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Contents

Reification and the Web of Norms: Toward a Critical Theory of Consciousness[1]

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Abstract: This paper proposes a reconstruction of Georg Lukács' thesis of reification by viewing it through the normative theory of consciousness. As I see it, reification of consciousness is the result of the ways that norms that have been patterned by external social systems that come to be absorbed into the background structures of cognition. As a result, consciousness becomes increasingly fitted to these normative patters. A web of norms therefore heteronomously links consciousness and social systems via processes of socialization. I end with a consideration of how a theory of critical judgment can be used to overcome this reification of consciousness, all the while sticking to Lukács' basic line of argument.

1. Reification Revisited

It has been fifty years since the apex of the student and social movements of the late 1960s. These movements embraced both western and communist societies, from San Francisco to Paris to Prague. An awakening of the dullness and the injustice of modern, administered societies – both capitalist and communist – were among the central the focuses of these movements. Viewed long range, these movements evince a very different kind of political agency and moral awareness than those in contemporary societies. Whereas movements for racial, class and gender

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justice have by no means disappeared, there has been a deepening of the acceptance of liberal-capitalist institutions. The tacit consensus that pervades our world is rooted in a degradation of moral awareness and political dissent. Add to the passive acceptance of these institutions the fact that we are also witnessing a decline of democratic institutions, values, and practices. How can we confront and explain these trends in modern society? I think that a core thesis is to expand the idea of reification to encompass the core spheres of the personality, consciousness and the self that provide for the continued political and cultural stability of a society based on exploitation, domination, inequality and alienation. In short, I want to show how the theory of reification can be expanded to provide an account of subjectivity that accepts as legitimate and as basic the pathological consequences of capitalist society.

Another aspect to the argument I want to explore here is what reification actually inhibits in one's social agency. Following this question, the theory of reification must not only be diagnostic with respect to the problems of rational reflection within subjects, but it must also be normative in the sense that it can make evident that which is being blocked by reified consciousness. This second aspect of the argument is rich with possibility insofar as we see reification as hiding from view or even distorting our cognitive capacity to grasp the social-ontological structure of our world. What I mean here is that reification is not only a process whereby things that are human become non-human objects, but, more importantly and, I think, more accurately, it distorts and misshapes our cognitive capacity to see our world as cooperative, interdependent, and constituted by our actions. In this sense, it robs from us a crucial aspect of what Marx saw as crucial for any sense of social transformation: a conception of our species as self-conscious of our own socio-poietic capacities. In this sense, reification renders consciousness non-dialectical.

It is true that reification cannot be – indeed no concept can ever be – exhaustive in its diagnosis of the problems of capitalist society. But reification comes as close as any of its competitors to such a category. Not everyone agrees. Nancy Fraser, for one, has argued that "we must

replace the view of capitalism as a reified form of ethical life with a more differentiated, structural view."[3]   I do not believe this observation is correct. More than any other time in capitalist society we can see our world as sustained by a culture of internalized, implicitly valid norms and world-views with respect to the social goals posited by capitalist imperatives. More than any other time in the history of capitalism, we are witnessing a decrease in class conflict and an increasing stability of the system's legitimacy. All of this despite obvious and well-publicized accounts of corruption, inequality, social pathologies and other social defects. I want to suggest a widened conception of reification that is still rooted in the basic thesis put forth by Lukács in 1923: that consciousness has become colonized by heteronomous patterns of social life that have themselves been saturated with quantification, administrative reason, and exchange value. But as I see it, this basic thesis must be enlarged in order to confront what I think is a core pathology in modern cultures, namely, the degradation of agency and the self and its incapacity to articulate concrete alternatives to the prevailing social order.

The central thesis of this paper is that the concept of reification has to be expanded and cultivated into a richer theory about the nature of defective social consciousness in order for us to come to terms with the acute erosion of moral and political agency in modern societies. The idea is not that reification follows simply from the logic of commodification. Rather, my argument is that capitalist society as a social formation consisting of certain kinds of social relations larded thickly with norms and value-orientations, has a strong constitutive power in forming the consciousness and personality of subjects. Norms are where much of the action is in the problem of reification because of the ways that norms underwrite our conceptual and evaluative dimensions of the self. Norms are, as I see it, capable of structuring our cognitive powers and concep-

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3   Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism." In Penelope Deutscher and Critina Lafont (eds.) *Critical Theory in Critical Times: Transforming the Global Political and Economic Order.* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 141-159, 153.

tual fields to the extent that they are routinized by social institutions and systems and then internalized by agents who are "successfully" social-ized by those institutions and systems. These norms carry with them what I call an "implicit validity," by which I mean they require no jus-tification to be accepted by the subject, but are accepted by them as a second nature. Reification is not only a concern of this problem, but also the consequences of the acceptance of these norms on our reflective and cognitive powers as a whole.

What I would like to explore therefore is the impact that reification has on moral consciousness or, more generally considered, the capacity of individuals to reflect and judge their world from a rational, critical perspective. The essence of the problem that I want to diagnose is the demise of the rational capacities of autonomous individuals in modern, mass societies. One reason that we should consider this an important concern is that it constrains and distorts the ability of individuals to come to critical consciousness of their social world. A basic reason for this is that, as I see it, at the root of our cognitive faculties lie value-orientations that are embedded within our consciousness due to socialization. These value-orientations can be residues of traditional or conventional forms of morality on the one hand, but they are also, most certainly, absorbed from the value systems put forth by modern administrative capitalist institutions. Values of efficiency, of technical progress, of profit, of pos-sessive individualism and consumption can serve to undergird the ways we think cognitively through our world. If these values were not suc-cessfully absorbed by social actors, there would be an erosion of the le-gitimacy of institutions that operate according to those imperatives. The problem here is that the more secure and more consolidated any system of socialization becomes, the more successful that it becomes in securing its values and aims within the personality structure of the subject and, as a result, the more heteronomous will be the subject's moral-political consciousness.

But another reason for taking this seriously is the current emphasis in philosophy and in critical theory as well on norms and moral con-

sciousness as the mode in which critique occurs. The postmetaphysical and normative turn in moral philosophy more generally and critical theory more specifically is premised on the capacity of individuals to participate in a community of reason-givers and reason-takers that can obtain objectively valid values and norms via agreement and the project of justification. On this view, critique is seen as a means by which we ask for reasons and justifications for the social norms that we are asked to accept.[4] But this approach takes no account of the effects of reification and the ways that it serves to frustrate, if not totally block, such a capacity. Indeed, what this approach misses entirely is the fact that essential to any system of modern dominance is the capacity of that system to deploy norms and values that render its activities legitimate in the minds of its actors. This is the essential problem of reification and why it remains such an essential category for any critical theory of society. Without a diagnosis of this pathology of consciousness and social cognition, there will be no way for us to comprehend the ways that culture is the handmaiden to other systems of power and dominance.

My purpose here is to reconstruct reification and place it on a very different trajectory. As I see it, reification ought to be seen as the result of capitalist forms of social relations, as determined by the productive forms of social structure and function that pervades under a commodity-based production and consumption system. However, reification is the result of the ways in which consciousness is shaped by these relations in such a way that individual subjects become unable to grasp the objective context within which they live their lives; an objective context that is determined by a hierarchically structures system of extractive social relations that come to be for the interests of a small, elite segment of the community as a whole. Reification is unique to capitalism, however, because it does not rely on a value system that is transcendental or in any way but rather is entwined with the ontology of our social relations and social processes. As Andrew Feenberg has remarked: "In modern

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4   See specifically Rainer Forst, *The Right to Justification*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

societies, the reified formal rationality of the technical disciplines and experiential knowledge of the technical achieve a partial separation at the level of discourse, but in the material reality of artifacts and systems they interpenetrate through and through."[5]

The centrality of reification for critical theory becomes more evident when we see that its central aim is the raising of critical consciousness. The withering of this capacity under the conditions of modern and late capitalism are without question, but the insights that Lukács was able to elicit from his theory of reification require development if they are to maintain their theoretical and practical salience for any critical theory of society. The basic problem becomes the inability of subjective consciousness to find appropriate mediations for self-understanding. A false totality is impressed on consciousness that represses and distorts reflection on the actual and potential ways we can structure and shape our social life. This is where the theory of reification ties in with the project of a critical social ontology: for the same norms that restrict critical consciousness also shape our social actions and orient our collective intentionality toward articulating specific kinds of social forms and social facts.[6] Robbed from us is the capacity to imagine let alone re-shape the reality of our social world. Again, this is because of the role played by norms in consciousness: they orient the intentional structures of consciousness that in turn shape social action and the meaning we attach to those actions. Since the thinking subject becomes unable to find a critical means by which to cognize world and self, *thought is collapsed into the object*. In this sense, since social facts – unlike natural or brute facts – are dependent on our intentions, on the normative meaning we ascribe to them collectively (think of Pierce's concept of the *legi* here as well as Searle's theory of collective intentionality) it follows that if social institutions can shape these forms of normative-intentional meaning, they can also orient

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5   Andrew Feenberg, *Technosystem: The Social Life of Reason*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017), 133.

6   I have explored this thesis with more technical depth in my paper "Collective Intentionality, Social Domination and Reification." *Journal of Social Ontology*, vol. 3, no. 2 (2017): 207-229.

our cognitive capacities and endow social facts with a second-nature-like objectivity.

But the theory of reification has been seen as superseded, in many senses of the term. Attempts at a reconstruction of the theory of reification have recently come into vogue. Axel Honneth's attempt to reconstitute reification as a pathology in recognitive relations misses a crucial aspect of the problem: namely that reification, as I interpret it, is becoming increasingly total. There are fewer and fewer social spaces where the culture of capitalism and the values and norms that orbit it are excluded. But in the end, I think that the basic principles and tenets of the theory of reification as laid out by Georg Lukács retain their salience today, albeit in different philosophical and social scientific language. A renewed theory of reification can enable us to see the continued salience of reification no only for a revived formulation of critical theory, but for a more critical understanding of the ways that social processes are able to shape, in a pathological way, the reflective capacities of individual subjects. I therefore want to defend the thesis that Lukács' understanding of reification is of paramount importance for any brand of critical social theory.

This does not mean that I seek no modification of what we might call the classical formulation of reification. Lukács' theory was constructed using the language of German Idealism; it was meant to intervene in the debates of neo-Kantian and Marxist theories of consciousness and social theory. I want to defend Lukács's totality thesis that states that reification results form a patterning by the economic system of other spheres of social and cultural life. This patterning of the totality is a gradual but increasingly penetrating phenomenon and it results in a deep distortion of the subject's capacity to gain critical cognition of the what we can call the "false totality" of capitalism. One reason I believe that this thesis needs to be taken seriously is that it nullifies, or at the very least seriously calls into question, alternative logics of critique that believe an immanent critique of capitalism can come about through the intersubjective practices either of language, justification, reason-giving and reason-taking, or recognition. What Lukács' theory implies is that logics from these kinds

of social action cannot carry over into a critique of the totality.

At another level, I want also to show that only a cognitive and evaluative grasp of the totality as a social ontology of relations and processes can we achieve critical knowledge of modern society. At the heart of the theory of reification is that insight that certain ways of thinking, of being able to perceive and cognize one's place within the social system and the causal nature of its processes on subject formation. My basic argument is that reification can be further understood as the colonization and rigidification of these spheres of consciousness. Emancipating these spheres and enabling them to achieve critical awareness can only come about when we question the totality, and place capitalism once again at the heart of any theory of social criticism. Any approach that leaves this out will, as I see it, be doomed to reproduce the reified categories and practices that already exist. Although Lukács formulates his argument through the philosophical language of German Idealism, I maintain that we can construct a more compelling, more satisfying account of reification through the development of the extensions that I propose.

2. The Classical Theory of Reification

Lukács introduces his concept of reification as a result of a prolonged attempt to understand the problem of the crisis of culture that he witnessed during the late nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. He also saw that the precepts of orthodox Marxism – which posited a mechanistic form of consciousness that would propel working people to revolutionary praxis – as misguided. What was lacking in Marxist theory was a theory of mind and consciousness that was adequate to grasp the problems of cognition under industrial capitalism. To do this, Lukács read Marx's theory of the fetishism of commodities through several important sources. First, there was the philosophical problems of Idealism raised once again by neo-Kantianism. According to this view, a separation of facts from values was needed to be able to construct a conception of science that was free from the moral baggage of normative claims. Empirical facts could only be grasped rationally, on this view, through

being cleansed of normative value judgments, which were to be resolved not through the analysis of facts, but through discursive domain of culture. In terms of its epistemic theory, neo-Kantianism also broke with the Hegelian view which saw that rational knowledge could only be approached through the dialectic of essence and appearance: I come to know what something is not through an analysis of empirical facts, but through the teleological end that any object holds within a system or totality. To return to empiricism in social theory would therefore mean a reifying of consciousness in the sense that objects disappear from cognitive view. Lukács therefore saw one root of reification as the return to subjective Idealist models of mind as well as an epistemology that privileges empiricism over coherence theories of truth.

Another source for Lukács' concept of reification came from his sociological studies with Weber and Simmel. From Weber he took the thesis of rationalization seriously which maintained that modernity was being characterized by a methodical calculation of means and ends and that this was coming to affect the subjective capacities for judgment and knowledge of the social world. Since modern industry was characterized by a heightening of rationalization, or a "methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means," its ability to shape consciousness according to its patterns of operation were increasing their dominance.[7] From Simmel, Lukács took seriously the thesis of the "tragedy of culture," which saw a growing inability of modern individuals to be able to comprehend the totality of social life and its many mechanisms and forces – a rift between what Simmel termed "subjective" and "objective" culture respectfully.

Lukács saw Marx's theory of the fetishism of commodities as the prism through which these theories could be made concrete. Both Weber and Simmel saw their diagnoses as essentially fatalistic and pessimistic; there would be no way out of the dilemmas of modernity and they were consequently unable to locate an agent of transformation. But for Lukács,

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7   Max Weber, "The Sociology of the World Religions," in Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills (eds.) *From Max Weber*. (London: Routledge, 1970), 293.

reification is a theory that brings together the theory of mind as well as the theory of society: it seeks to reconcile the problems of subjectivity and objectivity from the abstractions of neo-Kantianism by positing their relation within a totality. As with Marx, the fetishism of commodities is the expression of the fragmentation of a consciousness that can no longer grasp the whole process that produces it, for Lukács, reification is the inability to grasp totality, to see the internal relations that undergird reality itself. The ability to know the essence of reality is to be able to grasp dynamic process as opposed to isolated particulars. It is the ability to conceive of the processes that shape objective and subjective life – it is the very groundwork of what allows capitalist institutions to maintain their legitimacy in an age of legal-rational authority.

Central to Lukács' concept of reification is the notion that objects of consciousness – most specifically, those things that are human – become "thing-like." What Lukács has in mind here is the thesis that the social world loses its inherently human character and ceases to be seen as created by human praxis. But also, it turns human beings themselves into objects for manipulation and into extensions for one's own projects. Think of a waiter in a restaurant, a cashier at a store, or a cab driver. All are transformed from human subjects to practical objects that can be utilized via the cash nexus. The social bonds between people become reified, dehumanized. Since humans make the world not only materially through the labor process and the shaping of nature through work but also cognitively via the intentional structures of consciousness, to lose the human character of the world means that it becomes estranged from our comprehension of it as collectively formed and re-created.

The commodity form under modern forms of capitalist production is responsible for this change in consciousness. What occurs through the division of labor and the rationalization of mass production is the fragmentation of the object. No longer do we see the objects created by human labor as human, but increasingly as inert objects. As Lukács notes: "this fragmentation of the object of production necessarily entails the fragmentation of its subject. In consequence of the rationaliza-

tion of the work process the human qualities and idiosyncrasies of the worker appear increasingly as *mere sources of error* when contrasted with these abstract special laws functioning according to rational predictions. Neither objectively nor in his relation to his work does man appear as the authentic master of the process; on the contrary, he is a mechanical part incorporated into a mechanical system."[8] The "thingness" of reification (recall the German term is *Verdinglichung*, literally, "to become thing-like") is now also a cognitive problem insofar as a "thing" (*Ding*) in Kantian terms, is an object that fails to become an object of cognition. It literally disappears and is taken for granted, not thought about, not reflected upon.

As a result, the subject encounters not a world that he has shared in making, but rather as an already-formed totality to which he must fit himself and conform: "He finds it already pre-existing and self-sufficient, it functions independently of him and he has to conform to its laws whether he likes it of not."[9] The effect of this is the deterioration of the subject's will as he increasingly surrenders his autonomy and power of judgment to the functional imperatives of the system: "As labor is progressively rationalized and mechanized his lack of will is reinforced by the way in which his activity becomes less and less active and more and more *contemplative*."[10] The subject now becomes divided against himself. Reification renders one's consciousness passive to the activity of the system. The system is, of course, re-created by us, by those rendered passive. Hence, one is still active in the sense that one labors, one purchases, one lives one's life according to the structures and norms shaped by the system. But now, each of us does this without reflecting on the purposes and ends of that system. We take it for granted, as basic, as the basic background conditions for our lives. As such, it is rendered outside the scope of critical consciousness.

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8   Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1971), 89.

9   Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89.

10   Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 89.

But what this means for Lukács is more than a mere cognitive defect. He argues that reification effectively hides from view the very purposes and legitimacy of the social order as a whole. We become unable to critique the totality and to see it as the cause of any of the particular subjective pathologies we may experience. We are unable, in effect, to move beyond the phenomenological experience of social pathology and question the system as a whole. "The question why and with what justification human reason should elect to regard just these systems as constitutive of its own essence (as opposed to the 'given,' alien, unknowable nature of the content of those systems) never arises. It is assumed to be self-evident."[11] The key issue here is, once again, a question of drilling down into the "essential structure" of the system itself, the system *as totality*. The core property of critique now can be seen in Hegelian and Marxian terms at once: as the penetration beneath the phenomenological, empirical manifestation of the system and its products into the essential structures and processes that are constitutive of it: "The question then becomes: are the empirical facts – (it is immaterial whether they are purely 'sensuous' or whether their sensuousness is only the ultimate material substratum of their 'factual' essence) – to be taken as 'given' or can this 'givenness" be dissolved further into rational forms, i.e., can it be conceived as the product of 'our' reason?"[12]

Reification now is further revealed to be our incapacity to rationally comprehend the essential structure of the system. By essence is meant not some inflated metaphysical substance but the basic structure of the system as a whole and the way it structures social relations, social processes and social ends or purposes that constitute the social whole and our subjective orientations as well. The key idea here is therefore one of critical metaphysics: de-reified consciousness is not some mystical, special power to which only a select few have access; it is the result of an ability to thematize the nature of the social system as a whole. There is an ineliminable social-ontological component to this thesis. Lukács

11   Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 112.
12   Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 116.

sees in Hegel and in Marx a need to understand that social reality is the product of our practices, practices guided by ideas. Hence, the nature of social reality corresponds to the nature of the ideas we possess about it. Indeed, if we go back to the Aristotelian conception of *praxis*, it is not simply a matter of activity, but it is *thought directed to an end*. As Aristotle says in his *Nicomachean Ethics*: "thought (διάνοια) alone moves nothing, but thought directed toward an end (πρακτική) does; for this is indeed the moving cause of productive activity (του ποιεῖ) also since he who makes something always has some further end (τέλος) in view."[13] This means that for a practice to change, it entails a transformation in the end toward which that practice is organized.

Now we can glimpse a richer idea of what reification is about. Once we connect our powers of cognition with the idea of social practice, we can see what the social totality means as an ontological category. The totality is not an entity external to us, but one that is constituted through us – through us as practical beings. It is an ontological category because it embraces the total world of social facts that we as members of any community create and endow with meaning and significance. As Lukács see it, what is special about capitalism is its ability to constitute the entirety of the totality; it is a capacity to reshape and reorient all social practices toward ends that it posits as valid. Once we see practice as consciously directed activity, reification now presents itself as a corruption of praxis; it is the supplanting of heteronomous ideas about what the ends of our activities should be that re-orients our world-creating powers toward

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13 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI.ii.5. Lukács will seek to develop this idea more fully in his *Ontology*, but even in *History and Class Consciousness* we can see he has this insight in view: "In his doctoral thesis Marx, more concrete and logical than Hegel, effected the transition from the question of existence and its hierarchy of meanings to the plane of historical reality and concrete praxis. 'Didn't the Moloch of the Ancients hold sway? Wasn't the Delphic Apollo a real power in the life of the Greeks? In this context Kant's criticism is meaningless.' Unfortunately Marx did not develop this idea to its logical conclusion although in his mature works his method always operates with concepts of existence graduated according to the various levels of praxis." *History and Class Consciousness*, 127-128.

heteronomous ends and purposes. These ideas are normative ideas, for they express ways that we should orient our activities, our practical lives, as well as the ways that we rationalize and legitimate those regimes of practice. Capitalism as a total process, indeed, as an "inverted world," as Hegel would have called it, is not only an economic, but a total social system once it is able to absorb not only our time and labor, but our practices as a whole.[14] It has absorbed our capacity to see that the ends toward which our activities are oriented possess class character – that capital is material force insofar as it has the capacity to colonize our practices by supplanting *its* ends as *our* ends. The key idea here is that reification is not epistemic in nature, but rather (social) ontological: it is re-organizes the very reality of the social world via this shaping of our consciousness and the norms that underwrite it and our practices. What I want to show now is how this shaping of consciousness is a matter of the shaping of norms and values that are absorbed through socialization processes before returning to this theme of a critical social ontology that can provide us with a means to shatter the effects of reification.

14 As Michael E. Brown notes: "the fact that capitalist political economy defines and therefore can be said to operate hegemonically across the entire terrain of economically relevant and economically dependent social life makes it difficult to speak sensibly in ways that are inconsistent with it... The comprehensiveness of capitalist production, and the inevitable moral vacuum in the local settings it inevitably leaves behind, are findings of the Marxian critique of ideology." *The Production of Society: A Marxian Foundation for Social Theory*. (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1986), 101, 103. This is one reason to accept the implications of Lukács' thesis that the totality is re-patterned around the imperatives of capital once it penetrates the domain of culture. Andrew Feenberg notes that: "'Culture' now refers to the unifying pattern of an entire society, including its typical artifacts, rituals, customs, and beliefs. The concept of culture points toward the common structures of social life. It assigns the researcher the problem of discovering the overarching paradigms of meaning and value that shape all the various spheres of society." *The Philosophy of Praxis: Marx, Lukács and the Frankfurt School*. (London: Verso, 2014), 65.

3. An Expansion of the Model of Reification

Central to my project of reconstructing reification is the thesis that it is a complex concept, covering three distinct areas of human thinking and feelings. As I suggested above, the main thesis that Lukács puts forth is the idea – taken heavily from the project of German Idealism – that the subject's impulses for ethical and political obligation and, implicitly, of dissent rests on the ability to comprehend the social reality within which one lives. This is a theme taken from Hegel's phenomenological understanding of the ways in which the thinking subject transitions to absolute knowledge: one is able to comprehend one's world and as a totality, but also, if one is free, one sees that this totality is rational, i.e., that it serves the rational, universal interest of the social whole rather than elevating a particular part of it over the whole. The Marxian twist on this is a critique of capitalist society that distorts the social-ontological structures and processes of society to run counter to the common social interest and instead valorize private surplus over social, human ends and needs. Reification is a lack of the kind of cognitive power to penetrate the *appearance* of capitalist society as "natural" and justified based on its mere existence. Reification is the defective form of reasoning that limits this power of reflection.

But there is also a neo-Kantian trace in Lukács' thesis in that he is claiming that the central capacity – indeed, the *critical* capacity – to be able to perceive the world as a proper object of knowledge disintegrates and we are left with the problem of the reified subject relating to the world as mere appearance, where essence (or the space of causal reasons) is veiled beneath a haze of "natural" processes and forms. The neo-Kantian separation between fact and value means that it is unable to see the connection between the way that values are constitutive of the world; that there is in fact a unity between the norms and values we possess and the nature of the social facts that are generated and then interpreted by us. By insisting on a separation between these two spheres, consciousness is rendered unable to see that this distortion in consciousness is the result

of the transformation of norms that are generated by rationalized forms of production, consumption and social coordination that are successfully internalized by subjects. At the core of the phenomenon of reification, it can be said, is this mechanism of the generation and internalization of norms and its effects on consciousness and cognition.

Think of reification therefore not simply as a transposition problem within consciousness but as a re-coding of the norms that shape and structure our cognition and our practices. What this thesis entails is the idea that any norm is not simply value but is also a routing of cognitive and epistemic capacities in such a way that they are unable to work outside of the boundaries set by the system of norms that are ambient within the community. In this sense, norms take on a kind of social power in that they can orient action and the reasons for such actions. As Joseph Raz has pointed out: "Generalizing, one may say that normative power is the power to effect a normative change. A normative change can be interpreted to comprise every change in the reasons for action that some person has."[15] If we explore this idea, we find that the idea of normative power is the capacity of our norms to be shaped and oriented by others. But going further, it entails the shaping of our intentionality, the very way that we endow meaning and significance to the world – i.e., the very creation of social facts itself. Since social facts are created by our intentionality, the power to shape norms is also the power to shape social reality itself.

This, in turn, leads to a deeper problem in that social power now operates within the normative valences of consciousness. Raz calls this "influence" and argues that it "includes the power to affect the goals people have, their desires and aspirations. Beliefs in the desirability of pursuing certain styles of life are induced through educational institutions and the mass media."[16] Reification, on this view, can be seen as the result of this kind of power and social dominance. Elsewhere I have called this *constitutive power*, or the power to shape and orient our norms and val-

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15   Joseph Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms.* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1975), 99.

16   Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 99.

ue-orientations that in turn transforms not only our consciousness, but also our social practices.[17] But what reification adds to this discussion is that it is not simply a neutral shaping or orienting of consciousness. More specifically, it is shaped according to the logics of the dominating social systems and their imperatives. Historically speaking, under rationalized capitalist forms of social production and consumption, it means that these new norms and values absorb subjective life into the system of production and consumption that generates private surplus. But what is particularly problematic here is that the different dimensions of subjectivity are shaped and formed by this reification of consciousness. Pointing to three different dimensions of subjectivity, we can say there exist cognitive, evaluative and cathectic dimensions of the self and that each are underwritten by the normative structure of consciousness.

