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Perry Anderson's peculiar omission of Freudomarxism

Mats Deland[1]

Abstract: One peculiar omission in Perry Anderson's influential discussion of Western Marxism is his minimal interest in the attempts that were made to fuse the influence of Freudian psychoanalysis with the Marxist tradition in the 1920s. This lack of interest also affects his treatment of the Frankfurt school of critical theory, which is reduced to its philosophy and aesthetics, and blamed for the lack of strategic thinking during the decades preceding 1968. With the examples of Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm, this article shows that Freudomarxism instead originated in a deep knowledge of the life of the working class and the reasons behind its inability to withstand fascism in Central Europe, a knowledge founded in the practice of the free clinics started on Freud's own initiative at the end of the First World War. It is suggested that this heritage has a lot to tell us in contemporary struggles against populism and state repression.

In the mid-1970s, the British Marxist Perry Anderson began to form the picture of modern Marxism for a whole generation. In two books, the co-founder of *New Left Review* (NLR) and of the Anglo-Saxon New Left in general made an attempt to explain the long post-war period of acquiescence on behalf of the revolutionary left. He borrowed the concept Western Marxism from the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and defined it as a product of the triple defeats to counter-revolution, Stalinism and Fascism in the 15-year period from the late 1910s to the early 1930s. However, instead of presenting it as a superior alternative to previous Bernsteinian or Leninist Marxism of the Second and Third international (as Merleau-Ponty had), he argued that Western Marxism

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marked a retreat from revolutionary practice and strategy (or at least party-building) towards university posts, impervious language, philosophy and aesthetics. The new protest movement of the 1960s, however, had brought its message back from the universities a few years before the publication of the first book, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (in the following *Considerations*) in 1976, with the NLR and its publishing company New Left Books/Verso as main outlets and, from 1970, its introducing most of the authors mentioned in Anderson's book.

The NLR and the E. P. Thompson debate

The NLR originated in a double crisis for the British labour movement in 1956 – the rigidly Stalinist Communist party crumbling under the shock of revelations about the crimes under Stalin's leadership and the brutal crushing of the reform-communist revolt in Hungary, while the Labour Party struggled with inner conflicts after the universally condemned military campaign against Egypt together with France and Israel. When the editors of the party journal *Reasoner* were excluded from the Communist Party in 1957, they instead started *The New Reasoner* aimed both for oppositional communists and the Labour and TUC left. In 1960, *The New Reasoner* teamed up with the student paper *University and Left Review* to form NLR. In its first years, under Stuart Hall's editorship, the journal largely was a part of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) and was affiliated to numerous discussion clubs connected to the Labour Party. When the CND together with the clubs collapsed in late 1961 under repression from the Labour leadership, the NLR acquired the form it still has with bi-monthly booklets containing longer articles, academic at least in a formal sense. This also meant that the editors from *The New Reasoner*, Edward P. Thompson (1924-1993) and John Saville (1916-2009) left the editorial board (the latter to found the yearbook *Socialist Register* together with Ralph Miliband) and the much younger Oxford literary student Perry Anderson (born 1938) took over as editor and one of its main contributors.[2] After a number of long articles on Swedish social de-

2 According to his official CV, Anderson's only academic exam is a BA in French and

mocracy and Portuguese colonialism, in the mid-1960s Anderson wrote an influential text on the history of English capitalism, class formation and culture.[3] This article, which ostensively was intended to mark an affiliation to the rising radical student movement, follows a pattern that Anderson has kept through his life. On the one hand, he has continued to write long articles or book-length macrohistories mainly about European but also other states, including his two books on the evolution of the European state form from antiquity to the eve of the Bourgeois revolution.[4] On the other, two books on Western Marxism connect to a large number of works on Marxism and its competitors, including significant books on Gramsci and Postmodernism and a large number of essays on leading thinkers.[5] However, one conclusion was and remained controversial. Because of the peculiar class formation of its society, English culture had, argued Anderson, never developed a sociological thinking, Marxist or non-Marxist, of its own. Hence the need to import western, that is, non-British Marxism.[6]

This statement provoked a long debate between Anderson and Thompson, who in the meantime had produced the monumental *The making of the English Working Class* (1963). This debate started in 1966,

Russian Literatur and Language from Oxford University, 1956-59. See: https://www.college-de-france.fr/media/samantha-besson/UPL1107531752999725718_PERRY_ANDERSON_CV.pdf. For a general introduction to the work of Anderson, se Gregory Elliot, *Perry Anderson: The Merciless Laboratory of History* (University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

3 Perry Anderson, "Origins of the present crisis," *New Left Review* I, no. 23 (1964).

4 See e g Perry Anderson, *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (New Left Books, 1974); *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (New Left Books, 1974); *The New Old World* (Verso, 2009).

5 See e g Perry Anderson, *The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci* (New Left Books, 1976); *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (Verso, 2017); *The Origins of Postmodernity* (Verso, 1998); *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas* (Verso, 2005).

6 Anderson, "Origins", 26-28. The latter part of the conclusion was further spelled out in his essay "Components of the national culture," *New Left Review* I, no. 50 (1968).

with a fifty-page essay by Thompson in the *Socialist Register*, where he accused Anderson (and co-editor and historian of the Labour Party, Tom Nairn) not only of methodological rigidity (which could have been excused considering that they were still in their mid-20s) but also a "stridency" and "tone" that he argued reminded him of what had made him leave the Communist Party in 1956 (that is, of Stalinism).[7] On the issue of the valence of English Marxism, Thompson distinctly criticised how the NLR seemed to be more interested in "Parisian journals" "from the Marxistentialist Left Bank" than in English social thought.[8] Beyond the methodological issues that a committed empirical and process oriented historian had with what he felt were schematic and ill-conceived sketches of British history, he also sensed that the theoretical interest was another way of saying that the working class needed to be told what to do. He refuted claims that a "corporatist" class consciousness should be replaced with a "hegemonic" one as just an excuse for contraposing a reformist against a revolutionary (that is, Leninist or even Trotskyist) strategy. In this way, the issues of empiricism versus structuralism, inspiration from continental Marxism as opposed to Indigenous traditions and different strategic choices all came together in the question of what causes human action. Pointing to the need to understand the historical process, Thompson also mentioned the need for a Marxist social psychology.[9] In the first rejoinder, the discussion focused on how to interpret the theories of Antonio Gramsci (Anderson responded that Thompson had misunderstood the concept of hegemony and overstated his case).[10]

In the second round of the debate, which took place in the late 1970s when Thompson was among the leading figures of a resurgent movement

7 Edward P. Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," *Socialist Register* no. 2 (1965), reprinted in E. P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (Merlin Press, 1978), 297-298.

8 Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," 286, 258.

9 Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," 291.

10 Thompson, "The Peculiarities of the English," 283-84, 295-97; Perry Anderson, "Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism," *New Left Review* 1, no. 36 (1966), 26-30.

against nuclear armament (European Nuclear Disarmament, END), the main figure of contention was again a representative of Western Marxism, the French philosopher Louis Althusser. Throughout Thompson's 200-page essay, which gave its name to his collection *The Poverty of Theory & other essays*, Anderson is only referred to once, in passing (much ink instead spilled on sociologists Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst).[11] This time, Thompson argued that the rigid Marxism of Althusser only superficially could disguise an un-reformed Stalinism (Althusser was until 1978 one of the main critics of Eurocommunist reform in the French Communist Party).[12] This rigidity, Thompson argued, was hinged on an inflated understanding of economic determinism, which he traced back to how Marx had abandoned an understanding of society as a whole derived from Hegel, when he concentrated on the study of economic theory for what became *The Capital*. Thompson instead suggested a less deterministic research programme focused on "experience" and "culture", understood as the rational and (in rough terms) irrational ways of understanding that mediated human consciousness and action. Althusser's theory of "ideological state apparatuses" "interpellating" individuals would, he argued, reduce values and morals to external influences, not something "men and women" could come up with on their own account.[13] In other words, Althusser had provided the editors of the NLR another way of saying that someone had to infuse class consciousness into an English working class that otherwise would not know what to do.[14] Anderson's book-length defence of Althusser was published in 1980, between the two books on Western Marxism and drawing on the first of them.[15] Written in a more conciliatory tone than the article from 1966, it now more overtly emphasised the political differences between Thompson's left-labour po-

11 Edward P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (Merlin Press, 1978),

12 On Althusser's relation to the French Communist Party and Stalinism, see Gregory Elliot, *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (Verso, 1987), 245-274.

13 Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 169-176.

14 Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*, 185.

15 Perry Anderson, *Arguments within English Marxism* (Verso, 1980).

sition and the revolutionary Marxism with a Trotskyist tendency that the NLR stood for.[16] While paying due respect to Thompson's legacy as a historian, it refuted his claims that Althusser could be identified with Stalinism (and if so, rather with the Chinese variant).[17] Methodologically, it emphasised once again the need for a stronger methodological rigour in order to account for the many different ways in which experience could be handled by both individual and collective agents. Anderson convincingly could show that Thompson's attempt to provide a social psychological underpinning through complementing the concept of *experience* (to cover rational reflexivity) with *feeling* (for the affective reactions), still would not provide a solid enough theory explaining different outcomes to seminal experiences.[18] Anderson could not, however, provide an alternative mediating concept despite a long discussion of Parson's and Sartre's attempts.[19] None of the antagonists tried to use psychological concepts systematically. This lacuna in English Marxism remained after the discussion.

Outline of the article

Together with his two books on the evolution of the European state, *Considerations* brought prominence to Anderson beyond NLR readership and in 1980 he took up a professorship in New York. In his next book, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (1983) he mentioned his regret that

16 Anderson, *Arguments*, 152-156. Anderson concedes, with the hindsight of a little less than two decades, that the conflict also had personal dimensions originating from the generational conflict: "[The shift of editors in 1962] was compounded by the exaggerated sense of generational distance typical of that age, accentuated by the particular climate of the decade. […] If we had possessed greater maturity, there would have been more equal and fluent collaboration; if they had been veterans, there would have been easier acceptance of our need to find our own feet." Anderson, *Arguments*, 137. For an outsider's perspective, see Elliot, *Perry Anderson*, 2-7.

17 Anderson, *Arguments*, 100-12.

18 Anderson, *Arguments*, 25-29.

19 Anderson, *Arguments*, 49-57.

Jürgen Habermas was absent from the list of authors[20] and also discusses the feminist movement more profoundly. However, the omission that I will discuss in this article has a closer connection to the main argument of both books. It also relates to the problem of the concept of experience in the debate with Thompson, concerning its relation to political practice, and the strategic mistakes that led to the original defeats in the 1920s in the first place.[21] The authors that I will discuss, and that I think (among others) could have helpfully been included, are sometimes labelled Freudomarxists: Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957) and Erich Fromm (1900-1980).[22] While Reich is of east European descent (born in the Lviv area), Fromm was born in the southwestern part of Germany (Frankfurt am Main), and they both belong to the central and east European generation that lived through and was affected by all the defeats. As Jews they were also affected by the Holocaust, only lightly touched upon in this context by Anderson. At the same time, they were also losers within the realm of Western Marxism itself (as well as within the realm of the Freudian movement), since they were thrown out of their institutional environments (and in Reich's case, the communist movement). While both revised their views on Freud and Freudian psychoanalysis in the late 1930s, they kept their left-wing and critical Marxist leanings to the end; Reich even living to see his books burned twice (in Berlin, 1933 and in New York, 1956). Their work has become even more topical recently as a background to the analyses of the current surge of right-wing populist and authoritarian movements and governments. Both also illustrate different ways to broaden Marxist thought towards practice and strategy, during a time when such attempts were – as Anderson rightly argues – rare.[23] There seems, thus, to be good reason to include them among the foremost representatives of Western Marxism, even if this means amending the concept a little. This

20 Perry Anderson, *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism* (Verso, 1983), 59.

21 Cf. Anderson, *Arguments*, 29.

22 For the concept, se Jean-Michel Palmier, *Wilhelm Reich: Essai sur la naissance du Freudo-marxisme* (Union générale d'éditions, 1969).

23 Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (Verso, 1976), 117.

is at least what I intend to propose. In other words, I will argue for their inclusion on Anderson's own terms.

This might all seem a petty criticism of a classic work, and it goes without saying that nothing I suggest in this article has the intention to diminish the worth of Anderson's books, or his work in general. But my intervention has two further purposes, one political and one methodological. The political issue is straightforward enough. Western Marxism in general and Critical Theory in particular can and should be restored to the revolutionary Marxism that it was in the early years and the lessons and aspirations of those years integrated into contemporary political practice, not least to counter the threat of Right-Wing Populism. To do this, I will particularly emphasise the political engagement of Wilhelm Reich which took place as much in the streets as in seminar rooms – but also Fromm connected to the Labour movement. Secondly, there is a methodological lesson to be drawn from the efforts of the Freudomarxists to provide a way to conceptually understand the connections between social action and individual and political understanding, the lacuna left in the debate with Thompson. This, I think, remains a fundamental weakness in much Marxist thought although, of course, in recent years an abundance of work has been issued to alleviate it.[24]

I will continue by first presenting Reich and Fromm as Marxists in the context in which they came of age. Then I will discuss their relation to the proletarian class and movement, as well as to praxis and to strategy. In the summation, I will briefly discuss what the inclusion of Reich and Fromm would have meant for Anderson's analysis, and why I think they were omitted.

Wilhelm Reich and the Ambulatorium in Vienna

The first condition for what was to become known as Freudomarxism was a speech held by Sigmund Freud at the fifth conference of the In-

24 To mention just one of these works, Erik Hansson's precious book on anti-Roma racism in contemporary Sweden, *The Begging Question: Sweden's Social Responses to the Roma Destitute* (University of Nebraska Press, 2023).

ternational Psychoanalytical Association (IPA) in Budapest in September 1918. With the war still raging, the conference was only attended by participants from the Central Powers, except some colleagues from the neutral Netherlands. In this speech, Freud announced the opening of free clinics, where the working class and lower middle strata could be treated for a low fee or even without paying at all. Analysts – including himself – would be required to set a certain amount of time off for pro bono work. At the same time, education would be subject to some form of regulation.[25] The reason for this seemingly surprising step was that Freud, after learning about successful treatments of shellshock symptoms with the help of psychoanalysis during the war, wanted to capitalise on its increased prestige in order to open the way for government funding.[26] The initiative led to the prompt opening of a clinic in Berlin in 1920, financed by the sympathetic millionaire Max Eitinger, followed by the more modest Ambulatorium in Freud´s hometown Vienna in 1922.[27]

One of the young analysts recruited to the Vienna clinic was Wilhelm Reich, a war veteran from the Italian front.[28] While studying medicine in 1918, together with a couple of young fellow students – including Otto Fenichel – he formed a discussion group around Freud's 1905 book, *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie*.[29] After subsequently meeting Freud, he

25 Elisabeth Ann Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics: Psychoanalysis & Social Justice, 1918-1938* (Columbia University Press, 2005), 17.

26 Andreas Peglau, "Revolutionärer Sozialdemokrat und Kommunist. Zur Rolle des Psychoanalytikers Wilhelm Reich in der österreichischen 'Linken' zwischen 1925 und 1930," *Socialistische Geschichte Online* 12 (2017), 495–96, https://doi.org/10.17185/duepublico/44666; Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 18-19. Some years earlier, Freud had instead argued for the clinical value of substantial pecuniary compensation, for its motivational value. See Sigmund Freud, "On beginning the treatment (Further recommendations on the technique of psycho-analysis I)," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII (The Hogarth Press, 1958), 132–33.

27 Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 49–57, 108.

28 Karl Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien: Psychoanalyse und Politik* (Geyer-Edition, 1988), 21–22.

29 In the calendar over the meetings that is published in Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 30–32, five lectures by Reich are registered already during autumn

was accepted into the inner circle and a couple of years later he was in charge of the "technical" seminar, devoted to clinical improvements.[30] In 1924, Freud suggested that Reich should collect his experiences from the technical seminar in a book about clinical practice. This would mean a substantial expansion and revision of psychoanalytical doctrine, since the patients of the clinics largely came from much less affluent groups than those on whom Freud had so far built his theory. Not least, they were groups with far more restricted opportunities to sublimation, due to their circumstances of life. At the same time, the project was connected to the overall trend within contemporary psychology (cf. *Gestaltpsychologie*) to investigate holistic characters rather than individual symptoms.[31] Reich used the Freudian concept *Aktualneurosen* (somatically caused neuroses) to construct a connection between inhibited desires (*Libidostauung*; blocked libido) and neuroses. This, in order to understand how repressive bourgeois morals caused mental problems among the exploited classes that were far worse than among relatively affluent people.[32] When combined with a violent upbringing, frustration would exacerbate the deference to authority instilled during childhood and lead to a dangerous mix – aggressive people willing to follow any strong leader.[33] The manuscript for this book, *Die Funktion der Orgasmus* (1927) was finalised in autumn 1926, before Reich had shown any particular interest in pol-

1919. The large frequency of marriages between the members of the seminar testifies both to the intensity of the work and the, for the time, large proportion of female analytics, see Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 44.

30 Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 41–47. Fenichel became a member of the society in June 1920, Reich in October, see Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 43, 67. See also Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 101, 123-25; 139; Elisabeth Ann Danto, "An anxious attachment: Letters from Sigmund Freud to Wilhelm Reich," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 47, no. 2 (2011): 159, https://doi.org/10.1080/00107530.2011.10746448.

31 Danto, "An anxious attachment," 156–60.

32 Wilhelm Reich, *Die Funktion des Orgasmus: Zur Psychopathologie und zur Soziologie des Geschlechtslebens*, (Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1927), 10, 79.

33 Reich, *Die Funktion des Orgasmus*, 153–57, 187–88.

itics. However, a massacre of some 85 working class protesters on the streets of Vienna in July 1927, after a clash with the unreformed police nominally led by the Social Democrats, radicalised him and during that summer he read both *Das Kapital*, and Engels' *Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigenthums und des Staats*. It goes without saying that he never achieved any expertise in Marxist scholarship; he was and remained a psychoanalytical therapist, but from now on his theory evolved in combination with a Marxist worldview.[34] In September 1927 at the IPA Conference in Stuttgart he presented his ideas for the next book, which was to become his main work in clinical theory. In the manuscript of *Characteranalyse* (1933), partly completed already in 1928, he used his experiences from meeting the resistance of his patients, who both for their own sake (they could not afford to waste too much time in treatment) and for the sake of the clinic (which was overwhelmed) had to be catered for expediently.[35] In order to achieve this, he used the clues that became visible through the resistance itself, and which combined appeared to constitute the general character of the person – in difficult cases, conceptualised as *Characterpanzer*, Character Armour.[36] The last part of the book developed the idea of the simultaneously deferent and aggressive character, now labelled as sadomasochistic. As a Marxist, he pointed out that the psy-

34 Wilhelm Reich, *People in Trouble* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), 72–74. Philip Bennett has in Reich's library not only found the classic works by Marx and Engels but also works by among others Max Adler, Nikolai Bucharin, Heinrich Cunow, Lev Trotsky, Karl Kautsky, Gustav Landauer, Vladimir Lenin, Karl Liebknecht, Rosa Luxemburg, Franz Mehring, Georgi Plechanov, Karl Radek, and Karl August Wittfogel, all of them in German editions from the 1920s and early 1930s. That does not necessarily mean that he had read all this, but it is an indication of his ambitions. Cited from Andreas Peglau, *Unpolitische Wissenschaft? Wilhelm Reich und die Psychoanalyse im nationalsozialismus* (Psychosozial-Verlag, 2015), 47, n. 44.

35 Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 75–77.

36 Wilhelm Reich, *Charakteranalyse, Technik und Grundlagen für studierende und praktizierende Analytiker* (Im Selbstverlage des Verfassers, 1933), 10, 213–76; cf. David Shapiro, "Theoretical Reflections on Wilhelm Reich's Character Analysis,", *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 56, no. 3 (2002): 338, https//doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2002.56.3.

chological problems he discussed were socially caused and best treated prophylactically.[37]

At that point he had already left Vienna due to difficulties with the rest of the staff and joined his friend Fenichel in the Berlin clinic.[38] When the part on the sadomasochistic character was about to be published as an article in the journal of the IPA, Freud – outraged by Reich's accusation that his own theory of the death drive was only presented as a way to cover up social problems – wanted to publish a commentary denouncing Reich as a communist (he had joined the ÖKPD in 1929, and the German KPD a year later). These plans were abandoned, but his radicalism had caused a major rift between Freud and Reich, less than a year before books from both authors were burned on the streets of Berlin.[39] Because of the tense political situation in Austria in 1933, the publisher cancelled the contract and Reich had to turn to self-publishing (though the book was distributed by the IPA).[40] His next book was also published at his own expense, but this time in Copenhagen, the first stop on his Scandinavian odyssey before he would end up in the United States. This book, *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (1933) is his main contribution to Marxist theory. Building on his revision of psychoanalytic theory, foremost in *Characteranalyse*, it explicitly focuses on the strategic consequences of the psychological traits it describes as common within the working class. The first edition discussed the defeats of the labour parties in Germany and in later editions both the Soviet Union and Spain were discussed.[41] In

37 Reich, *Charakteranalyse*, chapt. IX.

38 Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 225–26.

39 Peglau, "Unpolitische Wissenschaft?" 133–37; Reich, *Charakteranalyse*, 287–88. In his memoir *People in Trouble* (1953), he describes how he during the July days 1927 was affiliated with a medical group belonging to the communists without, however, leaving the Social Democrats; Reich, *People in Trouble*, 30-31.

40 Reich, *People in Trouble*, 194.

41 Wilhelm Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (Souvenir Press, 1972), xx (from the preface to the third revised edition 1942). The English-language edition that is available on the market today, the third edition from 1942/1946, contains five chapters added to the original text (there are also other revisions).

that way, it was largely parallel to the writings of Trotsky, much heralded by Anderson.[42] Building on Freud's discussion in *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921), he also suggested an explanation of the effects of fascist propaganda, as symbolic displacement of sexual desire.[43] Luckily, however, the psychologically induced deference to strong authoritarian leaders could be changed through political education loyal to the cause of the international proletarian movement. [44]

Reich's theory should not be understood as some kind of psychological imperialism over (Marxist) sociology. On the contrary, he pointed out, the psychological analysis could only start where the Marxist explanations were no longer sufficient to explain the actions of the proletariat. While an industrial or general strike, for instance, could – and should – be explained as a rational action to defend the economic or political interests of the proletariat, psychology was needed to explain when the proletariat did not act in its own best interests. [45] As he put it, in times of deprivation, a "scissor" (*Schere*) figure became visible where conservative or fascist support for the status quo was rising, while incomes and political opportunities of the proletariat were decreasing.[46] That presented the labour movement with two pedagogic missions, both of them at that point ignored by the German labour parties: on the one hand, the

One of the chapters (IX) is an abridged version of Wilhelm Reich, *Masse und Staat, Zur Frage der Rolle der Massenstruktur in der revolutionären Bewegung. Zur Diskussion gestellt von der Sexpol* (Sexpol-Verlag, 1935), which was distributed in a duplicated edition after the Italian invasion of Abyssinia – the section on Spain was added later. On his Scandinavian odyssey, see Reich, *People in Trouble*, 197–223; Myron Sharaf, *Fury On Earth: A Biography Of Wilhelm Reich* (Da Capo Press, 1994), 192–203.

42 Anderson, *Considerations*, 96-101.

43 Wilhelm Reich, *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus* (Verlag für Sexualpolitik, 1933), 53–54.

44 Reich, *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus*, 99–100.

45 Wilhelm Reich "Zur Anwendung der Psykoanalyse in der Geschichtsforschung," *Zeitschrift für politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie* 1, no. 1 (1934), in Helmut Dahmer ed., *Analytische Sozialpsychologie* vol. I, (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), 193–94.

46 Reich, *Massenpsychologie des Fascismus*, 19–30.

deference towards authority (caused by the faulty integration of the violent father figure) must be broken through in order for the proletarians to actually understand, both intellectually and emotionally, their best interests. On the other hand, the proletarians must be made to abstain from both the sadistic and the masochistic gratifications that followed from their own economic and political exploitation (especially, he pointed out, the men must refrain from domestic violence).[47]

Erich Fromm and Institut für Sozialforschung

The opening of the free clinic in Berlin in 1920 slowly led to a refocusing of the psychoanalytical movement. Several other clinics were opened in Germany as well as abroad, but the seminars in Berlin remained the most advanced and were uninhibited by the presence of Freud.[48] In 1923, Frieda Reichmann, a medical student who had worked with brain damaged soldiers at the hospital in Königsberg during the war, began an analysis with Hanns Sachs at the Berlin clinic. The private analysis soon turned into an educational and in 1924 she opened her own clinic in Heidelberg, with influences both from psychoanalysis and orthodox Jewish scholarship (casually labelled the "Thorapeuticum"). Among her patients / interns were the couple Leo and Golda Löwenthal – Leo subsequently famous for his studies of fascist propaganda – and the young sociologist of religion, Erich Fromm.[49] Together with Heinrich Meng and Karl Landauer, and in close cooperation with the Berlin clinic, this group formed a south-west German psychoanalytical society, soon relocated to

47 Reich, "Zur Anwendung der Psychoanalyse," 193–94; E[rnst] Parell, [Wilhelm Reich] "Was is Klassenbewusstsein," *Zeitschrift für politische Psychologie und Sexualökonomie* 1, no. 1 (1934): 16–28 https://archive.org/details/ZeitschriftFuumlrPolitischePsychologieUndSexualoumlkonomieI1934Heft.

48 Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 52–64.

49 Ursula Engel, "Vom 'Thorapeutikum' nach Chester Lodge. Frieda Fromm-Reichmann (1889-1957)," in *Psychoanalyse in Frankfurt am Main. Zerstörte Anfänge, Wiederannährung, Entwicklungen*, eds. Thomas Plänkers et al. (edition discord, 1995), 147–49; Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A history of the Frankfurt school and the Institute of Social Research 1923-50* (Heideman Educational Books, 1973), 87.

Frankfurt am Main.[50] Karl Landauer famously conducted the analysis of Max Horkheimer[51], according to Anderson one of the foremost proponents of Western Marxism, who from 1928 increasingly took over directorship (formally from 1930) of the Marxist Institut für Sozialforschung (henceforth the Institut), one of the several privately financed institutes associated with the university in Frankfurt.[52] Landauer also was the analyst and educator of Erich Fromm, after Fromm married Reichmann. In 1929, after consultations with Eitington in Berlin, Landauer and Fromm opened a psychoanalytical free clinic in the same house as the Institut, thus preparing for the theoretical reorientation towards psychoanalytically informed sociology that Horkheimer would announce in 1930.[53] During its short history it never became an actual free clinic, open for workers and the lower middle strata, such as in Berlin and other cities. Most of the patients were academics, but the staff still kept close contacts with the Berlin clinic and its seminars.[54] However, it would share a precarious situation with the Institut since the allegedly "liberal" (meaning Jewish) university became a target for fascist violence already in the early 1930s.[55] Against that background it was a bold move when in 1929 Horkheimer gave Fromm the assignment to undertake a large-scale empirical investigation of the moods and ideological assertiveness of the German working class (and the lower middle strata, the "*Angestellten*").[56]

50 Michael Laier, "'Sie wissen, dass alles von unserem alten Institut vernichtet wurde…' Das Frankfurter Psychoanalytische Institut (1929-1933)," in *Psychoanalyse in Frankfurt am Main. Zerstörte Anfänge, Wiederannährung, Entwicklungen,* eds. Thomas Plänkers et al. (edition discord, 1995), 47.

51 John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of the Frankfurt School* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 188–91.

52 Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 5; Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* (Polity Press, 1994), 9–23.

53 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 36–37.

54 Danto, *Freud's Free Clinics*, 227; Laier, "Sie Wissen…," 58–64; Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 193–95.

55 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 112–13.

56 Wolfgang Bonβ, "Kritische Theorie und empirische Sozialforschung: Anmerkungen zu einem Fallbeispiel," in Erich Fromm, *Arbeiter und Angestell-*

The investigation was conducted as an attitude study after the pattern of an *enquête* that Marx in 1879 had sent out to the French labour movement.[57] Yet, with the addition of Fromm's knowledge in psychoanalysis – he was now practicing – the formula also included "projective" open questions, intended to disclose hidden psychological dispositions that Fromm would unravel while reading the answers.[58] The formulas were mainly distributed through the channels of the organised (and male) working class[59], and in the chaotic circumstances during the years before the Institut had to relocate to Geneva, Paris and finally the United States, most of the formulas that had been returned seem to have been lost in the process.[60] Parts of the result were published in the 1936 Institut anthology *Autorität und Familie*, which also included a substantial methodological note by Fromm.[61] In its entirety, the investigation was not published until 1980, the year of Fromm's death.[62] However, already in 1936 it was clear that the answers indicated a substantial authoritarian tendency within

te am Vorabend des Dritten Reiches, Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung, ed. Wolfgang Bonβ (Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1980), 7–9. The manuscript was reconstructed from the English translation "German Workers 1929 – A Survey, its Methods and Results" and an incomplete German manuscript.

57 Hilda Weiβ, "Die 'Enquête Ouvrière' von Karl Marx," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 5, no. 1 (1936): 76–98 https://www.kritiknetz.de/zeitschrift-fuer-sozialforschung/1280-zeitschrift-fuer-sozialforschung-jg-5-1936; Marcelo Hoffman, *Militant Acts, The role of investigations in radical political struggles* (State University of New York Press, 2019), 28–38.

58 Erich Fromm, "Einleitung," in Erich Fromm, *Arbeiter und Angestellte am Vorabend des dritten Reiches, Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung*, ed. Rainer Funk (Open Publishing E-Book, 2015), n. 1 and 2; Fromm in Bonβ, ed., *Arbeiter und Angestellte*, 55–60.

59 Fromm in Bonβ ed., *Arbeiter und Angestellte*, 72–75, 80–81.

60 Bonβ, "Kritische Theorie und empirische Sozialforschung", 7-8. The extent to which the questionnaires actually were lost became one of several contentions between Fromm and Horkheimer, see Lawrence J. Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm: Love's prophet* (Columbia University Press, 2014), 44.

61 Erich Fromm, "Sozialpsychologischer Teil," in *Studien über Autorität und Familie, Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung, Schriften des Instituts fur Sozialforschung* ed. Max Horkheimer [1936], (Dietrich zu Klampen Verlag, 1987), 85.

62 Bonβ, "Kritische Theorie und empirische Sozialforschung," 7–9.

the working class and, in the process, the aim of the investigation had been changed from understanding the causes of the limited militancy of the German workers during the revolutionary surge 1919-1923, to understanding the reasons for the defeat against fascism.[63] Fromm was clear in pointing out the influence of these attitudes on strategical mistakes by the German labour movement.[64] Together with Friedrich Pollock, Fromm received administrative duties at the Institut and was the first to travel to New York in 1934 to prepare for the subsequent move from Geneva.[65] However, during his stay in the United States he would modify his psychoanalytical theory. During the early 1930s in a series of articles in the journal of the Institut, the *Zeitschrift für Socialforschung*, he had formed a theory about how libidinal connections, sexual in their origins, formed the *Kitt*, the cement of human sociality.[66] While in the United States, inspired by Karen Horney and Henry Stack Sullivan, he abandoned this theory for an existentially grounded "ego" psychology.[67] In the wartime

63 Fromm "Sozialpsychologischer Teil," 248–53.

64 Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm*, 45.

65 Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer*, 203–04 and n. 83; Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, 89.

66 Continuing the metaphor, he also suggested that in terms of social upheaval, the cement could turn into "dynamite". See Erich Fromm, "Über Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie," *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* 1, no. 1–2 (1932): 53. https://www.kritiknetz.de/images/stories/texte/Zeitschrift_fuer_Sozialforschung_1_1932.pdf.

67 Erich Fromm, *Die Determiniertheit der psychischen Struktur durch die Gesellschaft. Zur Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie* (Open Publishing E-Book, 2015), 30–38. Fromm started to write the article during a trip to Mexico in the summer of 1936 when he took a break from the work with what would become the book *Escape from Freedom* (1941). The article was intended for *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, but the editors at a meeting 7 December 1937 decided to refuse publication. Fromm then expanded the article and had it translated into English. Not until 1991 was it rediscovered by his former assistant Rainer Funk in the Fromm archive at the New York Public Library and could be recovered with the help of the translated version. See Rainer Funk, "Anmerkung des Herausgebers," in Erich Fromm, *Die Determiniertheit der psychischen Struktur durch die Gesellschaft. Zur Methode und Aufgabe einer analytischen Sozialpsychologie*, ed. Rainer Funk (Open Publishing E-Book, 2015). The title is added by Funk since the original title, 'Zur Meth-

bestseller *Escape from Freedom* (1941) he largely took over Reich's concept of the sadomasochistic character and relabelled it authoritarian.[68] Fromm and Reich had worked closely together at the Berlin seminar and clinic before emigration, so he knew the basics of the theory well.[69] The methodological reorientation, together with personal animosities between him and Adorno, led to his demotion from the deputy directorship and eventually he left the Institut.[70] The theory, however, would live on and after amalgamating with Californian experimental psychologists and a couple of fellow refugees from the psychology department of the University of Vienna (Paul Lazarsfeld and Else Frenkel-Brunswik), the Institut would conduct two major empirical research projects dealing with antisemitism, ethnocentrism and authoritarian attitudes. In other words, they would continue working with the very problems that arguably were behind much of the three major defeats of the central and eastern European labour movements. The first of these projects resulted in a report over 1,000 pages long that dealt with antisemitism within the US industrial labour force. It was financed by the Jewish Labor Committee, a union organisation, together with the national union federation AFL-CIO. For reasons of war morale, the report was never released, but its final editing, involving both Lazarsfeld and Adorno, gave impetus to the next project, financed by the American Jewish Committee.[71] *The Studies in*

ode und Aufgabe einer Analytischen Sozialpsychologie', could be confused with one of the articles from 1932. See also Erich Fromm, *Escape from Freedom* (Farrar & Rinehart, 1941). Fromm had met Horney already in the mid-1920s at Georg Groddeck's seminar in Baden, and their relation was for a while also intimate. See Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm*, 24, 78–84.

68 Fromm, *Escape from Freedom*, chapt. V; Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm*, 54. Of course, the sado-masochistic personality according to Reich also contained conformist and destructive traits, that Fromm would discuss in other parts of his work. See Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm*, 112–14.

69 Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm*, 26, 65.

70 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 265–73; Friedman, *The Lives of Erich Fromm*, 56–57.

71 Also this survey was operated by a large number of union volunteers, and on the side of the Institut monitored by Arkady Gurland, Paul Massing, Leo Löwenthal, and Friedrich Pollock, see Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 367–

Prejudice produced five major reports, among them Leo Löwenthal and Norman Guterman's study of the mechanisms of fascist propaganda, *Prophets of Deceit* (1949).[72] The most well-known report was *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno and Frenkel-Brunswik together with Los Angeles psychologists Daniel N. Levinson and R. Nevitt Sanford. This major study, for some reason never mentioned in Anderson's discussion of Adorno in *Considerations*, also numbered around 1,000 pages combining attitude surveys, interviews (of different kinds and length) and psychological tests.[73] It became a milestone in social psychology, and its basic methodology, or at least traces of it, still lives on within the more mainstream (but still largely left wing or left-leaning) traditions of Canadian Bob Altemeyer and the "Mittestudien" of German research groups at the universities of Bielefeld and Leipzig.[74] The tradition became topical

69; Eva-Maria Ziege, *Antisemitismus und Gesellschaftstheorie. Die Frankfurter Schule im amerikanischen Exil* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2018); Catherine Collomp "'Antisemitism among American Labor': a study by the refugee scholars of the Frankfurt School of Sociology at the end of World War II," *Labor History* 52, no. 4 (2011): 417–439 https//doi..org/10.1080/0023656X.2011.632513.

72 Leo Löwenthal, and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*. Studies in Prejudice Series vol. 5, American Jewish Committee (Harper & Brothers, 1949).

73 Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel L. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, Studies in Prejudice Series vol. 1, American Jewish Committee (Harper & Row, 1950). Latest imprint (with some extra material) by Verso 2020. All five books in the Studies in Prejudice series are available on the homepage of American Jewish Committee ajc.org. Anderson, *Considerations*, 80-89.

