TOWARDS A '"NEGATIVE" UNIVERSAL HISTORY'

The Interpretation and Construction of History in the Philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno

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ABSTRACT

The guiding premise of this thesis is that Adorno's concept of history offers a critical means for the philosophical comprehension of the historical present. It seeks to expound the concept of history that emerges from Adorno's thought with a view to articulating its criticality for our own time in the wake of subsequent theoretical attempts to conceptualise history. I argue that although Adorno never articulates a 'world history', his conception of the *structure* of the historical process, particularly in his later works, begins to offer a way of critiquing history in a global sense. The first part of the work examines the discrete yet interrelated philosophical methods that Adorno utilises to interpret history. The second part consists in a reconstruction of the concepts totality and '"negative" universal history'. This takes place through an examination of the interrelation between Adorno's sociological and philosophical thought and a consideration of the theoretical possibilities and limitations that derive from Adorno's construal of the negative universal in relation to postcolonial theory.

The first chapter extracts from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* a theorisation of the formation of time-consciousness and sacrifice in the historical process. The second chapter contends that the significance of Adorno's development of the concept natural history rests on a re-interpretation of the nature-history and natural history-social history distinctions that allows for a critique of the ideological fallacy that derives from understandings of history in which history is viewed either as separate from nature, or collapsed into it entirely. The third chapter explores Adorno's re-working in *Negative Dialectics* of Hegel's tripartite division of the concept in *Science of Logic* and assesses its implications for the philosophical interpretation of history. Chapter four argues that Adorno's concept of the false social totality is underpinned by a conception of historical time in which the latter is constituted by heterogeneous, divergent temporalities that are unified in an ongoing process of totalisation. I claim that the historical process could lead to new configurations between subject and object and explore this in relation to the idea of the *Gesamtsubjekt*. Chapter five reconstructs Adorno's idea of '"negative" universal history' in the light of postcolonial theory. I argue that despite Adorno's displacement of considerations of the world-historical in favour of an examination of society as a false totality, the idea of a '"negative" universal history' could be substantiated via a development of Adorno's concept and critique of integration.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Notes on Translations

Edmund Jephcott's translation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is utilised throughout this work. I usually cite Dennis Redmond's translation of *Negative Dialectics*, available to download online. I indicate in the text if the E.B. Ashton translation is used. I have included references to Adorno's *Gesammelte Schriften* and to the *Nachgelassene Schriften* throughout the work. The full bibliographic details of the latter are listed separately in the bibliography. Any alterations that I have made to existing translations are indicated in the text.

DE	*Dialectic of Enlightenment*
ED	*Einführung in die Dialektik*
ES	*Einleitung in die Soziologie*
GF	*Zur Lehre von der Geschichte und von der Freiheit*
GS	*Gesammelte Schriften*
HF	*History and Freedom*
HTS	*Hegel: Three Studies*
ID	*Introduction to Dialectics*
IS	*Introduction to Sociology*
MM	*Minima Moralia*
ND	*Negative Dialectics*
P	'Progress'
PD	*The Positivist Dispute*
PETG	*Philosophische Elemente einer Theorie der Gesellschaft*
PETS	*Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*
RCT	'Reflections on Class Theory'
S	'Society'
SD	'"Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories'
SO	'On Subject and Object'

CONTENTS

PART TWO

Introduction

> We are neither simply spectators of world history, free to frolic more or less at will within its grand chambers, nor does world history, whose rhythm increasingly approaches that of the catastrophe, appear to allow its subjects the time in which everything would improve on its own.[1]

I

Adorno was acutely aware of both the necessity and the conceptual and political stakes of philosophising about history (*Geschichte*).[2] In the history model of *Negative Dialectics* and in his lectures on history that took place between 1964 and early 1965, Adorno suggests that for philosophy to survive and not lapse into empty method, it must become history, while historiography is now only possible as the philosophy of history. Furthermore, the philosophy of history must involve the *interpretation* of history.[3] Philosophical history, or philosophy as history, he further suggests, reaches its apotheosis in both Hegel and Marx, but following on from actual history, conferring (positive) meaning to the historical process is no longer tenable, yet nor can history be viewed only as an unstructured collection of facts or events in positivist fashion, as this leads to acceptance of the status quo and the so-called 'cult of the facts'.[4] It is this problem – that is, the problem of how history is to be interpreted and constructed without attributing a positive meaning to the historical process yet also holding on to the idea that history possesses a structure and is more than only the ebb and flow of events – that forms one of the nerve centres of Adorno's philosophy.

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[1] Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 1998), pp. 89–104 (p. 99); *GS*, 10.2:568.

[2] It should be pointed out that the concept 'history' that is under examination is not a historiographical one, despite the fact that Adorno suggests that historiography should become indistinguishable from philosophy, but rather the history that Reinhardt Koselleck defines as 'the collective singular form of *Geschichte*, which since around 1780 can be conceived as history in and for itself in the absence of an associated subject or object.' Reinhart Koselleck, *Future's Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 236. For a brief history of the trajectory of the concept 'history' (*Geschichte*) in the German context and its differentiation from *Historie*, see François Hartog, Michael Werner, 'History/Story', in *Dictionary of Untranslatables,* ed. Barbara Cassin, trans. Steven Rendall et al (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 445–447. It should be noted that nowhere in Adorno's work is this difference registered, and he tends to utilise 'Geschichte' rather than 'Historie'.

[3] See *ND*, 295–297; *GS*, 6:297; *HF*, 10; *GF*, 17, *HF*, 40; *GF*, 60.

[4] *HF*, 12; *GF*, 19.

This work takes as its starting point the premise that Adorno's thought is particularly well placed to offer a critical-philosophical intervention into the project of constructing a concept of history from the perspective of the socio-historic present, but that this is something that must be demonstrated rather than assumed in advance. It also stems from a suspicion that Adorno's extensive contribution to this area of inquiry has often been simplified in subsequent literature, and sometimes reduced to a bricolage of the thinkers from whom he drew, leading to a neglect of the conceptual specificities that characterise his own philosophical interventions on this subject. My intention is to elaborate *how* Adorno's concept of history is to be interpreted both immanently within the trajectory of his own thought through an examination of the constellation of concepts and interpretive methods that cluster around his treatment of history,[5] without thereby suggesting that any readily adumbrated 'theory' or 'philosophy' of history can be extracted from his work. I also gauge the limitations within Adorno's own conceptual schema that I take to be instructive in questions that are central for an examination of the internal problems that inhere in the concept 'history' viewed from a philosophical perspective. The idea that Adorno arrives at a pessimistic or declinist philosophy of history that precludes the possibilities of a critical stance towards the historical process is an objection that has been repeatedly levelled but also repeatedly disproven in the literature on the subject. It is a charge, however, that cannot be dismissed out of hand, but the manner in which it is to be refuted can take place from a number of different vantage points, with varying theoretical implications.

This work is situated at the intersection between two theoretical trends. First, the revival of that once seemingly outmoded branch of philosophy, that is, the *philosophy* or *philosophies* of history, a return that was in part inaugurated by the problematics laid bare by postcolonial, decolonial and critical race theory from the late seventies onwards.[6] The particular blend of optimism and conservatism – exemplified in Francis Fukuyama's infamous re-assertion of the Hegelian end of history thesis in the early nineties – that characterised a certain theoretical and political mood following the fall of the Soviet Union now lies buried under actual, interconnected historical developments: the increasing disparities produced by the global capitalist system, continued economic crises, and the new trajectories of capital; the condition of 'postcoloniality' coupled with existent forms of imperialism, colonialism and racism; the

[5] As Adorno states in *Negative Dialectics:* 'The determinate failure of all concepts necessitates the citation of others; therein originate those constellations, into which alone something of the hope of the Name has passed.' *ND*, 61–63; *GS*, 6:62. Following on from the Benjaminian constellation, the failure of 'history' as concept to properly encompass its contents necessitates the examination of concepts that are seemingly external to it but connected to it through relations whose articulation allows for the crystallisation of aspects of the concept that are occluded by its direct examination.

[6] See, for example, Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

resurgence of nationalisms and the so-called crisis of democracy; and the continuously worsening threat and actualisation of environmental catastrophe. In the face of an increasingly globalised 'world' and bleak and dystopic prognoses of the future, questions of history and historical temporality have again come to be perceived as possessing a theoretical urgency.[7] Second, and in a more historically and geographically specific intellectual tradition, that of the contested field of 'Critical Theory' developed both in the German context of the Frankfurt 'School' and its many afterlives,[8] but also outside of this remit, it appears that Adorno's thought has come to be viewed as offering a means of philosophically interrogating our own historical present in a way that did not seem to be the case in the decades following his death in 1969.[9] This is an intuition that might in part be responsible for the ever expanding literature on discrete aspects of Adorno's thought over the last thirty years that are, however, guided by various and often diverging theoretical-political objectives and agendas.[10] While an examination of Adorno's concept of history is not an entirely new line of inquiry,[11] this work forms a sustained attempt at articulating its criticality for our own time in the wake of subsequent theoretical attempts to conceptualise history.

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[7] Peter Osborne diagnoses the paradigmatic approach to questions of time and history in recent philosophy as leading to the affirmation of the former as an ontological category in contrast to 'history', which tends to appear in a 'narrowly empirical form.' See Peter Osborne, 'Marx and the Philosophy of Time', *Radical Philosophy*, 147 (2008), 15–22 (pp. 15–16). However, there are signs that this is shifting, both in continental philosophy broadly understood, but even in post-analytic departments.

[8] As has been noted by Rolf Wiggershaus, it is partly inaccurate to refer to those theorists that are now associated with the 'Frankfurt School' as a 'school'. The term 'school' implies that they propounded one coherent theory, and it is perhaps more fitting to refer to them as the Frankfurt 'circle', thus emphasising their institutional, theoretical and personal ties and affiliations but also the divergences that characterise the intellectual inclinations of each of their members and the fact that no one doctrine can be isolated. However, for the sake of simplicity, I retain the designator 'Frankfurt School'. See Rolf Wiggerhaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance,* trans. Michael Robertson (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1994), 1–5.

[9] The idea that Adorno's theoretical pertinence increases after his death is, to my knowledge, first articulated by Frederic Jameson in *Late Marxism,* published in 1990, and uncannily echoes Adorno's assertion of the actuality of Hegel's system as a philosophical expression of the socio-historic conditions of the twentieth century rather than late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century Prussia, albeit within the parameters of a far shorter time span. See Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno Or The Persistence of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2007), 5–6 and *HTS*, 27; *GS*, 5:273.

[10] Espen Hammer offers a comprehensive list of these, to which now might be added the emergence of analytic or post-analytic readings of Adorno in the Anglo-American but also the German context, as exemplified by thinkers such as Alison Stone and Fabian Freyenhagen, and also more economistic readings of Adorno, notably by Werner Bonefeld, which cannot comfortably be viewed as falling under Hammer's category of Marxist readings as exemplified by Robert Hullot-Kentor and Frederic Jameson. Rather, they are the conceptual descendants of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* theories of value beginning in the 1960s. See Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2006), 5–7.

