and Steel in the North East of England* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1991). Much of the analysis of the actions of management in this study dovetails with Flyvbjerg’s analysis of power

close a particular colliery, the authors argue that the National Coal Board actively sought to confine public discussion and debate within the narrow parameters of a particular conceptualization of economic interests, and deliberately discounted and obfuscated the efforts of trade unions to frame debate around a *competing* conceptualization of economic interests, which laid stress on the social costs and social consequences of mine closures. According to Benyon et. al., the Coal Board adopted the language of 'production', 'budgets' and 'plans' to rationalize a decision that had already been pre-determined on the basis of a pre-understanding reflecting the interests of dominant social groups.⁵³ This would appear to be a worrying confirmation of MacIntyre's thesis that the appeal to expertise functions in large part as a means of marginalizing, and suppressing social conflict.⁵⁴ When it dons the mantle of expertise and speaks the language of efficiency, administrative rationality is engaged to a large extent in *depoliticizing* social conflicts, involving the re-presentation of conceptualizations deriving from dominant social-economic interests in the form of technical-neutral decisions. This process, as Flyvbjerg stresses, serves one of the central purposes of administrative rationality, which is to keep conflictual relations latent rather than visible, and stable rather than confrontational. What *appears* simply as the transformation of public policy into administrative action is in fact determined by the influence and interests of dominant social groups, an influence that is at the same time disguised by the elimination of politics with the aid of

as producing technical rationalization. The authors argue, for instance, that the National Coal Board exploited its monopoly of knowledge to fend off criticism (pp. 37ff.).

⁵³See *A Tale of Two Industries*, p. 78.

⁵⁴See McMyllor, *Alasdair MacIntyre: Critic of Modernity*, pp. 145ff.

technics.⁵⁵

These analyses suggest that the notion of integration through domination, which was reinterpreted in the previous chapter through the notion of symbolic domination, can also form the basis of an internal critique of purposive-rationally ordered social forms. Systemic integration cannot *merely* be understood as integration via delinguistified media, but must *also* be understood as integration through domination. My arguments in this section have therefore furnished a partial vindication of Adorno's claim that the cohesion of modern societies is partially secured *through* an antagonism of interests (ESoz 78). A significant component of societal integration is the successful attempts of dominant social groups to impose their interests on the operations of purposive-rationally organized social forms. Habermas's focus on 'social' versus 'systemic' integration thus appears as woefully inadequate. Modern societies are integrated in large part, not through consensus, but via dominant interests, rooted in the lifeworld, that disguise themselves as systemic imperatives, *thereby furnishing a de-politicization, and thus suppression and marginalization, of social conflict*. We can understand the mediation of purposive rationality and social power, I suggested, by thinking of relations of domination as the social context within which mediatized social forms operate. When understood through their contextualization, the imperatives of subsystems are revealed, in large part, as the imperatives of dominant social groups.

Meaning and History

⁵⁵*Rationality and Power*, p. 161.

In his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber depicts the loss of meaning afflicting modern, rationalized social orders in terms of the severance of economic activity from its value-rational background in the protestant ethic, which had previously furnished economic activity with a moral-spiritual sense. Occupational asceticism had been religiously anchored, and responded to the need for salvation. Acquisition for acquisition's sake was, for Weber, 'originally not poiesis, but praxis, part of a mode of life in which what was at stake was not representations of success but representations of validity'.⁵⁶ In the course of the development of modern capitalism, Weber argued, economic activity lost its anchorage in the substantive rationality of moral-religious meaning,

The Puritan wanted to work in a calling, we are forced to do so. For when asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate world morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which to-day determine the lives of all the individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force. . . . Where the fulfilment of the calling cannot directly be related to the highest spiritual and cultural values, or when, on the other hand, it need not be felt simply as economic compulsion, the individual generally abandons the attempt to justify it at all. . . . [T]he pursuit of wealth, stripped of its religious and ethical meaning, tends to become associated with purely mundane passions, which

⁵⁶Wolfgang Schluchter, 'Ethik und Kapitalismus. Die zwei Thesen Max Webers', in *Unversöhnte Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), p. 210.

often actually give it the character of sport.⁵⁷

Weber's suspicion that the process of disenchantment has created conditions in which it was impossible to redeem the Enlightenment ideals of reason, freedom, and progress - that Enlightenment had 'relinquished its own realization' - forms a guiding theme of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.⁵⁸ The Weberian analysis was interpreted, by Horkheimer and Adorno, in terms of a transition in the form and structure of domination. An originally spiritual form of domination, which was rooted in a frame of social meaning linked to substantive reason, transformed itself into the domination of formally rationalized institutions - modes of production and bureaucracy disembedded from any cosmological sense - over human beings. This comprises both a new structure of class and group domination, mediated by the domination of institutions over human beings, and the reification of cultural meanings.

It is the latter thesis that Habermas attempts to reinterpret through the idea of 'cultural impoverishment'. Cultural rationalization, which sets free the inner logics of cultural value spheres, also remains encapsulated in expert cultures, in such a way that the professionalized treatment of cultural tradition becomes 'a kind of second nature that has lost its force'.⁵⁹ In my critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason, I argued that cultural reification must be understood, instead, as an internal distortion of moral discourse, which takes the form of a severance of moral value from experiential content and social-historical meaning. This was described through the notion of

⁵⁷Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons (London: Unwin, 1930), pp. 181-2.

⁵⁸*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 41; 48.

⁵⁹*The Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. 2, p. 327.

linguistic reification, understood as that process by which moral concepts becomes constitutively severed from social-historical contextual connections, and from moral experience. Habermas's diluted reading of the problem of cultural reification, I argued, leads to a number of untenable dualisms in his reading of the structure of moral discourse. The result of this reading was seen to be the reduction of moral discourse to a form of conflict management, a temporary negotiation of the clash of social interests, without transfigurative force.

It was also argued, however, that Habermas's recent work on the role of meaning-disclosive discourses hints at an interpretation of the problem of cultural reification more congenial to the analyses found in Adorno's work. Habermas's appeal to the existential orientation furnished by *das Außeralltägliche* (the extraordinary) and *das Unbedingte* (the unconditioned), I suggested, can be read as an admission of the danger of the potential desiccation of communicative practice, when moral-practical reason is emptied of the meaning content furnished by ethical ideals. However, although Habermas's analysis of the problem is correct, it cannot be surmounted by calling upon meaning-disclosive discourses to take the supplementary role of a nonrational complement to moral discourse. From an Adornian perspective, it is the de-cognitivizing of meaning-disclosure that lies at the very root of processes of linguistic reification. What must be made accessible to critical analysis is the process by which moral categories become systematically decontextualized, *and thus de-narrativized and de-practicalized*. This calls for a more substantive engagement with the distortions inherent in cultural rationalization than is discernible in Habermas's work. The basis of such an account, I believe, can be found in Charles Taylor's social philosophy. Taylor, I will argue, interprets the loss of meaning thesis in terms of the inaccessibility of the ethical background of moral norms. On Taylor's view, it is the social-historical meaning content attaching to moral

categories, that which enables those categories to work critically within the social world, which is seen to be under threat from the procedural rationality accompanying capitalist modernization.

An appropriate place to take up this idea in Taylor's work is his essay 'Legitimation Crisis?'.⁶⁰ The broadly Weberian thrust of Taylor's approach to the question of legitimacy can be discerned in his account of the relation between social practices and the ideals and self-understandings of human agents. Taylor's conception of legitimacy can be characterized as internalist.⁶¹ Legitimacy cannot be conceptualized in quantifiable terms, or in terms of scientific-behaviourist concepts, but is rather concerned essentially with the self-understandings of agents, involving conceptions of the good life and notions of what it is to be human that have framed the identity of persons in modern societies. Taylor's guiding thesis is that the structures and institutions of the social and political order realize and embody a determinate form of human self- and world-interpretation, and thereby 'materialize' a corresponding moral map, or vision of the good.⁶² With this idea of a vision of the good that is carried by and within institutions, Taylor intends something akin to Hegel's objective spirit, as the social-political embodiment of the *Geist* of a set of agents. The identity of agents in modern societies, Taylor argues, can be seen to contain three specific normative self-interpretations, which determine the dignity of the self and its sense of its own moral worth. The modern agent understands him or herself as an equal bearer of rights (the legal self-

⁶⁰In *Philosophy and the Human Sciences: Philosophical Papers 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁶¹Hartmut Rosa, *Identität und kulturelle Praxis: Politische Philosophie nach Charles Taylor* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1998), p. 418.

⁶²See Hartmut Rosa, *Identität und kulturelle Praxis*, p. 417. See also his 'On Defining the Good Life: Liberal Freedom and Capitalist Necessity', *Constellations* 5 (1998) 201-214, pp. 206-7.

interpretation), as a producer (the economic self-interpretation), and as a citizen (the political self-interpretation). These self-conceptions are typically embedded within a set of practices, which sustain, nurture and support the modern identity. The normative self-interpretations of equal rights bearer, producer, and citizen, argues Taylor, are materialized by practices such as the operation of the legal system, the practices of negotiation and collective bargaining, and the political system of voting and elections.⁶³ According to Taylor, then, members of a society will find that society legitimate just so long as they affirm the self-representations and inherent goods which are sedimented in its institutions, structures and practices. A legitimation crisis may ensue because individuals come to affirm self-interpretations, drawn from other cultures or worked out in opposition to one's own society, that are in conflict with the objective spirit of the society in question. Another possibility, however, is that political-social structures can no longer function as embodiments of the common moral map, the normative self-interpretations of agents, either because they have become rigidified, or because they have been infiltrated by imperatives that negate these self-interpretations. It is the latter possibility that can form the basis for a loss of meaning thesis.

Modern capitalist society, Taylor argues, tends to undermine the capacity of social practices to function as the embodiments of the self- and world-interpretations of modern agents. This society, Taylor asserts, 'has a fateful tendency to sap the bases of its own legitimacy'.⁶⁴ The institutions and social practices which entrench and express the modern identity tend, over time, to undermine participants' faith in this identity. For instance, productive labour within the economic system is linked, via the normative self-interpretations distinctive of what Taylor calls the 'naturalist' world

⁶³'Legitimation Crisis?', p. 276.