74 One of the first critical anthologies on the study was put together by students to Sanford and Frenkel -Brunswik: Richard Christie and Marie Jahoda, eds., *Studies in the Scope and Method of 'The Authoritarian Personality'* (Free Press, 1954). See also Bob Altemeyer, *Enemies of Freedom: Understanding Right-Wing Authoritarianism* (Jossey–Bass, 1988); Bob Altemeyer, *The Authoritarian Specter* (Harvard University Press, 1996); Oliver Decker and Elmar Brähler, *Vom Rand zur Mitte: Rechtsextreme Einstellungen und ihre Einflussfaktoren in Deutschland* (Friedrich Ebert-Stiftung, 2006); Andreas Zick and Beate Küpper, *Die geforderte Mitte: Rechtsextreme und demokratigefährdende Einstellungen in Deutschland 2020/21* (Verlag J. h. W. Dietz Nachf., 2021); Oliver Decker, Johannes Kiess, Ayline Heller, and Elmar Brähler eds., *Autoritäre Dynamiken in unsicheren Zeiten. Neue Herausforderungen – alte Reaktionen?* (Psychosozial Verlag, 2022).

during the Trump presidency for the same strategic reasons that brought it to the fore in the early 1930s: the need to combat the irrational, extreme right-wing influences on working class political behaviour.[75]

Praxis, connection to the proletarian masses and empirical studies

As has already been mentioned, the study that Erich Fromm conducted of the mental state of the working class, was initiated at an (explicitly Marxist) university institution, but its actual operation was undertaken by cadres of the labour movement. Without the active participation of an unknown but arguably quite substantial number of activists (as well as community servants), the study would not have been possible to conduct. It is also obvious that the reason for the investigation was an urgent need for reorientation of the political strategy of the left in order to avoid further defeats. It has been argued that the survey should not be counted in the group of "militant investigations" (surveys undertaken as a part of revolutionary political practice), for the sole reason that it was instigated at a university institution, but that discounts both the actual participation of labour movement activists and the extremely dramatic and dangerous circumstances surrounding the whole endeavour.[76] This was a time when students and staff together formed armed self-defence organisations.[77]

The projects that Wilhelm Reich worked with also had their origins in deep contacts with the working class and the lower middle strata, in the free clinics operated by the psychoanalytical movement (and largely paid for by affluent American patients). However, already in 1922, as a matter of the prophylactic therapy that he saw as the only solution to the neurotic diseases among poor people, he had started to give psychological and sexual advice through mobile clinics.[78] This project was partly

75 Cf. Peter E. Gordon, "The Authoritarian Personality Revisited: Reading Adorno in the Age of Trump," *boundary 2* 44, no. 2 (2017): 31–56.

76 Hoffman, *Militant Acts*, 5–6.

77 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 112-13.

78 Wilhelm Reich, "The Sexual Misery of the Working Masses and the Diffi-

illegal (since abortion advice and contraceptives were offered) and often dispersed by police. In 1928, with the blessings of Freud and together with the skin doctor and communist Marie Pappenheim-Frischauf, the Sexualberatungs-Klinik für Arbeiter und Angestellte was opened in Vienna, with inspiration from similar praxis in Berlin.[79] Most of the doctors involved were also communists and the schedules were published in the party paper *Die Rote Fahne*.[80] Reich published extensively in journals meant for a working-class readership, and books such as *Geschlechtsreife, Enthaltsamkeit, Ehemoral* (1930) (in later editions *Die sexuelle Revolution*) were meant for a wide readership.[81] Reich was himself still a member of the radical centrist Austrian Social Democrats, but in December 1929 he was among the founders of the Komitee revolutionärer sozialdemokratischen Arbeiter. He seems to have financed the whole project himself, as well as the three issues of *Der Revolutionäre Sozialdemokrat* that were published in January 1930. This led to his dismissal from the Social Democrats and on 15 April he joined the small Austrian communist party (which on order by the Comintern may even have staged the whole episode).[82] The same year he moved to Berlin, disappointed by the

culties of Sexual Reform," *New German Critique* 1 (1973): 90–97 https://doi.org/10.2307/487631105.

79 Peglau, "Revolutionärer Socialdemokrat," 21–22; Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 85–87, 101–02, 115–20.

80 Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 117–21.

81 Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 122–27. See Wilhelm Reich, *Die Funktion des Orgasmus: Zur Psychopatologie und zur Soziologie des Geschlechtslebens* (Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1927); Wilhelm Reich, *Sexualerregung und Sexualbefriedigung* (Münster Verlag, 1929); Wilhelm Reich *Geschlechtsreife, Enthaltsamkeit, Ehemoral: Eine Kritik der bürgerlichen Sexualreform* (Münster Verlag, 1930); Wilhelm Reich, *Der Einbruch der Sexualmoral. Zur Geschichte der Sexuellen Ökonomie* (Verlag für Sozialpolitik, 1932); Wilhelm Reich, *Der sexuelle Kampf der Jugend* (Verlag für Sexualpolitik, 1932); Felix Bohm, Otto Fenichel, and Wilhelm Reich, *Über den Ödipuskomplex: Drei psychoanalytische Studien* (Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1931).

82 Peglau, "Revolutionärer Sozialdemokrat," 28–41. Peglau however points out that it was clear from his writings that he never plugged into the Stalinist party line (the "third period") that in the years around 1930 led especially the German KPD to fight social democracy more ferociously than the reac-

conciliatory policy of the Austrian Social Democrats.[83] He continued the advisory practice in Berlin until in 1932, when the German KPD closed their offices and confiscated the stock of publications (in an effort not to provoke conservative workers).[84] Reich went back to Austria, but on the initiative of Freud – who was trying his own appeasement policy towards the rising reaction in the country – he was pressed to promise not to continue lecturing for communist and socialist organisations. He left for Copenhagen in 1933 but in November that year was excluded from the Danish communist party (the local branch of the Comintern). Less than a year later he was also excluded from the IPA. [85] Among Western Marxists, he was far from alone in meeting this fate for at least trying to influence the policy and strategy of the Stalinised communist movement.

Summary: Anderson's problem with Freudomarxism

In this article, I have demonstrated why the Freudomarxists Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm should belong in the Western Marxist tradition. Their influence on the Frankfurt school is paramount, their ideas are directly derived from the defeats of 1919, 1927 and 1933-34 and Reich is together with the bulk of the generation born in East-Central Europe. It may be easier to see their relevance today, considering the very different historical situation compared to when *Considerations* was written. Both Reich and Fromm help us to understand the contemporary authoritarian and populist (they would say frustrated or ethnocentric) surge, although in different ways.

However, there is more to this. Anderson's book was written in the early 1970s when the Marxist movement was still wavering between

tionary forces, and not least to abandon psychoanalysis. It seems that his period in the communist parties (Austrian, German, Danish) was motivated by day-to-day political goals (resources for his outreaching advisory activities), although he was used for other purposes. See Peglau, "Unpolitische Wissenschaft?" 41–48; Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 179–93.

83 Helmut Gruber, *Red Vienna: Experiments in Working-Class Culture 1919-1934* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 157–70.

84 Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, xvii (Preface to the third edition, 1942).

85 Reich, *People in Trouble*, 194–201, 224–48.

those still loyal to the Soviet Union, and the different oppositions from those loyal to China, the Gramsci-inspired Eurocommunists and the Trotskyists. None of these factions had much sympathy for Freudomarxism (which through the popularity of Herbert Marcuse was rather associated with the Hippie/Yippie anti-war movement in the US).[86] The Swedish sociologist Göran Therborn, a close associate of Anderson, had taken it upon himself to attack the Frankfurt school in a ferocious article (followed up a bit more conciliatory 26 years later).[87]

The roots of this conflict can be traced to the 1920s, and implicated Wilhelm Reich. During the early years of the Soviet Union, psychoanalysis in fact thrived, and was in tune with many of the reforms in sexual and family law that were introduced (such as the right to divorce, abortion, legal contraceptives and the legalisation of homosexuality). In 1922, a psychoanalytically inspired orphanage, the Detski Dom, was opened in Petrograd. A free clinic was opened in Moscow the following year and in 1925 one in every eight psychoanalysts registered with the IPA was active in the Soviet Union, with psychoanalytic societies existing in eight cities.[88] With the ending of the NEP and the struggle within the party leadership, however, things would soon change.

An article by Lenin, published in 1922 in the (Russian) party theoretical journal *Under the Banner of Marxism*, would change the conditions of scientific development as a whole. In this article, Lenin declared that all science must take inspiration from materialist natural sciences, instead of falling for "idealistic and scepticist leanings".[89] For psychologists, this

86 Anderson, *Considerations*, 81.

87 Göran Therborn, "The Frankfurt School," *New Left Review* I, no. 63 (1970): 65–96; Göran Therborn, "Dialectics of Modernity: On Critical Theory and the legacy of Twentieth-Century Marxism," *New Left Review* I, no. 215 (1996): 59–81.

88 Martin Miller, "Freudian Theory under Bolshevik Rule: The theoretical controversy during the 1920s," *Slavic Review* 44, no. 4 (1985): 625–46 https://doi.org/10.2307/2498538636–39.

89 Vladimir I. Lenin, "On the significance of militant materialism", [Under the Banner of Marxism (Pod Znamenem Marksizma) 1922: 3], Vladimir I. Lenin, *Lenin's Collected Works Volume 33* trans. David Skvirsky and George Hanna

basically meant experimental psychology with roots in neuroscience, and soon Detski Dom had to close, together with many other institutions.[90] Discussions continued for a couple of years. In 1925, Aleksandr Luria from Kazan in the Tatar Soviet republic had been invited to the institute of experimental psychology in Moscow and tried to argue for psychoanalysis as a science with material foundations.[91] Another important voice was Trotsky, who in the 1926 article "Culture and socialism" argued that psychoanalysis was merely anticipating results that experimental psychology would arrive at at a later date (a view not far from Freud's own). This support would soon be counterproductive as Trotsky was outmanoeuvred and eventually deported in 1929.[92]

This discussion reached Germany and the West already in 1924, with the article "Psychoanalyse und Marxismus" by Wladimir Jurinetz.[93] This

(Progress Publishers, 1972).

90 Fallend, *Wilhelm Reich in Wien*, 159, 164–66; Miller, "Freudian Theory," 625-27, Galina Hristeva and Philip W. Bennett, "Wilhelm Reich in Soviet Russia: Psychoanalysis, Marxism, and the Stalinist reaction," *International Forum of Psychoanalysis* 27, no. 1 (2018): 154–55 https://doi.org/10.1080/0803706X.2015.1125018.

91 Miller, "Freudian Theory," 639.

92 Lev Trotsky, "Kultur och socialism," *Litteratur och revolution* vol. 2 (René Coeckelberghs Partisanförlag, 1969), 269; Lev Trotsky, "Brev till akademiledamoten I. P. Pavlov (September 27, 1923)," *Litteratur och revolution* vol. 2 (René Coeckelberghs Partisanförlag, 1969), 270–71; Miller, "Freudian Theory," 642–46.

93 The article was published in the autumn 1924 in the Russian language edition of the journal (*Pod znamenem marksizma* 8/9) and after that in the first annuity of the German language edition in 1925 (90–133). Since the German edition of the journal is not available on the Internet I will refer to a West German anthology from 1970: Hans Jörg Sandkühler, ed., Siegfried Bernfeld, Wilhelm Reich, Wladimir A. Jurinetz, Ischaïa D. Sapir, and Aleksej Konstantinovič Stoljarov, *Psychoanalyse und Marxismus: Dokumentation einer Kontroverse* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970). The article can also be found on the internet without pagination: https://libcom.org/library/psychoanalyse-und-marxismus-vladimir-jurinetz. Like Reich, Jurinetz came from the vicinities of Lemberg/Lviv in the old Austrian-Hungarian empire. He was born in 1890, and studied in Vienna, Berlin and Paris. After being held prisoner of war he joined the Red Army as a news editor, before he continued his studies in Moscow. When the article was published, he was active in Charkov in the

article took up the positive assessments that Trotsky had made of the experimental psychologist Ivan Pavlov.[94] Freud, on the other hand, was considered a follower of Henri Bergson, as well as the German philosophers Schopenhauer, Fichte and the philosophical psychologist Eduard von Hartmann. The theoretical development of Sigmund Freud had certainly taken a philosophical turn after the war and these difficulties were also discussed by his own followers.[95] The main problem, however, according to Jurinetz, was that psychoanalysis seemed to have ambitions to expand to a global philosophy – thus competing with Marxism.[96]

Wilhelm Reich responded in 1929 to this article with his "Dialektischer Materialismus und Psychoanalyse", written already in 1927-28 and also published in *Under the Banner of Marxism*. His defence was that psychoanalysis was actually a natural science, as part of medicine, dedicated to help people with their mental problems. On the other hand, he emphasised, it could also serve as a guide to the "inner life of the social human", helping to understand the irrational motives behind actions contrary to her class interests.[97] He added that the character of psychoanalysis "objectively" was revolutionary.[98] With the help of the theories of Matriarchy discussed in the 19th century by Bachofen and Engels (and followers), he further emphasised the historical character of psychoanalysis,[99] as well as its dialectic character.[100]

Ukrainian Soviet Republic. He was murdered in 1937 during Stalin's purges.

94 Wladimir A. Jurinetz, "Psychoanalyse und Marxismus," in *Psychoanalyse und Marxismus: Dokumentation einer Kontroverse,* ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 70.

95 Jurinetz, "Psychoanalyse und Marxismus," 71–72, 75–85, 103, 125. Cf. Sigmund Freud, "Vorwort zur vierten Auflage," in *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie.* Vierte, vermehrte Auflage (Franz Deuticke, 1920), vi.

96 Jurinetz, "Psychoanalyse und Marxismus," 105–17, 130.

97 Wilhelm Reich, "Dialektischer Materialismus und Psychoanalyse," *Under dem Banner des Marxismus 3* Offprint (Verlag für Sozialpolitik, 1934), 5–9.

98 Reich, "Dialektischer Materialismus," 16–21.

99 Reich, "Dialektischer Materialismus," 31.

100 Reich, "Dialektischer Materialismus," 35–39.

When the article was published, psychoanalysis had already lost most of its legitimacy in the Soviet Union, and an accompanying article by Ischaïa D. Sapir sharply criticised the arguments used by Reich.[101] In an attempt to rescue what still could be rescued, Reich together with his wife Annie Pink Reich, went to Moscow in September 1929 as guests of the Communist Academy, and of the Schmidt couple who still tried to campaign for the Freudian heritage. At that time, Luria had already left the Psychoanalytical society and in 1927 the linguist Valentin Nikolajevitj Voloshinov published his highly critical book *Freudianism* (immediately translated to German and still in print in English by Verso).[102] Reich's speech, recently translated and published, was even more defensive than his articles, but as Galina Hristova and Philip W. Bennett emphasise it was clear from the discussion that Soviet tolerance for psychoanalysis almost was at its end – a year later the psychoanalytical societies had ceased to exist.[103]

This episode is important since it more or less became the definitive breaking point between Marxism and Psychoanalysis. After this the connection only continued to exist within the Institut, or Horkheimer group – after the war increasingly known as the Frankfurt school. The followers and friends of Wilhelm Reich were also informally held together for a while through newsletters edited in exile by Otto Fenichel, until his untimely death in 1945.[104] Psychoanalysis increasingly acquired its contemporary largely unpolitical face.[105] In fact, one of the few controver-

101 Ischaïa D. Sapir, "Freudismus, Soziologie, Psychologie. (Zu dem Aufsatz von Wilhelm Reich…)," *Unter dem Banner des Marxismus* 3 (1929): 937–952; 4 (1929): 352–385, in *Psychoanalyse und Marxismus: Dokumentation einer Kontroverse* ed. Hans Jörg Sandkühler (Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970), 244–46.

102 Valentin N. Voloshinov, *Freudianism: A Marxist critique* (Verso, 2012) exists since 1976 in an English translation (trans. I. R. Titunik), currently in press by Verso.

103 Hristova and Bennett, "Wilhelm Reich in Soviet Russia," 60–62; Reich's speech and discussion, 64–69.

104 Russel Jacoby, *The Repression of Psychoanalysis: Otto Fenichel and the political Freudians* (University of Chicago Press, 1983).

105 Dagmar Herzog, *Cold War Freud: Psychoanalysis in an age of catastrophe* (Cam-

sies with any connection to its Marxist past that continued concerned the 1950 study by Adorno *et al* mentioned above (and in the 1950s there would also be a debate between Fromm and the Institut philosopher Herbert Marcuse on the political value of Freudian theory).[106]

A political conclusion

One major difficulty with discussing Perry Anderson's views on Freudomarxism is that so far he has never written anything comprehensive either on the subject itself or more generally on Freud or Freudian psychoanalysis. His views must be reconstructed from the scattered mentions that can be found. The main text on the matter is a 2001 *London Review of Books* article on Sebastiano Timpanaro (1923-2000), the Italian linguist. Timpanaro is in fact mentioned in both *Considerations* and *In the Tracks of Historical Materialism*, but in both cases for his book *On Materialism* (1970), translated to English in 1975.[107] The year after, however, his critical book on Freud, *Il lapsus freudiano: psicanalisi e critica testuale* (1974) was translated. There can be no mistake about the importance of this book for the editors of *New Left Review*. Its issuing was preceded by the publication of two chapters in the journal.[108] Six authors were invited to comment on the article in a subsequent issue[109], and the final review was made by Charles Rycroft, an associate of Melanie Klein (and independent from the journal and publishing house).[110] Timpanaro's rejoinder to his six critics directly implicated the recently coined concept Western

bridge University Press, 2017).

106 Peter E. Gordon, "Introduction," in Theodor W. Adorno, Else Frenkel-Brunswik, Daniel N. Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality* (Verso, 2020); Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 653–54.

107 Anderson, *Considerations*, 77 n. 20 and 97 n. 40; Anderson, *In the Tracks*, 8, 82. See Sebastiano Timpanaro, *On Materialism* (New Left Books, 1975).

108 Sebastiano Timpanaro "The Freudian Slip", *New Left Review* I, no. 91 (1975): 43–56.

109 Jacqueline Rose; Juliet Mitchell and Lucien Rey; Alan Beckett and John Howe; David Rumney, all published in *New Left Review* I, no. 94 (1975).

110 Charles Rycroft, "Timpanaro and 'The Freudian Slip'," *New Left Review* I, no. 118 (1979): 81–88.

Marxism: "If I had to give as concise and accurate a definition as possible of the typical 'Western Marxist', I would say: 'Someone who is firmly convinced that Freud is always right.'"[111]

This is not the only connection between Anderson and Timpanaro. Originally, the plan was that Anderson would write a preface to the book, but that never came to pass.[112] The contents of this preface instead ended up in the 2001 article in *London Review of Books*. But before discussing that text, Timpanaro's book should be placed in context. The book is a linguistic analysis of Freud's *Zur Psychopathologie des Alltagsleben* (1901), one of Freud's earliest books published only a year after his debut with *Traumdeutung* (1900, actually published 1899). Timpanaro argues that Freud at that point made a wrong turn in introducing a way of interpreting utterances (and dreams) that was not not refutable – simple memory slips and technical mistakes could account for the slips of tongue just as good as the deep psychological interpretations that Freud based his analysis on.[113] Be that as it may – the book definitely has some valuable insights –, the basis for the analysis, presented in the preface and the conclusion, is more or less echoing the Leninist refutations of Freud that had been launched in the 1920s.[114] Timpanaro is careful to point out the disastrous effects of the Stalinist cult of Pavlov and his variant of experimental psychology, and also emphasises the favourable views on psychoanalysis that Trotsky had argued.[115] He furthermore gives some credit to Reich's attempt to present a Marxist variant of psychanalysis (Fromm is only mentioned in passing as a follower of Horney and Sulli-

111 Sebastiano Timpanaro, "Freudian slips and the slips of the Freudians," *New Left Review* I, no. 95 (1976): 45–54.

112 Even the catalogue information from the publisher (New Left Books/Verso) contained this information until I recently pointed this out. Personal information over e-mail from the Verso publishers 4 August 2023.

113 These main arguments had been presented already in Timpanaro, "The Freudian Slip".

114 Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip: Psychoanalysis and textual criticism* (Verso, 1985), 184–85.

115 Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip*, 206–09.

van).[116] In the end, though, the critique boils down to the fact that Freud left the neuropsychological profession at the turn of the century and entered a way of thought with roots rather in the philosophy of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche than in empirical evidence.[117] Largely, this critique echoed his earlier book on materialism, which also had been presented with a chapter published as an article in *New Left Review*. In this chapter, he argued against Western Marxism in general and psychoanalytical and structuralist Marxism in particular, as "permeated with anti-materialist ideology", in much the same way as Anderson subsequently would do.[118]

In 1992, Timpanaro published a book on Freud's complicated relation to the city of Rome, never translated to English but commented on by Anderson in the article he published in 2001.[119] In this article, Anderson concurs with Timpanaro's view that Freud had abandoned a position that was "robustly materialist" for "a speculative system that had effectively cast off scientific controls".[120] Timpanaro's books were, with a couple of posthumous exceptions, not translated to French or German and sold little in Italy. With the help of the NLR, Timpanaro largely became a British author. In a follow-up article in 2021, Anderson considered the attention given to Timpanaro in his "second country" as "paradoxical".[121]

In many way it seems, thus, that Anderson's silence about the Freudian tradition has to do with the fact that Timpanaro, 15 years his senior, had already said what needed to be said, and that Anderson instead has used his influence to give as much credit as possible to his friend. The scattered evidence that exists apart from what he has written about Tim-

116 Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip*, 13–14, 211.

117 Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip*, 192.

118 Timpanaro, *The Freudian Slip*, 22, cf. Anderson, *Considerations*, 57–58.

119 An abridged version was published in *New Left Review*, see Sebastiano Timpanaro, "Freud's Roman phobia", *New Left Review* I, no. 147 (1984): 4–31.

120 Perry Anderson, "Philologist Extraordinaire: Sebastiano Timpanaro", in Perry Anderson, *Spectrum: From Right to Left in the World of Ideas* (Verso, 2005), 196.

121 Perry Anderson, "Timpanaro among the Anglo-Saxons," *New Left Review* II, no. 129 (2021): 109.

panaro certainly points in that direction. In *Considerations*, the Freudian influence on the Frankfurt school (with the example of Marcuse in the 1950s) is discussed in the general context of "different kinds of European idealism".[122] Anderson also contrasts what he calls Marcuse´s "instinctual theory" to Althusser's use of Freudian concepts for his structuralist theory of ideology.[123] However, by focusing the Frankfurt school's use of Freudian theory on Marcuse and his post-war development, the connection between Freudomarxism and the strategic needs of the struggle against fascism is lost. This is also largely the case for the discussion and contraposing of Lacan's and Habermas' different kinds of linguistic theories, structural and pragmatic respectively.[124] In the critical analysis of contemporary English culture that he wrote in the late 1960s, he positively mentioned Melanie Klein as "maybe the most important systematic development of psychoanalytic theory after Freud" (however without much influence in her new homeland), and he further commended Rokeach, Hanley and Christie's critique of the biologist psychologist Hans Eysenck (without noting that all three were students of Frenkel-Brunswik and Sanford and working within the tradition of *The Authoritarian Personality*).[125]

And that is about it. The little evidence that there is points in the direction that Anderson largely stays within the confines of the Marxist critique of Freud's theories as they were framed in the mid-1920s and has stayed ever since. There is no reason to suspect that he is not fully knowledgeable about both the Freudian and post-Freudian body of theory, or that he does not fully well know who Wilhelm Reich and Erich Fromm were (the latter was even still around when *Considerations* was published). If he does not discuss them, it is because he does not want to. He also does not criticise them.[126]

122 Anderson, *Considerations*, 57–58.

123 Anderson, *Considerations*, 88–89.

124 Anderson, *Considerations*, 65–66.

125 Perry Anderson, "Components of a national culture," 36–38, 41–43.

126 On a personal note, it should be mentioned that Anderson's wife at the time,

The inclusion of them in *Considerations* would have made it more difficult to argue that Western Marxism was confined to the universities (in fact, in Europe psychoanalysis has had far greater difficulties in joining the academic establishment than Marxism ever had). He could not have argued that it was distanced from the working class or from party work at the basic grass roots level (as we have seen, Reich devoted much of his time to this and possibly knew more about the inner life of the working class than it did itself). He could also not have argued that Western Marxism did not concern itself with political strategy; in fact, both Reich and Fromm devoted most of their political efforts to find ways out of the hopeless situation in which the German (and Austrian) labour movement had put itself. Not least, in Fromm's and later Adorno's case they did this with the help of large-scale empirical investigations and went into dialogue with cutting edge representatives of positivist experimental psychology from the universites in Vienna (Lazarsfeld and Frenkel-Brunswik), Los Angeles and Columbia, New York. They also wrote in an accessible language, more inspired by Freud's than Marx's style, in contrast to other Western Marxists (not to speak of the post-structuralists that would compete with them in the late 1970s). In short, with an open eye to the Freudomarxist tradition, he could have written a better, more complex book, more topical both then and now. But furthermore, he would also have been able to integrate the Freudomarxist contributions into the revolutionary Marxist tradition that has always been the trademark of Perry Anderson's work and of the NLR. Not least, he would more successfully have been able to answer the tricky question posed by his friend and antagonist E. P. Thompson, as to what connects people psychologically to the structures they create and inhabit.

Juliet Mitchell, already in 1974 had published her seminal *Psychoanalysis and Feminism* where she discusses Reich (though not Fromm) at length. Anderson does not mention this book. See Juliet Mitchell, *Psychoanalysis and Feminism: A Radical Reassessment of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (Allen Lane, 1974). Fromm was derogatively dismissed by Anderson as "dabbling an unguent syncretism of faith and psychoanalysis" when editing one of the most important anthologies of the socialist humanism movement that Thompson was a part of. Anderson, *Arguments*, 108.

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Adorno's Marxism and the Critical Promise of Psychoanalysis

Stella Gaon[1]

> *What tissues in the life of our modern society remain cancerous, and despite our assumed enlightenment show the incongruous atavism of ancient peoples? And what within the individual organism responds to certain stimuli in our culture with attitudes and acts of destructive aggression?* (Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman, forward, *The Authoritarian Personality*, 1969, v)

Abstract: By the 1930s, a number of critical theorists were turning to psychoanalysis to understand how objective social forces are implicated subjectively, that is, in the development of consciousness. For Theodor Adorno, in particular, Freud was an important resource, because the lure of authoritarianism and the rise of fascism cried for explanation. The Freudian theory on which Adorno relied, however, is rife with problems of bias, sexism, Eurocentrism, and contradiction, and it has since been displaced by a number of different approaches. These include the more liberal traditions of developmental psychology (on which second generation critical theorists drew when they drew on psychoanalysis at all) and object-relations theory, which eclipsed Adorno's Marxian, dialectical analyses. This paper returns to the Adornian problematic in order to clarify what psychoanalytic theory can and cannot offer to critical theory, and to identify which of the post-Freudian theories might prove fruitful now. I consider the object-relations theories of Melanie Klein and Donald Winnicott that are championed by Amy Allen and Axel Honneth (respectively), and the revised Freudianism that Joel

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Whitebook adopts. I argue that these approaches are limited to agent-structure and/or subject-object dualisms, and that they are therefore inadequate theoretical resources. In contrast, Jean Laplanche's account of "primal seduction" can illuminate the psychological mechanisms and processes by virtue of which individuals are driven [*getrieben*] to replicate relations of domination that contradict their own interests. It thus constitutes the theoretical tool that Adorno originally sought.

1. Introduction

The question of how the psyche and the polis can be said to interact is as old as Western political philosophy itself. This discursive binary surfaces as metaphor, as analogy, and as a problematic from Plato through Kant, from Machiavelli through Hobbes, and from Aristotle through Marx, in a variety of loosely related configurations. But this classical question took on particular importance in the years leading up to and immediately following the Second World War, when it was reformulated by members of the Frankfurt School in terms of the relation between individual consciousness and collective politics in the context of Marxian analyses of ideology critique.

These analyses were significantly enriched by the newly emerging field of Freudian psychoanalysis, which Freud first called "depth-psychology." Indeed, for first generation critical theorists, including Erich Fromm, Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Max Horkheimer, Freud was as important a resource as Nietzsche, Weber, or Marx. This was because the failure of workers to act in their own interests or to resist the lure of authoritarianism directly contradicted the Enlightenment conception of reason as an emancipatory force. Most notably, in their mid-1940s text *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) argued that the idea of pure reason is fundamentally entwined with the regression to barbarism and authoritarianism; reason as such is by no means the royal route to emancipation that Enlightenment philosophers had originally envisaged. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr summarizes the issue as follows:

> The failure of a proletarian revolution to occur in the developed capitalist societies, the subjugation of workers' organizations to a consolidated and expanding fascism, the manipulative power of monopolistic mass society in the West and

> of state socialism on the Stalinist model in the East – all these political experiences lent impetus to the transition from the Critical Theory of the 1930s to the critique of instrumental reason during the 1940s.[2]

For Horkheimer and Adorno, the overwhelming implication of the events of the 1930s and 40s (of *Auschwitz*, in Adorno's shorthand) was that something *other* than reason – something unconscious, irrational, and otherwise inexplicable, some "cancerous tissue," as Horkheimer and Flowerman suggest in the epigraph above – must be at work. Psychoanalytic theory (Freudian theory, that is) thus emerged as an "indispensable weapon" against ideology.[3] As Adorno put it in 1964, "A phenomenology or comprehensive and ... systematically deduced description of the reified consciousness would, as far as the *subjective* manifestation of ideology is concerned, surely be the most important task."[4]

One can recognize in these remarks the germ for the recent re-emergence of a lively discussion about the relationship between critical theory and psychoanalysis. Broadly speaking, current debates in the literature hinge on the question of which version of post-Freudian theory (Donald Winnicott's, updated versions of orthodox Freudianism, or Melanie Klein's, most notably) is best able to explain irrational or antisocial behaviour, particularly when it operates collectively. Certainly the notable rise and pervasive appeal of fascist ideology and authoritarian politics more generally provoke this kind of questioning now. Among the first generation of critical theorists, however, Adorno always held to Marx's materialist insight: social existence determines consciousness.[5] In Ador-

2 Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, afterword to *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, by Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002), 228.

3 Helmut Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," *Thesis Eleven* 111, no.1 (2012): 99.

4 Theodor Adorno, *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, ed. Tobias Ten Brink and Marc Phillip Nogueira, trans. Wieland Hoban (Polity Press, 2019), 138 (emphasis added).

5 This should not be taken to imply that a structure-agency or chicken and egg problem is at stake, because the question of a original cause or origin

no's terms, unconscious drives, which he defined as socially mediated impulses that present as "needs," are "preformed" by societal relations of domination.[6] Paraphrasing Adorno, Helmut Dahmer writes that the psychology of "isolated individuals" is shaped by "relations of production and distribution," from which individuals "imagine themselves to be independent." Their psychology "is thus not a constituent of society, but rather a *constitutum* or social product."[7]

From this point of view, it follows that problems such as violent or irrational societal behaviour can only be overcome through systemic change – that is, at the political level rather than at the level of the individual – even though the psychoanalytic account of the drives is arguably an essential part of the critical-theoretical analysis. In other words, critical social theory would still have to investigate the nature and psychological origins of unconscious drives, but it would have to avoid reifying the drives as innate, inherited, or ahistorical. Such a theory would have to keep the question of social mediation front and centre in its analysis. Most important, for Adorno, is that "individual psychology does not reach the decisive socially relevant form of action, namely economic action."[8] As he puts it elsewhere, "The thesis that in the totalitarian era the masses act against their own interests is thus hardly the whole truth, and in any case only comes true *ex post facto*."[9] In a nutshell, "the problem of mediating between society and psychology or that of psychic reification may well be," as Adorno says, "the

(the chicken or the egg, the agent or the structure) is otiose from a dialectical point of view. I return to this point below.

6 Theodor Adorno, "Theses on Need," trans. Martin Shuster and Iain Macdonald, *Adorno Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): esp. 102-103; Theodor Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology," trans. Irving N. Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 46, Nov/Dec (1967): 80; Theodor Adorno, "Society," in *The Legacy of the German Refugee Intellectuals*, ed. Robert Boyes, trans. Fredric Jameson (Schocken Books, 1972), 148.

7 Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," 102.

8 Adorno, *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, 94.

9 Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology," 80.

central thing."[10] This problem can only be addressed by what he called a "dialectical psychology."[11]

In what follows, I argue that a properly dialectical psychoanalytic theory could indeed help to illuminate how individual subjectivity is mediated by material social forces, but that such a theory has not yet been brought to bear on this question. This matters, because unless the analysis of the subject extends beyond the level of concrete, interpersonal, intersubjective relations, it will not be possible to show how subjectivity is mediated by objective forms of systemic domination, and how oppression and inequality are thereby perpetuated. As a result, the emancipatory critical theory under development will fall short of its political aim.

In order to advance this argument, I begin by describing how the radical, materialist edge that characterized the Frankfurt School's theoretical project was lost when the Marxian heritage of critical theory was left behind. My discussion of the contemporary critical-theory scene is aimed to set the stage for the introduction of a new psychoanalytic paradigm, namely, the approach developed by Jean Laplanche. Laplanche's theory can reinvigorate the question of how subjectivity is socially mediated at the most fundamental of levels, I argue, because it is at once intersubjective, dialectical, and genuinely materialist. This has implications not only for emancipatory critical theory in general, but also for our understanding of how a variety of social codes might intersect and take root in the development of the ego during the process of subject formation. In both cases, the political target of critique should not be the subject or its identity, but rather the social and political conditions that structure that identity and thereby first enable it. First, however, it is necessary to distinguish between the role of psychoanalysis as it is being conceptualized now and Adorno's original understanding of its utility. This is the focus of section two. I then turn to a detailed discussion of contemporary critical theoretical approaches to psychoanalysis, which are treated in sec-

10 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel*, Band I (Suhrkamp, 2003), 39-42, quoted in Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," 101.

11 Ibid.

tion three. In section four I describe Laplanche's psychoanalytic theory in order to support my argument that his theoretical model supplies the critical tools that Adorno originally sought.

2. The role of psychoanalysis in critical theory

Among contemporary critical theorists, the idea seems to be that psychoanalysis can help to explain and ameliorate the societal and political problems of our times, and perhaps even to illuminate a path beyond them. In her aptly named, *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis*, for example, Amy Allen explains the impetus behind the recent return to psychoanalytic theory. She claims that in the face of authoritarianism the challenge is "to envision an account of psychic integration that is not only noncoercive and nondominating but that also allows for the possibility of resistance, autonomy, and critique."[12] In other words, for Allen no less than for Noëlle McAfee, Axel Honneth, Joel Whitebook, Duarte Rolo, and David McIvor, psychoanalysis is needed for a philosophical anthropology, one on which to base an understanding of "the aims and methods of critique."[13]

For Honneth, for example, psychoanalysis can provide a realistic concept of the human being that takes unconscious motives and affects into

12 Amy Allen, *Critique on the Couch: Why Critical Theory Needs Psychoanalysis* (Columbia University Press, 2021), 67.

13 Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 17; McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown: Politics and Psychoanalysis* (Columbia University Press, 2019); Honneth, "Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory: On the Seeming Obsolescence of Psychoanalysis," *Philosophical Explorations* 2, no. 3 (1999); Honneth, "The Work of Negativity: A Recognition-Theoretical Revision of Psychoanalysis," in *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition*, trans. Joseph Ganahl (Polity Press, 2012); Whitebook, "The Marriage of Marx and Freud: Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge University Press, 2006); Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott: On Axel Honneth's Appropriate of Psychoanalysis," *Constellations* 28, no. 3 (2021); Rolo, "Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory: A New Quarrel about Revisionism?" *Constellations* 26, no. 1 (2019); McIvor, "The Cunning of Recognition: Melanie Klein and Contemporary Critical Theory," *Contemporary Critical Theory* 15, no 3 (2016).

account and so acknowledges the limits of rational deliberation.[14] Similarly, McAfee proposes that "Troubles in the psyche – ghosts, crypts, secrets, and fears of breakdown – all show up in the forum of the public sphere. Because of these unconscious intruders, political theory and political practice need psychoanalysis."[15] Or, as Whitebook articulates the point, "the most pressing and dangerous issue that confronts us is fundamentalism," and "as it was with fascism, the primitive rage and sheer irrationality of the phenomenon require the resources of psychoanalytic depth-psychology. Nothing else will do."[16] Indeed, in his recent reentry into the dispute with Honneth, Whitebook accuses Honneth of failing to acknowledge "our species' powerful propensity to omnipotently deny reality"; Honneth, Whitebook implies, thereby remains powerless to change what must be faced.[17]

The basic claim is that the role of psychoanalysis is to provide critical theory with a conception of the subject in all its complexity, and that this conception can serve as the ground for emancipatory politics. On Honneth's view, according to Rolo, the contribution of this "auxiliary science" would be a "realistic" model of subjectivity that accounts for aggression and other unconscious, negative forces, and thereby illuminates the possibility of societal change.[18] But, although Adorno drew on Freudian theory to explain the subjective effects of ideology too, that was not his aim. On the contrary, as I indicated above, he was acutely mindful of the shortcomings of Freud's theory of the unconscious, not least because he held that, as individuals, we only imagine ourselves to be independent of economic "relations of production and distribution."[19] For Adorno, human psychology does not constitute society but is largely its effect. If this is so, then the promise of psychoanalysis – the role of an

14 Honneth, "Work of Negativity," 195.

15 McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*, 2.

16 Whitebook, "Marriage of Marx and Freud," 97.

17 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 317.