[11] For two introductory essays that nonetheless interrogate in detail certain aspects of Adorno's philosophy of history, see Brian O'Connor, 'Philosophy of History', in *Adorno: Key Concepts*, ed. Deborah Cook (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008), pp. 179–196 and Iain Macdonald, 'Philosophy of History', in *A Companion to Adorno*, ed. Peter Gordon, Espen Hammer, Max Pensky (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2020), pp. 193–206.

It would be remiss to fail to point out the great socio-historical differences that exist between Adorno's time and our own, and it would be sheer anachronism to assume that Adorno's concept of history could be tasked with meeting the theoretical requisites that our own time demands. He could not have foreseen the various developments and historical dynamics that were to emerge after his own lifetime such as environmental crisis, the dominance of communication technologies, the fall of the Soviet Union, but also theoretical developments such as the emergence of postcolonial theory. A consideration of this historical difference points to the fact that Adorno's conceptual imaginary was different to our own. Central to it was his conceptualisation of Auschwitz, considered as both event and system, totalitarianism as a political phenomenon, and his experience of both fascism in Nazi Germany and a new kind of capitalism in exile in America. There is a danger inherent in criticising a philosopher's construal of history from the perspective of the present because it has the advantage of taking place with hindsight. However, there is a deeper structure that underlies Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process that does not remain confined to a consideration of the particularities of his own historical experience. As I will attempt to consider in the conclusion of this work, it is not a case of separating the 'dead' aspects of Adorno's thought from those that are 'living' but rather to attempt to gauge them through their mediation.

This thesis is composed of two parts. The shorter first part consists of three chapters that take the form of largely self-contained analyses of distinct yet interrelated methods for the philosophical interpretation of history that emerge from a consideration of Adorno's work, based on critical expositions of aspects of major texts and lectures in which the concept history plays a central role, principally 'The Idea of Natural-History', *Dialectic of Enlightenment, Negative Dialectics*, and the lectures on history. The expositions will then allow for a more precise conceptual mapping of Adorno's concept of history in the second part of the thesis. In these chapters, I do not intend to isolate discrete procedures that exist in Adorno's philosophy. Rather, I aim to closely discern the specificities that demarcate Adorno's earlier and later thought, and thus place into question the idea that Adorno's thought was characterised by a 'remarkable consistency' over time,[12] at least in connection to his philosophical treatment of history, although not at the expense of gauging the continuities that do exist. There is a discernible shift in Adorno's later thought that appears to necessitate the attempt at comprehending history in a more global sense, corresponding to his move towards Hegel and Marx from the late thirties onwards and to the solidification of his sociological thought, and a move away from the arguably more localised comprehension of history that occurs in earlier texts such as *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These chapters largely take place immanently to

[12] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and the Frankfurt Institute* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), xii.

Adorno's philosophy, rather than introducing elements of more recent thought, although an exception to this is a brief assessment of the implications that Adorno's concept of natural history might have for theories of the Anthropocene, in chapter two.

The longer second part of the thesis is in part a work of reconstruction, and thus necessarily privileges certain aspects of Adorno's thought over others. A central premise of this thesis is that despite the way in which Adorno never articulates anything like a 'world history', his treatment of the *structure* of the historical process, particularly in his later works, begins to offer a means by which to critique the historical process in a global sense. The fourth chapter argues that Adorno's attempt to think the concept totality and the process of totalisation in relation to the historical process in his later work requires a delineation of the relation between his sociological thought and his philosophical thought. Adorno's philosophical consideration of history alone is insufficient in gauging the parameters of his consideration of totality, which nonetheless forms an essential moment in the attempt at considering how history is to be constructed. This is because Adorno's concept of totality as it is developed in his sociological thought both problematises but also substantiates aspects of Adorno's conception of historical temporality. In chapter five, I interpret Adorno's somewhat gnomic treatment of the problematic of 'universal history' and from there reconstruct a '"negative" universal history' while simultaneously outlining the limitations of such a construal in relation to postcolonial theory.[13] This is thus a *critical* reconstruction in that it seeks to show how Adorno's own conception of a universal history is limited by certain elements in his thought, notably his Eurocentrism. It is conceived of as a 'model'[14] that draws together diverse strands of Adorno's thought in a configuration that does not emerge from a consideration of Adorno's work *at first sight.*

[13] Postcolonial theory is a broad and contested field that has itself been the subject of numerous critiques. See, for example, Timothy Brennan, 'Subaltern Stakes', *New Left Review,* 89 (2014), 67–87. I do not here seek to suggest that it can be understood as a coherent and unified collection of standpoints from which Adorno's philosophy is to be retrospectively judged. Such an endeavour would fail to do justice to its material on both sides. However, given the paramountcy of questions of imperialism, colonialism and race for any critical-philosophical treatment of history today, and the increasing number of attempts to re-read Adorno in the light of theoretical and historical developments that occurred both in his own lifetime and since, an interrogation of his conception of history is theoretically obliged to consider Adorno in relation to the works that can only loosely be brought together under the rubric of postcolonial theory.

[14] I use 'model' in Adorno's sense to denote a form of theorising that does not take place by means of examples but rather through the arrangement of specific material that attempts to avoid the materials' dissolution under a 'general master-concept'. See *ND*, 39–42; *GS*, 6:39. In the case of Adorno's conceptualisation of history, this 'master concept' has often been taken to be the idea of history as the history of the domination of nature.

II

As Brian O'Connor points out, an examination of Adorno's concept of history could be regarded as co-extensive with a study of Adorno's entire works.[15] It is thus necessary in advance to point to aspects that will not be covered here, and to delimit certain critical questions that form the basis of this inquiry. While Adorno was a thinker of history, he could not, in the same way, be considered a thinker of time, although the beginnings of a theory of time-consciousness can be extracted from his thought, which I examine in parts of chapters one, two and four of the work.[16] But Adorno rarely discusses time in and of itself, and when he does it tends towards abbreviation, even though, as I draw out in chapter four, there is a basic concept of historical *temporality* that underlies his thought that posits the existence of divergent and discontinuous temporalities that are nonetheless bound together by way of the negative universal moment that is given its unity by the domination of nature and the exchange process.

This work will not examine Adorno's critique of Heidegger, except for a few prefatory remarks in chapter two in relation to his development of natural history and in connection to the possibility that the latter concept could be utilised as a means of critiquing the ontological assumptions that often accompany theorisations of the Anthropocene. This may seem surprising given that Adorno's concept of history was developed in part as a response not only to the logical positivist construal of 'history' as a collection of facts and singular events, but to Heidegger's concept of historicity which Adorno critiques at length in the first part of *Negative Dialectics*. This decision stems from the sense that not only has the relation between Adorno and Heidegger already received a substantial amount of critical attention but that the material I focus on is less concerned with the ramifications of his critique of ontology, and rather with his more substantial claims on the question of history that can be read apart from this latter. I also do not consider in any detail Habermas or Honneth's respective critiques of Adorno, except by way of a discussion of the reception history of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in chapter one. Although the reception of these critiques remains an important question in relation to the history of Frankfurt School critical theory considered as a multigenerational enterprise, and its possible future, an examination of this would lead to a different complex of

[15] O'Connor, 'Philosophy of History', 179.

[16] As Hammer convincingly claims, despite the fact that Adorno never arrives at anything resembling a *theory* of time-consciousness, his philosophy centres on questions of transitoriness and ephemerality, and is in this sense bound up with the question of time. Hammer explores this in relation to the account of natural beauty contained in *Aesthetic Theory,* and the possibilities of an alternative time-consciousness that could be derived from this latter. See Espen Hammer, *Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 213–222. I take a different if related path by drawing out the beginnings of a possible concept of time-consciousness in relation to Adorno's examination of sacrifice, the archaic and the exchange relation.

conceptual questions that would necessitate a consideration of the question of normativity that I do not hold to be a decisive one in relation to Adorno's concept of history. Finally, the relation between Adorno's concept of history and his aesthetic theory will be largely left to one side in this work. A proper examination of this relation would require its own study and I want to avoid utilising Adorno's philosophical claims concerning art to simply serve as counterpoints or illustrations for Adorno's philosophico-historic and sociologic claims on history. This is because there is simply not enough space to satisfactorily deal with their interrelation.

Three central problematics form the basis of this inquiry. They do not order but rather continuously emerge in different configurations through a critical examination of the material. The first of these is Adorno's construal of the universal, particular and individual, and involves the question of Adorno's inheritance of both Hegel's and Benjamin's thought, examined in chapter three, four and five. Adorno's treatment of both historical individuality and historical subjectivity in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and *Negative Dialectic* gives rise to the question of whether he considers the *imago* of the bourgeois subject alone as a kind of repository for historical possibility and thereby fails to account for the different forms that subjectivity has taken, and could take, beyond the individual in history. A further question is whether the *bourgeois* individual is regarded by Adorno as identical with the 'individual' per se. Given that Adorno's critique of Hegel's concept of universal history in *Negative Dialectics* centres on the idea that the latter neglects *both* the individual and particular moments in the historical process, this question comes to possess an urgency in relation to the attempt to substantiate the idea of a '"negative" universal history' as a concept that could form a means of grasping the global. I stage this problem in the context of Adorno's critique of Hegel in the history model of *Negative Dialectics* in the third chapter, and return to it in chapter four, where I seek to offer an alternative means of interpreting the subject-object relation through a reading of Adorno's essay of that name, along with an examination of his suggestive yet (intentionally) nebulous notion of the *Gesamtsubjekt* that appears in his essay on progress and which he discusses in the lectures on history.

A second problematic that emerges in the second part of the thesis is the relation between Adorno's sociological and philosophico-historical thought, and the question as to whether the former exercises a kind of block on the latter. The question of this relation, I contend, is central to a deeper comprehension of Adorno's concept of history, but it has largely been neglected in subsequent commentary. Ostensibly, Adorno's sociological thought appears to suggest that 'society' is on the verge of becoming 'static', because it is becoming increasingly 'timeless' given the homogeneous temporality that emerges as a result of the prevalence of the exchange process and the uniformities of technical rationality; while his examination of the historical

process in *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history depends on the idea that the historical process keeps negating and is thus – in a limited sense at least – 'dynamic'. An examination of the tension that holds between these seemingly divergent temporal models is productive in further substantiating the critical aspects of Adorno's conception of history in particular with regard to his concept of totalisation, which I suggest has often been misinterpreted as implying the abandonment of a philosophical conception of history. I also question whether Adorno's examination of the *world-historical* is cut short via his concept of society as a 'false' totality, in chapter five.

The final problematic is examined intermittently and indirectly throughout the work and is necessarily more vague and difficult to interpret in a systematic way. This is the question of where the historically *new* is to be located for Adorno and how it relates to the process of determinate negation. It concerns the question of the possibilities latent within the historical process, but also thematises the limits of philosophy in offering answers to questions that pertain to the direction of the socio-historic process (and thus, by extension, to the limits of philosophico-historical interpretation). This is further connected to the conceptual burden that is assumed by Adorno's inheritance and re-working of Benjamin's concept of *catastrophe*, which plays a significant and continuous role in Adorno's examination of the concept history and thematises Adorno's concept of the future as theorised from his socio-historic present. The question is whether a latent catastrophism is at play within Adorno's concept of history, as has been suggested in various different guises, which would suggest that the possibilities of historical renewal emerge only at the point of *total* catastrophe, or whether such a reading is contrary to Adorno's own attempts to remain attentive to the negations that characterise the historical process and his mistrust of the theoretical hubris that accompanies *both* utopian and dystopian forms of thought.