Now, this means that the phenomenon of reification runs much deeper than the cognitive layer alone. Hence, the extent to which subjectivity gets folded into the fabric of the social order is more deeply rooted than a cognitivist framework can account for. Going back to Raz for a moment, we can see that norms have a deeper impact on how we see and how we judge and evaluate the social world. Any norm can shape our evaluative capacities. Think of the simple argument that says: *it is right for you to φ*, which leads to the logical consequence: *φ-ing is good*. Once successfully internalized by the subject, the personality system may also come to invest itself cathectically in φ: *It feels good whenever I φ*. This is, to be sure, an overly simplistic argument about the effect of norms on consciousness and personality, but it captures much of how the norms that shape systems can also reify consciousness. Norms and values therefore constitute a crucial means by which reification can serve to hide from view a more critical account of the social world. It also goes a long way in demonstrating that phenomenological and pragmatist arguments concerning critical reasoning are unable to overcome the problem of reification. Indeed, as much as communicative and discursive theories of judgment may appeal

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17 See Michael J. Thompson, *The Domestication of Critical Theory*. (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

to some, they are unable to explode the structures of reification that fuse subject and object in capitalist society.

Norms are therefore more than simply structures of practice, they are also structures of meaning in that they serve as the ways that we as subjects and members of a collective form of life assign meaning to objects and phenomena that occur within the lifeworld.[18] In this sense, the alteration of social practices necessarily entails a transformation of norms. Since a practice is, as Aristotle and Marx agree, thought-directed activity, then once we change the meaning and purpose of any activity, we also change the thought behind it. Capitalism patterns meaning just as it patterns practices; it therefore becomes constitutive of new norms and value-patterns that form into coordinated webs of norms that shape social action and subjective dispositions. But these norms are rooted not in the spontaneity of the lifeworld, or according to some democratic consensus about how we should organize our world, but according to the imperatives of productive and consumptive demands of an economic system oriented toward private surplus and the means to the expansion of that surplus. These imperatives gradually reorganize the very ontological structures of the social world and creates a new social reality. Reification therefore constitutes a deeper pathology not only of consciousness and itself, but those structures of meaning that orient practices and the very reality that our social practices create.

The key idea here, taking after Parsons, is that there is a sense in which "successful" forms of socialization are understood to be the extent

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18 Andrew Feenberg notes, on this point, the common avenue of departure for both Lukács and Heidegger: "it inspired Heidegger and Lukács, who both accepted Lask's breakthrough to a new kind of transcendental account of meaning that borders on ontology. Meaning is the 'being' of the phenomena through which we gain access to them as what they 'are.' Heidegger and Lukács went on to attempt to ground being on practice rather than subjectivity." *The Philosophy of Praxis*, 75. I think the key idea here is that we need to move into the next stage, to that of a social ontology where meaning, as structured by normative frames of cognition, is the nexus of consciousness which is infiltrated by social practices and the norms that ground them thereby serving as the location of reification since that is the meeting point between fact and value as well as thought and being.

to which individuals take up the norms of the social systems and institutions around them. But the key issue here, as Parsons points out, is that these norms cannot simply be acquired in mature adulthood. There must be some background basis for the acquisition of more complex social norms. For Lukács, the thesis of reification holds that it is the activities of the workplace – of the technical transformation of production, of the collapsing of time into space in terms of the expansion of productive capacities, and rational forms of bureaucratization, and so on – that serve as the soil of reification. This may have been true in the early twentieth century, but as these norms of production and consumption, or rationalization, the legitimacy of the capitalist economic life and culture penetrated more deeply into the layers of culture and social institutions as a whole, reification became more trenchant since the acquisition of the values of capitalist life are acquired at younger ages. Hence, Parsons notes that

> [I]t may be concluded that it is the internalization of the value-orientation patterns embodied in the role-expectations for ego of the significant socializing agents, which constitutes the strategic element of this basic personality structure. And it is because these patterns can only be acquired through the mechanism of identification, and because the basic identification patterns are developed in childhood, that the childhood structure of personality in this respect is so stable and unchangeable.[19]

Once the social order is seen as, essentially, a collection of norms that guide and coordinate social action, we must also see that for this to be successful it is required that it be absorbed or internalized by the ego structure of the individual. This leads, as Herbert Marcuse insightfully points out, to a crippling sense of reification as one-dimensionality, literally as a folding of the ego into the social structure itself, unable to distinguish itself from the social reality:

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19   Talcott Parsons, *The Social System*. (New York: The Free Press, 1951), 228.

> The mediation between the self and the other gives way to im-mediate identification. In the social structure, the individual becomes the conscious and unconscious object of adminis-tration and obtains his freedom and satisfaction in his role as such an object; in the mental structure, the ego shrinks to such an extent that it seems no longer capable of sustaining itself, as a self, in distinction from id and superego.[20]

Hence, we can see that reification can be expanded to understand the ways that norms and value-orientations fuse the subject to the objective domain of the world of social facts. The more that capitalism as a so-cial formation, as a economic-social-cultural formation is able to make its web of norms efficiently internalized by the ego, the more that reification will be deeply rooted in the subject. As Andrew Feenberg points out con-cerning the analysis of reification, "The focus must shift from the mecha-nistic 'influence' of social conditions on consciousness to the generalized patterning of all dimensions of society."[21] This internalization of the web of norms deployed by social institutions is what causes the reification of subjects, what essentially explains their relative lack of awareness of the defective nature of the social order of which they are a part and which their practices have been oriented to re-create. It also quells the antag-onism of class conflict. This is one reason why industrial and post-in-dustrial societies have witnessed a sharp decline in the politicization of economic inequality: the normative webs of the system have penetrated deeply into the culture that socializes its members to such a degree that critical reflection has been stunted.

But again, norms are more than mere normative "A should φ" state-ments. They are also constitutive of facts as well in the sense that they endow our practices with a social-ontological facticity.[22] Here reification

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20 Herbert Marcuse, "The Obsolescence of the Freudian Conception of Man." In Herbert Marcuse, *Five Lectures: Psychoanalysis, Politics and Utopia* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1970), 44-61, 47.

21 Feenberg, *Philosophy of Praxis*, 66.

22 As Joseph Raz notes: "Statements of facts which are reasons for the

takes on a more pernicious and more deeply rooted course. Parsons was correct that successful internalization was a means to the stability of any social system and that the ego had to internalize social norms for it to stabilize the ego. But this also means that it has the capacity to create new social facts as well. Hence, the link between norms and consciousness. At a more technical level, we can see that the collective-intentional structures of consciousness shared by any community is active in the ways that it articulates their social reality. This is because, as John Searle has argued, the norms we adopt coordinate collective forms of meaning by assigning objects "status functions," or forms of meaning with which we endow objects based on collective forms of intentionality, or collective forms of meaning-giving. In this sense, social facts are the result of this collective intentionality and the ability to control the norms that shape that intentionality is also a power to shape the structure of social reality. In this sense, reification and social ontology are deeply entwined and constitutes a theory not only of defective consciousness but also a theory of power.[23]

4. Value Heteronomy and Cognitive Distortion

I have been arguing that an extension of reification as a concept for critical theory should focus on a particular conception of cognition that sees epistemic capacities as tied to value-orientations. I have also argued that these value-orientations have the ability to shape cognitive and epistemic powers. Most importantly, they are able to form the basis not only for the *content* of reasoning – both normative and cognitive ideas that individuals carry with them and use to understand their world – but also the *formal* aspects of thought, given in terms of isolated, episodic think-

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performance of a certain action by a certain agent are the premises of an argument the conclusion of which is that there is a reason for the agent to perform the action or that he ought to do it." Raz, *Practical Reason and Norms*, 28.

23   See John Searle, *Making the Social World: The Structure of Human Civilization*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 145ff. Also cf. Thompson, "Collective Intentionality, Social Domination and Reification."

ing styles as opposed to holistic and dynamic and relational forms of thought. The latter was considered critical in the objective Idealist sense since it was concerned with the actual, objective features of thought and reality. Whereas for Kant, and Enlightenment thinkers more generally, cognition was conceived as an independent process, contemporary psychological models of mind show that it is more correct to see it as a function that is embedded in the personality system of individuals. According to this view, the problem of cognition is linked to the kinds of value-systems that individuals possess.

Lukács echoed this view in the sense that he saw the central problem of reification as residing in the ways that practices were reordered by new normative regimes that patterned the background conditions for our reflective and evaluative judgments about the world.[24] Reification can now be seen as a pathology of consciousness, but one which is itself linked to the pathology of personality. Since norms come to socialize agents, the nature of the norms will come to shape value-orientations that also give form to the concepts used to understand the world. Reification is the result not of the rationalization of society alone – i.e., of the techno-industrial order and of forms of strategic action – but of the values that are required to secure legitimacy of a system of extractive social relations. Here, Lukács seems to me to lay a foundation for an extension of reification which goes beyond techno-industrial forms of social integration and toward one that can capture the intricacies of social power and domination in a systemic sense. A society that is able to *routinize* particular norms and values therefore has the ability to shape the powers of cognition as well. Reification is a pathology of the whole self; a problem that affects the total personality of the subject, not simply forms of reasoning. As such, it presses itself onto the powers of reflection and critical judgment by ensconcing the subject in a web of norms from

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24   By background conditions, I mean, as Searle does: "The Background consists of all of those abilities, capacities, dispositions, ways of doing things, and general know-how that enable us to carry out our intentions and apply our intentional states." Searle, *Making the Social World*, 31 and *passim*.

which it is difficult to escape.

What I mean by this is that as the web of norms are increasingly rooted in the systemic imperatives of the social order, and the more that this social order is articulated by rational, administrative-capitalist purposes and goals, the more that this web of norms will exert pressures on different spheres of agency. The social field, where the web of norms is located, exerts four kinds of pressure: internalization, routinization, rationalization and socialization pressures. In the first level, the ego must absorb the value-patterns (web of norms) that are ambient within the social world. This becomes more efficient in modern societies by routinizing them so that they become part of the background *hexis* of the subject. As these value-orientations and the practices that they shape become more routinized and internalized, they carry with them their own rationalizations. This is because they become increasingly self-referential as the system becomes more imbued by those value-patterns and more and more spheres of life and institutions are colonized by the logics of rational authority tied to economic imperatives. Last, we can that these leads to the socialization pressure where our active forms of judgment and reasoning are pressed into the structural constraints imposed by the social system but also, once it has been successfully internalized by the subject, imposed from within as well.

According to this scheme, reification is the result of the constraints placed upon cognition by the value systems resulting from the inculcation of social norms. It is also a diachronic and synchronic process which affects multiple levels of consciousness and social action. This means that the powers of reason as well as of judgment, in the model, are affected by the types of value-orientations that the subject has absorbed. The goal of social norms under capitalism is to maximize the efficiency of its goals; to this end, it is crucial that subjects accept the goals of such institutions as their own, to see that the only real purpose of their own actions, values, and ideas are in some kind of conformity with the world around them. Hegemonic values and norms therefore are the starting point for the deformed kind of consciousness that constitutes reification.

These values are increasingly heteronomic in that they emanate from institutional worlds that do not require nor do they ask for any form of rational justification. Rather, they increasingly are taken as basic and form the background condition for the various forms of deontic power that hold social action together.

As I have been arguing, norms affect consciousness in a straightforward way. They have the ability to shape our practical activities as well as the rationalizations for those activities and their effects. This occurs through the problem of *value heteronomy*, where the socialization process has been able to successfully inculcate a basic value system that orients the evaluative capacities of the subject. Value heteronomy is the condition where modern forms of authority express themselves as interior to the subject. Recall that for Weber, authority or domination is "the chance of commands being obeyed by a specifiable group of people," and on in which "the content of the command becomes the maxim of their conduct for its very own sake."[25] The reification of consciousness therefore begins with the inculcation of routinized and rationalized value systems and concepts which shape normative orientations toward the world. But they also, as Weber points out, solidify and legitimate the social relations that serve as the conduits of authority and socialize the sense of self that constitutes the personality of the individual.

Reification of consciousness therefore begins with the uncritical acceptance of heteronomous value systems which legitimate ideas, norms, values, social relations, institutions and goals. Crucial in this sense is that the norms be accepted as they are presented; that they become part of the subject's interior structure of attitudes. But it is not possible to do this if the norm is questioned, or if some rational basis is sought for its acceptance. When this occurs, there is generally some form of deviance involved. But more importantly for my purpose here, it also implies an affect of the rational faculty of cognition: to accept norms without rational justification means to accept its conception of the world. Rational-

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25 Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972), 532.

ized social and institutional norms that serve the powers of elites and their economic ends – norms about labor, about inequality, about income and wealth, about education, about the purpose of social goals, and so on – are imposed on consciousness which results in a lack of consistency between the different values within the subject. This lack of logical consistency, over time, requires that the subject's cognitive powers be weakened in order to accept the particularistic norms of capitalist institutional logics. Rational consciousness and evaluative consciousness are therefore dialectically linked.

Recall that the reification thesis has at its core the insight that consciousness is shaped by norms and value-orientations. What this means is that since norms are constitutive of social facts, as I have demonstrated, it also means that such social facts carry with them their own validity, what I call *implicit validity*. This is because the mechanism of value-acquisition does not come as a result of rational justification but because it is embedded in the practices and norms that constitute the social world. As a result, reified consciousness is able to split reality into particulars. It lacks consistency and can only know isolated, static forms of reality as opposed to dynamic and processual forms of reality. It is unable to grasp internal relations and to connect the logic of the social world with the pathologies one experiences, at a social and existential level. Since value systems establish a basis for the evaluative capacity of the subject, it can also be shown that they form the basis for the cognitive capacity of subjects in the sense that knowledge about the world requires the suspension of critical cognition. As Milton Rokeach claimed in his investigation of "open" and "closed" minds, "Isolation between parts reflects a tendency not to relate beliefs to the inner requirements of logical consistency, but to assimilate them wholesale, as fed by one's authority figure."[26] As a result, reified consciousness not only shapes cognitive but also evaluative capacities about the relative rightness and wrongness of things, irrespective of the "reasons" given for them.

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26 Milton Rokeach, *The Open and Closed Mind*. (New York: Basic Books, 1960), 61.

The reification of consciousness – conceived as the concealment of dynamic social reality behind the façade of isolated, episodic consciousness – therefore implies that the mind is somehow constrained from grasping the essential nature of the world. And this only makes sense since the value systems that constitute subjectivity under capitalism exert the pressure of partial, immediate forms of reasoning. They offer for the subject simple scripts for understanding the world; not in terms of how it actually works, but how they must work within its conception of how the world should be. Hence, the relation between the value system and cognition becomes manifest: a critical, *mediated* relation to the world is displaced by an *immediate* relation to the world. The values that steer consciousness also deter the subject from rational inquiry, from being able to see the world in its actuality. As Lukács argues: "As long as man adopts a stance of intuition and contemplation he can only relate to his own thought and to the objects of the empirical world in an immediate way. He accepts both as ready-made – produced by historical reality. As he wishes only to know the world and not to change it he is forced to accept both the empirical, material rigidity of existence and the logical rigidity of concepts as unchangeable."[27]

Reification of consciousness therefore is not simply to be understood as the inability to conceive of the social world properly, but at its root, it is the result of specific forms of values and norms that stultify the forms of socialization that make individuals critical, open, and to see social praxis and civic life as an essential aspect to their individuality. As Lukács wrote much later in his "Literature and Democracy": "If we are not aware of this relation, or if we do not wish to take notice of it, then our so-called external destiny, that is, our economic, political, and social destiny appears, in our creations, to be stripped of every human element. The we do not experience and imagine this destiny as being our social interactions with other people, but, rather, in our self-consciousness, we fetishistically transform it into external objects and lifeless things. Instead of the concrete economy of life, the colorful web of our interactions,

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27 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 202.

an abstract, impoverished, oppressed 'I' stands opposed to an external world that has become an abstract, fetishized, dead thing."[28]

5. Overcoming Reification through Critical Judgment

So is there a way out? If critical theory is to serve any useful end, it must move beyond the merely diagnostic and into the political where we can perhaps use rational reflection to mitigate against reification. Even though the argument I have elaborated above seems complete and total-izing, this can never be the case. Rather, any social system suffers from its own imperfections, as subtle as they may be. Pathologies of society and self still emerge in the process of our lives and it is only when those pathologies are experienced in some way can we have an entrée point into the possibility for social critique. To combat and dissolve reification is therefore only possible when we are open to questioning the basic val-ue-orientations that shape the social reality of which I am a part. This must be a political act, or the result of a political challenge to the culture that perpetuates the forms of social power that pervade our lives. For this reason, combatting reification must be a central role of any political critique of power. For reification to become the object of political critique once again, it is necessary to understand the inherently social-ontological structure of Lukács' argument.

With this in mind, let me return now to how we can reconstruct a theory of critical judgment from the reflections I have laid out here. As I see it, the essence of critical judgment must be expressed in an expanded form of thinking that can encompass the social totality as the basis for under-standing any particular expression of social or political power. Reification becomes increasingly difficult to combat the more that it penetrates into cultural and personality structures. But the reality it creates is one that is always open to critique because it is a false totality – i.e., it is a totality that is irrational because it does not serve universal ends and purposes. The contradictions generated by such an irrational system are the necessary

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28   Georg Lukács, "Literature and Democracy II," in Tyrus Miller and Erik Bachman (eds.) *The Culture of People's Democracy*. (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 75.

cracks that forces us back to re-theorize the totality. In this sense, we must ask about the purpose and end of the social totality – we must inquire into the validity of ends and purposes of our lives as interdependent, cooperative social beings. Now, this is precisely, I think, what Lukács urges in his critique of reified consciousness. His idea of "expressive totality" may seem to us to be out of date politically, but I want to suggest that it has been dismissed too soon without proper theoretical treatment.

What Lukács argues is that it is only when working people discover that they are the "subject-object" of history that reification will be overcome. This kind of consciousness, though, is not a contemplative form of consciousness, but an active one. He has in view here the need to change the practical relations we have with one another and with nature, and this means, as I have been arguing here, a transformation of the normative structure of consciousness that orients our activities. As Lukács puts it: "the consciousness of the proletariat must become deed. . . . namely, since consciousness here is not the knowledge of an opposed object but is the self-consciousness of the object *the act of consciousness overthrows the objective form of its object*."[29] What this means is that consciousness must become a new self-consciousness that sees the immanent ontology of our sociality and the ways that this has been shaped and formed according to the interests of others, directed and oriented toward private needs, ends and purposes as opposed those of all. A rational universal is therefore discovered through a new form of self-consciousness. But this self-consciousness is to know ourselves as social beings, as practical beings and as members of a totality entails a new way of thinking and judging.

For this reason, Lukács maintains that three aspects of critique must be in play. First, we must become aware of the contradictions that plague the system as a whole. If we are able to do this, then it is necessary, second, for us to have "an aspiration toward totality, that action should serve the purpose, described above, in the totality of the process." What this means is an ability to grasp the truth of the totality – "the truth that in the dialectical totality the individual elements incorporate the structure of the

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29 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 178.

whole."[30] In this sense, we need to be able to see any particular contradiction or norm or practice part of a total process. Last, if we are to be able to judge any given norm or practice, "it is essential to relate it to its function in the total process."[31] If we are able to do these three things then the hold of reification can be loosened. The reason is that thinking in terms of relations, processes, and ends or purposes is the grammar needed to think the totality as an ontological reality. Once we see this, we can begin to grasp the ways that uncritical practical activity helps to re-create and sustain the false totality that generates the contradictions in the first place and push us toward embracing a "critical practical activity."

This may seem overly philosophical, but we can make this more concrete by casting it in terms of a social ontology. Once we gain self-consciousness of ourselves as social beings, whose existence is interdependent on, and within relations with, other beings; that these interdependent relations are embedded in processes of change and activity; and finally that these processes and practices have ends and purposes, we can glimpse the essential structure of any given social reality in ontological, as opposed to empirical, form. The totality of social reality begins to expose itself. I go to work each day to bring home money to pay my bills and purchase things. But as isolated "facts" these things taken independently render critical reflection inert. Once I ask about the *purposes* or *ends* of that work, or the things I purchase, or about the kinds of relations that are needed to bring about the things for which I work or which I purchase, and the other institutions, norms and practices that uphold such a social reality, I begin to inquire into the legitimacy of such a system. Is it rational? Does it exist for the benefit of all? Reification only begins to break down at such a point, when the question of the ontology of my social world and my place within it is raised to consciousness. This is why Lukács argues that "Marxist theory is designed to put the proletariat into a very particular frame of mind."[32]

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30 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 198.

31 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 198.

32 Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 262.

Once we see this as an alternative mode of critical judgment, we can also see the severe errors of the post-metaphysical, discursive and phenomenological approaches to judgment that are current in theory today. Relying on thinkers such as Hannah Arendt, Jürgen Habermas, or Axel Honneth cannot get us past the blockages posed by reification. Indeed, as I see the matter, such theoretical projects do little more than refract reified consciousness back onto the judging subject. Indeed, their emphasis on a noumenal conception of intersubjectivity shears off the deeper normative, practical and social-relational structures and processes that constitute our social reality. It is this, after all, what Marx really meant by the term "material": that our sociality possesses a thick ontology of practices, norms, processes and relational structures and these structures are embedded within a social totality with its own imperatives. Without access to this totality, as Lukács importantly points out, there is no way to overcome the pathology of reification and come to terms with the deeper, core dynamics of our social world and the way it shapes its members. Perhaps a return to this concept and its critical implications for culture and political judgment can help us return critical social theory to its original Enlightenment political aspirations for a rational, free form of sociality. And perhaps it can also enable progressive social movements to disclose a rationally valid emancipatory interest to overcome the dehumanizing, reifying tendencies of capitalist modernity.

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Reality as Palimpsest: Benjamin Flâneur[1]

Howard Eiland[2]

Abstract: The figure of the flâneur in Benjamin's writings brings into play an intimately informed historical imagination coloring a physiognomic perception of the modern metropolis in its endless detail. Negotiating the labyrinth demands an art of reading. As urban wanderer, the flâneur divines the presence of far-off times and places within the everyday faces of the city; before him every street and byway lead downward into the past, so that for his productively distracted gaze the city becomes a dynamic palimpsest. Especially as presented in *The Arcades Project*, where flânerie is an organizing motif, the city as polycentric and multilayered historical text entails a nonclassical allegorical interpretation oriented by concerns of the interpreter's own present day. Such reading of the city has something in common with the panoramic and micrological "prismatic work" by which the art of film refracts an urban milieu. A vignette on advertising from *The Arcades Project* adapts cinematic devices (superimposition, dissolve) for a meandering palimpsestic narrative of forgetting and remembering that exemplifies the Benjaminian *Denkbild*.

My title has reference to a statement made by Theodor Adorno in 1955, in his introduction to the first collection of Walter Benjamin's writings, published in Germany in two volumes fifteen years after Benjamin's suicide on the Spanish border of Nazi-occupied France. "He immerses himself in reality as in a palimpsest," Adorno writes concerning the allegorical tenor of Benjaminian philosophy.[3] He's talking about the way with Benjamin everything in Creation becomes a text to be in-

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1   Presented as a talk at the University of California Berkeley (April 15, 2010), Brandeis University (October 30, 2014), and MIT (March 26, 2015).

2   Howard Eiland is the author of *Notes on Literature, Film, and Jazz* (2019) and, with Michael W. Jennings, of *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (2014). He has translated Benjamin works such as *Berlin Childhood around 1900* (2006) and *Origin of the German Trauerspiel* (2019).

3   "Er versenkt sich in die Realität wie in einen Palimpsest." Theodor W. Adorno, "Einleitung zu Benjamins *Schriften*" (1955), reprinted in Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, rev. ed. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), p. 41/ "Introduction to Benjamin's *Schriften*," trans. R. Hullot-Kentor, in *On Walter Benjamin*, ed. Gary Smith (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1988), p. 8 (trans. modified).

tensively entered into, puzzled out and deciphered. The only problem is that the material has to be deciphered in the absence of a definitive code—a proceeding Benjamin sometimes referred to as a "parody of philology."[4] This idea of interpreting reality as script—a many-layered and essentially ambiguous script whose surface writing partly reveals and partly conceals a virtual expanse of stratified underwritings, their spectral characters still in some measure traceable—this quasi-philological and quasi-archaeological enterprise points, I believe, to a basic characteristic of Benjamin's way of seeing and his perceptual world. It's a way of seeing that emphasizes the vertical—and vertiginous. And in which what is called objectivity necessitates vigilant reflective absorption in the given object and its encompassing historical problematic. No doubt there are precedents for such a mode of vision, above all in the tradition of what Benjamin calls allegorical perception, rooted as this partly is in biblical narrative and its tendency (I'm thinking of Erich Auerbach's classic analysis[5]) to look simultaneously backward and forward in time, thereby evoking at any moment in the succession of narrated events a complex vertical dimension of remembrance and expectation.

Of course, Benjamin's way of seeing is also specifically modern in its dynamic polycentric character. To borrow a model from physics: a static atomistic mode of thought and perception (let us call it "bourgeois") has given way to a transformational *field-oriented* mode, in which a certain continuous discontinuity is of the essence. The logic of linear causality is accordingly transformed in the field of force—where a principle of simultaneous concentration and expansion governs the vibration of events. Following in the tracks first of Nietzsche and Bergson, and subsequently, in the 1920s and 30s, of Baudelaire and Proust, the literary-philosophical Benjamin develops a dynamic constellatory vision of reality, a monadological conception of truth, and a correspondingly plas-

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4 "Parodie der philologischen [Methode]." *Über Walter Benjamin*, p. 41/ *On Walter Benjamin*, p. 9.

5 *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

tic convoluted mode of thought. The development arguably culminates in the conception of the "dialectical image," the suddenly emergent, retrospective-anticipatory historical constellation as site of the lightning flash of recognition.[6] This sort of image is dialectical because, as a spatiotemporal cut and composite, it splices together a particular moment of the past with aspects of the present as its legacy and immediate entry point, turning time in on itself in a reflective moment of experience at once past and present. It is dialectical also because it is necessarily an image *read*, the event of an encounter and negotiation between different moments and different epochs. In the hermeneutic tension and convolution of divergent historical forces, as in the expansive concentration of the image space, the *meaning* of past events is actualized—is distilled and constructed anew in confrontation with concerns of the historian's own present day. Already in 1914-1915, as a university student, Benjamin speaks of historical understanding in terms of a volatile convergence or focal point (*Brennpunkt*) of attention and remembrance, a state of being in which close reading of what has been ignites the possibility of a future, and in which the overwhelming gravity of lament for what is irretrievable and unredeemable coexists with the inconspicuous radiation of messianic promise.[7]

The highly oblique parody of philology—that is, the art of reading—at issue in these matters assumes a more concrete form in the figure of the

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6   "To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with tensions—there the dialectical image [*das dialektische Bild*] appears. It is the caesura in the movement of thought…. It is to be found…where the tension between dialectical opposites is greatest. Hence, the object constructed in the materialist presentation of history is itself the dialectical image…; it justifies its violent expulsion from the continuum of historical process." Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 475 (N10a,3). Text abbreviated in notes below as AP, with reference to particular convolute and entry.