18 Rolo, "Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory," 32.

19 Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," 102.

account of individual consciousness with respect to politics – must be differently construed.

While the question of irrational or socially destructive behaviour – not only on the part of individuals but by social collectivities *en masse* – is apposite, in other words, a strictly psychological or psychoanalytic perspective is not sufficient for the critical theory of society that Adorno envisioned. As he says, "all varieties of psychologism that simply take the individual as their point of departure," or that fail to account for the social relevance of economic structures and action are "ideological."[20] And, if this is true, it means there is something inadequate in contemporary critical-theoretical approaches to psychoanalysis in general, regardless of the theorist's particular orientation.

The question this raises, of course, is whether Adorno's own attempt to mobilize psychoanalysis for critical theoretical purposes is any sounder, notwithstanding his critique of psychologism. In particular, it is often claimed that Adorno shared Horkheimer's orthodox interpretation of Freud's theory of the drives, namely, that they are rooted in an "unassimilable biological core," and that they are therefore purely physiological.[21] This understanding leads to a decidedly pessimistic depiction of human being, much to the chagrin of critical theorists who are seeking a positive path forward, who are therefore inclined to criticize Adorno for refusing or neglecting to provide it. To be sure, there is textual support for this interpretation of Adorno's thought, beyond the evidence in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. In his articles on "Revisionist Psychoanalysis" and on "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," most notably, Adorno associates Freud with "those dark thinkers who insist on [the] wickedness and incorrigibility of human nature," such as Hobbes, Mandeville, and de Sade.[22] The association is based on the Freudian descrip-

20 Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology," 77.

21 Whitebook, "Marriage of Marx and Freud," 99n12; Schmid Noerr, afterword to *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* 228-30.

22 Theodor Adorno, "Revisionist Psychoanalysis," trans. NanNan Lee, in NanNan Lee, "Sublimated or Castrated Psychoanalysis? Adorno's Critique of the Revisionist Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to 'The Revisionist Psychoanal-

tion of libido (the erotic "life" drive) as something "pre-social" and even "archaic,"[23] and of the so-called death drive as an equally innate (hence natural) "instinct of destructiveness."[24]

In the first place, however, it must be underlined that Freud equivocated throughout his life on what these "two principles of mental functioning," these two so-called "drives," actually entail.[25] In fact, there is no authoritative set of definitions within Freud's work to which to refer. One finds instead a number of confusing and contradictory formulations concerning what is variously called the ego drive, the self-preservative drive, the life drive, the sexual drive, the Nirvana principle, the constancy principle and the death drive. Variations and theoretical switchbacks among these terms appear right up to the end of Freud's life. Whether or not one agrees with the negative assessment of human nature, therefore, one will be hard-pressed to find a definitive explanation of it in Freud.

In the second place, one would also have to read Adorno quite selectively to support the argument that he ever adopted an unqualified, essentialist position with respect to the theory of the drives – as, for example, Joel Whitebook maintains.[26] Even in the "Fascist Propaganda" essay, for example – where some of Adorno's most explicit discussions of classical Freudian theory can be found – the references to Freud's hypotheses concerning the "primal father" and the Oedipus complex have to be placed in context.[27]

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ysis,'" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 40, no. 3 (2014), 335.

23 Adorno, "Revisionist Psychoanalysis," 330, 335.

24 Theodor Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," in *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (Routledge, 1991).

25 The reference is to Freud's paper entitled, "Formulations on the Two Principles of Mental Functioning," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, vol. 12 (1911-1913), *The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique, and Other Works* (Vintage Books, 2001), 218-226.

26 Whitebook, "Marriage of Marx and Freud," 99n12.

27 Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," 120.

For, as Adorno explains, while fascism is necessarily irrational, it cannot be explained in strictly psychological terms. The following passage from that text makes this clear:

> While there certainly exists potential susceptibility for fascism among the masses, it is equally certain that *manipulation* of the unconscious, the kind of suggestion explained by Freud in genetic terms, is indispensable for the actualization of this potential. This, however, corroborates the assumption that fascism as such is *not* a psychological issue and that any attempt to understand its roots and historical role in psychological terms still remains on the level of ideologies such as the one of "irrational forces" promoted by fascism itself. Although the fascist agitator doubtlessly takes up certain tendencies within those he addresses, he does so as the mandatory of powerful economic and political interests. Psychological dispositions do not actually cause fascism; rather, fascism defines a psychological area which can be successfully exploited by the forces which promote it for entirely non-psychological reasons.[28]

This passage suggests, minimally, that Adorno did not support looking to psychoanalytic theory alone for a model of subjectivity to explain either the appeal of fascism or the potential for resistance to it. He appears to have held instead that the unconscious, self-destructive, irrational draw of fascist ideology, together with a tendency to resist it, are made possible by particular societal, political conditions. Any attempt to understand what is going on today would have to start there.

28 Adorno, "Freudian Theory," 129-30 (first emphasis mine). Cf. Adorno in *The Authoritarian Personality*: "It is an open question whether and to what extent the fascist danger really can be fought with psychological weapons. Psychological 'treatment' of prejudiced persons is problematic because of their large number as well as because they are by no means 'ill,' in the usual sense, and, as we have seen, at least on the surface level are often even better 'adjusted' than the non-prejudiced ones. Since, however, modern fascism is inconceivable without a mass basis, the inner complexion of its prospective followers still maintains its crucial significance, and no defense which does not take into account the subjective phase of the problem would be truly 'realistic.'" Theodor Adorno, Else FrenkelBrunswik, Daniel Levinson, and R. Nevitt Sanford, *The Authoritarian Personality*, vol. 1, *Studies in Prejudice*, ed. Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman (W.W. Norton & Co. 1969), 748.

Accordingly, one must also underline in the third place that, as far as Adorno was concerned, the concept of the "individual" no less than the concept of "society" has to be developed *critically*, which is to say, not as a fixed abstraction characterized by immutable structures or impulses, not as particulars to a universal, but rather as part of a dynamic, social, totality-in-process.[29] More specifically, the individual should be understood "as an arena" that embodies "a history of class struggles" rather than as a fixed, biologically determined entity.[30] As Adorno says in *Negative Dialectics*, "the critique of the superego ought to become the critique of society, which produced it; if it falls silent before this, then it accommodates the prevailing social norm."[31] And, contrary to the assumption that political-economic concerns are replaced with cultural ones in the later work of Frankfurt School theorists, Adorno continued to emphasize this Marxian point, particularly in his sociological writings. The following indices will help to illuminate this claim.

In his 1942 essay, "Theses on Need," for example, Adorno begins by complicating the distinction between biological instincts and unconscious, psychological drives. Instincts [*Instinkte*], we should recall, are somatic impulses that serve self-preservation. As even Freud acknowledged, human beings, unlike most other animals, are shockingly poorly equipped in this regard. More importantly, though, the few instincts that do exist are not available for analysis, because we never experience them in anything like a pure form. For Adorno, as for Jean Laplanche, instincts are always already drives [*Triebe*]. In Adorno's words, "need is a *social* category. Nature as 'drive' is included in it."[32] To borrow his provoca-

29 Adorno, "Society," 145.

30 Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002), quoted in Schmid Noerr, afterword to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 232.

31 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. Dennis Redmond (unpublished manuscript, 2001; corrected and consolidated, 2021), Part III Freedom, subsection "Reason, Ego, Superego" at p. 161 of pdf, https://platypus1917.org/wp-content/uploads/Negative_Dialectics_Redmondtrans2021.pdf.

32 Adorno, "Theses on Need," 79 (emphasis added).

tive example, we can satisfy the instinctual need for food by consuming locusts and cakes made of flies. However, insofar as this repulses us, something more than the natural category of instinct is clearly at play. Evidently, even hunger is socially mediated, as are other needs. "Every drive," Adorno continues, "is socially-mediated in such a way that its natural side never appears directly, but only as something socially-produced. The appeal to nature in relation to need of any kind is always a mere mask for denial and domination."[33]

Here Adorno has a particular form of domination in mind; he is talking about the way in which economic structures invade individual consciousness and social relations. In his major paper on "Sociology and Psychology" of 1955, for example, Adorno writes, "The manifest or repressed instinctual moment finds expression only in the form of needs, which have today become wholly a function of profit interests."[34] Thus, he continues,

> In making the leap from psychological images to historical reality, [Freud] forgets what he himself discovered – that all reality undergoes modification upon entering the unconscious – and is thus misled into positing such factual events as the murder of the father by the primal horde. It is this short-circuit between reality and the unconscious which lends psychoanalysis its apocryphal features.[35]

In other words, Freud forgets his own insight: even if unconscious fantasies can be traced to real events, they do not *represent* history, because that very "reality" will have been modified, often beyond recognition, when it entered the sphere of what might be called "psychic reality" (Jean Laplanche's term).

Adorno makes the same point in his 1964 lectures on the "Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society." There he writes that although Gustave Le Bon and Freud made excellent contributions to the understanding of mass fascist movements in their works on group psychology, they,

33 Adorno, "Theses on Need," 79.

34 Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology," 77.

35 Theodor Adorno, "Sociology and Psychology II," trans. Irving N. Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 47, Jan/Feb (1968), 80.

> deal only with a relatively limited area of socialization, namely the area where one is really dealing with unconscious or pre-conscious human reactions in very specific constellations, omitting precisely the aspect that generally determines their social actions; the pressure of social objectivity.[36]

This pressure involves what Adorno calls "the systemic-immanence of proletarian consciousness."[37] A strictly psychological or even a psychoanalytic analysis, in short, deals solely with the *subjective* manifestation of ideology, as mentioned before. A "dialectical psychology," in contrast, would be one in which the critique of the psychoanalytic categories of subjectivity – of the ego, the superego, and the id, in this case – becomes the critique of social *objectivity*, that is, of the pressures on consciousness stemming from economic and other systemic structures of society. And, as Adorno's comments clearly suggest, Freudian theory in its original form did not constitute that critique.

3. Winnicott, Freud, Klein

Adorno's understanding of the role of psychoanalysis in critical theory was largely eclipsed by the Habermasian turn to developmental psychology in the 1970s and 80s. More recently, however, a number of theorists have returned to psychoanalysis in search of a "noncoercive, nondominating account of psychic integration".[38] Yet, as the previous section already begins to show, Adorno's attempt to demonstrate how subjectivity is mediated by objective social forces is still being sidelined. Specifically, the current idea is that a model of the "healthy personality" can serve as the basis for a critical theory of society.[39] A psychoanalytically enriched critical theory, in other words, would be one which incorporates unconscious, negative motivations and drives directly into its understanding of the well-adjusted individual, who is therefore presumably able to resist

36 Adorno, *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, 94.

37 Adorno, *Philosophical Elements*, 54.

38 Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 67.

39 Honneth, "Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory," 227.

domination. Consequently, hope for change is conceivable. And, once that formulation is accepted, the debate will be restricted to the question of which version of psychoanalysis is best positioned to meet it. Concomitantly, none of the currently influential psychoanalytic approaches will include any consideration of how psychology at the level of the individual might be shaped or constituted by economic forces that are socially *systemic*, that is, which operate at the level of the polis. This is why the Winnicottian theory of object-relations that Honneth mobilizes, the updated version of Freud's account of the life and death drives which Joel Whitebook develops, and Melanie Klein's drive theory as taken up by Amy Allen, David McIvor, and Noëlle McAfee, will all remain ensnared by the ideology of reified consciousness, one way or another, rather than surmounting it.

Of course, these three positions are different from one another in profound and significant ways. Each of them merits a full and careful exposition in much more detail than can be undertaken here. However, the following sketches should suffice to illustrate my narrow point: despite their differences, these approaches are all vulnerable to the criticism that they predetermine the subject in a restrictive and uncritical way for the sake of the emancipatory, political project. To put this in Derridean terms, a preemptive decision in each case about what the subject essentially *is* overwrites the constitutive *un*decidability that is always in play in any such discursive category.

a) Honneth's Winnicott

This problem is evident, first, in Axel Honneth's appropriation of Donald Winnicott's theory of object-relations. Object-relations theory is based on the important premise that human infants, the *subjects* in this account, are incapable of even surviving, let alone of developing, without adult care. Thus the infant is hypothesized to begin with as in a state of symbiotic fusion – that is, essentially in a fantasy state – from which it has to gradually extricate itself, develop as an independent subject, and recognize its caretaker (its mother) as an independent, external *object* that

is separable from its own projected "fantasies."[40] If the care is "good enough," Winnicott claimed, the child will be able to accept reality, deal with the loss of its omnipotent power (the loss of "the experience of being God," as Whitebook puts it), and accede to the limitations of being a mere individual.[41]

According to Winnicott, this developmental step from fusion to separation is made possible by a so-called "transitional object" (a teddy bear, blanket, etc.), which represents a zone of being that is neither strictly interior, all *me*, nor strictly exterior – all *not* me.[42] This object is the target of both affection and aggression, as the child works itself out of its fantasy of being all, tests the limits of its reality, and confronts the anxiety that results from that loss. Ideally, the infant will gradually emerge – from the plenum into its own individuality – through the interpersonal relationship.[43] Alternatively, if the "holding environment" is not "good enough," or if it is provided for too long, the consequence could be psychosis.[44]

Given his era, it is not surprising that Winnicott attributed the caretaking role almost exclusively to women, who were described in terms of the 1940s and 50s, British, middle-class model of the stay-at-home wife.[45] What is surprising is that Honneth's depiction of the mother-child relation fifty years later is even more problematic than Winnicott's. As McAfee and Whitebook both remark, Honneth believes that "both partners" in the original state exist in a state of "symbiotic oneness" and "absolute dependency."[46] He apparently thinks that adult women are no more ca-

40 Honneth, "Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory," 234.

41 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 312.

42 See Axel Honneth and Joel Whitebook, "Omnipotence or Fusion? A Conversation Between Axel Honneth and Joel Whitebook," *Constellations* 23, no. 2 (2016), 178.

43 Honneth, "Postmodern Identity," 234.

44 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 312.

45 For caveats regarding Winnicott's attribution of care-taking to women, see McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*, 243-44n16.

46 Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflict*, trans. J. Anderson (The MIT Press, 1999), quoted in Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 312. McAfee quotes the same lines and makes the same point

pable of differentiation, and no more independent, than are the infants in their care. Honneth says that "they must learn from each other how to differentiate themselves as independent entities."[47] What is more, Whitebook's rebuttal to Honneth is equally astonishing. It is essentially that, according to Winnicott, the mother is not *completely* merged with the infant initially. However, she must be somewhat merged or else she will not be able to adapt herself to its needs as they arise. Conversely, if she merges with the child too much, she will risk becoming psychotic herself.[48] In other words, parenting (by women) apparently carries the danger of psychosis, at least on some readings of Winnicott's view of the intersubjective relationship between parent and child.

Beyond the obvious problem that this is an odd and implausible account of parenting and its relation to infantile development, a number of other points bear highlighting. First, Honneth claims that his explanation of psychic development is especially suitable to the contemporary, "postmodern" moment, because subjects are no longer monolithic, but plural. Honneth says he addresses this change by shifting from Freud's model of intrapsychic conflict (conflict within the psyche) to an understanding of conflict that occurs between infant subjects and adult objects.[49] This is what he means when he says that "the formation of inner psychic life [is] a conflict-ridden process of *internalizing interactive relations*."[50] Notably, it is clear that the conflict in question still takes place entirely inside the psyche of the infantile subject (via its transitional object). Honneth does not simply take the individual as his starting point, it is true, but the difference is trivial; he takes the individual in communication with its caretaker – whose own subjectivity is completely erased – as his starting point instead. The fact that the infant is thought to develop as a subject by

in *Fear of Breakdown*, 36.

47 Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, quoted in Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 312-13.

48 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 313.

49 Honneth, "Postmodern Identity and Object-Relations Theory, 226.

50 Honneth, "Postmodern Identity," 230 (emphasis added).

interacting with external objects, and that it supposedly begins from an entirely self-enclosed state, suggests this is very much a subject-centred account. It is essentially a subject-object model, not an intersubjective one.

Second, the social context that is so crucial for Adorno is, in Honneth's rendition, reduced to the question of recognition between individuals. There is no direct engagement with political or economic structures of domination on their own terms, notwithstanding Honneth's purported intent to "take account of the socialization milieu of society as a whole."[51] Typical of Honneth's treatment of the "socialization milieu" is his comment that in capitalist societies we perceive ourselves as objects according to others' interests, rather than relating to one another with mutual recognition.[52] The same is said about the fight for wages, racial oppression, sexism, and other significant political issues; they are always reduced to the problem of intersubjective recognition. Thus, while Honneth's analysis is not strictly individualist in orientation, it is nonetheless limited to the level of individuals' concrete relationships and their psychology. Absent, here, is any attention to what ultimately is abstract, namely, *systemic* forces of political domination.[53]

Third, Honneth's conception of the subject does not arise *from* his reading of Winnicott's theory of object-relations but rather preempts the question from the outset. He does not provide a critical theory of society, but rather an *un*critical theory of the subject, one on which an argument for a particular political vision can be based. Honneth says this explicitly: the appeal of Winnicottian object-relations theory is that its "basic concepts allow a relatively seamless translation into social-theoretical cat-

51 Honneth, "Work of Negativity," 196.

52 Axel Honneth, "A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Critical Theory*, ed. Fred Rush (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 349.

53 The frequent dismissal in public discourse of systemic racism exemplifies the same point; since often it cannot be seen at the level of interpersonal relationships, its existence is denied.

egories," such as the category of "recognition" with which he begins.[54] Thus, while both Whitebook and McAfee contest Honneth's somewhat selective interpretation of Winnicott, that is not at issue here. What is more important is that Honneth starts from an assumption, a decision about what the subject naturally is, and supposes that what is possible politically will follow from that. In other words, by focusing on concrete, interpersonal, intersubjective relations, Honneth is not only blind to abstract, impersonal, structural relations of power, such as the relation of labour to capital. He is also blind to the relationship "between society and psychology," which, as Adorno shows, calls for a dialectical (rather than a dualistic) analysis of how societal forces shape subjectivity at the level of the drives.[55]

Honneth does not take this possibility into account. His position is that we are fundamentally cooperative beings who seek connection and mutual recognition. Social pathologies are thus not due to any innate aggressivity or naturally destructive impulses, but rather are the result of problems or deviations occurring in the original child-parent (subject-object) relationship. He suggests that a failure to internalize the interactive relations fully or adequately produces antisocial, negative behaviour. For Honneth, accordingly, social formation "goes all the way down," as Whitebook remarks, but it is limited to intrafamilial relations.[56]

b) Whitebook's Freud

Whatever fault one might find with this rosy, Lockean description of human nature, it cannot be resolved by flipping to Whitebook's darker, explicitly Hobbesian version of subjectivity. This is the depiction of human beings as "naturally driven, asocial, and strategically oriented individu-

54 Honneth, "Work of Negativity," quoted in Amy Allen, "Are We Driven? Critical Theory and Psychoanalysis Reconsidered," *Critical Horizons* 16, no. 4 (2015), 316.

55 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Briefwechsel*, Band I, quoted in Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," 101.

56 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 319n8.

als."[57] This is not a solution, that is to say, if we heed the Adornian insight that "the appeal to nature in relation to need of any kind" – such as the need for recognition and connection, or for dominance and power, for example – "is always a mere mask for denial and domination."[58]

Whether Whitebook, unlike Honneth, began from the Hobbesian assumption that we innately bear aggressive tendencies and then was drawn to a particular, orthodox reading of Freud for that reason, or whether he only arrived at it as a result of his clinical practice and his reading of Freud, remains an open question. In either event, his position is that it is true. Thus, pushing back against the accusation that Hobbes took the particular conditions of early capitalist society (the war of all against all) as universally valid, Whitebook maintains that capitalism did not *cause* "human egoism, aggression, and acquisitiveness," it merely unleashed them.[59] These "antisocial forces" – which Whitebook groups together under the broad heading of "negativity" – are, Whitebook agrees with Freud, "a piece of unconquerable nature."[60] Accordingly, a vision of what is politically possible cannot get off the ground unless, and until, one acknowledges the full "sting of negativity."[61] "Regressive forces," Whitebook proposes, "represent a constant pressure (*Drang*) on psychic life," and this pressure is rooted in our biology.[62]

Whereas, for Honneth, social pathologies are the result of inadequate parent-child (object) relations, Whitebook apparently deems external objects as unnecessary, at least as far as the drives are concerned. On

57 Joel Whitebook, "Mutual Recognition and the Work of the Negative," in *Pluralism and the Pragmatic Turn: The Transformation of Critical Theory, Essays in Honor of Thomas McCarthy*, ed. William Rehg and James Bohman (MIT Press, 2001), 257.

58 Adorno, "Theses on Need," 79.

59 Whitebook, "Mutual Recognition and the Work of the Negative," 260.

60 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 318; Whitebook, "Mutual Recognition," 261.

61 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 307.

62 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 307; Whitebook, "Mutual Recognition," 266.

Whitebook's view, struggles both between and within individuals arise from what he calls, following Hegel, "the dynamics of Life and Desire," upper case.[63] The protagonists of these struggles are the great metaphysical forces, which, according to Whitebook, Freud had once characterized in terms of "the battle of the giants."[64] Thus, this is in the first place even more of a subject-centred model than Honneth's. Moreover, Whitebook's preemptive appeal to human nature re-entrenches the two aspects of Freudian theory that Adorno had explicitly rejected (and that Honneth also tries to evade), namely, the "metaphysics of the drives and the idolization of mere mindless organic life."[65] Psychoanalysis was valuable to Adorno as a "sharp weapon" *against* these forms of ideology, not as a tool with which to re-entrench them.

Second, Whitebook's approach, much like Honneth's, is limited to the concrete relations and behaviour of individuals. Whitebook's quick dismissal of the Hobbesian problem, namely, Hobbes's reification of a personality structure that is distinctly tied to the social relations of capitalism, is a case in point. On Hobbes's view, aggressivity is innate in individuals; it has nothing to do with social structures. Again, therefore, what is abstract and systemic is ontologized as an immutable feature of human nature. And this means, in the third place, that the model is dualistic, insofar as the individual is treated as entirely separable from, and at the root of, the ostensible social malaise. The problem with this remains that, if one begins from individual psychology, it is not possible to see how our very drives, desires, and motivations can be decisively shaped by economic structures and action. It is only when one adopts a dialectical approach that the "problem of mediating between society and psychology," in Adorno's phrase, can come into view. Moreover, from a dialectical perspective the question of which comes first, the agent or

63 Whitebook, "Mutual Recognition," 266.

64 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 307.

65 Theodor Adorno, "Der Begriff des Unbewußten in der Transzendentalen Seelenlehre," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 1 (Suhrkamp, 1973 [1927]), quoted in Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," 99.

the structure, the chicken or the egg – the biological individual with its innate psychological drives and aggressivity (as per Whitebook), or the socially cooperative individual that is shaped and determined interactively, in relation to others – is rendered moot.

c) Freud's aporia

The impasse between Honneth and Whitebook, which arises from their fixed (nondialectical) conceptions of human nature, replicates closely the argument that took place between Erich Fromm and Max Horkheimer in the 1930s. Fromm held that human beings seek connection and are shaped by familial and institutional structures, whereas Horkheimer supported Freud's biologically based drive theory.[66] Interestingly, this deadlock about whether the inside or the outside of the psyche comes first can be traced to a contradiction in Freud himself. The contradiction becomes apparent when one compares Freud's theory of the death drive, which follows from the premise that infants are born as self-enclosed monads (as Horkheimer and then Whitebook maintain), to his theory of conscience (the superego), which is tied to the theory of the oedipal crisis. The latter theory deploys a rudimentary version of object relations (as Fromm and Honneth try to show). The contradiction between them points to a fundamental impossibility, an "aporia of consciousness," so to speak, at the root of the subject itself.[67]

Specifically, Freud's the theory of ego development entails two mutually exclusive, yet intricately entwined, developmental theories. Elsewhere I have called these the "narcissism" and the "melancholic" trajectories of egoic development.[68] On the narcissism account, to which Freud refers repeatedly, there is an originary cathexis of a unified self, a prima-

66 Schmid Noerr, afterword to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 229.

67 I borrow the phrase from Adorno, who refers to the "aporias" of consciousness in a slightly different context. See Theodor Adorno, "Opinion Delusion Society," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (Columbia University Press, 2005), 120ff.

68 Stella Gaon, *The Lucid Vigil: Deconstruction, Desire and the Politics of Critique* (Routledge, 2019), 203-20.

ry narcissistic investment, which is eventually parceled out to the others (from in here to out there). Freud begins this account of subjectivity by modeling the infant as a self-enclosed, monadic entity (as reflected in Whitebook's understanding of innate egoism), which is endowed with a fundamental capacity for selfpreservation. This capacity provokes the gradual development of an ego – which is to say, a representation of itself as an "I" (*das Ich*) – as well as a sexual drive.

The sexual drive is at first bound up with self-preservation. It is said to lean on or to prop itself against the self-preservative instincts, and it is essentially merely the attachment of libidinal energy to oneself as a self to begin with. But the sexual drive eventually deviates from what Freud called the (self-preservative) "ego drive," redirects libidinal energy externally towards others, and ultimately comes into conflict with self-preservation. Without this primary narcissism, there can be no attachment by, and no sexual object for, the subject at all. This conception was shelved for a number of years, but Freud returned to it later to support the thesis of a death drive: he speculated that all living beings seek to return to a state of absolute quiescence, that is, to the state of nonexistence that obtained before life. Freud had also posited that the narcissistic attachment to the ego prompts anxiety and aggression when the ego is perceived to be under attack. Some version or other of this hypothesis – that the human psyche is the field of battle between a destructive, death drive and an erotic, life principle that seeks to unify and bind – informs Herbert Marcuse's idea of surplus repression, Whitebook's idea of an original, presocial, psychotic core and, as well, Melanie Klein's idea of innate aggressivity, which is said to evolve from quasi-biological impulses.

The problem is that the narcissism trajectory is in direct contradiction with the melancholic trajectory of egoic development, which underlines another of Freud's most important hypotheses, namely, the oedipal theory of morality. On this view, what comes first is the internalization of the paternal other (from out there to in here) and, thus, the constitution of an ego (and a superego) from without. This second trajectory is based on the supposition that the individual does not evolve an ego by itself, en-

dogenously, but rather that the ego is a consequence of exogenous forces, specifically, the individual's conflictual relations with others. It is easy to see in this the roots of the object-relations approach to psychoanalysis, particularly Winnicott's, but also Klein's.

On Freud's account, the consolidation of the ego occurs in conjunction with the emergence of a superego, and it is explained as the outcome of the notorious Oedipus crisis, when the child (most notably the male child) identifies with a father or father figure. If all goes well, the resolution of the crisis results in a modification of the subject's own ego; the child internalizes both the figure of the father and the ambivalence that goes with it, along with the threat that the father represents and more general social norms and values, as a newly incorporated part of his "self." In other words, both affectionate and aggressive impulses are internalized at the level of the drive (the unconscious) as a result. Insofar as the lost or forbidden other (the ambivalently loved, same-sex parent) is internalized whole rather than being decathected (which is said to happen in normal mourning), the process is characterized as a "melancholic" one. This trajectory entails socialization all the way down, as Honneth would have it, in contrast to Whitebook. And, since Freud's theory of the superego – the very basis of a moral conscience – depends on this account, it cannot simply be jettisoned. The problem is that these two descriptions of how the ego and the unconscious are constituted are mutually exclusive; read together, they indicate an impossible splitting at the very origin of the ego, and thus an irreducibly aporetic subjective structure.

d) Allen's Klein

Amy Allen does not take a stand on one side of the dispute or the other, but she does not solve the problem of the aporia either. Her Kleinian position, it is true, goes beyond Honneth's version of object-relations because, unlike him, Allen understands the importance and primacy of the drives. At the same time, she also rejects what she calls Freud's speculative biology. By that Allen means that the drives should not be

understood as metaphysical forces ("Life" and "Death," as per Freud and Whitebook). Instead she proposes a compromise position, whereby we are unconsciously driven by impulses that are rooted in our biological instincts, but which take their specific character and form as a result of object relations.

This Kleinian view, put schematically, holds that unconscious fantasies and drives do develop from (or lean on) innate instincts, as per Whitebook's account; as the psychic representatives of primary, instinctual urges, they are said to originate endogenously.[69] At the same time, however, Allen argues that for Klein the drives are not strictly biological because they evolve as "relational passions," so there is an exogenous factor as well.[70] Furthermore, unlike a classical developmental model, whereby the ego (reason) is ultimately supposed to overcome the id (the irrational) as one matures (which translates the Enlightenment ideal of full, rational, self-transparency and autonomy into a developmental trajectory), Klein describes two possible ego positions that remain in continual tension. On one hand, there is the "paranoid-schizoid" position, which is associated with a lack of ego integration, and which is characterized by fear, anxiety, and rigid, binary thinking (famously represented by Klein's good breast/bad breast metaphor, which the infant supposedly splits in its fantasy).[71] And then, on the other hand, there is the "depressive" position, which is associated with a more mature capacity to tolerate ambiguity, and which entails the task of mourning and the desire for a reconciliation that never comes. Thus, on Allen's view, the drives are neither metaphysical forces nor ideals, but "constitutive ten-

69 See Susan Isaacs, "The Nature and Function of Phantasy," *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 19, no. 6 (1948): 81.

70 Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 34ff.

71 Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 16. Allen explains that Melanie Klein's chief departure from classical Freudianism is her "positional model of the psyche, which emerges in her late metapsychology. This model distinguishes between the paranoid-schizoid and depressive positions, where these are understood not as stages of development but as configurations of object relations or ways of organizing psychic experience."

dencies to relate to others in certain ways, modes of sociality itself rather than innate antisocial tendencies."[72] In this sense, her position is closer to Honneth's belief that the drives are exogenously constituted than it is to Whitebook's strictly endogenous view of a biological origin.[73] Social formation is said to go at least some, but not all, of the way down.[74]

This is a more historicized, less reductionist version of unconscious forces, and, indeed, a less idealized one as well, to be sure. But it does not move much beyond the issues that are flagged above. First, the problem that attends Honneth's version of intersubjectivity attends Allen's approach as well: there is virtually no consideration of the parental "object" as a fully fledged subject. As Noëlle McAfee says, "the mother may hold the infant, but she too has been held – or not – and shaped by the larger environs," and this suggests that the larger context must be thematized directly.[75] Absent this thematization, Kleinian object-relations theory does not advance much beyond the philosophy of the subject, Allen's references to intersubjectivity notwithstanding.

Second, Allen appears to be taking the concrete individual as the point of departure too. This is evidenced, for example, when she suggests that Klein can teach us "how to practice democracy in a more depressive mode."[76] If Adorno is right that "fascism as such is *not* a psychological issue" but rather the practice of exploiting and manipulating psychologi-

72 Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 65.

73 Whitebook, "Misuse of Winnicott," 53.

74 Jean Laplanche argues that for Melanie Klein "fantasy and drive are tightly bound together, and are ultimately endogenous (as she has often been criticized for thinking) not only in their force but also in their modalities of manifestation. What one finds here . . . is a biological idealism for which lived experience is only ever a point of attachment and anchorage. The objection is a decisive one, and it applies to any psychoanalytic theory that aims to contrast a biological or somatopsychical organism with an environment that is taken, in its very essence, to be nonpsychical." Laplanche, "The Drive and its Source-Object: Its Fate in the Transference," trans. Leslie Hill, in *Essays on Otherness*, ed. John Fletcher (Routledge, 1999), 12425. Allen's approach appears to be vulnerable to the same objection.

75 McAfee, *Fear of Breakdown*, 56.

76 Allen, *Critique on the Couch*, 195.

cal propensities "for entirely non-psychological reasons," however, then individual choices to modify individual practices, no matter how many of us are inclined to make them, are not going to solve the problem of the increasing appeal of authoritarian politics.[77] Insofar as Allen's account turns exclusively on what happens at the concrete level of interpersonal relations, it too is insufficient as a critical theoretical approach, because it too overlooks systemic forces of domination. Such forces have to be *analyzed*, precisely because they cannot be seen.

Finally, Allen formulates what one might call "a third way" between Honneth's Lockean depiction of individuals as cooperative and largely socially constituted, and Whitebook's Hobbesian depiction of human beings as innately aggressive, self-interested, and strategic. It is a rapprochement, but it is not the dialectical psychology that appears to be needed. To put it baldly, to say that the drives are both socially constituted *and* rooted in biology, or that individuals are both cooperative *and* anti-social, is not to displace the structure-agency, inside-outside dualisms behind the debate. It is merely to work with and between them.

4. Laplanche and Dialectics

A dialectical psychology, in contrast, which Adorno called for but did not ultimately develop, would analyze the concepts of the "individual" and "society" both *critically*, which is to say, as parts of a dynamic, social, totality-in-process.[78] If, for example, need is not merely an interpersonal but a *societal* category, if what is natural never appears in an unmediated way, and if the structure of individual drives themselves change along with changes to the "relations of dominance and exploitation," as Dahmer puts it, then a subject-centred, individualist, dualistic theory will not do.[79] Instead of a positive determination of what the subject is, what is required on Adorno's account is a psychoanalytic theory that exposes the subject to its social constitution, effectively undoing the in-

77 Adorno, "Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda," 130.

78 Adorno, "Society," 145.

79 Dahmer, "Adorno's View of Psychoanalysis," 12.

side-outside dichotomy, and thereby deconstructing the very terms, the conceptual categories, of the theoretical analysis. This would be a *negatively* dialectical psychology, not a positively dialectical one, whereby the critique of the psychoanalytic categories becomes the critique of society.

My submission is that Jean Laplanche's reconstruction of Freudian psychoanalysis, unlike the version of Freud with which Adorno was working, does constitute such a theory. With respect to the need to account for the societal determinations of consciousness and, thus, to explain (for example) the unconscious, self-destructive appeal of authoritarianism, Laplanche's theory is significantly more robust. It is an intersubjective model rather than a subject-centered one; it is (negatively) dialectical rather than dualistic, and it points toward abstract societal forces rather than remaining at the concrete level of interpersonal, individual relations.

First of all, Laplanche's approach is much more genuinely intersubjective, unlike the subject-centeredness that characterizes both versions of object-relations theory, Winnicott's and Klein's, and unlike the classical Freudian approach adopted by Whitebook.[80] For, Laplanche's theory hinges not only on the fact that infants are born in a state of dependency, but on the fact that the adult caretaker on whom the infant depends (the so-called object in object-relations) is already a subject in their own right. If this is less than a fully intersubjective relation, it is precisely because the infant's subjectivity is not yet developed; the subjectivity of the adult other (rather than the child) is on this view a crucial factor in infantile development.[81]

Specifically, Laplanche postulates that infants are born into a "fundamental anthropological situation" – namely, the situation that they are

80 Laplanche's theory could also be shown to differ in this respect from the arguably transhistorical, structuralist theory proffered by Lacan. However, an engagement with Lacan is beyond the scope of the present analysis.

81 Indeed, this why Laplanche himself would reject the term "intersubjectivity"; it suggests an egalitarian relationship whereas, according to Laplanche, the infant is orbiting around the adult subject, not interacting with them as an equal participant.

not able to survive without adult care and so are in relation from the start.[82] This is a point with which the object-relations theorists all agree. However, unlike for the object-relationists, there really are two protagonists in this scenario rather than one. One is the newborn infant, which Laplanche describes as a "bio-psychical," communicative individual that is aware of the world and supplied with some rudimentary, self-preservative instincts. Helpless and speechless as it is, however, the infant can only communicate by crying, kicking, or shouting, for example, which its parent learns to recognize as calls for help.

The other protagonist is the caretaking adult who provides for the child's physiological and psychological preservation by feeding and cleaning and fondling it.[83] In so doing, the adult transmits or conveys (both verbally and in a tactile way) messages that are laden with unconscious, sexual meanings. These messages are unconscious for the adult caretaker him or herself. They are conveyed in "gestures, comportments, expressions, and so on," Laplanche says, and are thus the "noise" and "excess" of the conscious attachment that the adult communicates at the same time.[84] They are literally implanted on the infant's skin. Laplanche calls this the scene of "primal seduction," because what is at stake are the adult's unconscious sexual fantasies, which are reactivated when caring for a child in the primal situation, and which "break in," as it were, traumatically, seducing, or perverting, or leading the self-preservative instincts astray. The messages are "seductive" insofar as they are experienced by infants as an excess excitation (as libidinal energy) that is disturbing and incomprehensible (enigmatic), and which thus impels a response.

