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Interpreting the Fractal Nature of Social Experience

Noëlle McAfee[1]

In her recent books as well as in the series she edits for Columbia University Press, Amy Allen has been teaching us how to think anew about critical theory. Her book series, New Directions in Critical Theory, has been a venue for some of the world's leading theorists, as well as rising scholars, to interrogate received concepts, develop new ones, and, especially, to bring psychoanalysis back into the fold of critical theory. Most notably this includes psychoanalytic thinking with "the sting of the negative," challenging the normative idealism that has been so prominent for the past half century. Allen's previous monograph, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory*, calls out recent critical theory for relying on spurious developmental accounts of both subjectivity and society. Her collaborative book with Mari Ruti, *Critical Theory Between Klein and Lacan*, broadens critical theory further to encompass literary critical theory and psychoanalytic theorists whose accounts have been too dark to make their way into any of the idealizations or utopianism of so much critical theory. In her newest book, *Critique*

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on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis, Allen shows how critical theory lost its footing after Adorno and needs to move away from its utopianism and idealism toward a more realistic account of human subjectivity and toward a critical theory that can light up new constellations of thought.

At issue here is the meaning of "critical theory" itself, a term favored by so many yet used so differently, from Horkheimer and Adorno beginning in the 1930s to Habermas and then Honneth in the late 20th century to the present. Common to all is a dual worry: (1) that the contemporary world is riven with inhumanity and injustice and (2) that there are no transcendent philosophical truths or foundations that the critic can invoke to combat these wrongs. As Horkheimer wrote, "critical theory has no specific authority on its side, except its concern for the abolition of social injustice."[2]

The first generation of critical theorists, led by Horkheimer and Adorno, was primarily focused on diagnosing and analyzing the ills and largely skeptical about combating them, though Adorno did see the need for interpretation. Allen reads Adorno's use of that term, interpretation, in a quasi-psychoanalytic vein, in so far as interpretation is a method of illuminating "the refuse of the physical world," so that it can be brought into consciousness and possibly affectively worked through.[3] The second generation, namely Habermas, found Adorno's approach to be too pessimistic and chose instead to focus on addressing the second worry: even if there are no metaphysical truths that can be used to combat injustice, perhaps there are standards immanent to our social practices that can orient progress toward justice. As I read this history, the first generation was genuinely interested in understanding the maladies of the social world and how those came about. But beginning with the second generation, namely Jürgen Habermas, the focus shifted to reconstruction, or as Daniel Gaus puts it, to understand and then explicate the standards

2 As quoted in and translated by Stefan Müller-Doohm in "Critical Theory", in Allen & Mendieta 2019, 83.

3 Allen 2021, 175-180.

of rationality in modern societies so that they can become standards of critique.[4] Or, as I would put it, to see how far societies have diverged from their own standards of rationality. This kind of immanent critique avoids invoking so called timeless truths because, instead, it is invoking the ones that are actually being presupposed even if not lived up to. With that move, critical theory becomes a project of seeking a normative foothold for critique. In Habermas, that foothold is communicative rationality; in the third generation, namely Honneth, that foothold is a universal demand for social recognition.

Much was lost with that move, perhaps nothing as profound as a critical theory that took psychoanalysis seriously. Yes, even though Habermas drew on Freud in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, and yes, even though Honneth drew on Winnicott's psychoanalytic theory. Instead of reading the unconscious as a source of drive and energy, Habermas reads it as a corrupted text. And instead of recognizing the difficult path to sociality in pre-oedipal object relations, Honneth finds there a normative foothold for critical theory. Most curiously, where the first generation focused on understanding what went wrong with society, the next two generations seem bent on finding what has been *right* there, and right *there*, all along. Given our supposed communicative rationality and longing for love and recognition, it is a wonder that the world has any problems at all.

Allen takes issue with three key features of post-Adornian critical theory: its normative idealism, which I have briefly sketched above; its developmentalism, a view that individuals and societies will and should become increasingly moral and just; and its rationalism, the view that the path to social justice is through increasing rationality, rational reconstruction, and rational insight. In response to post-Adornian developmentalism, and in addition to her book, *The End of Progress*, Allen turns to Melanie Klein in chapter two for a more realistic, and less rosy account of human subjectivity. With Klein, the unconscious is populated by both good and bad objects and also capable of becoming more mature and integrated. But this is not a developmental process, with the human subject

4 Daniel Gaus, "Rational Reconstruction," in Allen & Mendieta 2019, 369.

becoming increasingly rational, for any one of us at any time is vulnerable to being thrown back into a more primordial or infantile position. Moreover, with Klein, the unconscious is not a corrupted text shorn of rationality but a resource for enrichment and integration.

As for the turn to rationalism, even to the extent that critical theorists such as Habermas, Honneth, and Celikates turn to psychoanalysis, they do so for the sake of rational insight and knowledge.

For Habermas, psychoanalysis is a process of enlightenment that works through the medium of critical insight; for Honneth, it is the repair of a distorted form of rationality; for Celikates, it is the enhancement of the analysand's capacities for critical self-reflection. Even as all three authors acknowledge, to varying degrees, that analysis is not merely cognitive but also affective, motivational, and practical in character, they converge on the assumption that psychoanalysis works, if and when it does work, through the medium of rational insight or reflection.[5]

To show how ineffective this approach is, in chapter five, "Transference: Psychoanalysis and the Methodology of Critique," Allen turns to Freud's "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through" in which he notes the transformations in his thinking "from an early reliance on hypnosis to bring about catharsis, to a later emphasis on interpretations to generate insight into the cause of repressions, to a more mature focus on the importance of working through the transference relation".[6] Freud is documenting how in his earlier days he thought that rational insight could cure the patient, if only he could help them remember, that is *know*, the source of their suffering, they would get better. But knowledge alone did not cure the patient. (In fact, in his early cases, he usually broke off treatment as soon as he had discovered and then informed the patients of the source of their suffering. Unsurprisingly, this was hardly sufficient.) Instead, what is needed is to work through the dynamics that show up in the relationship the patient has to the analyst, that is, to the transference, and the way the patient repeats, over and over again, old patterns. By

5 Allen 2021, 161.

6 Ibid., 162.

surfacing the unconscious fantasies that have organized the patient's experience—surfacing them in a practical, experiential, and not just cognitive way—the psychoanalytic process allows for transformation. In other words, the crux of psychoanalytic treatment is not enlightenment but the affective dynamics in transference relationship. Without such a relationship, insight will have no traction.

What is the analog for critical theory? How can the critical theorist have anything like a transference relationship with society? For one, there is not that much distance really between psychoanalysis and sociology, or between the patient and society. As Allen writes, quoting Adorno,

"The isolated individual," he [Adorno] writes, "the pure subject of self-preservation, embodies in absolute opposition to society its innermost principle. The jarring elements that make up the individual, his 'properties,' are invariably also moments of the social totality. He is, in a strict sense, a monad, representing the whole and its contradictions, without, however, being at any time conscious of the whole." In other words, the individual is a "contradictory microcosm" of the antagonistic society… [P]sychoanalysis offers insight not only into the individual psyche but also into the social totality, inasmuch as the individual serves as a contradictory microcosm of the antagonistic whole.[7]

As I read Allen reading Adorno, it seems to me, then, that psychoanalysis is itself always already a critical theory of society. But, alas, what goes on in the consulting room remains there unless suitably anonymized for a case conference or journal article, usually remaining at the level of the analysand, not the social whole.

Another analog for critical theory is this: In contrast to those theorists who have been trying to identify universal and largely timeless truths that can orient individuals and society, critical theorists should see themselves, Allen writes, as participants "in ongoing social and political struggles" in a world that is "in large part a contingent construction open to internal transformation".[8] To help with this, Allen turns to Adorno and

7 Ibid., 179-180.

8 Ibid., 175.

his notion of interpretation, specifically to interpret a distorted unjust world (which after all is the object of a critical theory of society). The task is "to interpret unintentional reality".[9] This is done through "the construction of constellations—trial combinations of the minute fragments of experience" as well as focusing on what might seem insignificant, just as happens in psychoanalysis in trying to read through repressions and distortions, through what Jonathan Lear calls the fractal nature of psychic life.[10] For Adorno too, Allen writes, "social experience too has a fractal nature…. [T]hese fragments contain within them keys to interpreting the social totality; like Leibnizian monads, they hold up a windowless mirror to the contradictory nature of social reality".[11] The theorists can come to discern this unintentional reality not through systematic philosophy or Habermasian rational reconstruction, Allen suggests, but through something like Adorno's negative dialectics.

From this perspective, psychoanalysis is not, as Habermas thought, a study of how the unconscious has been "delinguistified," for there are psychic phenomena prior to language. It is not a resource for sociality, as Honneth has argued, because it also attends to the "sting of the negative" and the sometimes destructive aspects of the drives. The task of critical theory is not to provide a foothold for reconstructing normative theory. Rather in a critical theory that takes psychoanalysis seriously, "the critical theorist immerses herself in the blind spots and waste products of history, assembling them into constellations that can strike a spark that lights up social reality in a new and practically transformative way".[12]

But how does this transformation come about? How does the "patient," that is, society, take in and metabolize these new constellations? Or, as Allen reminds us that Horkheimer asked, "how can we possibly know that critical theory is bringing about the emancipatory transformation at which it aims?" Allen's answer: "The answer is that we can't:

9 Ibid., 177.

10 Ibid., 178.

11 Ibid., 179.

12 Ibid., 152.

'There can be no corresponding concrete perception of it…until it actually comes about.' In other words, the proof can only be in the pudding".[13] And this reminds the reader of the title of the book's fourth chapter, itself a Lacanian mantra: The cure is that there is no cure, or, in other words, the patient is better when they know they are likely not going to magically get all better.

And yet, in closing, I have to say that this analogy does not sit well at all. In the psychoanalytic transference, there is a *relationship* between analyst and analysand. What is the relationship between society and the critical theorist of society? Does the public even know the critic is there, much less what the critic is writing? Do those lightning like constellations, those interpretations of society's fractal, contradictory, and yes irrational nature enter the consciousness of the people being studied? This is not just a question for Amy Allen, not a criticism of her book, but a question I have to ask myself *as well as someone who sees herself practicing psychoanalytic critical theory*. I can revel in flashes of insight, but in the end, how do I work in a way that will make these flashes reverberate in the world at large?

The answer that seems best to me is there in Allen's book, first, in the passage I cited earlier about the social theorist seeing herself to a participant in the world, and second, in Adorno's observations that each one of us contains and is an instance of the multitudes of society's contradictions. The critical social theorist should see herself as a product of the very society she is criticizing; and likewise she can see her own transformation as a way of transforming the world. And, with Habermas, I would add that the critical social theorist is also a piece of a larger informal public sphere whose words and deeds reverberate throughout. It seems to me that the *responsibility* of the critic is to see herself thoroughly tied up in, a piece and a parcel of, the larger social whole, hardly immune from the irrationalities and contradictions of that whole. And I am sure that Amy Allen would say, yes, of course.

13 Ibid., 183.

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Drive theory and heredity in Amy Allen's Critique on the Couch

Duarte Rolo[1]

Amy Allen's *Critique on the Couch* is a seminal contribution to the study of the relationship between psychoanalysis and critical theory. At a time when most authors prefer to ignore the difficulties raised by the pessimistic anthropology of psychoanalysis rather than turning those difficulties into the object of their reflexion, Allen's approach does justice to the inspiration of the founders of the Frankfurt School, who made psychoanalysis one of the pillars of their critical theory of society.

Critique on the couch is a systematic and meticulous study, in a style reminiscent of Joel Whitebook's *Perversion and Utopia*, an author with whom Allen maintains a permanent dialogue throughout the book. The particularity of this style is precisely not to be satisfied with a distant or opportunistic understanding of psychoanalytical theory, operating by punctual borrowing of isolated concepts. On the contrary, Allen dares to engage in the meanderings of metapsychology. As a result, the book is of interest to psychoanalysts, insofar as it brings to light questions of metapsychology that the psychoanalytic tradition, undoubtedly caught up in problems arising primarily from clinical practice, has tended to neglect (see, for instance, Chapter 2 in the book). Consequently, this work invites a true interdisciplinary dialogue.