7   See the opening paragraph of "The Life of Students," in Benjamin, *Early Writings: 1910-1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 197-198.

flâneur in Benjamin's writing, a figure that has come to be seen as representative of his style of thought.

This figure belongs primarily in the context of Benjamin's unfinished magnum opus, *The Arcades Project (Das Passagen-Werk)*, a multi-faceted study of the history, architecture, and surrounding milieux of the Paris arcades in the mid-nineteenth century. Benjamin intermittently pursued this research project, without quite knowing where he was heading,[8] in libraries of Berlin and Paris during the last thirteen years of his life, as the study proliferated in a variety of directions, all bearing on the cultural history and the everyday life, individual and collective, of a vanished epoch (the epoch of Baudelaire), and all reflecting a general concern with the fate of art in a world in which things are practically everywhere becoming commodified. The figure of the flâneur emerges as an organizing motif in the resulting aggregate of *Arcades* texts, those notes and materials, citations and reflections, which became for the author, as he put it in a letter of January 20, 1930, the "theater of all my struggles and all my ideas."[9]

The flâneur is the urban stroller whose penetrating social eye and whose feel for locality are animated by an intimate historical remembrance. Like another of Benjamin's nineteenth-century types in *The Arcades Project*, namely, the collector, who divines the entire history of his treasured object when he gazes at it in his showcase, the flâneur apprehends the ghosts of other times and places haunting the phenomena he encounters in his walks through the city. For him, the city streets have become precipitous. "The street conducts the flâneur into a vanished

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8   He knew quite well, however, that he was heading in a direction opposed to that of "established, traditional forms of historical research." See Gretel Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *Correspondence 1930-1940*, trans. Wieland Hoban (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2008), p. 155 (letter of August 16, 1935, from Benjamin).

9   *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin: 1910-1940*, trans. Manfred and Evelyn Jacobson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 359 (trans. modified). The figure of the flâneur subsequently plays an organizing role in the composition of Benjamin's essays, "The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire" and "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in 1938 and 1939.

time," we read near the beginning of Convolute M, the section in the *Arcades* specifically devoted to this figure (this figure who is also Walter Benjamin).[10] Thus, amid the traffic on a busy street corner, the flâneur sees the specter of a barricade erected three decades earlier by workers in revolt against the monarchy. In the tramcar passing before him he recognizes traces of the old horse-drawn omnibus and, at a deeper level, the stagecoach, just as he recognizes in the *names* of streets and squares and bridges, of hotels and theatres and restaurants, a reflection of forgotten establishments, personages, and events. In the presence of particular storefronts or building facades, particular gateways or boundary markers, particular stretches of cobblestone, particular entrances to the catacombs, and particular cafés, the flâneur experiences a sudden thickening and, Benjamin says, "intoxication" of space and time, a revelatory spatiotemporal masquerade by virtue of which "far-off times and places interpenetrate the landscape and the present moment."[11] To borrow another phrase from Adorno, the flâneur views the world from the perspective of the dead.[12] In the productively estranging, festive and melancholy process of flânerie, experience unfolds as a lucid dream: at such times, "everything is face," proposes Benjamin, and it is the flâneur's special study—for he makes "studies"—"to read from faces the profession, the ancestry, the character."[13] The city is *read* in its historical character as a manifold physiognomy and moving image, offering "double and triple perspectives, or inklings of perspectives (images within images)."[14]

This last description is a quotation from the world of painting, from Odilon Redon, whose delicate and luminous still-lifes Benjamin admired, but it could just as well have come from the world of *motion* pictures, that distinctively modern medium which is invoked at several key points in

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10 AP: M1,2.

11 AP: M1a,4 and M2,4.

12 "Verloren…ist der Blick, der aus der Perspektive des Toten die Welt sah…" This is what Adorno says of Benjamin himself, in his obituary "Zu Benjamins Gedächtnis" (October 1940), reprinted in *Über Walter Benjamin*, p. 72.

13 AP: M1a,1, M20a,1, and M6,6.

14 AP: M6a,1.

The Arcades Project (not least because it epitomizes the principle of discontinuous continuity) and which, of course, figures decisively in Benjamin's well known essay of the mid-Thirties, "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility." In Convolute M on the flâneur and in early notations for the *Arcades* complex, it is a particular cinematic device, one prominently exploited in silent film, that is brought into play—namely, the device of superimposition, by which, as you know, two or more interarticulated shots appear simultaneously in multiple exposure on the screen. There's an obvious analogy here with the palimpsest. As a device of vertical montage—this is how Eisenstein conceives it (and his concept includes both visual and auditory dimensions[15])—cinematic superimposition might be said to constitute a dynamic palimpsest, wherein the vertically assembled images bleed into one another like the layers of written texts on a parchment. What Benjamin stresses is "the interpenetrating and superposed transparency of the world of the flâneur [*Durchdringungs- und Überdeckungstransparenz der Welt des Flaneurs*]."[16] The street leads *downward* in the historical imagination of the flâneur, becomes transparent to an historical underworld, becomes a medium of historical perception and of allegorical perception. At the approach of the flâneur, the historical locale rouses and divulges hints, weaving its potentially educative spell. But it is not so much cognitive or conceptual knowledge that is at stake in the flâneur's physiognomic readings of the urban landscape as "felt knowledge," a bodily anamnesis and divination. It's a little like the subliminal register of "atmosphere" in a film.[17]

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15 See S. M. Eisenstein, *Towards a Theory of Montage*, trans. Michael Glenny (London: British Film Institute, 1991), chapter 13, "Vertical Montage" (1940), pp. 327-399. In a 1928 interview with André Gide, Benjamin records Gide's comment on Proust's novelistic exploitation of the cinematic devices of superimposition (*surimpression*) and dissolve. "Conversation with André Gide," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 94. Cited in the text below as SW2.

16 AP: S2,1.

17 See Carl Th. Dreyer, "Photography in Danish Film" (1940), in *Dreyer in Double Reflection*, trans. Donald Skoller (New York: Dutton, 1973), pp. 113, 118.

Benjamin's theory of film, as it emerges from his scattered reflections on the new medium, has a further bearing on the figure of the flâneur and his visionary excavations, his masking and unmasking of localities. In a newspaper article of 1927, published soon after his return from a two-month visit to Moscow, Benjamin writes apropos of Eisenstein's *Potemkin* of the "new realm of consciousness" coming into being with the art of film. He will incorporate the passage in question into the Work of Art essay eight years later, where he conceives of film as the "training ground" for a newly emerging, shock-tested way of seeing and experiencing, a "reception in distraction" that habitually arises in our negotiation of modern big-city life, and that furthermore distinguishes artistic production in an age of advanced technology.[18] In the newspaper article of 1927, "Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz," which shows the influence of Russian film theory, and of Vertov in particular, Benjamin conceives of film as a kind of technological prism, one in which "the spaces of the immediate environment—the spaces in which people live, pursue their avocations, and enjoy their leisure—are laid open before their eyes."[19] Just as the "deeper rock strata emerge only where the rock is fissured," so the "dynamite" of cinema's revolutionary technical devices explodes the reified customary surfaces of everyday life, with the result "that now we can take extended journeys of adventure between their widely scattered ruins. The vicinity of a house, of a room, can include dozens of the most unexpected stations." (Think of the way Fritz Lang's camera moves through the warehouse where Peter Lorre is hiding from the police in *M*, or the way Hitchcock's camera travels over objects on a dressing table.)

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18 "Film: unfolding <result?> of all the forms of perception, the tempos and rhythms, which lie preformed in today's machines, such that all problems of contemporary art find their definitive formulation only in the context of film" (AP: K3,3). See Howard Eiland, "Reception in Distraction," in *Walter Benjamin and Art*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 3-13.

19 Walter Benjamin, "Reply to Oscar A. H. Schmitz" (SW2, 17 [trans. Rodney Livingstone]).

This disclosure of spaces within spaces—a deconstruction, if you like, of the milieu—occurs in flânerie as well. The flâneur similarly performs "prismatic work," a work of refraction, on a locality, at once decomposing the whole into discrete elements and opening up within the isolated particular—the doorstep, the courtyard, the cabstand, the shop window—an unexpected station, a landscape in which to dwell. The micrological gaze of the flâneur may not have the versatility of a movie camera, but it too affords shifting angles on the most ordinary things, tracking and zooming and cutting through "collective spaces" as through a field for play (*Spielraum*), namely, the play of historical imagination that governs the wandering gaze. In the course of flânerie, the spaces of the city become a plastic medium of historical remembrance. That is to say, they become arcades—more or less complex *passages* into the virtual space of the past, or, as Benjamin likes to say, the dream space. For, in his conception, the past is a dream we carry with us and that carries us. The conscious goal of his arcades project is precisely to waken from "that dream we name the past,"[20] and one truly awakens (as Freud and Proust in their different ways likewise suggest) only by descending back into the recesses of the dream, as the flâneur descends into the subterranean secret history of the city. One wakens *from* the past only by waking *to* it, in its infinite depth. This is the "dialectic of awakening" at the heart of Benjamin's historical materialism. It is an historical awakening conditioned on what he calls, in his 1929 essay "On the Image of Proust," intertwined time (*verschränkte Zeit*), in which experience of reality is a function of the emergent and constructed communion of living and dead.[21]

Historical remembrance in Benjamin generally does not take the form of a sequence of events understood as causes and effects within a homogeneous continuum (the model of nineteenth-century Rankean historicism attacked by Nietzsche), but rather seizes on the recollected moment as monad, as historical threshold; the telling detail from a former age comes to encapsulate and epitomize that epoch as a living legacy simul-

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20   AP: K1,3.

21   See SW2: 244

taneously unfolding and receding. The unity of a Benjamin text—and this is especially evident in longer works such as *One-Way Street*, *The Arcades Project*, and *Berlin Childhood around 1900*—consequently tends to be not the unity of conventional narrative or argument but that of montage, not logical deduction but assemblage in dispersion, secret affinity. It is the unity, we might say, of a city. Indeed, at one point in *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin describes the world of the flâneur (Baudelaire's flâneur, in this case[22]) as a city of arcades, a city of passages—rather a nice description of the *Arcades* text itself, which is literally and figuratively a book of passages, insofar as it is a book at all.

For the solitary urban walker with his "dreamy eye,"[23] the spaces of the city become a medium of remembrance, as we've seen. In the art of flânerie, the city functions "as a mnemonic [*mnemotechnischer Behelf*] for the lonely walker;" his steps "awaken an astounding resonance" on the asphalt.[24] The resonance which encompasses the flâneur and which is generated by his passage through the city is an image of memory itself, which Benjamin, in the wake of Bergson and Proust, conceives as ontological rather than exclusively psychological—not first of all a faculty or instrument but an element and theater, the resonating, endlessly stratified chthonic medium of what has been (*das Gewesene*).

Benjamin gives concentrated expression to this line of thought in a passage of his *Berlin Chronicle* from 1932, a passage which he adapted in a short piece entitled "Excavation and Memory." In the *Berlin Chronicle* he writes that

> Memory [*das Gedächtnis*] is not an instrument for surveying the past but its theater. It is the medium of past experience [*Medium des Erlebten*], just as the earth is the medium in which

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22 AP: m5,4. Baudelaire likens the figure of the flâneur to "a kaleidoscope endowed with consciousness" in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life," cited M14a,1.

23 AP: m5,4.

24 These formulations are from "The Return of the Flâneur," Benjamin's 1929 newspaper review of his collaborator Franz Hessel's *Spazieren in Berlin* (On Foot in Berlin [SW2: 262]).

dead cities lie buried… [Genuine recollection] must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter, to scatter it as one scatters earth, to turn it over as one turns over the soil. For matters [*Sachverhalte*] are nothing but deposits laid down, strata which yield only to the most thorough investigation… Fruitless searching is as much a part of this as happy discovery, and consequently remembrance must not proceed in the manner of a narrative or still less that of a report, but must… assay its spade in ever-new places, and in the old ones delve to ever-deeper layers.[25]

In "Excavation and Memory," he lays more stress on "the strata which first had to be broken through," on the exact location in "today's ground" where the excavation is situated; that is, he lays stress on the present moment of study that provides a perspective on the past moment by which it is itself conditioned: what he calls in *The Arcades Project* the "now of recognizability," the mediated moment of historical awakening. Real and effective remembrance (*wirkliche Erinnerung*) is, again, an actualization—a renewal and making new—of what has been, a return of the buried moment in an image transformed by what Proust calls the terrible re-creative power of memory. In one degree or another, newer and older phenomena interpenetrate to form the historical constellation of the dialectical image, with its convolved temporality.

The palimpsest character of memory—the formula derives most immediately from Baudelaire[26]—is explored throughout *The Arcades Project*, but it figures in a particularly graphic way in a section devoted to early forms of advertising. I'm referring to an entry in Convolute G ("Exhibi-

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25 SW2: 611 (trans. modified).

26 Baudelaire speaks of the "vast, complex palimpsest of the memory…, with all its superimposed layers of past experience," in the section entitled "Le palimpseste," toward the end of *Les paradis artificiels* (1860), which Benjamin first read in 1919. See *Artificial Paradises*, trans. Stacy Diamond (New York: Citadel, 1996), pp. 147-149. The material in question is indebted to De Quincey, as Baudelaire indicates, and indirectly to Carlyle's conception of history as a palimpsest in his essay of 1830, "On History."

tions, Advertising, Grandville") that tells the story of a marvelous poster, an image glimpsed, forgotten, and eventually retrieved from the depths of oblivion; it's a kind of surrealist parable (the Surrealists, of course, were also inspired by advertisements), and it wittily exemplifies the method of composite imagery that depends on the virtual intercommunication of different times and places. Such spatiotemporal montage is fundamental to the philosophy of the flâneur, who discerns in the world of everyday objects specific "citations" of things dead and gone, a material resonance not just historical but prehistorical and mythic. In the vignette from the *Arcades*, which is set in Berlin rather than Paris (although it acknowledges its own inclusion in a larger "Parisian space of recollection"), and which highlights a moment of charged contemplative standstill within a series of dreamlike transitions, of cinematic dissolves in time and space, Benjamin travels through several layers of remembrance, moving back and forth in time as he broods upon a particular place, to arrive finally at a utopian element embedded in the deepest stratum of the memory. And, after all, is this not the strategy of your typical advertisement as well: to discover utopia in the everyday? Benjamin's poster, an advertisement for "Bullrich Salt," is seen to contain a deeper, more mysterious text inscribed within the commercial message, a latent allegory of lost salt that has not lost its savor, a tableau of foreground and background writing, converging from above and below, that spells magical "predestination in the desert," that is, the figurative desert landscape of a modern Moab (the Berlin district of Moabit, its name echoing that of the ancient biblical kingdom said to have been settled by the descendants of Lot, whose wife, you will recall, was turned into a pillar of salt). The desert superimposed upon the city. But let me read the passage from Convolute G:

> Many years ago, on the streetcar, I saw a poster [*Vor vielen Jahren sah ich in einem Stadtbahnzuge ein Plakat*] that, if things had their due in this world, would have found its admirers, historians, exegetes, and copyists, just as surely as any great poem or painting. And, in fact, it was both at the same time. As is sometimes the case with very deep, unexpected impres-

sions, however, the shock was too violent: the impression, if I may say so, struck with such force that it broke through the bottom of my consciousness and for years lay irrecoverable somewhere in the darkness. I knew only that it had to do with "Bullrich Salt" and that the original warehouse for this seasoning was a small cellar on Flottwellstraße, where for years I had circumvented the temptation to get out at this point and inquire about the poster. There I traveled on a colorless Sunday afternoon in that northern Moabit, a part of town that had already once appeared to me as though built by ghostly hands for just this time of day. That was when, four years ago, I had come to Lützowstraße to pay customs duty, according to the weight of its enameled blocks of houses, on a china porcelain city which I had had sent from Rome. There were omens then along the way to signal the approach of a momentous afternoon. And, in fact, it ended with the story of the discovery of an arcade, a story that is too *berlinisch* to be told in this Parisian space of recollection [*Erinnerungsraum*]. Before this [*Vorher*], however, I stood with my two beautiful companions in front of a miserable café, whose window display was enlivened by an arrangement of signboards. On one of these was the legend "Bullrich Salt." It contained nothing else besides the words, but around these written characters there was suddenly and effortlessly configured that desert landscape of the poster. I had it once more. Here is what it looked like. In the foreground, a horse-drawn wagon was advancing across the desert. It was loaded with sacks bearing the words "Bullrich Salt." One of these sacks had a hole, from which salt had already trickled a good distance on the ground. In the background of the desert landscape, two posts held a large sign with the words "Is the Best." But what about the trace of salt down the desert trail? It formed letters, and these letters formed a word, the word "Bullrich Salt." Was not the preestablished harmony of

> a Leibniz mere child's play compared to this tightly orchestrat-
> ed predestination in the desert? And didn't that poster furnish
> an image for things that no one in this mortal life has yet ex-
> perienced? An image for the everyday of Utopia [*Ein Gleichnis
> für den Alltag der Utopie*]?[27]

Benjamin's word for "image" at the end, *Gleichnis*, means literally "likeness," and hence "simile" or "parable" or "allegory." The correspondence of foreground and background inscriptions on the streetcar poster, inscriptions meant for each other, is a *Gleichnis*, we may say, for the messianic convergence of past and present moments in the dialectical image; the space here imitates a convolution in time. It is the flâneur's experience of the world in a state of similitude.

Now, it is a nice coincidence—speaking of similarity—that in 1927, around the time Benjamin was composing his Bullrich Salt vignette, there was showing in theaters all over Europe a documentary film on the city of Berlin directed by a successful designer of posters, Walther Ruttmann: the influential *Berlin: The Symphony of a Great City*—in which, at one point, in the midst of a montage of moving streetcars, we see a parade of "Bullrich Giants," as they were called, tall puppet-like creatures with smiling papier-mâché heads—sandwich men, really—walking across a busy Berlin thoroughfare, all of them (there are shorter, box-like creatures as well) bearing the insignia "Bullrich-Salz." Or, rather, "Bullrich-Magensalz" (literally, "stomach salt")—for this widely distributed and elaborately advertised commodity, which has a history in German manufacturing going back to the 1820s, is in fact not a "seasoning" (*Gewürz*), as Benjamin presents it, but a patent medicine, an antacid, which is sold in German drugstores to this day.[28]

No reproduction of the poster Benjamin describes has ever been found, so we cannot check the documentary status of his little tale. No matter:

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27 AP: G1a,4.

28 See Max Pensky, "*Geheimmittel*: Advertising and Dialectical Images in Benjamin's *Arcades Project*," in *Walter Benjamin and The Arcades Project*, ed. Beatrice Hanssen (New York: Continuum, 2006), p. 127.

the anecdote retains its charm and is worthy of consideration alongside other of Benjamin's signature *Denkbilder*, his philosophical images and parables. These texts exemplify the attentive immersion and multidimensional concreteness which Adorno celebrated in the work and life of his departed friend—that simultaneously thickened and loosened mode of experience that bespeaks the continually renewed convergence of divergent perspectives.

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Political positivism and political existentialism. Revisiting Herbert Marcuse

Alex Koutsogiannis[1]

Abstract: The paper argues for the political significance of two aspects of Marcuse's thought. The first is Marcuse's political reading of positivism and the second is his earlier critique of political existentialism. Both aspects can be employed by a critical understanding of current authoritarian trends. Notwithstanding major changes in the historical trajectory of capitalist societies, Marcuse's dialectical conception of the contradictions that cement modern societies was situated against the conservatism of both idealist positivism (in the adoration of facts against facts) and totalitarian socio-political order. An attempt at a parallel reading of these critiques may shed some new light in the re-appearing kinship of fragmented social totalities with the emergency condition. The paper is divided in three parts. The first part examines Marcuse's assessment of the political implications of the positivist method while the second focuses on a shift of paradigm, on Marcuse's critique of technological society. The last part of the paper is concerned with Marcuse's analysis of the social basis of authoritarian politics.

Introduction

Mainstream apprehensions of the recent economic crisis perceive its political manifestations in two major ways. One relates directly authoritarian solutions with social disenchantment and impoverization and the other thinks of the political as essentially bankrupt, at least in comparison to overriding economic interests. The rise of an aggressive, un-reflective and protectionist political practice is a tendency well observed in our days. Perhaps the regressive effects of the crisis make Marcuse's thought unhappily relevant, but this view can only be sustained

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insofar as his thought never ceased to apprehend fundamental aspects of advanced capitalism. Marcuse did not hesitate to embrace critically new conceptual tools that sociology, aesthetics or Freudian psychology had to offer for the understanding of the dynamics of modern societies.

Before Marcuse's death, post-war capitalism was already beginning to prove more elastic than predicted. In today's transmutations for example, finance capitalism along with the governance model of contemporary political institutions reshaped the nexus of value-orientations and production forces (including technology). In the political field, the new ideologies of transparency, openness and dissemination of power had to be tested for their applicability as well as for their underlying goals. Specific aspects of globalization processes questioned for a moment the legitimacy of the bureaucratic nation-state and pushed further a latent tension between politics and economics. This is, in very crude terms, the environment that surrounds the new social and political conservatism. What brings together established political forces of different liberal democracies is an almost systemic fusion of the demand for self-determination with separatist, protectionist and xenophobic political agendas. Through this fusion however, the social and rational requirements of self-determination appear to be readily endangered. It is precisely against this paradoxical symbiosis of freedom with aggression that Marcuse's understanding of the political becomes significant. Needless to say, Marcuse was not alone in investigating the contradictions endemic in the social relations of capitalism. His contribution, though multileveled, is of course quite distinctive on its own account, something that I hope to make clear in the process. The present essay focuses on two fundamental aspects of Marcuse's thought and argues for their importance in the critique of advanced forms of totalitarianism. The first is Marcuse's critique of positivism and the second is his critique of political existentialism.

Marcuse employs the concept of positivism rather broadly, on both philosophical and methodological terms. There are two branches or types of positivism that he initially attacks: naturalist empiricism and

the philosophy of common-sense experience. Both currents are charged for isolating social facts or phenomena from the historical possibilities of their realization. For example, aggravated by the disturbing effects of the exogenous and unpredictable world of norms and social relations, positivism adhered to the static aspect of social facts obscuring their historical-dynamic content.[2] Bound by their methodological dispositions, both the above currents acquired a political form as advocates of an established social totality. Marcuse's approach is in this respect more political than simply methodological, although himself would perhaps reject this distinction altogether. In combining philosophy with social theory, *Reason and Revolution* offered a political reading of positivism, in which critique was called to expound, in sharp contrast to formal logic, the contradictory character of its objects (part 1).

Marcuse had progressively brought new conceptual tools into this project following a social-theoretical route, where the critique of alienation had to be translated into the language of the social contradictions managed by advanced capitalism. In this thematization, expressed mostly in his *One-Dimensional Man*, the total state has given its place to a totalized society, this time under the guise of scientific (rather than immediately natural) objectivity. Political neutrality and social uniformity synthesize the new picture of relations of domination. The emphasis on the structural omnipotence of the capitalist world is not however a reversed adoption of the holistic paradigm. Even at his most "structural" moments, in *Eros and Civilization* and *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse devoted enough energy in calling for the revolutionary mediations in the ontological incompatibilities between objective knowledge and subjective praxis (part 2). Far from being a "pluralist" in the modern political sense, Marcuse retained a dialectical conception of social *totality* even during the despairing times of established fascism. I would like to ar-

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2   Marcuse noted that Hume's empiricism was at least raised against a colossal ideological enemy, while modern empiricism is simply affirmative of the established order. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London: Routledge, 1991), 173.

gue that an implicit endorsement of the concept of totality in Marcuse's social theory is not just of critical philosophical value (in which totality "contains" its negation) but of political value as well, insofar as Marcuse vehemently opposed particularistic or "esoteric" solutions to the totalitarian transformations of the political phenomenon.[3]

Although these transformations may also be denoted from a philosophical-anthropological perspective, found in abundance in Marcuse's writings, the guiding thread of an opposition to totalitarianism was simultaneously a question of political ideology. However, instead of proceeding directly with an immanent confrontation with the fundamental principles of liberalism, Marcuse inquired into the common social and economic premises of two politically irreconcilable systems (part 3). In his 1934 essay on the *Struggle Against Liberalism and the Totalitarian View of the State*[4], Marcuse arrived at the well-known conclusion that totalitarianism did not alter the fundamental socio-economic structure of former liberal political systems. An examination of totalitarianism from this particular viewpoint not only exposes the antinomies between liberal ideas and practices but it mostly reveals the political pathways (as determinant forms) by which the historical continuity of capitalist social relations is ensured.

More generally, Marcuse is convinced that liberal politics were never essentially compromised by the exercise of centralized economic or political oppression. One of the strongest ideological protagonists to this union is the reduction of rational justification to the brute existence of a specific state of affairs. In its crude political form, existentialism surrendered to the relativist fluidity of the phenomenal world, blurring the borders between everyday experience and historical reality. Fixed in the emergency conditions of socio-economic crisis, modern authoritari-

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3   Provided of course that the political phenomenon itself appertains to processes and arrangements that are not just plural and diversified but mostly collective and general.

4   Herbert Marcuse, "The struggle against liberalism in the totalitarian view of the state" in *Negations: Essays in Critical Theory*, trans. Jeremy, J. Shapiro (London: MayFlyBooks, 2009).

an trends exhibit a similar reduction of rational critique to un-reflected decisionism that appears perhaps more Schmittian than expected. The last part of this paper focuses on Marcuse's critique of political existentialism.