82 Jean Laplanche, "The Other Within: Rethinking Psychoanalysis," interview by John Fletcher and Peter Osborne, *Radical Philosophy* 102, July/Aug (2000), 36; Gaon, *The Lucid Vigil*, 235.

83 John Fletcher, "Gender, Sexuality and the Theory of Seduction," *Women: A Cultural Review* 11, no. 1/2 (2000), 102.

84 Jean Laplanche, *Jean Laplanche: Seduction, Translation and the Drives: A Dossier*, ed. John Fletcher and Martin Stanton, trans. Martin Stanton (Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1992), 57.

On this view, the (so-called) "natural" instincts of self-preservation do not simply (or magically) become drives by themselves, as Freud and a number of his contemporary followers, including Whitebook and Allen, appear to postulate. Rather, our self-preservative instincts (*Instinkte*) – of which human beings have very few – *become* psychological drives (*Triebe*) immediately as the infant's consciousness is colonized by the enigmatic noise that comes from without, in the process through which the infant attempts to interpret or, as Laplanche says, to "translate" them.[85] Specifically, Laplanche argues that the small self-theorizing, self-interpreting human being starts as a Copernican: not fused or wholly merged with the other, but not a monadic entity, either. The infant starts by circulating around the other's message (the sun), but it has to internalize the message in order to quiet the excessive excitation, to regain its equilibrium. And so, Laplanche writes "he Ptolemizes himself"; "he builds an inside [an ego] in order to internalize."[86]

Notably, two moments thus constitute the infant's developmental trajectory: the initial implantation of enigmatic (sexually loaded) messages on the part of the adult, and the attempt to decode and symbolize them (to "translate" them) on the part of the infantile child. But because the infant's resources are so few, it will draw on whichever social codes are at hand. These include myths and social fantasies – such as the gender-laden oedipal and castration codes, racially imbued ideals of personhood, the syntax and binary logic of language, and also, not least of all, the norms, assumptions, and conceptual categories that express existing structures of production and distribution, that is, the common sense of capitalist social relations, which is culturally pervasive.

85 Laplanche's key concept of "translation" is discussed in a number of places. See, for example, "A Short Treatise on the Unconscious," trans. Luke Thurston, in *Essays on Otherness*, esp., 95-100 and "Interpretation Between Determinism and Hermeneutics: A Restatement of the Problem," trans. Philip Slotkin, in *Essays on Otherness*, esp., 157-67.

86 Jean Laplanche, "An Interview with Jean Laplanche," interview by Cathy Caruth, *Postmodern Culture* 11, no. 2 (2001), section 1 "Trauma and Time," https://www.pomoculture.org/2013/09/19/an-interview-with-jean-laplanche/.

This, I submit, is precisely when and how a variety of social modalities of oppression are incorporated psychologically, intersecting through the very process by which egoic subjectivity is constituted. The infant is not selective; it simply pulls from the ether of the "socialization milieu" any decoding devices that are at hand to help. And of course, what is at hand is the particular set of social relations and their ideational representatives that obtain within the given social, political, historical context. Most importantly, this second moment of translation retroactively revivifies, reinterprets, and simultaneously represses the first, which means that the origin of the process itself is not recoverable.

Laplanche characterizes the temporality of this process in terms of the German concept of *Nachtraglichkeit*, which he translates as "afterwardsness" or *après-coup*.[87] It is a concept he associates with Freud's thinking about trauma. Just as in Freud's explanation of sexual trauma, the cause cannot be located either in the first moment or in the second one. Trauma is, rather, the retroactive effect of a later interpretation of an event that was initially incomprehensible, just as the trace (or *différance*) is, for Derrida, the retroactive effect of the linguistic determination of differences. It is what can be postulated as a cause only after the effect. By the same token, the unconscious, which constitutes the so-called primary process, only *becomes* primary after the fact; it is the retroactive effect of the infant's incomplete, partial interpretations of the original, enigmatic messages implanted by the other subject. The contents of the unconscious, accordingly, are the untranslated, fragmentary residues, the waste products, of the infant's attempts to translate. For the infantile subject, however – for each of us – this primal residue will, *afterwards*, have come first.

In the second place, therefore, the most intriguing thing about this theory is that it is not only intersubjective; it is also genuinely dialectical. What I have referred to as the aporia of consciousness, which Freud stumbled upon and which gave rise to the ongoing debate about whether

87 For an explanation of this term, see John Fletcher, introduction to *Essays on Otherness*, 5, and Laplanche, "Notes on Afterwardsness," in *Essays on Otherness*, 267.

irrational aggressivity is rooted in egoic structures or in the social milieu (Horkheimer vs. Fromm, Whitebook vs. Honneth), is, in Laplanche's theory, *aufgehoben* or dialectically sublated. Social existence on Laplanche's view does determine consciousness, as Adorno insists, insofar as drives are socially mediated needs, but the primary elements of the subject's unconscious are also the direct source of the drives. As Laplanche says, one must hold to a set of apparently contradictory claims: "the relation to the world comes first" and yet the "internal world comes first."[88] More precisely, the internal world *will* have come first, but only *after* prevailing norms, ideas, codes, and even such political-economic concepts as self-interest, utility, autonomy, and individualism have been internalized as aids to translation. Significantly, moreover, the logic of Laplanche's analysis displaces the structure-agency debate. The question of the chicken or the egg, the first and the second, are from this point of view conceivable as *co*-constitutive, and thus as established at the same time. But one requires a Derridean understanding of *différance*, or a Laplanchean understanding of *Nachträglichkeit*, to make sense of this paradox.

Thus, in the third place, Laplanche's theory makes it possible to move beyond the individualist, interpersonal perspective found in a variety of contemporary critical-theoretical approaches to psychoanalysis. It allows us to begin to grasp analytically how abstract social forces, which operate systemically, can infiltrate, invade, and come to constitute individual consciousness on a concrete level; it allows us to see, in other words, precisely how what Honneth calls the "socialization milieu" shapes subjectivity at the level of the drive. And this, I believe, is what Adorno was going for all along; it is the explanation he was likely looking for in Freud, but was ultimately unable to find.

Conclusion

Where the critical promise of psychoanalysis lies, therefore, is not in its use value or in its utility as a model for psychological healing, an ideal

88 Jean Laplanche, "A Metapsychology Put to the Test of Anxiety," trans. Philip Slotkin, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 62, no. 1 (1981), 84.

of psychic integration (the healthy personality), or a normative resource for critique. The promise of psychoanalytic theory – of Laplanche's at any rate – is, rather, that it can explain subjectivity in a dynamic way, thereby accounting for the subject's social constitution without reducing to social determinism. Consciousness cannot be grounded either on a psychological substrate, or (strictly) on a given set of social relations (of production, of gender, of race, or any other such set), or on a combination of these. To put it simply, the relation between consciousness and politics is dynamic, rather than fixed; neither of these categories is standing still.

Accordingly, the promise of a psychoanalytic critique of the subject lies with its capacity to reveal the social and political conditions of possibility of contemporary forms of consciousness – that is, its critical role is to deconstruct the very categories (subject, drive, ego, unconscious, etc.) that constitute the theoretical system, not to offer a new and improved ground or a model of mental integration. Specifically, a critical theory that is informed by a Laplanchean approach to psychoanalysis can reveal what is covered over by the conceptual categories that are taken as given, thereby exposing the interests and forces behind them. This is how negative dialectics or deconstruction can be mobilized for critique. Such an analysis will not tell us what is good, what to do, or how to do it. It will merely reveal the targets of a critical-political intervention, thus pinpointing where political action can start.

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The Horkheimer Circle in America: Authority, Personality and the Transfer of Knowledge

Eszter Pál[1]

Abstract: The article discusses the complex intellectual relationship and mutual influences between exiled Frankfurt scholars and their American hosts between 1934 and 1949. The US presence of leading figures of critical theory represents an early point of interaction between American and European social science. Critical theory was deeply embedded in European traditions and at this stage largely alien to American social scientific discourse. Consequently, the American reception and integration of the Frankfurt School during the fifteen years of Horkheimer's stay progressed in a complicated context of personal, institutional and intellectual affinity and aversion. It is an interesting case in the history of science where several factors that generally influence processes of knowledge transfer are involved. The article first discusses the contextual elements – the field of American social science in the 1930s – pertinent to the interpretation, and then moves on to analyse texts on authority and prejudice by Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno written during these years and directed at an American audience. The article presents an approach to the circulation of knowledge as a discursive shift that can be traced and interpreted by discourse analytical methods.

Scientific discourse and scholars in exile

The history of the Frankfurt School has been discussed by many articles and a few monographs since the 1970s. Some of these works focus partly [2] or

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2 Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923 – 1950*, (The University of California Press,1973); Martin Jay, 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School: Critical theory's Analysis of Anti-Semitism', (*New German Critique*, 19(1), Special Issue 1: Germans and Jews, 1980, 137-149.); Jack Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School, Jewish Lives, and Antisemitism*, (Cambridge U. P., 2015); Stuart Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss. The Lives of the Frankfurt School*, (Verso 2016); Anson Rabinbach, 'The Frankfurt School and the "Jewish Question," 1940-1970', In, *Staging the Third Reich*, (Routledge, 2020), 335-356.; Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School. Its*

mainly[3] on the 15-year period from 1934 to 1949 that Max Horkheimer, the director of the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research, spent in the United States. These 15 years were marked by the publication of several of the most important contributions Horkheimer and his circle made to the history of social theory. Not surprisingly, many of the historical studies focus on these works, their origins and reception. Others make it their central question to trace the personal and institutional setting Horkheimer and his colleagues found themselves in, discussing the personal relationships, friendships and conflicts that influenced the extent of the German social scientists' integration into American academic life. Relying on these important works, the present article approaches the same period from a different angle: it is primarily treated as an exceptional case of knowledge transfer; one where we can study many different factors that influence the circulation of scientific knowledge at play.

The exile years of the Horkheimer Circle represent a special episode in the history of scientific influences: Horkheimer and his colleagues were forced to relocate to a country that would not have been their first choice even as refugee academics. They were supposed to integrate into an academic sphere and social scientific discourse that was dominated by markedly different approaches from their own. As will be discussed below, not only did they feel strangers and assumed to have to face a downright hostile attitude to their true theoretical and ideological convictions there, but also considered their stay temporary. Consequently, this situation evoked a strong reluctance on especially Horkheimer's and Adorno's part, and instead of doing their best to integrate into the new setting, they tried to keep their independence as much and for as long as possible. This strategy, however, was not viable for 15 years, and even-

History, Theories, and Political Significance, translated by. M. Robertson, (The MIT Press 1995).

3 Ehrhard Bahr, 'The Anti-Semitism Studies of the Frankfurt School: The Failure of Critical Theory', (*German Studies Review*, 1978, 1(2): 125-138.); James Schmidt, 'The Eclipse of Reason and the End of the Frankfurt School in America', (*New German Critique* 2007, 100: 47-76.); Thomas Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*, (The University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

tually, their exile years produced important contacts, research cooperations, and some of their most significant written works.

The present article analyses the textual manifestations of the influences between the Frankfurt scholars and their American colleagues during these years. Circulation of academic knowledge can be approached and studied through objects, practices, different indices, among other things[4]. Most of scientific communication, however, has always been, and, at least in the case of communication within the scientific field, still is, carried out through the medium of written texts. This is especially true in the case of humanities. Analysing written works, in many cases, is the best way to understand and trace the transfer and transformation of ideas. Published scientific texts, however, create only the most salient part of textual corpora. These works are meant to "condense epistemic knowledge in order to circulate it"[5]. A lot of other, unpublished, texts mark the process of constructing and circulating knowledge and help interpret the "condensed knowledge" that is made available for a public audience. Sometimes, as in the present case, different types of texts are crucial in studying these processes. The question of knowledge transfer during the American years of Adorno and Horkheimer can only be approached through a careful selection and reading of different texts. In this case, it is not only a matter of clarification or additional contextual information of the published works. During their exile years, Horkheimer and Adorno followed conscious strategies to balance their academic life between their desire of full autonomy and an expectation to integrate, which resulted in stark differences between German and English, published and unpublished, academic and personal texts written in this period. In order to interpret and evaluate their English-language publications as productions of academic exchange and knowledge transfer, we need to look at other types of texts too.

4 Wiebke Keim and Leandro Rodriguez Medina (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Academic Knowledge Circulation* (Routledge, 2023)

5 Larissa Schindler and Hilmar Schäfer, 'Writing: On the Entanglements of Producing and Circulating Academic Knowledge', in Keim and Rodriguez Medina (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Academic Knowledge Circulation*, 31.

The primary analysis focuses on specific writings selected on the basis of the following criteria: 1) the texts were written in English originally, i.e. they addressed an American audience at the time of their conception, 2) the texts were written by Horkheimer or Adorno, who were not only the two leading figures of the Frankfurt School but also the ones whose resistance towards American influences was the strongest, and 3) the texts discuss issues related to authority and prejudice. Their writings on authority and prejudice create links to the American discourse not only in the sense that these studies were started while still in Europe and continued in the US, but also as works that raise and analyse issues that were important for both these European scholars and their American colleagues. This wider area of interest created a bridge between these two discourses at a time when they were still highly divergent. Sharing this field of interest was one of the factors that facilitated a lasting contribution and mutual influence between American academic discourse and Frankfurt scholars, who were arguably the most reluctant to such exchanges of all European theorists arriving in the US during these troubled times.

Even though Horkheimer and Adorno authored other, very important works in German during their US years (most notably, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*), the analysis will hence be restricted to the ones originally written in English, seriously limiting the scope of the discussion. The purpose of the analysis to follow is not, by any means, to provide an overall view or evaluation of the scientific output of the Frankfurt scholars while in the US; neither will it give a general picture of the American reception of critical theory. This study treats the Horkheimer Circle's American exile as an exceptional case of scientific migration and knowledge transfer, where many different factors were at play at the same time. The focus will be on the points of contact during these years while the question of long-term influences and reception will remain largely unaddressed.

The first part of the article will describe the most important characteristics of the American social scientific, or more precisely, academic field that hosted Horkheimer from 1934. Although the situation in the

21st century is more complex, it can still be argued that the university is the main institution of the circulation of academic knowledge[6]. This was undoubtedly the case in American social science before WW 2. The main structural lines within the academic and social scientific field were drawn by universities, with their rivalry as the dominant forces of structuration. The Frankfurt scholars' academic position and, in turn, their chosen subjects of study, the contents and the form of their publication, were all largely determined by the local university context – academic field – they were accepted in. A short discussion of this field is therefore necessary for the following analysis. Set in this context, the analysis of the works on authority and prejudice will reveal different factors that influenced the conception of these texts. Relying on secondary literature and primary sources[7], I will interpret the changes and conceptual shifts in the discourse as traces of a multidirectional knowledge transfer.

American Sociology, 1892-1933

After the Civil War, a reform in higher education radically transformed the American university sphere. Expansion, secularization and other factors made a fast institutionalization of American sociology possible[8]. Sociology in post-Civil War America became a very successful discipline that, largely due to the progressive movement of which sociology was

6 Laurent Afresne, 'Studying the Circulation of Academic Knowledge as Reception', in Keim and Rodriguez Medina (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Academic Knowledge Circulation*, 44.

7 Secondary sources include, besides the most relevant articles and books on the history of the Frankfurt School, correspondence between the important actors. As will be clear, strategic considerations often influenced the form published texts by Adorno and Horkheimer took during these years. Correspondence gives us an insight into these considerations and thus helps in understanding the primary sources, i.e. the selected scholarly texts.

8 Richard Hofstadter, 'The Revolution in Higher Education', in Schlesinger and White (eds), *Paths of American Thought*. (Houghton Mifflin Company 1963); Anthony Oberschall, 'The Institutionalization of American Sociology', in A. Oberschall (ed), *The Establishment of Empirical Sociology*, (Harper and Row, 1972); Craig Calhoun, 'Sociology in America: An Introduction' In, Calhoun, (ed), *Sociology in America. A History*, (The University of Chicago Press 2007), 1-38.

considered an integral part, established its own institutions – among others, the world's first sociology department in 1892 – and legitimized its position within academia faster and more smoothly than in most European countries. With regards to the process of institutionalization, only French sociology was comparably successful during these early decades.

Early American sociological discourse developed fairly independently from European theories. The mainstream, mostly represented by the Chicago and Columbia departments, the two major institutional players in the sociological field, was influenced by evolutionary theories – both in the form of European authors and local American ones – during the earliest decades. Other than that, the only remarkable European influence was exerted by Georg Simmel, who was personally acquainted with Albion Small and Robert E. Park – the first two chairs of the Chicago sociology department, and, primarily through his writings on city life[9] and the social position of the stranger[10], he shaped Chicago sociology from the early years of the 20th century[11].

At the outset, American sociological thinking was embedded in a wider meliorist discourse, focusing on a general improvement of social circumstances as the consequences of rapid industrialisation and unregulated market capitalism became apparent[12]. The heterogeneity of the field was reflected in the programme of the first official social scientific body, the American Social Science Association, which, among its objects, declared the improvement of public morals, repression of crime, targeting issues of public health, pauperism – and so forth, in short, solving a wide

9 Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', In Kurt Wolff, (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, (Free Press, 1950 [1903]) 409-424.

10 Georg Simmel, 'The Sociological Significance of the 'Stranger'', In R. E. Park and W. E. Burgess (eds), *Introduction to the Science of Sociology*, (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1921 [1908]).

11 Donald N. Levine, Ellwood B. Carter and Eleanor Miller Gorman, 'Simmel's Influence on American Sociology I.' *American Journal of Sociology* 1976, (81): 4, 813–845.

12 The following short overview is based on my longer discussion of early American sociology: Eszter Pál, 'Vallás, reform és tudomány. Az amerikai szociológia kezdetei', *Szociológiai Szemle*, 2009, 19(3), 3-25.

range of social problems that emerged in the wake of capitalization[13]. After decades of professionalization, having turned into a respected academic science, the focus of American sociology was still unchanged: the study of all manner of social problems. Between 1865 and 1920, "sociology" in America turned, from a general term that had referred to a wide scale of different reform programmes and theories, into the name of a specific area that now had an equal status in the ranks of disciplines. "Sociologists", in turn, became, from a group of religious reformers and social activists, a smaller, well-defined group of academics[14]. However, by the 1910s and '20s, sociology as a science, as Robert E. Park so unambiguously put it in his guiding instructions to his students, was not to concern itself with the practical solutions of problems: a sociologist should refuse to act like a crusader and instead do the job of a detached, objective scientist[15].

Hence, sociology took its place as one of the university disciplines by the turn of the century. The emphasis then shifted from attempts at defining sociology itself to developing concrete research programmes, and linked to these, to methodological questions. Because of its broad thematic, methodological and institutional scale, "American sociology" as a general phenomenon is difficult to discuss. As Charles Camic points out[16], the given university context cannot be ignored in discussions of American sociology, as the institutional position of sociology within early 20th century American universities varied greatly, and the particu-

13 The Constitution of the *American Association for the Promotion of Social Science*, 1865

14 Michael S. Evans, 'Defining the Public, Defining Sociology: Hybrid Science – Public Relations and Boundary-work in Early American Sociology', *Public Understanding of Science*, 2009, 18: 5-22.; Susan E. Henking, 'Sociological Christianity and Christian Sociology: The Paradox of Early American Sociology', *Religion and American Culture*, 1993, Vol. 3., No. 1: 49-67.

15 Ernest W. Burgess, 'Social Planning and Race Relations', In J. Masuoka and P. Valien (eds), *Race Relations. Problems and Theory. Essays in Honor of Robert E. Park*, (The University of North Carolina Press, 1961) 17.

16 Charles Camic, 'Three Departments in Search of a Discipline: Localism and Interdisciplinary Interaction in American Sociology, 1890-1940', *Social Research*, 1995, Vol. 62. No. 4: 1003-1033.

lar context had a big impact on the views of leading sociologists about the subject matter and methodology of sociology alike. These theoretical programmes are in fact difficult to interpret without understanding the context of interdisciplinary struggles at the universities. The structure and dynamics of the pre-WW2 American sociological field was determined in combination by the wider academic field that contained hundreds of universities, and the relative positions and rivalry of the major sociological departments at less than a dozen of these universities.

Practical orientation and a strive for scientific objectivity advocated by Park were not the Chicago School's exclusive characteristics. Although on a very different methodological footing, its main rival, the sociology department of Columbia also represented a problem-oriented and objective approach, which was the dominant stream within American social discourse when Horkheimer arrived.

Columbia Sociology in the 1930s

By the time the Great Depression hit American society, the field of higher education, and within it, sociology, had grown into a multi-faceted professional sphere with a variety of important centres. The economic crisis contributed to a further restructuring of the field, and as a result, Chicago was no longer the single most important institutional actor, albeit it has maintained its position amongst the leading departments. Recognizing this power structure and building on personal contacts also, after the Nazi take-over in 1933, Horkheimer's Institute for Social Research sent out mailing about their achievements to the most important university departments[17], and finally settled on Columbia to accept offers of help in relocating. In retrospect, it is clear that Horkheimer's decision to act early proved decisive: not only did they arrive and received help when still relatively few refugees fleeing the Nazis sought refuge, but they could also benefit from a somewhat left-leaning political atmosphere during the years of the New Deal – an important aspect for the critical theorists who were extremely circumspect even in this period not to appear too rad-

17 Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

ical (Marxist) for their American hosts, as will be discussed later. Nevertheless, even during these years, support and affiliation for European refugee scholars were offered on the basis of mutual benefits, and when being contacted, leading sociologists at Columbia saw this as much as a chance to solve their own problems as those of the European scholars'.

The Department of Sociology at Columbia was established in 1894 by Franklin Giddings, who successfully turned it into one of the most significant centres for sociological training and knowledge production in the US, second only to Chicago[18]. Giddings was a positivist, one of the first to incorporate the analysis of statistical data into social theorizing. His department represented a strong lenience towards quantitative methods, in contrast to the rival Chicago School, famously heralding qualitative research techniques. This was not primarily due to an aspiration to develop a characteristic feature to differentiate from Chicago, even though rivalry was strong, but because this methodology was perfect in the local context of Columbia for the new social sciences as an aid in their legitimation and demarcation strategies. Camic and Xie point out[19], that statistical methods were originally taken up by American social sciences – first at Columbia – because they offered an effective solution for the "newcomer's dilemma". Statistical methods were, beyond question, considered scientific, and in this sense, they met the demand of scientific conformity, but at the same time these methods – in accordance with the different European statistical traditions – were suitable to show the distinctiveness of each new social science. Thus, the economics, anthropology, sociology and psychology of the turn of the century Columbia embraced different types of statistical methods and, within their own territory, they all gave them prominent roles[20].

18 George Steinmetz, 'American Sociology Before and After World War II: The (Temporary) Settling of a Disciplinary Field', In, C. Calhoun, (ed), *Sociology in America. A History*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2007) 314-366.

19 Charles M. Camic and Yu Xie, The Statistical Turn in American Social Science: Columbia University, 1890 to 1915. *American Sociological Review*, 1994, Vol. 59., No. 5., 773-805.

20 Camic and Xie, 'The Statistical Turn', 785.

Columbia maintained its characteristic quantitative approach, but by the 1920s, it became more challenging to distinguish itself on this basis[21], as making "objective science" was by then an emphatic aspiration for the whole of mainstream American sociology, after leaving behind the heavy baggage inherited from the progressive movement and having demarcated itself from social work and other "too practical" or "amateurish" approaches.

In 1928, a critical moment for the survival of the department, a new chair took over. As historians remark, Robert MacIver was perhaps not an obvious choice in this context: he was more of a theorist, an anti-positivist, interested in political theory and familiar with the European sociological tradition, and less focused on the study of social problems[22]. Despite his personal interests, as a chair he decided to continue and even strengthen the tradition Columbia established. He emphasized the importance of empirical study and quantitative methods and attempted to establish a social research bureau. The timing was not very fortunate, however, as the depression directly hit academia and sociology departments, and funding became rather scarce. In 1931, attempting again to strengthen empirics at Columbia, MacIver appointed Robert Lynd to the department in the hope that, as the author of the famous *Middletown* study[23], Lynd would be able and inclined to catalyse empirical social research by leading community studies at Columbia. Lynd, however, did not meet these expectations, and pursued other interests, which left the need for a strong empirical basis at Columbia as yet unsatisfied[24].

In short, by 1933, Columbia experienced a shortage of funds and had still not realized its goal in establishing a quantitative research centre. Within this context, as Wheatland[25] points out, the appearance of a

21 Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

22 Steinmetz, 'American Sociology'; Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

23 Robert Lynd and Margaret H. Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Contemporary American Culture.* (Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1929)

24 Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

25 ibid

self-funded research institute with an apparently strong quantitative research portfolio wanting to get affiliated with the department must have seemed to offer the almost miraculously perfect solution for this problem.

Entry to American Academia

The *Institut für Sozialforschung* was established in Frankfurt in 1923 with a grant that guaranteed its financial autonomy. Max Horkheimer became its director at the end of the decade and within this institutional framework, he started to gather a circle of philosophers and social scientists to pursue research harmonious with the approach that came to be widely known as "critical theory". Critical theory was an explicitly Marxist approach represented by scholars of mostly Jewish backgrounds[26]. Consequently, the Institute could not continue its work after the Nazis' rise to power. The Frankfurt office was closed in 1933 and the affiliated researchers were ready to leave Germany.

Horkheimer opened offices in London, Paris and Geneva, and stayed in Switzerland, but, fearing that Nazism threatened to get a hold on the whole continent, considered this only a temporary arrangement and decided to start establishing contacts and negotiating a possible relocation of the Institute as such in the United States[27]. As social theorists and intellectuals, Horkheimer and his colleagues were deeply rooted in European philosophical and cultural traditions – they were, as Adorno put it in his recollections[28], "European through and through". The American scientific and cultural milieu seemed distant and strange. The decision of moving to the US and the resulting necessity of adjusting to this new setting was accepted with a certain level of reluctance even on Horkheimer's part who made the decision himself. Horkheimer's and Adorno's aversion towards American society, culture and social science was strong at the beginning and, unlike in the case of some other Institute members,

26 Jeffries, *Grand Hotel Abyss*, Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*

27 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

28 'Scientific Experiences'

remained so during the entire period, which left its mark on the scientific work they produced during the exile years.

Even though their European roots were very deep, not all of Frankfurt scholars felt alien to American discourse. Erich Fromm and Julian Gumperz both knew English well even before moving, and, perhaps more importantly, they had direct connections with American academics. Their familiarity was utilized in the organizing and execution of a strategic plan to establish contacts and potentially an official affiliation between the Frankfurt Institute and one of the targeted American universities[29]. They wrote to the most prestigious sociology departments in the United States and their leaders, selecting those with similar interests. They sent a detailed description of their work, emphasizing their empirical research, their interests in authority, family, and social psychology. Already recognizing the ideological divide, even though they added economics and labour to this list, their Marxist orientation was not explicit in the description[30].

Although Fromm's negotiations with Chicago progressed rather well, eventually it was the Columbia department, more specifically Robert MacIver who came up with the most favourable offer. As Wheatland suggests[31], it is very likely that somebody within American academia endorsed the Horkheimer circle without which such an offer would have been unlikely. It may have been Paul Lazarsfeld, another immigrant social scientist already established and respected in the US, who was an old acquaintance from Europe. Or perhaps it was Robert Lynd himself, who may have recognized an affinity between his research and the work of the Frankfurt school. Either way, Columbia replied positively, and Horkheimer travelled to New York in 1934 to negotiate the terms personally. From the perspective of the Columbia department, the empirical research projects conducted by Horkheimer and his colleagues, and especially the material on authority and the family, were highly promising.

29 Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

30 Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

31 *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

Thus, as Columbia sought an institute for empirical social research and thought to have found it, their expectation from the Frankfurt scholars was that they primarily engage with empirical research. Given the actual inclinations of Horkheimer, this was somewhat unrealistic: "I am in the first place not a social scientist but a philosopher – and, what is worse, a philosopher of an old school of thought, not very popular in social science", wrote Horkheimer to Pollock, his closest friend and colleague beside Adorno in June 1943, recalling his first months in the US[32]. "When we became aware", he continues,

> "that a few of our American friends expected of an Institute of Social Sciences that it engage in studies on pertinent social problems, fieldwork and other empirical investigations, we tried to satisfy these demands as well as we could, but our heart was set on individual studies in the sense of Geisteswissenschaften and the philosophical analysis of culture."

The two main issues referred to here – representing an "old school of thought", i.e. Marxist theory, and favouring philosophical studies to empirical investigations – remained the most salient hindrances according to Horkheimer throughout their years in the US.

What Horkheimer originally hoped for was to keep their independence but be affiliated to one of the respected American universities, since "it does really seem that an official trademark will be unavoidable", and so, as he reported to Pollock from his first visit to New York in May 1934, he instructed their lawyer to draw up a first draft for an agreement, under which Columbia University would offer them some office space "without any obligations associated with it".[33] This must have been a misunderstanding that gave Horkheimer the impression that they could continue their work in the US without having to deal with too much interference, as if their move to New York would be nothing but a simple geographical relocation. Having their own funds supported this idea and

32 MHA, VI.33. 470. https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/horkheimer/content/pageview/6544529

33 MHA VI.31. 94. https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/horkheimer/content/pageview/8195127

they assumed financial independence would mean a general autonomy: they intended to finance their own independent studies and offer grants to other European refugee scholars. While they necessarily did engage in some activity at Columbia from the beginning, their cooperation did not exceed the level of a polite minimum. In retrospect, once their situation worsened and they had to apply for funds in the US after 1938, Horkheimer realized this isolation had been a mistake:

> "Since the time when we came into this country, […] we neglected social contacts and public appearances. We also should have taken a greater part in university activities. We should have pushed our incorporation in the teaching system of Columbia University."[34]

In the same letter he admits that this lack of engagement was to a large degree the result of his reluctance, as a philosopher, to participate in any work with a sociology and social science department. As we will see, this attitude fundamentally curtailed the influence Horkheimer's immediate circle exerted in American social science while they were – albeit only marginal but still – a part of it.

Adorno, who became Horkheimer's closest collaborator after joining him in the US in 1938, recalls a similar ambiguity and tension between the expectations of their American colleagues and their own hopes and plans. His situation was made worse by the fact that, arriving at a time when Horkheimer had to start introducing certain budgetary restraints and consequently could not offer a full payment to Adorno, he had to accept a job at Paul Lazarsfeld's Princeton Radio Project to be able to come to the US[35]. As is well known, Lazarsfeld, who was also a European immigrant, made a name for himself by advancing quantitative methods in social research. His research project on the listening and mass consumption of radio programmes was a wide-scale longitudinal empirical study within which Adorno was entrusted with the job of directing the

34 MHA, VI.33. 470. https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/horkheimer/content/pageview/6544529

35 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 236-246.

research on music consumption. Although the topic itself suited him, he could not feel more puzzled and alienated by the method he was supposed to approach it with:

> "When I was confronted with the demand to 'measure culture,' I reflected that culture might be precisely that condition that excludes a mentality capable of measuring it. In general, I resisted the indiscriminate application of the principle 'science is measurement,' which was then little criticized even in the social sciences. […] The task of translating my reflections into research terms was equivalent to squaring the circle."[36]

The differences in the understanding of the nature of scholarship was embedded in a wider intellectual divergence, on occasions perceived as a downright incompatibility, that the critical theorists, Horkheimer and Adorno more than anybody else, sensed:

> "I consider myself European through and through, considered myself as such from the first to the last day abroad, and never denied it. Not only was it natural to preserve the intellectual continuity of my life, but I quickly became fully aware of it in America."[37]

This attitude, however, was not welcome during these years:

> "'Adjustment' was still a magic word, particularly for those who came from Europe as persecuted people, of whom it was expected that they would prove themselves in the new land not to be so haughty as to insist stubbornly on remaining what they had been before.'[38]

Indeed, even though Adorno was still as sceptical about quantitative social science as ever in 1969, the theoretical and methodological foundations of their work had undergone remarkable changes during their years in the US, and perhaps rather reluctantly but they had to eventu-

36 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America', In D. Fleming and B. Bailyn (eds), *Intellectual Migration, Europe and America 1930-1960*. (Harvard University Press, 1969), 347.

37 Adorno, 'Scientific Experiences', 338.

38 op. cit. 339.

ally adjust to the academic and cultural environment surrounding them, at least to some extent. This adjustment made certain mutual influences possible, while the reluctance itself may have curtailed the range of fertile exchanges.

Studies on Authority and Prejudice

At the backbone of critical theory, there lay a line of studies started in Europe and continued and adapted to the American context. While its central concept, authority, lent the mixture of emphatically interdisciplinary empirical and theoretical discussions a seemingly high level of cohesion, the subject matter, the conceptual framework, the methodology and even the theoretical foundations underwent significant modifications from the late 1920s to the 1950s. As many authors point out[39], at the centre of this transformation one can discover a changing perception and conceptualization of antisemitism. As Martin Jay[40] remarks, a basically complete dismissal of antisemitism or any specifically Jewish problems, shared by all Institute members, persisted throughout the 1930s. Antisemitism was treated as a symptom of a general crisis of capitalism that could be satisfactorily accounted for within a purely Marxist framework, as exemplified by Horkheimer's *Die Juden und Europa*, published (only) in German in 1939. Consequently, no special attention was given to the question of antisemitism in their monumental *Studien über Autorität und Familie* (*Studies on Authority and the Family*)[41], published in German with short abstracts and summaries in English in 1936.

Authority and the Family in German and English

Studien deserves our special attention for several reasons. First of all, since this compilation of general theoretical studies and research papers

39 Bahr, 'The Anti-Semitism Studies of the Frankfurt School'; Jay, 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School'; Rabinbach, 'The Frankfurt School and the "Jewish Question"'; Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*

40 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School'

41 Max Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie.* (zu Klampen, 1987[1936])

on a variety of specific issues was written and published in German but short abstracts and a few longer summaries in English were appended to the most important chapters, it is possible to conduct a close comparative text analysis between the original German works and their English summaries, also written by the Frankfurt scholars themselves. Second, the book was the first publication at least partly targeted at an American audience, and the research it was based on represented a major asset in the Institute's portfolio when they approached American universities in 1933. In short, it was meant to serve as a bridge between the European thinkers and their American colleagues, and even perhaps as some kind of evidence of a social science study that could fit in an American frame of reference too.

It certainly must have been a primary goal to demonstrate at least a minimum level of compatibility with American social scientific discourse when the "New York branch" of the Institute translated extracts from the manuscript of almost one thousand pages. The monumental work itself is clearly unfinished and represents only a selection of the results of a vast project and thus, even the final book gives the impression of an unedited or loosely edited manuscript. As the preface states, it is a report about the work of the Institute of Social Research that is of an essentially "programmatic" character: "It aims primarily at delineating the territory which the sociological department of the Institute plans to study in the course of the next few years."[42].

The book is divided into three major parts. The first, theoretical, part, consisting of three essays by Max Horkheimer, Erich Fromm and Herbert Marcuse, is the most pertinent for the present article, and will therefore be discussed in detail below. The second part is a report on the empirical work of the Institute conducted in Europe. The introduction emphasizes the preliminary character of this work, cites the difficulties that the researchers had to face while trying to collect data in these troubled times in Europe. The results, consequently, cannot be generalized, as the text warns, and yet, the researchers felt it worth presenting a re-

42 Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie,* 899.

port, since it might offer "certain suggestions, especially in regard to the method of such investigations"[43]. Apparently, by this stage, Horkheimer and his colleagues have recognized the significance of research methodology as a point of connection to American social science: "The branch office in New York will, in the future, try to apply the American methods of empirical work"[44]. The third part contains different studies, and, admittedly, has been "hampered more than the others by lack of space", which meant that, even in the original German version, shortening and abstracting some of these studies was inevitable[45].

Two reviews appeared soon after the original publication of this work: one in the US by Hans Speier, another immigrant scholar from Europe, working at the New School[46], and another one in Britain by Thomas H. Marshall[47]. Speier was one of those German refugee scholars who succeeded in integrating in American academia very quickly and very thoroughly. Horkheimer always suspected him of nurturing a hostile attitude against the Frankfurt Institute theorists, and Speier did indeed write a rather unfavourable review of their book. Although it acknowledges some partial achievements, the review states that, in general, the contributors of the book largely overrated the validity of their "dogmatic assumptions"[48]. As opposed to Speier, Marshall may have been approached by the Frankfurt scholars themselves to commission a review, although there is no clear evidence of that. At the time, Adorno was still in Oxford, and the Institute maintained an office in London, where Horkheimer just paid a visit in 1936. In his overall far more positive review, what Marshall praises more than anything else is the methodologically innovative – although not at all flawless – research: "on the efficient

43 op. cit., 901

44 ibid.