⁶⁴'Legitimation Crisis?', p. 288.

view, to the strong goods of rational control and freedom from illusion. Hence, in productive labour, 'we are not only meeting our needs, but we are also realizing our status as autonomous, rational agents. We are affirming ourselves spiritually'.⁶⁵ The instrumental stance towards nature is normatively anchored by the affirmation of human autonomy. The latter constitutes the spiritual dimension to the assertion of instrumental control in economic practices. It is this spiritual-normative anchoring of productive activity that Taylor sees as threatened by the disfigurements of work within 'consumer society'. Elements of this are alienated labour, that is, the loss of control over work relations and tasks, the lack of common control of economic priorities, and commodity fetishism, understood as the organizing of a self-identity around consumer products.⁶⁶ The consequence of this is that the practices which organize productive activity prevent this activity from being experienced as an affirmation of the normative self-interpretations concerning freedom and autonomous control. Taylor encapsulates this argument as follows,

If we see ourselves as the playthings of mindless impersonal forces, or worse, the victims of a fascination with mere things, and this in the very practices which are supposed to sustain our identity and our conception of the good, then we cannot but lose confidence in these practices. We are threatened with a kind of anomie, in which we cease to believe in the norms governing our social life, but have no alternative but to live by them nonetheless.⁶⁷

Thus, there exists a 'contradiction' of modern capitalist society that is not reducible to economic

⁶⁵'Legitimation Crisis?', p. 268.

⁶⁶'Legitimation Crisis?', pp. 278ff.

⁶⁷'Legitimation Crisis?', p. 282.

crisis. Rather, this contradiction can only be elucidated in terms of the relation between the normative self-interpretations of agents, and the social practices which materialize these self-understandings.

There is a fundamental connection, for Taylor, between the modern capitalist order and 'naturalist' self-understandings. In the course of its development, however, modern capitalism, becomes unable to realize the 'goods', the conceptions of human autonomy and mastery, that form the normative background of naturalism. Current practices come to contradict the historical sense attaching to the strong goods of rational mastery and freedom that infuse the naturalist standpoint. These goods are understood by Taylor as ethical ideals that represent the value-rational background to certain characteristic, modern social-political practices. They articulate a sense of the good, or a vision of the human, representing a normative model of human existence that embeds an ideal of self. The failure of social-political practices to nurture and support these ideals, Taylor argues, is liable to provoke a form of moral crisis.⁶⁸

Taylor's thesis of a social-practical undermining of ethical ideals can provide the basis for an argument concerning the reification of moral categories. The guiding question here concerns what happens to moral norms when they are no longer able to draw on the substantive ethical backgrounds, which are threatened by the erosion of the forms of practical-cultural materialization of normative self-interpretations. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor relates this inaccessibility, or suppression, of ethical backgrounds to the emergence of a purely procedural model of moral-

⁶⁸'Legitimation Crisis?', p. 277.

practical reasoning.⁶⁹ Defining the moral in procedural terms leads to an identification of moral thinking with the rational justifiability of formal principles of action. Taylor's charge against the procedural model can be understood, essentially, as the claim that, within it, *integral elements of moral experience are deprived of their cognitive force*. Taylor expresses this in terms of the constitutive sidelining of 'qualitative distinctions' in proceduralist formulations of moral-practical reason. Articulating qualitative distinctions, Taylor argues, means to set out 'the point of our moral actions. It explains in a fuller and richer way the meaning of this action for us, just what its goodness or badness, being obligatory or forbidden, consists in'.⁷⁰ By bracketing qualitative distinctions as irrelevant to moral justification, the type of cognition furnished by procedural moral-practical reason becomes too weak to capture the rational pull of moral ideals. It cannot provide reasons for the subjects whose moral understandings are at stake. The proceduralist counter move to this argument, of course, involves drawing a sharp distinction between the moral-cognitive force of justificatory procedures, and the supplementary role of meaning-disclosive discourse, as a source of motivation answering the question 'why be moral?'.⁷¹ I want to argue that we can derive a response to this from Taylor's work, which charges that the proceduralist view is deeply and inseparably bound up with a process of linguistic reification. To construct this argument, we must note that the appeal to qualitative distinctions in Taylor's work, involving the normative self-interpretations attaching to ethical ideals of the self, serves as a critique of the decontextualization of moral categories. The

⁶⁹Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 86-7.

⁷⁰*Sources of the Self*, p. 80.

⁷¹Jürgen Habermas, 'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', pp. 69ff.

ethical background of moral norms represents, for Taylor, those social-historical contextual connections that establish the cognitive binding force of moral categories. In tracing the history of modern moral categories in *Sources of the Self*, Taylor's strategy is to recover the social-historical meaning content of those categories, which is constitutively bracketed by the dominant procedural model of moral-practical reason. This is the same critical strategy that we saw at work in Adorno's critique of linguistic reification, where the intention is to 'comprehend things in their having become' (ESoz 245). Like Adorno, Taylor sees the potential for critique in the social-historical possibilities that enter into the construction of moral concepts, those possibilities that are neutralized or bracketed by a procedural determination of moral cognition. Thus in recovering the historical meanings of moral categories, Taylor wants to reclaim the emancipatory content of those categories, that which enables them to work as concrete disclosures of disfigured forms of practice. The transcendent element in moral categories is drawn from their (unredeemed) historical possibilities, locked within 'moral sources'. We can see the functioning of ethical ideals as a critique of reification in Taylor's discussion of the category of rights. Taylor constructs this critique through a distinction between two different structures of justification, namely, that type of justification that articulates a vision of the good (i.e. an ethical background) and the procedural mode of justification that focusses on 'basic reasons'. The 'vision of the good' represents the social-historical meaning content on which the procedural justification implicitly relies for its cognitive force, but which it simultaneously brackets or neutralizes,

It is one thing to say that I ought to refrain from manipulating your emotions or threatening you, because that is what respecting your rights as a human being requires. It is quite another to set out just what makes human beings worthy of

commanding our respect, and to describe the higher mode of life and feeling which is involved in recognizing this. . . . Our conceptions of what makes humans worthy of respect have shaped the actual schedule of rights we recognize, and the latter has evolved over centuries with changes in the former.⁷²

The 'vision of the good', therefore, *de-reifies* the category of rights, rendering its meaning sensitive to the historical process in which the concept is embedded. The *Sollen*, the 'ought' embedded in the category of rights can then appear as the realization of a historical possibility, and simultaneously as the 'truth' of an ethical self-interpretation that is socially-practically materialized (in imperfect form) in the institutions which secure the protection of rights.

Taylor's critique of the procedural model, which he also identifies with the instrumentalism of 'disengaged reason', relies on the notion, which we have seen to be central to Adorno's critique of the abstractions of moral reason, that moral cognition is parasitic upon the disclosure of experiential meaning. In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor traces the suppression of the cognitive force of a particular type of experience, which he terms the exploration of order through personal resonance, and which is said to be characteristic of artistic and literary modernism.⁷³ These 'epiphanic' works are founded on the assumption that a publicly accessible cosmic order of meanings has become impossible. Hence a feeling of contact with a moral order could now only be explored through the mediating term of what Taylor calls a personal vision. The intention of artistic and literary modernism was, according to Taylor, to 'retrieve experience from the deadening, routinized,

⁷²*Sources of the Self*, p. 77.

⁷³See *Sources of the Self*, pp. 456ff.

conventional forms of instrumental civilization'.⁷⁴ This did not mean a recovery of unmediated experience, but rather a transfiguration of conventional ways of seeing. It is the experience of the everyday as transfigured through personal resonances which, according to Taylor, is capable of generating an affective bond to moral value.⁷⁵ The suppression of this form of experience is, Taylor argues, a consequence of the dominance of the disengaged, instrumental mode of thinking. Habermas assumes, unsurprisingly, that Taylor's critique of the procedural model can only be a demand for an aesthetically motivated renunciation of philosophy, which must give up any pretense to convince on the basis of its 'own arguments'.⁷⁶ But in fact, Taylor's is invoking the same critique of the reduction of moral-practical reason to action-coordination that I explored at length in my critique of Habermas. As we also saw with Dewey's theory of communication, Taylor is arguing that moral validity is not reducible to the purely logical dimension of illocutionary force. The *justification* of norms is always also the disclosure, the 'sharing', of an experience of moral meaning; illocutionary force necessarily embodies an affective component. Whereas Dewey sees the affective bond emerging through the transfigurative power of the praxis of communication, for Taylor, it emerges in the transfigurative power of personal resonances. Taylor is suggesting that an integral part of the 'rational pull' of normative justification is to be found in the experience in which moral categories are disclosed as a meaningful ideal of self- and other-relations. Or, to put this differently, moral arguments must at some level incorporate an expressive presentation of self. To

⁷⁴*Sources of the Self*, p. 469.

⁷⁵As Taylor puts this, an epiphanic work 'can put us in contact with the sources it taps', *Sources of the Self*, p. 512.

⁷⁶'Remarks on Discourse Ethics', p. 74.

assent to a claim to moral validity is always also to respond affectively, sympathetically, to a claim to moral insult and injury, and to respond solidaristically to the ideal of intersubjective relations that is revealed in this self-presentation.⁷⁷

Taylor's argument, then, is that ethical self-interpretations, as mediated by forms of experiential disclosure, are *intrinsic to the meaning of moral norms*. The *reasons* we have for accepting moral norms are incomprehensible unless they also embody the articulation of an ethical ideal of self. This point is directly related to the critique of linguistic reification. For Taylor, it is ethical self-interpretations, which draw on the experiential disclosure of moral meaning, that furnish the narrativization of moral categories. They provide a 'story' of 'who we are', 'how we have become' and 'where we are going' that enables the transcendent force of the moral to be felt as a form of *ethical self-transcendence*, a claim on the self that is the self's own ideal social-historical possibility.⁷⁸ Moral categories, on this view, cannot appear merely as procedurally determined norms functional for action coordination. When their decontextualization and de-narrativization is seen through, they must be understood both as informed, constituted, by the history of struggle inscribed within them, and, through their historical possibilities, as embodying an *ethical* project of self-transformation. At this point, we can see a clear connection with Hegel's account of the struggle for recognition in the dialectic of crime. The moral claim that is raised in crime constitutes an innovative moral performance. The act that Hegel theorizes as 'crime' calls on other agents to acknowledge the concrete forms of injury wrought by prevailing social structures. But it does not

⁷⁷Jay Bernstein refers to this moment of self-presentation as the 'exemplary communication of subjective experience'. See his *Recovering Ethical Life*, p. 221.