III Chapter Outline

Chapter One offers a critical textual analysis of elements of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in light of the idea that it should be regarded neither as a definitive articulation of Adorno's concept of history nor as espousing a straightforwardly 'negative' philosophy of history. This chapter seeks to extract from the text an exposition of the formation of time-consciousness and its relation to sacrifice in the historical process, while still problematising Adorno and Horkheimer's conceptualisation of the historical individual. The chapter argues, first, that Adorno and Horkheimer's re-interpretation of the prehistory-history distinction does not seek to collapse modes of conceptuality that arise in non-capitalist societies into a linear history of the domination of nature, but rather in part to critique a particular form of time-consciousness

that emerges from the contingent development of the socialisation of certain prehistorical conceptual processes. I then turn to an examination of the excursus on Odysseus and suggest that the concept of sacrifice that appears therein possesses a more generalised sense that could be employed as a critical concept for the interpretation of history beyond a prehistory of the bourgeois subject. In the final section, I claim that the concept of history that emerges from the text remains largely confined to such a history that relies on a particular articulation of the socio-historic present from which the past is examined but that the text could be considered as a groundwork or preparation for a more generalised conception of history.

The second chapter outlines the critical dimensions of Adorno's concept of natural history and argues that it forms a means by which to critique the ideological fallacies that arise from the different temporalities that we attribute to history and nature respectively. I re-read the early lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History' by attending to its Freudian dimensions, with a particular emphasis on the concept of the archaic that appears therein. I draw out its implications for Adorno's concept of historical time. I also claim that interpretations of Adorno's concept of natural history tend to neglect its Marxian dimensions. I do this from the perspective of a study of the divergences and similitudes between Adorno and Marx and suggest that Adorno's concept of natural history seeks to incorporate the moment of materialism that Marxism arguably fails to address. I go on to claim that the criticality of the concept natural history does not rest on its affective dimension. In the final section, I suggest that Adorno's theorisation of natural history does not smoothly translate to a kind of theorisation of the Anthropocene *avant la lettre* but rather could form a means by which to critique certain assumptions that have often accompanied theorisations of the latter.

The third chapter critically assesses Adorno's concept of the particular in *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history, with a view to outlining its ramifications for philosophico-historical interpretation. It begins with a brief exposition of Hegel's doctrine of the concept in *Science of Logic*, the *Encyclopaedia* and *The Philosophy of Right.* I argue that Adorno's treatment of the particular is not simply a negative inversion of Hegel. I examine a possible problem with Adorno's critical inheritance of Hegel's doctrine of the concept; that is, the seeming equation of the historical particular with the historical individual that emerges from a consideration of his work. I then outline the implications that Adorno's construal of the particular has for philosophico-historical interpretation, arguing that Adorno's conception of the particular as that which is to be accorded the same 'right' as the universal begins to thematise the consideration of the historical process in a more global sense, because it necessitates the examination of the relation that holds between the particular and 'whole', and also requires that the particular itself is to be critiqued as that which emerges from the historical universal, but also affects this latter, rendering it particular.

Chapter four is premised on the idea that prior to assessing Adorno's critique and retention of the concept of 'universal history', an examination of the relation that holds between Adorno's concept of the 'false' social totality (and the particular temporality that it entails) and his theorisation of the historical process is required. This is because an exposition of the apparent disjunction between Adorno's conceptualisation of a 'false' social totality and his consideration of the historical process can go some way in concretising the latter theoretically. I suggest that Adorno's concept of history cannot be understood solely on the basis of the exchange process, but rather that, for Adorno, the exchange process produces a systematically imposed structure of time that leads to the development of a certain kind of historical consciousness. From there, I raise the question of the relation between Adorno's sociological and philosophico-historical analyses in relation to the concept of totality. After considering how the concept totality is treated in his philosophical works, I turn to an examination of his conception of totality in his sociological thought via an examination of the introduction to *The Positive Dispute, Introduction to Sociology,* and *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*. In the final part of the chapter, I examine Adorno's concept of the subject. I suggest that, for Adorno, the subject-object relation is historical, and that the historical process could lead to new configurations between subject and object. I end by considering the concept of the *Gesamtsubjekt* that appears in the essay on progress and the lectures on history, and question how it ought to be translated into English, suggesting that its translation as the 'global subject' is anachronistic, which points to a tension in the concept itself. I further problematise the idea that the *Gesamtsubjekt* can begin to be substantiated via Adorno's idea of the extreme differentiation that gives rise to the individual, as has been argued by Deborah Cook.

Chapter five seeks to critically reconstruct a '"negative" universal history' that could be placed at the service of thinking history in the wake of postcolonial theory. In so doing, I locate the Eurocentric assumptions that undergird Adorno's concept of history. These are often mentioned in the literature but rarely examined. I propose a reading of Adorno's concept of discontinuity that challenges the idea that he under-theorises discontinuity in favour of the idea of the continuity of the domination of nature, as has been argued by O'Connor and Vincent. Following on from this, I suggest various lacunae in Adorno's attempts to consider the universal moment in history, which I connect to his displacement of considerations of the world-historical onto his conception of society in the 'strong sense', although I uncover another possible source for a critical construal of historical time, connected to his examination of the process of totalisation discussed in chapter four. I problematise the idea that suffering as a concept is sufficient in constructing a '"negative" universal history', suggesting that this would need to be accompanied by a more historically specific concept of domination that could be developed further in relation to Adorno's concept and critique of integration. I end

by questioning where the historically new could be located for Adorno, through a reading of his essay on progress, and consider whether catastrophe is conceptualised as offering possibilities of historical transformation.

1

Nothing New Under the Sun? Historical Temporality, Sacrifice and the Bourgeois Individual in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*

1.1 Reading *Dialectic of Enlightenment* today

Dialectic of Enlightenment occupies a problematic conceptual space within both Frankfurt School 'critical theory' and the philosophies of Adorno and Horkheimer. Critics of the text have often focused on the idea that it represents a move away from Horkheimer's attempts in the 1930s to offer a means by which 'modernity' could be analysed via an immanent critique of bourgeois thought and a broadly Marxist understanding of history, replacing these methodologies with a sweeping critique of instrumental reason and a Nietzschean focus on relations of power and domination.[17] This is coupled with the text's perceived lack of historical specificity and the universalising tendencies contained within it. If *The Odyssey* is to be read as a fable of proto-bourgeois man as is suggested in the first excursus, it appears that categories of periodisation come to be increasingly irrelevant, and the concomitant possibilities of historical critique curtailed. Furthermore, given the text's lack of engagement with the potentialities of the future and its doubt pertaining to praxis in general, it has been commonplace to treat it as reaching a kind of theoretical and practical impasse that could perhaps be solved via a return to a theoretical model based on Horkheimer's interdisciplinary materialism and 'early' critical theory of the 1930s.[18] This impasse has often been comprehended biographically as the result of Adorno and Horkheimer's experience of war and exile, following on from the failure of the prospect of revolution in the 1920s and the rise of fascism in the 1930s.

In recent years, these readings have come under critical scrutiny which has led to a re-consideration of the text's potentialities.[19] Two important ideas arise from these re-readings. First, that instrumental rationality does not play as significant a role in the conceptual schema

[17] See, for instance, Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 106–130, Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power: Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, trans. Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: The MIT Press, 1993), 36–56, and Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1996), 253–273.

[18] For an example of this view see John Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer and the Foundations of Early Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 425–432.

[19] For a comprehensive summary of Habermas' gloss of the main arguments of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Lambert Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 108–113.

of the text as suggested by Habermas' and Honneth's respective readings.[20] Second, that Adorno and Horkheimer did not intend the work to be read as a comprehensive and contained 'negative' philosophy of history.[21] This suggests that Adorno's concept of history is not exhausted by and should not be regarded as identical with the concept of history that underlies *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and that reading the text exclusively through the concept of instrumental reason fails to do justice to the complexities of the various arguments and histories contained within the material.

This work treats *Dialectic of Enlightenment* separately from Adorno's later thought as a way of avoiding overstating (but not neglecting) the continuity that holds between this text and Adorno's conception of the historical process that is developed elsewhere. It therefore rejects the idea that a definitive philosophy of history can be extracted from *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. This chapter instead forms a critical re-reading of aspects of the text with a view to extrapolating certain elements that remained relatively unremarked upon in the literature, notably, Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of the relation between the contingent development of certain forms of historical conceptuality and the formation of a particular kind of time-consciousness. This is significant, I argue, because it does not constitute a theorisation of historical time in which the latter is considered as homogeneous and empty but rather forms an argument about the way in which historical time has come to be experienced and classified. The chapter proceeds through an exposition of the concept sacrifice as it is developed in the Odysseus excursus and delineates its relation to the exchange process, which is important because it underlies Adorno's concept of exchange in his later works. The final section of the chapter considers Adorno and Horkheimer's theorisation of the historical present and suggests that despite a problematical hypostatisation of the individual of the 'liberal' era, the text could be read as a groundwork or preparation for a conception of *world* history, even though the 'civilization' in the text is undoubtedly 'Western.'

In order to map their examination of prehistory and history, Adorno and Horkheimer utilise a disjunctive combination of anthropological theory, a Hegelian and Weberian-style history of 'Western' rationality, a Nietzschean history of conceptuality, aspects of Freud's analysis of culture and the idea of the return of the repressed, and a Marxian theory of historical development, alongside aspects of Pollock's theorisation of state capitalism and Benjamin's

[20] Espen Hammer suggests that instrumental rationality is not the 'central term' of the text, and that the concept plays only a 'subordinate' role. He further points out that the term is not in fact utilised at all in the main body of the text and was rather coined by Horkheimer in *Eclipse of Reason*. See Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 43.

[21] For a clear demonstration of this argument, see Amy Allen, 'Reason, power and history: Re-reading the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*', *Thesis Eleven*, Vol. 120.1 (2014), 10–25 (p. 20) and Amy Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2016), 171–172.

critique of progress and his idea of catastrophe. Horkheimer's 'dark thinkers' – notably de Sade – are also utilised to reappraise certain aspects of enlightenment, as are now lesser-known figures such as Ludwig Klages and Rudolf Borchardt. Although I wish to avoid reducing the text to a theoretical collage of these other thinkers, the following analysis will indirectly examine how they influence the construction of the historical process in *Dialectic of Enlightenment.*

Before beginning, it is necessary to address two problems that necessarily complicate any reading of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The first is the question of authorship and the extent to which the text should be read as a whole or as separate fragments written by two thinkers with divergent interests and emphases. While Adorno and Horkheimer claimed that the text was written conjointly,[22] most evidence from the extant drafts and typescripts points to the fact that the third chapter were largely written by Horkheimer, and the Odysseus and 'Culture Industry' chapter by Adorno.[23] This attribution ties in with Horkheimer and Adorno's theoretical concerns prior to the project (Horkheimer's critique of rationality, bourgeois forms of sociality and scientific theory and Adorno's interest in myth, nature and sacrifice present from *Kierkegaard: Construction of the Aesthetic* and the lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History' onwards). While this is true, it does not make sense to artificially separate the chapters, especially given the fact that Adorno continued to hold *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a whole to be a necessary point of reference when he was delivering his own lectures on history and writing *Negative Dialectics*.[24] I thus refer to both Adorno and Horkheimer as the authors throughout the chapter.