Amy Allen's central proposition, clearly formulated at the beginning of her book, consists in affirming that critical theory needs psychoanal-

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ysis in order to reach some of its fundamental objectives. This proposal takes shape in a context that should be recalled: it is the controversy, revived by Axel Honneth and Joel Whitebook[2], about the uses and the fate of psychoanalysis in the Frankfurt School tradition of thought. Allen's book is explicitly a continuation of this controversy (of which we can bet that it will be a fundamental piece from now on):

> 'Taking up Honneth's challenge, this introduction addresses the following questions: What (if anything) does contemporary critical theory that seeks to take up the legacy of the Frankfurt School anew need psychoanalysis for? In other words, what work do we, as critical social scientists, need psychoanalysis to do for us now?'[3]

Allen puts forward three elements in response to this question:

— First, she argues that critical theory needs psychoanalysis in order to establish a realist conception of the subject, one that would not fall into the pitfalls of normative idealism.
— Secondly, she considers that psychoanalysis provides critical theorists with resources to rethink autonomy without the need to resort to dubious developmentalist schemes or evolutionary theories.
— Thirdly, she argues that psychoanalysis offers a compelling model for conceiving the purposes and methods of critique. This model makes it possible to conceive emancipation without necessarily falling into utopianism or narrow rationalism.

These arguments are successively developed in distinct chapters of the book (Chapter 1 for the first point, Chapter 2, 3 and 4 for the second point and finally Chapter 5 for the last point). The developments that Allen devotes to the question of the Ego, or to the critique of developmentalist or evolutionary conceptions of autonomy, deserve a more generous treatment than is possible in this article. Insofar as I am unable to discuss in detail all the contributions of Allen's book, I have chosen to focus my review on a specific topic that interests me particularly. I will therefore

2 Honneth 2007, 2012; Honneth & Whitebook 2016.

3 Allen 2021, 3.

limit myself to the formulation of some considerations on metapsychology and philosophical anthropology regarding what Amy Allen calls a 'realist conception of the subject'. Allen defends a realist conception of the subject by relying largely on the psychoanalytical work of Melanie Klein. However, it seems to me that her interpretation of Klein's work calls for some remarks.

A realistic conception of the subject is one that does not overestimate the rational powers of the individual and that, consequently, takes into account "the sting of negativity"[4]. What do we mean by "the sting of negativity", an expression that has become somewhat emblematic in the recent controversy between Axel Honneth and Joel Whitebook[5]? At first sight, this formula undoubtedly refers to Joel Whitebook's[6] remarks on the "work of negativity", an expression borrowed from the French psychoanalyst André Green (1999). In this case, this expression designates the irrational forces at work in the subject. Otherwise put, by "work of the negative" we must understand the tendencies that are refractory to reflection, stand opposed to consciousness, and produce complex forms of denial of reality. Whitebook also refers to what he calls Freud's Hobbesianism, i.e. the idea that there is a deeply hostile and anti-social tendency in all human beings. This conception of negativity can also be linked to the Adornian theme of conflict between the individual and society: in his indictment of the neo-Freudians, Adorno insists at length on the antagonism that exists between the individual and society, an antagonism that revisionists seek to abolish by "sociologizing" psychoanalysis. This thesis refers, moreover, to a certain reading, very widespread among the first generation of the Frankfurt School, of Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*: the egoistic search for satisfaction is opposed to the renunciations that civilization requires. Thus, there is a fundamental opposition between drive satisfaction and social requirements. In short, the

4 Honneth 2007; Allen 2015.

5 Honneth and Whitebook, "Omnipotence or Fusion?"

6 Whitebook 2001.

goals of the individual and those of society are irreconcilable and there can be no civilization without sacrifice[7].

Ultimately, we can understand "the sting of negativity" as a set of irrational, egoistic and antisocial forces at work in the individual, which are a source of conflict and opposition. It seems to me, however, that in order to do true justice to the Freudian discovery, negativity should not only be conceived as a source of conflict between the individual and society. Freud's genius was to show that the individual is not only at grips with forces that attack him from the *outside*, but also with forces that attack him from the *inside*. Drives that seek satisfaction in an egoistic and anarchic way come into conflict with the civilized social order, but they are also offensive towards the ego. This aspect of Freud's discovery, the fact that "the Ego is not master in its own house", dealt a blow to the illusion of the Kantian autonomous and self-transparent subject, freely deciding on his means and ends. Psychoanalysis has brought on stage a divided subject, dispossessed by an authority that she ignores, but which nevertheless acts within herself. An individual who, at times, turns against herself and acts against her best interests. Therefore, the challenge is to think together destructiveness towards others and self-destructiveness; the capacity to make others suffer and the tendency to inflict suffering on oneself; sadism and masochism[8]. This aspect is obviously at the heart of the negativity invoked by critical theorists when they appeal to psychoanalysis.

7 Whitebook 2004.

8 I emphasize this point because it comes into play in the discussion of the concept of death drive as used by Amy Allen. She is right to insist on the fact that among Freud's disciples, it is certainly Melanie Klein who took the death drive hypothesis most seriously, to the point of making it a central axis of her own theory. Nevertheless, in Amy Allen's use of it, this death drive appears most often in the form of instinctual aggressiveness. However, instinctual aggressiveness, as it can be observed in animal behavior for example, has an adaptive function. The drive, on the contrary, does not obey an adaptive logic. Therefore, it seems important not to assimilate the death drive only to instinctual aggressiveness. The drive carries within it the *human* excessiveness that unconscious sexuality confers on it. It is a search for excitation without limits, which is why it seems more appropriate to speak, like Jean Laplanche, of "the sexual death drive" (see Laplanche 2015).

The question that runs through the current controversy about psychoanalysis in critical theory regards specifically the aetiology of "the sting of negativity". How can we conceive of the origin of this core of irrationality?

For Allen, only a theory of drives can account for "the sting of negativity" (a proposal with which I agree). She criticizes Axel Honneth's theory of recognition insofar as the latter has renounced a strong conception of drives in favour of a theory of object relations, judged more compatible with the idea of an intersubjective constitution of the subject. The theory of object relations preserves, moreover, an element of human sociability, thus fighting against the pessimism of orthodox Freudian anthropology. Honneth's choice is seen as a concession to social adaptation and an abandonment of the radical content of the original Freudian theory. According to Allen, Melanie Klein's theory is better able to preserve the sting of negativity:

— because it is clearly anchored in a theory of drives, on the one hand;
— and because it does not lock itself in an essentializing biologism which would leave no place to social transformation, on the other hand;

The whole point of Allen's demonstration is to support the importance of a theory of drives as a nucleus of negativity, while avoiding falling into the pessimistic conservatism often reproached to Freudism. To avoid this problem, one must escape from the biologism associated with the theory of drives. According to Allen, Melanie Klein's theory makes it possible to reconcile these two requirements because it conceives of the drives as psychological and social properties rather than biological ones. Following the work of Fong[9], Allen maintains that drives are "shaped" by the environment. Moreover, they are vectorized towards objects, as relational passions. Consequently, the subject is "turned" towards interaction and driven by eminently social forces. This argument makes it possible to avoid the fatalism commonly associated with the immutability implied by a biological conception of the subject and it thus opens up

9 Fong 2016.

possibilities of psychic and social transformation. Surely, if the drives are intersubjectively constituted, they can be transformed provided that one manages to act on these intersubjective conditions.

This interpretation of Melanie Klein's work deserves nevertheless some comments. One can understand the issues at stake in the reading put forward by Allen, but the latter seems overly influenced by the relational interpretation of Greenberg and Mitchell[10], in particular on one point: even if one can conceive of the drives as being shaped by human relationships, the fact remains that in Kleinian metapsychology these drives are fundamentally innate. There are many passages in Melanie Klein's work that attest to this fact:

> "The repeated attempts that have been made to improve humanity – and in particular to make it more peaceable – have failed, because nobody has understood the full depth and vigour of the instincts of aggression *innate* in each individual"[11]

> 'I formerly made the suggestion that the ego's capacity to bear tension and anxiety, and therefore in some measure to tolerate frustration, is a *constitutional factor*. This greater *inborn capacity* to bear anxiety seems ultimately to depend on the prevalence of libido over aggressive impulses, that is to say, on the part which the life instincts plays from the outset in the fusion of the two instincts' [12]

For Klein the drives 'are there from the beginning' (a statement that Allen herself repeats many times), even if they can be latter influenced by environmental factors. Clearly, this 'from the beginning' means 'already there at birth'. The Kleinian theory of the drives thus confers an important place to heredity, an aspect that Allen seems to underestimate in her reading. Doesn't this fact imply revising downwards the role of cultural and social factors in the formation of the drives? What is the determining weight of the hereditary factor compared to the influence of relationships?

10 Greenberg & Mitchell 1983.

11 Klein 1975, 257. Emphasis added.

12 Klein 1997, 68. Emphasis added.

This conception of the drives raises, moreover, another problem. The otherness of the drives and consequently, their negativity, comes from the fact that they are *not there from the start*. This is a point on which the French psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche particularly insists[13]:

> 'What is also contested by us is the notion of a primordial id, at the origin of psychic life, an idea that goes directly against the novelty implied in the notion of drive, as a sexual process not adapted (in man) to a pre-established goal. If the notion of id retains a meaning, it is to characterize the repressed unconscious which, by its otherness, becomes truly "something in us", an "internal foreign body", an "id".'[14]

In this quotation, Laplanche establishes a link between the drives and unconscious sexuality. The drives are a product of infantile sexuality, hence their characteristics (polymorphous perversion, autoeroticism, etc.)[15]. Following Laplanche, and in truth a tradition of French psychoanalysis, the negativity of the drives can be explained by their sexual and unconscious roots. But in Allen's conception, the drives appear as entities dissociated from sexuality, as autonomous forces of another kind, in particular the death drive. This dissociation makes it difficult to understand the specific characteristics of the drives, as well as the way in which they manifest themselves. How can we explain the disruptive character of the drives without appealing to their genesis, which depends on the repressed unconscious and infantile, perverse polymorphic, sexuality?

The drives become an internally attacking force for the subject because they are emanations of unconscious sexuality. They thus develop into an instance of alienation inasmuch as they result from the introduction of foreign elements in the psychic functioning, to such an extent that they will constitute an 'internal foreign body'. Therefore, the sexual unconscious and the drives constitute a source of negativity precisely because they are not an inner nature or an original, more authentic self, but in

13 Laplanche 2005, 2015.

14 Laplanche 2007, 198-99. *Translated by the author.*

15 Freud 2015.

fact a second nature[16]. However, if drives are ultimately forged in relationships with others shouldn't they rather, as Honneth postulates, constitute a potential of sociability (even a wounded or mutilated sociability), instead of becoming asocial? By choosing to conceive of drives as relational passions, Amy Allen risks repeating the flaws she criticizes in Honneth's intersubjectivist conception. For my part, I believe that a radical and critical conception of the subject, on the contrary, should be able to account for the genesis of these hostile forces that undermine the individual from within other than by appealing to heredity[17].

Some remarks, which were intended only to point out a few aspects of Allen's approach that merit questioning, cannot detract from the merit of the author's work. Like any good scholarly work, *Critique on the Couch* provides at least as many answers as it raises good questions. Between the proponents of an untamable and hostile Nature and the proponents of a civilizing Culture, Allen has opened a stimulating third way, which we hope will inspire other researchers.

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Critical Theory of the Subject

Gunzelin Schmid Noerr[1]

A stimulating and substantial book. It's well-written, it's helpful didactically, and it contains numerous previews and summaries. There are crucial questions here, in Allen's book, that have been raised in the past, also in other discourses to do with psychoanalysis and critical theory. The central demand, which is that drive theory should once again be included in critical theory, is something I can agree with wholeheartedly, even if an evolving critical theory today can no longer hold on to some of the original premisses associated with it in the past. Within the given framework, I cannot here deal with concepts that are important for Allen, such as that of the death drive or progress. I will limit myself to a few questions on the relationship between critical theory and psychoanalysis: What is meant by critical theory? Is psychoanalysis itself a critical theory? How should we deal with those parts of psychoanalysis that many critics reject as ahistorical and biologistic? How does society enter into the subject and its drive structure? And to what extent does psychoanalytic practice serve as a model for the critical theory of society?