45 ibid

46 Hans Speier, 'Review of *Studien über Autorität und Familie*', *Social Research*, 1936, 3(4): 501-504.

47 'Authority and the Family', *Sociological Review*, 1937, 29(1): 1-19.

48 Speier, 'Review'

development of methods of this kind depends the future progress of sociology as a science"[49].

Apart from these mixed reviews, the English language reception of *Studien* was very limited during the years after its publication. The three theoretical chapters, written by Horkheimer, Fromm and Marcuse, respectively, were published in English in different edited compilations of the works by these authors decades later[50]. These editions contain precise and full translations of the original German essays included in the 1936 edition. The brief English language summaries appended to the 1936 volume are not only much shorter than the original texts but also reflect some deliberate terminological changes. A comparative textual analysis of the two versions – the brief summaries and the full texts – is thus rather informative of the Frankfurt scholars' discursive strategies during their first years in the United States.

Since the present article primarily focuses on Horkheimer's and Adorno's writings, and since both Fromm and Marcuse found themselves outside the Horkheimer Circle by either leaving the Institute (Fromm) or loosening his ties with it (Marcuse) after 1941, I will limit the comparative reading to Horkheimer's chapter, "Part I. The Problem and its Setting"[51] and will use its later complete English edition[52] to stand for the full version.

The chapter, originally over 70 pages long, was shortened to a mere 5-page summary. Consequently, most of Horkheimer's discussion was omitted. Some of the omissions seem relevant, but the clearly important feature of this short text is signified by the terminological changes that no doubt are the results of a conscious deliberation. Rather conspicuously,

49 Marshall, 'Authority and the Family', 19.

50 Max Horkheimer 'Authority and the Family'. In, M. Horkheimer, *Critical Theory. Selected Essays.* transl. M. J. O'Connell et al. (Continuum, 2002[1972]); Erich Fromm, 'Studies on Authority and the Family. Sociopsychological Dimensions', In, E. Fromm, *Early Writings*. Fromm Forum 2020, 24. 8-58.; Herbert Marcuse, *A Study on Authority*. Transl. Joris De Bres. (Verso, 2008[1972]).

51 Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie,* 902-907.

52 Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family'

the summary is basically stripped off the explicitly Marxist terminology: "immanent dialectic"[53], "materialist view"[54], "dominant class"[55] disappear, while "bourgeois thought"[56] becomes the "dominant view of philosophical literature"[57]. A detailed description of "the fearful exploitation of the factory system"[58] is only referred to in passing. According to the argument in the complete version, the "fullest possible adaptation of the subject to the reified authority of the economy is the form which reason really takes in bourgeois society"[59]. The rephrased – but, in this case, not shortened – thought in the summary states: "the bourgeois epoch […] regards all persons, in principle, as on an equal footing. As a rule, when one man subordinates himself to another he does not do it because he regards the other as more worthy, but rather because such conduct appears more appropriate for his own purposes. Authority is thus based upon considerations of reason."[60]. "Bourgeois authority" and "bourgeois age"[61], "bourgeois era"[62] become "patriarchal family", "paternal authority", "modern times"[63] and "present epoch"[64]. The original "bourgeois family" is merely the "family", "bourgeois society" is "the present historical epoch". Whereas in the original long version most of the argument about the family is devoted to issues regarding the bourgeois family, mainly to support the claim that the "impulse of submission […] is not a timeless drive, but a phenomenon emerging essentially from the limit-

53 Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family', 53.

54 op. cit. 54.

55 op. cit. 71.

56 op. cit. 72., 78. etc.

57 Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, 903.

58 Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family' 78.

59 op. cit. 83

60 Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, 904.

61 Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family', 101.

62 op. cit. 127

63 Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, 905-906.

64 op. cit. 907

ed bourgeois family"[65], disproportionately more attention is devoted to the "disintegration of the working-class family" in the English language summary[66]. The original version is richer not just in Marxist phraseology, but it contains whole arguments that are entirely missing from the summary. A whole tendency, rooted in economic processes, is described in the original essay, for instance, that created the "bourgeois age" and that "dissolves all cultural values and institutions"[67]. This is not mentioned in the short version at all. An argument on the decrease of importance of "the whole bourgeois middle class", as well as the final lines on the disruptive and antagonistic processes of the present age are left out of the summary altogether.

The 1936 edition of *Studien über Autorität und Familie* is symptomatic of several pertinent issues. First, these terminological modifications visible in the English parts show a clear strategizing – a form of "balancing act", as Wiggershaus[68] calls it – which Horkheimer felt necessary. Since critical theory was fundamentally a critical, Marxist, analysis of bourgeois society, Horkheimer expected hostility from within an academic field where their approach certainly counted radical. Even if they could not tame German-speaking immigrant scholars from the New School, many of whom were anti-Marxists, by modifying the terminology of their writings, they still tried not to draw attention to the radical anti-bourgeois, anti-capitalist edge of their analysis in the English version which was intended for the American colleagues.

One might still wonder why they felt it necessary to add English summaries and abstracts to this work when they continued to ignore American audiences in other respects even after their arrival. The fact that American audiences were not prioritized is obvious from the continuation of the German publication of their most important outlet, the journal *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, which was possible until 1940, the

65 Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family', 111.

66 Horkheimer et al., *Studien über Autorität und Familie*, 906.

67 Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family', 127.

68 *The Frankfurt School*

German occupation of France. (The journal was printed by a French publishing house.) The Frankfurt scholars clearly wanted to write for a contemporary and future German-speaking audience and did not put a lot of effort into generating an American one. From this point of view, they might have left out the English summaries altogether. However, they must have hoped to evoke some international interest in their research, since they appended not only English, but French summaries and abstracts too. But more importantly, we can assume that by making the manuscript at least partly accessible for English-speaking readers, they may have felt that they proved themselves as a research institute and met some of the expectations of their hosts.

Overall, it seems that perhaps too much effort went into strategic thinking, at least in this case: the publication of this book was almost completely overlooked by the entire American academic field. The only review published in the US at the time[69] was written by somebody who could read the original German text anyway, and who, although one of the anti-Marxist New School academics, was more of an anti-Freudian, and his condescending, at points downright ironic, tone was directed more against the Freudian basis of Fromm's argument[70] than the Marxist framework itself. But even Speier remarks that recognizing of the significance of the family in questions of subjugation "is not so alien to American sociology as the terminology of the German scholars might sometimes suggest"[71].

Research Project on Antisemitism

Despite most members' Jewish background, and despite the increasing threat of antisemitism in Europe – and in the United States –, its study as a specific problem remained absent from the social studies of the Frankfurt Institute during the 1930s[72]. Antisemitism, as demonstrated by

69 Speier, 'Review'

70 "this sort of psychology [is] mildly comic", op. cit., 502

71 op. cit. 503

72 Jay, 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School', Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*,

Horkheimer's *Die Juden und Europa*[73] was treated as an integral part of capitalist class antagonisms rather than an important social phenomenon to study in its own right. A few years into the American exile, however, Horkheimer's thinking started to visibly change. There are many possible reasons for this. As Martin Jay points out[74], Adorno's 1939 study on Wagner[75] manifests the signs of a shift towards an increasing stress on psychological dimensions – an influence of Fromm's famous typology of personalities already developed in *Studien*[76]. The employment of Freudian categories became a permanent feature in the works of Frankfurt theorists, and yet, even Adorno's relationship with psychological approaches remained ambivalent: "we never questioned the primacy of objective factors over psychological ones"[77].

An intensifying interest in psychological factors itself is hence not a sufficient explanation of the new approach to antisemitism. News from Europe obviously contributed to a re-evaluation of antisemitism, although it seems that only with the progress of war did the immigrant critical theorists realize the centrality and gravity of this issue. Until then, they perceived their surrounding American social environment to be more prejudiced and antisemitic than what their earlier experiences suggested about German society[78].

The Frankfurt scholars' deepening psychological interest and their gradual recognition of the extent and severity of antisemitism must have contributed to starting its systematic study. This is also reflected in their German-language projects of this period[79]. The process of redirecting

Bahr, 'The Anti-Semitism Studies of the Frankfurt School', Rabinbach', The Frankfurt School and the "Jewish Question"', Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*

73 Max Horkheimer, Die Juden und Europa. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. 1939, 8(1/2): 115-137.

74 Jay, 'The Jews and the Frankfurt School'

75 Theodor W. Adorno, *Versuch über Wagner*, (Suhrkamp 1952).

76 Fromm, 'Studies on Authority and the Family'

77 Adorno, 'Scientific Experiences', 356.

78 Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*

79 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (Herd-

their attention to this social phenomenon gathered pace only after 1938 when it transpired that the financial autonomy of the Institute was not tenable any longer. Horkheimer realized that they needed to generate financial support from external sources, so he started to develop projects and apply for funds to American organizations[80]. The first attempts were not successful, and Horkheimer began to communicate and act strategically: until this point he had aspired to secure the greatest level of autonomy for the Institute possible, now, however, he was eager to appear willing to collaborate and integrate into American academia. As he put it to his friend Pollock in 1941, he wanted his group to have a good reputation so that people would

> "not hesitate in relying on us in the future. This is only possible if nothing could lead to a possible resentment or even a 'bad feeling'. The preliminary goal should be that Mr. Lasswell, Mr. McIver, etc. think 'these people' are honestly trying to get involved in American life and make worthwhile contributions. A good opportunity for this will soon present itself."[81]

After the initial rejections, Horkheimer and his colleagues continued to apply for funds. As Jacobs describes in detail[82], the recognition that their background was an asset in applying to Jewish organizations with research projects on antisemitism eventually resulted in different grants, some publications and conference and workshop presentations. Whether these were the fruits born out of a purely strategic planning, or Horkheimer's growing engagement with the phenomenon of antisemi-

er and Herder, 1972 [1947]).

80 Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*

81 „Wir sollen so mit den Leuten stehen, dass keine Hemmungen haben, in Zukunft auf uns zurückzugreifen. Dies ist nur/nun möglich, falls kein Faktum geschaffen wird, das uns auch nur in den Verdacht eines möglichen Ressentiments oder gar „bad feeling" bringen könnte. Das vorläufige Ziel lasst euch so formulieren: Mr. Lasswell, Mr. McIver etc denken: „Diese Leute" bemühen sich ehrlich, sich ins amerikanische Leben einzuschalten und worthwhile contributions zu machen. Es wird sich dafür wohl bald die wohlige Gelegenheit bieten." https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/horkheimer/content/pageview/6543372, MHA, VI.31. 340.

82 Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*

tism is difficult to establish. What is clear and needed to be emphasized here is the realization of the final inevitability of research collaborations in the US to secure the Institute's financial future. From 1940, collaborative research projects were in the focus of the Institute's work while Horkheimer and Adorno themselves moved down to California and tried to devote as much time as possible to their own theoretical project, the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These years were quite prolific; Institute members were engaged in both theoretical and empirical research, but as to published texts in English, a single 20-page long research project that appeared in their own journal stood alone to evidence all this activity right until the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality* in 1950[83].

The "Research Project on Antisemitism"[84] describes a theoretical and empirical approach to the study of this phenomenon. It contains certain elements of their earlier thinking, but points to new directions too. Its main claim reflects the process of transition that eventually led to a new position on the centrality of antisemitism: "As long as antisemitism exists as a constant undercurrent in social life, its influence reaches all groups of the population and it can be rekindled by suitable propaganda"[85]. This thesis, expressed unambiguously for the first time here, remains an assertion that guides empirical and theoretical studies by the Horkheimer Circle from here on. In this text, however, the claim that antisemitism exists in all societies, and that its latency does not only make it a dangerous current that can surface unexpectedly but also renders it difficult to observe, leads to the recognition that studying antisemitism requires innovative research methods. The proposed method here was an experiment with film viewings where the researchers would observe reactions

83 A grand study on antisemitism within American workers was financed by the Jewish Labor Committee, but the 1449-page manuscript that resulted from this monumental work never saw the day of light (Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*).

84 Max, Horkheimer, 'Research Project on Antisemitism', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung. Studies in Philosophy and Social Science.* Vol. IX/1941, (The Institute of Social Research, 1941), 124-143.

85 op. cit., 125.

of audiences of demographically different composition to violent scenes, the role of Gentile and Jew in the fighting allocated randomly. As is well-known, years later, in the finalized research project, antisemitism was observed and measured by different methods, but what remained the same was the assumption that this prejudice was a trait observable only indirectly. Besides the innovative methodological thinking, the project article importantly introduced a preliminary typology of antisemitism that was developed further in *The Authoritarian Personality*.

Certain assertions in this text, however, still manifested a position held by Horkheimer and Adorno that they never abandoned (as is clear from their German-language writings of the same period and later), but eventually came to realize it was not compatible with the American context of their work. The claim that "progressive modern thought has an ambivalent relationship to the concept of human rights"[86] is an expression of their long-held conviction that antisemitism, among other social problems, can be traced back to the Enlightenment and the foundations of modern bourgeois society – a conviction elaborated on famously in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Adorno and Horkheimer never actually revised this hypothesis but merely thought better of openly expressing it in English. On the other hand, their other contention still present in this text disappeared later not only from their English-language writings but apparently from their thinking also: in a section called "The Jews in Society" they discuss Jewish character traits, even a "Jewish mentality", that might stir the antisemites' reactions and form a basis for prejudice. This line of thought, even with the added argument that these characteristics have economic and historic roots, must have contributed to the rejection of the proposal in this form.

Perhaps the newest element in this text, one that remained a foundational assumption in *The Authoritarian Personality*, was that, to combat antisemitism effectively, a thorough knowledge of its psychological roots is necessary. More faithfully to their own thinking however, the proposed research, unlike the one that was later realized, was still not primari-

86 op. cit., 124.

ly psychological, but rather followed an interdisciplinary approach in which historical and economical studies were just as important for the success of understanding and fighting against antisemitism as psychological and experimental studies were.

The negotiations with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) finally bore fruit in 1943, first in the form of a one-year funding of a joint project between Frankfurt scholars and AJC members. When the year was over, they agreed to continue the project within a new institutional frame: the Scientific Department of AJC was set up, with Horkheimer as its director. *Studies in Prejudice*, a book series that contained the results of this project, was published in 1950, with *The Authoritarian Personality* as one of the five volumes. The most widely known work ever written by any of the Frankfurt scholars is the final testimony to both the potentials and the limits of integrating critical theory to American social science.

The Authoritarian Personality: Squaring the Circle

Theodor Wiesengrund Adorno, one of the greatest European philosophers and social theorists, harboured arguably the worst grievances of all Frankfurt Institute members against American pragmatism and empiricism, and, at least for a while, even against psychologizing. Perhaps ironically, he became one of the most well-known "social psychologists" in America after the publication of *The Authoritarian Personality*. Any irony aside, we can consider this development as something that tells us a lot about the ambivalent relationship between the Frankfurt scholars and American social science.

The book is a collaborative work of four authors, each of whom wrote different chapters but cooperated closely throughout the entire project, under the guidance of the editor Max Horkheimer. Of the four, only Adorno belonged to the group of Frankfurt scholars, and therefore I will only look at the parts written by him and Horkheimer.

A certain ambiguity surrounded this work right from its conception: whereas the research focus itself – an analysis of the personality susceptible to prejudice and authoritarian ideologies – was framed in a psychological, psychoanalytical approach, the leading Frankfurt scholars

involved in the project, Horkheimer and Adorno, tried to distance themselves from a view of antisemitism that inspects it through a primarily psychological lens. Other – theoretical and ideological – concerns may have played a role. In 1943, at a very early stage of discussions of the research with AJC members, Horkheimer wrote to Pollock, who was going to participate at a meeting representing their ideas on the topic:

> "I am afraid that the whole report, which is nothing but a hasty sketch of fleshes on our work, cannot be understood adequately, particularly by people who don't think along our lines. […] The hypothesis of the first part will meet with different kinds of opposition from the different groups represented at the meeting. MacIver will think they are extravagant and unscientific. […] The members of the Committee will look at them as too academic, and our own friends may find them idealistic and psychologistic. It would, therefore, be a good thing if, in a few opening remarks you would […] remind the audience that our whole study, in all of its parts, is meant to be a psychological supplement of the economic and sociological investigations which are being made in New York, and which we consider the fundamental parts. Our real ideas on Antisemitism attribute an infinitely greater part to economic and social factors than an isolated glimpse upon our work could suggest."[87]

Unfortunately for Horkheimer, but – from the point of view of the success of *The Authoritarian Personality* – perhaps luckily overall, "this isolated glimpse" that placed the research and the interpretation of prejudice in a basically psychological framework remained decisive in the reception of the published study.

This take was further strengthened by the omission of Adorno's *Remarks* that were likely intended as a preface to the book[88]. On these 30 pages, Adorno tried to clarify the relationship of the psychological focus present in the book to a wider theoretical (economic and sociologi-

87 MHA, VI.33. 419. https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/horkheimer/content/pageview/6544471

88 Theodor W. Adorno, 'Remarks on The Authoritarian Personality', MHA VI.1D, 69-98.

cal) embedding of the studied phenomena, primarily antisemitism. This paper was probably written in 1948[89], a year before Adorno's return to Frankfurt and two years before the final publication of the book. It is an edited and completed text and was, beyond any doubt, meant for publication. We do not know why it was eventually left out of the volume, although it is likely that the decision was made by Samuel H. Flowerman. He and Horkheimer coedited the book, and their relationship had become rather tense by this time as Flowerman represented the ideas of AJC on the project which diverged on many points from Horkheimer's – theoretical and practical ones alike.

What is absolutely clear is the intent on Adorno's part to stress the importance of an underlying socio-economic frame of the elaborated and presented psychological study. In a way, this introduction would have qualified the whole research, or even pointed out the limited validity of the study – in Horkheimer's private words, a mere "supplement" – itself. And, primarily, even though the text does not contain an overt Marxist terminology, it would have served to indicate the continuity between the original version of critical theory and this study conducted in America among American people with American scientific methods and colleagues.

Let us see what Adorno felt important to add to the book in his *Remarks*. Explaining the "subjective focus" of the study, he first distinguishes between "stimuli" (economic and social conditions) and "reactions" (individual attitudes), and then goes on to state:

> "We are convinced that the ultimate source of prejudice has to be sought in social factors which are incomparably stronger than the 'psyche' of any one individual involved. […] Thus we fully realize that limiting the study to subjective aspects is not without its dangers. Our detailed analysis of subjective patterns does not mean that, in our opinion, prejudice can be *explained* in such terms. On the contrary, we regard the analysis of objective social forces which engender prejudice as the most pressing issue in contemporary research into anti-minority

89 Jacobs, *The Frankfurt School*

> bias. The relative negligence with which this task is treated throughout American research is due to its 'democratic bias', to the idea that socially valid scientific findings can be gained only by sampling a vast number of people on whose opinions and attitudes depends what is going to happen – just as success or failure of a commodity offered on the market supposedly depends on the mentality of the buyer. Methodologically, a not insignificant result of our study is the suspicion that the aforementioned assumption does no longer hold true. […] This observation seems to fall in line with the economic tendency towards gradual disappearance of the free market and the adaptation of man to the slowly emerging new condition. Research following the conventional patterns of investigation into public opinion may easily reach the point where the orthodox concept of what people feel, want, and do, proves to be obsolete."[90]

Adorno, thus, intended not only to draw attention to the limitations of the study, but to express his long-standing aversion towards "American research" – the quantitative surveys of public opinion – not only on a methodological, but also on an ideological basis. Later, he returns to the thesis that links prejudice to capitalism and bourgeois society explicitly stated by him and Horkheimer in several of their German-language publications. Here – similarly to their other texts addressed to an American readership – he phrases his ideas with more circumspection:

> "our findings that 'highs' [i.e. people who scored high on the scale measuring prejudice] conform more thoroughly to the prevailing cultural climate and are – at least superficially – better adjusted than the 'lows', seems to indicate that, measured by standards of the status quo, they are also more characteristic of the present historical situation"[91]

In the remaining parts of the paper Adorno addresses different issues, contextualizing the study by discussing the role of psychoanalysis in the present discourse, elaborating on the connection of their approach to other research on antisemitism etc. He also raises the problem that appears

90 Adorno, 'Remarks', 2.

91 op. cit. 5.

in Horkheimer's foreword most saliently: how to fight against antisemitism in contemporary American society, what measures to implement to save democracy. Whereas, as we will see, Horkheimer (and Flowerman) focus on a pragmatic argument, in Adorno's line of reasoning, the issue leads to another covert attack against American social science, at least a very important part of it in the 1940s:

> "Without disparaging the community studies now favored on account of their concreteness and the quick return they might bring, we believe to be justified in giving our own study a completely different emphasis: that of 'cultural anthropology'. We hypothesize that contemporary anti-semitism can be fought adequately either politically or with long-range educational measures, but not with short-term, on-the-spot actions and the by now mythological institution of 'intercultural relations'. Viewed pragmatically, our findings have to be evaluated mainly in terms of a long-range educational program which seeks to affect the broad and basic anthropological conditions that favor the rise of fascism in this country. This emphasis may look academic and defeatist to those who expect everything from manifestations of good will. It is our opinion, however, that the objective situation necessitates a somewhat reserved attitude vis-á-vis such manifestations."[92]

From the above quotations it is not difficult to see why Adorno's *Remarks* were left out of the book: not only does he go so far as to, in some sentences, almost challenge the methodological and theoretical foundations of the whole research, but, as an integral part of his entire argument, he repeats the claim mostly carefully kept out of English language interactions that prejudice is a direct concomitant of bourgeois, capitalist (American) social and economic conditions, and further that American social scientific research methods – public opinion survey and community studies – are not suitable to understand the true nature of these very conditions.

Instead of a revised – i.e., a fundamentally different – version of this text, the book was finally published with a foreword to the whole series

92 op. cit., 10.

of *Studies in Prejudice* authored by Horkheimer and Flowerman together and a preface to *The Authoritarian Personality* written by Horkheimer alone. The foreword[93] stresses the practical significance of the series of studies and justifies the psychological focus by this aspect:

> "It may strike the reader that we placed undue stress upon the personal and the psychological rather than upon the social aspect of prejudice. This is not due to a personal preference for psychological analysis nor to a failure to see that the cause of irrational hostility is in the last instance to be found in social frustration and injustice. Our aim is not merely to describe prejudice but to explain it in order to help in its eradication. That is the challenge we would meet. Eradication means re-education, scientifically planned on the basis of understanding scientifically arrived at. And education in a strict sense is by its nature personal and psychological."[94]

In his preface, Horkheimer[95] repeats the claim that scientific, theoretical studies can contribute directly to social amelioration.

> "This conviction must not be brushed aside as an optimistic illusion. In the history of civilization there have been not a few instances when mass delusions were healed not by focused propaganda but, in the final analysis, because scholars, with their unobtrusive yet insistent work habits, studied what lay at the root of the delusion. Their intellectual contribution, operating within the framework of the development of society as a whole, was decisively effective."[96]

In the end, he expresses his appreciation to the founder of the research project, AJC, and especially its Scientific Research Department, which, as he claims, was "under pressure to solve problems" and still took on "the responsibility of furthering basic research programs." The volume,

93 Max Horkheimer and Samuel H. Flowerman, 'Foreword to Studies in Prejudice', In, T. W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*, (The American Jewish Committee, 1950), V-VIII.

94 Horkheimer and Flowerman, 'Foreword to Studies in Prejudice', VII.

95 Max Horkheimer, 'Preface', In, T. W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*. (The American Jewish Committee, 1950) IX-XII.

96 op. cit. IX.

according to Horkheimer, "symbolizes that link between democratic education and fundamental research"[97]

The book itself is divided into parts written by different authors, except for the description of the development of the famous F-scale – this process is described in detail by the four authors together. The chapters written by Adorno are devoted to the analysis of the interviews (Chapters XVI., XVII. and XVIII.), and to "Types and Syndromes" (Ch. XIX.). In the latter, Adorno utilizes Fromm's famous character types[98] originally described in *Studien*, referring to the "sadomasochistic" character as the most relevant for the understanding of the "authoritarian syndrome". Before analysing the research results along these lines, he addresses the scientific legitimacy of typologies in general. Here, once again, he defends his approach against the American scientific (psychological) discourse, which, according to him, thoroughly criticizes the concept of typology itself. After citing the importance of constructing typologies for diagnostics in psychiatry and referring to Émile Durkheim's famous argument about the social nature of categories[99], he goes on to claim that the creation of types has a pragmatic relevance beyond the scientific ones: "the necessity that science provide weapons against the potential threat of the fascist mentality."[100]. On the other hand, he adds: "It is an open question whether and to what extent the fascist danger really can be fought with psychological weapons."[101] One could take this remark as yet another expression of his aversion towards the psychological approach itself, but he continues to claim that the usefulness of this approach can be achieved exactly by the typological conceptualization of the problem: "There is no psychological defense against prejudice which is not oriented toward

97 op. cit. XII.

98 'Studies on Authority and the Family'

99 Émile Durkheim and Marcell Mauss, *Primitive Classification* (Cohen & West. 1963[1903]).

100 Theodor W. Adorno et al., *The Authoritarian Personality*. (The American Jewish Committee, 1950), 748.

101 ibid.

certain psychological 'types'"[102]. Accordingly, the approach manifest in *The Authoritarian Personality* follows the concept of a "critical typology": the construction of typology is meant to be purposeful from the point of view of the social function it fulfills, i.e. a good typology must be "pragmatically productive".

Adorno's *Remarks* were not included in the volume, and in the published texts he followed the discursive style most fitting for an American audience that emphasized pragmatic aspects, refrained from a description of the wider ideological and theoretical framework that, in his understanding, would have necessitated an at least covertly Marxist terminology. He even accepted the psychological focus and a largely quantitative methodology that he was not utterly comfortable with. And yet, what Adorno later recalled from this collaborative research process was, not least, the element of freedom[103]. According to his recollection, it was exactly this freedom – a freedom to think innovatively, not bound by conventional scientific expectations – that distinguished this work from the rest of the plentiful American empirical social studies:

> "we developed the F-scale at Berkeley in a spirit of freedom of invention that deviated considerably from the conception of a pedantic science carefully scrutinizing its every step. The explanation for this is what might be called the 'psychoanalytic background', particularly the familiarity with the method of free association, among the four persons responsible for the study. I emphasize this, because a work like The Authoritarian Personality, which, though much criticized, has never been charged with lacking familiarity with American materials and American procedures, was published in a fashion that did not attempt to conceal itself behind the customary facade of positivism in social science. The conjecture is scarcely too far-fetched that The Authoritarian Personality owes to that freedom whatever it has to offer that is original, unconventional, imaginative, and directed toward fundamental issues."[104]

102 ibid.

103 'Scientific Experiences'

104 Adorno, 'Scientific Experiences', 360.

Conclusion: Authority, Personality and the International Transfer of Knowledge

When fleeing from Germany, Horkheimer's primary goal was to save the Institute, i.e. to provide his associates with a safe place to live and work and to keep their intellectual program going until circumstances would allow a relocation. In this respect, he was successful, although when he returned to Frankfurt in 1949, only Adorno and Pollock accompanied him. But he managed to reestablish the institute in its place of origin and secured its reputation in social theory for generations to come.

What he did not intend during his exile years was to integrate into American academia, adjust as well as possible to its expectations and find his American – academic or lay – audience. Many of his colleagues – most importantly Erich Fromm, Franz Neumann, Leo Löwenthal and Herbert Marcuse – did find a way to reestablish their careers in the US and to become successful and well-known Americanized theorists. In the end, of the significant Frankfurt theorists, only Adorno shared his deep aversion towards the American academic environment.

The reception of critical theory during these 15 years in the US was very limited despite the presence of its representatives. As Bourdieu points out[105], international exchanges are subject to a number of "structural factors", one of which is the fact that "texts circulate without their context". Importantly, authors also migrate (if not circulate) without their context. In Germany, Horkheimer had been part of a small but respected segment of the scientific field with a high amount of symbolic and economic capital. While he could move the latter with him, symbolic capital (professional authority and reputation) is rather difficult, if not impossible, to transfer from one field to another. The field of American social science was very different from the German one, determined by different forces of structuration, different sources of symbolic capital,

105 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas', In, R. Shusterman (ed.), *Bourdieu. A Critical Reader*. (Blackwell, 1999), 221.

and a very different academic habitus. Critical theory itself was not easy to translate into something to connect to within the American discourse of the 1930s and 1940s. The Marxist bases of the approach were blurred by Horkheimer in the English texts for a good reason, and the highly abstract theorizing in general was very distant from the pragmatic approach and empiricism of American sociology.[106] Horkheimer's position was not possible to translate into a similar one in this field either and his isolationist stance of the first few years only deepened the difficulty. He remained an unchallenged leader of the Frankfurt scholars in their exile, or even solidified his dominant position under the new circumstances, when, as Wiggershaus[107] remarks, the others were more dependent on him than ever, but his position remained unrecognized by the American colleagues: when Columbia finally opened tenured positions to Institute members, Horkheimer was not one to receive such an offer, and when Lazarsfeld brought his Bureau of Applied Social Research to Columbia, he lobbied for retaining the "empiricists" of the Frankfurt scholars and let Adorno and Horkheimer be only associated and work distantly from California[108]. The Americans obviously knew Horkheimer was the leader of his circle but did not find collaborating with him as easy and potentially as fruitful as with other members of the Institute of Social Research who were more flexible and willing to adjust to the methodological and theoretical expectations within American social science.

Despite his unwavering commitment to critical theory and abstract philosophy deeply rooted in European traditions, Adorno's fate was

106 It must be noted that pragmatic philosophy could have created a common ground, if only Horkheimer recognized this potential – or had been interested in finding a common ground at all. I agree with Arvi Särkelä ('American Pragmatism and Frankfurt School Critical Theory. A Family Drama', In, M. Festl (ed.), *Pragmatism and Social Philosophy*, Routledge, 2020.) that a partly shared intellectual tradition and social criticism could have brought John Dewey, who was working at Columbia in the 1930s, close to Horkheimer. The potential to connect critical theory and pragmatism was realized only much later, most notably in the works of Jürgen Habermas.

107 *The Frankfurt School*

108 Wheatland, *The Frankfurt School in Exile*

quite different partly because he was forced by financial necessity from the very beginning to work on empirical projects in collaboration with American colleagues. Albeit he did not like it, and at first, he was basically incapable to adjust to this new kind of social research, in the end, through his growing interest in antisemitism and his increasing affinity for psychological approaches, a natural point of contact emerged that organically linked him to a segment of American sociological discourse on prejudice. This was not only part of the mainstream but also represented an innovative streak within it which eventually secured a solid position for him in American social science's hall of fame. The price he paid for this was a lasting misinterpretation of his work which could have been avoided by the publication of his *Remarks on The Authoritarian Personality*. However, his *Remarks* are fundamentally incompatible with the whole study, supporting our conclusion that his American influence was *only* possible on the basis of this misunderstanding. Although Bourdieu was referring to translations, his contention applies to Adorno's case with *The Authoritarian Personality* too: "Very often with foreign authors it is not what they say that matters, so much as what they can be made to say."[109]

Overall, we can argue that *The Authoritarian Personality* represents the highest level of research achievable by a fertile combination of first-generation Frankfurt scholarship and American social science of the 1940s. Together with the other texts analysed in this article, this work, so to speak, organically emerged out of a context that contained different factors and their mutual interplay: the authors and the main actors within the American sociological field and within the Horkheimer Circle, their other works, their symbolic capital, habitus, and probably many further constraining elements that always influence research projects. The profound impossibility of translation between early critical theory and 1930s and 1940s American social science is revealed by the fact that the American reception of this highly influential work is still based on a fundamental misunderstanding that casts Adorno as primarily a social

109 Bourdieu, 'The Social Conditions of the International Circulation of Ideas', 224.

psychologist of prejudice. A more nuanced American reception of critical theory began many years after the publication of this work, with the 1964 appearance of Marcuse's *One-Dimensional Man* and eventually, in 1972, the English translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and then other works by Horkheimer and Adorno. But, of course, the 1960s and '70s were marked by a very different climate in American academia and social sciences, opening a whole new chapter for the reception of the ideas of the Frankfurt School.

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Before the Beginning and After the End of Nature: Adorno and the Anthropocene

Edward Guetti[1]

Abstract: This essay is a critical engagement with the topic of Adorno's possible relevance for discussions of the Anthropocene. In spite of the tacit endorsement by recent works, perhaps most visible in the concluding references to Adorno and negative universal history made in Chakrabarty's famed "Four Theses" essay, I argue that Adorno's cannot be understood to be a philosophy for the Anthropocene. The story is made more complicated, however, by the obvious overlap of hallmark themes of Adorno's philosophy with some of what must be understood to be the positions or claims of the Anthropocene. And, moreover, the detail of relation suggested by the idea of Adorno's apparant *relevance* leads me to introduce my discussion by sketching a response to the general question: what does it mean to (re)discover Adorno as a contemporary? I adumbrate two pathways for conceiving the possible, general, relevance of philosophy to some historical epochs, all the while making it clear that Adorno's philosophy can hardly countenance the idea that we have entered into a new planetary age. My account then focuses on the idea of natural history and possibility in Adorno as a way of drawing out the different senses of 'nature' at work in the semblances of overlap or relevance. The conclusion asks what is meant by the Adornian idea that natural history must be a canon for philosophy, especially if this automatically invokes a specifically post-Kantian subject-object epistemic framework. An open-ended historical materialist approach, compatible with Adorno, it seems to me, might include a broad sense of ecological interrelations provided the latter are viewed through a natural-historical lens, meaning a view that emphasizes their presence as a ruin of possibility.

Clov: There's no more nature.
Hamm: No more nature! You exaggerate. [...] We breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!
– Beckett, *Endgame*

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Introduction

Since Adorno's philosophy regularly connects socio-epistemological critique with the ethical urgency of rescuing nature (conceived, variously, as life, lives, unborn generations, and, obliquely, the nonidentical, possibility) from its enchanted captivity by a certain historical spell (call it "identity thinking"), it can be interpreted as a complex presentiment of the Anthropocene. More than a prophet of ecological turmoil, Adorno's work seems to frame him as a (perhaps *the*) philosopher of the Anthropocene *avant la lettre*.[2] Indeed, in one of the landmark essays that sought to interpret and promulgate the gospel of the Anthropocene from stratigraphic science into unevangelized regions of humanistic scholarship, Dipesh Chakrabarty's essay now known as "Climate of History: Four Theses",[3] the reader finds sketches of a future horizon of Anthropocene scholarship pivoting around an Adornian notion: negative universal history. It seems to follow that the time is right for a return to Adorno, a return summoned by the emergency conditions of Climate Change and all else is packaged with the Anthropocene.

The reader may be able to recall, however, that this is not the first time that the prevailing mood has seemed to be geared towards a "return to Adorno,"[4] and, perhaps more significantly still, not the first time a return to Adorno has seemed a useful move for the formation of a radical

2 In addition to Cook's *Adorono on Nature* (Acumen 2011) and Chakrabarty, Adorno's purported naturalism or his use of 'natural history' has been discussed in Hogh 2022 and Whyman 2017. Alison Stone 2006 gives a particularly insightful look at Adorno and a possibility of "reenchanting" nature, albeit one that drew the sharp if abstract critique of Cook. See also the more direct engagement of Adorno and the Anthropocene in, e.g., Luke 2018, Ford 2021, or the 2019 issue of *Adorno Studies* available here: https://www.adorno-studies.org/?page_id=54

3 Originally in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009) and since included, in a modified form, in Chakrabarty 2021. I cite the latter here.

4 See Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Origin is the Goal" and "Back to Adorno", the introduction and first chapter of his 2006, for a kind of historical whiplash effect in seeing ripe conditions every few decades.

ecological philosophy to disrupt or, hopefully, supplant the extent forms of domination and destruction. Deborah Cook's *Adorno on Nature* (2011) provides a critique of the ways that Adornian notions overlap or rhyme with those taken up by Deep Ecologists (through the writings of Arne Næss), Ecofeminists (principally via Carolyn Merchant and, to a lesser extent, Val Plumwood), and Radical Ecologists (Murray Bookchin). For Cook, these overlaps do not give way to a deeper convergence. Among the differentiated points of criticism she provides for each theoretical view, Cook generalizes a diagnosis that each relies on a principle of finding "unity in diversity," and appeals to a new and holistic conception of nature. (122) Thus with Adorno's apparent ripeness for a return in the Anthropocene comes also the time for harvesting the returns of Adorno's critical dialectical methods within this putatively new context. In other words: in for a (conceptual) penny, in for a (dialectical) pound.