⁷⁸Taylor discusses the narrative structuring of the self in *Sources of the Self*, p. 47.

achieve this by appeal to a disembodied norm. It constitutes rather, at one and the same time, *both the self-presentation of the injured self, and a normative claim on behalf of the ideal self, and thus evokes a response which is both normative and solidaristic*. The moral claim in the act of crime is both a claim on the collectivity to recognize itself in the injured self - that injury as its own doing - and a demand for the recognition of the ideal self that is invoked, as the most truthful instantiation of the ethical orientations of the collective identity. The normative claim raised in the act of crime is inseparable from a concrete history of struggle. To affirm the normative validity of that claim is also to respond affectively (sympathetically/solidaristically) to this history, as manifested in the self-presentation of the injured self. Hegel's dialectic of crime, then, exemplifies a dialectic of the moral life beyond the reification of moral categories, and beyond the diremption of illocutionary force.

Taylor criticizes Habermas for failing to deal with the *experiential consequences* of instrumentalism. Although Habermas's model of communicative democracy can deal adequately with the *public* consequences of instrumentalism, that is, its tendency to erode forms of democracy and self-government, Taylor argues that it fails to respond adequately to issues concerning loss of meaning and fragmentation, and 'loss of substance' in our human environment and affiliations.⁷⁹ The search for a purely formal-procedural model of practical reason, Taylor believes, merely intensifies problems deriving from the cognitive inaccessibility of moral meaning. Unless the moral bond can be made subjectively meaningful, in the terms of an ethical ideal of self, it can only represent an agreement to cooperate on nonmoral, instrumental grounds. What is left when moral meaning is subtracted is not the self-subsistent logical kernel of moral validity, but rather the semblance of normative interaction, masking the reality of systematically distorted communication.

⁷⁹See *Sources of the Self*, pp. 499ff.

Claus Offe has described the consequences of the formalization of norms through the process of societal modernization in a way which supports Taylor's thesis on the centrality of the experience of moral meaning to the moral bond. In his essay 'Modern "Barbarism": The State of Nature in Miniature?', Offe argues that the recourse to procedural regulation of relations, without a positive commitment to the ethical bases of 'civilized' interaction, is liable to have a potentially disintegrating effect on the moral bond. This is not that type of case, as in Durkheim's notion of anomie, where norms *themselves* become uncertain or unable to be comprehended. Rather, what occurs is that 'actors willfully step out of a system of norms which is present and well-defined, or make themselves insensitive to its demands'. What is in question is the decay of an ethical orientation, and the loss of the 'operational force of validity in the actual life of society' of norms that are still 'present', in the sense of being clearly defined and understood.⁸⁰ Offe speaks, in this regard, of the creation of 'micro-states of nature', as a consequence of 'the erosion of non-formal rule-systems in the process of modernization itself', which generates a standpoint of detached indifference, or predisposes towards the 'opportunistic carrying out of barbaric acts of exclusion and violence'.⁸¹ Offe suggests that the increasing role of the media of money, law, and professional knowledge in mediating social interaction is liable to render social life more susceptible to the potential effects of ethical disintegration, or to what he terms potential 'de-civilizing effects'. In the case of law, the positivity and formal-procedural nature of legal norms means that they become increasingly severed from the ethical bases that root legal validity within lifeworld understandings.

⁸⁰Claus Offe, 'Moderne "Barbarei": Der Naturzustand im Kleinforma?', in M. Miller and H. G. Soeffner (eds.), *Modernität und Barbarei* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), pp. 267-8.

⁸¹'Moderne "Barbarei": Der Naturzustand im Kleinforma?', p. 270.

This has the result that their social recognition becomes ever more precarious. This opens the space for the strategic employment of legally sanctioned norms for non-moral ends. Once legal norms become generally perceived solely as instrumentally useful, a failure of social integration emerges that cannot be made good with the means of law. Offe argues that

The civilizing effect of laws is often dependent on whether, in their field of application, a non-formalized, spontaneous accommodation to the reciprocal demands of law can occur, on the basis of nurtured norms of civil ethics, recognition, tolerance, respect, readiness for compromise, empathy, and so on. Without this supporting framework (*Unterfütter*) of civil interaction, the law is not peace-promoting, but rather, at the least, virtually conflict-intensifying'.⁸²

It is this process of ethical disintegration that Taylor has in mind when he speaks of the experiential consequences of instrumentalism. With the severance of norms from ethical interpretations linking them to subjective experience, norms do not disappear. Rather, they risk becoming intersubjectively meaningless. The practical consequences of this are described by Offe as an 'anaesthetization of the sense for the elementary inadmissibility of actions and also non-actions which injure the physical and symbolic integrity of other human beings'.⁸³ According to the view I am suggesting here, pathological consequences can be said to derive from the formalization of moral norms in the process of modernization, as a result of the tendency of purely procedural regulations to de-cognitivize moral meaning.

I want to argue, finally, that taking up the thesis of linguistic reification allows a different

⁸²'Moderne "Barbarei": Der Naturzustand im Kleinformat?', p. 285.

⁸³'Moderne "Barbarei": Der Naturzustand im Kleinformat?', p. 265.

perspective on the phenomenon that Taylor terms the 'ethics of inarticulacy'.⁸⁴ Taylor asserts that there are 'strong moral motives' at work in the suppression of qualitative distinctions, most notably a defence of modern freedom against parochial ethical principles.⁸⁵ But this may be only part of what is at stake in the failure of articulation that Taylor identifies as a constitutive condition of modern moral discourse. This failure may not simply reflect a *moral refusal*, but rather, and more worryingly, a *practical impossibility*. What this entails becomes clear if we see Taylor's notion of a failure of articulation in the context of Albrecht Wellmer's insightful discussion of pathological forms of speechlessness, in his essay 'Modernism and Postmodernism'.⁸⁶ Wellmer understands these pathological forms as simple types of linguistic reification, in which the articulation of an experience in language is rendered impossible by 'specific blockages, pathologies, or perversions of linguistic communication or social praxis'.⁸⁷ The distortions are said to represent a disproportionality of the universal and the particular, in which the particular cannot come into its own through language; it cannot be *named*.⁸⁸ Wellmer identified three specific types of pathologies of linguistic praxis.⁸⁹ The first concerns a speechlessness in the face of one's own experience, where we lack the means to communicate a personal and unique experience. The second concerns a 'prearranging' (*zurüstende*) and 'truncating' (*abschneidende*) use of language, where technical terms

⁸⁴*Sources of the Self*, pp. 53ff.

⁸⁵*Sources of the Self*, p. 85.

⁸⁶In *The Persistence of Modernity*.

⁸⁷'Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 74.

⁸⁸Wellmer takes this distortion to be the essence of Adorno's critique of identity thinking.

⁸⁹'Modernism and Postmodernism', pp. 75ff.

are used in routinized institutional settings to objectify and classify human beings, and represent a refusal of personal or therapeutic involvement. Through this institutionalized form of linguistic reification, human beings are transformed into objects and denied communicative attention. The third pathological form identified by Wellmer concerns the compulsion to systematize, where the need to assign everything to its allotted place leads to a rigidification of meanings. This reveals itself as an incapacity for experience and an incapacity for self-revision. The rigid system 'corresponds to a rigid ego'.⁹⁰ Drawing on Wellmer's reading of inarticulacy, as representing pathological forms of linguistic praxis, it might be suggested that the 'ethics of inarticulacy' identified by Taylor derives from a *reification of moral language*. The general failure of articulation - of speechlessness in the face of one's own moral intuitions, one might say - could then be interpreted as evidence of a process of linguistic reification, *in which moral categories become emptied of the social-historical content that enables them to be experienced as meaningful*. It is this decontextualization of normative concepts, as we have seen, that Adorno perceives to be the work of an objective process of abstraction, whereby value (as exchange value) is constitutively abstracted from the meaningfulness of things (their 'use value') within human experience. In being decontextualized, normative concepts are simultaneously de-narrativized. Normative judgement becomes unable to articulate the unredeemed historical possibilities of the item being judged. Taylor's work, or so I have claimed, deploys this argument as a loss of meaning thesis, which, I suggested, is discernible in pathological forms of moral 'speechlessness'. The 'meaning' lost must be understood as the dimension of moral transcendence, which is locked in the historical possibilities of 'moral sources'.

⁹⁰'Modernism and Postmodernism', p. 82.

Crisis of Experience

My analysis of systemic domination was intended to furnish the conceptual basis for explicating the role of instrumental logics in entrenching structures of social domination. I argued that instrumental logics provide an ideological veil for forms of social power rooted within the lifeworld, by representing the imperatives of dominant social groups as systemic imperatives. In this section, I want to provide a reinterpretation of the distorting effects on the lifeworld of the process that I have described as the infiltration of exchange logic into culture. The guiding presumption behind this analysis is that the transition to forms of 'indirect domination', understood as the mediation of structures of domination by social forms that intrinsically instrumentalize the relations between agents, not only implies the persistence of entrenched forms of social power, but brings forth a new set of experiential distortions effecting the lifeworld as a whole. Habermas's notion of colonization interprets the distortion of instrumental reason (now characterized as 'functionalist' reason) as the monetarization and bureaucratization of spheres of life that can only be reproduced through communicative action. I will argue, in opposition to the Habermasian analysis, that the distortion of cultural meaning brought about by the process of colonization, the infiltration of instrumental reason into the social world, must be understood in terms of a neutralizing of moral experience. The analysis will attempt to draw out the social-theoretic import of the problematic of linguistic reification, as this was explored earlier through the immanent critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason. The guiding idea behind this analysis is that the diremptions of moral-practical reason, as exemplifications of linguistic reification, are rooted in an objective process of abstraction, and it is this objective process that I want to bring to light with the aid of social theory.

On one level, this argument might be seen as an appropriation for critical social theory of Alasdair MacIntyre's 'emotivist self' thesis, which implies *the social-practical dissolution of the distinction between treating others as means and as ends, between manipulative and non-manipulative relations*. On my reading, the emotivist self is *not* to be seen as the asocial self, stripped of all social obligations and attachments.⁹¹ It is rather to be understood as the self that is *produced* by the process of colonization, in which lifeworld relations are subsumed under the instrumental logics of profit, effectiveness, and productivity. From this perspective, it is clear why MacIntyre's own account falls short. MacIntyre's reading rests on an untenable opposition between social roles as the bearers of moral obligation, and human nature, stripped of its social attachments, as inherently egoistic. This is why the solution to the problem of moral disintegration, for MacIntyre, must embody the idea of role conformism. If, however, the incapacity to treat others as subjects of moral concern is *socially produced*, the central task must be to distinguish and identify the structural logics that render moral categories inoperative.⁹² The emotivist self thesis can then be deployed as part of a critical social theory.