The title *Critique on the Couch* is misleading. It is based on a category mistake, inasmuch as philosophical-scientific considerations follow a different logic than those of the drives and their vicissitudes. Of course, the title is there to be trenchant and metaphorical, to draw attention. But just who is placed on which couch, and with what purpose? In any event, the soundness of a theory or its applications cannot be tested by reference to subjective unconscious motivations that are being processed "on the couch."[2] Allen is concerned neither with a psychopathology of en-

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2 Years ago, there was indeed a contentious work published under the title *Psychoanalysis on the Couch*. Back then the title was legitimate, in that it was

lightened thought and action nor with a meta-critique of critical thinking in the sense of Adorno's critique of 'identity theory' – with the aid of a psychoanalysis transformed into philosophy, in order to become self-reflexively aware of one's own impulses for empowerment.

More accurate for the content of the book is its subtitle, describing the need, as it sees it, for psychoanalysis in the critical Theory of Society. In carrying this out, the author deals with several historically successive approaches to critical theory, in the first instance those of Theodor W. Adorno, Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth. But "need" is a relational concept. In this context, the question arises as to who needs what and to what purpose. To anticipate Allen's answer to the second part of the question, it is psychoanalysis that is needed, particularly the version developed by Melanie Klein. On Freud himself Allen says very little that has not already been passed down through other authors. The answer to the third part of the question too can be summed up in a few keywords, as she formulates it in the introduction: It is about a realistic view of humanity that does not exclude the finitude of reason and does not ignore "radical evil" (to speak with Kant and Hannah Arendt), furthermore it is about a critique of the idea of progress and finally whether psychoanalysis can be a model of social critique. Oddly enough, however, the author does not explicitly address the first aspect of the relation of needs. I.e. does critical theory need psychoanalysis or vice versa? What, then, is to be understood under the term "critical theory"?

The expression is equivocal. Critical theory, wrote Horkheimer in later years – in 1965, looking back on his work of the 1930s – understands its concepts

> "as moments of the historical constellation, and at the same time as expressions of that will towards a just society – which in different historical situations expresses itself differently, in theory and in practice –, whilst at the same time maintaining its unity".[3]

primarily an institutional critique of psychoanalysis 'from the inside', with the intent of "finding ways out of a psychoanalysis that had become cowed and self-restrictive" and getting psychoanalysts to "shift the 'underworld' of their own actions by examining and reflecting on it" (Lohmann 1984, 16).

3 Horkheimer 1965/1988, 13.

"Critical theory" thus refers on the one hand to the research context of what later came to be called the "Frankfurt School", bound to specific historical contexts, but on the other hand it also refers to a "will towards a just society" that can be distinguished from its respective manifestations and to the type of action and knowledge associated with it. Sceptical of utopias, Horkheimer says very little about what is "right", focussing mostly on what is *not* right. More than that, for him, it was not so much a "theory" as the "behaviour" of certain "subjects" that mattered most,[4] which was not merely intended as aiming at individual social improvements, but rather "to have society itself as its object".[5] It was directed at "changing the whole"[6] in the sense of a more rational and a more just ordering of society.

To conceptualise critical theory in its transformations as well as its overall structure, on the one hand we have to *historicise* it, while on the other hand we have to *dehistoricise* it. Both perspectives have their justification, and at the same time have their own particular difficulties. In the first case, we contextualise the theory by relating it to individual authors and the changing political, socio-cultural or scientific constellations. Though, the problem arises: how are we to establish just where the boundaries of the "school" are to be drawn? At the very least, it is possible for us to make further personal and historical subdivisions concerning the approaches that comprise the central themes constituting this school of thought – beyond the all too schematic distinction between 'early' and 'contemporary' Critical Theory. But even beyond that, it is necessary to take into account era-specific discursive networks. That's the historicising side. In the second instance, we seek to grasp the various formations of critical theories as specific expressions of a more general

4 Something of this spirit of the 1930s could still be felt in the late 1960s in the student movement. The culmination of critical theory, as it was experienced at the time, was the close connection of the analysis of social conditions with political campaigns and the change of subjective behaviour through the experimentation with new forms of collective living and working.

5 Horkheimer 1937/1988, 180.

6 ibid., 182.

structure, and to reconstruct a "critical theory" that is bound not to individual persons but as an epistemic form with a specific orientation. But again, how is this form to be grounded and distinguished from other approaches? To what extent is it still related to the Marxian paradigm? Can it be derived from a moral demand for emancipation? Allen however nowhere explicitly addresses these questions. What she understands under critical theory has to be teased out indirectly, by following up the rather repetitive invocation of the few main authors she cites. Thus, the concept of critical theory remains somewhat underdetermined, as does the 'need' that psychoanalysis should or can cover in this context. Important aspects of the connection that are postulated – such as science, technology, nature, politics, education, culture, even social psychology – are not addressed in Allen's work.

So why would critical Theory be in need of Psychoanalysis? Though already historically quite far removed from that pivotal constellation Adorno was dealing with – the nationalist-fuelled endorsement of the First World War by a majority of both the middle and the working classes and their political leaders, as well as their subsequent susceptibility to National Socialism in Germany – he, in the 1960s for example,[7] never wavered from the conviction that the understanding of destructive irrationality prevailing on a such a huge societal scale is possible, based on psychoanalytic notions. Critical theory was made possible not least by the fact that psychoanalysis itself could be understood as a critical theory,[8] for it too is a type of knowledge that arises from a practical-emancipatory engagement with forms of subjective experience that are currently opaque to themselves. With the help of psychoanalysis, the ways by which power and authority come to be interiorised into the deeper layers of the psyche were to be made more transparent. In keeping with this orientation, the notion of a "critical theory of the subject" was coined during the early 1970s and was subsequently concretised in numerous publica-

7 cf. 1977, 773 f.

8 Adorno 1965/1986, 162.

tions. Its origins go back to discussions between Alfred Lorenzer, Klaus Horn and Helmut Dahmer at the Sigmund Freud Institute in Frankfurt.[9]

The level at which Allen pursues the need for psychoanalysis is not that of substantive social criticism (which after all is also conceivable and has been done), but rather at the relatively abstract one of personality theory, epistemology and methodology. In this, it is the relationship to drive theory that she places at the centre of her deliberations. And indeed, the shibboleth of a psychoanalysis that does not willy-nilly serve the function of social conformism was and has always been the question of drive theory. While Horkheimer or Herbert Marcuse – as far as social and cultural critique is concerned – attributed a somewhat symbolic quality to Freud's drive biologism, and Adorno dismissed Karen Horney's and Erich Fromm's ego-psychological departure from Freud's drive theory as "revisionism", Habermas developed a language-theoretical understanding of psychoanalysis, in which drives featured only as free-floating energy, interpreting the processing of conflicts within the subject (and from the subjective side) primarily as rational self-reflection. Honneth too evades the whole question of the drives by denying the genuine asociality of the psychic structure or by reinterpreting it in an interactionist way. He ultimately derives aggression and destructiveness from frustration and fear as a result of unfulfilled desires for satisfaction, and not at all from a genuine inner-psychic dynamic.

Like Habermas and Honneth, what Allen rejects is what is called Freud's biologism and his related ostensible, ahistorical anthropology. However, she *does not* follow either of them – and, I think, she's fundamentally right in this – in rejecting the theory of drives altogether. She does so by invoking Melanie Klein, whose concept of the death drive presupposes a core of psychic (self-)destructiveness that cannot be dissolved reactively – and by focussing on this, capturing the fundamental duality of the unconscious, its essentially conflictual and contradictory nature. She also points out that Klein sees the development of drives in the subject as object-related from the outset, which is meant to give a kind of

9 cf. Dahmer 2002, 2.

drive-theoretical stopping point to the conviction held by critical theory that human nature is fundamentally socially determined.[10]

Klein bases her work very emphatically on Freud's dualism of the life and death instincts, which she believes to be reflected in its full drama in the conflicted feelings of her child subjects. But while for Freud, the object of the drive appears fundamentally secondary and is variable in relation to it, for Klein it is a constitutive component of the drive itself. In Allen's work, the reference to Klein's metapsychology is not just there to establish the basis for a realistic, i.e. non-idealistic, non-rationalistic conception of the human being, which to an extent accommodates the methodological negativism of critical theory, but also to give plausibility to critical theory's implicit conception of the possibility of a non-coercive ego-integration.

> "Because she views subjects as object-related from the start, Klein understands the self in intersubjective or relational terms; but because of her commitment to drive theory and her related emphasis on unconscious phantasy, her account of subjectivity is much richer, more complicated, and more ambivalent than intersubjectivist accounts such as Honneth's."[11]

At the same time, Allen freely concedes the counter-intuitiveness of this quotation – Klein, too, essentially presents her theory as universally valid and has, moreover, been subjected to criticism for her wildly speculative assumptions about the unconscious fantasies of infants and young children. Here, too, though, we should first agree with Allen that the social-scientific usefulness of a theory is judged less by the self-understanding of its author than by its conceptual systematics. What is true

10 Freud's notion of a Thanatos/Eros opposition is fraught with ambiguities, which have been addressed over the years on various occasions. A particularly important contribution to this debate, not mentioned by Allen, comes from Jean Laplanche, who relocates the decisive drive dualism in terms of both free and bound energy into the inner workings of a general sex drive. Laplanche also deals critically with Klein, among other things under the ironic and at the same time honorific title "Should Melanie Klein be burned?" (Laplache 1988, 100 ff.).

11 Allen 2021, 44.

of Freud – namely, as Allen points out, especially in chapter 3 following Whitebook, distinguishing between the rationalist-enlightenment and irrationalist-enlightenment, sceptical facets of his work and assessing them accordingly by distinguishing between culturally or individually specific conditions opposed to a more abstract, overarching 'conditio humana'.

Except that Klein herself does not pursue this possibility. Which raises the question whether Klein's version of psychoanalysis is particularly suited for clarifying the relationship between drive structure [Triebstruktur] and social structure [Gesellschaftsstruktur]. It is true that she understands the infant's feelings, fantasies and fears – conceived of as instinctual derivatives – as representations of object relations from the outset. But she does not explain how the very real early care-givers and thus also the objective social structure come to have a formative influence, in conjunction with the development of the nascent structure of the subject.

In addition, Allen emphasises as a special merit in Klein the latter's refusal to define the content of drives in biological terms altogether, focussing instead on a purely psychological description of how they express themselves in the emotional dynamics of conflict. Except that the corporeality of the drives is not to be equated with a speculative biological reductionism. To the core thesis of Critical Theory – the sociality of (external and internal) nature –, belongs just as much its antithesis, the naturalness of the social. This idea seems to me a better point of departure than Kleinian psychologism if we are to probe the legitimate objections that have been raised against the rationalism of Habermas' and Honneth's conception of psychoanalysis. This physiological dimension of psychoanalysis has to be preserved, since it is already at this level of drives (long before morality or ideology come into the picture) that subjects are socially formed. It is of this critical sense of Freud's materialism that Horkheimer explicitly reminds us:

Where Victorian ideology waxed lyrical about the sublimity of love while hardening itself to the suffering that the instinctual entails, Freud spoke of erogenous zones and availed himself of the terminology of physiology. In the zeal to derive the physical from the psychological,

Freud's tendency to derive the highest values from material processes – to dissolve the psychological into the physiological, even the physical – is almost overlooked today. The former tendency, which is also a feature of Freud's work, has much less materialist, critical implications and is therefore far less dangerous to the prevailing ideologies.[12]

Alfred Lorenzer – whose research into the specificity of psychoanalytic theory had an influence on the early Habermas' linguistic-hermeneutic reconstruction of the same[13] – has, in subsequent works,[14] further documented both the bodily-interactive foundations of sensual and linguistic symbol formation as well as the processes of desubjectivising desymbolisation that take place as a result of repression and other defence mechanisms. It is from this side of things that the 'social production' of the individual psyche becomes intelligible: from the very beginning of embryonic-organic development, psychophysical "interaction forms" are established in the course of direct bodily interaction, which, as patterns of gratification, shape subsequent situations of agreement with the early attachment figures. These intrapsychic condensations of experienced interactional relationships already form a pre-linguistic structure of learned behaviour and action templates. Simultaneously, these are also subject to the social determination of form, since both the sensually immediate and the symbolically mediated behaviour of the significant other is imbued with the practice of society as a whole.