Second, there is the question of how the different editions of the text should be read together. Throughout the 1944 text, references to class society (*Klassengesellschaft*) are replaced with 'exchange society' (*Tauschgesellschaft*) or 'society' in the 1947 edition. Numerous other such political neutralisations appear within the text. The 1947 edition excises mentions of monopoly and replaces it with more anodyne and generalised designations, thus 'monopoly society' became 'present society' (*gegenwärtige Gesellschaft*).[25] These alterations significantly change the temporal specificity present in the first edition of the text and lend a more generalising, static quality to the newer edition. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr reads these edits

[22] See 'Preface to the New Edition, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xi; 'Zur Neuausgabe', *GS*, 3:9.
[23] Stefan Müller-Doom, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 279- 280 and Schmid Noerr, 'Editor's Afterword', *DE*, 219–224.
[24] See, for example, *HF*, 15, 45, 172–173.
[25] For more examples of these alterations see Willem van Reijen and Jan Bransen, 'The Disappearance of Class History in '*Dialectic of Enlightenment'*: A Commentary on the Textual Variants (1947 and 1944)', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 251–252.

as deriving from Adorno and Horkheimer's sense of the limitations of their previous reliance on the idea of monopoly capitalism – particularly in the chapter on the culture industry – and the fact that their first formulation of the dialectic of enlightenment had been overly economistic.[26] But it is not clear that the terminological alterations demonstrate a consistent theoretical shift from Marxist to post-Marxist categories, even if this is in keeping with Horkheimer's (rather than Adorno's) eventual theoretical trajectory. For the purposes of the following analysis, I will remain sensitive to the terminological alterations while rejecting the idea that any of the editions can be read as either Marxist or post-Marxist. Rather, an attempt at delineating the concept of history with which Adorno and Horkheimer work necessarily involves a reckoning with the problem of the text's relation to Marxist theory.

1.2 The Eternity of the Actual: Magic and Enlightenment

Adorno and Horkheimer's stated intention in the 1944 preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is to trace the degradation and apparent 'self-destruction' of enlightenment (*Aufklärung*).[27] 'Enlightenment' in the sense in which it is used in the text does not map on to the historical time period that is commonly referred to as the 'Age of the Enlightenment' (although it does include it), but rather denotes a set of systematising and classificatory conceptual processes and behaviours which derive from attempts by the subject to dominate both external and internal 'nature'. These processes initially stem from the fear of nature, and their beginnings can be found not only in the processes of naming and ordering that already appear in myth, but even in the earliest forms of ritual, notably sacrifice and the substitution that it involves. The decision by Adorno and Horkheimer to radically displace the everyday understanding of 'enlightenment' and extend the term's application to 'prehistory' is an attempt to rethink historiographical categories themselves, and to reject easy dichotomies between old/new and archaic/modern. Rather, historical and temporal categories are to be subjected to wholescale reappraisal to demonstrate the 'intertwinement of history and prehistory.' But one question that might be posed is why Adorno and Horkheimer singled out 'enlightenment' as the concept to be deployed for such a reappraisal. As Buck-Morss points out, this can partly be attributed to the polemicising function of reconfiguring 'enlightenment' given the historical Enlightenment's position as a sacred cow of bourgeois rational thought.[28] This seems right, and it is in part the result of this detemporalised use of the concept of 'enlightenment' that has led to the text being read as a dehistoricisation of critical theory.

[26] 'Editor's Afterword', 240.
[27] *DE*, xvi; *GS,* 3:13.
[28] Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 61.

However, while it is true that in Horkheimer's *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* essays from the 1930s the Enlightenment is held to be a generally progressive force in which a materialist tendency is combined with the first instances of ideology critique,[29] even in his early writings, Horkheimer repeatedly returns to what he perceives to be the empty quality of Enlightenment theory, a theme that becomes central to the *Juliette* excursus. He states that Enlightenment thought offers 'little in the way of specific instruction',[30] and connects the exclusion of value judgements that Enlightenment thought encourages with the new ideal of self-preservation: bodily preservation and the avoidance of death become the only good in the wake of the critique of more substantial values.[31] Further, there is a discernible trace of Schopenhauerian nihilism and suspicion of the concept of history – understood here in relation to progress – in Horkheimer's praise for the Enlightenment when he discusses the pointlessness that every 'student' of the Enlightenment feels: '(the student) is convinced that the future generations for which he is fighting are irrevocably transitory and that, in the end, nothingness is victory over joy.'[32] Horkheimer's appreciation for the historic Enlightenment is thus not incompatible with the transfiguration that the concept undergoes in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; in the early essay 'Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History', Horkheimer cites Hegel's injunction in *Phenomenology of Spirit* that the Enlightenment must be 'enlightened' about itself, an idea which forms a cornerstone of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.[33] Second, it is important to note that the actual, 'historic' Enlightenment does not disappear from the text, but is rather referred to as the 'Enlightenment of the modern age', which is contrasted with 'earlier stages of demythologisation.'[34] Thus, 'enlightenment' as a retemporalised concept that maps onto a set of conceptual and behavioural processes and 'Enlightenment' as a historic period both refer to demythologisations that seek to expunge the natural, but the latter is an instance of the former, and the beginning of its culmination.

The temporal schema at work in the 'Concept of Enlightenment' chapter is based on the idea of the existence of different conceptual and behavioural responses to nature (both internal and external). These are: magical, mythical, metaphysical, techno-scientific, and, connected but

[29] See Max Horkheimer, 'Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, trans. G. Frederick Hunter, Matthew S. Kramer, and John Torpey (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), pp. 313–388 (p. 361). For more on Horkheimer's examination of the French Enlightenment in particular, see Abromeit, *Max Horkheimer,* 103–108.
[30] Horkheimer, 'Materialism and Morality', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, pp. 15–48 (pp. 16-17).
[31] Horkheimer, 'Egoism and the Freedom Movement: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, pp. 49–110 (p. 50).
[32] Horkheimer, 'Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, pp. 151–176 (p. 158).
[33] Horkheimer, 'Beginnings of the Bourgeois Philosophy of History', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 361.
[34] *DE*, 72; *GS*, 3:111.

separate to the last, positivist. Magical thinking is understood to be 'prehistoric' in that there is no sense of a unified subjectivity in contrast to the external world on the part of the (pre-) subject. All forms of conceptuality aim for some form of domination (or at least control or influence) over nature but do so using different methods. Adorno and Horkheimer begin by positing a historical break between magical thinking and all following stages: 'The disenchantment of the world means the extirpation of animism.'[35] Weber's idea of disenchantment (*Entzauberung*), connected as it is with the idea of a rationalistic and scientific spirit that comes to dominate 'occidental' societies towards the end of the sixteenth century, is thus displaced onto an earlier time; Xenophanes already discerns the way in which the Greek gods resemble their 'creators' – 'man' – in Feuerbachian fashion,[36] and the identification of anthropomorphism is the 'stereotyped message' of enlightenment that can be already be found in Oedipus's answer to the sphynx's riddle.[37] But what alters in techno-scientific conceptuality is, first, the increase in power derived from the manipulation of nature and connected with this, second, greater 'estrangement' or alienation (*Entfremdung*) from the nature over which the power is wielded.[38] While for science, nature becomes a 'mere objectivity' to be manipulated, the magical response to nature involves a set of behaviours that include imitative practices and an awareness of the 'manifold affinities between existing things.'[39]

Crucial to the distinction that Adorno and Horkheimer make between the magical and the scientific lies in the idea of 'substitutability' or 'representation' (*Vertretbarkeit*). While both magical and scientific processes involve a kind of substitution, in magic this substitution is 'specific': it relates to the particular thing that is sacrificed.[40] The implication is that the uniqueness of the sacrificed thing is somehow retained in the process of sacrifice, which makes the object of sacrifice 'non-exchangeable even in the exchange.'[41] By contrast, in science, there is no such specific representation; substitution becomes 'universal fungibility' in which the representative becomes specimen.[42] The scientific attitude thus involves an increased distance from the object and a relation of intent rather than kinship, while magic includes a mimetic response to its object, even though it is also concerned with ends.[43]

Later in the chapter, Adorno and Horkheimer analyse further the 'distance' that occurs between thought and nature in a speculative depiction of early forms of society. They write:

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[35] Ibid., 2; *GS*, 3:21.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid., 4; *GS*, 3:23.
[38] Ibid., 6; *GS*, 3:25.
[39] Ibid., 7; *GS*, 3:27.
[40] Ibid., 6–7; *GS*, 3:26–27.
[41] Ibid., 7; *GS,* 3:26.
[42] Ibid., 7; *GS*, 3:26.
[43] Ibid., 7; *GS*, 3:27.

> The distance of subject from object, the presupposition of abstraction, is founded on the distance from things which the ruler attains by means of the ruled. The songs of Homer and the hymns of the *Rig Veda* date from the time of territorial domination and its strongholds, when a warlike race of overlords imposed itself on the defeated indigenous population…With the end of nomadism the social order is established on the basis of fixed property. Power and labour diverge.[44]

As has been famously drawn out by Habermas,[45] this sketch of the historical development of conceptuality echoes Nietzsche's 'real history' of morality in *Genealogy of Morality* in which a strong and unreflective master morality dominates the weaker slave morality via a 'pathos of distance', before the latter subvert the morality of the former through the transvaluation of values and, in so doing, give rise to both reason and bad conscience. In his examination of the formation of bad conscience, Nietzsche holds that, at some point in prehistory, humans, out of fear, become forced to think, draw conclusions, and combine cause and effect, processes that lead them to experience a 'feeling of misery' and 'leaden discomfort.'[46] Yet the old instincts remain latent, and themselves turn inward, leading to the 'internalisation' of the 'individual'. With this is introduced the 'most sinister sickness' which continues to affect the 'individual today'; that is, 'man's sickness of *man,* of *himself*: as the result of a forcible breach with his animal past …'[47] In 'On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense', Nietzsche postulates that the very formation of the concept originates as a strategy for self-preservation that is based on various types of deception. Not only do concepts arise from the equation of unequal things, but subjects are indifferent to knowledge that has no consequences for survival. The intellect 'unfolds its principle powers in dissimulation, which is the means by which weaker less robust individuals preserve themselves…'[48] Adorno and Horkheimer follow Nietzsche in connecting the development of conceptuality to the experience by the subject of the 'order and subordination' of society,[49] and 'truth' itself comes to be associated with classificatory modes of apprehending reality. They argue that the so-called 'truth' that arises from classification and systematisation aims at expunging from the subject both knowledge that 'apprehends its

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[44] Ibid., 9; *GS*, 3:29–30.
[45] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 120–122. Importantly, at the root of Nietzsche's account lies the idea of the will to power (*Wille zur Macht*) as the fundamental motivation behind all human behaviour, which Adorno and Horkheimer clearly reject. In this sense, while Nietzsche *recognises* the dialectic of enlightenment, he then uses a generalised drive theory to underpin and glorify it.
[46] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson and trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 57.
[47] Ibid.
[48] Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense', in *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's,* ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press, 1992), pp. 79–100 (p. 80).
[49] *DE*, 10; *GS*, 3:30.

object' but also leads the subject to feel a 'hatred' towards an 'image of the vanquished primeval world and its imaginary happiness.'[50] Thus, forms of thought which are based on the rigidity of actual social forms of domination both prevent apprehension of internal and external nature and lead the subject to form an idea of a false, 'primeval' and inaccessible state of nature which – as a result of its inaccessibility – leads to an attitude of *ressentiment* on the part of the subject towards this lost nature.