⁹¹See *After Virtue*, pp. 31-2.

⁹²If MacIntyre falls for the illusion that humans are 'naturally' egoistic (which has perhaps been intensified by his recent embrace of Thomism), Zygmunt Bauman, whose work I discuss in detail below, perhaps falls victim to the opposite error, when he argues that humans are naturally moral creatures. Although I will affirm much of Bauman's analysis of the social production of moral indifference, I believe it is possible to do so without resorting to a fixed 'social' versus 'natural' opposition.

Impulse and Experience

As we saw in the critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason, Adorno's notion of the 'impulse' stands for that level of moral experience which is subject to de-cognitizing pressures in the course of cultural rationalization. The impulse, for Adorno, denotes a type of affective attunement to the objects of moral attention, which is not simply functional for empirical motivation, but is rather integral to the very sense of the norms through which it receives a rational articulation. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno deploys the notion of the impulse in order to criticize a certain cognitive reductionism, a result of which is that forms of moral meaning disclosure accessible to situated experience are unable to inform the cognitive content of moral norms. In the section in *Negative Dialectics* entitled 'The addendum' (*Das Hinzutretende*), Adorno attempts to resist the reduction of the impulse to a mechanism governing the translation of the will (cognitive insight) into the act. The impulse is said to be 'intramental and somatic at one and the same time' (ND 228-9; 228), straddling the Kantian divide between the phenomenal and the noumenal. The import of this idea is that any attempt to sever absolutely the components of moral-practical reason, into a moment of 'pure' insight and a supplementary non-rational motive to the execution of moral imperatives, can only comprise a severe distortion of the cognitive force with which moral phenomena reveal themselves. The point is not that insight and motivation are to be seen as identical. Adorno's argument is rather that this distinction becomes highly problematic when it is fastened on to the diremption of a rule-governed cognitive process from (non-rational) situated, bodily experience. It is this latter diremption that, when absolutized, renders moral-practical reason indifferent to the rational pull of moral experience, and thus it is this diremption that Adorno's moral philosophy sets

out to undermine.

It is this same critique of the diremption of cognition and bodily experience which underlies Adorno's materialist epistemology. The term which straddles the divide between the mental and the material is here referred to as 'sensation' (*Empfindung*) (ND 192-4; 193-4). Sensation is said to include a 'somatic moment' which prohibits its reduction to an immanent fact of consciousness. This somatic moment comprises a 'bodily feeling' (*Körpergefühl*) which is already meaningful prior to immanent conceptual synthesis (ND 193; 194). The somatic moment can be seen as the forming moment of nonconceptual experience within cognition,

The somatic moment, as the not purely cognitive element of cognition, is irreducible.

. . . The fact that the cognitive acts of the subject of cognition are somatic according to their own meaning does not only affect the founding relationship of subject and object, but also the dignity of the bodily element (*des Körperlichen*). The latter emerges at the ontic pole of subjective cognition, as the core of that cognition. This dethrones the guiding idea of epistemology, to constitute the body as the law governing the connection between sensations and acts, thus to constitute it mentally (ND 193-4; 194).

The diremption of subject and object, in the form of sense-conferring mental processes and an inert, meaningless matter is thus false. It is not 'false', however, in the sense of being a mistake of thinking. Adorno's point is that this representation of the cognitive process is grounded in an objective process of abstraction, and hence one must speak here of an *objectively true fiction*. It is as a result of this 'real' abstraction that experiential items become inert 'facts', meaningless in themselves, whose sense derives solely from the purposes for which they are spliced up in the act

of subjective synthesis.

The moral-philosophical import of this materialist critique becomes apparent in Adorno's reflections on 'suffering physical' (ND 202-4; 202-4). The objective abstraction which dirempts subject and object gives rise, within the sphere of moral-practical reason, to a *rigidification of language*, which renders it unable to articulate the experience of suffering. What Adorno here refers to as the 'bodily moment' of cognition comprises that level of affective attunement to suffering which is integral to the very sense of moral concepts. It is thus the meaningfulness of moral phenomena, as this is revealed to situated, bodily experience, and which is articulated and expressed in rational form within moral-practical reason. The de-cognitizing of the impulse comprises the neutralizing or bracketing of the type of moral meaning disclosure accessible through it, and it is this neutralization which defines the moral-practical form of linguistic reification. In my critique of Habermasian moral-practical reason, I argued that it was precisely this de-cognitizing of forms of moral experience which was announced in the appeal to the 'weak force' of cognitive validity. For Adorno, as we have seen, linguistic reification is grounded in a social process. Thus the critique of the neutralization of moral experience cannot simply criticize philosophical forms of abstraction. Adorno perceives the social process that is the ground of linguistic reification as a form of abstraction definitive of exchange logic, which dirempts 'value' from the sensuous qualities of things. The moral-philosophical critique of abstraction, therefore, must be expanded into a social theory which is able to identify an objective process of abstraction at work within social forms. What is needed is an account of the institutionalized operation of reasoning forms which neutralize or bracket normatively saturated experience. In remainder of this chapter, therefore, I will draw upon social theory in order to explicate the idea of a 'colonization' of the impulse.

The analyses to follow will attempt to substantiate the thesis that the bureaucratization, monetarization, and technologization⁹³ of the lifeworld must be understood, first and foremost, as a distortion of moral experience. In the subsumption of social relations under the instrumental logics of profit, effectiveness, and productivity, normatively saturated experience is neutralized or bracketed as a determinant of the 'value' of things, and it is this objective process of abstraction which grounds the moral-philosophical irreconcilability of the impulse and moral cognition and thus the rigidification of moral categories. The abstraction immanent in exchange logic, and exemplified in bureaucratization, monetarization and technologization, can therefore be said to generate pathological forms of moral disintegration.

Bureaucratic Action

Adorno's suspicion, expressed most perspicuously in the portrayal of the recoil of rationality into irrationality in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that the regression to barbarism in modernity is not explicable as a step *out of* the civilizing process, but rather forms an inherent possibility of a distorted process of cultural rationalization, and its embodiment in rationalized institutions, forms one of the central theses in the work of Zygmunt Bauman. More strikingly, Bauman, echoing Adorno's call for a changed philosophy 'after Auschwitz', has urged that the Holocaust must be comprehended as posing a fundamental challenge to the self-understanding of modern societies, *and* to the self-understanding of social theory. Mainstream sociology, Bauman argues, has proved

⁹³Again here, I am drawing on Andrew Feenberg's suggestion that technology can be understood as a third 'systemic domain', alongside the economy and the administrative sphere.

incapable of understanding the Holocaust as an essential possibility of modern civilization. According to Bauman, central, unexamined presuppositions of sociological theory concerning rationalization, progress, and society as a civilizing force, are responsible for the failings of sociological theory.⁹⁴ Adorno calls for a radical questioning of the presuppositions of philosophical thinking in the wake of the experience of Auschwitz. Any philosophical thinking which cannot adequately reflect *this* experience cannot be a true philosophical theory of modernity.⁹⁵ Bauman argues that the self-understanding of modernity, as well as that of social theory, is also called into question because '[t]he two most notorious and extreme cases of modern genocide [viz. the Holocaust and the Gulag] did not betray the spirit of modernity. They did not deviously depart from the main track of the civilizing process. They were the most consistent, uninhibited expressions of that spirit'.⁹⁶

Bauman has developed this reading of the modern rational order through a penetrating critique of bureaucratic action. The defining feature of the modern organization, he argues, is that

⁹⁴Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 1-30.

⁹⁵For both Bauman and Adorno, what is at stake is a reflection on how the social processes that are implicated in the regression to barbarism have infiltrated, formed and shaped the structures of sociological and philosophical thinking respectively. In his 1965 lectures on Metaphysics, Adorno argues that it is impossible, after Auschwitz, for metaphysics to proclaim the indifference of metaphysical ideas and social-historical processes. Metaphysics must reflect on the 'relevance the temporal' [*Relevanz des Innerzeitlichen*] for its own concept, and on the capacity of the social-historical to 'announce itself' within metaphysical forms. Adorno describes this reflection as the 'drawing in of what is full of content' [*Hineinnahme des Inhaltlichen*], which transforms the concept of metaphysics (Met 158-60). A detailed reading of the relation of Auschwitz and modernity in Adorno's work can be found in Jörn Ahrens, 'Der Rückfall hat stattgefunden: Kritische Theorie der Gesellschaft nach Auschwitz', D. Auer et. al. (eds.), *Die Gesellschaftstheorie Adornos* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1998).

⁹⁶*Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 93. Also, p. 87, 'Without modern civilization and its most central essential achievements, there would be no Holocaust'.

it constitutes 'a way of doing things that is free from moral constraints'. Thus 'people who come within the orbit of bureaucratic action cease to be responsible moral subjects, are deprived of their moral autonomy and are trained not to exercise (or trust) their moral judgement'.⁹⁷ Bauman employs the term 'adiaphorization' to denote that process by which social institutions neutralize or bracket the moral bases of social action.⁹⁸ The categories of 'good' and 'evil', Bauman argues, are declared to be irrelevant when it comes to the implementation of organizational duties. The sole standards by which such duties are to be judged are those of 'procedural correctness'. Thus the modern organization shows itself to be 'a contraption designed to make human actions immune to what the actors believe and feel privately'.⁹⁹ I take this assertion to be one possible rendering of Adorno's thesis that instrumental reason, when it becomes embedded in social institutions, neutralizes the 'bodily moment' of moral cognition that is accessible to situated experience. Bureaucratic action effectively 'brackets' the *experiential ground* of moral action, thus contributing to what Adorno sees as the systematic evisceration of moral cognition.

Bauman outlines three characteristic operations by means of which bureaucratic organizations are able to neutralize moral experience, and to render actions morally indifferent.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p. 262.

⁹⁸In the vocabulary of the medieval church, the term 'adiaphoron' denoted a custom or belief declared to be indifferent, neither good nor evil, embodying neither merit nor sin.

⁹⁹*Life in Fragments*, p. 261.

¹⁰⁰Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 125ff; *Life in Fragments*, pp. 149ff; *Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 21ff. Bauman has given different versions of the elements of adiaphoric processes, with different emphases in each case. The tripartite reconstruction here is my own interpretation.