It is these organismic forms of interaction that are, according to Lorenzer, the core of the unconscious that is operative throughout life. In the course of socialisation, they are linked with gestures, images, sounds and language – Freud derives consciousness from the interconnectedness of the "factual world" [Sachvorstellung] and the "symbolic world" [Wortvorstellung] – which can then be articulated, manipulated and reflected upon. The result of this linkage between types of interaction and different types of symbols are "symbolic forms of interaction" [Lorenzer: sym-

12 Horkheimer 1948/1987, 399.

13 Habermas 1968, 295 f., 312.

14 E.g. Lorenzer 1972, 1981

bolische Interaktionsformen]. As far as this link is concerned, however, it must be said that only a part of the particular forms of interaction will be available to the subject, while another part will remain nameless and unsymbolised. On the one hand, it forms a utopian potential of the unconscious, the not-yet-consciously symbolised. On the other hand, it is based on a compulsive element ('cliché' [Klischee] in Lorenzer's terminology) that cannot be reflected upon by the self and that then represent an avenue through which social manipulation can occur. For these symbolic forms of interaction can in their turn be dissociated again under the influence of contradictory practical experiences. Under such circumstances, "desymbolised forms of interaction" point to a pathologically based loss of experience. The behavioural repertoire congeals into behavioural clichés, language degenerates into the unemotional application of symbols, and emotions become cathected to substitute satisfactions.

If one bears this socialisation-theoretical background of subjectivity in mind, then it also becomes clear why Habermas' designation of the psychoanalytic process as rational self-reflection,[15] for all the affective context which he provides, falls short. This objection applies equally to Honneth. In his reading of things, what in Habermas is called an "emancipatory interest" is of relevance only at the level of the societal, namely in social conflicts. It would be possible to describe this in psychoanalytical terms only if there were such a thing as a societal subject to which it could be attributed, which is dubious. Though in doing so Honneth, too, presupposes that there is an increase in rationality somewhere. Allen's main objection to these approaches – in which, in different ways, therapeutic psychoanalysis serves as a model for social critique – is that the two critical theorists pay too little attention to the issue of transference. She insists that the goal of analytic practice consists in this, that the current neurosis – following the repetition compulsion of the drives – be remodelled via a transference neurosis. It is only this procedure that makes it possible for an interactive 'working through' of the existing resistances, whereas a premature rational self-reflection that skips this phase is just as likely to end up intensifying the resistances.

15 Habermas 1968, 280 ff.

These objections are correct and can be backed up by numerous accounts of psychoanalytic practice. But they could also mystify the psychoanalytic process if it is not possible to explain, on the basis of socialisation theory, how the 'unconscious fantasies' (Klein) or 'unconscious desire' (Jacques Lacan) derive their dynamics from sensual patterns of experience – in which even the earliest mother-child 'symbiotic' interactions are pre-symbolically manifested on an individual level – and in what way social influences make themselves felt even this early on. In this way that process of transference that is so indispensable in psychoanalysis is already inherent in the forms of interaction themselves, insofar as it can be derived from its dual character as both representation of drives and blueprint for possible interactions. The familiar protosymbolic mechanisms of dreams and fantasies are always already compromise formations between desymbolisation and resymbolisation. It is in this context that Allen's warning makes sense, namely that a rational interpretation, in the absence of the required transference, can turn into rationalisation. It results from the emotional emptying of the symbols used, with which the lack of clarity concerning the interaction forms on offer is obscured.

In probing this issue of how the psychoanalytic process works, Allen's primary aim is to clarify the extent to which an analogy between psychoanalytic therapy and social critique holds. She rightly points out that critical theory, especially Adorno's thinking in 'constellations', was strongly inspired by psychoanalytic ideas:[16]

> "[…] because of the fractal nature of social reality – the way that its contradictory, antagonistic, and oppressive patterns are repeated across multiple scales – the assembly of fragments into constellations can yield a new perspective on the contradictory whole, one that can have transformative effect. Like a good psychoanalytic interpretation, a good philosophical interpretation illuminates the contradictory, antagonistic structure of social reality in such a way that social actors can make an effective intervention in their own ways of thinking and acting."[17]

16 cf. also, for example, Klein 2007; Schmid Noerr 2014.

17 Allen 2021, 287

To make plausible this Adorno version of the analogy however, Allen has to remove an obstacle that she herself has set up – by placing so much emphasis on the high importance of the transference in therapy in the first place. In the field of critical theory however, there seems to be no functional equivalent for transference. It is true that in principle a reference to Horkheimer's concept of critical theory from 1937 would have made sense here, in which a close intertwining of theory and political practice is postulated (and for which one could also assume a kind of "transference" and "counter-transference"). He writes about the subject of critical behaviour in distinction to that of the specialist scholar: "His profession is the struggle to which his thinking belongs, not thinking as something distinct, to be separated from it".[18] And elsewhere on "critical theory and the historical effort to which it belongs": "Concretely, it is to be found among those who form the nuclei of a new world within the authoritarian states, and those who wish to belong to that."[19] But such a critical theory of Marxian origin, as a reflection of a social revolution, had in some sense reached a historical conclusion by the early 1940s. It doesn't seem as if Allen is trying to revive this position. Politics too is a field in which the mechanisms of transference and counter-transference are unavoidable and she does her best to conceptualize this in such a way that it is free of the asymmetry that is there in the professional relationship between the analyst and the analysand – so that the critical theorist, blinded by the analogy, does not end up in the role of charismatic guru or left-wing populist. When in psychoanalysis transference is there to create a practical stage on which the world view of the analysand can be worked through, the political analogy to this, according to Allen, can be formulated in this way:

> "[…] to establish something like a transference relationship in the context of critical theory would mean simply to bring into view, through the interaction between critical theorists and social actors, the actors' distinctive, idiosyncratic way of experi-

18 Horkheimer 1937/1988, 190.

19 Horkheimer 1938/1988, 289.

> encing the world as precisely that: a way of experiencing the world that they themselves have had a hand in constituting. Doing so thus reveals this structure of experience as something that is open to practical transformation."[20]

But is this still "transference" in the sense of the repetition compulsion? And isn't this once again based on the fiction of a total societal subject?

Another obstacle presents itself here. While Allen repeatedly invokes Adorno to shore up the idea that psychoanalysis forms the basis for critical theory, she passes over the fact that he denounced most harshly "the therapeutically much-vaunted transference" as a fascistoid "crossing out of the self."[21] The reason for this – and Allen does not take this into account either – is that Adorno in particular, much more decisively than Habermas or Honneth, held a rationalist view of psychoanalysis as an instrument of knowledge. For him, it is an ally of critical enlightenment, selectively following only the early drive theory. As far as psychoanalytic practice was concerned, he preferred a kind of cathartic method of relentless confrontation to "bring people to the consciousness of unhappiness, the general one and their own, which is inseparable from it."[22] These are significant philosophical principles, but they are dysfunctional in therapy. Allen herself points out – something that is now a widespread psychoanalytic consensus – that patients need more than rational interpretations to make them aware of their unhappiness, namely also an alternative emotional relational experience. Thus, it would have been appropriate to name not just Adorno's productive insights, but also such lapses in judgement.

An analogical relation always includes unity *and* difference. If psychoanalysis contains a useful model for critique (in the sense of critical theory of society), then its usefulness must be limited already because of the difference of the subject matter. Above all, society is not an integral subject in the sense of a patient hoping for a benefit in terms of dealing with life's challenges through therapy. This does not mean, however, that

20 Allen 2021, 272 f.

21 Adorno 1951/1980, 67.

22 ibid., 68.

psychoanalysts, when they participate in political discourse, completely set aside their professional expertise. They have no reason to do so, but they should also know that it is a sensitive tool that can be abused all too easily. They play two social roles that have to be kept apart: as consulting experts and as citizens with equal rights. Recourse to latent motivations is fundamentally inappropriate in the political arena.

It is necessary and appropriate to a critical theory to discuss the connection to psychoanalysis not solely at the abstract level of philosophical anthropology and epistemic structures such as normativism, evolutionism or rationalism, but also to examine it through the answers that it provides to significant issues facing society today. This is why, in her concluding chapter, Allen takes up, albeit all too briefly, questions of Trumpism that are less those of individual psychopathology and more those of contemporary culture. She rightly warns against the comfortable complacency that can be associated with the diagnosis that those seduced by populism suffer from some kind of pathology. After the social devastation wrought by neoliberalism and by Trumpism it is necessary, she says,

> "to build the new kind of progressive populist movement that we need to push back against the tide of neoliberal financialization." This movement should be characterised "by enhanced […] integration, greater tolerance for ambivalence, and the attempt to bring our perceptions in line with reality."[23]

It is doubtful, however, whether at the level of politics Klein offers a more useful orientation than a properly understood Freud (and many other successors who also deal explicitly with political phenomena) – anti-Manichaeism and tolerance of ambiguity are classic psychoanalytical virtues. And while "'paranoid-schizoid' most certainly doesn't sound like a compliment,"[24] in the political context the recommendation of the 'depressive position' doesn't sound as if it is going to be such a popular success either.

23 Allen 2021, 309-310.

24 Ibid., 305.

The competence of socially critical psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically trained social theorists makes it possible to analyse the latent dimensions of political events and structures. It deals in a fundamental way not just with the attitudes and actions of others, with political opponents and competitors, but also with oneself. The Psyche is intimately intertwined with the political at both the individual and the socio-psychological level, so that psychoanalysis – contrary to an Adornoesque scepticism that has been misunderstood, e.g. by Peter Gordon – is most certainly able to enlighten us about politics. Even in the political sphere, its way of approaching things does not proceed top-down but bottom-up, i.e. its point of departure is the self-reference of its addressees, it takes their feelings seriously and provides them with a resonance space for the purpose of clarification and an increase in civilisation. Latent and unconscious content, informal group opinions, can be made accessible through the scenic understanding of psychoanalytical intervention. The prerequisite for this is the associated basic attitude of a receptive spirit, being emotionally available, restraining one's own impulses and one's inclination towards partisanship.

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[transl. Frederik van Gelder]

On the use and misuse of psychoanalysis

Gianluca Cavallo[1]

Amy Allen's new book, *Critique on the Couch*, is not simply a contribution to recent debates on critical theory and psychoanalysis. She reconsiders the entire history of the relationship between the two since the time of the first generation of the Frankfurt School, pointing out several questions that had been left open and paradoxes that had never been overcome. In doing so, she engages in a lively discussion with one of the most prominent experts in the field, namely Joel Whitebook.

One of the problems that Adorno and Horkheimer had left open was the question of how to conceive a form of ego-integration that was not repressive of the demands of the id. As Allen reminds to the reader, this impasse was one of the reasons that led Habermas to turn away from psychoanalysis. Allen questions Whitebook's authoritative reading of Adorno, according to which Adorno viewed ego integration as inherently violent and coercive.[2] While it is indisputable that Adorno never spelled out a less coercive model of psychic integration, Allen argues that a Kleinian understanding of ego integration is compatible with Adorno's view. Ego strength does not necessarily correspond to a domination of id impulses (on the contrary, this must be understood as a form of ego weakness, since the domination of the id amounts to a submission to the demands of the super-ego). Indeed, there are hints in Adorno's work that point towards a different conception of ego strength, according to which this is to be understood as a free intercourse between the id and the ego, which, as Adorno insists, both have their origin in libidinal energy. According to Allen, Klein's account of ego strength should be understood along these lines. On Allen's reading, it amounts to the capacity to

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2 Whitebook 1995, ch. 3.

withstand the existence of ambivalent drive impulses, without resorting to defense mechanisms and repression. The integration of the ego, thus understood, also entails the never-ending process of bringing one's internal, phantasized objects into closer alignment with external objects, i.e. recognizing both the unavoidable distortions in our perception of the object and its independence and autonomy. This is very much in the spirit of Adorno's negative dialectics.

Yet, surprisingly, Allen does not mention an important difference between Adorno and Klein. Adorno, in accordance with the early Freud, placed particular emphasis on the conflict between the libidinal and the self-preservation drives, while Klein endorsed the late Freud's view of a conflict between life and death drives. Adorno saw aggression as a reaction to repression and powerlessness, and not as the manifestation of the death drive. Allen contends that only the assumption of a death drive can adequately explain domination and power, but this is far from evident. The problem is that Allen bases on this disputable assumption one of the central arguments of the book, namely that Klein should be preferred to Winnicott (or any other object-relation theorist) for the reason that Klein admits the existence of a death drive, and therefore allows us to explain undeniable social facts such as domination and power. As I said, however, it is not clear why the death-drive postulate is necessary, since there can be alternative accounts of aggression.