But while this imagined primeval world is false, Adorno and Horkheimer appear to view the transition from nomadism to property ownership as a kind of founding historical catastrophe. In Adorno's notes for his contribution to the 'Research Project on Anti-Semitism', written directly prior to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, he also mentions the shift from nomadism to settlement as a rupture, and connects this with the emergence of anti-Semitism:

> The abandonment of nomadism was apparently one of the most difficult sacrifices demanded in human history. The Western concept of work, and all the instinctual repression it involves, may coincide exactly with the development of settled habitation [...] But the more the world of settled habitation – a world of work – produced repression, the more the earlier condition must have seemed to be a form of happiness which could not be permitted, the very idea of which must be banned.[51]

Settlement and a fixed order of property are tied to work, which is inextricably linked to sacrifice and repression on the part of the subject. In this sense, Odysseus's attempt to return to his property is an early instance of a search for the homeland that is one of the constitutive features of subjectivity, whereby the subject must continually labour to dominate inner and outer nature in order to fix a point of origin for itself which does not in fact exist. By contrast, the 'tribe' of the 'nomadic period' attempts to influence nature in a collective way as a result of the lack of rigidity in social structure: all can take part in magic.[52] In these formations that do not rely on a fixed point of origin, then, power and labour have yet to diverge, and influence rather than domination over nature is sought. However, while there is no homeland or lost paradisal state, the dialectic of origins cannot be surpassed without the concept of home, to which all 'longing' is directed, but the latter must be 'wrested from myth.'[53] When read alongside these passages in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* the oft quoted line from *Minima Moralia* – 'It is now part of morality not to be at home in one's home'[54] – that is seemingly a pronouncement on the impossibility of living outside of the guilt context of the 'present' and

[50] Ibid.
[51] Adorno, cited in Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School*, 276–277.
[52] *DE*, 15; *GS*, 3:37.
[53] Ibid., 61; *GS*, 3:97.
[54] *MM*, A:18; *GS*, 4: A:18.

a critique of the Hegelian idea of consciousness being at home with itself in 'modernity', appears to contain a new sense. That is, that there never was a home, bourgeois or otherwise. This would echo Freud's concept of the uncanny (*Unheimlich*) that denotes the experience of 'home' as that which is always in danger of appearing to be unfamiliar and familiar simultaneously and thematises the return of repressed nature within the subject but also in society and history more broadly.[55]

The utilisation of anthropological theory in the first chapter is problematic. Not only is it highly speculative, but Adorno and Horkheimer appear to construct a historical teleological schema by assimilating evidence from non-capitalist societies taken from early anthropologists such as Herbert, Mauss, and Frazer in their reconceptualisation of *pre*history and thus history. How are these historical anthropological claims to be read in connection with the philosophical import of the text? Given Adorno and Horkheimer's antipathy towards philosophical anthropology,[56] it appears peculiar that historical anthropological claims would be unquestioningly imported and transposed onto their critique of 'modern' forms of conceptuality in this manner. However, a short and undeveloped criticism of Freud that appears in the first chapter is indicative of the fact that Adorno and Horkheimer's intention is not to assume that magical thinking and other forms of thinking resemble one another or can be compared in any straightforward way. They suggest that Freud's comparison between neurotic thought processes and magical thinking in *Totem and Taboo* (subtitled 'Resemblances between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics') – in which both are viewed as representing an overvaluation of psychical acts – is an anachronism.[57] Magical thought is not characterised by a belief in the power of mental processes over nature but rather by the detection of a perceived affinity between mental processes and natural processes which in turn leads to imitative forms of behaviour that do not lose sight of the unique qualities of the object. This is important because it demonstrates that Adorno and Horkheimer do not simply want to collapse modes of conceptuality and behaviour that arise in non-capitalist societies into a linear conception of history as the history of the domination over nature in which magical ways of thinking are regarded straightforwardly as an antecedent mode of conceptuality. Instead, the point is that control over nature *becomes* the absolute goal at a certain historical point contingently in certain forms of historical society, those dominated by an 'all-embracing industrial technology'.[58] Freud's mistake is to assume a continuity based on

[55] See Sigmund Freud, 'The 'Uncanny'', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud,* Volume XVII (1917-1919), trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981), pp. 217–253.
[56] See Max Horkheimer, 'Remarks on Philosophical Anthropology', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*.
[57] *DE*, 7; *GS*, 3:27.
[58] *DE*, 7; *GS*, 3:27.

the supposition of the existence of an overvaluation of the mind in contrast to nature or objectivity by *both* magical thinking *and* the 'neurotic' subject of pre-First World War Vienna. Adorno and Horkheimer's claim is that this kind of overvaluation of the mental only begins at a particular temporal juncture, one that is connected to rigid social domination in which the thinking subject is increasingly separated from the nature that is being controlled. Adorno and Horkheimer develop this idea in relation to magic in order to show the way in which 'modern' rationality is also necessarily based on the fear experienced by the subject unable to control external nature and at the behest of social domination.

What alters historically is that equivalence ceases to be a mere instrument and instead becomes a fetish in itself.[59] In this way, a process that originates as an attempt at the control of nature – the act of rendering something not only substitutable for but equivalent to another thing – becomes the way a certain form of conceptuality operates more generally. Importantly, this has repercussions for the experience of historical temporality. If all particular things are viewed as equivalent, first from fear and later from the fetishisation of equivalence, then no ontological historical novelty is possible: all becomes a part of an equation that can be repeated in different forms. What thus emerges from Adorno and Horkheimer's comparison between magical-mythical and enlightenment forms of thought is the connection that is posited between the experience of the fear of nature, attempts at its alleviation via the supposed and actual control garnered by conceptual process that depend on equivalence and substitutive acts, and the development of a particular form of time-consciousness. They write:

> The doctrine that action equals reaction continued to maintain the power of repetition over existence long after humankind had shed the illusion that, by repetition, it could identify itself with repeated existence and so escape its power. But the more the illusion of magic vanishes, the more implacably repetition, in the guise of regularity, imprisons human beings in the cycle now objectified in the laws of nature, to which they believe they owe their security as free subjects. The principle of immanence, the explanation of every event as repetition, which enlightenment upholds against mythical imagination is that of myth itself. The arid wisdom which acknowledges nothing new under the sun, because all the pieces of the meaningless game have been played out, all the great thoughts have been thought, all possible discoveries can be construed in advance, and human beings are defined by self-preservation through adaptation – this barren wisdom merely reproduces the fantastic doctrine it rejects: the sanction of fate which, through retribution, incessantly reinstates what always was. Whatever might be different is

[59] *DE*, 12; *GS*, 3:33.

made the same. That is the verdict which critically sets the boundaries to possible experience.[60]

The question of the historical experience of temporality is central to the conceptual arc of the book's first chapter. If everything can be exchanged for something else in order to ward off or control the feared object, then time itself comes to be regarded as eternal sameness. Viewing discrete objects as identical to and as substitutable for one another results in both the creation, experience and perpetuation of a homogeneous temporality in which all actions cancel one another out.[61] Repetition and the 'incessant' reinstatement of 'what always was'[62] is not only something that plays out in the individual psyche, as theorised by Freud in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in his concept of the repetition compulsion (*Wiederholungszwang*),[63] it is further something that occurs on an historical level in which social compulsion comes to be modelled on the repetitions of not only natural cycles but also on attempts to dominate nature. Symbols, and later general concepts, come to perform a means of consolidating the supposed 'permanence' of social 'compulsion' or 'coercion' (*Permanenz des gesellschaftlichen Zwangs*).[64] At a certain historical juncture, this comes to be reflected in the development of a consciousness of time that views the new itself as the 'predetermined' (*Vorbestimmtes*) and therefore the 'old'.[65] This aspect of the first chapter forms the beginning of a critique of time-consciousness as it has contingently developed in history. It is not solely a sketch of the means by which conceptuality in general has developed in historical time, but, more specifically, a critique of a particular formation of time-consciousness that expunges actual historical difference and therefore fails to see the 'hope' that lingers in existence, in part by categorising the past only into 'material for progress' thus banishing its 'living' elements.[66] The idea that history is comprised of an always-already process is, for Adorno and Horkheimer, a cornerstone of the mythical way of thinking that they seek to combat.

However, if subjectivity as it has so far developed is born of the recognition of power 'as the principle of all relationships',[67] how can this arid wisdom that limits possible historical experience be surpassed? For Adorno and Horkheimer, there also exists a kind of remainder

[60] *DE*, 8; *GS*, 3:28.
[61] Jay Bernstein expresses this as the idea that 'immediacy must be negated, must be placed into a pattern of like occasions.' See Jay Bernstein, 'The Idea of Instrumental Reason', in *The Routledge Companion to the Frankfurt School*, ed. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Axel Honneth (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 3–18 (p. 8).
[62] *DE*, 8; *GS*, 3:28.
[63] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XVIII, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981), pp. 7–66.
[64] *DE*, 16; *GS*, 3:38.
[65] *DE*, 21; *GS*, 3:44.
[66] *DE*, 25; *GS*, 3:49–50.
[67] *DE*, 5; *GS,* 3:25.

or surplus that subsides in subjectivity, one which can be detected in certain conceptual experiences and that suggests the possibility of alternate forms of historical existence. It is precisely because the self 'never quite fitted the mold'[68] that increasingly coercive forms of social domination develop that seek to extinguish this remainder of natural life within the subject. Thus, Adorno and Horkheimer do not hold that power and knowledge are *necessarily* synonymous, but that this has come to be the case due to the contingencies of the historical process. In particular, it is connected with the development of capitalism that combines the 'dark horizon' of myth with the 'sun of calculating reason'.[69] But who is the 'self' that never quite fitted the mold? Given the way in which Horkheimer tended towards a reactionary nostalgia concerning what he regarded to be the demise of the bourgeois individual from the early 1940s, is the history that emerges in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* solely a history of the bourgeois subject, or is it something more? Put in another way, is the bourgeois subject the given genealogical starting point from which history is then read?