The first operation is the ensuring of distance rather than proximity between the two roles or components of action: the 'doing' and the 'suffering'. These components are separated through time and space, and hence the effects of action are held beyond the reach of the workings of the moral impulse. There occurs consequently the phenomenon that Bauman terms 'responsibility floating': responsibility can be located solely in the impersonal self-propelling principles of the organization itself, not in individual agents. The second operation concerns forms of dehumanization. In the case of the Holocaust, this was realized partly by ideological definitions and indoctrinations, which made it easier for bureaucratic organizations to operate without the interference of moral impulses. Bauman suggests, however, that dehumanization can also occur *through operations intrinsic to the workings of bureaucratic institutions*. Thus ideology is, in strict terms, not necessary for the neutralizing of the moral bases of action. This intrinsic dehumanization occurs through the 'dissembling' of other 'human objects' of action into functionally specific traits, and holding such traits separate. Each trait can then become the object of a *task* that, in itself, is exempt from moral evaluation. The third operation is that process which Bauman terms 'authorization'. The evaluation of the actions of members of bureaucratic organizations is usually exhausted by the question of whether procedures and commands have been followed. This is expressed in the idea of organizational discipline, which comprises 'the demand to obey commands of the superiors to the exclusion of all other stimuli for action, to put the devotion to the welfare of the organization, as defined in the commands of superiors, above all other devotions and commitments'.¹⁰¹ In this way responsibility to the human objects of bureaucratic action is *systematically displaced* by duty towards bureaucratic authority.

¹⁰¹ *Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 21.

The notion of adiaphorization, according to Bauman, allows us to understand the *social* production of moral indifference, that is, a blindness to the normative import of action that is attributable, not to a regression to pre-modern barbarism, but to the mechanisms of the civilizing process itself. What is required is a theoretical model that can take stock of the evidence that

*the civilizing process is, among other things, a process of divesting the use and deployment of violence from moral calculus, and of emancipating the desiderata of rationality from interference of ethical norms or moral inhibitions. . . . This general accomplishment of rationalizing tendency has been codified and institutionalized, not unexpectedly, in modern bureaucracy. Subjected to [a] retrospective re-reading, it reveals the silencing of morality as its major concern; as, indeed, the fundamental condition of its success as an instrument of rational coordination of action.*¹⁰²

Modern civilization, Bauman suggests, made possible a new form of barbarism, distinguished by the virtual absence of all forms of impulsive hatred and murderous motives. In its place emerges rational, carefully calculated design. This latter simply puts out of action altogether the spontaneous element in human action. The modern forms of barbarism are characterized by ‘an almost complete elimination of contingency and chance, and independence from group emotions and personal motives’.¹⁰³ Because it short circuits spontaneous involvement entirely, modern barbarism effectively makes it impossible for moral engagement to intervene in the execution of large-scale barbaric acts. Bauman argues that ‘the accomplishment of the Nazi regime consisted first and

¹⁰²*Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 28-9.

¹⁰³*Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 90.

foremost in neutralizing the moral impact of the specifically human existential mode'.¹⁰⁴ It was bureaucratic organization which made this neutralization socially effective.

Although the *possibilities* of the bracketing of moral experience within bureaucratic action were realized only in one historical moment, Bauman argues that the effects of this bracketing process are discernible at the most mundane levels of bureaucratic action.¹⁰⁵ This can be seen in the hierarchical and functional divisions of labour that are a feature of any bureaucratic organization. One consequence of this hierarchical and functional division is to prevent the effects of bureaucratic action from being assimilated into the experiential horizon of the acting subject. Technical responsibility - whether the act adequately embodies technical know-how, and is cost-effective - can thus substitute for moral responsibility.¹⁰⁶ Also, the form of dehumanization that is internal to the operation of bureaucratic organizations is visible in the most commonplace procedures of bureaucratic action,

Dehumanization starts at the point when . . . the objects at which the bureaucratic operation is aimed can, and are, reduced to a set of quantitative measures. For railway managers, the only meaningful articulation of their object is in terms of

¹⁰⁴*Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 185. Bauman's thesis is that genocide became possible when this neutralization was merged with the typically modern project of large-scale social design (*Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 106). The role of the creation of order through the state in modern genocide is discussed in Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Response and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York: The Free Press, 1979).

¹⁰⁵Making this connection with the 'normal', everyday operation of bureaucratic action is of course vital for Bauman's implicit thesis that the *essential nature* of bureaucratic action is discernible from an investigation of its most barbaric appearance form (viz., its role in the Holocaust).

¹⁰⁶*Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 98ff.

tonnes per kilometre. They do not deal with humans, sheep, or barbed wire; they only deal with the cargo, and this means an entity consisting entirely of measurements and devoid of quality. . . . Reduced, like all other objects of bureaucratic management, to pure, quality-free measurements, human objects lose their distinctiveness. They are already dehumanized - in the sense that the language in which things that happen to them (or are done to them) are narrated, safeguards its referents from ethical evaluation.¹⁰⁷

Bauman suggests that the workings of dehumanization can be seen, in some measure, in the references to 'targets' that 'fall' when 'hit' in military organizations, to the destruction of 'competition' in business organizations, and in the redefinition of the human objects of welfare agencies as 'benefit recipients'.¹⁰⁸

Adams and Balfour have developed a critique of administrative action which echoes many of Bauman's key theses. They describe the process of moral bracketing within administrative institutions as potentially giving rise to what they refer to as 'administrative evil'.¹⁰⁹ Adams and Balfour perceive the bracketing of moral experience to be at work in the redefinition of social policy areas as amenable to purely technical-rational solutions.¹¹⁰ Social problems thus become reduced to a series of technical tasks, transforming the subjects that come within the ambit of administrative

¹⁰⁷*Modernity and the Holocaust*, pp. 102-3.

¹⁰⁸*Modernity and the Holocaust*, p. 103.

¹⁰⁹Guy B. Adams and Danny L. Balfour, *Unmasking Administrative Evil* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998).

¹¹⁰See the discussion of welfare and drug policy in *Unmasking Administrative Evil*, pp. 147-51.

organizations from subjects of moral concern into objects of technical action.¹¹¹ Given that responsibility is exhausted by the notion of obedience to authority, and actions are judgeable solely through the internal criteria of propriety, efficiency and success, moral involvement is effectively erased. Adams and Balfour note that '[a]lthough certainly not inherently evil, the values of procedural correctness and efficiency contribute to a blindness to the context in which they are applied and to the human consequences of administrative action'.¹¹²

The combined effect of the operations of distancing, dehumanization, and authorization within bureaucratic organizations, on Bauman's view, is to place moral experience outside the ambit of social action. Moral experience is not actively suppressed (except in the extreme case of ideological indoctrination). What occurs is simply that *the world as it is organized and structured through bureaucratic action cannot be revealed as morally meaningful, as a world which demands moral, rather than technical-instrumental, attention*. The adiabatic effect of bureaucratic action is achieved by the *systematic bracketing* of those components of the human world which form the experiential basis for moral judgements. When moral experience is neutralized or bracketed, moral categories simply become inapplicable to the spheres of social action that are 'adiaphorized'. This thesis of adiabaticization, as I have interpreted it here, allows for a deeper insight into the force of Adorno's critique of the diremptions of moral-practical reason.¹¹³ Adorno sees the central problem

¹¹¹An analysis of this shift can be seen in Nils Christie's study of incarceration policy, in his *Crime Control as Industry: Towards Gulags, Western Style?* (London: Routledge, 1993). Christie demonstrates how liberal-democratic states have used prisons as a technical 'solution' to social pathologies and disorders. See also Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, p. 205.

¹¹²*Unmasking Administrative Evil*, p. 135.

¹¹³See chapter 6 of this work.

of modern moral-practical reason as its having become indifferent to the moral content of experience, which, as we saw, he theorizes in terms of the 'impulse'. The purely formal-procedural form of moral-practical reason can only be, on the Adornian view, a consequence of a process of moral reification, in which the moral-cognitive import of bodily experience is neutralized. Now if this process of neutralization can be seen to be characteristic of institutions which are organized through instrumental logics, it would make sense to view its appearance *within* moral-practical reason in terms of the idea of *infiltration*. This internal distortion of moral-practical reason could then be interpreted as a process of linguistic reification, deriving from the *objective process* in which moral experience is systematically severed from the frame of social action.

Economic Rationality

As in the case of bureaucratic action, the effect on the lifeworld of the infiltration of the logic of economic action can be seen in terms of the neutralization of the experiential basis of moral action. I will flesh out this thesis by drawing on André Gorz's analysis of 'economic rationality'.¹¹⁴

Gorz defines economic rationality as a type of reifying rationalization founded on the principle of arithmetical calculation (*le calcul comptable*). The measure of reification -the penetration of economic rationality into the lifeworld - according to Gorz, can be understood as the extent to which the principle of the quantification of values has come to regulate and order behaviour and preferences within various social domains. One significant consequence of this reading is that it permits the comprehension of the distorting effects of the monetarization of social

¹¹⁴In his *Métamorphoses du Travail: Quête du Sens* (Paris: Galilée, 1988).

relations in terms of the infiltration of the lifeworld by a principle of rationalization. Monetization, and thus reification, argues Gorz, has its cultural anchorage in a 'technique of thinking', which is the common root of both economic rationality and cognitive-instrumental reason. This common root is defined as a '(mathematical) formalization of thinking which, in codifying it in technical processes, isolates it from all reflexive turning on itself', and thus isolates the principle of rationalization from the 'certitude of lived experience'.¹¹⁵ This is deeply reminiscent of Simmel's analysis of *Verstand* (understanding). Simmel's notion of *Verstand* was intended to characterize a form of cultural rationalization, marked by the predominance of calculation and quantification, which generated a certain distortion of the experiential basis of social relations.¹¹⁶ I have argued that Adorno took up Simmel's analysis by theorizing the exchange principle as a principle of rationalization which became autonomous vis à vis the economic base structure. Gorz's reading echoes this idea, in that it understands the pathological, experiential effects of capitalist modernization to derive from the unconstrained expansion of a principle of rationality, namely, economic rationality. On Gorz's view, modern capitalism itself must be understood as the expression of economic rationality liberated from all checks and restraints (religious, cultural, etc.). Hence, Gorz argues that the 'irresistible dynamic' (Habermas's phrase) with which the 'economic subsystem' absorbs or engulfs all spheres of social activity is explicable solely as a dynamic of economic rationality.¹¹⁷ Gorz understands colonization as the extension of economic rationality

¹¹⁵*Métamorphoses du Travail*, pp. 157-8. Gorz, as I will show, understands mathematization as a process which results in the bracketing of moral experience.