This paper contends that Adorno's philosophy should not be understood to fit comfortably or even uncomfortably with Anthropocene discourses.[5] Adorno's philosophy, here focusing predominantly on the notion of "natural history", does not cohere with what I will call the claims of the Anthropocene. In saying that, I am of course not claiming that Adorno's texts deny climate change: the idea of the Anthropocene is not identical with the reality of Climate Change and the fact of Climate Change does not necessarily imply an Anthropocene, as the many -cenes testify *en masse*. I am suggesting, however, that Adorno's philosophy provides routes for his readers to reflectively consider what is presupposed by Anthropocene and related -cene discourses, especially the idea of 'nature,' as a kind of systemic unity, in its relation to history, and, of course, what we understand to be the movement and measure of histo-

5 Before others rush to pile on against the beleaguered 'Anthropos', the same would go for any -cene (Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Androcene, Polemocene, etc.) perhaps with the sole exception of the Agnotocene, which emphasizes the production and maintenance of ignorance. I will try to support this claim in the next section but the entire paper should be understood as contributing to support the notion that, from Adorno's philosophical approach to history, we have not entered into a new age. See Bonneuil and Fressoz 2016 for more on 'Agnotocene' and other -cenes.

ry, whether and why we should countenance the suggestion that *now* is a new age or that anthropogenic Climate Change (finally) provides reasons to be skeptical of a certain progressivist narrative of history as a history of civilization(s).

Some readers are entitled to reply that every moment need not require its own philosopher or that it is the perennial richness of Adorno's philosophy, not anything particular about a loosely defined present age, that propels it constantly into the scholarly spincycle oscillating between neglect and oversaturation. I would agree, and, rather than think that Adorno's emergence for Anthropocene philosophy flows from the uniqueness of the present moment, it would be more consistent with Adorno's work to think of the present crisis as flowing from out of the fixtures of thought that have arrested human possibility in relation to what has been called 'nature.' Just as in the epigraph above from *Endgame*, we will need to maintain a notion of *nature* that resists being reduced to any particular identity, not the Kantian space of necessary physical law,[6] not the bourgeois or settler-colonial ideals of *terra nullius* ordained to be exploited for the fungible wealth it contains or destined to be blighted by waste and absorb polluting runoff, and not even as a system of occasional beauty containing the breath of fresh air or photogenic scenes of supposedly natural beauty that elicit consolatory sighs after the end of a working day. When we describe something called "nature' or, indeed, "natural beauty", in Adorno, we are talking about something that has been negated in human mediation that has, so to speak, left no stone unturned, but which has not yet become other than this potent dialectical moment at a standstill.

> The image of nature survives because its complete negation in the artifact —negation that rescues this image— is necessarily blind to what exists beyond bourgeois society, its labor, and its commodities. Natural beauty remains the allegory of this

6 In anglophone philosophy, at least, this way of presenting a dead, mechanical universe described completely by physical law is not perhaps entirely traceable to Kant (especially considering the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*) as it is to some Kantians.

> beyond in spite of its mediation through social immanence. If, however, this allegory were substituted as the achieved state of reconciliation, it would be degraded as an aid for cloaking and legitimating the unreconciled world as one in which —as the claim goes— beauty is indeed possible."[7]

Although this will be detailed below, Adorno's difference from Anthropo- (and other) -cene claiming is that he (following Benjamin) comprehended nature and history as a dialectical unity, one that becomes legible in its transience or decay. History appears in the intelligible form of ruination, the temporal articulation of catastrophe. Nature is characterized here through lost possibilities, its significance as a fragment, coerced or teased out by a conceptual norm.[8] Hullot-Kentor insightfully inverts this thought as: "meaning is the ruins of nature."[9] It is through an emphasis on transience and decay that Adorno maintains thoughts that *superficially* resemble Anthropocene claims (e.g., the merging of non-human natural

7 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 69 Also: "Experience of nature is coconstituted by the capacity of determinate negation. With the expansion of technique and, even more important, the total expansion of the exchange principle, natural beauty increasingly fulfills a contrasting function and is thus integrated into the reified world it opposes. Coined in opposition to absolutism's wigs and formal gardens, the concept of natural beauty forfeited its power because bourgeois emancipation under the sign of the alleged natural rights of human beings made the world of experience not less but more reified than it was in the eighteenth century. The unmediated experience of nature, its critical edge blunted and subsumed to the exchange relation such as is represented in the phrase 'tourist industry,' became insignificantly neutral and apologetic, and nature became a nature reserve and an alibi. Natural beauty is ideology where it serves to disguise mediatedness as immediacy." (*AT* 68)

8 Adorno employs Lukács's distinction and characterization of a first and a second nature whenever he approaches the idea of natural history. I mention this here because second nature is portrayed as a charnel house (i.e., a vault holding the decayed/decaying remnants of the dead). The death or passing of what we might call the immediate significance of natural life (i.e., the passing of an archaic or immediately given *first* nature into a *mediated cluster of fragments* – second nature), produces the space for what Benjamin pursues as an idea of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. See the third section below.

9 Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 245.

history and human history) but that also resist other closures or conceptual baggage that is otherwise inconsistent with Adorno's work (e.g., the implication that because non-human history and human history have merged they must have been legitimately separated beforehand).[10] But, before we even approach this more complex matter, we should come to understand the general pressures that seem to countermand the establishment of Adorno as a philosopher of the present moment; this is not because of anything unsuitable about his own philosophy but, rather, about the very idea of the present as calling for a specific kind of philosophy.

1. Back (once again) to Adorno: The (Perpetual) Contemporaneity of the Adorno Omnibus?

"What would be different has not begun as yet."[11]

Adorno seems and has seemed, perennially, to be ripe for renewed interest. This has been true since the publishing strife over *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the frequent troubles of bowdlerizing and creative translation that seem to menace Adorno's "difficult" texts as a chronic predisposition.[12] In 1990, no less than Frederic Jameson, who perhaps was on his way of surrendering the idea of the postmodern as characterizing the contemporary,[13] provided this rough assessment of the career of Adorno's relevance:

> Adorno was not the philosopher of the thirties [...]; nor the philosopher of the forties and fifties; nor even the philosopher of the sixties [...]; and I have said that, philosophically and theoretically, his old-fashioned dialectical discourse was incompatible with the seventies. But there is some chance that he

10 Compare, e.g., *Negative Dialectics,* 179: "The suppression of nature for human ends is a mere natural relationship, which is why the supremacy of nature-controlling reason and its principle is a delusion."

11 Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 145. Henceforth as *ND*.

12 For more on this, see Robert Hullot-Kentor "Back to Adorno" in *Things Beyond Resemblance*.

13 See Osborne, *Postconceptual Condition* (Verso, 2024).

> may turn out to be the analyst of our own period, which he did not live to see [...]. It now seems to me possible, then, that Adorno's Marxism [...] may be just what we need today.[14]

The exact meaning of the space occupied by "Adorno's Marxism"[15] in Jameson's text would need to be reconstructed further, and this is entirely besides my point here.[16] In any case, Jameson is serving as a witness in testifying to the rediscovery of what we might call Adorno's perpetual marginality, a space defined by the vagaries of professional interest in conjunction with those of conceptual salience. But, though the preponderant conception of the present has shifted from Jameson's postmodern spaces tarrying with an end of history to a time encountering itself a

14 Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 5.

15 In order to see the difficulty of suggesting that Adorno had any available kind of orthodox Marxism, John Bellamy Foster (2016) points out that Alfred Schmidt's *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (1962, translated into English 1971) seemed to buttress Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an acceptable (i.e., not Soviet) face of Marxism. Foster goes on to note that Adorno specifically was plucked out as critiquing a Soviet, if not purportedly Marxist, fantasy of the "absolute control of nature" but that, via Schmidt, the ground was also fertilized for a first generation of ecosocialists as well as a tradition centered around the idea of the (social?) production of nature along with a Weberian critique of scientific reason. Down the one branch, Andre Gorz and Daniel Bensaïd; down the other, Bruno Latour. If true, this would indicate that at least kernels of Adorno's thought will have had a massive and multivalent influence that has yet to be fully recognized. See Foster 2016: 395-6.

16 One might wish to compare Jameson's portrayal of Adorno as a modernist representative of *Spätmarxismus* against the characterization put forward by J. M. Bernstein and others of Adorno as a Hegelian *after* Hegel, after Nietzsche, and after Auschwitz (in Huhn, ed. *Cambridge Companion to Adorno*), or even Hullot-Kentor's provocative depiction of the pedigree of Adorno's aesthetics: "every element of Adorno's analysis of the dialectic of enlightenment and its relation to aesthetics has its precedent in Schiller's aesthetics." (34) Along with the matter of the constant discovery of his relevance, it might be worth pursuing the question why Adorno, in expositions made by others, seems to also be made available always *after* something else, always belated, leading to the joint situation of being both behind and ahead of the present. One answer is simply to emphasize the method of dialectic and immanent critique. A separate, though related, answer would require a treatment of the discussion of 'modernism' and its relation to the wreckage of modernity.

a new 'epoch' in which, according to a notion assumed by the Anthropocene and related discussions, a unified globe (presumed now to be a unified space of capitalisms in different developmental phases) is said to be "facing the planetary" as if for the first time, one might wonder what is meant by this time now to be a one ripe for Adorno's philosophy.[17]

There are, however, at least two different pathways to the claim of a special relation between Adorno's thought and present conditions of the Anthropocene.[18] The first is more familiar. It grants the broad claim of the rupture of the Anthropocene from a previous epoch and searches out aspects of Adorno's thought that are already congenial for the sheaf of bundled conceptual factors that have been identified: human relations with non-human nature wherein such relations must include strong lines of critique but do not ultimately reduce to Marxism.[19] This approach moves by way of judging semblances, taking an Anthropocene view concerning the relevant data to be explained or corroborated by the (independent) conceptual elements of Adorno's philosophical works, which are identi-

17 N.b.: *world* is a phenomenological category; *globe* a political-economic one; *planet* and *planetary* would be, so far as can be gleaned now, something of a completely other order.

18 This discussion about the novelty of the present era and its name mirrors in very broad outline a previous discussion within the Institute for Social Research in the 1940s concerning the novelty of National Socialism when compared with Capitalism in the economic analyses of Friedrich Pollock, to whom *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was twice dedicated, that proved to be very influential for the development of the concept of "capitalism" for the members of the Institute. See van Reijen and Bransen, "The Disappearance of Class History in 'Dialectic of Enlightenment': A Commentary on Textual Variations (1947 and 1944)" appendix to Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. G. Schmid Noerr. trans. E Jephcott. Stanford University Press 2002.

19 But was Adorno not a Marxist of some stripe? Of course, but this question avoids the point. Adorno's allure for Anthropocene theorists, as we will see below, stems from what we might call his negative Hegelianism which is not the same thing as turning Hegelianism upside down (i.e., Marxism). For the sake of brevity, we might say that Marxism is a view that has commitments regarding unavoidable international revolution; Adorno, of course, has no such commitments other than to the resistances that are achieved in actual (as opposed to "pseudo-") thinking. See the conclusion below.

fied as independently citable phrases (and, crucially and erroneously, *not* the movement and patterning of a style of thinking).

Against any quick reaction to dismiss this pathway here, let us note the following: even though Adorno pursued what became, after Kant and Hegel, a necessary dialectical challenge of confronting his own philosophical methods and concepts with accusations against their legitimacy, if not suspicions of their complicity with terror, Adorno responded consistently to such reflective self-challenges through an idea of the recovery of nature.[20] But what is meant by 'nature'? There is a tendency to read a plight of nature via a static or identifiable conception related to the 'envrionment.' This view neglects what we can make out to be natura naturans (i.e., as a space of potent possibilities) or as allegorizing the passion of the non-identical.[21] But, in any case, it has rendered Adorno a kind of unexpected Environmental Philosopher and, it seems especially so in what is understood to be the Anthropocene. In support of this, one might point to the concluding paragraph of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, in which the authors attempt to arrive at a depiction of a "true praxis capable of overturning the status quo" tantamount to the consummation and abolition of Enlightenment. It is a literally revolutionary moment in the sense that it is a gesture of turning around: the philosopher's soul's revolt from its captivity to the traditional Platonic revolution —away from shadows in a cave and towards strictly intelligible ideals. It is also

20 According to Robert Hullot-Kentnor "Memory of nature in the subject is the answer that runs throughout Adorno's work." The question being asked, in this case, is "how is it possible to recuperate mimesis without simply reenacting the dialectic of enlightenment?" (although this is, as readers of Adorno will know, a question that might appear under different names in different places, e.g., "if the *ratio* consumes its relation to its object and those produces a pseudo-objectivity, how can thought justify its own process and continue to think?"). Cook 2011 also frames non-human nature in its non-identity as a central motor for Adorno's philosophy writ large.

21 The centrality of possibility in Adorno's thought has recently and insightfully been drawn out by Iain Macdonald, *What Would Be Different: Figures of Possibility in Adorno* (Stanford University Press, 2019). I have benefited particularly from chapters 3 and 5.

a reversal of the near and the far,[22] wherein "the closest practical objectives reveal themselves to be the most distant goal already attained, and the lands of which [repeating a citation from Bacon] 'their spials and intelligencers can give no news'—that is, *nature misunderstood by masterful science—are remembered as those of origin*."[23]

Even if we bear in mind that the subsequent pages of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* are an excursus to the *Odyssey*, we ought not emphasize the undertones of this redeemed approach as a return to an ancestral home. True praxis overturns the "mythical scientific respect of peoples for the given reality, which they themselves constantly create" by turning away from any constancy of positive presence (i.e., the enduring archaic home), the promise of progress or civilizational advances and, apparently, towards nature. But what is meant by the idea of return, of remembrance, of nature? And what do we do now, long after *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* that nature is taken to be dead? The figuration of nature (or natural history) as what is opposed to a static reproduction of the same, the persistence of non-identity under the dominance of identity, might very well be some sort of standalone takeaway for which one does not need to ennoble successive collapsing avatars of collectivity with the title "dialectic." In the following, I will at least try to provoke a few reactions concerning this potentially standalone epistemic setting.[24]

Setting these questions to one side, consider a second kind of relevance Adorno's philosophy may have for the present. The second line of conceiving Adorno's particular relevance denies the present epoch any status as a special case by 'Anthropocene' or any other name, and looks with great suspicion on the assumption of an ordered succession of history's epochs especially in relation to 'nature.' This second pathway, which has affinities with Benjamin's theses on the concept of history and the 1939

22 In this as in all things with Adorno, one might have framed this point as a dispute with Heideggerian reversals characterizing *Being and Time*..

23 Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* 33.

24 See esp. the conclusion.

exposé of the *Passagenwerk*,[25] reframes the crises of the Anthropocene as not only continuous with but, at its strongest articulation, *repetitions* or reinstallments of older formations and thereby not meriting the rhetoric of transformative rupture that is everywhere attached to it.[26] In this view, the misrecognition of history presents the succession of one moment to the next all the while tracing in outline a trauma that can hardly be witnessed or recognized (though we may often betray our unhappy unconsciousness of such). Along this pathway we note that the explicitly belated, recovered, or reiterated imperative to recognize Adorno's relevance for a prior present moments was defended by Robert Hullot-Kentor in 1989 and in 2006.[27] Of course, with repetition an open possibility, one must qualify the sense in which two or more times may differ from repetitions of *the same*, where the latter is intuited in abstracted stereotypes or perhaps not even so much recognized as *allegorized* into loose equivalence: one is accustomed to speaking here of societal regression,

25 I cite moments from the Theses on the Concept of History essay below. The 1939 exposé emphasizes straight away the proliferation of phantasmagoria in relation with a vision of history that is at once reifying and progressivist. Against this, Benjamin arranges Blanqui, who does not appear in the 1935 exposé, as anticipating Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence as a sign of his resignation to the notion that "the century was incapable of responding to the new technological possibilities with a new social order." (*Arcards Project*, 26), a sentiment that clearly still continues to resonate in what we must refer to as *today*.

26 The extent to which anyone interpreting Adorno must disagree with any views on the current -Cene is the extent that any would say that any candidate factor other than human thought, the abstraction at the heart of subjectivity (*ND* 181), and related psychology (which are obviously both *natural developments, developments of nature's relation with itself,* in Adorno's secular reckoning) is responsible for subordinating a reified and damaged conception of 'Nature.' Although drawing out separate lessons, Deborah Cook's "Nature Red in Tooth and Claw" (chapter 2 in her 2011) and Joel Whitebook's "Weighty Objects: On Adorno's Kant-Freud Interpretation" (chapter 2 in Huhn 2004) both provide compelling accounts of this line in Adorno's thought.

27 See, respectively, his "Back to Adorno" and "Introduction: Origin as Goal" both in his *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Adorno* (Columbia University Press, 2006)

the threat of fascism, barbarity resurgent, the idiocy of self-administered self-destruction, the idiocy and guilt of critical reasoning that can do little other than witness genocide without substantial appeal.[28]

Apart from being the dialectic of enlightenment (where the fantasy of progress, independence, and reason conceals the reassertions of regression, dependency, and irrational self-destruction), this view of the unrecognized reinstallment of mythic violence is surely one that Adorno inherited and adjusted from Benjamin. This coheres with the author of *Minima Moralia* (e.g., "Our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer."[29]) and such an account is only intensified when it comes to Western philosophy's metaphysical tradition as Adorno reads it. "The mythical doom is timeless. *Philosophy has been its secularization*, in thrall to the doom insofar as its gigantic euphemisms would reinterpret the immutable as the good, down to the theodicies of Leibniz and Hegel."[30]

The second pathway of recognizing Adorno's relevance for the present maintains a vision of history as a single and uninterrupted catastrophe rather than an arrhythmic systolic and diastolic series of crises and recoveries. This approach is ultimately the view of Walter Benjamin's famed eighth and ninth theses on the concept of history, to grasp disaster and catastrophe as unexceptional, as the rule. While Adorno never shied away from presenting his debt to Benjamin, especially in relation with what he called "negative universal history" in the lecture series on *History and Freedom*, he made an amendment to this historical vision that would rescue particular details from an obliterating judgment.

> If Benjamin said that history had hitherto been written from the standpoint of the victor and needed to be written from that

28 Against this blurry equivocation and allegorization of all regressions, compare this line from Benjamin's third thesis on the concept of history: "To be sure, only a redeemed humanity receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed humanity has its past become citable in all its moments." (*Illuminations*, 254, trans. emended)

29 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 15.

30 *ND*, 122, my emphasis. The grand euphemisms are an abbreviated citation to Platonism's orientation towards the Good, True, and Beautiful.

> of the vanquished, we might add that knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat, but should also address itself to those things which were not embraced by this dynamic, which fell by the wayside – what might be called the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic. It is in the nature of the defeated to appear, in their impotence, irrelevant, eccentric, derisory.[31]

This addendum, of course, bolsters the famed *Finale* of *Minima Moralia* where we read that the only philosophy that can be responsibly practiced is "the attempt to contemplate *all things* as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption."[32] Such a viewpoint coming into clearer outline would herald the exit from the temporal drift enforced by the dominance of mythic history. Here we remember that, for Adorno, such a philosophical practice of critical reason as such is saddled with its tasks from the redemptive possibilities that, in a matter of speaking, shine through the brokenness and damage inhering in the present. Yet, having any kind of clearer outline is also impossible because such knowledge will be marked by "the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape,"[33] vitiating the possibility of a universal messianic perspective given externally to spatio-temporally local guidance by particulars. This is one reason why natural history, in Adorno's sense, becomes canonical for philosophy.[34]

With this in mind, we must revise the expectation that some particular philosophy could have a specific kind of application or unique resonance with prevailing social conditions without examining the basis of such putative conditions. This is also not to mention the more dour or hopeless tones of the lecture on *Metaphysics* in which traditional philosophical fields (not only the theodicy inherited from Leibniz and Hegel above but "postive metaphysics", a phrase indicating both a sense of material and historical purposiveness, the goodness of creation, the sense that histo-

31 Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 151.

32 *ibid.*, 247, my emphasis.

33 *ibid.*

34 See the third section below.

ry will resolve its debts and will have discovered its secret purpose)[35] are repeatedly rebuked for making a mockery of the suffering of others, for refusing to countenance the thought that all culture has failed and proven itself to be garbage after Auschwitz.[36] Certainly, in this horrible regard, one of Adorno's more bombastic moments appears especially noteworthy for the Anthropocene or -cene-by-any-other-name search for a totalized collective identity, that "genocide, the eradication of humanity, and the concentration of people in a totality under which everything is subsumed under the principle of self-preservation, *are the same thing*."[37] These thoughts, of course, lead to the arch-philosophical question in these lectures, whether one can live after Auschwtiz,[38] and this is obviously a question that vitiates the immediate plausibility that some collective humanity has entered into a new age through climate disaster.

Aside from the crucial question whether we are not already avoiding the Benjaminian lesson that the apparent "state of emergency" is, in fact, the rule that has been experienced by the oppressed, these foregoing considerations require that we question our motive for finding a new philosophy for ourselves, whether it is something that we can extract insights for mapping a guide to living (and dying) well in the Anthropocene or at the end of the world.[39] As an alternative to this vulgar interest

35 See *Metaphysics* pp. 101ff.

36 One necessary word: although Adorno obviously intends Auschwitz to mean and include the Shoah he also repeatedly expands the sense in the lectures on *Metaphysics* to include "Vietnam", "torture", "the atom bomb" (see pp. 101ff.) Such an expansion makes it unclear what it would meant to live "after Auschwitz" and not "with Auschwtiz" as an ongoing but unacknowledged reality, which, tendentiously, becomes a kind of ongoing passive denialism as the cost of a habitation in a fantasy of the present.

37 Adorno, *Metaphysics,* 108. Adorno underlines this through Hegel's reading of the relation of absolute freedom and terror: "[...] absolute self-assertion and the absolute negation of all that lives, and, thus, finally, genocide, are one and the same thing."(*Metaphysics* 109)

38 Adorno candidly remarks that this question takes on special urgency for him as he has recurrently dreamt that he is, in fact, not alive but merely the "emanation of a wish of some victim of Auschwtiz." (110)

39 One way of inflecting this notion is through the Socratic-Platonic mantra in

in philosophy, there is a Hegelian motto in *Philosophy of Right* for thinking of philosophy as one's own time articulated in thought.[40] This is not an *application* of any independent analytical procedures or philosophical "categories", to identifiable issues independently known in the present time. This is a way of seeing something, a dialectic,[41] working itself out in experience, in concrete conditions, in, for example, the Pauline "groaning" of all creation awaiting its deliverance, awaiting the thoroughgoing presence of *parousia,* true life, which has also been conceived of as an end of historical days.[42]

Here it strikes me as important to recall that Adorno introduced *Negative Dialectics* by depicting *any* time in which *philosophy*, in particular, is called for, as a time constituted *after* a lapsed opportunity to transform the world.[43] Because transforming the world would have

Phaedo that philosophy is best thought of as "learning how to die", see Roy Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene.* See also Dona Haraway's repeated trope of "living and dying well" in present circumstances in *Staying with the Trouble*, e.g., pp. 29, 43, 51, and 56.

40 "Whatever happens, every individual is a child of his [or her] time; so philosophy too is its own time apprehended in thoughts. It is just as absurd to fancy that a philosophy can transcend the contemporary world as it is to fancy that an individual can overleap his [or her] own age, jump over Rhodes. If [the] theory really goes beyond the world as it is and builds an ideal one as it ought to be, that world exists indeed but only in opinion, an unsubstantial element where anything you please may, in fancy, be built." *Philosophy of Right* p. 11.

41 "[D]ialectics is a challenge from below" (*ND* 303)

42 If the allusion to Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans or the hope for apocalypse appears to introduce an element of devoutness that was not already present in the discussion of the comparatively sober and secular global/planetary epoch, then it would be useful to remember the remark from *Negative Dialectics* concerning the construction of a "World Spirit": "In the concept of the world spirit, the principle of divine omnipotence was secularized into the principle that posits unity, and the world plan was secularized into the relentlessness of what happens. The world spirit is worshipped like the deity, a deity divested of its personality and of all its attributes of providence and grace." (*ND* 305)

43 Bernstein's phrasing in "Negative Dialectics as Fate" in Huhn ed. *Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, in the buildup for an argument framing Adorno as a post-Hegelian Hegelian, is very adroit for my purposes here: "So philosophy

been a *realization* of philosophy's emancipatory and redemptive tasks —tasks which include the upbuilding of humanity, the tutelage and constitution of a global subject,[44] the overdue beginning of human history— the purported relevance of philosophy is at once an indirect claim of the inadequacy of its available concepts and methods. Hence, as *Negative Dialectics* continues, philosophy can only ruthlessly criticize itself.

As condemned to its self-laceration, we can see how it would be unavoidable for Adorno's critical philosophy to be attuned to the present moment. Yet this is not what one finds in the present run of neologisms with which to baptize the conceit of a novel epoch. Against this trend, the idea of a *philosophy of the Anthropocene*, or any other -cene, should hardly be countenanced by Adorno and Adornians. On the other hand, as he invokes it in the lectures on *History and Freedom* and, it seems, by the positioning in *Negative Dialectics* (after the collapse of World Spirit, before the Mediations on Metaphysics), there *is* a sense that philosophy can only be guided by natural-historical examinations, that natural history is the canon for philosophical activity. So we should anticipate that the story will be slightly more complex than outright rejection (or acceptance). It seems to me that the thought of natural history, whether intentional or not, resonates with the oft-cited sense of the method of detecting possibility employed by negative dialectics: "The means employed in negative dialectics for the penetration of the hardened objects is possibility – the possibility of which their reality has cheated the objects and which is

continues [...] through critical engagement with the conceptions of reason that were to enable us to stop philosophizing and live a human life. We have philosophy because such a life is not available, which is also an Hegelian idea, namely, that philosophy speaks to the *need* of culture which that culture cannot satisfy. And [...] the categorial expression of need in a culture consists of unreconciled dualities, say, between history and nature."

44 Cook's conclusion to *Adorno on Nature* emphasizes this possibility of a global subject from Adorno's essay on "Progress". See Adorno, *Critical Models*, esp. 144. The idea that a global subject has *failed* to emerge obviously rejects the image invoked in the "Anthropocene" although other -cenes (Capitalocene, Plantationocene, e.g.) do not suggest a central agential synecdoche.

nevertheless visible in each one."[45] But this will not be understood entirely until the end of this paper. I turn now from considering some of the difficulties, in general, of finding Adorno to be a particularly relevant philosopher for any time to seeking an understanding of how Adorno was used by Chakrabarty to frame the tasks of the Anthropocene.

2. Chakrabarty's Adorno: Negative Universal History

As is well known, the identity of the current epoch has been an object of intensifying scrutiny, at least insofar as many are concerned to search out and call it by its proper name. The "Anthropocene", is a term that has, one might say, its original home among stratigraphers, geographers, and Earth-systems scientists. One of the essays that broadcast the notion of the Anthropocene for many beyond these scientific communities is Dipesh Chakrabarty's "Climate of History: Four Theses."[46] I take the liberty of reminding the reader of the four theses that Chakrabarty abstracts from the notion of the Anthropocene viewed through the lens of Anthropogenic Climate Change, and, for reasons of space, will only suggest that these four theses can stand in for a variety of claims made about the Anthropocene.

Thesis 1: Anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the humanist distinction between natural history and human history.[47]

Thesis 2: The idea of the Anthropocene, the new geological epoch in which humans exist as a geological force, severely qualifies humanist histories of modernity/globalization.[48]

Thesis 3: The geological hypothesis regarding the Anthropocene requires us to put global histories of capital in conversation with the species history of humans.[49]

45 *ND* 52.

46 Originally in *Critical Inquiry,* vol. 35, no. 2 (Winter 2009) and since included, in a modified form, in Chakrabarty *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, University of Chicago Press, 2021. I cite the latter here as "Four Theses" followed by the page number in Chakrabarty 2021.

47 Chakrabarty, "Four Theses," 26

48 ibid., 31

49 ibid., 35

Thesis 4: The crosshatching of species history and the history of capital is a process of probing the limits of historical understanding.[50]

Each of the theses expresses a partial view onto a crisis in historical representation and narration. Because of the collapse of the givenness, the obviousness, of a static sense of nature (i.e., the thetic snapshot of *physis*), which we understand from earlier in "Four Theses" had been a necessary condition of historical narration (i.e., 'nature' as the immutable stage upon which human actions and dramas were held),[51] this danger is also a danger for human historical self-understanding. Chakrabarty takes up an explicit Adornian concept of "negative universal history" at a concluding moment in a discussion of the obscured universality of "species" as a stand-in category of collective self-understanding to be used by historical consciousness.[52] Yet, for Chakrabarty, there are difficulties in taking up a project of reflectively representing ourselves as a collective under the sign 'species': "We humans never experience ourselves as a species. We can only intellectually comprehend or infer the existence of the human species but never experience it as such."[53] Further, Chakrabarty describes 'species' as a kind of "placeholder", a dummy variable, for "an emergent, new universal history of humans that flashes up in the moment of danger."[54] (45)

Dummy or not, some *je ne sais quoi* subjectivity seems to be required as a standard measure for historiography or for providing a shared and

50 ibid., 43

51 See Chakrabarty's elaboration of the first thesis, which includes references on the stability and background of 'nature' in Vico, Croce, Collingwood, Stalin, and Braudel. pp. 26-31.

52 This point is motivated in "Four Theses" through a reference to E.O. Wilson and weakly supported by a claim by Gadamer.

53 "Four Theses," 43. I note also that 'species', strictly speaking, would leave out the technological appendages that Chakrabarty refers to as extensions of the collective of human dominance: "When I speak of humans constituting a certain formation of domination – a complex of humans, their technologies, and the animal species that flourish through association with humans – I speak of a certain dominant collectivity that even contains the nonliving (i.e., technology) as a part of itself. This collectivity, cognitively available to me, is still not available to my phenomenological experience of the world." (44)

54 ibid., 45.

shareable sense of the experience of the alarming changes taking place. Even if individual human beings do not come across 'species' in their experiences of their phenomenal world,[55] it is *as a species*, per Chakrabarty, that human beings have become a geological agent. And so, the species *is* indirectly experienced in the ecological havoc that it has wrought. In more recent work, Chakrabarty has come to put a finer spin on the idea of the human as species or as something else, perhaps as a kind of split into *anthropos* and *homo*, or perhaps there is no real way to distinguish the species being of humans from their social identity.[56] But perhaps the finesse on such or any spin cannot really budge the difficulty of explaining this "crosshatching" action and the critical "conversation" suggested in the third and fourth theses.

This is the space in which reference to Adorno and a negative universal history is meant to be established. Our capacity for historical consciousness founders upon its supposed need to have a way of articulating the presumably collective subject orchestrating the present disaster. But there seems to be no way of positively representing this collective agency of humans (and human abrogations of non-human and non-living beings) as *species* or as "the West" or under any other name. "[Adorno] knew that positing any positive content for 'all' of humanity would in fact lead to one particular section of humanity oppressing another par-

55 I can only remark here without further comment on the curiously raw sense-data qualities of that which is available to the human sensorium in the epistemic framing of 'experience' supposed here.

56 The difficulties of naming a subject at times seem to linger with Chakrabarty – in distinguishing *anthropos* from *homo* in his 2015 *Tanner Lectures*, "The Human Condition in the Anthropocene" – especially pp. 156-60. But also see his 2016, "Whose Anthropocene? A Response" in which he claims to agree with the thought that "one can no longer separate the biological agency of humans from their geological agency in the way in which I appeared to do in my essay 'The Climate of History'". Chakrabarty. "Whose Anthropocene? A Response" in: "Whose Anthropocene? Revisiting Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'Four Theses,'" ed. Robert Emmett and Thomas Lekan, *Rachel Carson Center Perspectives: Transformations in Environment and Society* 2016 no. 2, 103-113. Here p 104

ticular section in the name of the universal or the whole."[57] Instead, what we are in some sense compelled to do is to sketch out the universal that arises "from a shared sense of catastrophe" that has no positive content, although this is only a temporary condition for Charkarbarty.[58] He concludes his addendum with the noncommittal gesture of looking for new identities to come: "It may someday be possible to fill out the 'we' of a negative universal history of the Anthropocene with concrete identities of humans and nonhumans. Or it may not."

Upon reflection, negative universal history in Chakrabarty ultimately becomes a proposal to dislodge and forbid any *positive* content from a universal history while preserving the lineaments of a universal history for an era in which all historical universals, and their sectioned-off effigies, are rotted out. Perhaps Hegelians, Marxists, and Post-Colonial theorists have learned this already from the ersatz privileged universals, the universal classes of the bourgeoisie or the proletariat, and readers today might apply similar suspicions towards the notion of humanity. Although, it must be said, Adorno is not unique in claiming that positive contents can be misused for ideological purposes (indeed, the very conception of ideology in Marx would already cover everything Chakrarbarty wants to attribute to Adorno concerning the oppressive misuse of concepts). But we note that what is 'negative' about Chakrabarty's negative universal history is undialectically so; it is a standing denial awaiting the proper ("indigenous" and "non-human")[59] identities to come along

57 "Four Theses," 47. Incidentally, Chakrabarty draws from Harriet Johnson's contribution to the *Adorno Studies* collection on the Anthropocene mentioned above. Johnson's readers will note how the present essay portrays negative universal history as both (i) heavily indebted to Benjamin (a point that Chakrabarty fails to adequately take up and, in failing to do so, renders the notion of its negativity unintelligible), (ii) a stepping-stone on the way to understanding the need for natural history.

58 "It is empty in that it is an emergent concept with no particular, concrete content yet." (46) "The 'negative universal history' of the Anthropocene – the history that gestures to a 'we' that may indeed be more than human – can only be an ethical advisory at this point. Its empirical content for now remains necessarily empty." (48)

59 The reference to "Indigenous peoples" (48) in Chakrabarty concerns a mode

but meanwhile barring the door to all foreseeable arrivals akin to the gate/door of the law in Kafka's parable, awaiting the right traveller from the conceptual periphery.

Whether or not the "negative" in Charkabarty functions as an undialectical *Bilderverbot*, it is evident that the sundering in the crisis of traditional historiographical conditions does not lead Chakrabarty into, for example, a kind of disconnected paratactical style of laying out various objects —citations, scenes, or commodities— and trying to suggest from these particulars a kind of atmosphere of a whole epoch.[60] Neither is the reader enjoined to seek out whatever modernism in historiography would be, aspiring to hold open the contingent possibility of being able to narrate objectively for all in the use of unstable and fractious forms in a singular, particular, artifice. It seems that negative universal history is a sort of Lenten season before the return of a possibly universal history as soon as the new universal agency is recognized. We also are not led to suppose that an eventual encounter with non-human nature is best seen in considerations of aesthetics and artworks instead of universal history, although this is the direction at which Adorno gestures in these lectures as well as in the later *Aesthetic Theory*.[61]

In sum, instead of taking up a transformed relation to possible histories, Chakrabarty helps himself to the continuity and the sense of the old toaltities of human and non-human, though they are "rotten" and insufficient on their own. And, though we are given a sense in which nature and natural history have metamorphosed into something other than an ahistorical backdrop for human protagonism, the *object of nega-*

of hearing "the non-human", a reified and problematic homogeneity, without any anthropomorphization or ventriloquism.

60 For recent contributions ot this style, see e.g., Karl Schogel *Das sowjetische Jahrhundert. Archäologie einer untergegangenen Welt* or Andy Robinson *Gold, Oil, and Avocados: A Recent History of Latin America in Sixteen Commodities.* Of course, these, by virtue of what one must regard as their completeness, contrast against the paradigmatic entry in this category: Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*.

61 "Natural beauty is the trace of the non-identical in things under the spell of universal identity." (*AT* 73)

tive universal history, that which is disclosed through its damage, remains some self-identical and necessarily obscured object, "non-human nature" viewed indirectly, which has provided a stable backdrop until this excessive meddling of human/~~species~~ doings has cast it beyond the epistemic horizons of the present and perhaps will only be (authentically? primordially?) known in terms that would provincialize Eurocentric traditions. Recall here Adorno's characterization of a faulty idea of nature, one that he would replace with his sense of natural history: "The concept of nature that is to be dissolved is one that [...[would come closest to the concept of myth. [...] By it is meant what has always been, what as fatefullly arranged predetermined being underlies history and appears in history; it is substance in history."[62]

Chakrbarty's "Four Theses" is in a strange position with respect to the references that clearly stem from Benjamin (the source of a moment "flashing up in a moment of danger" Chakrabarty p. 45) and the remainder of Adorno's lectures and their development in *Negative Dialectics*. As impressive as the idea of "negative universal history" no doubt is, drawing from its source in Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History*, it is not Adorno's last word, nor was it one of his first words on the matter.[63] Instead of negative universal history we might be talking instead about natural history, but this would suppose a radically different framework from the one Chakrabarty assumes. Chakrabarty might be described as in a kind of Goldilocks position between the revolutionary mysticism of Benjamin and the dialectical critique of Adorno, on the one hand, all the while refusing to let go of a liberal strand of the humanist tradition, on the other hand, which is somehow only now encountering the project of modernity as red in tooth and claw. And if the tasks of the Anthropocene are neither one nor the other, then we might wonder whether there are broader disconnections at play between Adorno's philosophy and the broad notions

62 apud. Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 253.