1.3 The Pristine Dawn of Culture Revisited: Sacrifice and Odysseus as Proto Bourgeois Man

> Mythical inevitability is defined by the equivalence between the curse, the abominable act which expiates it, and the guilt arising from the act, which reproduces the curse. All law [*Alles Recht*] in history up to now bears the traces of this pattern [*die Spur dieses Schemas*].[70]

In the first excursus, Adorno and Horkheimer's ostensible objective is to demonstrate the extent to which 'bourgeois' conceptual and behavioural tendencies can be traced back earlier in history than traditional historiography and philosophy had so far done via a 'prehistory of subjectivity'. The bourgeois subject is understood by Adorno and Horkheimer as having its antecedent not only in the burgher emerging at the end of feudalism, but in Odysseus and the mode of systematising and rationalising thought already evident in the epic form. The excursus can thus be read as demonstrating the way in which the endless attempts of self-preserving reason have been constitutive of (bourgeois) subjectivity.[71] However, it also seems that the intention of the excursus is to examine the way in which subjectivity develops in civilisation more broadly. In the following analysis, I question whether Adorno and Horkheimer's reading of *The Odyssey* goes beyond a prehistory of the bourgeois subject by examining the idea of

[68] *DE*, 9; *GS*, 3:29.
[69] *DE*, 25; *GS*, 3:49.
[70] *DE*, 46; *GS,* 3:77.
[71] See, for example, Douglas Kellner, *Critical Theory, Marxism and Modernity* (Oxford and Cambridge: Polity, 1989), 87–88.

sacrifice and its relation to the historical process. I argue that while the intention of the excursus is on the one hand to offer a re-reading of the epic (and mythical) form in order to suggest the similitude between forms of thought already present in Ancient Greece and the present day, and thereby critique the historical present through a reconfiguration of bourgeois subjectivity, something more is effectuated by the theorisation of sacrifice that appears within the text that comes to be developed in *Negative Dialectics*, albeit recast in relation to the idea of identity.

The preliminary remarks in the first excursus centre on the idea that there exists a moment of truth in what Adorno and Horkheimer refer to as the 'conservative' critique – as represented by thinkers such as Klages and Borchardt – of Homer, following on from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. This critique rests on the idea that the epic bears resemblance to the bourgeois novel in that it concerns itself with the sphere of 'mediation and circulation'.[72] Adorno and Horkheimer thereby implicitly oppose Lukács' idea – as formulated in *Theory of the Novel* but later abandoned – that suggests that the Greek epic contains a completeness of form that corresponds to a harmonious sociality which is contrasted with the 'transcendental homelessness' symptomatic of the reified social world that is represented in the nineteenth-century novel.[73] By contrast, to examine the way in which Odysseus opposes himself to the social whole already divided between those who labour and those who do not through radical self-assertion and repression is to attempt to show that (pre)subjectivity in Ancient Greece contained features that we regard to be 'modern', but also that typically 'modern' features of subjectivity are in fact in some sense prehistoric: the 'second nature' that Lukács links to rationalisation and the emergence of capitalism is already contained within the structure of the epic. Adorno and Horkheimer thus dispute the idea that ancient Greece represents some kind of 'pristine dawn' of culture and the concomitant belief in the superiority of classical culture that is repeatedly found in eighteenth and nineteenth century German philosophy and philology. This is exposed as a kind of myth or, in Nietzschean terms, a form of 'monumental' history that wrongly hypostasises a given historical period at the expense of understanding the continuities of historical development. This prefigures the re-evaluation of the Enlightenment inheritance of ancient Greek thought that has occurred in postcolonial theory. Samir Amin would later argue that central to the construction of the Eurocentric, in particular, in relation to the 'formation' of the 'honest, upright bourgeois citizen' is the idea that the 'Greek heritage predisposed Europe to rationality'[74] which, he suggests, is inaccurate not only because of the

[72] *DE*, 37; *GS*, 3:63.
[73] Georg Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1978), 41.
[74] Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore and James Membrez (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 167–168.

lack of continuity between European forms of thought and the philosophies of Ancient Greece, but because it further neglects Ancient Greece's location in the 'ancient Orient'.[75] Adorno and Horkheimer, on the other hand, work on the assumption that there exists a historical continuity between Ancient Greece and forms of thought that later developed in Europe but argue that this continuity is to be recast in relation to an altogether darker history in which the epic forms a codification of a reaction to mythical forms of terror from which bourgeois forms of thought never fully emerge.

For Adorno and Horkheimer, the 'conservative' critique of Homer that recognises the continuity between the epic and bourgeois forms of thought not only goes on to wrongly assert the existence of an archaic prehistory in which the mendacious nature of bourgeois cunning was not yet present, and to glorify a mythical time in which power could be asserted in an unmediated and natural manner, but it also fails to comprehend the fact that the myth and epic have something in common, that is, 'power and exploitation'.[76] Thus, the mythical also contains a moment of mendacity, connected to the idea of rationality, and therefore also involves 'enlightenment', and conversely, the epic (and the novel) also bears witness to the domination of nature required by burgeoning subjectivity but in a more sublimated manner. Thus, while the currency of *The Odyssey* relies on the gift rather than blood sacrifice, the interactions with nature and myth (represented by the 'chthonic' entities and the gods that have been banished to the peripheries of the Mediterranean) take on the form of interchanges in which the deity or entity is fooled by Odysseus's rational cunning, but, conversely, this rational cunning also necessitates that violence is exacted by Odysseus on his selfhood. The myth as it appears within the epic is already something that has been classified and subjected to a more developed form of subjectivity, but this form of subjectivity falls victim to its own cunning because it must simultaneously deny the self that it seeks to assert through an adaptation to the nature that it attempts to dominate.

Adorno and Horkheimer's reading of *The Odyssey* takes up a line of inquiry that first emerges in Adorno's study *Kierkegaard* in which an examination of Kierkegaard's 'pure inwardness' leads Adorno to argue that the idea of sacrifice is central to the latter's thought. His critique of Kierkegaard, treating both 'individual' and philosopher as an 'historical constellation' following Benjamin's method in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, centres on the idea that rather than demonstrating an act of transcendence, the leap of faith in *Fear and Trembling* is symptomatic of the propensity to self-sacrifice on the part of the rentier of the nineteenth century behind whose pure inwardness and spiritualism lies a fundament of mental abstraction

[75] Amin, 168.
[76] *DE*, 37; *GS*, 3:63.

that derives from the mythical. Importantly, the sixth chapter of Adorno's book – entitled 'Reason and Sacrifice' – examines the way in which, underlying Kierkegaard's critique of Hegelian idealism, there is precisely the same moment that Kierkegaard ridicules in the Hegelian system. Adorno's argument is that while Kierkegaard discerns the way in which Hegel *defers* the present moment until the completion of his system, Kierkegaard's own 'repetitions' fail to reach the 'concrete fullness' in their dealings with the past because they substitute consciousness and empty *Existenz* for system.[77] In this way, thought as conceived of by Kierkegaard intends to break the 'power' of the system, but in so doing denies precisely what is termed the 'prerogative of consciousness', and this results in self-sacrifice:

> For Kierkegaard, consciousness must have pulled itself free from all external being by a movement of 'infinite resignation'; through choice and decisiveness, it must have freely posited every content in order finally, in the face of the semblance of its own omnipotence, to surrender its omnipotence and, foundering, to purify itself of the guilt it acquired in having supposed itself autonomous. The sacrifice of consciousness, however, is the innermost model of every sacrifice that occurs in his philosophy.[78]

To achieve autonomy, Kierkegaardian consciousness must remove itself from all determinants that exist outside of itself, a gesture that leads to the moment of resignation and empty inwardness. Adorno links this to the mythical sacrifice of Odin, in which Odin (but also, by extension, the 'individual') must 'perish' to become 'himself', and the god remains in the 'natural domain of his own domination'.[79] External determination (or 'nature') thus comes to be annihilated for consciousness, but, as a result, so does 'spirit' itself. Kierkegaardian 'antinatural spiritualism' remains irrevocably trapped in nature through its denial of nature, which leads to the collapse of both time and the individual whose consciousness is that which is posited; time becomes an 'abstract, contentless *nota bene*'.[80] Underlying the empty abstractness and timelessness of Kierkegaardian subjectivity is, according to Adorno, its opposite. Adorno locates Kierkegaard's symbol of the window mirror – which Kierkegaard views as denoting the timeless inwardness of consciousness – precisely as the instrument that only the bourgeois subject could utilise: 'He who looks into the window mirror, however, is the private person, solitary, inactive, and separated from the economic process of production.'[81] In other words, that which in Kierkegaardian thought is symbolic of the archaic and unchanging depends for its articulation on the historical, 'modern' apartment.[82] Again

[77] *KCA*, 106; *GS*, 2:151.
[78] *KCA*, 107; *GS*, 2:152.
[79] *KCA*, 108; *GS*, 2:153.
[80] *KCA*, 117; *GS*, 2:166.
[81] *KCA*, 42; *GS*, 2:63.
[82] *KCA*, 44; *GS*, 2:65–66.

following Benjamin's method, Adorno's point is that the symbols employed by Kierkegaard to depict inwardness are historical objects that in fact show the actual conditions of the bourgeois subject whose abstract inwardness depends on the labour of others (in Kierkegaard's case, specifically the rent of others), in a kind of master-slave like reversal whereby the apparent independence of the bourgeois subject depends on the social domination of others and, conversely, results in precisely domination (and sacrifice) of the self. In a similar way, when confronted with the sirens, Odysseus can rely on the labour of others (his crew) to preserve his own selfhood, but this is itself representative of a 'mutilation' in which he must hear the song of the sirens without surrendering himself.[83]

Adorno's early interest in the relation between bourgeois subjectivity, inwardness and sacrifice in the *Kierkegaard* study appears to confirm the idea that the Odysseus excursus forms a transposition of the examination of the self-sacrifice involved in bourgeois subjectivity onto 'Western civilisation' more broadly. This would suggest that the general structure of the excursus relies on a genealogy that isolates certain features of bourgeois subjectivity, notably cunning (*die List*), formalism and abstraction, and then demonstrates the way in which they are (pre)historically tied to self-preservation, domination and self-sacrifice. In this sense, prehistory is read through the 'present', which is 'bourgeois society', just as 'bourgeois society' is read through prehistory. This method could be said to assume a certain one-dimensionality. While Odysseus' dealings with the various entities and gods are considered from the perspective of the self-assertion and rationality that is constitutive of bourgeois subjectivity, and his actual powerlessness is revealed precisely through his very control of both external and internal nature, 'nature' itself could be said to become increasingly abstract and amorphous as an idea, incorporating all social, physical, and psychological phenomena that are examined only in relation to the (pre)bourgeois subject. This is a point made by Honneth who argues that the model of the original prehistoric domination of nature in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* provides a model for all other kinds of domination within the text that leads to a 'pessimistic' philosophy of history that does not allow for a more specific analysis of the various forms taken by social domination.[84]

However, Adorno and Horkheimer do not project characteristics of the 'bourgeois individual' onto Odysseus in any straightforward way; instead, they claim that it is from the 'standpoint of the developed exchange society' that *The Odyssey* appears as no more than a 'depiction of the risks which line the path to success.'[85] Odysseus and later Robinson Crusoe are precursors of the atomised subject who is only ostensibly removed from society. In this sense, the various

[83] *DE*, 27; *GS*, 3:52.
[84] Honneth, *The Critique of Power,* 42, 51–52, 55–56.
[85] *DE*, 48; *GS*, 3:80.

gods, chthonic entities, and crew members are regarded by Odysseus as material to be utilised, manipulated, or dominated in order that he can return home, and thus both physically and internally fix his subjectivity through his return to a posited origin, his property. This is a historical point regarding the way in which bourgeois subjectivity deals with society and nature, regardless of its particular qualities; all societal relations are to be utilised and manipulated to further whichever goal is required in order that internal qualities and economic objectives can be solidified and fixed. In this sense, nature becomes amorphous and undifferentiated when regarded from the perspective of a subjectivity that views it only in relation to self-preservation.[86] In particular, it is Adorno and Horkheimer's argument that the 'nature' that appears in *The Odyssey* is already ideological; the supposed helplessness of Odysseus in the face of the 'foaming sea' is a depiction of his actual social predominance and 'sounds like a legitimation of the enrichment of the voyager at the expense of indigenous inhabitants.'[87] In this sense, nature becomes amorphous when it is used as a means by which to legitimate already existing privilege, and this mode of viewing nature, as is suggested, has its subsequent realisation in colonial pursuits that rely on conceptions of 'nature' as that which is to be dominated not simply via physical force, but also through trickery and intrigue.