Political positivism

In his discussion of Weber's account of industrial capitalism Marcuse notices that a strict insulation of a purified techno-science from value-laden superstructures, would result in the inability to rationally criticize the latter. The more rigid the division, the more abstract it becomes. In the end, being able to separate essences from appearances with great clarity, knowledge becomes formal and static, denying nothing.[5] Marcuse is very skeptical about the political implications of Weber's methodological presumption that it is possible to separate the Is from the Ought, ethics from science or an 'outside' contextual backdrop of knowledge from knowledge itself. There is no branch of reason that can be immunized from external interferences nor can it pronounce any rational judgment upon social or material relations without contextual substantiation.

For Marcuse, as well as for other members of this first generation of critical theorists, there is nothing wrong with taxonomical logic, as long as its elevation to a principled universality is averted. It is true that there are many distinct versions of positivist thought incorporated in this generalized schema and Marcuse's critique of positivism is no exception to this generalization. But what characterizes a pejorative understanding of positivism "in general" is the political value inscribed in the injustice done to the contradictory (and not just divergent) nature of the object of knowledge, namely a historically situated social totality, reducible neither to the neutral functionality of a *method* nor to the omnipotence of a comprehending subject. Adorno for example summarizes this along the following lines: "The more knowledge is functionalized and made a product of cognition, the more perfectly will its moment of motion be

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5   See Herbert Marcuse, "Industrialization and Capitalism in the work of Max Weber" in *Negations*, 151-52.

credited to the subject as its activity, while the object becomes the result of the labour that has congealed in it – a dead thing."[6]

Marcuse retained a political reading of this discussion in almost every occasion he encountered un-dialectical thought. Even during his earlier preoccupations with phenomenological Marxism and with Heidegger's rejection of the absolute dualisms of western rationalism, Marcuse sustained a close link between the objective essence of social phenomena which "resist" the irrational contradictions that characterized capitalism. In his later writings, the dialectical method involved the dissolution of abstract historical categories into forms of *praxis*, as acts of liberation and yet in sharp distinction to a kind of decisionism (or "practicing voluntarism") opposed to objective and knowledgeable social conditions. The subjective factor, such as the function of Marxist political parties, "is only the formulation of the objective factors, which, directing the political action, becomes an integral part and aspect of them."[7] The weakening of the revolutionary potential is an indication that the cognitive and voluntarist element is not embodied in the objective situation.[8] In this latter case, politics succumbs to the "naturalistic" reality of capitalism and is unable to break with this determinism.

As is well known, *Reason and Revolution* exemplifies Marcuse's critique of positivism, conceived in relation with the "philosophy of 'common sense' experience."[9] Alongside traditional scientific thought, common sense takes social totality as a given sum of describable facts. Facts are taken to be initially independent from cognition. Marcuse traces in Hegel's philosophical development a critique of positivism, but even more, a critique of reification. I shall attempt here a parallel reading of these terms although Marcuse himself kept them relatively apart.

6   Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics,* trans. E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1990), 91.

7   Herbert Marcuse, *Soviet Marxism. A Critical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 146.

8   See ibid.

9   Herbert Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution. Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 112f.

First of all, positivism represents for Marcuse a kind of rationality (from Hume to the logical positivists) that is conservative and affirmative, quite opposite to Hegel's negative philosophy and Marx's historical materialism. As such, positivism remains tied to the world of objects, to facts against consciousness, to the universality of nature against the universality of the subject. Reification on the other hand is a subjective category, anchored in the other shore of the subject-object dualism. Marcuse often uses the term reification interchangeably with alienation and reminds us that since Hegel, reification rests on the externalization of human powers in such a way that the conflict between idea and reality or between consciousness and existence is perpetuated. Human beings (their desires, goals and above all *potentialities*) continue in other words to be confronted by a hostile and alien reality. But, in Hegel at least, alienation is intrinsic to the mediating activity of the subject, which realizes itself in its unimpeded externalization to the world of "things". In this respect, Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* represented for Marcuse the political expression of the historical dialectic, where the self-reduction of the subject to an external object assumes a very specific form: it is now a *person*, a contractor, or an object of purchase. Marcuse observes that a contractual relation (in Hegel's account of private property) results in the objectification of the contractual parts, yet such objectification must not be total: "The alienation of the person, however, must have a limit in time, so that something remains of the 'totality and universality' of the person."[10]

Marcuse argues that whereas Hegel's answer to this question rested, finally, in the consummation of alienation in the realm of thought where the subject always remains a free subject (an open potentiality, still under enslavement), Marx responded by demonstrating that only the alteration of the concrete conditions of social life can put an end to the contradiction between the conditions themselves, and man's universal essence, the latter having in Hegel "no refuge save the mind, where it was hyposta-

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10   Ibid., 195.

sized as an abstract universal."[11] Marcuse praises however both Marx and Hegel for extending the resolution of actual social *contradictions* (the "true" objects of thought) to a historical project whose feasibility rests upon the examination of the untruth of existing, or "common sense" facts. In Marx, the real objective condition is the universalizing force of alienated labour. The "logical" fallacy of this universalization is the separation of labour from its object and by extension the separation of facts from their historical singularity. Coterminous to this, is an anthropological fallacy of a substantial, ethical grounding. Marcuse quotes Marx's *Paris Manuscripts* drawing attention to the human content of alienation that the early Marx understood as alienation between and within human beings. In the capitalist mode of production labour is deprived of its essential nature, of the fulfillment of human capacities. It is also deprived of its essential sociality, namely the positioning of individual freedom as universal freedom, the inter-dependence between the particularity of the individual and the universality of its social existence. Marx's analysis goes for Marcuse far beyond the structure of economic relationships. Capital, private property and commodities are empirical crystallizations of the social mode of production. For Marcuse, Marx's empiricism was neither positivistic nor ideological. The social content of economic relations is not emphasized "by virtue of any humanitarian feeling but by virtue of the actual content of the economy itself."[12]

In 1941, amidst the 2nd World War, authoritarian ideologies owed already much of their sweeping influence to crude versions of positivist thought. In Marcuse's eyes, these currents were mere vulgates of Hume's empiricism and Hegel's rationalism.[13] The last section of the second part

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11 Ibid., 284.

12 Ibid., 281.

13 Of course, this is not so for Heidegger's existentialism. However, in spite of Marcuse's disavowal of Heidegger's affiliation to Nazism, the basic theoretical formulations on concrete individuality and authenticity continued to be integrated in his dialectical thinking. Andrew Feenberg argues that although some superficial similarities between Heidegger and Marcuse vanish quite early (sharing this view with Douglas Kellner), there is a considerable conti-

of Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution* is devoted to just that. With a proviso, that a new theoretical discipline made its appearance. Social theory, which began critically as the negation of immediacy or the refutation of prevailing appearances, was reduced (in some branches of it) into an ideological justification of the established order. In the reactionary conservatism of 19th century positivist philosophies of the state or society (in A. Comte), alienation is not a central theme. In political positivism in particular, such as this of F.J. Stahl's philosophy of right, in which Marcuse pays special attention, the critique of alienation would amount to a speculative rationalism whose aspirations cannot be fulfilled by the naturalness of the personality and the political order that corresponds to it. Marcuse notes that in his attempt to substitute Hegel's abstract universalism for a theory of concrete personality, Stahl grounded existing inequalities and contradictions on the nature of the substituting category of personhood. This interminability of inequality in nature demands that all forms of the "personality's" social existence (in the division of labour) must be governed.[14] An overpowered state is thus not to be bounded by individual interests and avoid at all costs a de-concentration of its governing authority. Here, the vulgate is in full circle. For Marcuse, the political implications of crude naturalism anticipated the emergence of the modern authoritarian state.[15] The result is a fundamental antinomy, the reduction of the former core of individuality to an objective and relatively undifferentiated part of the totality of "personal" relations "emanating from the Person of God and terminating, on earth, in the person of the sovereign monarch."[16]

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nuity at a deeper philosophical level. This continuity is particularly traced in Marcuse's attempt at unifying aesthetics with politics, as well as in his conceptualization of technology. See Andrew Feenberg, *Heidegger and Marcuse. The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (New York & London: Routledge, 2005), xv.

14   Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 371.

15   See ibid., 372.

16   Ibid., 370.

Had it not been for the need to respond to spurious critiques of totalitarianism (for example Popper's *Poverty of Historicism* published in 1957), Marcuse would perhaps never have returned to the political implications of epistemological questions, save those implied by his critique of technological rationality. Marcuse contends that Popper's ahistorical constructivism did not account for the actual roots of totalitarianism. Popper is particularly scorned for a "misplaced abstractness", substituting the real causes of violence, namely the societal function, with the abstract principle of non-violence and the philosophical (rather than sociological) refutation of holistic theories.[17] Popper's central misapprehension of totalitarianism stems from the conflation of the methodological conviction that there can be no totality of *all* aspects and properties of a thing, with the political assertion that there can be no political system or state that could control all relations that comprise social reality.[18] In this conflation totalitarianism is nothing but a "logical impossibility",[19] a false generalization that for Marcuse minimizes the scope and prospect of violence or terror. Practically speaking, a totalitarian society does not, Marcuse observes, have to add up all dispersed parts of social life in a concrete whole, simply because a control of some key factors of social life could as well suffice in controlling this whole. More importantly, Marcuse contends that Popper's critique of holism misses the fact that the concept of a prevailing structure "does not preclude but calls for a 'selective' analysis - one which focuses on the *basic* institutions and relations of a society."[20] Finally, Popper's concept of "holism" is blamed for not discriminating between theories of total-

17 　See Herbert Marcuse, "Karl Popper and the Problem of Historical Laws" in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, (London: NLB, 1972), 194.

18 　Against Adorno's and Habermas' accusations that Popper is destined by his methodology to a defense of the status quo, Popper replied as a rationalist philosopher proper, insisting that his theory on scientific method is different from his social theory (on piecemeal changes), and that an evaluated suggestion to a solution of a *problem* can be put forward by a man regardless of his attitude towards society. See Theodor Adorno et al., *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London: Heinemann, 1976), 298.

19 　Marcuse, "Karl Popper and the Problem of Historical Laws", 201.

20 　Ibid., 201.

itarian and an anti-totalitarian intuition, not recognizing that the latter employ a critical notion of inexorable laws "which sees in these laws the feature of an 'immature' and oppressive society."[21] The call is then made for the breaking of these laws rather than justifying them as natural and unchangeable. Marcuse is convinced that an unqualified rejection of the concept of inexorable laws reduces the capacity of accepted knowledge to influence a course of action. Hence the specific social conditions of a phenomenon (such as violence) are facts and forces that provide a ground for predictability that Marcuse comprehends as a "projection of tendencies".[22] By contrast, the denial of a fundamental discrimination between facts and underlying forces, would lead to the impossibility of distinguishing one factor from another, making thus scientific thought speculative again.

For Marcuse, the central political implication of Popper's "un-critical" critique is a kind of neutral and subjectively unobstructed relativism, reaffirming in the last analysis a primordial self-alienation of rational thought from the anonymous social totality. More to the point, Marcuse makes clear that the absolutization of social indeterminacy in Popper's "pluralist philosophy" fails in its attempt to oppose liberalism to totalitarianism. This is because totalitarianism pertains to societies characterized by "piecemeal" rather than "holistic" doctrines. The laws of the market and of unobstructed competition cannot in other words guarantee the harmony between private interests and general welfare. Marcuse brings to memory what Marx knew already, that liberalist societies are not immune (due to their "misplaced" drive for independence) to an increasing centralization of economic and political power.

The argument on the non-immunization of liberal democracies against totalitarian politics must not however be confused with a crude conflation of the two political systems. To each regime corresponds a different standpoint of critique. Faced with the horrific practices of Nazism and its ideological contours, Marcuse shifted his problematic to the irrational kernel of totalitarianism. Advanced capitalism is not however an easi-

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21 Ibid., 202.
22 Ibid., 199.

er target. Social processes of alienation were re-employed by Marcuse's later political thought, still under the conviction that they are not mere cancellations of an esoteric compulsion to freedom. In *Eros and Civilization* (1955) the question of repression is met with a dialectical and no less sociological understanding of the psyche's structural workings[23]. It would appear that this "individualization" of the concept of freedom in the viewpoint of repression, is at odds with Marcuse's central sociological orientation. However, in spite of anticipated and well-observed cleavages, Marcuse's thought is in my view dialectical throughout. *One-Dimensional Man* (1964) represents in this regard a breaking point. In discussing the political function of technology, Marcuse adopts a non-individualist standpoint in the critique of advanced industrial society, while not dispensing with the question of freedom. Far from reproducing the liberal anxiety on the restriction of individual powers by society, Marcuse adopts a holistic approach, in which social contradictions are exposed for what they are, from the viewpoint of the category of totality. In what follows, I shall try to demonstrate how a nuanced use of this category allowed Marcuse to incorporate the individualist connotations of the concept of freedom into a dialectical critique of conditions of domination in advanced capitalism.

Totality and Domination

It is true that Marcuse never inquired in any explicit manner (unlike Adorno and Horkheimer for example) into the critical value of the notion

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23 For Wiggershaus the book was Marcuse's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Wiggershaus argues that while Horkheimer and Adorno presented only a fragmented groundwork for a positive conception of Enlightenment, Marcuse expounded more directly the pathways that may lead "beyond the reality principle". The argument is about Marcuse's refutation of Freud's thesis on the indispensability of instinctual repression for civilization. See Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School - Its History, Theories, and Political Significance,* trans. Michael Robertson (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 2004), 499. Marcuse is of course no less political here. One of the main purposes of the book is to ground the possibility of freedom on both the instinctual and social aspects of domination.

of totality. Since Lukács, this category has nevertheless played a vital role in the development of critical theory from its early stages. Horkheimer in particular often appealed to this category in arguments against un-dialectical empiricism or idealist metaphysics. He insisted that one-sided thought (whichever its philosophical standpoint and no matter how universal it pertains to be) is always fragmentary and fails to reach the actual content of phenomena. The demand for inter-disciplinarity would make sense only within a projection of the unification of disciplines in the knowledge of broader tendencies. At the same time, "for the materialist, judgments which embrace all reality are always questionable and not very important, because far removed from the kind of activity which generated them. In metaphysical systems, on the contrary, the stress tends to be just the opposite: knowledge of the particulars is usually taken simply as an example of knowledge of universals."[24]

Horkheimer did not qualify the notion of totality with any stronger transcendental powers such as those derived from a historically and socially "purified" science, or those involved in the construction of a harmonious social whole. In their hurry to conclude with history's final ends, both attitudes failed to grasp the contradictions that generate the alienation between theory and practice or between politics and science. They thus fail to account for the social embeddedness of knowledge. For Horkheimer it was clear that the distinguishing characteristic of modern social totalities is their "disruptive element" rather than their "unitive" one (the "living reality" of bourgeois power in its former glory)[25]. Social totality is undoubtedly dialectical and contains its own negation. In the latter, theory (science) and practice are not initially separated, in order to be united as distinct entities at a later stage of attained knowledge. As Horkheimer observed, those who (initially) placed facts against superstition and prophetic insights were individuals and groups who

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24 Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Metaphysics" in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell and others (New York: Continuum, 1982), 20.

25 See Max Horkheimer, "Authority and the Family" in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, 128.

stood in a different relation to theory than the fragmented sciences do. Their negative action meant that "They did not move in an unbroken succession from scientists into men of action and back again into scientists. Their fight against the *status quo* combined the true unity of theory and practice. …Their specific action was contained in their very mode of perception, just as the praxis of the faulty society was embedded in its misguided science."[26]

It seems that the above "groups and individuals" represent a specific type of action (so far variously manifested) for which dialectical totality is something more than a wider perspective of critique. This action is therefore not just theoretical but has a practical importance, it is a revolutionary principle that the Lukács of *History and Class Consciousness* hoped to see flourish in the consciousness of the proletariat. In a well-known passage Lukács asserts that the decisive difference between Marxism and bourgeois thought is not the primacy of economic motives but the point of view of totality. With this, Lukács aimed at two interrelated targets. On the objective side (to use his typical train of argument), bourgeois science is based on an abstraction from totality, namely "the isolation of elements and concepts in the special disciplines", an approach not necessarily unscientific if not the contrary. "But what is decisive is whether this process of isolation is a means towards understanding the whole and whether it is integrated within the context it presupposes and requires, or whether the abstract knowledge of an isolated fragment retains its 'autonomy' and becomes an end in itself."[27] In this latter case, politics for example would be reduced to a mere administrative science, a mere fragment of its actual scope. There is also a subjective side, where only a "total subject" as a collective subject can posit the "totality of the object."[28]

According to Lukács both views are not mutually exclusive. To pos-

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26   Max Horkheimer, "The Latest Attack on Metaphysics" in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays*, 161.

27   Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Merlin Press, 1990), 28.

28   Ibid.

it the importance of the movement of thought in history is not to deny the importance of the "objective" factor. It only means that the latter is *integrated* in a more concrete and comprehensive totality.[29] In 1967, in his preface to the new edition of the book, Lukács acknowledged the distortions that may result from his positing of the category of totality at the centre of analysis, overriding thus the primacy of the economic.[30] But at the time he wrote *History and Class Consciousness*, it was pertinent for Lukács to respond to orthodox vulgates of Marx's transcendence of Hegel's dialectic and to oppose a resulting scientism, which ignored the "truth" of the historical dialectic that Marx brought to fruition through his appropriation of Hegel's philosophy. Be that as it may, the category of totality continued to work as a more implicit or explicit methodological backdrop for critical theory in general, including attempts at its contextual or methodological reconceptualization.

Marcuse was of course not unaware of the complications involved in an unwarranted use of this category and was certainly observant of its misinterpretations. Skeptical perhaps, of the theoretical (high level of abstraction) and political ('totalizing') vulnerability of the concept, Marcuse preferred to put this category in the background, yet not quite unproductively. His *One-Dimensional Man* represents in this regard a transformative endeavor where concepts such as advanced capitalism, technological rationality and modern industrialism are all employed for the denotation of a new social-historical structure. The historical positioning of these concepts must also "be grounded on the *capabilities* [my italics] of the given society."[31] However, seen from the point of view of totality, industrial societies are built upon a fundamental contradiction: the need for refusal and subversion was no longer embodied in the action of effective social forces. For Marcuse, this paradoxical fusion, -a central theme of the book- was indicative enough for the need to employ new conceptual tools of critique.

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29   Ibid., 188.

30   Ibid., xx-xxi.

31   Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, xlvii.

Marcuse had first to recognize that up to a certain extent, the ability for theoretical abstraction is premised upon the fact that a specific social totality is already formed. As a crystalized social structure, reified as it is, it must also be capable of turning theoretical reason into social practice. It reflects, therefore, a new rationality in its own right. [32] Hence there must be in every society a certain point where theory and practice are integrated, constituting observable realities in spite of their contradicting nature. Next, Marcuse inquired into the historical nature of his society, pointed its differences with the pre-technological model[33] and questioned its political significance. Through this dialectical course, he was able to expand the scope of analysis into the ideological function of the new technological rationality. I think that Marcuse's nuanced holism made possible the exploration of the political significance of modern technology, the latter conceived not as the mere sum of technical capabilities but mostly "subjectively", as a way of thinking and acting, as a dominant social norm or as a legitimizing rationality.

Once again, positivism, along with formal logic has been Marcuse's target of criticism, this time from a significantly different social paradigm. The transformation consisted in the pervasive power of one-dimensionality: the neutralization of political opposition[34] and social contradictions, the adoration of facts (at the expense of values)[35] and the democratization of totalitarianism.[36] Nonetheless Marcuse did not disregard the liberating aspect in the advancement of productive forces. As he notes in *Eros and Civilization*: "Technology operates against the oppressive utilization of energy in so far as it minimizes the time necessary for the production of the necessities of life, thus saving time for the development of needs

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32   See ibid., 146.

33   In this stage however, freedom meant liberation from the toil entailed in individual and social reproduction, a "necessity" that according to Marcuse can be still active insofar as the "truth" of human existence is prevented by enslavement (ibid., 128).

34   Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man,* 20-1.

35   Ibid., 147.

36   Ibid., 52.

beyond the realm of necessity…"[37]

However, the dominant rationality of this advancement culminated in the social ingression of technology's scientific neutrality, by whose ideological "objectiveness" the available spaces of negation were considerably restricted. This is, in a sense, a political move and not an ontological propensity to expansion. It is through the political use of technological means that scientific rationality has become a social paradigm. This fusion of society with techno-science is not however harmonic. Andrew Feenberg argues very convincingly I think, that the play of social contradictions differs significantly between science and technology, insofar as science, interacts only *indirectly* - unlike technology - with the "lifeworld". In Feenberg's view, this discrimination may prove useful in responding to conservative objections, according to which the critical theory of technology sacrifices scientific freedom, throwing thus the baby with the bath water. Feenberg proposes a distinction between a non-teleological critique of science and a teleological critique of technology, in an attempt to safeguard the latter from holistic, undialectical ontologies.[38] It is true that Marcuse never discriminated systematically between science and technology. Both share of course similar forms of rationality. But he had no illusions as to the main opponents of the political critique of technological (rather than scientific) rationality. He worried not so much for the unattainable scientific purity of technological knowledge as with the historical conditionality of its exploitation. Enraptured by the demand for positive knowledge, advanced technological society reified in Marcuse's view the faculties of rational abstraction to the point of de-historicizing their conclusions.

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37 Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (London: Sphere Books, 1969), 84. Marcuse immediately notes that in spite of its liberating operation, technological civilization had to "defend itself against the specter of a world which could be free" (Ibid., 85). This echoes Adorno and Horkheimer's well-known view of an *Enlightenment* turned against itself. I shall touch upon this discussion very briefly emphasizing Marcuse's differentiation.

38 See Feenberg, Andrew, *Transforming Technology. A Critical Theory Revisited.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 174-75.

In order to prevent an overextended relativisation of critique in the historical viewpoint, which would be a disaster for a dialectical approach that distinguishes between continuation and eruption, Marcuse had to call back the option of unifying theory with praxis, rational abstraction with political action. Of course, Marcuse did not advocate a linear connection, whereby knowledge is imported to social action from the outside. He supported instead a conception of the acting subject as the *object* of this knowledge and thereby a capable bearer and component of this knowledge. Far from conceptualizing socio-political action as an unmediated, fixed product of ideologically sanitized knowledge (transmitted to an alienated populace), Marcuse maintained the idea of integral praxis, conceived as an action integrated with the objective contradictions of advanced, capitalist societies. His fundamental problem was to turn the critique of social contradictions into principled action, bringing thus true negation back to its feet. Marcuse's aspiration would be severely compromised if the dualisms of facts and values or between theory and practice, society and science are taken as absolute, for there would be no objective point of view left to account for actual conditions of domination, whichever their historical form or level of brutality.

The path that leads from the rational understanding of social conditions of domination to a superseding action would be blocked, once these particular conditions are rationalized as autonomous, and henceforth theoretically detached aspects in relation to an overwhelming structure. The relation becomes then very spurious. In Marcuse's words, "the insanity of the whole absolves the particular insanities and turns the crimes against humanity into a rational enterprise…the annihilation of five million people is preferable to that of ten million…"[39] The rationalization of domination is effectuated through its dispersion in semi-autonomous segments that are deemed inevitable, however manageable

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39   Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man,* 52. Marcuse wrote of course in the Cold War era. But issues of mass impoverishment and toil, not to exclude mass physical annihilation - with various means and in a relatively short timescale - are evidently not eliminated.

and legitimized. In many instances of *One-Dimensional Man* domination appears as the ultimate referent of capitalist society.

This all-powerfulness of the capitalist "whole" has attracted much criticism, of course not confined to Marcuse alone. One of the points made was that instrumental rationality was not very successful in its all-absorbing function. With regard to Marcuse's own theory in *One-Dimensional Man*, Douglas Kellner argued for example that Marcuse's treatment of the structuring power of capitalism led, to its own detriment, to the limitation of the importance of contradictions and struggles between the state, economy and culture. Marcuse's theory thus failed to take account of the fact that the expanding function of social control is in large part capitalism's defensive manoeuvre against the offensives of social struggles and crisis tendencies.[40] In a broader tone and targeting the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Habermas questioned the extent to which instrumental reason has actually permeated the world. Insofar as the process of enlightenment lays claim to reason only in the form of a purposive-rational mastery of nature and of humans, reason itself is mutilated. For Habermas there are, however, healthier spheres of reason, in science, law, morality and aesthetics that are not dominated by the positivistic "assimilation of validity claims to power claims". [41] But when the Enlightenment itself comes under "suspicion of not producing anymore truths"[42], the above spheres are also mutilated.

Earlier, in his now classical study on the ideological character of technology and science Habermas pointed to an essential antinomy in Marcuse's view of technological rationality. On the one hand technological rationality has a liberating function with respect to the realm of necessity and on the other it is an instrument of domination. Habermas' objection concentrated on the second function, reading in Marcuse's theory the ro-

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40 See Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 273.

41 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 110-13.

42 Ibid., p.116. Habermas refers here to ideology critique, not as another theory among others, but as a critique of power relations.

mantic theme taken from Husserl and especially Heidegger, that the im-
manent logos of technology is one of domination, of rational control over
nature and humanity.[43] Habermas dramatized this point even further, see-
ing for example in Marcuse's upholding to the intrinsic non-neutrality of
techno-science, an unrealistic critique, an unfeasible "world project" on
the creation of a "different science", based in different social organizations
and different modes of thinking. For Habermas this amounts to a familiar
attitude in Jewish and Protestant tradition on the "resurrection of the fall-
en nature".[44]

It seems however that in his rather harsh critique, Habermas under-
valued Marcuse's primary goal to retain the dialectical core of a critique
of domination by means of a revision: the blunt totalitarianisms of the
30's and 40's had given their place to the overwhelming dominance of
technological civilization. In the latter, Marcuse knows too well, human
suffering has been alleviated by the welfare state and a higher standard
of living, while freedom was significantly served by the democratization
of political institutions – at least in advanced industrial and for that mat-
ter, "post-industrial" societies. Marcuse rarely considered this positive
development as pure illusion. He preferred to place it in one of the poles
of a fundamental contradiction, which, considering its dialectical essence
is the characteristic mark of the new society. Habermas had in fact shared
a similar positive evaluation of the conquests of modern technology and
democratic governing. In this light he attempted to substitute the critique
of ideology and domination with the critique of obstructed communi-
cation, a project that purported to offer an updated ground of critique,
in which concepts such as relations of domination or the contradiction
between forces and relations of production were no longer beneficial.