63 I am referring here to the mention that Adorno makes of his early lecture on Naturgeschichte that he draws out in the *Lectures on History and Freedom*, more than thirty years after his initial take on the matter.

of the Anthropocene that we can identity either in Chakrabarty's notable essay or in other prominent accounts of the new planetary age.

3. Nature as Natura Naturans, Natural History as Transience

Consciousness does justice to the experience of nature only when [...] it incorporates nature's wounds. The rigid concept of natural beauty thereby becomes dynamic. It is broadened by what is already no longer nature. Otherwise nature is degraded to a deceptive phantasm.[64]

At times, Adorno's elaborations of negative universal history in the lectures on *History and Freedom* and the corresponding sections of *Negative Dialectics* approach notions that sound very much like those emphasized by Chakrabarty,[65] for example, that universal history is to be preserved in some sense:

> Thus the task is both to construct and to deny universal history or, to use yet another Hegelian term, one used to refer to public opinion in the *Philosophy of Right*, universal history is to be *respected* as well as *despised*. The domination of nature [...] welds the discontinuous, hopelessly splintered elements and phases of history together into a unity while at the same time its own pressure senselessly tears them asunder once more.[66]

64 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 68.

65 It is telling to compare the account given by Harriet Johnson's "The Anthropocene as Negative Universal History", which cites Chakrabarty and which Chakrabarty cites in his addendum to "Four Theses". Like his relation to Adorno, Chakrabarty excerpts some general notions form Johnson that seem to correspond with the idea of a negative universal history (see Chakrabarty 47, and also Johnson 55-56) but resists following Johnson down a pathway that includes a more thoroughgoing engagement with Walter Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History* or Johnson's emphasis that negativity in negative universal history operates across particulars and universals (57) or the logically more primordial trouble with identity thinking that Chakrabarty seems to overlook.

66 Adorno, *History and Freedom*, lecture 10. See also ND 320: "Universal history must be constructed and denied. After the catastrophes that have happened, and in view of the catastrophes to come, it would be cynical to say that a plan for a better world is manifested in history and unites it. Not to be denied for that reason, however, is the unity that cements the discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments and phases of history — the unity of the control over nature, progressing to rule over men, and finally to that over men's inner

One wonders whether Chakrabarty sufficiently despises universal history to take up the dialectical iteration that appears at the conclusion of the second sentence.[67] Taking a wider view, this initial sketch from Adorno's lectures of a task of dialectical history would seem to mirror the Chakrabarty-Anthropocene notion of disputing any kind of continuous framework or perspective (obviously including the notion of the natural world as a permanent and static background). But any 'break' with foregoing historical consciousness for Chakrabarty-Anthropocene perspectives, a break that is legitimized in the scurrying and half-baked efforts to find the best terms for the present, is contradicted by Adorno's portrait of the truth of this dialectic: "We must say instead that history is highly continuous in discontinuity, in what I referred to once as the permanence of catastrophe." Without putting too fine a point on the matter, Chakrabarty is perhaps overly impressed by the disastrous novelty of Anthropogenic climate change. For Adorno, the horrors of the past forcefully and disquietingly culminate under the name of Auschwitz, rendering it impossible to pursue a legitimate project of universal history or positive metaphysics as might have been continued from classical and modern philosophies of history.

To leap momentarily beyond the lectures on history, wherein we cannot help but realize that negative universal history, along with the idea of various guises of World Spirit in historical avatars (Volk, Nation, Civilization, or international classes), are mystifying hypostases, also described as fetishes.[68] In the lectures as well as in *Negative Dialectics*,

nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb."

67 And, moreover, we might say other than specifically universal history, the very idea of a comprehensive collective totality formed through whatever means. See "Spirit as Social Totality" in *ND* 314ff.

68 "What is irrational in the concept of the world spirit was borrowed from the irrationality of the world's course, and yet it remains a fetishistic spirit. To this day, history lacks any total subject however construable. Its substrate is the functional connection of real individual subjects [....] But history is equipped with those qualities [i.e., the Tolstoyan notion that history does nothing, it does not fight, it does not pursue ends, et c.] because society's law of motion has for thousands of years been abstracting from individual subjects, degrading them into the mere executors, mere partners in social wealth

we find Adorno treating these models of collectivity treated as a succession of hollow effigies of transcendence, much as we would suspect if we appreciated Adorno as a reader of Hegel and a dialectician in his own right. As we move beyond "negative universal history" and its associations with Benjamin,[69] we encounter another, entirely other, conception of nature than what is given in Chakrabarty's portrayal of the objective totality that has suffered the passion of human history and even the set of non-human beings whose voice has been denied by the dominance of the more-than-human collective. In *Aesthetic Theory*, we are warned against a kind of "fetishism of nature" (a "pantheistic subterfuge" perhaps returning in the expectant hope for non-human nature to speak in human terms, a hope shared by Chakrabarty, Latour, and others still),[70] which is checked and avoided by acknowledging nature as something other than its existence at any time, we might call it the *dynamis* or a potential opening of possibilities that have not yet and are not fated to attain. Adorno's conception, in other words, checks the fetishism of nature as asserting the dignity of the potentiality of *natura naturans* over and above the attainment of the *natura naturata*, or the world as an attained collection of facts or things, and that this shows an apparently contradictory fact: "the fact that nature, as it stirs mortally and tenderly in its beauty, does not yet exist."[71] Nature and natural beauty plainly are more evocative of *natura naturans* for Adorno than with any pregiven or available totality:

and social struggle. The debasement was as real as the fact that on the other hand there would be nothing without individuals and their spontaneities." (*ND* 304)

69 Lecture 10 of the *History and Freedom* lectures includes long stretches of Adorno reading out to his audience some of Benjamin's theses. I repeat that it seems that there is a hole in the shape of Walter Benjamin that has been cut out of Chakrabarty's text.

70 I have in mind Latour's well-known image of the parliament of things from the end of *We Have Never Been Modern* (Harvard University Press, 1993) and given more detail in *Politics of Nature* (Harvard University Press, 2004), and another reification, the notion of "the Terrestrial", being identified as the "new agent of history proper to the new Climactic Regime" in *Down to Earth* (Polity, 2018).

71 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 74.

> The shame felt in the face of natural beauty stems from the damage implicitly done to what does not yet exist by taking it for existent. The dignity of nature is that of the not-yet-existing; by its expression, it repels intentional humanization." This dignity has been transformed into the hermetic character of art, into – as Hölderlin thought – art's renunciation of any usefulness whatever […]. For communication is the adaptation of spirit to utility, with the result that spirit is made one commodity among the rest; and what today is called 'meaning' participates in this disaster.[72]

Far from thinking that this is a one-off or atypical rhapsody of potential over actuality, this same relation is used, once again, to defeat a kind of harmful fetishism in a famous run of sentences in *Negative Dialectics*. If philosophy has any task remaining for it, and this reconnects with the question of what it means for a philosophy to be geared towards any particular time, then it is solely in the negative, in the rejection of the "fetish of the irrevocability of things in being."[73] Notice the mystifying hypostatization of the concrete *qua* physical condition covering over the obviousness where any condition of "things in being" lacks univocal normative judgment, clouding the relation between the universal-concept and the particular-individual. This fetish, one wants to call it more of a hex, is only undone by "the insight that things are *not simply so and not otherwise*, that they have come to be under certain conditions."[74] Hence, once again, the method of negative dialectics is given by holding hard to possibility, "the possibility of which [objects'] reality has cheated the objects and which is nonetheless visible in each one."[75]

This figure of the possible as something which is purloined by mere actuality encourages comprehending the nonidentical *not only* as that which persists as an extant remnant in relation to that which had been smoothly incorporated into a particular concept. Non-identity is not

72 *ibid.*

73 *ND,* 52.

74 *ibid.,* my emphasis.

75 *ibid*.

only to be considered under the synchronic framework of a particular "timeslice" of the world, so to speak, where "things in being" are irrevocably just the way that they are (one might have used Adorno's term "*so-sein*" if it provided any independent clarity). Non-identity is perpetually produced diachronically, by the contingency through which things are *so* and *not otherwise*, by the road not taken not having been taken.[76] One figuration of this is through imagining what is cheated when the window for climate action closes further: banal actuality, as the mere continuation of practices some of which have no internal relation to the production of greenhouse gasses, destroys the possibility of other contingent possibilities (as other actualities of a counterfactual present or as future actualities down a temporal stream from this present) and concommitantly entrenches the mythic authority of the way that things are.

Following Benjamin and Lukács' early work on the *Theory of the Novel*, Adorno argues for a deep connection between conceptions of nature and history that become visible in factors of disintegration: ruin, decay, transience. This has long featured in Adorno's philosophy; in lectures on *History and Freedom* in 1965 he approvingly cites his 1932 address to the Frankfurt Kant Society, "The Idea of Natural-History" that "the task of philosophy should be to comprehend historical existence in its extreme historical determinacy, at the point where it is at its most historical, as itself a natural form of existence .. or to conceive of nature as historical existence precisely where it is at its most natural."[77] Attaining a dialectical relation of nature and history is to be understood as part of the same effort of undoing a certain kind of "spell" or "fetishization" that is mistaken as a kind of secular disenchantment but, in practice, amounts to the shuntering of human subjectivity in the thrall of unrecognized myth.[78]

76 See also Deborah Cook, "From Actual to the Possible: Nonidentity Thinking," *Constellations* 12.1 (2005): 21-35.

77 See Lecture 14 "The History of Nature (II)" (7 January 1965). The same citation occurs in *ND* 359.

78 Although I cannot start to explain this here, there is a dispute with Heidegger throughout these lectures (i.e., beyond the book *The Jargon of Authenticity*, which is approvingly cited in *History and Freedom*) not only over what

Adorno's point can be put in the following terms[79]: That which had formerly been thought of as the Will of God, an active formative and causal principle of history, has been secularized and "ontologized" into (static, "disenchanted"[80]) nature.[81] This secularization, however, did not reveal or transform all of the trappings of sanctification and authority that devolved from God's Will as it was revealed in time, in what would have been able to be described as "creation" or "natural law", so that existing features of a supposedly secularized worldview are presented as if they were essential and rationally (since not divinely) justifiable. This pattern of confusing that which is contingent and constructed (although not *by* individuals)[82] with that which is essential and uncreated replicates a wider fetishism (after both Hegel and Marx) wherein what is brought about in an impersonal context (which, one assumes, includes *Geist*, the Nation, exchange relations of commodities) is taken to be part of or in line with objective nature. The contingent and constructed is mistaken to be essential and uncreated; for Adorno, this fetish substitution becomes the structure through which a reified (static, "disenchanted") conception

are called fundamental structures of Dasein but also over the emphasis on hermeneutics or interpretation as orienting philosophical activity as opposed to the kind of allegorical work given through natural history.

79 I am abbreviating and condensing because much of the lectures are not as condensed as Adorno's other work. I will also provide citations to Adorno's finished versions of these lectures, i.e., as they appear largely unmodified albeit in a somewhat different micro-ordering in the section "World Spirit and Natural History" in *Negative Dialectics*.

80 "Disenchanted" in quotes here because we see that this conception of nature is part of a wider mythical fetish.

81 "When history becomes the basic ontological structure of things in being, if not indeed the *qualitas occulta* of being itself, it is mutation as immutability, copied from the religion of inescapable nature. This allows us to transpose historical specifics into invariance at will, and to wrap a philosophical cloak around the vulgar view in which historical situations seem as natural in modern times as they once seemed divinely willed." (*ND* 358)

82 Here my "contingent and constructed" are terms attempting to simplify the presentation of what is meant by "second nature" in Lukács and Adorno's use (see, e.g., *ND* 357). The obvious contrast is to "essential and uncreated" as first nature.

of nature, nature as a collection of things, as the perdurance of a suggested immediacy, displaces a conception of nature as a space of dynamic potency or "becoming" in pre-Socratic terms.

How or why does this "substitution" continue to happen? Part of the answer is to understand that what is contingent and constructed depends, in being such, upon the mediation and modification of that which is already given as bare existing reality, which need not correspond to what is identified as 'nature' but merely just has to be given.[83] From within this perspective that Adorno associates with Hegel, there can be nothing given as such to human awareness or experience, the given is a myth that has been revealed to be human mediation as a primary activity. Thus the givenness of primary reality appears as already derivative residuum of logically and temporally prior mediations. Immediacy is "suggested" only after the consciousness of mediation seems to imply something else, something projected beyond experience by its epistemico-logical primacy. So, there would be no "outside" or "otherwise" to what has been created by human beings, hence, no nature for human beings beyond its thoroughgoing mediation. The reader can see, in this context, that the death or end of nature is not *only* a result of empirical events (e.g., Climate Change). It is a function of dominant philosophical epistemology and a corresponding metaphysics. Hence, what is posited (contingent, constructed) comes to be regarded as that which is given because it appears unavoidable and uncreated by any individual, what is given as what has been posited, and this is an effect of a denial of anything non-identical to the register of concepts that has been constructed.

If what is given has already been constructed, then some readers might take this to mean that nature (as stand-in for given) and history (a

83 "But second nature, philosophically raised for the first time in Lukács' theory of the novel, remains the negation of any nature that might be conceived as the first. What is truly – produced by the functional context of individuals, if not by themselves – usurps the insignia of that which bourgeois consciousness regards as nature and natural. To that consciousness, nothing appears as being outside any more; in a certain sense, there actually is nothing outside any more, nothing unaffected by mediation, which is total." *ND* 357

space of constructions) have already been intertwined in the post-Kantian tradition. How does this differ from what Adorno means in saying that nature and history are dialectical unities? Note that the ersatz unity emerging form the consideration of the iterated operation of second nature upon first nature would suggest a unity only through *presence*. Second nature is what has become of first nature by there being nothing left over, no "outside" or indivisible remainder, and through the apparent totality of this presence. So, the historically-shaped and mutable conditions of human judgment and thought take on the air of being natural inasmuchas "nature turns into an irresistible parable of imprisonment."[84] Against this view, Adorno supposes a unity that appears only when that appearance of gapless totality exposes its untruth.

We can understand the view opposed by Adorno, one that annihilates anything which is posited as outside of the powers of constitutive human consciousness, as *reinforced* by Anthropocene theses and not at all disrupted by the supposed "collapse" of a distinction between human and natural histories in the space of the planetary. The idea of the planetary acts as a tremendously flexible and accommodating catch-all that seems to represent an advance over a superficial division of nature and history. In this reading, the planetary becomes the ultimate guard against any kind of "outside", it is a transformation of the parable of imprisonment in nature into the staging of what is catastrophically happening and what will continue to happen as if it were fated, historical contingencies as the inexorable operations of the planetary. The planetary, then appears as the author of the Mephistophelean decree: that everything that comes into being deserves to perish. This is not to see history as nature or nature as history but, in not being able to discern one from the other any longer, to enshrine as Terrestrial Reason the exposure of human and non-human generations to a blind ordeal of self-preservation in the teeth of hybrid physical-conventional forces of genocide, ecocide, immiseration, terror, and the indignity of precarity. The Anthropocene category of the planetary flashes up here as a mutation of a famous Hegelian/Schillerian dic-

84 *ND* 358.

tum articulating an image of world history as the Last Judgment: die Naturgeschichte as Naturgerichte.

Rather than thinking of a hybrid identity of indiscernibles of nature and history in their blended presence, Adorno understands this proximity as a moment of commensurability that is only visible when viewed through the moment of passing, through transience, through decay.[85] "No recollection of transcendence is possible any more, save by way of perdition; eternity appears not as such, but diffracted through the most perishable."[86] Nature, in the sense isolated by Adorno (after Benjamin), appears as a kind of image (a "pictograph"[87]) and also, though this comes out more in *History and Freedom* and "The Idea of Natural-History", as allegory. The pictograph is associated with the prophecy of Daniel with the writing on the wall at Belshazzar's feast, the *Mene Tekel*. The reference to this prophecy is not only a matter of celebrating the prediction of the end of a political regime, but, essentially, a way of displaying the difference between a image's presentation and its significance. And, here, Adorno is deeply indebted to Benjamin's *Origin of German Tragic Drama*. This idea of signification is not to be understood as perceiving the concept in the particular, it is not a way of grasping the universal in its exemplary instantiations. Rather, it is essentially a way of trying to create *and* recover meaning in the wake of a collapse of highly visible or legible symbols of meaning. Allegory for Benjamin and Adorno performs this double function precisely because of the voiding of a transcendent ordering of meaning. Benjamin occasionally drives this thought in a more severe direction: "any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility, a destructive but just verdict is passed on the profane world: it is characterized as a world in which the detail is of no great importance."[188] Adorno, however, understands that

85 See part two of "The Idea of Natural History", lecture 14 of *History and Freedom*, and *Negative Dialectics* p. 359ff.

86 *ND* 360.

87 *ND* 359-60

88 Benjamin (2009 [1963]: 175)

this indicates that everything existing is, from the perspective of signfication, fragmented, ruined, decayed or broken. A late Adornian transposition of this thought in the famous opening of *Aesthetic Theory* is that "the only thing evident [...] is that nothing is self-evident." Rather than Benjamin's apocalypse, which is presented as the ciphered conditions of possibility latent in all allegory (i.e., "significance" only arrives through the sundering of the automatic, natural, meaning of particulars, "meaning is the ruins of nature"), Adorno in the early lecture on "The Idea of Natural-History" supposes that "for radical natural-historical thought [...] everything existing transforms itself into ruins and fragments."[89]

As a practice of framing concrete materials in a constellation of signification, allegory aligns with "seeing" nature as history and with history as nature. Hullot-Kentor describes this as allegory's "double aspect"[90] as both a triumph of creative subjectivity and the foundering of signification. "In allegory, the force of the illusion of human autonomy, knowledge, is turned against itself and presets the only form of transcendence possible in a radically secular condition, the collapse of illusion."[91] Allegory could be said to dominate the particulars in the arbitrariness of significance asserted by creative subjectivity, here history as second nature asserts itself as nature, convention occupies the space of being, but nature soon is shown through the very conventionality of that which is asserted by creative subjectivity, that is, through a historical lapse that emphasizes becoming and decay, transience, in which first nature returns in the ruin of second nature's inescapably subjective impositions. This demonic dialectical movement unfolding out of the consciousness of a crisis of signification stemming from dissatisfaction with an extent order (reified as an impersonal achievement and projected into an archaic past), moving into the creative assertion of novel conventions and the eventual dissatisfaction with such conventions (as the charnel house of

89 apud. Hullot-Kentor, *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 264.

90 *ibid*., 128

91 *ibid.*

long dead interiorities) is the backbone of Lukács *Theory of the Novel*,[92] which Adorno and Benjamin both knew, and which was only supposed to be overcome by what Lukács regrettably prophesied as the new spiritual world to come out of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy.

Adorno might be said to be preoccupied with the ruin, the fragmentary, for at least two reasons. The first, quite evidently, is that the transient fragment, which perdures in its decay or desuetude, is a way of leaving off from reasserting the Lukácsian-Hegelian dialectical line. The second is that the ruin as ephemeral is the only instance in which the transcendent is visible, which would prioritize here the conditions of signification and the modal space of possibility that things, these particulars as survivors of a collapse of possibility, need not have been *sosein*. (Thus refusing the sense that Naturgeschichte is "Naturgerichte", in other words, understanding the present moment of a historical trajectory of a totality of actualities as a kind of final judgment on the natural world.)

Notwithstanding the superficial resonances between natural history in Adorno and the Anthropocene notion of a merging of nature and history (or the human and the non-human), it is obvious that Adorno's notion of natural history is a more stringent concept that leads us towards aesthetic considerations in concrete (if fragmentary) individuals and *not* towards the assembly of new collectivities. If there are to be deeper resonances between Anthropocene or any discourse of a new -cene and the work of Adorno, then I hazard that the pathway must go also through Benjamin's analysis of baroque plays of lamentation and a revision of the Ausnahmezustand that Benjamin attempted in *Origin of German Tragic Drama* (in a critical dialogue with Schmitt) through the "Theses on the Concept of History".[93] Adorno's own directives for allegory arising out of natural history

92 And, obviously, this is the broad fate of Hegelian unhappy consciousness, see especially its appearance in *Phenomenology of Spirit* through culture and the world of self-alienated spirit §§ 487-490.

93 Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin and the Idea of Natural History* (Stanford University Press, 2024) along with Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other HIstory* (University of California Press, 1998) and Buck-Morss, *Dialectics of Seeing* (The MIT Press, 1989) appear salutary for this purpose.

instead of a logic of instantiation of generality, either as particular-universal or as species-type, obviously highlight the enigmatic aesthetics that is perhaps at a foundation of these matters. I would suppose that the selective ability to take up a natural-historical allegory, as a kind of occasional aesthetic regime in experience, would be one way of filling out a response to Martin Jay's question: "Is Experience Still in Crisis?"[94]

Conclusion

Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,
The silent withering of autumn flowers
Dropping their petals and remaining motionless;
Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,
The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayable
Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?
\- Eliot "The Dry Salvages"

I said above that Adorno's philosophy cannot be made to cohere with basic notions of the Anthropocene. In conclusion, I will make explicit some of the claims left implicit in the foregoing sections and will briefly extend some of the ways that Cook (2011) has anticipated a general strategy of some of the novel -cenes. So far, I have simply tried to explain the idea of negative universal history as it is functioning in Chakrabarty's famed essay on the Anthropocene and sought to understand the use being made of Adorno therein. This connects, in other ways, with either more tangential or more direct reclamations of Adorno for this new time of ecological and planetary crisis. I have already commented above on the idea of Adorno's perpetual marginality and the sense that this quality is there to be discovered within a time that he surely would have regarded as unreconciled.

The "negative universal history" at work as Chakrabarty's suggestion as a style for narrating experience in the Anthropocene appears to me to be lacking its Benjaminian heritage. This is understandable if one wants to avoid, for example, the murky matter of understanding how moments of history are laden with temporal indices or the burden of saddling one-

94 Chapter Five in Huhn, *Cambridge Companion to Adorno*.

self with a weighty task written in a code that advocates saving the dead from the undefeated fascist forces of that animate the present. But one cannot avoid the sense in Benjamin and in Adorno that the task is to "brush history against the grain" which is not the same as "including non-human agencies" in an expanding collective narrative. I read "negative universal history" as a kind of indication of its historical-temporal direction, granting that this is not very transparent to common sense, and not an indication of its different tenor. A more-than-human community of historians, if possible, does not inaugurate negative universal history. For Adorno, moreover, there has not (yet) been human history; instead, one might say, we live under a spell of history, of the necessary lie of 'progress' or, perhaps more recognizable now as "development."[95]

When reflecting on the presumption in Benjamin's theses of the necessity of preserving the species, Adorno admits that some idea of "progress" is coded into this aspiration in relation to unborn generations (and, one would add, the dead). But the assertion of progress closes off the presumption that it is a progress of *human* history:

> This confirms the concentration of progress on the survival of the species: no progress is to be assumed that would imply that humanity in general already existed and therefore could progress. Rather, progress would be the very establishment of humanity in the first place, whose prospect opens up in the face of its extinction. This entails, as Benjamin further teaches, that the concept of universal history cannot be saved; it is plausible only as long as one can believe in the illusion of an already existing humanity, coherent in itself and moving upward as a unity.[96]

In this regard, Adorno partakes of the animus that opposes the letter if not also the spirit of the assertion of the human as the planetary hegemon

95 "The nineteenth century came up against the limits of bourgeois society, which could not fulfill its own reason, its own ideals of freedom, justice, and humane immediacy, without running the risk of its order being abolished. This made it necessary for society to credit itself, untruthfully, with having achieved what it had failed. ("Progress" p. 154)

96 Adorno, *Critical Models*, 145.

of the recent past and present. But, for reasons that will return in a few paragraphs, the similarities would end here between Adorno's philosophy and, say, the Capitalocene or the Plantationocene. It is true that Adorno, for his part does not try to anticipate or dictate a program in response to the question *what is to be done?* apart from what we might call an emphatic conception of thinking as a kind of resistance.[97] But, also, we did see that he sets great store, calling it a kind of canon for philosophy, in what he calls natural history. Natural history, in Adorno's texts, proceeds, on one hand, from the essential non-identity of any claim of nature, which I have been framing here as the notion of natura naturans, "nature" as potentia, as not yet existing. On the other hand, natural history acquires its impetus from the partial collapse of forms of collective representation, which is indebted to the Lukácsian dialectic of first and second nature. I am emphasizing, the partiality of this collapse because the movement (better, the disappointment) from first to second nature is never entirely completed and whatever satisfaction attains with the products of second nature are fleeting and, thus, intimate a doomed loop of striving to impossibly resurrect or reenchant the immediacy of natural law, natural sense, and meaningful connections with the divine and more/other-than-human. Both the satisfaction and the dissatisfactions are never total enough to say of a collapse or an accomplishment that it has been the last one.

The direction of thought that is supposed by Adorno's (and, before him, Benjamin's) notion of natural history anticipates the ways that collective representation has been thrown into crisis by climate change and the intimations of the Anthropocene. In this regard, some of the motifs that have dominated the -cenes (e.g., the "end of nature", the "planetary", or the move towards novel conceptions of subjectivity if not also of humanity) are portrayed as the insistences of second nature that have forgotten their culturally and historically mediated forms and indulged a

97 Although this pops up in the lectures *Metaphysics*, see also "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" and "Resignation" in *Critical Models and Catchwords*. See also Martin Seel 2004.

petitio principii of being discovered or revealed to be immediate and ahistorical truths. This tendency of the riotous novelty of the Anthropocene evokes those long familiar strains within the wider music of German Idealism's secularized theodicies and the soi-disant rational progression of history. This tradition has long associated transcendence with the establishment or verification of impersonal community, including, perhaps especially, after the ruination of foregoing baseline presumptions taken to be natural or features of natural consciousness.[98] Reading Adorno casts the emergence of the Anthropocene not as the rupture of traditional forms of collective self-understanding but, rather, its continued though perhaps its last major expression. In this light, the discourses of -cenes, generally, appear as ways to assert the last fact of (ersatz) community or collectivity, gathered under an undesirably creative use of identity terms like "species" or "class" or "peoples", due to the planetary threat, the coercive pressure, to at least appear to be in solidarity with others and to join in the refrain of "we are all in this together."

In other words, much like Chakrabarty's version of negative universal history, the Anthropocene is a way of preserving at least the features of progressive universal history under a ban of silence. The blossoming of a thousand other -cenes has the effect of enforcing the arbitrariness of any particular interpretive scheme and, thereby, further embedding the unfathomed and unspeakable presence of universal histories of imagined communities against which Adorno situates "the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived."[99] Even if engaged in one of the varieties of using but not intending terms like 'human', 'nature,' or 'species' (not without a certain understanding of nonseriousness circulating between speaker and audience), such variet-

98 For an elegant account of the specific emphasis on the relation in classical German philosophy between the belief in personal transcendence and impersonal categories of community, see Michael Rosen, *The Shadow of God*, (Harvard University Press, 2022). This theme certainly appears in Adorno but with the additional dialectical step of understanding that no transcendence of community can be given or settled.

99 *ND* 5

ies (from ironic postmodern, nihilistic condescension, to the High Technocratese spoken in neo-specializations) do little else than offensively gild the shambles of history. They are, often against their own avowed purposes, a kind of conceptual Haussmannization, augmenting and embellishing a landscape all the while undermining conditions of revolt by seeking to construct wide thoroughfares for collective movement and eliminating all barricading resistances.

As a way of illustrating the point, consider Adorno's remark on the concept of 'life' portrayed as a biological category, the presumed authority of which legitimizes the irrationality of industrial capitalism; it does so by masking its historicity in a kind of enforced invariance through, one might say, conceptual development. As a baseline, Adorno notes the frayed edges, the damage, persisting in the concept that indicate other possibilities as well as the inadequacy of the concept with its identity relation: "While life keeps reproducing itself under prevailing conditions of unfreedom, its concept, by its own meaning, *presupposes the possibility of things not yet included, of things yet to be experienced* — and this possibility has been so far reduced that the word 'life' sounds by now like an empty consolation."[100] Adorno shifts to addressing the material and productive conditions of a society's possibility to reproduce its conditions of production, claiming that the conceptual associations with 'life' in the age of industrial capitalism served as a screen to justify an image of economic activity as exposed to unpredictable forces, 'life' as the principle of an anarchic order of capital accumulation. Against this function of the concept 'life', Adorno contrasts a society in which

> the social processes of production and reproduction were transparent for subjects if the subjects determined that process, they would no longer be passively buffeted by the om-

100 *ND* 263, my emphasis. Note the recurrence of the strategy of establishing a critical foothold through a sense of possibility that has been whittled away in actuality, a sense of possibility that is implied by the emphasis of the non-identical in life (including what is not included). Perhaps it would be best moving forward to frame the basis as "natural-historical *life"* and not merely "natural history."

> inous storms of life. The so-called 'life' would vanish, then, and so would the fatal aura with which the fin-de-siècle surrounded that word in the industrial age, to justify its wretched irrationality.[101]

Adorno's readers should, so it seems, take a similar line in the generalized approach to 'nature' in the Anthropocene or more-than-human collectives. We should bear in mind whether such notions are asserted as ahistorically true and, in retaining play, unpredictability, or, as is much more the case now, in emphasizing forms of connectivity and *de facto* community, these new accounts provide a screen for the phantoms of connectivity that are summoned by the idea of globalized capitalism. From the other direction, we can see that there are lines of possibility before the beginning and after the end of nature. These are only disclosed when one reads 'nature' as other and more than the biological and earth-scientific category of (eco)systems but which have to be transposed into the unfreedom and self-obscurantism of bourgeois society's conserved pleasure grounds, environmental reserves, and the mounting landfills and dumps. Nature as an ongoing creative principle is butchered under the eye of hypostasizing reification and, so, not even begun in such schemas.

From a more measured perspective, we might notice that this image of nature (as *physis,* as *natura naturans*), no matter however purportedly dynamic in the sketch above, seems to be conceptually prearranged into a landscape of objects that perhaps have no relationship with others apart from the classical Idealist relation of knowledge-judgment. The world seems little more than an empty container for an encounter with objects of judgment, notwithstanding the degree to which we say that we are tracking their damage at our own hands. There surely are further questions here about the Adorno's kind of materialism, which, as Peter Gordon remarks, necessarily has passed through Idealism,[102] but, we may speculate, not without cost. For example, it is clear that it is a

101 *ibid.*

102 See Gordon 2023 pp 109ff.

melancholic spirit that presides over the elogizing of natural history, wherein lines of lost possibility are legible in the natural-historical ruin of objects of experience, marking a difference between what is and what might have been. Is this melancholy not the preserve, the caesura, or the impasse in which the melancholic theorist is able to not entirely let go of philosophy's heritage, and, beyond this, the philosophical heritage of the Frankfurt School? Would it be desirable (i.e., without being entirely committed to ideological screening) to reframe an Adornian priority of the object as that of ecosystems, in the sense that these would need to be included as the late-twentieth and twenty-first centuries' annex of the conditions necessary for the possibility of reproducing society's productive capacities? And, of course, within the wake of Idealism, we cannot approach a revision of the conception of the object without also being prepared to renew our acquaintance with the subject who appears gliding along on the coattails of its conceptual opposition and symmetry, its fear and desire of the object. One of the characteristic features of Anthropocene and other -cene discussion portrays the subject, subjectivity, as a myth if reduced to individual egos and resisting the outward and inward links enchaining every human with a more-than-human community, as *holobiont* to use a term from Haraway (2016) or as species appended with technologies (of human invention and non-human creation) and connected with uninvented beings (biotic and abiotic, etc.).[103] It might be said by some extreme Adornians that such constructions, too, are to be respected and despised if their effect is to fix the discontinuities of history in the currency of conceptual constraints.[104] But is there no alternative mode of thinking with Adorno today or at any time than transcribing 'thinking' into this dispirited conjunction of affects? Yet surely the lack of immediate guiding praxis produced from this melancholy, respectful,

103 See Tsing et al. 2024

104 This is the line that Cook takes with respect to the principle of unity in diversity that she reads in Deep Ecology, Ecofeminism, and Radical Ecology. Unity in diversity, so far, has tended to fall out of balance and privilege a unifying one over the liberation and possibilities of each of a many. See Cook 2011 pp.156-162

and derisive mood, where thought is suitably distanced from calls for pseudo-activity, is not a new critique for Adorno.[105]

It might be suggested by some who are impatient that this is the unnerving truth of the view that Adornian natural history is canonical for philosophy. What is clear, at least, is that the theses of the Anthropocene, per Chakrabarty, are misaligned with Adorno's philosophy, and, furthermore, that, like any dialectical philosophy, Adorno's is not one from out of which one can be content with citing a principle and assuming an otherwise shared or obvious theoretical framework. Having said that, it is also evident that many of Adorno's focal points overlap with or "rhyme" with the concerns and outlook that are being associated with Anthropocene or other -cene discourses. For example, a 'natural history' in Adorno, tracking the transience and decay of objects seems to correspond with the study of "Anthropocene landscapes" associated with Anna L. Tsing.[106] One element that we might emphasize in closing is the sense in which Adorno's approach, from his early address on "The Idea of Natural History" through *Negative Dialectics*, pivots around a sense of what becomes visible in its passing away, in its being damaged, that this expresses the dialectical unity of nature and history. This is axially orthogonal to approaches that see the passing away or damage as something imposed onto nature, nature as the substance of history, which is, as we have already seen above, a way of mythologizing both nature and history. And, finally, we should also encourage more circumspection in the face of claims that "we" have entered into a new age or historical epoch. Surely it is laughable for an Adornian to think that it is because, we have now discovered that modernity has failed its promise. Artworks, for some, have already revealed this. Others have not needed to wait for the news of anthropogenic climate change that universal history continues to be a screen for disaster.

105 See "Resignation" in *Critical Models: Catchwords and Phrases*.

106 See Tsing et al. 2017

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Benjamin on Culture, History, Art and Psychoanalysis

Christopher Norris[1]

On Film, History and Psychoanalysis

It is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: 'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious.
The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.

'A Little History of Photography'

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. Historical materialism wishes to retain that

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He has also published a number of poetry collections: The Cardinal's Dog; For the Tempus-Fugitives; The Matter of Rhyme; A Partial Truth; As Knowing Goes; The Winnowing Fan; Hedgehogs: verse reflections after Derrida; Damaged Life: poems after Adorno's Minima Moralia; Socrates at Verse; Recalibrating and Other Poems; After Rilke: renderings, parodies, rejoinders and animadversions; and A Listener and Other Poems about Music. His political verse has appeared in three volumes: The Trouble with Monsters, The Folded Lie, and Convulsions, 2021-24: a Trusstercluck. 'Aerogel: a quintain' was published in the September 2022 number of Scientific American.
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image of the past which unexpectedly appears to man singled out by history at a moment of danger.

'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

1

No film director who can rival Freud
For telling how the other lives and speaks
Within ourselves, though it's on celluloid –
That realm of dreams wherein each viewer seeks
Fulfilment through the fabulous physiques,
Heroic deeds, and denouements devised
For their deluded bliss – it's there one sneaks
Such insights as Freud might have recognised
As showing what he'd guardedly surmised.

The camera sees what human eyes avoid,
Or see around, or practise learned techniques
For seeing just so far as sight's deployed,
In league with consciousness, to block the freaks
Thrown up by that deep otherness that leaks
Into our speech and would, in undisguised,
Un-sublimated form, elicit shrieks
From those, the wounded souls he analysed,
And scarcely do the job as advertised.

2

Think of the camera as a way to cut
Out ego's wilful censorship, or view
Direct, at moments, what's securely shut
Away by those defences that accrue
To ego's side when something punches through
And threatens to disrupt the fragile state
Of truce with which the psyche had made do

And which had even Freud negotiate
On terms those Viennese prudes might part-dictate.

So well attuned to psyche's wavelength, but
If he'd just known what movie-goers knew
Unconsciously and thought to tap the glut
Of riches to be had by viewers who
Could stand their censors down for just a few
Revealing moments, rather than translate
That knowledge into concepts, it would cue
Such cinematic insights as to rate
Among Freud's greatest *aperçus* to date.