Moreover, the way itself in which Allen understands domination and power is not self-evident. She makes reference to the work of Raymond Geuss, as if political realism would be the only social theory able to provide a convincing account for domination and power. This might be true, but Allen does not provide any justification for this assumption. Therefore, the thesis that Klein should be preferred because her account is compatible with political realism (while, for example, Winnicott's is not), is not entirely convincing. Furthermore, even if Allen had provided a justification for political realism, this would still not be enough to make an argument in favor of Klein, since the validity of a psychoanalytic theory cannot be established on the only base of philosophical premises, but

should be proved on the base of clinical observations and be compatible with the results of empirical research. Allen does make a strong argument for the suitability of Kleinian psychoanalysis for a realistic conception of society, but the discussion of alternative accounts, and therefore of other social theories – in particular, that of Honneth, which Allen discusses at length – is not sufficiently developed. Allen's criticisms of Honneth, which echo those of Whitebook, remain at the level of incompatible *Weltanschauungen* – as Whitebook said about some of his own criticisms in the context of his last published engagement with Honneth.[3]

In Allen's discussion of Adorno there is another important point which does not receive enough attention. Although Allen recognizes that for Adorno a non-coercive form of psychic integration is not possible in an antagonistic society, there is almost no discussion about the role played by society in structuring the psyche. Allen seems to suggest that ego integration is possible here and now, provided that we understand it correctly, namely as the capacity to face the inevitable ambivalence of our drives and the unavoidable conflicts that life and death produce in their eternal struggle. While this might sound like an ahistorical view on human nature, Allen argues that a Kleinian account of psychic drives is not incompatible with the thesis – central to critical theory – that drives are shaped by society. Drives must be understood as modes of social relatedness that derive from some distinctive characters of the human condition. The fact that humans are born in a protracted state of helplessness shapes the initial relationship between child and caregiver in a way that explains certain universal features of the human mind, which can be called life and death drives, or love and hate, recognition and aggressiveness. What form these will take, which force will prevail, and so on, depends on the social environment in which the child – and later the adult – grows. However, the dialectical relationship between mind and society is not sufficiently spelled out to free this account of psychoanalysis from any charge of revisionism.

The central disagreement between Adorno and the neo-Freudians was not so much about the existence of drives, which the revisionists denied.

3 Honneth & Whitebook 2016.

The most important point was rather that revisionists based their theories, and their critique of society, on strong assumptions about the ego and character development, which, in their view, was disturbed by negative social factors. In other words, society was seen by revisionists to exercise an extrinsic influence on character formation, and social problems were understood as the result of a social distortion of a potentially normal line of development. Even though Allen's account rules out the latter idea and rightly insists on the permanence of ambivalence, she runs the risk of similarly opposing individual and society. On one hand, we have the drives, which correspond to different modes of primary relatedness; on the other hand, we have society. While Allen clearly makes the point that psychoanalysis can help us to understand social conflicts, it is not entirely clear how, in her view, a critical theory of society could help us better understand the historically specific nature of the drives and the resulting psychic conflicts. There are several formulations in the book that suggest a view of the drives as the other of society, for example when Allen identifies them with "a stratum or mode of human experience that lies stubbornly outside of social control."[4] I do not think that identifying the drives with the non-identical[5] is an accurate account of Adorno's view on the matter. For Adorno, the self-preservation drive is at the very core of modern society, and the libido itself is redirected (towards narcissistic goals) under the influence of society. The non-identical, for Adorno, is not something specific. It is any particular, which, as such, cannot be subsumed under a concept. In this sense, the individual ego is potentially non-identical with the whole of society just as the drives are non-identical with respect to the ego. The problem is, for Adorno, that both the ego and the drives (as well as anything else) are subsumed under the identifying logic of capitalist society. However, Allen's rich account of the drives is not, per se, incompatible with a more dialectical approach to the issue, which also seems to correspond to the actual intentions of the book.

4 Allen 2021, 19.

5 Ibid., 28.

In the third chapter of the book Allen discusses what Whitebook has identified respectively as Freud's "official" and "unofficial" positions and their relationship to the related ideas of psychic development and social progress.[6] While Whitebook sympathizes with Freud's rationalism and believes that the idea of a scientific secularism which frees people of any illusion of omnipotence retains its validity after we have stripped away Freud's Eurocentrism, Allen points out that, in this way, Whitebook still upholds a problematic distinction between a "primitive" propensity for omnipotence and a more "advanced" capacity to master it. This corresponds to a parallel dichotomization between "advanced" scientific cultures and "primitive" cultures in which magical thinking, myth, or religion – understood as attempts to exert omnipotent control over reality – prevail. In other words, if Allen is right, Whitebook still upholds the very Eurocentrism he criticizes in Freud's official position. It is not just a matter of using the wrong words. Allen reminds us that Freud explicitly made the connection between stages of psychic and civilizational development. However, she suggests an alternative reading of Freud's unofficial position, which provides the outlines for a critique of these racist and colonialist relics. This reading starts with Freud's conception of the death drive as the force hidden behind civilization's highest achievements. If morality, which holds society together, is rooted in aggression, there can be no normative point of view from which something could be identified as better or more advanced than anything else. At the very least, there cannot be any backward-looking notion of historical progress.[7] This also calls for a non-developmental understanding of the psyche, which, Allen suggests, can be found in Melanie Klein's late work. Klein understands what she calls respectively the paranoid-schizoid and the depressive position as permanent dispositions which can recur throughout life, as opposed to developmental stages that one passes through and leaves behind. (It is worth noting that the reader who is not

6 Whitebook 2017.

7 Allen has introduced a distinction between backward and forward-looking notions of progress in her book Allen 2016.

familiar with Klein's work will find in Allen's book an exhaustive clarification of these concepts, which are discussed in constant dialogue with contemporary Kleinian authors).

However, while Freud's late conception of the super-ego as rooted in the death drive is, as Freud himself recognized, a distinctively Kleinian view, it is also true that this only applies to what Klein calls the paranoid-schizoid position. In the depressive position, guilt is "rooted in love," as Allen explains.[8] In other words, morality does not necessarily derive from internalized aggression, but can also be the expression of the urge for reparation that emerges from love. This undermines the Freudian argument upon which Allen had based her rejection of any backward-looking notion of progress. If what Freud called civilization is actually *not* just the result of a domestication of the death drive, there still seem to be a way to ground normative evaluations. Even though these do not necessarily have to imply a backward-looking notion of progress, there is a missing point in Allen's argumentation. It is not clear how her rejection of backward-looking notions of social progress, based on Freud's unofficial position, is to be linked to Klein's non-developmental model of the psyche. If a conception of social historical progress can be rejected simply by pointing out, with Melanie Klein, that the force of the death drive can never be completely mastered, and therefore the value of any form of civilization is equally ambiguous, then the Freudian argument is superfluous. However, it is not clear whether this would be sufficient, since Klein's work is focused on primary relations and does not provide a full account of the role of social constraints in shaping psychic conflicts. The translation from the personal to the social level is not immediate. This difficulty comes to the fore in the book's concluding remarks, where the political implications of the proposed account remain confined to a shift in the personal attitude towards political rivals and in the way we conduct our politics.

According to Allen, critical theory not only needs psychoanalysis because the latter is able to provide a realistic conception of human nature

8 Allen 2021, 133.

and because it helps to reject developmental notions of personal autonomy or social progress. Psychoanalysis also offers a compelling model for the critical method itself. The analogy between analytical and critical method has been important in the entire tradition of Frankfurt School Critical Theory. However, Allen contends, the central role that transference plays in psychoanalysis has never been sufficiently taken into account. In particular, Habermas, Honneth and Celikates (but this also applies to Adorno)[9] have overemphasized the role of rational insights both in the analytical method and in the praxis of critique. Allen rightly points out that "self-transformative rational insight has as its practical condition of possibility the affect- and desire-laden process of establishing and working through the transference."[10] Transference allows the analysand to gain consciousness of the way past experiences have shaped the way they relate to their object world. However, since this relation is thoroughly shaped by conflicting affects, the gain in consciousness can be achieved only if the analytic situation is able to reconstruct the analysand's affective world. Drawing an analogy between the analytic and the critical method, the task of a critical social theory, according to Allen, should not be restricted to rational insights into the constitution of the social world. Rather, critical theory should bring into view the social actors' distinctive way of experiencing the world.

I understand this proposal as suggesting that critical theorists should seriously take into account the way in which specific social experiences can shape the affective relationship one has to one's social world. In order to achieve this goal, the relationship between theorists and social actors should be one of real dialogical interaction. Moreover, taking into consideration the related concept of countertransference, Allen suggests that we could by analogy understand the position of the social theorist as more similar to that of a passionate participant, who reflects on their own affective involvement, than to that of a neutral observer. Allen draws a last analogy at the end of the chapter on methodology, where

9 See Schneider 2011.

10 Allen 2021, 168.

she suggests that, just as the aim of psychoanalysis cannot be an objective state of health or normality, there cannot be an end to critique, because a utopian state of harmony and peace will forever remain out of reach. This is, after all, the central point of the book: negativity, aggression, and therefore conflicts and power are unerasable features of human societies. This, however, does not make critique and struggles superfluous. It makes them necessary.

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Between the Psyche and the Social: Reply to Rolo, Schmid Noerr, Cavallo, and McAfee

Amy Allen[1]

I'd like to start by expressing my gratitude to Gianluca Cavallo for organizing this symposium and to all the contributors for their rich and thought-provoking responses to my book. I'm grateful to the authors for their serious and generous engagement with my work, their evident appreciation of what the book is trying to accomplish, and their challenging questions and probing criticisms. The papers included in this symposium cover a wide range of topics, from meta-psychological questions about drive theory, ego integration, and the source of aggression to social-theoretical queries about the relationship between individual and society to meta-theoretical questions about the historicity of our critical concepts and the tasks of critical theory. Along the way, significant interpretive questions are raised about my readings of Theodor Adorno and Melanie Klein. Given the breadth and depth of the topics raised for discussion, I fear that I may not be able to address everything that has been put on the table. In some cases, the best response I can offer will be one that indicates some directions for future research.

Before I delve into the more substantive criticisms, I'd like to address Gunzelin Schmid Noerr's comment about the book's title. Schmid Noerr finds the title, *Critique on the Couch*, misleading insofar as it suggests that the book will offer a psychoanalytical diagnosis of critical theory. Although Schmid Noerr finds the subtitle of the book—*Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis*—more accurate, it, too, could be read as saying

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that critical theory stands in need of psychoanalytic treatment. But this, of course, would involve precisely the same sort of category mistake that Schmid Noerr identifies in the title. Moreover, as Schmid Noerr notes, the aims of the book itself are quite different than these readings of the title would suggest. In light of these comments, I thought I should say a few words about the book's title and how it came to be. I had originally hoped to title the book *The Sting of Negativity*, for reasons that Duarte Rolo's review so beautifully makes clear. Unfortunately, the press rejected this as too obscure. They then suggested a much more prosaic—not to mention, more easily googleable—title that I disliked. At the last minute, I floated *Critique on the Couch*, half in jest, and the press loved it. I tell this story not to make apologies for the title, but rather to underline the point that, as Schmid Noerr himself notes, it is meant to be metaphorical and memorable. However, if one insists on reading the title literally, I suggest that it might seem less puzzling if one lets go of the image of psychoanalysis as an objectivating, neutral, diagnostic science and instead understands it as an interactive, co-created, transformative dialogical practice—as what Jessica Benjamin has called a "two-way street."[2]

Although the papers in this symposium raise a wide variety of concerns, they also converge on some common themes. In what follows, I will start with the metapsychological issues raised primarily, though not exclusively, by Rolo and Schmid Noerr, as these questions are foundational for my project. I will then turn to the social-theoretical and political questions that come to the fore in the contributions of Cavallo and McAfee. Throughout, I will do my best to respond to some of the more significant interpretive challenges as well.