To the plausible accusation of a holistic ontological determinism on
Marcuse's part, one must simply reply by turning to Marcuse's main en-

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43 See Jürgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as Ideology" in *Toward a
    Rational Society. Student Protest, Science and Politics*, trans. Jeremy J. Shapiro
    (London: Polity Press, 1989), 85.

44 Ibid., 86.

emies at that time. To be sure, Marcuse himself struggled in many of his later writings with the utopian element contained in the demand for a structural radicalization of individuals and societies and many times over he defended a non-reductionist interpretation of capitalism. Instead of isolating the qualitative differences between spheres of rationality (technological, economic or political) Marcuse incorporated these spheres into a determining social tendency without endangering their autonomy. For example, neither instrumental rationality, nor abstract ethics can by themselves address the complexity of freedom and of its historical possibilities. There is indeed no point in proceeding with logical abstractions from the appearances of immediacy without an interest towards the possibility of freedom. Rationality may contain in itself a liberating value, and it may simply be employed for such purposes (and of course against them). Both cases are immanently political.

This is perhaps the reason for Marcuse's reluctance to de-politicize the concept of domination in front of more essential powers, such as the naturalization of economic relations or of relations of alienation. Very roughly, Marcuse's political orientation is built upon three definitional regions: social contradictions, political power and freedom. The endemic to capitalism contradictions of the realization of freedom through affluence or of the "welfare state" through "warfare state", are not ontological postulates (turning for example enlightenment into myth) but specific political conditions that safeguard a systemic rationality against its historical potential. They are rational but no less un-dialectical. Freedom is thus attained, but only at the expense of its dialectical essence. Nonetheless partial freedom may be a very conscious and informed action. Marcuse hinted quite often at this consensus, a kind of social pact based on voluntary serfdom. But what is decisive for the establishment of a specific power nexus within capitalist societies is a process of political *de-subjectification*, trapped as it were, in the immediacy of pertinent facts.

In many of Marcuse's major works (especially in *Eros and Civilization* and in *One-Dimensional Man*), de-subjectification amounts to the expulsion of the individual from history of which it is itself the author. The in-

dividual is also exiled from the particular society of which it is an active part. However, opposite to the liberal axiom on the repression of individual freedom by society, Marcuse in an almost Rousseaudian fashion argued for the possibility of substituting a heteronomous condition of *inner*-freedom for an autonomous social existence. The critique of one-dimensionality can henceforth be also understood as a demystification of individuation processes in affluent societies.

Back in 1936 in his essay on authority (in the chapter on Luther and Calvin), Marcuse had already contested the breach in the relationship between "worldly" and inner freedom. In the reformed Christian faith of the 16th and 17th century Europe, esoteric freedom ought never to be turned - Marcuse quotes Luther - to "something completely of the flesh".[45] The breach is of course managed and controlled in the amalgamation of the two types of freedom in which esoteric freedom leaves the social world undisputed and becomes therefore essential to the latter's preservation. For Marcuse, the critical task would then be the breaking of this self-contradictory unity in a movement of an *equal* power, one however that surpasses the immediacy of social domination and aggression, entwined as they are, with the actualization of freedom. Marcuse's words are blunt enough: "The 'holism' which has become reality must be met with a 'holist' critique of this reality."[46]

It is from this viewpoint that Marcuse assessed totalitarianism in its typical fascist expression. And it is from a similar philosophical predisposition that he was able to align the critique of positivism with a contextually Marxist critique of alienation and domination. The destruction of the point of view of totality that Lukács feared it to be a disruption of the unity of theory and practice[47] is to a despaired Marcuse the obliteration of social *opposition*, depicted on the one hand in the integration of the working classes to the established social order (including the concom-

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45 Herbert Marcuse, "A Study on Authority" in *Studies in Critical Philosophy*, 62.

46 Marcuse, "Karl Popper and the Problem of Historical Laws", 208.

47 See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 39.

itant neutralization of a large part of institutional politics) and on the other, in the actual political defeat of Marxist political parties in favour of an overarching political existentialism.

Totalitarianism and Liberalism

In his 1954 epilogue to *Reason and Revolution* Marcuse writes: "The defeat of Fascism and National Socialism has not arrested the trend towards totalitarianism."[48] We can agree with him that in late industrial civilization, the development of human potentialities and the realization of freedom still take place within a framework of a socially expanding domination. Marcuse knows of course that this framework cannot be adequately refuted on ethical grounds. A simplified critique of brute force or of conditions of actual impoverishment is obviously inspired by ethical goals but it is not necessarily political. Equally, various social advancements such as the rise of living standards, or mass participation in parliamentary democracies do not adequately address the question of freedom. The problem is fairly deeper and he poses it in the following way: "If the contradictory, oppositional, negative power of Reason is broken, reality moves under its own positive law and, unhampered by the Spirit, unfolds its repressive force."[49] Marcuse points at various indicators of this condition that bring to mind some basic themes raised in the once popular discourse on globalization: homogenization of values (and hence repression of individual freedom), concentration of economic power and the retreat of confrontational politics. Nonetheless it is quite difficult to identify, *sensu stricto*, current political reality with totalitarianism.

While traditional totalitarianism (until the dictatorships of the 70s) was more irrationalist, reversing some critical edges of romanticism, yet within a functionalist state apparatus, advanced totalitarianism appears to be simply neutral and moderately rational. An overpowered, oppressive state is not anymore the issue. For some, this is already a serious gain that must be treasured. But how can one be confronted with ad-

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48   Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 433.

49   Ibid., 434.

vanced forms of totalitarian control that originate in territories outside a conventional state dominance? And how can the modern state reclaim its lost jurisdiction without resorting to authoritarian practices? Which are, in other words, the social preconditions of the totalitarian state?

As early as it may seem, Marcuse touches upon these questions in 1934, in his essay on liberalism and the totalitarian view of the state. In this essay Marcuse links totalitarianism with liberalism, a view later shared and discussed by many members of the School. I think that liberalism's exclaimed concerns for today's authoritarian tendencies can be disputed with the aid of some basic tenets of Marcuse's argument that still inform a critique of advanced totalitarianism. For Marcuse, it is clear that liberal societies are not essentially threatened by established totalitarianism, much less by lighter versions of it, in current tendencies or trends. The liberal ideal of freedom can easily be "repressed" in states of emergency but the blunt identification of individual freedom with private property and economic antagonism continues to shape the social structure of both liberalism and totalitarianism. Marcuse refers to a variety of political experiences: liberalism was not entirely hostile to an oppressive state, it has never really been pacifying and has acceded to many state interventions in the economy. These experiences alone do not coincide with a superficial and a-historical critique of liberalism: the attack on parliamentarianism and the party system, along with a vague critique of egotistic individualism and private interests (as against the interests of the nation) did not essentially alter the social and economic structure of liberalism. All this had its ideological foundations, which sought to offer an apology for the irrationality of the situation. Marcuse questioned the apologetic functionalization of two philosophical currents: naturalism and existentialism.

For its part, irrationalist naturalism is blamed for reducing human history to the history of eternal natural laws. Nature is presented as concrete identity, it is beyond and "before" individuals and as such it can only be actualized in a totality: of the nation, the people, and the race. In this kind of naturalism history is reduced to a chronology of events, to a

timeless sequence of an unfolding sameness. The new reality of National Socialism represents for Marcuse an unreflective totality of fixed *axioms*. Totality is no longer the conclusion but the axiom.[50] Existentialism, in its political rather than philosophical facet is also suspected by Marcuse of reducing social reality to the facticity of a political organization, which is supposed to actualize the abstractions of heritage, race and community (in distinction to other communities, cultures and so on). This subjugation of social life to an existential *friend and foe* relation may appear at the surface as the outcome of a political restructuring that was deemed "necessary" (in a state of emergency). For Marcuse, there is nothing more erroneous than to substantiate the new political situation on a successful usurpation of state-power. The fascist state was above all a fascist *society*[51] and this society did not appear to be in immediate opposition to its liberal parliamentarian past.[52] In this regard, current authoritarian tendencies cannot also be explained as crises of the political system alone.

Marcuse argued for the social basis of the affinity between totalitarianism and liberalism in both philosophical and political counts. First of all liberalism projects the resolution of conflicts between interests to a harmonious social unity that would emerge when things are left to follow their natural inclinations without any disturbance from the caprices of human activity. Totalitarian political thought shares with liberalism the belief that the balance between conflicting economic interests will be established in this harmonious whole.[53]

Secondly, the rationalist foundation of liberalism sprung from a demand on the security of private economic activity, guaranteed by law but also remaining essentially unfettered. In both cases, the liberalist organization of social life is *privatized* to the degree that it is tied to the *individual* activity (however multiple) of the rational economic subject. "In the end, of course, the rationality of liberalist practice is supposed to demonstrate

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50 Marcuse, "The struggle against liberalism", 4.

51 See Marcuse's forward to the 1968 edition of *Negations* in *Negations*, xvii.

52 See ibid., xvii-xviii.

53 See Marcuse, "The struggle against liberalism", 8.

itself in the whole and characterize the whole, but this whole itself is outside the sphere of rationalization."[54] The rational determination of a historical society upon which individuality is to be realized is blocked by the "privatization of reason". Social totality is thus surrendered to irrational forces: "an accidental 'harmony', a 'natural balance' ".[55]

Thirdly, the social structure of the monopolistic capitalism of that time was presented by the theory as the new classless society. As Marcuse observes: "The whole that it presents is not the unification achieved by the domination of *one* class within the framework of class society, but rather a unity that combines *all* classes, that is supposed to overcome the reality of class struggle and thus of classes themselves…A classless society, in other words, is the goal, but a classless society on the basis of and within the framework of – the existing class society".[56] In this respect the new political reality represented no actual supersession of the social basis of the established order.[57] Class struggle was instead appropriated and neutralized by an existential anthropology in which facts (such as decisions and events) are valued in themselves irrespective of any normative content. Class struggle was thus politically diverted from its historical signification and became one *form* -among many- of supra-historical, existential relations.

No matter how hard Carl Schmitt tried to substantiate the transcendence of social and economic divisions on the political unity of society, the societal designation of the enemy-other (against which this unity is achieved) was not accordingly substantiated. Class struggle had no place in this designation, neither any rational norm and ideal that could jeopar-

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54   Ibid., 11.

55   Ibid., 12.

56   Ibid., 14.

57   Of course the promise for social pacification in the interior was not met. Other members of the School such as Neumann and Horkheimer pointed on the social inequalities and economic antagonisms that continued to comprise the social structure of the National Socialist era. Neumann's *Behemoth* is most illustrative of this. See also Max Horkheimer, "The Jews and Europe" in *Critical Theory and Society*, eds. Stephen Eric Bronner & Douglas Kellner (London & New York: Routledge, 1989), 85-6.

dize the goal for political harmony. In a sophist fashion, Schmitt's political existentialism succumbed to the relativism of charisma, where only those "in charge" are to define in a more or less successful way what is right and what is wrong. Marcuse asks: "What, then, remains as a possible justification? Only this: that there is a state of affairs that through its very existence and presence is exempt from all justification, i.e. an 'existential', 'ontological' state of affairs –justification by mere existence. 'Existentialism' in its political form becomes the theory of the (negative) justification of what can no longer be justified."[58] The exclusion from politics of any normative content that could lie outside the realm of positive facts ascertains the conservation of present reality.

Marcuse did not go as far as to accuse Schmitt of misconceiving liberalism. However, his short critical passage through Schmitt's political theory only reflects his broader conviction that liberalism is not just about the excessive freedom of calculation and profit. Neither did he confuse liberalism (as Schmitt did) with the disorderly democracy of a split political society, an anathema since Plato's *Republic.* Marcuse was convinced in other words that from their inception, liberal ideals were essentially *political*, even at their most fierce confrontation with state power. The relation between freedom and obligation lies at the heart of the liberal conception of the state. The primary cell of this relation is the individual. But the de-privatization and politicization of existence promised by the totalitarian state was not the actualization of a structured polis within which individual freedom was eventually served.[59] Marcuse hints at the "immemorial" questions of political philosophy, those concerning the type of community to which individuals are bound, as well as those concerning the type of individuals that are to realize their autonomy in a rational organization of society. In this political anthropology Marcuse hoped to demarcate the ontological postulates of the political from the anti-individualist currents of his time. As he writes: "…Nor can totally delivering over the individual to the state that factually exists at a given

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58   Marcuse, "The struggle against liberalism", 21.

59   See ibid., 27-28.

moment be demanded merely on the grounds that man is 'ontologically' a political being or that political relationships are 'existential'. Unless it is to annihilate human freedom rather than to fulfill it, the political obligation of freedom can be only the free practice of the individual himself."[60]

Marcuse never explicitly opposed the liberal notion of individuality with an abstract anti-liberalism. What he actually did, was to elucidate the political directions that a specific social functioning of individual freedom might take. He was thus not content with the mere dissociation of totalitarianism from liberalism on the grounds that the first is more irrational or oppressive than the second, or on the grounds that the first immobilizes the institutions of public deliberation previously realized by the second. At the core of both social systems lies a *contradictory* perception of the individual, which is on the one hand obsessed with profit and rational control and on the other suffocates as a member of the oppressed classes or as a monad in a homogenized social totality. If both ends are at least analogous, Marcuse's evaluation can go deep enough into the occulted contradiction between free competition (of individuals and armies of devotees) and democratic institutions, and argue that the relativity and "openness" involved in modern processes of political deliberation and decision is essentially un-dialectical. It is not sufficient in other words to oppose abstract or total truths to instituted pluralism. If the "dialectics" of discourses on pluralism, transparency and openness do not address the sources of the above contradiction, they inevitably lose their critical function and become susceptible to populist or existentialist criticism. Indeed, it involves less risk to reproach modern democracies for the "ineffectiveness" of their political systems - which leads unreservedly to authoritarian or business-like alternatives - than to critically unveil the advantages of existing social and political formations, or of knowledge and technological progress. To Marcuse's mind, these advantages can be exploited for the benefit of primary goals: the satisfaction of existential needs and the abolition of alienated labour.[61]

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60   Ibid., 28.

61   See Herbert Marcuse, "Epilogue to Marx's *18th Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*"

Epilogue

The totalitarian possibility lurks where the political conditions available for the actualization of the liberating aspects of current social reality are nulled under the pressure of a specific class structure. In his epilogue to the 1963 English translation of Marx's *18ᵗʰ Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* Marcuse notices Marx's attention to the contradiction between "the political form and the social content of the rule of the bourgeoisie"[62]. Louis-Napoléon's coup d'état in 1851 marked not just the restoration of imperial France in the concentration of political power. The new authoritarianism was in Marx's analysis the expression of a fundamental division between the socio-economic interests of a social class and the established mechanisms for procuring social and political rights. Marcuse emphasizes the ideological function of the latter, in which bourgeois interests are presented as the general interests of society. With this familiar ideological abstraction, social divisions tend to diminish in front of the immediacy of "existential" policies. But even in more peaceful times, internal inequalities often become secondary with respect to various cries for political stability and social cohesion. Since Hobbes, a crucial argument reappears: the concentration of power makes administration swift and effective. However, none of this functionality would be legitimized, or be at all possible without mass mobilization. Seen as the final externalization of inner freedom, mass democracy temporalizes liberty and equality and thereby abandons the transcending effort. As Marcuse observes: "The evolving capitalist society must increasingly reckon with the masses, fit them into some condition of economic and political normalcy...The authoritarian state requires the democratic mass-base."[63]

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in *Marxism, Revolution and Utopia. Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse,* Vol.6, eds. Douglas Kellner and Clayton Pierce, (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 121.

62   Ibid., 118.

63   Ibid.

Marcuse's line of thought reveals here the following paradox: while the generalization of freedom is threatening to the established order it can also perform a legitimizing function, if reduced to a mere mass-democracy. To be sure, the latter has today progressed into an aggregate of multiple forms of "scientific" and political rationality. But to lose sight of the totality by which these forms appear in unity as a cluster of particular social or class interests, is to diminish the question of freedom into the particular rule of one social class. The legitimizing power of the majority principle technically sidesteps this problem with various constitutional or normative means, ready to be exercised for the "strengthening" of executives. Yet this is still a major technicality. In the *18th Brumaire* Marx unearths the actual content of Louis Bonaparte's battle with the French National Assembly. Before the final dissolution of the latter, the executive power had already "enmeshed and controlled" all possible manifestations of civil society (to which parliament is to submit), from the most public to the most private ones, making thus the National Assembly redundant.[64] For Marx, this political pre-establishment of class despotism amputated the "independent organs of social movement". The political interests of the bourgeoisie were in fact interwoven with the excessive state as they have been with civil society institutions: "Thus the French Bourgeoisie was compelled by its class position to annihilate, on the one hand, the vital conditions of all parliamentary power, and therefore, likewise, of its own, and to render irresistible, on the other hand, the executive power hostile to it." [65]

As the above point suggested (in some functionalist interpretations of Marx's work) the essence of the liberal state is reflected in its instrumentality even if the bourgeoisie finally contradicts its ideology and attacks its institutions in times of crisis. This renowned argument (of the state as superstructure or instrument) has been critically discussed in Marxist political theory from Gramsci to Althusser and Poulantzas. Marcuse's

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64   See Marx, Karl, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1984), 53.

65   Ibid.

appropriation of Marx's political thought developed, however, on a rather different terrain. Instead of focusing directly on a Marxist theory of the state, Marcuse, as well as Horkheimer and Adorno examined the political effects of the social dynamics of their epoch. Marcuse's distinctive approach was to proceed with an anthropological dialectic that led him directly to the content of political relations of domination (other than those of power-politics). For Marcuse, social conditions of alienation and domination made all the important difference with respect to an "outdated" power of authoritarian rule. There are two paths that follow from this. One is to read Marcuse's political thought substantively: contextualizing the specific characteristics of modern capitalist societies and re-connecting them with Marxist political theory. The other is to take his sociological orientations more literally and put him in a discussion with authors such as the later Poulantzas or Foucault.

Whichever the choice, I think that Marcuse's political thought is open to a contemporary assessment either as a substantive theory of political action or as a critical social philosophy. Both options were in a sense reflected in the social movements of the New Left in the 60s and 70s. There is no reason why they should cease to complement class-centered, as well as structural critiques of modern capitalist societies. To put it briefly, Marcuse's dialectical anthropology widened the historical horizon of capitalism allowing thus a clearer view of its fundamental modifications. It has also created a theoretical space for a deeper understanding of the perseverance of capitalist contradictions and their political management. In this comprehensive point of view, certain or more particular domains of a political philosophy *proper* are inevitably left unexamined. It would be more appropriate to assume that -given the thesis on the integration of the working classes - old theoretical problems such as the distinction between democracy and representation involved in Marcuse's thought the political radicalization of social movements, whose actions entailed something more than a competition for office or a protection of particular rights. The break with the "naturalistic" determinism of modern capitalism was for Marcuse an essential precondition for the re-embodiment

of the political moment in the fundamental contradictions of capitalist societies.

It is in this light that one can read positivist thought politically. Part 1 attempted a brief sketch of this reading by emphasizing Marcuse's major objections to positivism: the immunization of knowledge from external interferences and the subsequent injustice done to the contradictory character of objective and determinable social conditions. The critique of alienation was developed (not only in Marcuse's work) precisely upon the need to address this injustice and to emphasize the schismatic nature (appropriation through separation, freedom through repression), of a negative reality, one of the most important reproductive elements of capitalist social totality. The category of totality serves here a double purpose. On the one hand it is a critical tool that relates particular phenomena to the whole, which is precisely the foundation, and to a certain extent the cause of these phenomena and on the other hand, Marcuse's use of the concept of freedom (a "bourgeois" concept according to Adorno) was such that it resisted the idea of an external totality, either as an absolutist state or as capitalist society dominating its individual components. In *One-Dimensional Man*, Marcuse's most structuralist work where the second purpose is the strongest, technology is presented as primarily conditional on historical contingency in lieu of its enslavement on the "naturalness" of things.

Part 2 reflected upon some critical discussions on the issue of holism, as implied at least by Marcuse's treatment of the technological structure of affluent society. Between the two main vulnerabilities of the concept of totality, namely ontological abstraction and political totalization, Marcuse definitely renounces the second, while the first is perhaps admitted in the background, something that in my view is not necessarily an active remainder of Heidegger's aura. His critical disposition however towards the social-historical structure of advanced capitalism meant that the concept of society was not in itself less tangible or analytical. As Marcuse saw it, the suppression of reason in the pervasive power of one-dimensionality was a definite fact, however coterminous with an exhaustion of

the dominant, -once revolutionary- paradigm of the separation between facts and values or between empirical and moral rationalities. But Marcuse never projected an identity between them.

Totalitarianism, in all its forms is precisely coterminous with forced and unmediated identity, namely with manipulable social uniformity and with the neutralization of contradictions. In spite of its anti-particularistic ideology, totalitarian political order never dispensed with the liberal core of industrial societies (part 3). While Marcuse initially attacked liberal political ideology, the implied interdependence between capitalism, as a social system and totalitarian state-bureaucracy soon became a major discussion-theme among members of the School.[66] Marcuse was not actively involved in this discussion and the political critique of liberalism transmuted in his writings into a social-theoretical critique. Be that as it may, Marcuse never lost sight of the negative political significance of an abstracted notion of the individual and insofar as the debate had to be transferred to this terrain, he maintained that neither the total state nor a homogenized society (not just a politically assimilated majority) met the criteria of a structured polis within which individual freedom is to be realized. Still, Marcuse's aim has been to de-privatize reason and explore the possibilities of a rational determination of society as such. Marcuse then had to juxtapose the positivist ideal of constructing society's governing laws with a more realistic ap-

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66   See for example Max Horkheimer, "The Jews and Europe" in *Critical Theory and Society*, 77-94. See also Franz Neumann's 1937 essay, "The change in the function of law in modern society" in *The Democratic and the Authoritarian State*, ed. Herbert Marcuse (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1957), 22-68. In his *Dialectical Imagination*, Martin Jay provides an overall account of the Institute's preoccupations with the relations between capitalism and bureaucratic centralization. Jay distinguishes two major approaches in this discussion. One represented by Neumann, Gurland and Kirchheimer focusing mainly on major changes in legal and economic institutions and another (represented by Horkheimer and Marcuse) that shifted its focus from the economics of advanced capitalism to technological rationalization. See Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 166.

proach, for which social totality is contingently dynamic and yet a critically recognizable reality.

Both critiques of authoritarian rule, fascist and present, are just that. Purposively situated in their society, both reflected the distinctive tendencies of their epoch, but they were also developed as communicating vessels, steered by tenets that transcended a trivial or a purely normative factuality. This is not an unfounded conflation between political systems. No one can reasonably deny that in spite of their pathologies, democratic systems of governance are preferable to dictatorial regimes. And indeed, political authoritarianism today looks rather sectarian and "corrective" than totalitarian. It does not claim to have fulfilled historical destiny, representing a "revolutionary" stage, but it does lay claim to undisputed knowledge, to the capturing of facts and of political exigencies. I think that taking the risk of leaving aside, momentarily, Marcuse's meta-politics of imagination and aesthetics, his earlier critique of positivist empiricism and political existentialism may clarify the momentum gained by current authoritarian trends. It can be argued for example that advanced authoritarianism does not stand opposite to post-modern conditions of secluded, dispersed and otherwise "transparent" modes of thinking and acting. And it finally brings to mind the older agony felt in front of the malformation of a democratic polis into anarchic despotism.

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Broken Promises: Examining Berlin's Material Histories in an Age of Rubbling

Laurin Baumgardt[1]

Abstract: This article examines the figure of "rubble," also a Benjaminian concept, in order to tell a partial but very material history of Berlin as one of the rubble cities *par excellence*. In contrast to "ruins" in their capacity of preserving and freezing the past, "rubble" is here understood as a more impermanent, tactile matter within people's everyday lives. In the article, I identify four heuristic open-ended registers of what is subsequently called "rubbling," or four broken promises: first, the German postwar promise of turning dispersed rubble into gathered ruins; second, the broken promise of Berlin Wall rubble as memory devices turned into touristic commodities; third, the empty promise of the state for informal dwellers to recover from disasters; as well as, fourth, the promise of infrastructural futures caught up in suspended concrete. Throughout the following discussion, these promises will also be seen within the wider contemporary context of environmental destructions and political violence in what will be introduced as the "Age of Rubbling."

Introduction

Living in and with rubble is perhaps one of the new (and perhaps even old) default modes of the current twenty-first century urbanizing moment. Rubble is perhaps the new normal. What I will subsequently call the "Age of Rubbling" describes the constant unfolding of dispersed, fragmented, and buried violence and destructive histories. The "Age of Rubbling" is a similar index to that introduced by archaeologist Alfredo González-Ruibal, called the "Age of Destruction"—which he un-

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derstands as the archaeological counterpart and complementary to what is termed the "Anthropocene".[2] In the "Age of Destruction," González-Ruibal also includes technologies of mass destruction, extractive technologies, accelerated cycles of construction and destruction, necro-political regimes, and ruination of non-modern or early modern forms of existence. My coinage of the term "rubbling" derives from the literal German translation of words like "demolition," "destruction," "fragmentation," or 'ruination' which can be all translated as *Zertrümmerung*. *Zertrümmerung*—the process of making or generating rubble—literally means "rubbling," while the object word *Trümmer*, term also used by Walter Benjamin in his famous 9th thesis of *On the Concept of History*, denotes "rubble."

My foregrounding of rubble should, nevertheless, not only be understood as a diagnostic of the present or as a sedimented interpretation of history. Rather, it also directs attention towards imagining a future world that, however broken and uninhabitable, still holds promise and entryways to aspirations and failures. To think with promises means to always think about deferred futures. "A promise," as Brian Larkin defines it in relation to infrastructure, "refers to a temporal deferral that refuses to deliver something in the present. It involves both expectation and desire, frustration and absence."[3] Thus, with Larkin, expectation also means frustration and absence. Unlike with trajectories of "hope," my emphasis lies on the brokenness and discontinuity of promises. Broken promises mark a rupture, not a continuity, between past and future. They introduce surprises and unexpected openings and they do not suggest or create any illusions about an imaginary return that could reinstate previous conditions. Differently put, a promise is *a refusal, not a return*. The deferred promise allows for neither renewal nor recovery of that which has been lost. A promise refuses to deliver and to comply with expecta-

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2   Alfredo González-Ruibal, "Beyond the Anthropocene: Defining the Age of Destruction," *Norwegian Archaeological Review*, 51.1-2 (2018): 10-21.