3

He'd then have seen more clearly than he did
How those two mental agencies that vie
For psychic dominance, ego and id,
Must at the same time strive to have the eye
Provide their share of visual stimuli,
Whether to meet the need of consciousness
For ego's ambient world or else supply
Id's image-crunching drive with an excess
Of stuff that ego couldn't quite repress.

For there's no out-take editor whose bid
To please the censor, show 'good taste', or try
For popular release could keep the lid
On those unruly details that pass by
The viewer's knowing gaze and, on the sly,
Recruit unconscious forces to transgress
Whatever blocks Sir Ego might pile high
Against their nifty shifts to second-guess
The scraps of ground he'd strive to repossess.

4

Truth shows, and speaks, in just those telltale gaps
Where waking thought declines to tread, or where
Some sudden space-time jolt creates a lapse
In its accustomed service-role: to bear
The conscious mind, the image-stream, and their
Well-synchronised progression safely back
To the home-ground they still aspire to share
Despite that filmic witness to the lack
Of any guard-rail to keep things on-track.

An endless quest, a journey without maps
Through hostile country laid with many a snare –
That's what they face who'd seek them out, those traps
For Freud-instructed *cinéastes* who dare
To meet the X-marked screenshot with a stare
That ditches culture's gaze for Hitchcock's knack
Of feeding them material fit to scare
Any Hays Office censor with a smack
Of how abruptly words and scenes change tack.

5

'Screen-memories' – a phrase so often heard
In different contexts that the shifts of scene,
Like filmic cross-cuts, tend to give each word
And their conjunction double scope to mean,
For Freudians, just those memories that screen
Off hideous or traumatic episodes
With others less disturbing, while between
Devout film-goers all the psychic roads
Run deep and dark to demon-haunted nodes.

'Unconscious optics' – take an image blurred
By psyche's toll, or drop-outs that convene

To leave some telling speech-act slightly slurred,
Then have the analyst reveal what's been
Repressed at ego's bidding or made clean
Of those distorting errors in the codes
That now may serve, for senses newly keen,
As Freud's 'royal road' whose open prospect bodes
Fresh revelations as each reel re-loads.

6

Old scholars part surmised what film might bring:
'*Studium*' and '*punctum*', textual surrogates
That caught far in advance the kind of thing
Film-goers mean when one of them relates
Those moments in the cinematic greats
When something – visual detail, verbal slip,
Half-noticed cue, or scattered set of traits –
Jumps off the page (or screen) to swiftly flip
The reader/viewer's sense of present grip.

It's this sharp point, this sudden puncturing
Of their more settled, placid, studious states
Of readerly attention that may spring
To view at any time to put the skates
On scholar-feet by that which captivates
A rapt sensorium, lifts the censorship
Of joys unknown by *studium*'s advocates,
And casts the errant *punctum* loose to rip
Their codes apart on its transgressive trip.

7

By such abrupt awakenings may the course
Of history, that smoothly-flowing stream,
Encounter shocks, disruptions, and the force

Of those events that break the age-long dream
And tell the chronicler to let his theme
At last be this – the flashed-up sign that reads
'*Jetztpunkt*: so much of history to redeem
From the dead hand of *studium* lest it leads
The scholar back where cynicism breeds'.

They think time empty, those who would endorse
Its steady, even flow or have it seem
A homogeneous medium with its source
In some far-back triumphalist's regime
Which then gave savvy chroniclers a scheme
For taming history so that it proceeds
With crisis-points enough, but none extreme
Enough to flash them up, the words and deeds
They must ensure no later reader heeds.

8

Where better exercise such needful skills
In divination than by seeing more
To cinema than all those classic stills
Would have you see, or the well-vetted store
Of favourite clips, or what the censor saw
Fit to let through since taken to contain
No trace of those few moments in the raw,
Uncensored footage that, should they remain,
Might brush close-viewers up against the grain.

Yet they're the viewers, sharp-eyed for what spills
Across the bounds of image and Hayes-Law
Compliance, whose keen scansion best fulfills
The cry of history's victims: 'don't ignore
Those scraps just rescued from the out-take floor
Through some tired censor's failure to maintain

The kind of vigilance demanded for
Whichever latest stage in the campaign
To save the world for capital again!'.

9

It's Brecht who uses it to best effect,
That method, in his parables for stage
Where chroniclers allow him to select,
From China, ancient Rome, or latter-age
Chicago, Illinois, those pressure-gauge
Events or situations where the staid
Historians, ever anxious to assuage
Old wounds, soft-pedal all that might put paid
To re-runs of the victors' dress-parade.

Yet it's in movies that you'll best detect
Those covert signs by which the victims wage
A constant war that censors can't inspect
For lack of any means to disengage
Their own internal censor, or the rage
For order as it fires a fusillade
Of self-imposed, self-suffered victimage
At all attempts to raise the barricade
That else might fall to each nocturnal raid.

10

Think 'Guernica': how every hint of gloss
Was vetoed (house-paint only!); how the white,
Black, grey-scale shades avoided any loss
Of visceral impact by the viewer's flight
Into a range of hues fit to delight
Art-connoisseurs who'd rather have their eyes
Thus pleasured than offended with the sight

Of women killed, dead babies, smoke-filled skies,
Bulls gored, and silent heaven-rending cries.

And then think: should we count all colour dross
In painting, or its nuances too slight
For formal note – just vanities to toss
Aside where tyranny's arm is raised to smite
The innocent and poets have to write,
Or painters paint, what any artist tries
(Yet always fails) to represent despite
Intentions fixed against all compromise
With arty tastes in justice-seeking guise?

11

Put colours back – say, from the flag that stands
For some late-conquered state – and fill them in,
The greyscale spaces that Picasso's hands
So perfectly contrived to quiet the din
Of claim and counter-claim and so begin,
Like Goya, to give death a form that's stark
And comfortless yet may in future win
Some few a chance to make out, through the dark,
New signs of life in hope's rekindled spark.

For how else figure, in the shadowlands
Of war and tyranny, what latest sin
Against the human spirit most demands
That art respond to war in ways akin
To those that Freud found at the origin
Of every psychomachia, every mark
Of conflict, whether fought out deep within
The soul or waged as tyrants re-embark
On wars against some new heresiarch?

12

Yet it's in film, 'the movies', that we see
Most vividly achieved the master-stroke
That disarmed mastery, left the unconscious free
To play its not-so-little tricks, and woke
The senses to insurgent shades that broke
The victor-censor's power to hold in place
Those ego-sanctioned rules that kept the folk
From sensing the chromatics of a space
Long void of any but their faintest trace.

I see it filmically, the strewn debris
That drives Klee's storm-tossed Angel, and the smoke
From every battle where, if fitfully,
I make out moving images that stoke
Imagination's fire, like that baroque
Conceit that has *Angelum Novum* face
'Time's dark and backward abysm' and yoke,
As that **split instant sets the pace,
Past horrors to a glimpse of future grace.

An Image from Marx

Marx says that revolutions are the locomotives of world history. But the situation may be quite different. Perhaps revolutions are not the train ride, but the human race grabbing for the emergency brake.

The Arcades Project

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history.

Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

1

'All that is solid melts', so Karl Marx said,
'Melts into air.' Witness the speed
Of capitalist progress, so
Transformative its ceaseless need
That every effort go
Toward inventive ways to feed
The ever-changeable desires that led
To new means of production, which then fed
The new desires which guaranteed
That the pace never slow
Since set to satisfy the greed
Of capitalists and show
Consumers how they'd better heed
The signs, keep spending (till they're in the red).

Still hits the spot when you go back and read
Him once again, Marx in full flow
About how capital sped
It up, the process that would blow
Itself apart or shred
The contract that had bosses grow
Obscenely wealthy while that wealth decreed
That naught this locomotion should impede
And workers never learn they owe
To their own toil what's bled
Away in surplus value. So
The thing just goes ahead
And the worst-off once more bestow
Their dwindling little on that plundering breed.

I read it, and I think: the Marx I know,
The Marx whom they, the plunderers, dread
Lest he at length succeed
In having revolution spread
To just the folk whom he'd
Want well on board – how oddly wed
He sounds to all he'd have us overthrow
Since put in place by Loco-Shark & Co
To keep the working class in bed
With those who'd gladly lead
Them to give up their daily bread
And profit those thus freed
For yet more business-plans to tread
Them deeper down, those lowest of the low.
I see the logic: speed it up, the white-
Hot capitalist drive to make all new,
Transform what blocked the way

To social justice brought on through
The growing strength that they,
The working class, could use to do
What Marx's image bids: enlist the right
Of all those labouring masses and the might
Of new technology to shoo
The boss-class out, display
Their new-found muscle, and pursue
The new dawn of a day
Now glimpsed perhaps by those who crew
That loco as it thunders through the night.

I share the hope, the wish that time requite
Those victims, yield them now what's due
Their age-old suffering, pay

The bosses back in kind, and cue
The workers' turn to play
Their lead-role as the only true
Wealth-makers: jump aboard and hang on tight!
Yet sometimes I reflect: why not re-write
That passage, that heroic view
Of revolution – say,
By opting rather to construe
Its image, as Paul Klee
Once did, by a synchronic coup
That shrinks all history to one *Jetztzeit*.

In that split second, wings outspread but flight
Denied, his Angel's left to rue
The *paysage ruiné*
Of history piled in his rear-view
Scenario yet may,
By conjuring that scene, imbue
Its victims with the timely second sight
Whereby they see those wings now shining bright,
The whole class-system knocked askew,
And history's grey-on-grey
Suffused with revolution's hue
In future-charged array
Of all that Klee's fraught image drew
From its still-death shot of the history-blight.

Reflecting: ads and sidewalks

What, in the end, makes advertisements superior to criticism? Not what the moving red neon says – but the fiery pool reflecting it in the asphalt.

One-Way Street and Other Writings

For a living organism, protection against stimuli is almost a more important function than the reception of stimuli.

Baudelaire speaks of a man who plunges into the crowd as into a reservoir of electric energy. Circumscribing the experience of the shock, he calls this man 'a kaleidoscope equipped with consciousness'.

'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire'

1

Sidewalk and freeway tell what's to be told:
Reflection pure and simple, thinking-free.
The lights and shades so garish, colours bold.

Why criticise, why question what you see?
It's all there on the asphalt, in the rain:
Reflection pure and simple, thinking-free.

Then the true, unintended gist stands plain:
Forget the ads, the glitz, the bogus dreams;
It's all there on the asphalt, in the rain.

Too much the critics talk of 'is' and 'seems'.
Just take surrealism's point as read:
Forget the ads, the glitz, the bogus dreams.

They're our best clue, those ostents neon-bred.
Read Freud, then ask: what's real, what's dreaming's share?
Just take surrealism's point as read.

For you've the real *Traumdeutung* imaged there,
A lurid phantasm with truths to add.
Read Freud, then ask: what's real, what's dreaming's share?

They're held as in his magic writing-pad,
The psycho-gram of all those junk-goods sold.
A lurid phantasm with truths to add.
Sidewalk and freeway tell what's to be told.

2

They read amiss who merely criticise.
Take ads apart and still they'll haunt your sleep;
Best trust to rain-blurred images, sharp eyes!

What price high theory when you're counting sheep?
It's those pooled images then serve you best:
Take ads apart and still they'll haunt your sleep.

Why fend off that return of the repressed?
Just screen the swirligig on drowsy lids.
It's those pooled images then serve you best.
Then let the analysts put in their bids.
First off there's primary-process stuff to run:
Just screen the swirligig on drowsy lids.

The structuralists can do what's left undone;
The sidewalks show what slips that lucid gaze.
First off there's primary-process stuff to run.

No seeing through the streaked, gust-ruffled glaze:
Thought slews at its sight-ravelling interface.
The sidewalks show what slips that lucid gaze.

No billboard ad but leaves its psychic trace.
Cathexis rules! It's dreams they advertise.
Thought slews at the sight-ravelling interface.
They read amiss who merely criticise.

3

'The Viennese quack' – Nabokov's name for Freud!
No end of new tricks for the ad-man trade.
His nephew Bernays saw them well deployed.

How else explain the leading role they played,
The prompts, tags, cues, subliminal alerts?
No end of new tricks for the ad-man trade.

Viewed market-wise his ideas proved dead certs.
'We bring a plague' he said to Jung, and so –
The prompts, tags, cues, subliminal alerts.

They're what he'd soon, unwittingly, bestow,
A way of life distinctly US-style.
'We bring a plague' he said to Jung, and so

It turned out, pestilent and mercantile,
The neon red of ads in sidewalk pools,
A way of life distinctly US-style.

His message soon fired up the business schools.
'There's gold in them thar Freudian notions'; whence
The neon red of ads in sidewalk pools.

Let words and images displace, condense,
And work their spell in print or celluloid.
'There's gold in them thar Freudian notions'; whence
'The Viennese quack' – Nabokov's name for Freud.

4

Let's say it plumbed the shallows, Freud's bequest.
Let's grant, a culture conquest of a kind:
A Woody Allen film-script kind, at best.

So malleable, that new consumer mind.
'The Ego and its Own': Max Stirner lives!
Let's grant: a culture-conquest of a kind.

That Freudian stuff sells goods: it gives and gives!
Just get a wised-up shrink to join your board.
'The Ego and its Own': Max Stirner lives!

It's Freud's late 'morbid' turn they can't afford:
Massage their egos and they'll live to own.
Just get a wised-up shrink to join your board.
Sure to hit sales, the Freudian-stoic tone.

Forget all that *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*:
Massage their egos and they'll live to own.
Enough to give your customers the creeps,
His stuff about the death-drive: best if we
Forget all that *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*.

Then we're OK with depth-psychiatry,
We business guys – though please give it a rest,
His stuff about the death-drive: best if we
Just say it plumbed the shallows, Freud's bequest.

5

That's where surrealism does the trick.
It starts there, with the sidewalk and the ads
And pooled reflections, but declines to stick

At that and begs we analyse the fads,
The fears and fetishes they cater to.
It starts there, with the sidewalk and the ads.

'Go deeper', it exhorts, 'this speaks to you:
Ignore those ego-boosting charlatans,
The fears and fetishes they cater to.'

Such are the surreal depths Herr Doktor scans.
He tells home-truths the ad-men would abjure:
Ignore those ego-boosting charlatans!

Not alien to him, the stuff's allure.
Think of his Hampstead house, that fetish-trove!
He tells home-truths the ad-men would abjure.

So hard the man of reason in him strove,
Yet still those atavisms hard to kick.
Think of his Hampstead house, the fetish-trove!
That's where surrealism does the trick.

6

Back to the sidewalk, rain, and neon signs.
Decoding ads will get you just so far,
Like reading critic-style 'between the lines'.

See patterns stir-crazed by each passing car:
How else conceive what's going on below?
Decoding ads will get you just so far.

Or you may look to Dali, Ernst & Co,
Take them onboard as your depth-diving guides.
How else conceive what's going on below?

It's jetsam-dodging skills their art provides,
A *Blick ins Chaos*, every system down.
Take them onboard as your depth-diving guides.

Full fathom five and lords of commerce drown.
Unwise the ad-man in his bathysphere;
A *Blick ins Chaos*, every system down.

Let Freud-plus-Dali have those shapes appear
Uncannily at home in your front room:
Unwise the ad-man in his bathysphere.

He'll wander lost through culture's catacomb
In search of cheaper, family-friendly shrines.
Uncannily at home in your front-room;
Back to the sidewalk, rain, and neon signs.

7

Just think of rain on asphalt neon-lit.
Think how the flickering glow may yet catch fire,
Incinerate the ad-man's latest hit.

Car-hire, attire, spin-dryer, deep-fryer – smart buyer!
Look down from billboard at those goods ablaze.
Think how the flickering glow may yet catch fire.

It's your unmet desires that greet your gaze.
They feed the pyre, turn up no end of trash.
Look down from billboard to those goods ablaze.

Don't fret as every dream's reduced to ash.
Knew all about desires, Nabokov's quack.
They feed the pyre, turn up no end of trash.

Always some fetish-object that you lack;
Billboard to asphalt runs Cathexis Trail.
Knew all about desires, Nabokov's quack.

A death-wish gift enclosed with every sale!
How then should we resist the ad-man's deal?
Billboard to asphalt runs Cathexis Trail.

Beyond the pleasure principle it's real,
Freud's psychic spend-now-and-pay-later bit.
How then should we resist the ad-man's deal?
Just think of rain on asphalt neon-lit.

A Collector

O bliss of the collector, bliss of the man of leisure! Of no one has less been expected and no one has had a greater sense of well-being than a collector. Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who comes alive in them.

Collectors are people with a tactical instinct; their experience teaches them that when they capture a strange city, the smallest antique shop can be a fortress . . . . How many cities have revealed themselves to me in the marches I undertook in the pursuit of books!

You should know that in saying this I fully realize that my discussion of the mental climate of collecting will confirm many of you in your conviction that this passion is behind the times, in your distrust of the collector type.

'Unpacking my Library: a talk about book-collecting'

How capture that incomparable bliss?
What objects dearer than the ones you own,
Whose gift's to let you say 'they're mine alone,
Yet do not count me covetous in this:
It's not my share of worldly goods that's grown,
Or any rich man's plaything that I'd miss
If poverty or principle said 'kiss
That stuff goodbye, re-read your Marx, atone!'.

Yes, they're commodities, their price assigned
In monetary terms, their shifting worth
As reckoned by the plenitude or dearth
Of suchlike goods, though nowadays defined
As much by how far items of the kind
Float largely free of old-style, down-to-earth

Use-values and, near-magically, give birth
To phantom-hosts, real needs left far behind.

Too smug, too pious, not to mention too
Naïve and simple-minded their retort,
Those bourgeois art-collectors who resort
To Kantian aesthetics as their cue
For saying 'Any value they accrue,
These works, has naught in common with the sort
Of market-value ratio between 'bought'
And 'sold' that bourgeois philistines pursue!'.

For them, it's the particular cachet
That comes of having artworks, or their taste
In art, appear 'disinterested', based
On pure 'appreciation' (note the way
That word does double service!), so that they
Can deem all 'rich vulgarian' talk misplaced
Since their aesthetic judgement's clearly graced
By all the masterpieces on display.

That self-deceiving line's no part of my
Collector's mind-set, passion, craving – call
It what you will but that's not it at all,
The move those mercantile art-fanciers try
To set up as their routine alibi
For sending rival bidders to the wall
While touting their 'disinterest' to forestall
The charge those worsted rivals might apply.

You wrong him, the collector, if you take
His love for those choice objects to entail
The self-same mind-set that would gladly veil
The aims of one perpetually on the make
Behind a theory got up for the sake

Of telling others, and himself, a tale
Where Kant's great edifice, however frail,
Gives wealthy fine-arts patrons their big break.

My books, toys, paintings, photographs – all stand
To me, and I to them, in a relation quite
Remote from that, one where the chief delight
Of ownership is having close at hand
Those objects, trafficked here like contraband,
And such close sharers of my exile's plight
That now their presence grants them, as by right,
Joint welcome to this short-stay wonderland.

I share with them, in turn, the exile's need
For intimacy, that which comes alive
In them as much as me and which they strive
In vain to conjure up who fail to heed
That tenet of the true collector's creed
Which says: whatever pleasure you derive
From these possessions, know that they survive,
Like you, on terms both parties have agreed.

What's more, don't take the 'leisure' I impute
To those who share with me this sometime state
Of object-centred bliss to indicate
A leisurely existence that might suit
The bourgeois connoisseur whose standard route
To it starts out with family-wealth of date
And source unverified and then goes straight
To business deals politely termed 'astute'.

The leisure I'm here speaking of is that
Which comes most often of the opposite
Condition, one whose blessings so befit
Not only me, the scholar marvelling at

The spell they cast on each new habitat,
But those who see how well their exquisite
Affordances are set up to admit
The man with no fixed place to hang his hat.

I say 'well-being', and I mean the sense
Those objects furnish of beatitudes
Unknown to those for whom it's transient moods
They satisfy, but bringing recompense
Long sought by those for whom they may condense
Fond memories, deeds, life-changes, interludes,
And scenes on which the exiled spirit broods
As if dream-stranded in its own past tense.

There's none whom social expectations rest
As lightly on as he whose unquiet soul
Finds peace in what assigns to him no role
But that of the collector, truly blest
With ownership of objects that attest
His giving up all title to control
Those talismanic qualities whose toll,
If lost, would leave the owner dispossessed.

The packages delivered, books unpacked
From their protective wrappings, jackets bared
And viewed once more – what other joy compared
With that felt when they first arrived intact,
Those mailings self-addressed and left high-stacked
Till I, at last, cast off the spell and aired
Them once again in that new dwelling shared
By books and owner through time-honoured pact.

Yet in their tracking down and capturing
What added bliss, what tactics finely honed,
And what fresh joys enticingly postponed

On sallies that, with any luck, may bring
Fresh acquisitions to the gathering
Of objects – books and paintings – newly owned
And sins of greed or envy now atoned
As the collector's waking dream takes wing.

For there's no state of mind more blissful than
The one that crowns his quest, when times refuse
All comforts else, for just the books to choose
As having a redemptive charge that can,
Like Klee's storm-ravaged Angel, lift the ban
On graven images and disabuse
Those travel-weary souls who else might lose
Their last best chance since exile-time began.

For Asja Lacis

In a love affair, most seek an eternal homeland. Others, but very few, eternal voyaging. These latter are melancholics, for whom contact with mother earth is to be shunned. They seek the person who will keep far from them the homeland's sadness. To that person, they remain faithful. The only way of knowing a person is to love them without hope.

The idea that happiness could have a share in beauty would be too much of a good thing.

One-Way Street and Other Writings

1

'True to thee in my fashion', so he wrote;
Don't rank me with that English decadent!
True, he half-struck the melancholic note:
The voyaging, the *nostos*-swerving quest.
'True to thee in my fashion', so he wrote,

And maybe sought her likeness as he went,
Encountering other women, seeking rest
Yet ever restless, 'home' the asymptote
He'd oftentimes strike out for once he'd spent
Too long away, but then head further West.
'True to thee in my fashion', so he wrote.
Don't rank me with that English decadent!
The voyaging, the *nostos*-swerving quest.

2

I loved you, Asja, loved no-one but you.
God knows it's exile drove me land to land.
That poet, Dowson, the whole '90s crew –
Their melancholy's just an aesthete's pose.
I loved you, Asja, loved no-one but you.
To Latvia, Moscow, Berlin – nothing planned
Except to seek you, go where Asja goes.
And then, when news came of the Hitler coup
And borders closed to me on every hand,
Yours was the dwelling-place I chose.
I loved you, Asja, loved no-one but you.
God knows it's exile drove me land to land.
Their melancholy's just an aesthete's' pose.

3

So closely our two lives, thoughts, fates entwined!
You, comrade, knocked the bourgeois out of me,
Told me 'read Marx', gave lessons of the kind
It took to bring this scholar back to earth.
So closely our two lives, thoughts, fates entwined!
You, with Bert Brecht, taught me the abc
Of communist theatre, showed the worth
Of workers' education, turned my mind

To dialectics as the only key
To all that might yet bring new times, new birth.
So closely our two lives, thoughts, fates entwined!
You, comrade, knocked the bourgeois out of me.
Took you to bring this scholar back to earth.

4

Lessons in love were not the least you taught.
Why make a passion shared one's highest aim?
No fixed or charted star, the love I sought;
Solace, like refuge, always far to seek.
Lessons in love were not the least you taught.
From sundry lands your wandering call-sign came,
From lands remote with messages oblique:
A letting-go, the change in me you wrought.
Yet still I loved, still sought you just the same,
Though now of politics, not love, we'd speak.
Lessons in love were not the least you taught.
Why make a passion shared one's highest aim?
Solace, like refuge, always far to seek.

5

We lived together, once, but you moved on.
My flights to exile, yours to tasks unknown.
How fortune-crossed, our guiltless liaison!
Your tasks cast mine in an unflattering light.
We lived together, once, but you moved on,
I in my shifting, shiftless scholar-zone,
You teaching, acting, putting kids' lives right.
Our lives unwound like chant and antiphon,
Or lines cross-keyed to each successive tone.
What odds, what threats, what fears you had to fight!
We lived together, once, but you moved on.

My flights to exile, yours to tasks unknown.
Your tasks cast mine in an unflattering light.

6

Heimat: to me it means unending loss,
My homes-from-home mere variants on the theme.
Let others risk their necks to gather moss.
Dasein, begone from Heidegger's domain!
Heimat: to me it means unending loss.
You, Asja, spurned the groves of academe,
Found no such refuge from a teeming brain,
And turned to drama as your active gloss,
A Brechtian one, on what my scholar's dream
Dictates be done through readings more arcane.
Heimat: to me it means unending loss,
My homes-from-home mere variants on the theme.
Dasein, begone from Heidegger's domain!

7

Fatherland, mother-earth: how think to choose?
No dwelling but may trap the hunted soul.
Who'd not turn constant exile in my shoes?
You've your theatre, Marx, the rebel's fire!
Fatherland, mother-earth: how think to choose?
One choice at least for you: the choice of role,
Whether close-matched to your express desire,
Like Brecht's cut-back 'Good Woman' ('scenes to lose',
You told him!), or because the times that stole
My home gave all the stage-room you'd require.
Fatherland, mother-earth: how think to choose?
No dwelling but may trap the hunted soul.
You've your theatre, Marx, the rebel's fire!

8

We melancholics count what joys we've had.
Though fugitive, you were the chief of mine.
Snatched moments must suffice when times are bad.
You, self-propelled, made good my exile state.
We melancholics count what joys we've had.
I know you found them strange and byzantine,
Those texts I strove to read, parse, annotate,
And – yes – deploy in ways that, you were glad
To note, gave real-world, extra-textual spine
To revolution, could we but translate.
We melancholics count what joys we've had.
Though fugitive, you were the chief of mine.
You, self-propelled, made good my exile state.

9

'To the loved one far absent' – what more apt?
How else should wandering *Sehnsucht* stay its fears?
Not, to be sure, by *Heimkehr* safely mapped!
Whereabouts roughly known, but not for long.
'To the loved one far absent' – what more apt?
The words and music haunted me for years,
Brought thoughts of you to mind in every song
Of that Beethoven cycle, and thus tapped
Both into my old terror of frontiers
And sense of how your crossings made me strong.
'To the loved one far absent' – what more apt?
How else should wandering *Sehnsucht* stay its fears?
Whereabouts roughly known, but not for long.

10

No goal for you, 'eternal voyaging'.
'Elsewhere' meant things to do when you upped sticks.
To you, my 'elsewhere' had a dreamer's ring.

Forget the Kibbutz, we've a world to win!
No goal for you, 'eternal voyaging'.
Always your schedule: next stop politics!
Such forking paths for souls so close akin.
Your thoughts took timely flight while mine took wing.
You got your tips from comrades, Bolsheviks,
And Brecht while I . . . . but, dearest, how begin?
No goal for you, 'eternal voyaging'.
'Elsewhere' meant things to do when you upped sticks.
Forget the Kibbutz, we've a world to win!

11

Think of that piece that Brecht and Eisler did,
That song about the little radio-set
The exile carried off with him and hid.
Always I yearned to catch the day's home news –
Think of that song that Brecht and Eisler did.
He tuned in, dawn and dusk, to hear things get
More desperate day by day while you, the muse
Of my most cherished writings, had me bid
You serve as mobile earthing-point and let
Your vagrant link not be the link I lose.
Think of that piece that Brecht and Eisler did,
That song about the little radio-set.
Always I yearned to catch the day's home news.

Beyond the Pleasure-Principle

Something different is disclosed in the drunkenness of passion: the landscape of the body . . . . These landscapes are traversed by paths which lead sexuality into the world of the inorganic. Fashion itself is only another medium enticing it still more deeply into the universe of matter.

Fashion stands in opposition to the organic. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the living, it defends the rights of the corpse. The fetishism that succumbs to the sex appeal of the inorganic is its vital nerve. The cult of the commodity presses such fetishism into its service.

The Arcades Project

The poets were onto it long before Freud,
The love-death thing, the *Liebestod* conceit.
From Petrarch down they relished bitter-sweet
Ideas of love that told us 'once enjoyed,
Those pleasures, they remind us of the void
That lies in wait, or how our thought to cheat
Death's cold embrace through love's rekindling heat
Must end with vital spirits self-destroyed'.
They all – Villon to Shakespeare, Lovelace, Donne,
Marvell and later poets in that line –
Turned 'die' or 'little death' into a pun-
Like quip, a racy catchword to combine
Remembered or imagined joys with un-
Unabashed reminders of the death's-head sign.
Freud took it further, stressed how close the tie
Of love and death, and told us – in 'Beyond
The Pleasure-Principle' – just how that bond
Of drives or psychic forces that must lie,
You'd think, at opposite extremes may tie
Our logic up in knots because, *au fond*,
Those primal drives in no way correspond
To ego's protest that the one word, 'die',
Not serve for both. Think rather, he advised,
How closely they're entwined, the primal deed
Of life by lovestruck poets duly prized
Above all others, and the fate decreed

For living flesh by what – as he surmised –
Prepared it for the worms it soon must feed.

And further still he drove it, that idea
So alien to the eudaimonic sense
Of life and love that calls in self-defence
Whatever back-up from the ego-sphere
May give it some short-lived distractive steer
Around the ego-censored truth: that whence
We came, shall we return; that 'the expense
Of spirit' is 'a waste of shame', though we're
Too self-deceived to know. The death-drive haunts
Our love-lives, sounds uncannily in each
Last gasp of passion stilled, and duly taunts
Those who'd take lightly what it has to teach
With the decisive mortal denouements
That put immortal pleasures out of reach.
For even while the lover lives and burns
With passion yet unslaked, that fierce desire
Pervades their flesh with a consuming fire
That frets it to the bone and thus returns
It sooner to the state for which it yearns,
That inorganic state where pores transpire
Not with the moisture that love's heats require
But with the damp that funerary urns
Can't long keep in or out. That's why the passion
For other things, like shifting styles of dress,
May strike the viewer as dead matter's ration
Of hybrid substitutes that coalesce
With living flesh until the latest fashion
Becomes the last for earth to repossess.

That sexuality's our strongest clue
To thanatos and its incessant drive

For death, oblivion, all that man alive
So often seeks to place beneath taboo –
That's Freud's dark tale, and one that we might do
Well sometimes to recall, not further strive
Against its strict refusal to deprive
Our bliss-deluded kind of what's their true
Since fleshly lot in life. Then we might trace
Those paths by which the death-drive came to leave
Its imprint everywhere in psychic space,
Determine in advance what we conceive
As 'life' and 'death', and so ensure we base
Life-choices on a death-drive none should grieve.

A Thought of Emma Goldman

Life is in fact mortal, and the immortal things are flesh, energy, individuality, and spirit in its various guises.

Reflections

If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution.

Emma Goldman

Things mortal wither, perish,
Though cherish them you may;
Those thoughts of death won't vanish,
Though banished for a day,
But soon make way
For portents more nightmarish.

Mere life brings naught to hope for –
No scope for what they crave,
Those sleuths of the eternal
Who spurn all things that gave

Life savour save
Life-dues they got old rope for.
It's fleshly joy sustains us;
What pains us is to make
'Life', that death-bound nostrum,
Our rostrum for the sake
Of creeds that take
Away what joy remains us.

It's spirit, too, that shifts us,
Gifts us truth-questing ones,
Unresting ones, admittance –
Soul's quittance! – to what shuns
Bare life and runs
Where spirit's call uplifts us.

Its energy enhances
Life-chances, yet adds: Don't now
Allow these times to break it
Or fake it, Emma's vow –
'No end to how
My revolution dances!'.

Culture and Eros: a catechism

And we speak of the sexualisation of the spirit: this is the morality of the prostitute. She represents culture in Eros; Eros, who is the most powerful individualist, the most hostile to culture – even he can be perverted; even he can serve culture.

Letter to Herbert Belmore, June 23rd 1913.

The historical materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called 'Once upon a time' in historicism's bordello.

'Theses on the Philosophy of History'

1

Reader, I beg you: do not think I write
These words as if to strike some lofty pose
Of moral rectitude, or take my place
Amongst the pious frauds who catechise

Their tabloid-reading public from the height
Of some press-baron's pulpit where what goes
Down best is what equates your state of grace
With showing you're one of those regular guys

Who loves home-life, takes Jesus as his light
(One query: Mary Magdalen?), and knows
One thing for sure: that there's a master-race
Those whores had better greet with open thighs!

I'd meet you honestly on this: alright,
I've paid for sex, enjoyed what she bestows,
That 'fallen woman', thrilled to her embrace,
And not, like them, affected to despise

The sensuous pleasure of a wondrous night
When each accepts what the encounter owes
To chance, need, deprivation, or – worst case –
The lack of everything that money buys

Of creature-sustenance, and so holds tight,
As creature-kind, to him or her who shows
A loving-back no payment can debase
Since freed of all those life-degrading lies!

Believe me, then, as one who's known the blight
Of loneliness in exile, and who chose

To populate that unfrequented space
With a transaction nothing could disguise –

No bourgeois show of marriage-troths to plight! -
Yet in whose course the simulated throes
Of ecstasy might briefly bear a trace
Of what the sex-trade failed to merchandise.

2

Or so I once convinced myself – still do,
From time to time, when exile, boredom, fear,
Or clerkly travails bring on the desire
For all that Eros offers in the way

Of comfort, intimacy, and – should you
Strike lucky – somebody who'll lend an ear
To secret griefs and so prove worth the hire
Not merely in the sense 'a decent lay

With pillow-chat thrown in', but someone, too,
Who's doubtless travelled close to that frontier
Where vice and crime, like gun-towers and barbed wire,
Have naught but hopes extinguished to convey

You're right – it's every punter's lenient view
Of his recurrent lapses, that idea
That each new sex-transaction might acquire
Some self-redemptive power, some brief *entrée*

To realms safe-cordoned by whatever drew
Two souls together, like the shattered sphere
Of Plato's image whose split halves aspire
To naught but their long-dreamt reunion day.

That's self-deluding stuff, I always knew,
Or half-knew – stuff concocted just to clear

The queasy conscience when it's under fire
And out of high-toned, stupid things to say.

Worse still, sex-workers yield the tribute due
From eros to the anerotic sphere
Of culture where the skimpy night-attire,
Lewd gestures, and pimp-choreographed display

Of outré postures herald the debut
In spirit's realm of all the kinky gear
That goes to reassure the nervous buyer
There's special stuff for those prepared to pay.

3

Twice damned – for thinking somehow to placate
My guilty soul by that tear-jerker's tale
Of the good-hearted prostitute and my
Brief spell of comfort in her arms; and more

Acutely shameful yet, the bourgeois trait
Par excellence of grand ideas that fail
As soon as tested, like the way that I,
A Marxist culture-critic, could ignore

The ideologemes that saturate
My discourse, from the crassest kind of male
Ingratiating ruse ('please let me cry
On your soft shoulder') to the sexist lore

That has each guilty punter sublimate
The object of his lust into a frail
And sympathetic listener for the guy
Who comes with psyche primed: Madonna-whore.

It's culture, bourgeois culture, and the freight
Of sexual hang-ups following in its tail

That leaves most men unable to get by
Without some psychic levelling of the score.

But how should I, long schooled to cultivate
A sense of how the sex-drive may derail
The keenest intellect, think to deny
The thought that some rogue male *esprit de corps*

Has once more had me rise to the old bait
Of that lone scholar's solace, love for sale,
That, in his working hours, he'd classify
As top-shelf items in the bourgeois store

Of eros-substitutes. They'll not dictate
My fantasies, I tell myself, or nail
My errant mind to sex-drives that belie
Its still intact capacity to draw

The requisite self-knowledge from this state,
This inner turmoil, where the conscience-flail
Gives each judge-penitent good cause to try
Himself, like Josef K before the law.

The lively voice of Critical Theory

The Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. Our mission is to spotlight the critical theory developed by the first generation of the Frankfurt School while extending its insights to address contemporary issues. Regrettably, the concerns and theories of this pioneering generation are often overlooked by the second and third generations of the Frankfurt School.

We assert that the early Frankfurt School's theories remain highly relevant for explaining the social, cultural, and political challenges of today. However, these theories sometimes require revision to address the realities of the modern world. For instance, Adorno and Horkheimer's concept of the culture industry emphasized the unidirectional influence of mass media. Today, the media landscape has evolved to enable greater interactivity, allowing audiences to respond to or create content. Nevertheless, cultural domination through media persists, albeit through new mechanisms. Revisiting and updating the theory of the culture industry is essential for understanding these emerging forms of control.

The BJCT aims to bridge the foundational ideas of the first-generation Frankfurt School with the challenges of the contemporary world. To achieve this, we have assembled a distinguished editorial board of leading scholars in critical theory, dedicated to selecting and publishing original, high-quality articles.

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