It is further important to point out that the first excursus – and, in fact, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a whole – does not set out to provide an exhaustive account of the history of subjectivity or an underlying theory of 'history'. Rather, as Adorno and Horkheimer state, the twofold character (*Doppelcharakter*) of enlightenment is *a* basic motif of history (*historisches Grundmotiv*).[88] The implication is that the dialectic of enlightenment is not conceived of as an ultimate framework for comprehending history but one among several other motifs. This is important because it suggests that interpretations of the text that centre on its espousal of a pessimistic or negative philosophy of history miss the point: the text is not intended to be read as a complete philosophy of history but as an examination of the way in which a certain form of subjectivity develops. However, this leads to the question as to whether the excursus is restricted to a genealogy of the bourgeois subject, which takes as a starting point a particular theorisation of the present and deciphers prehistory (and thus history) through this prism.

By interrogating the relation between history and sacrifice, and the particular conceptual and social processes that the latter puts into motion, there is a clear sense in which the first excursus is concerned with something beyond only bourgeois subjectivity; it demonstrates the way in

[86] Bernstein suggests that it is Adorno's point that it becomes difficult to say anything specific about nature because it has been 'liquidated by enlightenment.' See Jay Bernstein, 'Negative Dialectic as Fate', in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 19–50 (p. 28).
[87] *DE*, 48; *GS*, 3:80.
[88] *DE*, 36: *GS*, 3:62.

which rationality derives from a set of sacrificial conceptual and behavioural processes that necessarily involve a moment of fraud (*Betrug*). The critical problem that the excursus attempts to trace is not only the development of certain qualities in 'bourgeois' subjectivity in historical time, but also the way in which the process of exchange has throughout history appeared as rational but in fact relied on moment of fraud that involves renunciation for both parties to a transaction. This is why Adorno and Horkheimer connect the process of exchange with its purported antecedent: sacrifice. Sacrifice is viewed as a kind of founding historical catastrophe and the prototype of capitalistic modes of exchange. It should here be noted that Adorno and Horkheimer's utilisation of sacrifice (*Opfer*) tends to refer to historical forms of sacrifice and to conceptual processes that utilise substitutive logical forms; in this sense, sacrifice designates relations in which the subject is in some sense deceived – whether by themselves, by another, or by society more broadly – and must give more than they receive in exchange.

Adorno and Horkheimer's idea is that even early forms of sacrifice contain a moment of rationality (as a result of 'archaic shortage') yet by their nature are fraudulent. A double movement is effectuated: not only has rationality always involved a moment of sacrifice but sacrifice itself contains a rational element. Further, although the sacrificial process long survives its actual necessity,[89] Adorno and Horkheimer also claim that even in earlier historical times it was always a form of ideology that to some extent was never believed by those who practiced it.[90] In this sense, behavioural and conceptual practices that involved substitutive processes initially appearing within sacrifice were fraudulent on two counts: first, because the object that was substituted for another was never in fact the same as that other object and was therefore not *actually* substitutable; and, second, at least one of the parties that took part in the transaction was in some sense aware of the non-substitutability and incommensurability of the thing exchanged but, in order to achieve a certain end, would attribute to the substitution an actual power. Adorno and Horkheimer's point is that this procedure comes to be introverted or internalised in a particular way by the bourgeois subject who then transposes this substitutive practice on all other kinds of behavioural and conceptual processes. This takes place in the emergence of the ego itself, whose sacrifice is a *temporal* one: the continual sacrifice of the present to the future moment is what in part unifies the bourgeois subject.[91] Furthermore, denying that sacrifice at a certain historical juncture contained a moment of rationality is itself an ideological way of disguising that the so-called 'particular' interest

[89] *DE*, 42; *GS*, 3:71.
[90] *DE*, 40; *GS,* 3:69.
[91] Ibid.

continues to prevail and demands a moment of sacrifice on the part of the subject, whether bourgeois or not.[92]

The significance of this for Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of history is two-fold. First, history comes to be viewed as largely formed through the sacrificial process: 'The history of civilisation is the history of the introversion of sacrifice, in other words, the history of renunciation [*Entsagung*]'.[93] Sacrifice (and substitution) takes place in the formation of subjectivity in which the subject must renounce their instinctual drives in the interests of self-preserving reason, as well as in historical forms of society in which, as was discussed in the first section of the chapter, certain dominant ruling groups imposed on others their own values. Second, Adorno and Horkheimer also claim that without sacrificial processes such as work there would exist a kind of vegetative bliss symbolised in *The Odyssey* by the lotus eaters. In this sense, sacrifice and substitutive conceptual processes are both the beginning of history as continual catastrophe and simultaneously necessary for the historical process to begin at all; thus, in the discussion of the lotus-eaters, Adorno and Horkheimer suggest that Odysseus is correct to assert the utopian potential of 'rational labour' against the sloth of flower-eating.[94] Following Marx, utopia continues to be connected with labour, even though labour requires the sacrifice on the part of the subject and thus is also in part what causes the natural-social domination and historical catastrophe in the first place. The second historical moment is then the introversion of this sacrifice, which occurs at a far earlier time than is suggested by Weber's account of the Protestant work ethic, or in Horkheimer's earlier depiction of the bourgeois revolts of the fifteenth century.[95] The critical significance of this second moment is not solely that it attempts to dispel narratives of modernity and progress that point to the exceptional nature of the historical, rational 'individual', but in the way in which Adorno and Horkheimer seek to root the seemingly repetitive nature of the historical process in patterns that entail that the rational itself always contain a moment of fraud throughout historical time. Historical novelty, then, or the end of history as catastrophe, would require a departure from the always-already process of the sacrificial element in *both* conceptual patterns *and* actual socio-historic formations. This hints at the formal possibility of other forms taken by subjectivity (both historically and in the future) in which sacrifice would neither be imposed from without nor introverted in the form of renunciation.

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[92] *DE*, 42; *GS*, 3:71.
[93] *DE*, 43; *GS*, 3:73.
[94] *DE*, 49–50; *GS*, 3:82.
[95] See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Peter Baehr and Gordon C. Wells (London: Penguin Books, 2002) and Max Horkheimer, 'Egoism and the Freedom Movements: On the Anthropology of the Bourgeois Era', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, pp. 49–110.

But this latter point leads to the question of whether Adorno and Horkheimer unquestioningly connect the existence of the collective with the domination of the subject, thus excluding the historical potentialities of the collective or the social entirely. Given the complexity of questions regarding power and domination, the treatment of the relation between the collective and subject in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* inevitably appear to be unsatisfactory from the point of view of social theory. It could be argued that the collective simply comes to be viewed as that which imposes sacrifice and renunciation on the subject.[96] However, Adorno and Horkheimer's remarks on the relation between subject and collective, while always vague, suggests that the collective is itself at the behest of the particular interest, and sacrificial processes occur on an individual and a social level. It seems that Adorno and Horkheimer hold that the collective could be otherwise, yet historically realised forms of collectivity have never been arranged in such a way that the true rational interests of both the collective and the subject within the collective have been served.

1.4 Monads or Nomads: The Bourgeois Individual and the Historical Present

In the previous section, I suggested that the idea of history in the first excursus of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not only tied to a prehistory of the bourgeois subject. However, the text as a whole relies on a theorisation of the present in the form of a conception of the demise of a certain kind of subjectivity, connected with both the bourgeois individual and the posited difference between liberal society and 'post-liberal', 'industrial' society. This is principally explored in the chapter on the culture industry and the chapter on anti-Semitism, the latter of which forms a partly psychoanalytical investigation into the false projection that leads to anti-Semitism, which Adorno and Horkheimer oppose to mimetic forms of behaviour. The problem is, first, that Adorno and Horkheimer's theorisation of the present could be said to rest on a dubious conception of the past, based on a nostalgic idea of subjectivity under liberal capitalism and, second, their possible adherence to Friedrich Pollock's state capitalism thesis and the complete integration of the 'individual' appears to leave little scope for any hope of recuperating historical novelty and escaping prehistory.

It is not entirely clear the extent to which Adorno and Horkheimer came to accept Friedrich Pollock's theory of state capitalism. Pollock's main idea was that state capitalism replaced market capitalism in the early decades of the twentieth century resulting in the increase of state power and the removal of the partial independence of capital. As Moishe Postone and others have argued, the theorisation of state capitalism by Pollock was never adequate to

[96] See, for example, *DE*, 9, 16.

historical reality for numerous reasons, based as it was on various ideal types that were only roughly connected to the very different economic realities that characterised the 1930s and 40s.[97] The question is whether Adorno and Horkheimer followed Pollock's main thesis, which would imply politics (and power relations) comes to replace economics (and class antagonism) as the main source of insight into the workings of society.[98] It is not clear that either Adorno or Horkheimer believed that the contradictions of class society had been eliminated as Postone claims but rather, as evidenced in Adorno's essay 'Reflections on Class Theory', written directly prior to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, that class had become 'invisible'.[99] It is true that in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* socio-historic contradiction is not explored through an analysis of the relations of production and the forces of production but via the prism of the 'disproportion' existing between collective and individual that results in the 'untroubled harmony between omnipotence and impotence.'[100] However, as Deborah Cook has convincingly shown, there are only a few passages in the text that could be employed as exemplifying an adherence to the state capitalism thesis. Rather, she claims, Adorno and Horkheimer's concern continues to be the demonstration of the 'primacy of the economy'.[101]

While there is no sustained discussion of class or the economy in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the relation between rationality and the emergence of capitalism is made explicit; the development of the market economy is described as the 'power' that ruined reason.[102] Thus, while self-preserving, functional reason can be traced back to prehistory, it is only when market capitalism arises as the 'prevailing form of reason' that the drive for self-preservation becomes a properly 'natural' force, possessing its own logic:

> With the development of the economic system[103] in which the control of the economic apparatus by private groups creates a division between human beings, self-preservation, although treated by reason as identical, had become the reified drive of each individual

[97] For a detailed critique of Pollock's theorisation of state capitalism, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labour, and Social Domination*: *A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 96-104.
[98] Helmut Dubiel argues that Adorno and Horkheimer 'found in Pollock's theory the political-economic refinement of their own thesis…that domination in highly developed, industrial societies no longer assumes an economic form, as in liberalism…Pollock's theory provided them with the economic justification for considering an economic analysis of society no longer necessary or even possible.' See Helmut Dubiel, *Theory and Politics: Studies in the Development of Critical Theory*, trans. Benjamin Gregg (Cambridge MA and London: The MIT Press, 1985), 81.
[99] *RCT*, 99; *GS*, 8:379.
[100] *DE*, 170; *GS*, 3:231.
[101] Deborah Cook, 'Adorno on Late Capitalism: Totalitarianism and the Welfare State', *Radical Philosophy*, 89 (1998), 16–26 (p. 18).
[102] *DE*, 70; *GS*, 3:109.
[103] 'Economic system' replaces 'capitalism' in the 1947 edition.