3   Brian Larkin, "Promising Forms: The Political Aesthetics of Infrastructure," *The Promise of Infra-structure*, edited by Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018), 181.

tions in the present. In keeping the future open, it fuels people's desires and expectations, but equally puts them on hold.

In what follows, I will introduce some of the images, stories and concepts evoked by and registered in the broken promises of rubbling. In dialogue with Gastón Gordillo's research on destruction through industrialized soy agriculture in the Argentine Chaco, I think of "rubble" as an affectively charged matter, as a sensuous texture, as a trace and evidence of destruction that occupies the present,[4] and that also holds potential for recuperation[5] and improvisation[6]. As a material, rubble can be anything from a pile of metal sheets, bricks, wall segments, devastated forests, construction dust and crumbs, to pieces and unfinished projects suspended in concrete. My primary focus, however, will be rubble's temporality. Temporality provides the lens through which I can write about suspension, history, memory, evidentiality, impermanence and in-betweenness, and helps explain why I emphasize the dimension of rubbling over material rubble.

I have here identified four heuristic open-ended registers of rubbling, or four broken promises which I will further explore in this paper: (1) in a first section, I will describe a particular constellation of *rubble-turned-ruin* as it appears in German postwar media representations. I will illustrate my argument on the basis of some iconic rubble figures and moments in the history of Berlin as one of the historical rubble cities *par excellence.* I will also present a more detailed look at four of these particular postwar genres, namely "rubble movies," "rubble women," "rubble mountains," and "rubble models." (2) On a second register, I will talk about rubble as a historical trace and evidence of destruction. As my main but not only example, I will introduce the so-called "rubble-gazers" and "wall peckers" of the Berlin Wall as *reversed flâneurs*. While the *flâneurs* look and

4   Gastón Gordillo, *Rubble. The Afterlife of Destruction* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 5.

5   Jane Guyer, "Aftermaths and Recuperations in Anthropology," *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7.1 (2017): 81–103.

6   AbdouMaliq Simone, *Improvised Lives* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

consume from afar, the "rubble-gazers" touch and act pragmatically. In this section, I will also discuss how the promise of a dispersed cultural memory in the form of Wall rubble-crumbs was turned into an economic enterprise. (3) A third lens will be provided through my interpretation of rubble as a modality of waste. Turning to the rise and representation of disasters, I will challenge definitions of waste understood as the *sublime*.[7] Rather, I will look at solid waste, valuable, recyclable waste, which holds all kinds of aspirational and capitalist promises. I will solidify my arguments in this section with ethnographic material about the practices and operation of settlement dwellers in the aftermath of South Africa's so-called "shack fires" and in the face of "empty promises" given by their respective municipalities. (4) And fourth, tying it even more closely to current debates around infrastructure, ecology and materiality, I will examine rubble in its role as *suspended concrete* in the afterlife of destruction and construction.

This last elaboration will also lead me to conclusions and questions about modalities and strategies which people adopt in order to live with and amidst rubble. Moreover, it will trigger questions about anthropology not only as a "science of ruins," as it has been called by Anna Tsing,[8] Bettina Stoetzer,[9] and others, but as a *science of rubble*. While my exploration of the first two registers focuses more on historical and representational dimensions and establishes "rubble" as an independent analytical object of study, the latter two parts on rubble in relation to waste and concrete gesture towards a more material, ecological and ethnographic reading of rubble. While the first two sections write the partial history of Berlin's rubble and embrace Berlin as its main location, the last two sections take more dispersed analytical directions and draw from a wid-

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7   Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives – Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004); Brian Thill, *Waste – Object Lessons* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

8   Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015).

9   Bettina Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies: Rethinking Nature, Migration, and the Urban Landscape in   Berlin," *Cultural Anthropology* 33.2 (2018): 295-323.

er range of examples, making it possible to understand rubble in other conceptual constellations and durations.

1. Ruins, Rubble, and National Histories

In this first part, I aim to describe some central conceptual directionalities; that is, how rubble moves to as well as turns into ruins, and vice versa, how ruins are turned into rubble. However, the analytical ambition will be to eventually decouple the affective and conceptual association of ruins and rubble, and to explore their semiotic fields independently of each other. I venture to do so in order to both decenter the obsession with ruins as material and conceptual fetishes, and to liberate "rubble" as a conceptual terrain worthy of further consideration.

Germany of the late 1940s and 50s saw the advent of a great number of rubbling figures, genres, and representations, which went by names such as "rubble photography,"[10] "rubble literature,"[11] "rubble models,"[12] "rubble women,"[13] or even "rubble philosophy."[14] In these media images of national heroism, spectacle, and grand recovery, one finds attempts at coming to terms with moral, social and physical loss and destruction.

One attempt to restore the past was through movies produced by the first GDR film production company called DEFA. For example, the 1946 film *Irgendwo in Berlin* ("Somewhere in Berlin")—only the third DEFA film ever produced—tells the story of a group of boys playing a game of tag on the rubble fields of central Berlin. Unattended by their indifferent and busy mothers or by their absent or dead fathers, they use the rubble

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10   William Taylor, "Assembling Ruin: Rubble Photography of the 1908 Messina Earthquake," *Transformations, Journal of Media & Culture* 28 (2016).

11   Kurt Buhanan, *Rethinking* Trümmerliteratur*: The Aesthetics of Destruction - Ruins, Ruination, and Ruined Language in the Works of Böll, Grass, and Celan* (Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University, 2007).

12   Helmut Puff, "Ruins as Models: Displaying Destruction in Postwar Germany," In *Ruins of Modernity*, edited by Julia Hell and Andreas Schönle (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

13   Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies."

14   Kai-Uwe Werbeck, *From Rubble to Revolutions and Raves: Literary Interrogations of German Media Ecologies* (PhD dissertation, Chapel Hill, 2012).

as a playground for imitating the war with stolen fireworks. One little boy's father, who has lost most of his fellow soldiers, returns hopelessly traumatized from the war to find his home in decay. He is an emotional wreck, a piece of rubble himself, but the children animate him so as to reconstruct his garage and also his psyche. Noteworthy, *Auferstanden aus Ruinen* ("Rising from Ruins") became the title of East Germany's national anthem in 1949, and thus the so-called *rubble women* entered the national imagination as heroic figures.[15]

After the war, 45,000 to 60,000 *Trümmerfrauen* ("rubble women") were recruited to clear Berlin's war ruins from rubble and to pave the way for a modern Berlin. It is estimated that 16 square kilometers of rubble defined central Berlin in 1945, that a million Berliners were left homeless after nearly half of the city's buildings were damaged, and that 400 million cubic meters of debris blanketed post-war Germany.[16] For example, the BBC Witness' Podcast "Berlin's Rubble Women" tells the story of women's empowerment and the change in their role from housewives to heroes. They interviewed the 92-year-old Helga Zettfelden who, in 1945 as an 18-year-old, was called to report to the Soviet authorities. After clearing Berlin's central park, the *Tiergarten*, from ammunition and uniforms left behind by German soldiers, she was recruited, together with only one other woman, to clear the rubble from an entirely bombed block of flats. They had no tools at hand and only used metal buckets for food which they had brought with them. "It was a demanding and dirty work," reports Helga, but it allowed them to obtain better food ration cards which they could then share with other family members. They worked 48 hours a week. Nevertheless, as she emphasizes, "we never thought of ourselves in that way—as heroines."[17] As heroic figures, rubble women entered into the newly forming national consciousness, despite the fact, as some

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15   Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies."

16   Titus Chalk, "The women who raised the rubble," accessed February 15, http://www.exberliner.com/ features/the-women-who-raised-the-rubble/.

17   "Berlin's Rubble Women," BBC Witness World Service Podcast, accessed February 15, 2019, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cswsjp.

historians argue, that the main rubble clearing was achieved through construction companies with heavy machinery and their skilled, mostly male, construction workers. Many or some of the rubble women (opinions differ) were also former NSDAP party members who were forcefully recruited for the work.[18] Turning rubble to ruins was also part of an older Nazi war-endeavor in order to maintain and preserve the image of a quickly recovering and successful Nazi regime.[19]

"Paving the way for economic growth," as Bettina Stoetzer describes in her fascinating article on Berlin's "Ruderal Ecologies" to be further addressed in the conclusion of this article, "large amounts of rubble were also recycled to rebuild roads or landscaped into so-called *rubble mountains*. Today, Berlin's rubble mountains—fourteen of them altogether—appear as a natural part of the urban landscape."[20] Almost all of Berlin's major elevations and hills today are rubble mountains. Beyond the practical task of clearing the rubble, the rubble mountains also followed a desire to forget the architectural Nazi remnants and Albert Speer's projected ruins of the Third Reich.[21] For example, the hill in the *Volkspark Friedrichshain*, a park between the Friedrichshain and Prenzlauer Berg districts close to where I spent my childhood and youth in Berlin, is a rubble mountain that covers an old Nazi bunker. Furthermore, the hills were part of an urban planning strategy to define a new national image for Germany's capital.[22] As depicted in a *CityLab* blog article, a huge amount of West Berlin's rubble, removed through rubble women, formed an artificial hill—today Berlin's highest hill of over 120 meters (394 feet) and since 1996 in the hands of private investors. The rubble could not leave West Berlin's city confines because it was surrounded by

18 "Die Story: Trümmerfrauen nur ein Mythos?", ARD, accessed February 15, 2019, https://www.youtube. com/watch?v=9nIlfN6uLVM.

19 Jeffry Diefendorf, *In the Wake of War. The Reconstruction of German Cities after World War II* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 18.

20 Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies," 301 (emphasis mine).

21 Diefendorf, *Wake of War*.

22 Fernando De Maio, "The green hills of rubble in black and white," *WIT Transactions on The Built Environment*, 131 (2013): 535.

East German territory. The name given by Berlin's citizens to this rubble hill is *Teufelsberg*, which means "Devil's Mountain." Between 1961 and 1989, the Americans installed a radar station on top of it with which they could spy on the Russians from this western enclave of Berlin.[23]

Another curious example from the list of rubble genres are the so-called *rubble models*. These are three-dimensional renderings of bombed-out cities such as Frankfurt, Hannover, Heilsbronn, and Würzburg. Twelve of these models can be found scattered cross these cities, and some of them are publicly exhibited in town halls and historical museums. In his chapter in the volume *Ruins of Modernity*, Helmut Puff explores how these models "freeze a moment in time into an object ready for visual consumption and investigation."[24] Depicting the emptiness of uninhabitable spaces devoid of humans, these models created a visual memory of the bombings that, unlike maps, can be appreciated "from many different angles."[25] Like the rubble films, they contained "the vague promise to remove the past with the rubble."[26] In other words, the models, in their function as a recovery mechanism, re-signified the immediacy of rubble experiences into a detached, long-term- and bird's-eye-view of ruins.

Turning rubble into ruins, or semiotically and materially clearing ruins from rubble—whether through films, city models or media figures, as these first examples have shown—runs the risk of aestheticizing and romanticizing modern ruins and converting them into (literal) playgrounds[27] or into what have also been called "ruin porns."[28] To discuss

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23   Feargus O'Sullivan, "Berlin's 'Devil's Mountain': Built From Rubble, And Going to Waste," accessed   February 20, 2019, https://www.citylab.com/design/2017/02/what-did-berlin-do-with-rubble-from-world-war-ii-teufelsberg/516609/.

24   Puff, "Ruins as Models."

25   Ibid.

26   Ibid.

27   Alfredo González-Ruibal, "Time to Destroy. An Archaeology of Supermodernity," *Current Anthropo-logy* 49.2 (2008).

28   Thill, *Waste;* Stephen Cairns and Jane Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die. A Perverse View of Architecture.* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2014).

the German rubble genres allows one to study the depiction of images of heroism, spectacle, and grand recovery, as well as the perceptual distortion of media representations. This analytic helps to move out of the problem-space of detached and disengaged "ruin-gazers,"[29] tourists, or 19th century *flâneurs* all of whom remain trapped within consumerist, wishful logics, and move towards other marginal Benjaminian figures like the rubble women and the so-called "rubble-gazers."[30] Susan Buck-Morss wrote that "the *flâneur* must become extinct only by exploding into a myriad of forms"[31]. In the context of war, destruction or revolution, this explosion fundamentally reverses the *flâneur's* perceptual attitude of 'look, but don't touch.' Whereas the ruin-gazer, tourist, and *flâneur* just *look, but don't touch*, the rubble women and construction workers *do* touch and incorporate more immediate and pragmatic modes of perception into their being.

In scholarly literature, "rubble" is often construed as A) being placed within ruins, that is, as indistinguishable from them; B) being subsumed under "ruin" as an umbrella term and as a particularly destructive type of ruin; or C) being the opposite of ruins. Ruins evoke traditions, visual codes, and a wealth of historical significations along with many other sentiments,[32] while rubble is perceived as insignificant, broken, meaningless, interruptive, cast out of sight, or, as Helmut Puff termed it, as "matter destined to be removed."[33] In my own terms, ruins are to be seen

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29 Hell and Schönle, *Ruins of Modernity*.

30 Werbeck, *Rubble to Revolutions.*

31 Susan Buck-Morss, "The Flâneur, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering," *New German Critique (*Second Special Issue on Walter Benjamin) 39 (1986): 104.

32 González-Ruibal, "Time to Destroy"; Puff, "Ruins as Models"; Werbeck, *Rubble to Revolutions*; Gordillo, *Rubble*; Thill, *Waste*; Jerzy Elzanowski, "Ruins, Rubble and Human Remains: Negotiating Culture and Violence in Post-Catastrophic Warsaw," *Public Art Dialogue*, 2.2 (2012): 114–146; Ann Stoler, ed., *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013); Stefka Hristova, "Ruin, Rubble, and the Necropolitics of History," *Transformations, Journal of Media &Culture* 28 (2016): 1-15.

33 Puff, "Ruins as Models."

as *gatherings*, whereas rubble is seen as *dispersed*. While ruins preserve, domesticate, and herald a fixed narrative of the past, the rubble of the past is meant to be neglected, forgotten, and shrouded. Much in the same vein, Gordillo speaks about a "hierarchy of debris" that is created by the positivity of ruins set against the negativity of rubble.[34] Hence, rubble, from a romantic, ideological or middle-class perspective, is imagined as the incommensurable blind spot of ruins.

Walter Benjamin was certainly also one of the first thinkers to highlight and explore this blind spot. It is perhaps nowhere better captured than in *On the Concept of History.* In his widely cited 9th thesis, he introduces Paul Klee's "Angelus Novus" as the "angel of history" that faces the past:

> Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling rubble upon rubble and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them.[35]

Speaking directly to the Benjaminian conceptualization of the Angelus Novus, Stefka Hristova conceives "rubble" as an articulation of historical materialism. Both ruins and rubble are man-made historical products, but, as Stefka Hristova compellingly shows, ruins create what she calls "historical monads" through the act of endowing places with "a melancholic trace of the past" and "a decadent beauty".[36] Rubble, on the contrary, "brings to the forefront the violence of politics and the ways in which human life has been rendered insignificant in the act of decay through a wrenching aesthetic of mortality."[37] Furthermore, she describes "rubble" as a productive allegory for the acknowledgment of

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34 Gordillo, *Rubble*, 10.

35 Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," In *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, 4: 1938–1940*, edited by Howard Eiland and Michal Jennings (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

36 Hristova, "Necropolitics of History."

37 Ibid.

a necropolitics of history: "Rubble calls for the dead to awaken–for the living-dead to speak up."[38] Benjamin's violent barbarity of modern progress is thus congealed in what Hristova labels "rubble as history." Although the angel has turned its back to the future and only faces the past, the accumulative piling of rubble upon rubble must be seen as an active, ongoing process of ruination,[39] as a process of rubbling in the present. It is a process of demolition, *Zertrümmerung*, in which the past mirrors, haunts, and disrupts the future.

2. Rubble, Evidence, and Cultural Memory

Berlin, so relates Brian Ladd in his book *The Ghosts of Berlin*, is a city associated with destruction, mainly because of the Nazi regime, but also because of its reputation as a city that quickly consumed its own past. "Many of the buildings that survived the war did not survive the peace."[40] For example, thousands of East Berliners, including my father and grandfather, and later on tourists, hacked away at the Wall. As Ladd describes, they took part "in the ritual participation in the removal of the symbolic barrier."[41] As rubble-gazers and *reversed flâneurs*, or, as my father told me, so-called *Mauerspechte* (literally "wall peckers"), these tourists and Berliners actively *touched* and dismantled the physical structure of the Wall in the first months after reunification, only to find their actions co-opted: the Wall became an "unintentional monument" and a "capitalist commodity."[42] An entire economy of the hacked-off rubble-crumbs unfolded in its dismantling. Authorities, entrepreneurs, wealthy collectors, auctioneers, souvenir hunters and traders who imitated the Wall

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38   Ibid.; comp. Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15.1 (2003): 11-40.

39   Stoler, *Imperial Debris*.

40   Brian Ladd, *The Ghosts of Berlin. Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 37.

41   Ladd, *Ghosts of Berlin*, 8.

42   Ibid., 12; Aleida Assmann, "'The Whole Country is a Monument': Framing Places of Terror in Post War Germany". In *Space and the Memories of Violence. Landscapes of Erasure, Disappearance and Exception,* edited by Estela Schindel and Pamela Colombo (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 135-149.

rubble with fake paint and graffiti, all took part in this "cat-and-mouse game" of marketing the defaced concrete. Ladd explains:

> Pieces of the Wall did indeed have a special aura: they were treated as holy relics that bespoke our deliverance from the Cold War. For that brief moment, the Wall was in demand precisely because it was disappearing. Detached pieces of it were valued as evidence of an apparently spontaneous will to destroy the Wall.[43]

These rubble pieces and crumbs became a globally dispersed monument—and a mediated, but broken infrastructure—for Germany's iconic historical rubble moment in 1989 and for a much wider global audience. Rubble, in this material and narrative constellation, has become a tourist commodity as well as a mnemonic (nostalgic) device. Many contemporary examples resonate with rubble's functioning as a dispersed ensemble of evidence and cultural memory. In Philadelphia, for example, in an area called "The Promise Zone," architectural rubble is collected and exhibited with the aura of special objects in order to create critical narratives about gentrification and the ever-shorter life spans of built structures due to ever-faster capitalist cycles of economic investments and divestments.[44] Similarly, in Rio de Janeiro's favelas, activists have built a so-called Evictions Memory Museum from rubble.[45.] Or, while studying the occupied territory of the Westbank in Palestine, Eyal Weizman's team developed a "forensic of architecture." They use ruins and rubble as a form of evidence of human rights violations and as semiotic devices through which they reveal the violent destructions and "urbicides" committed by Israel's military operations.[46] It must thus be highlighted in the remaining sections of this article

43   Ibid., 8.

44   Syjuco Stephanie, "American Rubble (Lancaster Avenue)," accessed February 20, 2019, https://www. stephaniesyjuco.com/projects/american-rubble-lancaster-avenue.

45   Rhona Mackay, "Vila Autódromo Launches Evictions Museum," accessed February 21, 2019, http:// www.riioonwatch.org/?p=29042.

46   Eyal Weizman, "Architecture, Violence, Evidence," *Future Anterior* 8.1 (2011): 111-123.

how rubble is not only a historical media object or piece of evidence with which people make sense of their histories and lifeworlds, but how, in conjunction with the former, rubble is also always already embedded in economic cycles of destruction and reconstruction. It also remains to be explored what other promises and dangers rubble holds in its afterlife. Despite the fact that rubble has become a tool of resistance to fight war in Israel or evictions in Rio de Janeiro, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, it also seems to have become an ever-greater profit-making scheme for all kinds of capitalist, entrepreneurial, and humanitarian enterprises.

3. Rubble, Waste, and (Non-)Sublime Disasters

Without a doubt, rubble, and this certainly comes as no surprise, is different for different people. It is, as Gastón Gordillo puts it, "a multiplicity that defies representation."[47] It is a hindrance and menace for the firefighters and construction workers, a burden for the clean-up workers or for the rubble women in postwar countries. For the archaeologists and some artists, it can be either a curio-sity and a hidden treasure for their scientific and artistic expression, or just a nuisance and something they have to get rid of in their journey to something more valuable. While it is a dystopian fantasy scenario for the disengaged movie watcher, it oftentimes becomes a site of trauma and pain, but also of remembrance and worship for the war-, hurricane-, and tsunami-survivors.

In the face of these latter events, as Brian Thill relates in his book *Waste, Object Lessons*, one stands "without comprehension" before the climate debris: "The debris field is the preeminent object of visual grandeur in our contemporary age of crisis. (…) Climate debris interrupts and mangles; it hands back to us the broken fragments of the wholes we had made, and we stand dumbfounded before it."[48] I aim here to push back against Thill's position on climate debris as just another evocation of the sublime and as an embracing of a holistic middle-class perspective. He takes the world as a whole that has just recently broken down and been

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47   Gordillo, *Rubble,* 25.

48   Thill, *Waste,* 88.

turned into ruins, not rubble. Instead, I suggest that a recasting of *rubble as waste*—as a modality of solid, valuable, or recyclable waste—will provide an analytical advantage and will also help to further decouple rubble from ruins. "Rubble" is thus to be understood as a central modality of waste in terms of its quantity and ubiquity. Much has been said about micro-plastic pollution, chemical toxicities, overfilled garbage heaps, but rubble is hardly spoken of in terms of a major waste issue. When simply considered as a type of solid waste according to certain sources, "rubble" from construction and destruction work of building structures accounts for about 60% of the global landfill capacity, for 35% of energy consumption, and 30-50% of greenhouse gas emissions.[49] On this material level, it also needs to be considered whether rubble, as waste, can be reused and reappropriated in the same way today as it was, for instance, used in the post-WWII period. Is (post)modern rubble different from (post)war rubble? Does modern rubble have different affordances? Does it contain different material composites, like glass and steel, but not bricks and stone? Is it harder to discard or reuse than older rubble formations?

Allow me to first present some more conceptual thoughts on the family resemblances between "waste" and "rubble:" different from dirt, as Rachele Dini puts it in her book *Consumerism, Waste, and Re-Use in Twentieth-Century Fiction*, "waste" is not "matter out of place," but is "matter out of time."[50] She writes that "any object has the potential to become waste," that every object has a "built-in obsolescence," and that, as a commodity, waste is defined as a stage in the lifecycle of a(ny)thing.[51] Her definition very much resonates with Brian Thill's coinage in his introduction to waste studies: "waste is every object, plus time."[52] Thill, however, adds

49 Dirk Meyhöfer, "Hochhäuser, Megahäuser, High Rises—Zwischen Himmel und Erde," podcast, accessed March 5, 2019, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/hochhaeuser-megahaeuser-high-rises-zwischen-himmel-und-erde.1184.de.html?dram:article_id=431860.

50 Rachele Dini, *Consumerism, Waste, and Re-Use in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 5.

51 Ibid., 6/7.

52 Thill, *Waste*, 8.

that waste is more than just a certain stage of an object's life cycle.[53] Waste, according to him, is an affective relationship we have with unwanted objects. It is interrupted, expended, transmuted, or suspended desire. This is also very reminiscent of Zygmunt Bauman's remarks in *Wasted Lives* about waste as the *sublime*—as the "unique blend of attraction and repulsion," as "an embodiment of ambivalence (…) simultaneously divine and satanic."[54] As such, and this is the conclusion that both Dini and Thill eventually reach in their respective projects, waste is more than just a physical object, it is also a narrative system and pedagogical device that allows people to make sense of certain experiences in the form of feelings, communications, rituals, and encounters. No matter whether waste lingers in the cognitive or affective fore- or background, whether it is seen or unseen, handled or quickly cast off, waste in all its physicality, virtuality, materiality and spectrality helps people make sense of their immediate life realities.

All this accounts for rubble in the same way. Moreover, not only do waste and rubble share similar objects and narratives, but also refer to uninhabited or uninhabitable grounds, wastelands, rubble fields, frontiers, and sacrifice zones. This is also reflected in the Latin root of the word "waste." It comes from *vastus* in the sense of "vast," enormous or immense, or from *vanus*, *vaccus* or the verb *vastare*, which means "to make empty or vacant, to leave unattended or uninhabited."[55] For the humans, non-humans, inhumans, or extra-humans dwelling on these scattered and rejected grounds, life is thus experienced as redundant,[56] disposable,[57] cheapened,[58] or zoned and disaggregated into death-worlds.[59]

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53 Ibid., 29.

54 Bauman, *Wasted Lives,* 22; see also Cairns and Jacobs, *Buildings Must Die*, 5.

55 William Viney, *Waste – A Philosophy of Things* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 18.

56 Bauman, *Wasted Lives.*

57 Simone, *Improvised Lives.*

58 Raj Patel and Jason W. Moore, *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things: A Guide to Capitalism, Nature, and the Future of the Planet* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017).

59 Mbembe, "Necropolitics."

As I was midway through my previous fieldwork on infrastructure and aspiration in a settlement near Cape Town in South Africa, hundreds of makeshift houses burned to the ground in an adjacent section of the hilly settlement where I was conducting my research. The scene was devastating. Charred wooden beams and metal sheets were scattered everywhere. While the smoke clouds were still lingering from the piles and grounds of rubble, many people, mostly men, immediately started cleaning up, repurposing old metal plates and rebuilding wooden scaffoldings for new houses. What was so surprising to me then was the fact that people immediately started rebuilding—without any deferral and without waiting for other infrastructural promises to reach them. What South Africans call "shack fires" is a brutal, daily reality. "Fires occur because of household accidents or deliberative political acts," explains anthropologist Kerry Ryan Chance.[60] It is estimated that shack fires happen ten times per day throughout the country, with one death resulting every other day.[61] The image of South Africans' instant repurposing, new territory-making, recuperation, and improvisation presents another example of how rubble can be dealt with both as an object and as a concept, and here totally decoupled from and regardless of ruins. AbdouMaliq Simone perhaps best described such settlement situations in his new book *Improvised Lives—Rhythms of Endurance in the Urban South*, by coining it as "a politics of making home on the run," a "form of fugitive grace," and "a place of operation."[62] The problem with Thill's assumption of a dumbfounded reaction or a sublime reception, and this also accounts for Zygmunt Bauman, lies in the fact that he assumed that one can experience disasters from a distance and with a receptive passivity. According to Edmund Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Friedrich Schiller, the main precondition for a sublime feeling to occur is a safe and distanced spot from

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60   Kerry Ryan Chance, "'Where there is Fire, there is Politics': Ungovernability and Material Life in Urban South Africa," *Cultural Anthropology* 30.3 (2015): 397.