Negativity and the drives

Duarte Rolo's insightful and generous review focuses on the metapsychology and philosophical anthropology that I develop, based on my

2 Jessica Benjamin, "Two-Way Streets: Recognition of Difference and the Intersubjective Third," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 17: 1 (2006): 116-146.

reading of Melanie Klein, in chapter one. As Rolo notes, a primary aim of my book is to consider how critical theory can do justice to the sting of negativity—the persistence of irrationality, reality-denial, hostility, and destructiveness in human social relations.[3] As I argue in the book's introduction, members of the early Frankfurt School turned to psychoanalysis for precisely this reason—to make sense of the stubborn persistence of irrationality and destructiveness and their overwhelming impact on the social and political conditions around them. By contrast, contemporary Frankfurt School critical theory has tended to follow the lead of Jürgen Habermas, who, after a sympathetic though one-sided engagement with Freud in his early work, has long since dropped psychoanalysis in favor of a more rationalistic ego and moral psychology.[4] One consequence of this move is that Habermasian and post-Habermasian critical theory has struggled to give a compelling account of the contemporary resurgence of right-wing populism, white nationalism, and authoritarianism. After all, to say that these political developments represent deviations from communicative rationality or deliberative democratic ideals may be true but isn't terribly helpful. The re-engagement with psychoanalytic negativity is thus presented both as important for understanding the depth of the social and political challenges we face and as a way of re-animating critical theory by returning to some of its early insights.

But how do we understand the source of this sting of negativity? Classical psychoanalysis locates its source in unconscious drives, but contemporary critical theorists have tended to be wary of the biological reductionism thought to be inherent in drive theory.[5] One attempt to get

3 As Rolo helpfully points out, a point echoed by Schmid Noerr, the flip side of this outwardly directed destructiveness is *self*-destructiveness, though this theme is left largely unexplored in the book.

4 This claim is certainly not original to me! Indeed, it is well explored in other important works such as Joel Whitebook, *Perversion and Utopia: A Study in Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) and Noëlle McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown: Politics and Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019).

5 To be sure, the turn away from psychoanalysis in contemporary critical theory is also motivated by concerns about its purported lack of empirical

around this problem has been advocated by Axel Honneth. His approach is to root the sting of negativity in a particular kind of experience—namely, the breakup of primary fusion. For him, early infancy is characterized by episodic yet powerful experiences of fusion with the primary caregiver. As the infant develops and the primary caregiver's attention is increasingly drawn back to the world, these experiences of fusion are, inevitably, broken up. Because the fusion experience is understood as a kind of primordial bliss—a completely unmediated being together with another person—its breakup, however necessary, is a painful, anxiety-provoking experience. This pain and anxiety is the source of negativity—a negativity that, when outwardly directed, takes the form of aggression and destructiveness. However, the downside of this approach is that it makes negativity, aggression, and destructiveness derivative or secondary. Thus, I contend—and on this point Rolo, Schmid Noerr, and I are all in agreement—that that only a theory of the drives can satisfactorily do justice to the persistence and ubiquity of negativity in human psychic and social relations. And I turn to the distinctive version of drive theory elaborated by Melanie Klein for a version of drive theory that can avoid the charge of biological reductionism—and the pessimism and fatalism that a biological account of the drives seems to imply.[6]

Nevertheless, Rolo raises some concerns about my turn to Klein. The first issue is primarily an interpretive one: Rolo contends that my reading of Melanie Klein, which emphasizes the relational and psychological aspects of the drives, is too influenced by Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell's relational interpretation of her work.[7] Rolo cites several pas-

grounding or justification. I don't have space to discuss this issue here. To my mind, the best response to this type of concern is still Jonathan Lear's classic essay, "On Killing Freud (Again)," in Lear, *Open Minded: Working Out the Logic of the Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 16-32.

6 I say "seems to imply" because I am aware that there is important work being done in the philosophy of biology that understands biology in non-reductionistic and non-deterministic terms. See, for example, Lenny Moss, "Detachment and Compensation: Groundwork for a Metaphysics of 'Biosocial Becoming'," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40 (1): 91-105. 2014.

7 Jay R. Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic The-*

sages where Klein insists that the drives are innate, which means that they are ultimately rooted in heredity. Worrying that I downplay this aspect of Klein's work, Rolo asks whether I need to "revise[] downwards the role of cultural and social factors in the formation of the drives."[8]

Although I do acknowledge that Klein, like Freud, "views the drives as constitutionally given or innate motivational forces," Rolo is quite correct to point out that I don't exactly emphasize this claim, nor do I explain how it squares with my claim that Klein views the drives as competing modes of relationality.[9] However, I think that the elements of an answer to this question are implicit in my reconstruction of Klein's work. To say that drives are innate is, as Rolo insists, to say that they are there from the beginning, from birth. But so too are object relations, Klein insists. To quote a crucially important passage from Klein: "There is no instinctual urge, no anxiety situation, no mental process which does not involve objects, external or internal; in other words, object-relations are at the *centre* of emotional life."[10] Thus, for Klein, drives may be innate or constitutional, but from the beginning they are bound up with our relations to objects. This is one of Klein's significant departures from Freud, who understood drives as having temporal and functional priority over the objects to which they become attached.[11] For Klein, we might say, drive and object are equiprimordial. They may have different sources, but they are both present—and bound up with one another—*ab initio*. Klein alludes to this idea when she explains how her use of the term 'object' differs from Freud's. After quoting a passage from Freud, Klein continues: "Freud's use of the term object here is somewhat different from my use of the term, for he is referring to the object of an instinctual aim, while I mean in addition

ory (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 119-150.

8 Rolo, p. 18.

9 Amy Allen, *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 38.

10 Melanie Klein, "The Origins of Transference," in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*, 1946-1963 (New York: Free Press, 1975), 53.

11 On this point, see *Critique on the Couch*, 35ff.

to this, an object-relation involving the infant's emotions, phantasies, anxieties, and defences."[12]

Thus, to return to Rolo's question about whether I need to revise my account of the role of social and cultural factors in the formation of the drives, I think that my reading of Klein can accommodate the idea that drives are constitutional factors that are present from the beginning of life, for this doesn't change the fact that drives are also, from the beginning of life, bound up with object-relations. To put the point a slightly different way, borrowing a distinction from Benjamin Fong, to say that drives are *formed* by social relations is not to say that they are *elicited* by them.[13] Drives can be there from the beginning and yet also be shaped and structured in and through our relations to objects. Klein herself gives an example of this when she talks about the formation of persecutory anxiety in early infancy. On her account, the "primordial cause" of this anxiety is the internal operation of the death drive, but this "inner" feeling is "intensified by painful external experiences" of frustration and discomfort.[14]

Interpretive issues aside, Rolo also has more systematic concerns about my appeal to Klein's version of drive theory. Appealing to Jean Laplanche, he insists that the foreignness of the drives is a function of the fact that they are *not* there from the beginning; instead, they emerge from the repression of infantile sexuality. The Kleinian account, as I reconstruct it, not only fails to appreciate the rootedness of the drives in unconscious sexuality, it also dissociates the drives from sexuality entirely. "How can we explain the disruptive character of the drives," Rolo asks, "without appealing to their genesis, which depends on the repressed unconscious and infantile, perverse polymorphic, sexuality?"[15] The Laplanchian critique of Klein, which Schmid Noerr also invokes, is

12 Klein, "The Origins of Transference," 51.

13 See Benjamin Fong, *Death and Mastery: Psychoanalytic Drive Theory and the Subject of Late Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 11.

14 See Klein, "The Origins of Transference," 48.

15 Rolo, p. 19.

certainly very interesting and I hope to have the opportunity to discuss it in future work. For now, however, I can only admit that Klein offers us a different picture, one in which we are disrupted all the way down, ambivalent to the core. However, I do want to resist the conclusion that Rolo seems to draw from this Laplanchian argument; namely, that because I understand the drives as formed in relations with objects, I risk falling into the very same problem that I identify in Honneth's intersubjectivist interpretation of psychoanalysis—that is, of viewing the drives as basically pro- rather than a-social. Klein presents us with a third alternative, I think, one in which the drives are *both* pro- and anti- (which is not quite the same thing as a-) social to the core. On this picture, destructiveness is, to be sure, a mode of relating to others, but it's a thoroughly negative mode—where negative means not 'deficient' but oppositional, aggressive, fueled by hate and persecutory anxiety. Klein's conception of the drives is thus ultimately neither pro-social nor anti-social; it is, rather, a vision of what Kant famously called, in another context and with very different aims in view, the "unsocial sociability" of human beings.[16]

The drives (again) and transference

Like Rolo, Schmid Noerr's detailed and erudite essay raises some questions about my interpretation of Klein's drive theory. Schmid Noerr's first point concerns the question of whether Klein's work is in fact helpful in understanding the relationship between drive structure and social structure. While granting that Klein understands drive and object as intertwined from the start, Schmid Noerr contends that she "does not explain how the very real early care-givers and thus also the objective social structure come to have a formative influence, in conjunction with the

16 Immanuel Kant, *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent*, in *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays*, translated Ted Humphrey (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 31-32. It should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway, that this reference should not be taken to imply an endorsement of the teleological philosophy of history to which Kant connects his claim about unsocial sociability.

development of the nascent structure of the subject."[17] On my reading of Klein, Schmid Noerr is half right on this point. As I argue in more detail in chapter one of the book, Klein is more sensitive to the complicated interactions between "internal" intra-psychic forces and "external" inter-subjective situations than she is generally given credit for being. The passage that I referenced above, where she explains the emergence of persecutory anxiety through the interplay of the internal operation of the death drive and its intensification through painful external experiences, is a case in point. Still, Schmid Noerr is no doubt correct to point out that Klein herself does not offer a detailed account of how objective social structures, working through the actions of early caregivers, have a formative influence on the psychic subject. Nor do I even attempt to do this work on Klein's behalf in my book. This is a fair point, I think, and here I can only concede that more work remains to be done on this topic. What my reconstruction of Klein's metapsychology aims to establish is simply that, given her unique understanding of the interplay between the intrapsychic and the intersubjective domains of experience, Klein provides the kind of conceptual framework in which such an account might emerge. And, moreover, that this aspect of her work has been frequently underappreciated or, worse, misunderstood.

Schmid Noerr's second worry is that I go too far in understanding the drives in psychological and social terms, neglecting their corporeality and the physiological dimension of psychoanalysis. Echoing a point also made by Rolo, Schmid Noerr asks what becomes of this corporeal, material moment in my account? As Schmid Noerr reminds us, a core thesis of the early Frankfurt School—particularly prominent in the work of Adorno—is that the relationship between the social and the natural is dialectical. Thus, the flip side of the sociality of nature is the naturalism of the social. Leaning into this dialectic, Schmid Noerr suggests, opens up alternative, non-reductionist, and socially mediated understandings of the drives as rooted in bodily, corporeal processes and experiences. Such an approach, he contends, offers a more promising avenue for a rapproche-

17 Schmid Noerr, 29.

ment between critical theory and psychoanalysis than a thoroughly psychologized reading of Klein. Drawing on the work of Alfred Lorenzer, Schmid Noerr refers to the foundations of linguistic symbol formation in early, somatic experiences and bodily interactions with primary caregivers. From this perspective, patterns of interaction between infants and primary caregivers condense into intrapsychic, pre-linguistic structures; these structures form the core of the unconscious, but they are at the same time mediated by social and linguistic forces operating through the actions of the primary caregiver. Such a perspective, according to Schmid Noerr, not only helps us to understand how the individual psyche is socially formed, but also is crucial for understanding why Habermas and Honneth's overly rationalistic interpretations of psychoanalytic transference are unsatisfactory. Schmid Noerr insists that we need an account of how the unconscious is formed through affective, sensual, embodied patterns of experience and of how these patterns are in turn socially mediated if we are to understand how transference works and why mere rational insight, unaccompanied by transference, all too easily turns into mere rationalization.