¹¹⁶Georg Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, pp. 591ff.

¹¹⁷*Métamorphoses du Travail*, pp. 154-5.

beyond its legitimate bounds. In contrast to Habermas, however, Gorz argues that legitimate bounds are not to be determined by a 'positivist-sociological' concept of the needs or necessities of symbolic reproduction, but rather by an understanding of the *lived sense* of certain practices. The distorting consequences of colonization, therefore, must be comprehended from the perspective of the experiencing subject.¹¹⁸

Zygmunt Bauman, as we saw, perceives the distorting effects of the procedural rationality of bureaucratic organizations to lie in their neutralizing of the moral import of experience, leading to the predominance of purely technical-instrumental relations. A similar intuition lies behind Gorz's analysis of the consequences of economic colonization. The bracketing power of economic rationality was already embodied in the conception of the agent in economic science, where behaviour was represented as obedience to calculable laws. Moral descriptions of behaviour were displaced by a conception of action as rigorous calculation. Gorz argues that capitalism, as the pure form of economic rationality,

raised the search for efficiency to the level of an 'exact science' and thus eliminated moral and aesthetic criteria from the field of considerations governing decision. Rationalized in this way, economic activity could organize human behaviour and relations in an 'objective' fashion, that is to say, in abstracting from the subjectivity of the decision maker and in shielding the latter from moral dispute. The question was no longer whether the decision maker was acting well or badly, but solely that of whether the action was correctly calculated. 'Economic science', insofar as it constituted a guide for decision and behaviour, relieved the subject of responsibility

¹¹⁸See *Métamorphoses du Travail*, p. 213.

for its acts.¹¹⁹

On this basis, colonization can be understood as an infiltration of economic rationality, which leads to a bracketing of the experiential basis of moral relations between selves. Significantly, Gorz constructs this theory of colonization by returning to a Husserlian conception of the lifeworld. Thus the experiential bracketing, or neutralizing effects of colonization can be understood as the result of a process of 'mathematization'. Quasi-automatic and quasi-autonomous procedures of calculation transform a 'lived relation' to the world into formalizations that are ideally separable from the intentional relation to reality.¹²⁰ The experiential distortions of economic rationality, therefore, are attributable to its functioning as a form of *subsumption*, in which the dictates of calculation and quantification bracket the lived sense of human practice, which is the experiential basis of moral action. Within the frame of economic rationality, the operation of a quasi-autonomous logic of maximization impels subjects to take an instrumental attitude to the lived sense of human relations, thus effectively neutralizing all attitudes embodying moral concern.¹²¹

This analysis suggests that the operation of economic rationality as a form of colonization can be understood, similar to the procedural rationality of bureaucratic/administrative action, as a

¹¹⁹*Métamorphoses du Travail*, p. 155.

¹²⁰*Métamorphoses du Travail*, pp. 155-6.

¹²¹This reading of colonization, as a bracketing of the lived sense of practice that is the basis of moral concern, can also be discerned in critiques of the extensions of markets that have focussed on the concept of 'commodification'. Elizabeth Anderson argues, for instance, that the penetration of economic rationality into the parental relation (in contract pregnancy) effects a form of dehumanization that eliminates the subject as a subject of moral attention. See her *Value in Ethics and Economics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993). See also Margaret Jane Radin, *Contested Commodities: The Trouble with Trade in Sex, Children, Body Parts, and Other Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996).

form of the social production of moral indifference. This can be drawn out by looking more closely at Gorz's critique of colonization from the perspective of a Husserlian understanding of the lifeworld.¹²² Gorz argues that those activities, in which the penetration of economic rationality violates lived sense, must be seen as situated 'underneath' and 'above' speech. This implies that what defines the relationships within these activities (mother-child, friend-friend, therapist-patient, educator-pupil) is more profound than a mutual understanding of practical tasks or an agreement on the values regulating action. Gorz characterizes this deeper level underneath speech, which defines these activities, as a form of *affective relation*. This idea reveals the link between Gorz's analysis and Adorno's theory of the neutralization of the moral impulse. The affective relation, Gorz argues, is exhausted neither in the transmission of cultural goods, nor in a mutual understanding of which language would be the vehicle. It comprises rather a form of normatively-laden bodily experience. This is understood as 'a lived comprehension in my body of the life of the body of the other'.¹²³ Affective attachments are said to disclose a sense of the relationships they embody, which makes possible a critical perspective in relation to potential instrumentalizations of practice. For Gorz, then, the lifeworld is not initially, as it is for Habermas, the locus of norms and traditions to which we adhere, and which we take for granted. It is rather the deeper certainty with which we have the world in its sensuous qualities, its material qualities (good, agreeable, etc.), and its adversity or suitability for 'corporeal flourishing'.¹²⁴ On the basis of this reading, Gorz speaks of the

¹²²The term 'bracketing', which I have been using throughout, is of course a Husserlian locution.

¹²³*Métamorphoses du Travail*, p. 214.

¹²⁴*Métamorphoses du Travail*, p. 113.

deeper, nonlinguistic level of experience that is neutralized by economic rationality as ‘tenderness’ (*la tendresse*). Economic rationality can thus be understood as a colonization of this bodily-experiential relation. The violence of the technical-mathematical relation, which is extended to the lifeworld through economic rationality, constitutes ‘a relation of technical rationalization of things of the world negated in their sensuous qualities and, in consequence, a devalorizing repression of one’s own sensuousness’.¹²⁵

In cutting itself off from the ‘sensuous thickness’ of the lifeworld, Gorz claims technical culture brings forth a world without sensuous value. The pathological effects of colonization, for Gorz, derive from this bracketing of the meaningfulness of sensuous experience. *In reducing the ‘wrong’ of instrumental reason to its effects on the conditions of communicative socialization, therefore, Habermasian critical theory blocks the possibility of a critique of the experiential distortions which undermine the affective basis of non-instrumental relations.* We saw in Zygmunt Bauman’s critique of bureaucracy a similar refusal of the Habermasian identification of the moral basis of human relations with the conditions of communicative socialization. Bauman locates the experiential basis of moral action in a ‘being-for’, which marks ‘an *emotional* engagement with the Other before it is committed . . . to a specific course of action regarding the Other’.¹²⁶ For Bauman also, the incursions of instrumental rationality must be theorized in terms of the operation of a logic of action which bypasses moral experience, thereby effectively bracketing its claim on the self. It is this focus on the social-practical bracketing of a type of normatively saturated experience which

¹²⁵*Métamorphoses du Travail*, p. 113.

¹²⁶Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, p. 62. Bauman takes the term ‘being-for’ from Emmanuel Lévinas.

connects both these accounts to Adorno's theory of the impulse. This reading suggests that the Habermasian critique of colonization enters at the wrong place to be able to gain critical access to fundamental lifeworld distortions. By rooting morality in the function of linguistic communication as a form of action coordination, the Habermasian perspective becomes blind to the erosion of the bodily-experiential ground of moral categories. Habermas's moral theory, as we have seen, can only appeal to the work of socialization to make good on the deficits of moral experience. My argument that affective attunement was integral to the meaning of moral norms, and thus not a functional complement to logical validity, was intended to criticize this move. Habermas's impoverished reading of moral cognition, as a purely logical bond, implies a renunciation of the possibility of a critique of the experiential consequences of the incursions of instrumental logics, and leaves a positivist-sociological conception of social engineering to take up the burden of explicating the re-entry of logical force into a lifeworld bereft of moral substance.

What disappears in Habermasian critical theory, as André Gorz argues, is the focus of attention of earlier critical theory on the consequences of the extension of instrumental logics for the self, understood as a subject of sensuous experience. This focus was the basis of the claim in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that

the self-dominating intellect . . . separates itself from sensuous experience in order to subordinate it to itself. The unification of the intellectual function, by means of which domination over the senses is achieved, the resignation of thought to the production of unanimity, means the impoverishment of thought as much as of experience; the separation of both realms leaves both impaired (DE 36; 42).

Gorz's commentary on this passage in *Métamorphoses du Travail* is instructive, as it links the focus

on the suppression of sensuous experience with the question of the social production of moral indifference. In the process of the domination of sensuous experience delineated by Horkheimer and Adorno, argues Gorz,

there lies the root of the acceptance of barbarism, that is to say, of the acritical submission to the technical imperatives of any kind of machinery, even if it should serve or lead to genocide. This is because the foundation of critique is not to be found in theory. It is to be found in the taste (*le goût*) that the being-lived of the experience of the world has for the one who lives it.¹²⁷

On the basis of this analysis, I suggest, an alternative reading of the 'wrong' of instrumental reason can be constructed, which departs significantly from the Habermasian reading of colonization. The concepts of the impulse (Adorno), of being-for (Bauman), and of tenderness (Gorz), can all be seen as intending to express the level of the experiential meaningfulness of moral phenomena. It is moral experience which is seen as neutralized by the encroachments of instrumental logics, reducing the social world to an arena for technical-instrumental action, rather than moral engagement. From an Adornian perspective, the problematic of colonization cannot be taken up from the standpoint of linguistically mediated interaction, because instrumental logics generate a distortion of linguistic praxis which makes consensus-oriented communication, so to speak, morally blind. The focus of the theory of communicative action on the function of language for action coordination makes it incapable of gaining critical access to processes of linguistic reification, which, I have argued, are generated by the colonization of bodily experience. The result

¹²⁷ *Métamorphoses du Travail*, p. 115.

of linguistic reification is an internal distortion of moral-practical reason, in which moral categories are rendered blind to the affective pull of experience. *The encroachment of instrumental reason thus tends to 'de-world' moral categories, leaving the regulation of lifeworld relations to be determined increasingly from the technical-instrumental perspective.* In speaking of colonization as a process of 'infiltration', the untenable Habermasian supposition of an uncolonizable kernel of lifeworld practice can also be avoided. The formalism of Habermas's approach, its focus on abstract theoretical structures of integration, renders it incapable of grasping the internal distortion of lifeworld practice, which I have expressed through the notion of 'infiltration'. Linguistic reification is necessarily a question of 'more or less', and hence colonization must be determinable in terms of the degree to which everyday communicative praxis has taken on a reified form.