61   Ibid.

62   Simone, *Improvised Lives*.

which to experience a disaster or other mighty forces. This is not the case for people who are directly affected through, for instance, the constantly recurring settlement fires in and around Cape Town. For example, Thembakazi Simolasi, an unemployed 29-year-old, took immediate action and helped her neighbors rebuild their homes. Simolasi said: "I am not sure when I will receive my own material. In the meantime, I decided to assist neighbors so that they in turn help me whenever my material is supplied."[63] The City of Cape Town usually provides emergency fire kits which consist of "twenty-five zinc sheets; fourteen wooden poles which are fire-treated; three packets of nails; a door; door hinges; a window frame and a window."[64] However, this emergency relief kit often comes delayed and does not suffice to rebuild in accordance with the previous standards. It often is only material enough to rebuild one room, instead of the previous two or three family rooms. One resident complained, "When there is a disaster like this all we see is the ruling party in the Western Cape coming in, in numbers, and giving *empty promises*. This is not the first fire in the area and we know there is nothing new they will say to us".[65] Or, as the renowned South African architects Ilze and Heinrich Wolff metaphorically described it, the biggest broken promise in South Africa is when parents stand at the ice-cream stand only to realize that they do not have enough money in their pockets to buy ice-cream for their children, and are also not bold enough to admit it to them.[66] This is how South Africa breaks its promises of housing and other relief services for its citizens.

Instead of promoting change in the political status quo, disasters have become an ever-greater revenue for capitalist, entrepreneurial, and political enterprises. This is no surprise because disasters are on the rise. The

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63   Bernard Chiguvare, "Kosovo fire victims slowly rebuild their lives," accessed March 10, 2019, https://www.groundup.org.za/article/city-cape-town-and-sassa-are-life-line-kosovo-fire-victims/.

64   Chiguvare, "Kosovo fire victims."

65   Chiguvare, "Kosovo fire victims" (emphasis mine).

66   Conversation with Ilze and Heinrich Wolff, Cape Town, July 19, 2019.

United Nations report that "62% of all urban residents are at high risk of exposure to at least one kind of natural disaster."[67] Some engineers and planners even go so far as to understand cities such as Istanbul, Tehran, or New Delhi, as "rubble in waiting."[68] As a consequence, the proliferation of rubble becomes a profit-scheme and an incentive for techno-capitalist innovation. For example, the California tech industry has invented rescue devices such as the snake-like "Rubble Robots,"[69] and Chinese designers advertise safety airbags for collapsing buildings with names like "Rubble Bubble,"[70] while the humanitarian "starchitect" (star-architect) Shigeru Ban reuses rubble for relief shelters in Nepal.[71] Hence, the question remains whether rubble has been turned into an ever-heavier force of oppression or whether destruction also simultaneously allows for little openings and potentials of resistance and recycling.

4. Rubble, Concrete, and Suspended Infrastructure

Rubble and concrete are intimately tied together. Rubble is a prominent modality of concrete's afterlife, and, at the same time, concrete during hurricanes, floods, fires, and tsunamis also often turns out to be one of the main generators of rubble's destructive proliferation. Thus, the rise of concrete also signifies the rise of rubble. Just as inventing the plane meant

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67　Michael Hooper, "Many Norms, Few Plans: Urban Rubble Clearance in the Cities of the Global South," accessed April 4, 2019, https://www.planetizen. com/features/103427-many-norms-few-plans-urban-rubble-clearance-cities-global-south/.

68　Andrew Revkin, "The Future of Calamity," accessed April 4, 2019, https:// www.nytimes.com/2005 /01/02/weekinreview/the-future-of-calamity.html.

69　Hollie Smith, "Stanford's search and rescue snake robot is a slithering success," accessed February 20, 2019, https://www.designboom.com/technology/stanford-snake-robot-07-20-2017/.

70　"Rubble Bubble," Eleven Magazine, accessed October 28, 2018, https://www. eleven-magazine.com/ ?entrants=rubble-bubble.

71　Caroline Massie, "Shigeru Ban Releases Designs That Reuse Rubble for Nepal Disaster Relief Project," accessed October 28, 2018https://www.architectmagazine.com/design/shigeru-ban-releases-designs-that-reuse-rubble-for-nepal-disaster-relief-project_o.

inventing the plane crash,[72] so did the invention of concrete entail the invention of rubble. However, this should not disguise the fact that not all rubble is materially made out of concrete (or bricks and stones). In this section, I am focusing on the strong connection between rubble and concrete because concrete is, just like plastic, "a material without limit," as architect Sarah Nichols most recently put it in her paper at the 8th Cultures of Energy Symposium at Rice University in April 2019. Concrete deems itself permanent and has the capacity to absorb and infuse itself into all kinds of ecologies. While concrete pretends to be a dream-molder for modern life, rubble is feared as the ultimate symptom of destruction and nothingness. The impermanence and in-betweenness of rubble are thus also contrasted with the imagined permanence and durability of concrete.

Destroyed cities in the form of rubble are oftentimes immediately made fit for rebuilding with concrete. Jerzy Elzanowski, for example, relates how post-WWII Warsaw—a city which was 85% destroyed with up to 60% of its population killed—adopted an ideological reformulation of ruins into so-called "economically valuable rubble."[73] Instead of turning rubble into ruins, as explored at the beginning of this paper, here ruins are turned into rubble. Rubble had less moral weight than ruins because ruins were physically suffused and rather associated with human remains and the mourning thereof.[74] The most adequate and practical solution to Warsaw's postwar rebuilding problem seemed to quickly turn rubble back into a valuable resource, namely into reusable concrete:

> Rubble fed into crushers is sorted depending on the diameter of the granulate (...) Water only lightly moistens granulate thrown into a cement mixer so that it does not reach saturation. Next, cement is added and only as much water as needed to moisten it. When mixing, the cement encircles the granulate

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72   Nigel Thrift and Stephen Graham, "Out of Order. Understanding Repair and Maintenance," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24.3 (2007): 1–25.

73   Elzanowski, "Ruins, Rubble", 128.

74   Ibid., 116, 129.

bonding only sporadically without affecting the air pockets. In this way, one obtains light, energy efficient, porous concrete.[75]

In other words, rubble is what I want to call and explore here as *suspended concrete*. "Suspension" marks the connection between two stable entities, between a beginning and an end. Rubble is the before and after of concrete. Suspension, however, should not be misunderstood as a form of delay which thrives towards completion. Akhil Gupta has strongly made a case for taking suspension not as "a temporary phase between the start of a project and its (successful) conclusion," but as "a condition in its own right"—a condition of being.[76] Suspension is, as Gupta argues, a "particularly interesting modality of infrastructural temporality."[77] I would then suggest that one understands "suspension" not only as an atmospheric or an infrastructural condition, but also as a particular human experiential condition. Suspension is an object and an analytical resource of temporality, but, first and foremost, it is an ever-extending dimension of the present twenty-first century experience. Much in line with rubble, other characterizing features of suspension are its instability, unsettledness, its potential danger, and its airy condition.[78]

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75 Ibid., 129.

76 Akhil Gupta, "The Future in Ruins: Thoughts on the Temporality of Infrastructure," In *The Promise of Infrastructure*, edited by Hannah Appel, Nikhil Anand, Akhil Gupta (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018); Akhil Gupta, "Suspension" Theorizing the Contemporary, *Cultural Anthro-pology* website, September 24, 2015, https://culanth.org/fieldsights/722-suspension.

77 Gupta, "Future in Ruins."

78 Timothy Choy and Jerry Zee, "Condition—Suspension," *Cultural Anthropology* 30.2 (2015): 210-23. The word "suspension" appears in many contexts. Cars have suspensions which allow them to reduce shocks. Students can be 'suspended' from school, which means excluded from an educational system. In chemistry, particles, which are neither dissolved nor separated, are 'suspended' when they are left floating around freely in a medium. In topology, suspension is a form of collapsing of planes or lines into points. Generally, one can think of "suspension" as a type of delay, postponement, prolongation, interruption, or exclusion. It literally means "to hang" ("Suspension," Wikipedia, accessed October 22, 2019, https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/suspension).

In his more recent chapter, Gupta describes how, during the suspension and afterlife of constructions (and not only destructions), one has to "maneuver around rubble" in the city of Bangalore. Rubble in Bangalore is concrete-turned-transient—it is *concrete-in-suspense*—, although not all rubble is concrete. As infrastructure's ruinated promise, "rubble here stands," so Gupta, "for the suspension between what was promised and what will actually be delivered." Despite the fact that Akhil Gupta does not pay close attention to the semantic differences between "rubble" and "ruin," he nonetheless provides a very vivid and materially-grounded ethnographic description of Bangalore's suspended infrastructure:

> Surrounding these ruins is rubble, alongside and on the roads: broken pieces of brick, tangled rebar, and broken concrete panels; *kacha* roads made of mud and stone; huge patches of tar and stone that have been used to hastily refill holes; pipes of all sizes and shapes, some of them broken and cracked; piles of dirt and rock; and dust, the particular dust of destruction, the rubble that emerges when buildings are demolished or foundations excavated. Driving in Bangalore is *to maneuver around the rubble*, to negotiate the bumps and slowdowns it creates, and to aspire to a better future, to a future with 'world-class' infrastructure.[79]

For Gupta, infrastructure is thus a movement, a maneuver, a process of ruination. He also refers to infrastructure's three dimensions—it is a channel that enables communication, travel, and transportation; it is a biopolitical project that exercises control and discipline; and it is a concrete instantiation of visions of the future.[80] What stands out here is that infrastructure is not only a mediation, a project and a vision. Rather, it is more specifically a ruined mediation, a destructive project, and a future in rubble (not in ruins). In one word, it is a broken promise, or "a promise intended to be broken."[81]

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79 Gupta, "Future in Ruins," 69 (emphasis mine).

80 Ibid., 65.

81 AbdouMaliq Simone, "Afterword: Come on out, you're surrounded: The be-

Conclusion, or Living in the Age of Rubbling

I have thus explored four broken promises in this paper: first, the German postwar promise of turning dispersed rubble into gathered ruins; second, the broken promise of Berlin Wall rubble as memory devices turned into touristic commodities; third, the empty promise of the state for informal dwellers to recover from disasters and to turn rubble into recyclable waste; as well as, fourth, the promise of infrastructural futures caught up in suspended concrete. I have also highlighted some of the groups and historical figures whose promises were, are, and will be broken. The *reversed flâneurs* in this paper were, among others, the rubble women, squatters and dwellers, the *Berliner Mauerspechte*, and construction workers. In contrast to Benjamin's *flâneur* who solely embodies a modern subjectivity which is based on 'his' disengaged watching of luxury-commodities on display, the other figures introduced here engage with the broken world in a more pragmatic and immediate fashion. They also do not fear to touch the most abject and discarded materials. I have depicted some of the strategies and modalities with which these people operate within fragmented infrastructures and in times of *suspension*, but the search for other contemporary rubble-gazers and reversed *flâneurs* does not finish here.

As a point of conceptual comparison and positioning of my writing about "rubbling," I end here by talking about two other strategies of living within this broken rubble world, namely with Jane Guyer's concept of "recuperation" and Bettina Stoetzer's exploration of Berlin's "Ruderal Ecologies." Jane Guyer, for instance, distinguished in her 2017 article "Aftermaths and Recuperations in Anthropology" between "recovery" as "the restitution, or revolutionary replacement, of whole systems," and

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tweens of infrastructure". *City: analysis of urban trends, culture, theory, policy, action* 19.2-3 (2015): 378. This is part of a longer quote from Simone: "Infrastructure always seems to promise something, and so often it seems as if it is a promise intended to be broken. Whether this is a matter of intended deceit or an ingenuous miscalculation as to how infrastructure will actually be used, and the costs entailed to keep it going, those responsible for its care often run to keep up or simply disappear from view."

"recuperation" which "refers to a process, which can include many heterogeneous elements chosen by a variety of actors, recorded in different situations by different scholars, which have been brought forward through time and applied to uncertainty."[82] As with the dwellers in South Africa, practices of recuperation, in contrast to processes of "recovery," "renewal," or "restoration," are selective, work on smaller scales and follow what Guyer calls "epistemologies of surprise." Anthropology's original project was to salvage, preserve, and recover totalities before they were lost. Today, in contrast, anthropology is not functioning as a ruin-preserver but as a rubble-observer. Without ever assuming a state of normalcy or projecting holism, the task for anthropologists (and historians) today, according to Guyer, is to attend to the small parts, to that which is considered to be of minimal value, to unfinished episodes, to the fragments. The word "fragment," so Guyer, derives from the verb *frangere*, which means to break off.[83] In other words, anthropology is the science of rubble, not of ruins.

Berlin's rubble has had and continues to have a life of its own,[84] whereas a ruin, following a famous phrase by Georg Simmel, is "a site from which life has departed."[85] Focusing on West Berlin rubble botany and urban gardening projects built in the shadows of border authorities, Bettina Stoetzer relates in her article on Berlin's "Ruderal Ecologies" that large rubble fields dotted Berlin's city center for decades and provided a habitat for many plants to flourish in the city for the first time. "Ruderal," so Stoetzer, is the term for this particular urban ecology. The term *ruderal* comes from *rudus*, which is also the Latin term for rubble.[86] Ruderal refers to plant communities that emerge spontaneously in disturbed environments considered hostile to life: sidewalk cracks, spaces alongside train tracks and roads, industrial sites, waste disposal areas, and rubble fields. For Stoetzer, ruderal is also a method of thinking across registers and it

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82   Guyer, "Recuperations in Anthropology," 82.

83   Ibid., 83.

84   Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies."

85   Viney, *Philosophy of Things,* 139.

86   Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies," 297.

serves as a guide to explore what lives in the midst of rubble.[87] Stoetzer's search for life among the cracks very much resonates with what Anna Tsing called "corners of livability" in her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*.[88] Tsing examines *matsutake* mushrooms as global commodities, but conceptually also as "guides" and "gifts" that uncontrollably grow in a world of blasted landscapes, in a world that falls apart or already lies in ruins.[89] Together with West Berlin rubble botanists, Stoetzer studied urban gardening projects and a famous touristic squatter tree house called *gecekondu*, which was built in the early 1980s by the Turkish resident Osman in the shadow of the Wall and of border authorities. She eventually claims to go one step further than Gastón Gordillo when she emphasizes that it is important "to go beyond destruction and situate one's analysis in the desire to forge new connections."[90] My exploration of rubble in the age of rubbling would thus provide an addendum to this Deleuzian notion and to Michel Foucault's comment (in his preface to Gilles Deleuze' and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*) about "our age of dispersion and specialization where 'hope' is lacking,"[91] but, as I would like to add, where little promises flourish within the cracks of this broken world.

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87 Ibid., 305.

88 Tsing, *Mushroom*.

89 Ibid., 2.

90 Stoetzer, "Ruderal Ecologies," 308.

91 Michel Foucault, Preface to *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* by Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari (University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xi-xiv.

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Verse-Reflections on Adorno's *Minima Moralia*

Christopher Norris[1]

(**Note**: The following poems attempt to refashion some cryptic and dialectically wiredrawn passages from Adorno's *Minima Moralia* into something more like Bertolt Brecht's tough-minded, down-to-earth didactic style.)

અન્જી

> Among today's adept practitioners, the lie has long since lost its honest function of misrepresenting reality. Nobody believes anybody, everyone is in the know. Lies are told only to convey to someone that one has no need either of him or his good opinion. The lie, once a liberal means of communication, has today become one of the techniques of insolence enabling each individual to spread around him the glacial atmosphere in whose shelter he can thrive.

> Theodor W. Adorno, "Promise me this, my child', in *Minima Moralia: reflections on a damaged life*, trans. E.P.N. Jephcott

1 'Promise me this, my child'

What happened to the good old lie,
The kind the bourgeois told,
As if to say 'the rules apply,
It's just that they're on hold'?

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1 Christopher Norris is Emeritus Professor in Philosophy at the University of Cardiff. In his early career he taught English Literature, then moved to Philosophy via literary theory, and has now moved back in the direction of creative writing. He has published widely on the topic of deconstruction and is the author of more than thirty books on aspects of philosophy, literature, the history of ideas, and music. More recently he has turned to writing poetry in various genres, including – unusually – that of the philosophical verse-essay. He has published several collections of poems, including The Matter of Rhyme and For the Tempus-Fugitives, and is now working on a further volume. He has lectured and held visiting posts at universities around the world, and his books have been translated into many languages.

Back then you got the thing to fly,
That falsehood they'd been sold,
In ways that kept the other guy
Within the human fold.

The message went: 'let's not deny
You fell for my fool's gold,
Yet we matched wits before you'd buy,
Cajoler and cajoled'.
Those bourgeois still met eye-to-eye,
They knew the rules of old;
They'd lie to you, they'd bleed you dry,
But keep you from the cold.

What's changed is how the glacial freeze
Creeps on from day to day,
How speech turns icy by degrees
As falsehood makes its way.

For now the dupe is one who sees
Straight through the games they play,
Those types whose every lie says 'Please
Don't trust a word I say'.

It's old-style liars hide the keys
To truth for fear that they
Might slip up when they shoot the breeze
To keep the cold at bay.

Now no-one needs to tack and tease,
Like predator and prey,
When post-truth adepts lie with ease
And there's no price to pay.

Let's not look back in fond regret
Nor wish they'd come again,
Those times when lies were ways to get

One up yet still maintain

A semblance of the etiquette
That bid us not disdain
Our dupes because the trap we set
Turned out a precious bane.

No call for such nostalgia, yet
Those lies required we feign
Some lingering grasp of untruth's debt
To truths denied in vain.

Now post-truth stalks the internet,
That permafrost terrain,
While truth becomes an empty threat
In error's's vast domain.

There's those who say we'll pay the price,
Pay dearly in the end,
When trust runs out and only ice
Can bind false friend to friend.

Some straightforward lying might suffice,
They say, to halt the trend
And yield, from that old-fashioned vice,
A new truth-dividend.

But those there are who warn: think twice
Before you re-extend
Lie's old domain lest, in a trice,
You've no old truths to mend.

For that's the snake in paradise,
The ladder you descend
When arctic bounds grow imprecise
And lies with falsehoods blend.

2 Gold Assay

Like gold, genuineness, abstracted as the proportion of fine metal, becomes a fetish . . . . The ungenuineness of the genuine stems from its need to claim, in a society dominated by exchange, to be what it stands for but is never able to be. The apostles of genuineness, in the service of the power that now masters circulation, dignify the demise of the latter with the dance of the money veils.

Adorno, 'Gold Assay', in *Minima Moralia*, trans. Jephcott

Deep thinkers talk of 'authenticity',
But we know that's the verbal rot
By which the fascist demagogues decree
We've no role in their master-plot.

It's just another piece of jargon, see,
One tailor-made to fill the slot
Where their kowtowing to the powers-that-be
Goes well with words like *Volk*, *Land*, *Gott*.

Please note Professor Heidegger when he
Reveals how language goes to pot,
With all those pompous jargon-words that we
Non-dupes are always quick to spot.

'In language lies our German destiny,
Our very ownmost sense of what
It takes for *Dasein*'s chosen few to free
Us from that thought-infected *Weltarm* lot.'

Their message, bluntly: if your race i.d.
Or native language-ways are not
Echt-Deutsch then you can stuff that empty plea
And scram, you rootless polyglot!

Let's not deny: their language-pedigree
Is one directly aimed to swat

Aside all those whose tongue or family-tree,
On their view, counts for didley-squat.

So when they next head off on some wild spree
Of hunting out old meanings hot
From source, just say 'junk-etymology
Plus racist crap: your crowning shot!'.

They're all the same, those real 'authentic' guys,
They all think true-to-self's the way
To find the soul beneath the social lies,
As in some private gold-assay.

They're wrong because the self they recognise,
Or think they do, will never stay
Put long enough or auto-stabilise
To yield a solid underlay.

That's why the authenticity they prize,
That fake of fakes, must cause dismay
In any fool depth-voyager who buys
Into its endless shadow-play.

We're social selves, existing in the eyes
Of others, those whose looks convey
Whatever fictive tales we must devise
To keep that wounding truth at bay.

Why not take this on board and recognise
How nothing now escapes the sway
Of capital, how it commodifies
Our lives, our loves, and everyday

Transactions to the point where 'worldly-wise'
Means 'giving head and heart no say,
Regarding men as so much merchandise,
And ordering all things just as they,

The boss-class, want'. So, should you think to rise
'Authentically' above the fray
Of inauthentic life, think how much ties
You to it like a tourniquet.

As Marx once said, no end to how it screws
The lifeworld up, this latest mode
Of capitalist production where we lose
Our human traits, where goods upload
Them in distorted form, where what we choose
To buy defines us, and we're owed
Respect just in so far as we abuse
The trust of others as our moral code.

'Be real authentic, self-invest your dues',
The gold-assayers said but showed,
To keen-eared jargon auditors, just whose
Crass slogans echoed down the road.

It's still the populist's most favored ruse,
That sense of genuineness bestowed
On trivial thoughts by summoning the muse
Of fake profundity to goad

The spirit-craving mob. Hear how they fuse
The lethal rhetoric that flowed
From Hitler's progeny with what ensues
When leopards ravage soul's abode.

For it's the same sound rings in their tattoos,
Those celebrants, as in an ode
Of Hölderlin as Heidegger construes
Each *eigentlich* semantic node.

3 Invitation to the Dance

Schiller's dictum that "Life's good, in spite of it all", *papier-mâché* from the start, has become idiocy now that it is blown into the same trumpet as omnipresent advertising, with psycho-analysis, despite its better possibilities, adding its fuel to the flames.

Adorno, 'Invitation to the Dance', in *Minima Moralia*

'Life's good, in spite of all', so Schiller said,
An idiotic slogan, just what you'd
Expect from one who touted dreams long shed
By stronger minds in his idealist brood.

It's like the ersatz Freudian stuff they spread,
Those US shrinks, among the host of screwed-
Up types who crave mere happiness instead
Of irksome truths to further blight their mood.

Just ask me, 'where's that foolish fancy bred,
That soothing Ego-trip that Freud eschewed?',
And I'll say: 'there, within the addled head
Of every dupe, promiscuous or prude'.

No wonder they're so grievously misled,
The witless, Disney-dreaming multitude
Who think that if things just work out in bed
Then they can quit the drink and comfort-food.

In truth, it's Freud's enlightenment they dread,
His knowledge of that old, unceasing feud
Between the life- and death-drives whose dark thread
He traced through all the lives it snagged and skewed.

The shrinks say: 'just cheer up, your demon's fled,
It's all those inhibitions you've accrued:
Hang loose, take Schiller's joyous creed as read,
And let Id's death-reminders not intrude'.

That's the *promesse de bonheur* they're drip-fed,
The dream that has those movie-goers wooed
By screening just the Ego-edited
Director's cut, all deathly thoughts tabooed.

Yet, screen it as you may, you'll end up dead,
A scene that haunts remembrance though unviewed
Through all your Hollywood romances wed
To happy endings dutifully cued.

Far less, not more of them you need to shed,
Those inhibitions properly construed
As lingering markers of a truth long sped
Beyond the bounds of fake beatitude.

It's by the pleasure-sniffing nose you're led,
You blissed-out fools and Ego-ticklers who'd
Prefer that even Freud's harsh truths not shred
Distortion's veil but see the lie renewed.

4 Little Hans

'Little Hans went out into the wide world' (German song, cited by Adorno)

Whatever the intellectual does is wrong. He experiences drastically and vitally the ignominious choice that late capitalism secretly presents to all its dependents: to become one more grown-up, or to remain a child.

Adorno, 'Little Hans', in *Minima Moralia*

Go out into the wide world, little Hans,
And you'll be screwed whichever path you take,
Whether it's intellect that grabs its chance
Or thought that takes back seat for action's sake.

Play worldly-wise, adopt a cynic stance,
And everyone will guess you're on the make,

Suspect your hidden motives at a glance,
And ask: Why push that notion? What's your stake?

Play man of thought, proclaim you'll break a lance
For intellect (should you have one to break),
And they'll conclude you're in a state of trance
From which hard knocks might just jolt you awake.

Then should you bring about some great advance
In that line, some big breakthrough fit to shake
Their certitudes, they'll say 'thought's old romance
Needs busting once again: a piece of cake!'.

You're stuck: let practicality enhance
Your hitting-power and have the label 'fake'
Affixed to your ideas, or look askance
At action-man and feel your thought-world quake.

You'll say: that world's no place for high finance,
For crude ideas that let the bankers rake
Their profits in; but ask how its slam-dance
Can wrong-foot theirs and thinking goes opaque.

A sad yet salutary truth: the fate
Of thought is always intricately tied
To economic factors such as rate
Of interest, unemployment, credit-side

And debt-side figures, this year's estimate
Of next year's borrowing, a sudden slide
In market share, or unexpected spate
Of firms gone bust with impact system-wide.

O Little Hans, sincerely though you hate
These crass considerations when applied
In intellect's domain, still you'll negate
Thought's very point and purpose if you hide

Its real conditions and the shifting freight
Of concrete circumstance that, specified
More plainly, might just trip you as you skate
So blithely where the wise adjust their stride.

Yet swing too far that way and you'll prostrate
Yourself before big business, take as guide
The FT Index, and let them dictate
The terms on which you thinkers must abide

Their insult to the fiercely guarded state
Of intellectual purity you've tried
To keep in place. Poor Hans, how it must grate,
That voice of worldly wisdom long denied!

Reflect a moment and you'll come to see
Your sad dilemma as the kind that's thrown
Up constantly when capital's the key
To figuring why your thoughts are not your own,

Why counter-thoughts reject your freedom-plea,
What unknown force sets limits on the known,
And how the rules are framed to check that we
Keep clear of capital's exclusion-zone.

Good sense says it's a matter of degree,
Thoughts not too worldly-wise, nor too high-flown,
Though principally it serves to guarantee
They don't become too revolution-prone

Or apt to strike the current powers-that-be
As cutting perilously near the bone
By showing there's no neutral referee
While capital's the power behind the throne.

Your choice, dear Hans: protracted infancy
For lack of business-bred testosterone,

Or giving in to their wise-up decree
That childishness be rapidly outgrown,

That every thought demand its proper fee,
That thinking seek out targets like a drone,
And adulthood reveal that nobody
Thinks well by strength of intellect alone.