I have neither the space nor the expertise to provide a detailed discussion of Lorenzer's work as it relates to Klein's. Still, it seems to me that there are some intriguing parallels that merit further exploration, particularly with respect to their shared understanding of the mutually constitutive interaction between drive and object/external reality.[18] To be sure, going further in this direction would require foregrounding the bodily basis of Klein's understanding of object relations. The infant's embodied, corporeal relation to the primary caregiver is clearly an important feature of Klein's work: her entire metapsychology revolves around the breast, after all! And while the breast plays a symbolic function in the infant's phantasy world, that symbolic function also refers back to the

18 For helpful discussion, see Mechthild Bereswill, Christine Morgenroth and Peter Redman, "Alfred Lorenzer and the Depth Hermeneutic Method," *Psychoanalysis, Culture & Society* 15 (2010): 221-250, 230ff.

corporeal experience of the infant being fed and nourished.[19] Perhaps I took too much distance from this aspect of Klein's work, out of an exaggerated fear of biological reductionism. In any case, I am grateful to Schmid Noerr for bringing Lorenzer into the conversation; I hope to have the opportunity to engage more deeply with his ideas in future work.

In addition to these metapsychological issues, Schmid Noerr also raises some concerns about my discussion of transference in chapter five. That chapter takes up the suggestion, prominent in the early Habermas and in some more recent work by Honneth and Robin Celikates, that psychoanalysis offers a fruitful model for the methodology of critical theory. Although I find this idea compelling, I also worry that the interpretations of psychoanalysis that these theorists offer in support of this analogy are overly rationalistic and cognitivist. None of their accounts take seriously enough the role of the transference in psychoanalytic method, and thus they don't even broach the question of what role transference phenomena might play in the project of critique. To be sure, one might be inclined to say that emphasizing the centrality of transference to psychoanalytic method simply undermines the possibility of modeling critique on psychoanalysis. After all, as Schmid Noerr asks, what could the functional equivalent for transference in critical theory possibly be? As I argue in the book, the best way to make sense of this is to understand transference in structural rather than relational terms.[20] In other words, transference here refers not so much to the process of transferring one's

19 Note that although Klein typically refers to the breast as the source of this nourishment, she also admits that the bottle can stand in for the breast as its "symbolic representative." (Klein, "Envy and Gratitude," in in *Envy and Gratitude and Other Works*, 178-79). Thus, although Klein herself certainly tended to assume a gendered account of mothering as the norm, her work is open to interpretations that do not naturalize gender categories. For discussion of this point, see Amy Allen and Mari Ruti, *Critical Theory between Klein and Lacan: A Dialogue* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2019), 52-53.

20 This distinction is relevant for Schmid Noerr's objection that I fail to discuss Adorno's critique of transference as a fascist liquidation of the self, as it seems to me that Adorno's critique in this section of *Minima Moralia* is implicitly aimed at the relational rather than the structural conception.

affective attachments or investments onto the person of the analyst but rather to the emergence, in the context of the analysis, of the analysand's idiosyncratic way of experiencing the world as precisely that—a way of experiencing the world that she herself has had a hand in creating. In the process, this pattern of experience opens up to practical transformation. When transference is understood this way, the analogy to critique as a process of de-naturalization through which the social world is opened up to transformation seems obvious (at least to me!). Still, Schmid Noerr is skeptical: "is this still 'transference' in the sense of the repetition compulsion? And isn't this once again based on the fiction of a total societal subject?"[21]

I agree with Schmid Noerr that we must take care not to introduce the totalizing fiction of the social subject. As he rightly reminds us, "society is not an integral subject in the sense of a patient hoping for a benefit in terms of dealing with life's challenges through therapy."[22] Moreover, this reminder does bring out a potential disanalogy between psychoanalysis and critique: individuals decide to enter analytic treatment, whereas societies as a whole—even deeply troubled ones, perhaps especially deeply troubled ones—do not seek out critical theory. Although it's true that I don't address this issue in my book, I think that one could at least begin to address it by being more attentive to the relationship between critique and social movements.[23] Social movements or struggles give voice to the affective outrage, felt suffering, and desire for transformation of groups of individuals who are marginalized or oppressed; in that sense, they could be seen as analogous to the analysand seeking out treatment. If

21 Schmid Noerr, 34.

22 Ibid., 35.

23 In my earlier work, I was skeptical of the appeal to social movements as a way of preserving this analogy. See Amy Allen, "Psychoanalysis and the Methodology of Critique," *Constellations* 23: 2 (2016): 244-254, 252. I now realize that my skepticism was in large part a function of the fact that I was implicitly presupposing a relational conception of transference; as a result, I couldn't yet see what could possibly serve as an analogue for transference in the case of critical theory.

we endorse Nancy Fraser's influential definition of critical theory as the self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age, then it follows that critical theory stands in a sympathetic though not uncritical relationship to emancipatory social movements.[24] The analogue of the psychoanalytic dialogue through which transference operates would then not be a dialogue between critical theorists and the society as a whole, but rather between critical theorists and the collective social agents who are already engaged in struggles for progressive social change.[25]

Aggression, domination, and progress

With Gianluca Cavallo's perspicacious and trenchant review, the emphasis shifts from the metapsychological to the social. Although he, too, has some concerns about my interpretation of Kleinian drive theory, and of the death drive in particular, his questions are oriented more toward issues in social theory than in psychoanalysis per se. Most of his remarks focus on the argument of chapter two. There, I maintain that Klein's novel account of ego integration offers a valuable resource for critical theory inasmuch as it shows a possible way out of the paradox of the ego as it arose in the work of the early Frankfurt School. For Klein, ego integration refers not to the progressive domination and repression of id by ego but rather to the ongoing expansion and enrichment of the ego through the incorporation of more and more unconscious content and the ability to withstand the ambivalence of conflicting drives without resorting to splitting. This account not only provides an alternative to Adorno's paradoxical embrace of the model the ego predicated on the repression of instinct—which, despite his devastating critiques of the domination of inner nature, he seems to view as necessary for the achievement of

24 Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical About Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

25 For illuminating discussion, see Robin Celikates, *Critique as Social Practice: Critical Theory and Social Self-Understanding*, trans. Naomi van Steenburgen (London: Rowman and Littlefield International, 2018). On this point, see also the contributions by Cavallo and McAfee in this volume.

autonomy—it also resonates in interesting ways with Adorno's own occasional remarks about the structure of non-identity thinking.

Although he is appreciative of my attempt to develop a less coercive model of ego integration through my reading of Klein, Cavallo is not fully convinced by some of my central arguments. The first point of contention concerns the postulate of the death drive. As Cavallo notes, Adorno and Klein diverge rather sharply in their understandings of the drives. Whereas the duality of life and death drives was utterly central to Klein's work, Adorno was inspired by Freud's earlier distinction between libidinal drives and the drive for mastery.[26] Thus, as Cavallo points out, Adorno didn't accept the postulate of the death drive; instead, he understood aggression to be a defensive response to repression and powerlessness. There are actually two problems here. The first is an interpretive question: why don't I discuss this important difference in my discussion of Adorno and Klein in chapter two? The second is a more systematic question: is it true, as I argue, that one must accept the postulate of the death drive in order to give a satisfactory account of aggression?

With respect to this set of issues, I'm more interested in taking up the systematic than the interpretive challenge. Adorno's interpretation of drive theory is fascinating and no doubt ought to be central to any in-depth interpretation of his philosophy. Although I would gladly grant that my analysis of the relationship between psychoanalysis and critical theory would have been more comprehensive if I had included a discussion of it, to me this challenge does not cut so deep. No book can do everything, and the primary aims of my book is to offer a reading of Adorno but rather to draw on Adorno's work to re-stage a dialogue between critical theory and psychoanalysis. The systematic challenge is an important one, however, because, as Cavallo notes, my claim about the death drive being necessary for a satisfactory account of aggression is at the heart of the book, and it provides a crucial justification for my turn to Klein. So, this is a challenge that must be met. But the gist of my reply is

26 For an excellent discussion of this aspect of Adorno's work, see Fong, *Death and Mastery*.

already previewed in my critique of Honneth's account of aggression in the introduction (and echoed in the commentaries by Rolo and Schmid Noerr): although there is no doubt that alternative accounts of aggression can be offered, there is a crucial difference between those that make aggression *primary* and those that make it *secondary* or *derivative* of some other phenomenon. To say that aggression is primary—which is, as I argue in chapter one of the book, all that Klein means by the death drive—is to say that it is ineliminable, irreducible. Such a view challenges us to face up to the depth of aggression's roots in the psyche and to give up entirely on pernicious fantasies of pure unity and wholeness. This is, I think, simply what it means to do justice to the sting of negativity.

Cavallo's next point concerns my conception of domination and power. He interprets my brief allusion to Raymond Geuss's work in chapter one as implying the claim that Geussian political realism is the only convincing or viable political theoretical account of domination and power. Here I think some clarification is in order. I certainly don't believe it to be the case that Geuss offers the only convincing account of power—as it happens, I've written quite a lot about domination and power elsewhere, most of it in Foucaultian and Butlerian rather than a Geussian vein[27]—nor do I think that this is implied by my brief reference to Geuss's work. My claim is not, as Cavallo suggests, that Klein's view is preferable to Winnicott's because it is compatible with political realism whereas Winnicott's is not. For one thing, I don't say nearly enough about what political realism is and what it entails for this to be what's going on. Nor do I take myself to be offering a critique of Winnicott at all, since I don't discuss his work directly, but confine myself to a discussion of Honneth's interpretation of him. Thus, my argument leaves open the possibility that Honneth's misreads Winnicott—which, for example Noëlle McAfee has argued convincingly.[28] My claim is simply that critical theory turns to

27 See Amy Allen, *The Power of Feminist Theory: Domination, Resistance, Solidarity* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); and *The Politics of Our Selves: Power, Autonomy, and Gender in Contemporary Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

28 See McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*.

psychoanalysis for a realistic conception of the person where this means one that acknowledges the role that irrationality, negativity, aggression, and domination play in human life. The reference to Geuss is meant to do no more than to help specify the relevant sense of the term "realistic" in the phrase "realistic conception of the person"—that is, to contrast *political* realism with metaphysical realism or scientific realism. The claim that Klein offers a more realistic conception of the person than that provided by Honneth's interpretation of Winnicott thus simply means that she offers a more compelling account of negativity and aggression, not that her work coheres better with Geuss's political theory.

Cavallo's next cluster of questions deal with the relationship between the social and the psychic. There are a range of issues presented here, including what role society plays in shaping and structuring the psyche, whether non-coercive ego integration is truly possible, and whether my account actually makes room for the historically specific nature of the drives and serves to illuminate the distinctive psychic conflicts we face as members of late capitalist societies. While I don't feel equipped to address all these issues, I do want to respond to one thread of this section of Cavallo's critique, which concerns the charge of revisionism. Cavallo maintains that the main problem with the revisionists, from Adorno's point of view, is that they understood society as extrinsic to and in opposition to the formation of the psyche. As Cavallo puts it, "society was seen by revisionists to exercise an extrinsic influence on character formation, and social problems were understood as the result of a social distortion of a potentially normal line of development."[29] Thus, on Cavallo's view, Adorno's critique charges the revisionists with opposing society to the psyche, and to the extent that my account reproduces that opposition, it runs the risk of inadvertently falling into the trap of revisionism.

However, as I read him, Adorno charges revisionism not with falsely opposing society to the psyche but rather with *denying or prematurely overcoming that opposition*. Thus, the concern is with their "sociologization of psychoanalysis," that is, their emphasis on social, cultural, and envi-

29 Cavallo, 42.

ronmental influences on the psyche "at the expense of hidden mechanisms of the unconscious."[30] At the same time, to be sure, Adorno takes issue with Freud's more pessimistic claims about the inevitability of the split between the psyche and the social, based on his ahistorical understanding of the drives. Which means that the opposition between society and the psyche is, for Adorno, both false and true. It's false insofar as it "perpetuates conceptually the split between the living subject and the objectivity that governs the subjects and yet derives from them," but it's also true inasmuch as—as a matter of fact under bourgeois capitalism—"inner and outer life are torn apart."[31] The split between individual and society is thus both true, insofar as it is reflective of social reality, and false, to the extent that it perpetuates and justifies the social antagonism that it expresses. The danger thus lies not in acknowledging the split between psyche and society but rather in prematurely overcoming it, on the one hand, or hypostasizing it, on the other. And the solution, moreover, consists not in integrating the insights of sociology and psychoanalysis into a seamless whole, but rather in understanding the particular individual as a windowless monad, whose structure sheds light on the fractured totality.