Technology and the Aestheticized Lifeworld

I want to broaden this account of a colonization of experience by focussing on technology, as a third colonizing mechanism. As a medium, technology differs from money and power most notably in its lack of an institutional base that can be clearly demarcated. In line with Andrew Feenberg's suggestion, I will read technology primarily as a means or mediator by which the media penetrate the lifeworld.¹²⁸ As in the discussions of bureaucratic and economic action above, the focus here is on the intrinsic subsumptive logic of technological rationality, and the experiential distortions deriving from its generalized social application. Following from this analysis, I will introduce the notion of an 'aestheticized' lifeworld. This idea is intended to designate the 'internalization' of

¹²⁸ Andrew Feenberg, *Questioning Technology*, p. 170.

reified culture, that is, the penetration of reified forms of reasoning into social experience, giving rise to a structure of lifeworldly relations marked by the neutralization of normatively charged experience.¹²⁹

On the basis of the claims that Adorno makes in *Minima Moralia*, we can see how the penetration of technological thinking into the lifeworld might be understood in terms of the thesis of the neutralization of moral experience. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno's micro-critical analyses focussed on the experiential consequences of the technological transformation of social artifacts. A decay of experience (*Absterben der Erfahrung*) is seen to result from the formation of things in terms of the law of their pure purposiveness, reducing human contact with objects to mere mechanical operations (*Handhabung*) (MM § 19). Generalizing from this argument, the incursions of technological rationality might be understood as a *colonization of sensuous experience*. The technicization of the lifeworld, André Gorz has argued, 'abolishes the sensuous world, condemns sensorial faculties to idleness, deprives them of the capacity of judging of true and false, of good and bad. It disqualifies meanings [and] withdraws certitudes from perception'.¹³⁰ Technicization thus puts out of action the type of judgements that rely upon the meanings accessible to sensuous experience. This process can be seen as having intensified since Adorno's time in a direction that renders obsolete the focus on the technological transformation of social artifacts. Albert Borgmann has described, for example, how the structure of 'hyperintelligence' made possible by computerized information has altered the parameters of the sensuous appropriation of the world,

¹²⁹This idea of an internalization of forms of reification is borrowed from Simmel's social theory. See David Frisby, *Simmel and Since: Essays on Georg Simmel's Social Theory* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹³⁰André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesses du possible*, pp. 180-1.

There is a symmetry between the depth of the world and our bodily incursion into it. In the real world, humans have a natural inclination to satisfy that symmetry daily through bodily intimacy with the world, walking about, feeling the weather, going on errands, handling things, and carrying burdens. . . . The hyperintelligent sensorium, just because it is so acute and wide ranging, presents the entire world to our eyes and ears and renders the remainder of the human body immobile and irrelevant. The symmetry of world and body falls to the level of a shallow if glamorous world and a hyperinformed yet disembodied person.¹³¹

Hyperintelligence, Borgmann argues, tends to lead to the formation of 'disposable and discontinuous experiences'.¹³² Similarly, Lorenzo Simpson has claimed that technology 'abstracts from the manifold connections that things, events, processes and actions have to historically shaped and culturally specific forms of life, and views them only under the aspect of their utility'.¹³³ Therefore, technicization does not only render problematic the possibility of rational critique. It also systematically disembeds experience, transforming it from a *process* informed by practical-social contextual connections (i.e. social meaning) into a sequence of discontinuous states. He suggests that Virtual Reality (VR) Technology represents an attempt to free experience from the constraints of sensuous embodiment: '[r]ather than thematizing the body as enabling human experience, the

¹³¹Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 106.

¹³²*Crossing the Postmodern Divide*, p. 118.

¹³³*Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1995). p. 48.

cyberspace experience thematizes the body as a prison'.¹³⁴ The colonization of experience can here be understood as a structure of commodification. By this I mean that, in general terms, experience becomes less and less amenable to moral judgement, and the import of experience comes more and more to be determined in terms of its aesthetic qualities.

A nice description of the centrality of technological thinking to the creation of an aestheticized lifeworld is given in Simpson's account of the experiential effects of VR technology,

Virtual Reality technology allows us an ironic, aestheticized distance on experience, and the control that goes with it. . . . Experience becomes something that can be stored in a computer file. This makes possible the disposing over and play(ing) with experience that testify to its having become weightless. At the same time that we are granted this aesthetic and technical power over our experience, we find that that experience can be reified into a commodity that can be bought and sold.¹³⁵

The weightlessness of experience, of which Simpson speaks here, is intended to signify the incapacity of experience to engage the self, other than momentarily and with the superficial quality of attraction, rather than with the deeper commitment denoted by concern. One consequence, therefore, of the commodification of experience would be a certain diminishing of the potential normative import of experience. The experiential focus of the aestheticized lifeworld comes to be

¹³⁴*Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity*, p. 159. Another important debate concerning the experiential effects of technological systems, has focussed on nanotechnology. Paul Virilio has described nanotechnology as embodying the project of a colonization of the body. This, of course, represents an even greater intensification of the tendency towards the direct modification of the sensuous appropriation of experience. See Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*, trans. J. Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 99ff.

¹³⁵*Technology, Time, and the Conversations of Modernity*, p. 158.

framed increasingly by the criteria of fascination, appeal, enticement, and thus is increasingly less capable of revealing the world as a scene of moral engagement. Gerhard Schulze's suggestion that the structure of experience in contemporary life has led to the marginalization of a certain group of moral problems can be read in the light of this thesis. Schulze argues that the experiential structure of everyday life can be understood in terms of a transition from a 'situation-centred', externally oriented form to the current 'subject-centred', internally oriented form. The construction and modification of social conditions is no longer the central orientation of life projects, according to Schulze. Rather, the life projects of contemporary culture involve a functionalization of external conditions, which are seen as means for bringing forth types of subjective experience (*Erlebnis*). Although Schulze does not see this process as generating a loss of morality itself, he does point to the loss of 'objective references for goals and problems'.¹³⁶ The dominant orientation towards subjective experience potentially leads to either an *aestheticization* or a *marginalization* of moral problems that require an external orientation towards social reality, such as unemployment, poverty and environmental issues. Aestheticization begins with the tendency of the information media to solidify objective problems into 'short units of experience [*Erlebnis*]'. Moral problems become marginalized because, within the subject-centred universe, the common solidaristic purpose required to address problems of environmental destruction and international poverty cannot be mobilized.¹³⁷

Zygmunt Bauman has described the aestheticized lifeworld in terms of a penetration of adiaphorizing mechanisms into the realm of everyday life. It is now not only social institutions that

¹³⁶Gerhard Schulze, 'From Situations to Subjects: Moral Discourse in Transition', in P. Sulkunen et. al., *Constructing the New Consumer Society* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 46.

¹³⁷See Gerhard Schulze, *Erlebnisgesellschaft: Kultursoziologie der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1992), pp. 69-70.

are the bearers of adiaphorizing processes, but also structures of individual identity and experience. 'Postmodern' identities, according to Bauman, represent a response to the 'fragmentarity', 'discontinuity' and 'inconsequentiality' of the social-cultural world.¹³⁸ Postmodern identity processes aim at

splicing the life-process into a series of (ideally) self-contained and self-enclosed episodes without past and without consequences, and as a result tend to render human relations fragmentary and discontinuous; they bar the construction of lasting networks of mutual duties and obligations. They all cast the Other as a subject of *aesthetic*, not *moral* evaluation; as a source of *sensations*, not *responsibility*.¹³⁹

The result of this, Bauman argues, is the removal of a large area of human interactions from the realm of moral judgement. The aestheticization of human relations leads to 'the suppression of moral impulse and the disavowal and denigration of moral sentiments'.¹⁴⁰ Like Schulze, Bauman emphasises that the structure of privatized identity and human experience in the late/post-modern social world militates against the mobilization of solidaristic sentiments for collective ends.¹⁴¹ One way of reading this aestheticization of relations, I suggest, is as a result of the infiltration of instrumental logics into the processes of identity formation. We cannot gain access to the distortions of the social world that arise therefrom, however, by focussing on the level of formalized symbolic

¹³⁸At the root of this process, Bauman argues, is 'the overall tendency to dismantle, deregulate, dissipate the once solid and relatively lasting frames in which life concerns and efforts of most individuals were inscribed', *Life in Fragments*, p. 265.

¹³⁹*Life in Fragments*, p. 155.

¹⁴⁰*Life in Fragments*, p. 156.

¹⁴¹*Life in Fragments*, p. 274.

structures. A central aspect of my argument against Habermas has been that the claims to normative validity that are raised in linguistically mediated interaction are parasitic upon the experiential disclosure of moral meaning. The illocutionary force that is brought to bear in language necessarily harbours an expressive component (the impulse), which can be understood as the experiential content that constitutes the intersubjective sense of moral norms. My analyses of bureaucratic, economic, and technological rationality have attempted to show that the incursions of instrumental reason into the social world can be understood in terms of a bracketing of the experiential ground of moral interaction. If the argument concerning the expressive character of communicative norms is valid, then colonization must be seen as giving rise to a *reification of normative categories*.¹⁴²

Drawing upon Adorno's interpretation of the transformed structure of domination in modern societies, as mediated by the non-class specific logics of purposive-rationally organized social institutions, I have attempted to show that instrumental reason must be understood as generating a twofold distortion of intersubjective relations. On the one hand, purposive-rationally organized institutions provide an ideological veil for the operation of social power, reformulating class-specific imperatives as technical imperatives. On the other hand, distortions of meaning and experience arise from the effects of the incursion of instrumental logics into lifeworldly relations.