5   Gaps

Anyone who died old and in the consciousness of a seemingly blameless success, would secretly be the model schoolboy who reels off all life's stages without gaps or omissions, an invisible satchel on his back . . . . Thought waits to be woken one day by the memory of what has been missed, and to be transformed into teaching.

Adorno, 'Gaps', in *Minima Moralia*

One mark of a well-crafted text: the gaps.
'Leave no loose ends, let every link show plain':
A schoolboy rule, enforced lest they should lapse
From drilled routine to thought, the teacher's bane.

They're unmarked spaces on our mental maps,
Anomalies that tell us 'think again',
Or sudden jolts that caution us: perhaps
Our mental tracks are what derailed the train.

How often it's a trite conclusion caps
Some stretch of reasoning eager to maintain
The rule, link up, avoid all booby-traps,
And keep conjecture on the tightest rein.

Totality's the monstrous beast that wraps
Its grubby paws around the teeming brain,
While thought disrupted fashions from the scraps
New linkages at each point in the chain.

Let paradox abound so thinking taps
Unknown resources, strikes a tangent plane,
Or stretches logic's tether till it snaps
And cuts across the rule-conformist grain.

Don't say: 'Adorno, give that stuff a rest,
Quit theorising, life's too short to waste
On running life-experience past a test
No real-world operator ever faced'.

Those textual gaps are everything repressed,
Struck out, distorted, edited, displaced,
Redacted, yet obliquely self-confessed
In lifelines by a skillful linesman traced.

The true-confessors say: make a clean breast
Of all your woes, give someone else a taste
Of what you've gone through, let the shrink digest
Whatever drives your psychic cut-and-paste.

Yet it's those shrinks, the 'get it off your chest'
Brigade, whose strikingly un-Freudian haste
For closure shows how deeply they're distressed
By gaps of sense too large or oddly spaced.

For there's no life so uniformly blest,
Or cursed, that its five-act progression's graced
Like that of narcissists who manage best
With text and lifeline smoothly interlaced.

Strict conscience says: the one maths-lesson missed
Through sleeping-in is one you won't get back
In a whole life spent pondering its gist,
So set the clock and cut yourself no slack.

Too true, yet time may teach the rigorist
How much may come of lives that veer and tack,

Or greet the schoolboy as he takes a twist
Of truant wandering from the proper track.

Your pupil who works dully through his list
Of tick-box tasks may yet turn out to lack
The gap-strewn way around that yields a tryst
With truth down error's seeming cul-de-sac.

Blake's message: if the fool would but persist
In folly, then the error-toll might stack
Up high enough to vindicate the blissed-
Out sleeper, not the kid with books to pack.

Learn then from him the bad, recidivist
Schoolboy how those content to take the flack
May earn, along with some slaps on the wrist,
Some credit for their gap-diviner's knack.

6 Constanza

The love which in the guise of unreflecting spontaneity and proud of its
alleged integrity relies exclusively on what it takes to be the voice of the heart,
and runs away as soon as it no longer thinks it can hear that voice, is in this
supreme independence precisely the voice of society.

Adorno, 'Constanza', in *Minima Moralia*

I write or speak 'I love you', and the phrase
Comes back at me in quote-marks, seeing I
Spent all those pages setting out the ways
That love's the bourgeoisie's great alibi.

'Pure feeling': thus a heartless world portrays
The X that waters tear-ducts long run dry,
That shrouds harsh outlines in a gentle haze,
And bids hard-bitten moguls yield a sigh.

Worse still: the more word gets around, 'love pays!',
The more we're taken in and pipe an eye
At love-scenes expertly devised to raise
The stakes till even the love-experts cry.

Don't call me cynic: I'll be quick to praise
The lover who gives bourgeois love the lie,
Who vows to remain faithful all his days,
And not give love's roulette another try.

Credit where due: if the false Don betrays
Those women and himself, then how deny
The truth his faithful opposite displays
To words that no fresh vow can falsify.

Yet there's a tipping-point where virtue strays
Into the realm where dubious motives pry,
Where the fake lure of bourgeois love-talk lays
Its trap, and who's to say you're the good guy?

It's that same cult of feeling, those clichés
They put about, the heroines who'd die
For love or couples love-struck at first gaze,
That let the Juan echoes multiply

Till every fresh endearment just conveys
The pressing bourgeois need to find some high-
Toned state of mind or soul that might erase
The trademark tags from which the traders shy.

Small wonder if such thoughts are apt to faze
Those long-time lovers – like myself and my
Devoted Gretel – whose life-resumés
And domicile beneath a foreign sky

Bear witness: how should that bourgeois malaise,
That sickness-unto-change-of-heart, apply

To us long love-united emigrés
Whose hearts and minds well know the reason why?

Yet still the thought returns: no end of ways
Heart hoodwinks mind and then's self-hoodwinked by
Its own complicity with every phase
Of love's old trade with feelings gone awry.

7   Magic Flute

Contemplation, as a residue of fetishist worship, is at the same time a stage
in overcoming it. As radiant things give up their magic claims, renounce the
power with which the subject invested them and hoped with their help himself
to wield, they become transformed into images of gentleness, promises of a
happiness cured of domination over nature.

Adorno, 'Magic Flute', in *Minima Moralia*

They held you spellbound once, the jewels you sought
And coveted, then hoarded till the sight
That kept you captive threatened to distort
Your every sense-modality, to blight

Your life-world by their radiance, and thwart,
Like scenes repressed but harshly dragged to light,
Your wish to have them not so dearly bought
Since touched by art's fine gift to put things right.

Listening to Mozart we have little thought
Of what old savageries are taking flight
In such beguiling melodies, what sort
Of half-remembered horrors may affright

The ear and mind less adequately taught
To filter out those overtones that might
Subdue our weak defences. They exhort:
Make no mistake, it's his Queen of the Night

Wins Mozart's verdict in the only court
That counts, the one where rival parties fight
It out between them and the bloody sport
Is waged each time on art's delusive height.

My point in brief: it took *peine dure et fort*,
The torturer's technique, to tame those bright
Jewel-treasuries whose gleam might else abort
Whatever signs of progress we could cite

Against the evidence of lives cut short
By avarice or man's dark appetite
For every fetish-object finely wrought
To conjure blood-lust in its acolyte.

How then appease the jewel-clad juggernaut
If not by art's veiled promise to requite
The ancient cravings of a creature caught,
Like Lucifer, in dark-bedazzled plight.

8 English Spoken

In my childhood, some elderly English ladies with whom my parents kept up relations often gave me books as presents: richly illustrated books for the young. All were in the language of the donors: whether I could read it none of them paused to reflect. The peculiar inaccessibility of the books . . . filled me with the belief that in general objects of this kind were not books at all, but advertisements, perhaps for machines like those my uncle produced in his London factory.

> The archaic, passionate nouns of the original [Brahms song] have been turned into catchwords for a hit song, designed to boost it. Illuminated in the neon light switched on by these words, culture displays its character as advertising.

> Theodor Adorno, 'English Spoken', in *Minima Moralia*

Those English aunts have much to answer for.
They gave me wondrous picture-books to read.

The pictures met my every boyish need.
Surely the texts had kindred gifts in store?

Not proper aunts, but ladies guaranteed,
My parents thought, to help the boy explore
Those topics recommended all the more
By text and image deftly inter-keyed.

One point the aunts elected to ignore
Or simply, being English, failed to heed,
Was that my speaking German might impede
My figuring out the image-text *rapport*.

It left me, decades later, up to speed
With English, yet still seeing nothing more
Than ad-man tricks or senseless signs galore
When faced with any illustrated screed.

The doubt remained, the book-contagion spread.
O why those garish pictures, words opaque,
Mute titles flagged up clear in nights awake,
All pleading yet refusing to be read?

My English uncle's factory would take
Out whole-page ads to keep the readers fed
With pictographs that kept his firm ahead
And them supplied with things he used to make.

That old delirium, one I've scarcely shed,
Had me soon thinking all the content fake
In books and pictures, done for profit's sake
Or market-share, whatever Uncle said.

It's not the sort of feeling you can shake
Off once it's got to you, that sense of dread
When first you light upon, then lose, some thread
Of sense that tells you: this is make-or-break.

Now I'm an exile, here in Disneyland-
Writ-large, Los Angeles, and the US
Strikes me as ad-man's paradise, no less
Than Uncle's mag-shots for the family brand.

It's cheap tunes for cheap sentiments ('God bless
America'), myths fake or second-hand,
Along with twists on Custer's doomed Last Stand,
Plus daily updates peddled in the press.

Just listen to that song of Brahms, now bland
As some love-crooner's ditty as they mess
With Heyse's words and turn to mawkishness
Those lines that once made hopes and hearts expand.

On every front our intellects regress,
Mine as the words grow dark when closely scanned,
Theirs through responses pre-rehearsed or canned
Till all but we dark-dwellers acquiesce.

See how that lyric piece acquires the sheen
Of Broadway lights, the glitzy neon glow
That says: 'here's what you arty types now owe
To advertising and the silver screen!

Just drop the art-talk, let the aura go,
View neon-lit, enjoy the culture-scene,
Make stimulus-response your fixed routine,
And don't have old Adorno spoil the show'.

It's like the ads for Uncle's new machine –
Sound product, no doubt, though the streamline flow
Of imagery says smoothly: 'Got the dough?
Then we'll keep operations squeaky-clean'.

That's why I'd look at books and hardly know,
At times, what all the hieroglyphs might mean,

Or whether all those pictures in between
Meant *ad*, not *book*, best fitted each tableau.

Maybe the culture-industry's now played
A final, killer trick; outsmarted me,
Its arch-decipherer, with the master-key
That sets my reading skills to entry-grade.

Perhaps – more welcome thought – it's helped to free
For me what each Parisian arcade
Showed Benjamin: how, as old fashions fade,
They leave a breathing-space for reverie.

It's there my English aunts and uncle made
Their deepest mark: by bringing me to see
Each text as an oneiric spelling-bee,
An interzone of sense-for-image trade.

Yet always it's the culture-industry
In place already, some old hit-parade
Motif that haunts the Mozart serenade,
That overlays Brahms' lyric melody,

Puts Schubert *Lieder* firmly in the shade,
Demands the poets bend a votive knee
To Tin Pan Alley, and – the powers decree –
Count Europe's culture-debt as yet unpaid.

9 Sacrificial Lamb

Dictation makes it possible for the author to slide into the position of the critic during the earliest phases of the production process. What one puts down is non-binding, provisional, mere material for reworking; once transcribed, however, it appears as something alienated and to a certain extent objective . . . . Thanks are due to those who take dictation, when they flush out the author at the right moment through contradiction, irony, nervousness, impatience and lack of respect.

Adorno, 'Sacrificial Lamb', in *Minima Moralia*

I speak my thoughts as thinking finds its way.
He listens, takes them down as I dictate;
Attentive, silent, thoughtful, up to speed,
Yet analyst and ironist combined.

Thoughts tentative, as suits a first assay,
Caught 'on the wing', well short of finished state,
Though by his dispensation somehow freed
To think what else might not have come to mind.

His subtlest gestures have their role to play,
His frowns, sighs, nods, slight wince when phrases grate,
And suchlike ways to let me know that he'd
Perceived me heading for some double-bind,

Found biases that led my thought astray,
Seen sticking-points I failed to indicate,
Or guessed beforehand how I might proceed
To leave those looming obstacles behind.

Call it a quaint old practice though you may,
A bourgeois thing, way past its use-by date,
Or else – on this we're pretty much agreed –
    An intellectual's get-out from the grind

    Of *ars scribendi*, still I'd want to say
Dictation has this virtue: to negate,
Like dialectics, any thought decreed
Truth absolute, infallibly divined.

It shows your idols to have feet of clay,
Your timeless truths soon going out-of-date,
And those, your precious sentences, to need
His quiet assent before they're countersigned.

Then there's the tell-tale gestures that betray
Some doubt, some hint that has you hesitate
Before permitting all the world to read
A claim too sweeping, crude, or ill-defined.

Yet if this next-word-hanger leaves you prey
To doubts and self-misgivings, he's a straight-
Man, goad and trickster also, one whose lead
May point your way to regions of a kind

Unlooked-for in the course of day-to-day
Philosophising or the null debate
Of minds self-tutored never to exceed
The 'laws of thought', canonically enshrined.

For it's the risker's blessing they convey,
The gift of those who pull down to create,
Who think no safe conclusion guaranteed
Since all truths come with errors close entwined.

That's how he merits his Socratic pay,
That shrewd amanuensis; by the rate
Of change in monologic when it's keyed
To thoughts aslant, resistant, non-aligned.

10 I.Q.

> While thought has forgotten how to think itself, it has at the same time become its own watchdog. Thinking no longer means anything more than checking at each moment whether one can indeed think . . . . As thought earlier internalized the duties exacted from without, today it has assimilated to itself its assimilation into the surrounding apparatus, and is thus condemned even before the economic and political verdicts on it come fully into force.
>
> Adorno, 'I.Q.', in *Minima Moralia*, trans. Jephcott

You've caught me napping yet again – that's you,
Old teacher in the wily ways
Of dialectic, always out to slew
The course of fixed thought-habits, raise
The stakes by lightning coup and counter-coup,
Expose unguarded turns of phrase,
Show hidden premises not followed through,
Reveal the symptom that betrays
A psychic block, shift viewpoint bang on cue
To bring the dupes up short, and faze
Those predisposed, like me, to think they knew
Enough by now to self-appraise,
To make the grade as readers, fit though few,
Whom no such jump-cuts can amaze
Since having you as guide (plus high IQ)
Got them well past the entry phase.

That's how you put critique in first to bat,
When you say IQ's just a test
Of mind-routines or habits got off pat,
Of giving active thought a rest,
Avoiding any doubt-inducing spat
With dialectics, faring best

At thinking-tasks you've long been expert at,
Tasks set by those you've second-guessed
A hundred times, and showing it's old hat
To you, this endless need to manifest
Your role as thought's internal bureaucrat,
Poised at society's behest
To self-apply its prudent caveat
Against all thinking-ventures pressed
Beyond the caution: 'let him bell the cat
Who counts us mice with nine lives blest'.

Thought its own watchdog – that's the gist of your
Mind-wrenching text: to have us note,
And strive against, the thought-debasing chore
Of IQ tests and every rote-
Like mental exercise that tells us more
About what has us by the throat,
Out there and deep within, than what small store
Of wit it takes for some to gloat
'We're way up-scale', as if one's IQ score
Were what best sorted sheep from goat,
Thought's poor foot-soldiers from its elite corps,
And so ensure that those who float
Straight to the top are those who soon deplore
All risky ventures to promote
The thought that dialectic's mouse might roar
As monologic's antidote.

But then I think: that's one big reason why
I read Adorno, that desire
Of mine to test the speed and power of my
Thought-processes against his wire-
Drawn dialectics, or to come out high
On his thought-checklist, or acquire

Some trusty scale or progress-chart whereby
To match wits with the test-supplier
And so commit, however hard I try,
The same mistake that drew his ire,
The view that thinking's something you 'apply',
Some set of tools assembled prior
To any use you make of them, the lie
That has us ready reckoners aspire
To do no more than check or certify
We labouring brains are worth our hire.

And that's my point: so many ways they close
In tight to block thought's might-have-been,
Shades of the mental prison-house for those
Caught up in some crass thought-machine,
Like IQ testing, as the darkness grows,
Automatism works unseen,
And poor *res cogitans* no longer knows
What these forced protocols might mean.
Yet I think idly sometimes: 'Just suppose
Your quick-shift dialectics screen
From consciousness a protocol that goes
To reinforce its own routine,
A work-out discipline I shrewdly chose
To let me oscillate between
The restless energy of your thought-nettled prose
And my relief as test-scores intervene.

11 Splinter

> The splinter in your eye is the best magnifying-glass.
>
> T.W. Adorno, 'Dwarf Fruit', in *Minima Moralia*

It's truth's distorted form they magnify.
No shard so small it leaves the optic clear.
A gift, those splinters lodged in the mind's eye.

Your views are error-prone but truth can't lie;
Sight-lines locate obstructions, far or near.
It's truth's distorted form they magnify.

Light bends at speed but these it can't get by,
Wave-blockers, mote or beam, that interfere.
A gift, those splinters lodged in the mind's eye.

Thought's optics tell us certain laws apply;
No room for pleading 'just my viewpoint' here!
It's truth's distorted form they magnify.

Trust lenses crazed or cracked to show us why
Things aren't and cannot be as they appear.
A gift, those splinters lodged in the mind's eye.

Take your first test-results and then retry
The test with splinter plus good optics gear:
It's truth's distorted form they magnify.

Those false beliefs you're eager to deny
Have their close analogue in vision's sphere:
A gift, those splinters lodged in the mind's eye.

For that's what best enables thought to vie,
Sight-primed, with ideology's false steer:
It's truth's distorted form they magnify.

Let thought find out where sight-lines went awry
And vision compensate where mind-tracks veer.
A gift, those splinters lodged in the mind's eye;
It's truth's distorted form they magnify.

12   Truth and Happiness

True thoughts are those alone which do not understand themselves.
Love you will find only where you may show yourself weak without pro-
voking strength.
Adorno, 'Monograms', in *Minima Moralia*, trans. Jephcott

To happiness the same applies as to truth: one does not have it, but is in it.
Indeed, happiness is nothing other than being encompassed, an after-image of
the original shelter within the mother.
Adorno, 'Second Harvest', in *Minima Moralia*

It's truth that understanding falsifies
By holding firm to some fixed master-thought,
Denouncing error like a thief who flies
The scene yet turns state's evidence when caught.

Frame concepts as you may, they're under-size
And leak truth-content till the thinker's brought
To test what comes of thinking otherwise,
Of stretching dialectics live and taut.

The concept-master warns, 'Beware the spies,
There's harm afoot, stay watchful, clear the court!',
While dialectics ventures to advise
'Stay tuned, keep moving, jump the juggernaut!'.

For there's no understanding that applies,
No concept that fits content as it ought
Where truth can figure only in the guise
Of what's squeezed out, distended, or cut short.

Who says 'I know the truth' is one who tries
To fob us off with untruths of the sort
That monologic fails to recognize
Since else its master-plan would self-abort.

Who says 'There is *a* truth', yet quickly shies
From stating it – from tipping its full quart
Into thought's puny pint-pot – snaps the ties
That hold us anchored fast in falsehood's port.

Give ear to Blake: eternity's sunrise
Is where they live whose aphorisms thwart
The Owl of Minerva who'd analyze
What keeps its dawn so dark and error-fraught.

* * *

So too with happiness, likewise a state
Of perfect truth-relatedness you bear
To life or love, yet cannot estimate
How much falls to your own or fortune's share.

Again, reflection always comes too late,
Strikes *après-coup*, bids consciousness beware
How its insensate meddling may negate
The happiness that once dawned briefly there.

Say, if you like, we thinkers meditate
How best to steer just wide of Descartes' snare,
Let cogito rest easy, and create
A space for thoughts beyond its spotlight glare.

Or say: the thinking-cap had better wait
Till happiness seeks out a place elsewhere,
A place where it can quietly contemplate,
Not fully grasp, how everything's set fair.

Check pleasure-quotients at the standard rate,
Not zones of happiness, since they're
Not intervals that simply aggregate
But moments out of time, beyond compare.

Bourgeois ideologues may talk of fate,
The lucky break, the moment rich and rare,
A fate benign in kind (though they placate
The bourgeois gods by adding woes to spare).

Twixt bliss and thoughts of bliss we alternate,
We prying housemaids, taking every care
Lest happiness exceed its use-by date
And thought give notice: 'nothing to declare'.

* * *

It's where thought meets a limit-point, where those
Thought-tantalizers, truth and happiness,
Demand it draws reflection to a close
And risks one let-down *denouement* the less.

It's how contentment happens, how it goes,
How stray thoughts find stray moments they can bless,
Not thoughts pursued with fixed intent to pose
The question: how conceive such pure largesse?

No 'state of mind' or 'mood' this thing bestows,
This happiness some gesture may express
Or fleeting tone of voice that no-one knows
Quite how, as knowing goes, to repossess.

The gap's an existential one and grows
The more as each new let-down brings distress,
Or each precipitous descent to prose
From lyric heights now lost with no redress.

The notion of things falling out just so's
A large part of it, sanguine types profess,
Though casting back a warm romantic glow's
What underwrites its Hollywood success.

That frown of puzzlement is where it shows,
The meditator's quickening shift of stress
From pure beatitude, lest thinking slows
To zero-point, then starts to retrogress.

What they so fear is just what 'happy' owes
To 'happen'; how chance vistas iridesce,
Still points emerge amidst chaotic flows,
Or truths negated yield a hard-won yes.

13 Toy Shop

Just because he deprives the things with which he plays of their mediated usefulness, he seeks to rescue in them what is benign towards men and not what subserves the exchange relation that equally deforms men and things.

Adorno, 'Toy Shop', in *Minima Moralia*

They do their thing, their mechanized display.
The pipers pipe, the coachmen drive,
The tightrope walkers make their risky way,
The girls fetch water, divers dive,
And children, watching, clap their hands and say
(Or do we onlookers contrive
To make-believe they do?) how bright and gay
Life is for them, how they arrive
Each time around, perform their short ballet,
Their puppet-moves, and seem to thrive
On the sheer joy of it, not work for pay
Or drudgery of nine-to-five
But every day another holiday,

No endless struggle to survive,
To keep the wolves of capital at bay,
But graceful forms now dancing live!

So we suppose, we adults apt to blend
Our Marx with a nostalgic take
On childhood, one that retrodicts an end
To that enchanted time, a break
With all things joyous when the shades descend
And things once prized for their own sake,
Like toys, are now discovered to depend
On work to ease the deeper ache
Of hunger unappeased, of hours you spend
In weary toil, of days you wake
To yet more of the same, and how you bend
Your every sinew just to make
Ends meet while the life-changing dividend
That should be yours goes to the snake
In Eden, toy-dream spoiler, city friend
Whose profit swallows your life-stake.

And so it goes, the standard Marxist line
On exchange-value as the root
Of all iniquities, with which combine –
As it goes here – a child recruit
To represent the time when all was fine,
When things were value-tracked to suit
Their usefulness, and no percentage sign
Yet marked the quantity of loot
Drawn off as surplus value. Hence the shine
Accrued to playthings once we mute
The voice of sweated labour, or resign
That childhood world and substitute
The rituals fit for capital's high shrine,

The toys-turned fetishes, things cute,
Not magical, and all the Byzantine
Complexities Marx would impute
To the commodity, made near-divine
By each fantastic attribute.

The kids are smarter, not entirely sold
On playing dumb, typecast as blest
With a know-nothing role in the tale told
By Marx, his wake-up call addressed
To folk less innocent since pre-enrolled
In a hard school, folk long oppressed
By capital, hopes shattered, lives on hold,
Yet also, for that reason, knowing best
How a quite different story might unfold,
One where the put-upon can wrest
Power back from those who up to now controlled
Their every life-chance, since the test
Comes when class-lessons, got by heart of old
('Read, learn and inwardly digest')
With Marx's help, say to them: break the mold,
Leave no class-grievance unredressed.

Somehow the child knows this, and knows it well;
Perceives enough to think or feel
'These marionettes give notice of a hell-
On-earth they must as yet conceal
From little me, in my protective shell
Of infancy, but must reveal
Before too long when toys and puppets spell
The truth out plain. 'It's our appeal
To your humanity insists you dwell
On all that makes your lives unreal,
Reduces social ties to buy-and-sell,

Rates toy-shops for the cheapest deal
In town, and leaves us kids alone to tell
You this home truth: no chance you'll heal
The class-wound or ring capital's death-knell
Unless, in our *Marionettenspiel*,
You see reflected everything that fell
Beneath commodity's dark privy seal.

14 Finale

> The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption .... Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light.
>
> T. W. Adorno, 'Finale', in *Minima Moralia*

No daybreak gleam this side of darkest night.
What price redemption if not black despair?
Through rifts and crevices it leaps to sight
Like last survivors sending up a flare.

How shield against the messianic light?
It's UVF so exercise some care,
Although such radiant prospects may invite
Exposure past all hope of cell-repair.

'Perspectives must be fashioned', so you write,
To suit a landscape indigent and bare,
Yet in a darkness visible that might
Show new worlds set apart by just a hair.

Let optimists pursue their facile flight,
Like birds' wings beating feebly in thin air,
While pessimists, clued up on our bad plight,
May chance to glimpse the gleam beyond the glare.

Hopes lost or hopes betrayed are those that blight
All wishful thought of our entitled share,
Our future stake in happiness despite
The sceptic's wariness, the cynic's snare.

Leave just that room for hope, however slight,
And see new rifts emerging in the *clair-*
Obscur of scenes sun-darkened at the height
Where reason sleeps through history's nightmare.

Let heaven-sent utopias requite
The dreams of those with future-faith to spare
Who trust their *promesse de bonheur* despite
The piled-up wreckage lying everywhere.

The light's fast vanishing, the chinks are tight,
The signs ambiguous, the visions rare,
And all the victims massing to indict
The dream-utopian in his armchair.

Yet light may fall on history's black-and-white
In lucid figurations like a prayer
Redeemed, a chiaroscuro to excite
A sense of hues unknown emergent there.

No measuring finite against infinite,
No way that scales so disparate might square,
Until truth's dawn shows all things heteroclite
Now reconciled yet each beyond compare.

The lively voice of Critical Theory

Berlin Journal of Critical Theory (BJCT) is a peer-reviewed journal which is published in both electronic and print formats by Xenomoi Verlag in Berlin. The goal is to focus on the critical theory of the first generation of the Frankfurt School and to extend their theories to our age. Unfortunately, it seems that most of the concerns and theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are neglected in its second and third generations.

We believe that the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School are still capable of explaining many social, cultural, and political problems of our time. However, in some cases, we need to revise those theories. For example, the culture industry in our time can also work with a different mechanism from that described by Adorno and Horkheimer. In our age, the majorities can access the media and even respond to the messages which they receive – this is something which was not possible in Adorno and Horkheimer's time. But this doesn't mean that the culture industry's domination is over. Thus, we may need to revise the theory of the culture industry to explain the new forms of cultural domination in our age.

Therefore, we are planning to link the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt school to the problems of our age. This means that we are looking for original and high-quality articles in the field of critical theory. To reach our goals, we gathered some of the leading scholars of critical theory in our editorial board to select the best articles for this journal.

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