Last, Cavallo raises important questions about the connection between my Freudian inspired critique of backward-looking ideas of progress and my reading of Klein's anti-developmentalism. As Cavallo notes, my argument at the end of chapter three turns on Freud's claim that morality is a function of the internalization of the death drive. This claim, I suggest, undermines the very idea of developmental civilizational progress that Freud defends in some of his other, more triumphalist works. However, I also draw on Judith Butler's reading of Klein, in particular, her suggestion that the depressive urge for reparation constitutes an alternative

30 Theodor Adorno, "Revisionist Psychoanalysis," trans. Nan-Nan Lee, *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 3 (2014): 326–38, 326.

31 Theodor Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology (Part 1)," trans. Irving Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 1, no. 46 (November–December 1967): 67–80, 69-70. For helpful discussion of this point, see Martin Jay, *Adorno* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 86-94.

source for ethics. But, Cavallo rightly points out, this latter point seems to undermine my argument against backward-looking notions of progress. As he puts the point, "If what Freud called civilization is actually *not* just the result of a domestication of the death drive, there still seem to be a way to ground normative evaluations. Even though these do not necessarily have to imply a backward-looking notion of progress, there is a missing point in Allen's argumentation. It is not clear how her rejection of backward-looking notions of social progress, based on Freud's unofficial position, is to be linked to Klein's non-developmental model of the psyche."[32] In other words, if Klein's account offers an alternative basis for ethics, then doesn't it also provide us with the grounds for normative judgments, including backward looking judgments about progress, too?

Cavallo is quite right that, as it stands, the relationship between these two strands of argument is far from clear. But perhaps it is helpful to appeal to a distinction that I make elsewhere between historical progress and progress in history.[33] The former refers to narratives of socio-cultural evolution according to which modernity or scientific secularism is posited as developmentally superior to more "primitive" forms of life. The latter refers to more locally and contextually grounded normative judgments about whether there has been progress in a specific domain, relative to a particular trajectory. Given their respective conceptions of the death drive, both the unofficial Freud and Klein give us reasons to be skeptical about the more expansive notion of historical progress. But Klein's work goes further, offering a distinctive vision of ethics that breaks free of developmental paradigms. In light of her anti-developmentalism, the possibility of splitting and breakdown never goes away. Thus, the work of reparation, like the work of critique, is always in the position of beginning again.

32 Cavallo, 44.

33 See Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 32-33.

Psychoanalysis and politics

Unlike the other contributions to this symposium, Noëlle McAfee's generative engagement is less directly critical and more reconstructive. As I see it, this is fitting, as my book resonates with and attempts to build upon McAfee's own groundbreaking body of work on psychoanalysis and critical theory.[34] Thus, I think that McAfee and I share a variety of overlapping theoretical (and political!) commitments. Still, her essay raises some deep and complex issues that any attempt to draw on psychoanalysis to do work in critical social theory must confront. It also offers me the opportunity to circle back to some of the core themes that emerge in the other essays of this symposium.

I start with the following observation from McAfee: "As I read Allen reading Adorno, it seems to me, then, that psychoanalysis is itself always already a critical theory of society."[35] This claim echoes a point also made by Schmid Noerr, who notes that Adorno himself thought of psychoanalysis as a critical theory, which means that he understood it as "a type of knowledge that arises from a practical-emancipatory engagement with forms of subjective experience that are currently opaque to themselves."[36] As a critical theory, psychoanalysis uncovers the ways that relations of domination and authority are interiorized into the psyche. But what does it mean to say, as McAfee does, that psychoanalysis is "always already a critical theory of *society*"? I take it that this means that, precisely because the individual psyche is formed in relation to the primary caregiver, who in turn is constituted as a subject by socially, culturally, and historically specific relations of power, the individual psyche necessarily bears the imprint of the social. This dynamic is clearly articulated in Schmid Noerr's contribution to this discussion. To be sure, it is of course true, and important to keep in mind, as Cavallo insists,

34 See McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*; and Noëlle McAfee, *Democracy and the Political Unconscious* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008.

35 McAfee, 9.

36 Schmid Noerr, 26.

that "the translation from the personal to the social level is not immediate."[37] And yet, for Adorno, the individual psyche is "contradictory microcosm" of the antagonistic society.[38] As such, the individual psyche is a vital source of insight into the contradictions that structure the social world. Thus, psychoanalysis offers a window into the individual psyche that also opens up onto the social totality. Indeed, Adorno maintains that psychoanalysis offers a *better* vantage point on the social totality than do totalizing forms of philosophy or social theory, as the latter tend to smooth over contradictions in the interest of subsuming particulars into their all-encompassing conceptual frameworks. Psychoanalysis as a discipline is distinguished by its attunement to particulars—to slips of the tongue, dreams, jokes, and other bits of flotsam and jetsam that proliferate in our subjective experience—in just the same way that critical theory is attuned to the blindspots and waste products of history. Thus, the translation from the personal to the social may not be immediate, and it may be fraught with certain dangers, but its conceptual basis is clear. Moreover, this work of translation remains an utterly essential task for critical theory.[39]

Still, as much as McAfee appreciates my Adornian inspired reading of the analogy between psychoanalysis and critical theory, she also raises a worry that echoes some of Schmid Noerr's questions about my discussion of transference. As she puts it: "In the psychoanalytic transference, there is a *relationship* between analyst and analysand. What is the relationship between society and the critical theorist of society? Does the public even know the critic is there, much less what the critic is writing?"[40] McAfee suggests two possible answers to this challenge, both of

37 Cavallo, 44.

38 Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology (Part 1)," 77.

39 Schmid Noerr makes a related point: "The Psyche is intimately intertwined with the political at both the individual and the socio-psychological level, so that psychoanalysis – contrary to an Adornoesque scepticism that has been misunderstood, e.g. by Peter Gordon – is most certainly able to enlighten us about politics" (Schmid Noerr, 36).

40 McAfee, 11.

which are implicit (if perhaps not fully developed) in my book. The first appeals to the idea, discussed above, that the critical theorist is an engaged and partisan if not uncritical participant in ongoing progressive social and political struggles. The critical theorist may not have a relationship with the whole of society, but she does (or at least should?) have a relationship with progressive social movements in the sense that her critique is responsive to the struggles and wishes that such movements articulate and for which they fight. Through these movements, critical theory has the potential to reach society at large. But the second response that McAfee identifies involves doubling down on Adorno's claim, discussed above, that each individual is a contradictory microcosm of the antagonistic society in which she lives. This means that the critical theorist is always situated within and constituted by the very society that she aims to criticize. But, as McAfee helpfully notes, it also implies a dialectical corollary: the critical theorist "can see her own transformation as a way of transforming the world."[41]

Thus, as I read McAfee, her contribution helps me to put a finer point on some of my responses to the challenges raised by the other commentators. Her work in the recent book *Fear of Breakdown*, which I've already alluded to, also helps me to address a final challenge that Schmid Noerr raises about the book's conclusion. Schmid Noerr first doubts that Klein's work is any more useful than "a properly understood Freud" at the level of politics given that "anti-Manichaeism and tolerance of ambiguity are classic psychoanalytical virtues."[42] More broadly, he remains skeptical of whether the advocation of politics in a depressive mode could ever gain widespread traction.

With respect to the first point, it may well be true that anti-Manicheanism and tolerance of ambivalence are classic psychoanalytic virtues, and yet I would insist that Klein is unparalleled in the psychoanalytic canon, even by Freud, as a thinker of ambivalence. As I argue at greater length in my book, this is because Klein takes the duality of life and

41 Ibid., 11.

42 Schmid Noerr, 35.

death drives as her metapsychological starting point. This means that her entire account of psychological maturation turns on the ability to withstand—not eliminate or overcome but withstand—the ineliminable ambivalence that structures our intrapsychic and intersubjective worlds without falling to bits or engaging in splitting. In our relations with others, this move to what Klein calls the depressive position means relating to others as whole objects, with good and bad parts, both loved and hated at the same time.

As to whether this depressive model of ego integration could possibly gain traction as a model of politics, here is where McAfee's work is enormously helpful. As she explains, any deliberative democratic model of politics must contend with fears of breakdown: that is, fears "of losing one's self, one's connections, one's moorings; of imagined (and sometimes real) needs to slay enemies and vanquish threats."[43] Such fears exacerbate internal political divisions and heighten polarization, threatening democracy with disintegration from within. McAfee articulates a range of democratic practices that can help polities work through the fear of breakdown. Of these, the most important is what McAfee calls "deliberating otherwise." Deliberating otherwise is, for McAfee, partly about engaging in the ongoing process of mourning the losses that will be entailed any collective political choice we make and partly about the stance we take when deliberating with others with whom we deeply and passionately disagree. As McAfee explains, what makes a politics that is trapped in the Manichean logic of the paranoid-schizoid position so debilitating is the tendency toward demonization of one's political opponents. In such a stance, political partisans come to see each other as "enemies who are less than human."[44] When done well, public deliberation offers a way out of this destructive dynamic. Such deliberation need not be aimed at reaching agreement about policy goals. As McAfee explains, "people may well leave the political process or forum with most of their views firmly entrenched. But if they deign to encounter others' views,

43 McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*, 11.

44 Ibid., 205.

they might change their relationship to and views of others."[45] While this attitudinal shift may not seem like much,[46] it seems to me that especially in contexts such as the United States that are currently marked by such high degrees of political polarization that partisans refer to alternative sets of facts, McAfee's vision of depressive democracy would in fact be a major step forward. Moreover, contra Schmid Noerr, this vision is articulated on distinctively Kleinian terms. As McAfee explains, democratic deliberation at its best enables participants "to move from the paranoid-schizoid tendency to divide the world between good and evil to a more depressive position of recognizing that one's opponents are themselves whole objects, complex people, with perfectly understandable motivations for holding their views."[47] This is the core insight that I tried to develop in my conclusion, even if all too briefly—though, it must be said that my treatment there is brief precisely because there is not much that I can add to McAfee's masterful account.

Conclusion:

The issue of the definition and tasks of critical theory runs through this discussion in both the more critical (Schmid Noerr) and more appreciative (McAfee) contributions, so perhaps it would be fitting to end with a few words on this topic. Schmid Noerr notes that the operative conception of critical theory is underdetermined in my book and has to be teased out through indirect references. This may be the case, but if so, it is largely because of my reluctance to repeat myself, as the preface my previous book, *The End of Progress*, opens with a meditation on the term critical theory. There, I note that, as I understand it and as I practice it in this book and elsewhere, critical theory refers simultaneously to a tradi-

45 Ibid., 206, emphasis added.

46 See Cavallo, who complains about the fact that "the political implications of the proposed account remain confined to a shift in the personal attitude towards political rivals and in the way we conduct our politics" and sees this as another instance of the insufficiency of my account of the relationship between the psychic and the social (Cavallo, 44).

47 McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*, 207.

tion, a method, and an aim.[48] I situate my approach to critical theory in the intellectual *tradition* of the Frankfurt School. As I see it, however, the best way to do justice to this tradition is not to remain faithful to its core doctrines or central figures but rather precisely to inherit it, by which I mean to take it up while simultaneously transforming it from within. This kind of ongoing transformation is necessary if critical theory is to remain responsive to contemporary social struggles. One of the reasons that this tradition is so appealing is that it also consists of a distinctive *method* for doing social theory. Methodologically, critical theory is situated between political realism—which analyzes the empirical conditions and power relations that structure our existing social, cultural, economic, and political worlds—and normative political theory—which articulates ideal, rational, normative conceptions of justice that it takes to be freestanding. On this way of understanding it, what is distinctive about critical theory is its conception of the critical subject as self-consciously rooted in and shaped by the relations of domination in the society that she nevertheless aims to critique. Finally, this method has as its practical and political aim a vision of freedom or emancipation. But, as I argue in *Critique on the Couch* and elsewhere,[49] a negativistic conception of emancipation, where emancipation refers to the minimization of relations of domination, not to a social world without or beyond power relations, is most compatible with the realistic aspect of critical theory's distinctive method. Recognizing this means giving up on the infantile wish for a power-free utopia and resolving nevertheless to engage in the ongoing struggle to transform existing relations of oppression and domination into mobile, reversible relations of power and practices of freedom. In that sense, the cure is that there is no cure.

48 See Allen, *The End of Progress*, xi-xiv.

49 See Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, chapter four, and Allen, "Emancipation without Utopia: Subjection, Modernity, and the Normative Claims of Feminist Critical Theory," *Hypatia* 30: 3 (2015): 513-529.

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