The loss of meaning thesis derived from Weber, I suggested, can be reconstructed as denoting the

¹⁴²It was this idea, I would suggest, that was the basis for Alasdair MacIntyre's 'emotivist self' thesis. The idea of an 'emotivist culture' posits that moral categories cannot intelligibly mark a distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative relations. *Pace* MacIntyre, however, it is not within social roles that this distinction is meaningfully established, it is rather constituted by the experiential sense that is bracketed by instrumental logics. The emotivist self is not the disembodied egoist, but the self whose experiential world is subsumed by the logics of bureaucratization, monetarization and technologization.

loss of the *critical orientation* of moral norms. This results from a decontextualization and de-narrativization of moral categories, through which those categories become incapable of expressing the unredeemed social-historical possibilities of the social world. The reification of norms can be understood as signifying their incapacity to function as a critique of domination. The idea of a crisis of experience describes the pathological consequences of the incursions of instrumental reason from the point of view of the lived sense of social practice. From this standpoint, I suggested, colonization can be understood as a process of moral disintegration, generated by the neutralization or bracketing of normatively saturated experience. Under the subsumptive force of instrumental logics, the world is less and less revealed to social agents as morally meaningful. One central conclusion to be drawn from my analysis is that critical theory must regain critical access to the operation of the institutional structures that embody instrumental logics. The twofold distortion of intersubjective relations that I have described is simply not accessible to critique from the standpoint developed in the Habermasian communicative paradigm. The ground conceded to systems theory by Habermas renders his theory blind to the structure and operation of social power, and the formalism of his communication theory cannot capture the experiential distortions of instrumental logics. As I have attempted to show, Adorno's interpretation of processes of linguistic reification is intended to capture the deeper level at which instrumental reason undermines the experiential sense of intersubjective relations. Adorno uses the figure of exchange logic - the separation of exchange value from use value - to denote that social process which is responsible for linguistic reification. My analyses of bureaucratic, economic and technological rationality were intended to function as a substantive reinterpretation of this theoretical figure. The logics embedded in these social forms represent objective processes of abstraction, in which items are given a purely technical 'value',

which is no longer informed by their experiential meaningfulness.

Conclusion

Through a reconstructive elaboration of the concepts of integration through domination, and lifeworld-experiential disintegration, I have attempted to expound the social-theoretic import of Adorno's reading of late capitalist society as constituted by a twofold distortion of the exchange principle. As we have seen, Adorno perceives the operation of exchange logic as encompassing both a structure of social domination and a principle of cultural rationalization. The former denotes a form of integration, in which the social order is held together through the suppression and marginalization of deep-rooted conflicts and antagonisms. I have argued that the concepts of symbolic power and systemic domination can be seen as encompassing a plausible reconstruction of the structure of integration through domination. Symbolic power, I argued, can be figured as a plausible replacement for Adorno's ideology thesis, articulated in his critique of the culture industry, since it conceives social power as operating at the symbolic, rather than the psychic level. Systemic domination, as we saw, operates through an implicit 'naturalizing' of the imperatives of dominant social groups, where the infiltration of the latter into the workings of instrumentally ordered complexes enables them to re-appear in the lifeworld as 'purely' technical-rational decisions. Subordinated social groups are thus 'subsumed' (integrated) through the identity-forming effects of symbolic power, and through the ideological transformation of the direct exercise of power by dominant groups into neutral-technical imperatives. The operation of exchange logic as a principle of cultural rationalization, I argued, denotes a process by which linguistic meanings become rigidified vis à vis cultural meaning and sensuous experience. This, I argued generates, on the one hand, an erosion of the immanent, critical orientation of normative categories. Normative categories

are less and less able to function as the articulation of the unredeemed social-historical possibilities sedimented within 'thick' cultural meanings (what Taylor calls 'moral sources'). I attempted to elucidate this thesis through an interpretation of the implicit thesis of a reification of normative categories in Charles Taylor's work. I suggested that what Taylor describes as the 'ethics of inarticulacy' is best understood in terms of the idea of pathological forms of moral speechlessness, deriving from the severance of a substantive social-historical orientation from moral norms. In becoming rigidified in this manner, normative categories lose the capacity to function as an articulation of the critical-negative of the social world. On the other hand, at the 'micro-level' of experience, I argued that exchange logic, embodied in institutional forms, begins to generate forms of moral disintegration. Through its inherent instrumentalizing of the lived sense of practice, exchange logic begins to undermine the affective basis of non-instrumental relations. Thus, putting these components together, it can be said that Adorno's work furnishes the basis for a critique of the modern social order which is significantly different from that propounded by other critical theorists, and, as I have argued, brings to light significant deficiencies in the works of Habermas and others.

Adorno's central insight, I suggest, is that the late capitalist order must be understood in terms of a *dual-level distortion of intersubjective relations*, in which the reproduction of structures of domination persists together with phenomena of disintegration at the level of cultural meaning, which are analysable as pathologies of meaning and (moral) experience. This account gains added coherence from the observation that the distortions wrought by the twofold operation of exchange logic are mutually reinforcing. The erosion of the experiential basis of moral integration carves out an ever increasing sphere both for the extension and intensification of systemic domination, and for

the symbolic reorganization of social relations through the symbolic power attaching to complex systems. Habermas and Honneth miss this mutually reinforcing dialectic, and hence are able to furnish an adequate account neither of domination, nor of disintegration. The traces of this dual-level distortion of intersubjectivity are certainly discernible in Habermas's 'loss of freedom' and 'loss of meaning' theses. As I have argued, however, Habermas's depiction of the lifeworld as reproduced by means of communicative consensus fails to gain critical access to the relations of domination pervading the social world. As a result, Habermas is able to conceive colonization *solely* as a process of technicization, and not as a process whereby the interests of dominant social groups are entrenched and reinforced. The same difficulty, as we saw, plagues Honneth's account which, like Habermas's, draws primarily upon a Meadian view of social integration. This renders Honneth's account incapable of dealing with phenomena of *misrecognition*, in which the identity-confirming function of social structures entwines with symbolic power. I also argued that Habermas's reading of the 'loss of meaning' is inadequate because it is not merely the intrinsic logic of cognitive specialization that is revealed in the 'desolation' of everyday practice, but also a process of linguistic reification, in which symbolic forms become systematically de-sensitized to experiential meaning.

The debate, however, also concerns how the normative standpoint of critical social theory is to be understood. I argued that the formalism of Habermas's approach - his focus on the structures of linguistic communication - makes it virtually impossible for him to explain the re-entry into the lifeworld of the transcendent force attaching to communicative structures. The transcendence embedded in communicative structures is not, as Habermas himself acknowledges, the same thing as a transcendence which is accessible in the form of a critical-negative experience, and which

enables a self-distanciation from the social order. Yet if the transcendence attaching to communication is *purely* formal, if it does not harbour any trace of negative experience of the social order, then we are bound to ask whether its formalness disguises a particular kind of blindness. The fundamental issue here, which has been a recurrent theme of this work, is how we are to conceive the normative-critical charge attaching to language in relation to the social world in which language is situated. Whether, more specifically, the normative force attaching to language is to be conceived as determinate negation or procedural subsumption. This is not necessarily a distinction between 'internal' and 'external' critique. Both Habermas and Adorno see language as working to draw out the normative potential that is *already implicit* in ideologically restricted thought structures. For Habermas, however, this normative potential which enables a form of life to judge itself, is a formal-logical structure. On Adorno's view of critical dialectic, this normative potential is brought to bear through the revelation of the *substantive untruth* of a form of life, thus normative critique makes a claim to be the most authentic, the truest expression of the experience that society has of itself. The normative force attaching to language which breaks apart the ideological assertion of identity is not a purely logical possibility, it is rather a concrete social-historical possibility, drawn from disfigured social experience in its entirety.¹ For Adorno, an *absolute* diremption between experience and normative force is impossible, or rather it is a sign that critique has become paralysed. If there is no trace of negative experience in the formal transcendence attaching to communicative reason, then it is unclear what it would mean to say that the ideal figured in communicative reason is the ideal possibility *of the present*: for how could such an ideal claim fail to reflect back on experience *in the present*, with its distortions and contradictions? From an

¹See the discussion of identity thinking in chapter 3 of this work.

Adornian perspective, Habermas, in emptying normative critique of any potential of self-distanciation and self-alienation, is simply reflecting this paralysis of critical reason, rather than critically addressing it.

It is the very blindness of communicative reason to experience that pushes Habermas back toward an externalist, positivist-sociological perspective on the social world. This, as we saw, is also exemplified in the inadequacy of the theory of communicative action as a theory of social struggle. Habermas cannot link up the normative force implicit in communicative reason with the oppositional praxis of social groups, who raise claims to justice against the social order. The normative force inherent in communicative reason is too far removed from how injustice is experienced, lived, and interpreted at the everyday level, and thus cannot connect with how social actors themselves conceive the injuries to their normative expectations. I argued that, in this regard, the theory of recognition successfully de-formalizes communicative reason, since it transforms the formal logic of emancipation implicit in the latter into a substantive critique of social structures. Honneth's work, as we saw, returns the focus on critical-negative experience to the centre of critical social theory, and thus, potentially at least, regains the possibility of a genuine interplay of normative theory and social experience, which was stalled by the consequences of Habermas's formal-procedural approach. I argued, however, that a critical theory of recognition would have to incorporate a theory of symbolic power in order to account for the entwinement of social structures and dominant social interests. This was seen to necessitate a more substantive reading of critical-negative experience that is given by Honneth's account. As in the case of Habermas, then, Honneth's theory does not provide for the requisite kind of self-distanciation and self-alienation from social experience which would provide the basis for a genuine critical-negative insight into

the social order, that is, that type of insight which could serve as the basis of oppositional praxis.

In bringing these ideas together, we can gain an insight into the full normative weight that is encompassed by Adorno's concept of 'reconciliation'. We can understand this concept as the figure for a type of undamaged, non-instrumental subjectivity, which is both richer in experiential terms and more compelling in critical terms than the possible bases of normative critique furnished by the inheritors to the tradition of critical social theory. Its richness stems from Adorno's commitment to the central tenets of the Hegelian dialectic of experience. Adorno's refusal of the 'positive positing' of the concept of reconciliation, often mistaken for pessimism, is in fact a part of the concerted attempt to keep critique working immanently.² Adorno consciously and deliberately refuses the temptation to normative abstraction in order to allow critique to work as the immanent dialectic of present, disfigured experience. Negative dialectic derives its entire normative force from experience's *own* self-articulation, such that its critical moment coincides with experience's own self-revealing, in negative form. Hence the normative potential of critical reason is brought to bear in the self-alienation of social experience - the latter can no longer recognize itself in the structures of the present, and hence demands their abolition as the realization of its own truth. It is critically more compelling because of its awareness that the disfigurement of intersubjective relations implicates both social structures and thought structures. It is one and the same process which both dirempts individuals from one another in domination, and, on the other, neutralizes the dialectic of language and experience in phenomena of disintegration. Only when a form of life beyond these distortions should become possible would a genuine form of reconciled intersubjectivity come into its own.

²See *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 145, 160; 148-9, 163, and *Hegel: Three Studies*, p. 27.

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