> citizen and proved to be a destructive natural force no longer distinguishable from self-destruction.[104]

For Adorno and Horkheimer, self-preservation becomes a 'reified' drive at a certain historical juncture, which is connected to the rise of capitalism and the emergence of a certain kind of 'self', implying that the drive to self-preservation is not a means to understand the historical process *in toto*, but becomes increasingly significant with the emergence of capitalism. Nor should their idea of 'self-preservation' (*Selbstverhaltung*) be read too literally. While in Freud's early drive theory, the term tended to refer to immediate physical drives or to what Laplanche and Pontalis describe as 'those needs associated with bodily functions necessary for the preservation of the individual',[105] in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* it appears to be used in a more general sense that encompasses physical, economic, and to a certain extent psychic and 'cultural' preservation. But given the lack of analytical specificity regarding the constitution of the egoistic drives or the drive for self-preservation, the re-orientation of thought towards the 'survival' and 'preservation' of the subject could be said to manifest itself in a concern with the preservation of the bourgeois individual. This would imply that Adorno and Horkheimer's idea of subjectivity in general comes to be viewed as identical with the subjectivity of the bourgeois individual.

This is evidenced by the way in which Adorno and Horkheimer seem to suggest that while the market economy ruins reason, removing its more 'substantive' varieties, something is also lost in the transition between what they refer to as the 'liberal period' and mid-twentieth century capitalism, and the supposed end of the free market.[106] The demise of freedom in general is connected directly with the 'abolition of the independent economic subject by big industry', which is further linked to the erosion of reflection and 'moral' decision itself.[107] In an unmistakeably Horkheiminian lament, the 'free interplay' of subjects or 'monads' that supposedly characterised market capitalism is mourned, which leads to a situation in which subjectivity itself – understood in psychoanalytical terms as the conflict of various drives – no longer experiences the oppositional moment of the subject who is to an extent freely opposed to society at large.[108] This conception of subjectivity is in large part the result of Horkheimer's attempts to incorporate social psychology with historical materialism in the 1930s that were based on Fromm's early work, and echoes his idea that there exists a latent utopian potential in the oppositional structures of the bourgeois family, a theme that was developed in detail in

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[104] *DE*, 71; *GS*, 3:110.
[105] See Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac Books, 1988) pp. 220–222.
[106] *DE*, 131; *GS*, 3:185.
[107] *DE*, 164; *GS*, 3:224.
[108] *DE,* 168; *GS*, 3:229.

his introduction to 'Authority and the Family' in 1937.[109] By the time Horkheimer wrote 'The End of Reason' in 1942, the necessary elements for the formation of an oppositional subjectivity expanded beyond the training ground of the bourgeois family to include the possession of private property more generally, which, in the text, is accompanied by a candid disquisition on the virtues of the small business entrepreneur, also considered as a historical bygone.[110] Two principal ideas derive from 'The End of Reason' that appear to also underlie the account of subjectivity contained within *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: first, that the individuation that was necessary at a certain historical point is no longer required by big business under twentieth century capitalism; and second, that the historical form taken by subjectivity that was connected to the (economically necessary) individuation that took place under market capitalism contained an emancipatory potential that is now lost, seemingly never to be recovered. This leads to the question of whether historical novelty, the possibility of leaving prehistory and oppositional subjectivity are only connected with the image of the bourgeois individual of the nineteenth and early twentieth century for Horkheimer and Adorno, or whether their analysis offers another way out.

While Horkheimer's increasingly conservative theoretical inclinations appear to lead to a kind of conceptual stasis and a privileging of the 'liberal' period, this does not exhaust the concept of subjectivity in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. It is, after all, Adorno and Horkheimer's intention to demonstrate the way in which abstraction, formalisation and the functionalisation of reason that occurs in bourgeois conceptual and behavioural process leads to a warped relation to nature, which becomes 'mere undifferentiated resistance'[111] in the hands of the abstract subject, as with Kierkegaard's pseudonymous rentier gazing into a window mirror. While these processes have occurred throughout history, Adorno and Horkheimer follow Weber in linking the beginning of the culmination of these tendencies to both the rise of Calvinism and the end of the French Revolution.[112] But it is in the 'liberal era' that the bourgeois proclivity towards coldness, paranoia and conspiracy becomes fully pervasive in both the psyche and society,[113] and it is in this time-period when the 'natural' impulses come to be fully subordinated and the 'mimetic heritage' that had previously accompanied even early forms of Catholicism finally expunged.[114] The full expansion and mechanisation of the labour process under capitalism and the accompanying suppression of impulses and hatred of

[109] See Max Horkheimer, 'Authority and the Family', *Critical Theory: Selected Essays of Max Horkheimer*, trans. by Matthew J. O'Connell and others (New York: Continuum, 2002), pp. 47–128.
[110] See Max Horkheimer, 'The End of Reason', *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science,* 9.3 (1941), 366–388.
[111] *DE*, 70; *GS*, 3:109.
[112] Ibid.
[113] *DE*, 163; *GS*, 3:223.
[114] *DE*, 149; *GS*, 3:206.

the body is thus viewed as a culmination (but not a necessary one) of the rationalisation of the sacrificial process detected in the formation of subjectivity and history in *The Odyssey*.

While it could be argued that Adorno and Horkheimer fail to connect the dissolution of bourgeois subjectivity with the possibility of the realisation of other forms of subjectivity, there are passages that point to alternate forms of historical existence. However, they continue to be related to the 'individual':

> Only when dream absolves them of the compulsion of work, of the individual's attachment to a particular social function and finally to a self, leading back to a primal state free of domination and discipline, do human beings feel the magic of pleasure.[115]

As discussed in the first section with regard to the trope of nomadism and Odysseus' attempt to return home, labour, property, the predominance of 'mind' and individuation itself are viewed by Adorno and Horkheimer as the beginning of history as catastrophe, and the nomad as an alternative *imago*. But nor do they fully entertain the possibilities contained within the dissolution of subjectivity, a point made by Peter Sloterdijk in his alternate reading of *The Odyssey* in which he points to the potentially liberating nature of Odysseus' play on his name – and subsequent denial of identity – when confronted with Polyphemus.[116] It is not necessary to accept Sloterdijk's idea of 'kynical' subjectivity to consider that Adorno and Horkheimer tend to neglect other possible forms of historical experience in the text. This is symptomatic of a conceptual tension in both Adorno's and Horkheimer's thought, in which that which begins the regressive progression of history as catastrophe (the process of false substitution required by sacrifice as prototype of exchange, labour, and the concept of the 'home') is also that which could offer a means of leaving prehistory. However, leaving prehistory is also understood with reference to the possibility of mimetic forms of behaviour in which inwardness would be overcome, which would form a liberation from what, in Nietzschean terms, are forms of ascetic morality that involve subjective and social forms of renunciation. It seems that bourgeois subjectivity is viewed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a kind of repository for historical possibility that could necessarily never be realised in this form, accompanied as it was by life-denying but simultaneously self-preserving paranoiac tendencies that culminated in totalitarian forms of politics and the shrinking of reason to its functional element.

But, even if historical possibility in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is not only connected to the bourgeois individual, it is limited in its focus on 'Western civilisation'. As discussed, the

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[115] *DE*, 82; *GS*, 3:125.

[116] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 74.

dialectic of enlightenment forms one, basic motif of history, a point which exonerates Adorno and Horkheimer from the criticism that they arrive at a universalising philosophy of history that seeks to apprehend all of history through the lens of self-preservation, false equivalence and the suppression of impulse. In the same way, the use of outdated historical anthropology does not entail a stagist, progressivist conception of history, and they steer clear of anachronistic forms of analysis in their comparison of magical, mythical, and enlightenment forms of thought. On the other hand, the omission of any consideration of non- 'Western' 'civilization' is indicative of the fact that the text fails to consider the dialectic of enlightenment that occurred in non-European history as a result of 'Western civilization', the utilisation of 'civilization' in conjunction with 'Western' itself suggesting the possibility of isolating histories from one another. Given the fact that the text is concerned with the 'subterranean' 'history of Europe', that is, 'the fate of the human instincts and passions repressed and distorted by civilization',[117] it seems curious that little mention is made of how this 'subterranean' history expanded beyond Europe through colonialism. However, in the section entitled 'On the Critique of the Philosophy of History' in 'Notes and Sketches', Adorno and Horkheimer point to what would be required by a philosophical construction of 'world history':

> A philosophical construction of world history would have to show how, despite all detours and resistances, the systematic domination over nature has been asserted more and more decisively and has integrated all internal human characteristics. Economic, political, and cultural forms would have to be derived from this position.[118]

The quasi-programmatic nature of this statement suggests that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* can be read as a preparation for a concept of history that would go beyond European history; and Adorno's later treatment of history in *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history attests to this, even though, as will be discussed in subsequent chapters, his forays beyond European history remain limited and, when they do appear, are confined to specific instances. However, if a philosophical construction of 'world history' is to be read through the systematic domination over nature, then various questions present themselves that are not broached in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Can economic, political, and cultural forms be derived from a construction of history as domination over nature, and can this form a properly critical concept of history? How can equivalence and substitutive conceptual forms be theorised philosophically? Finally, how is 'nature' itself to be understood? These questions necessitate

[117] *DE*, 192; *GS*, 3:265.
[118] *DE*, 185 (translation amended); *GS*, 3:254.

a consideration of Adorno's more direct examination of the problematic of the nature-history relation than that which takes place in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*.

2

Natural History as Interpretive Method and as Critical Concept

> Here was the broken pavement, worn so long ago by pious feet, that Time, stealing on the pilgrims' steps, had trodden out their track, and left but crumbling stones. Here were the rotten beam, the sinking arch, the sapped and mouldering wall, the lowly trench of earth, the stately tomb on which no epitaph remained, – all, – marble, stone, iron, wood, and dust, one common monument of ruin.[119]

2.1 The Natural Growth of History

The origins of the concept of natural history in the German tradition can be traced from Hegel's idea of second nature, to Marx's analysis of the relation between nature and history in *Capital*, via Lukács' development of Hegel's idea of second nature, to Benjamin's interpretive procedure in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, and finally to Adorno.[120] It is important to note that the concept is not directly connected to the everyday usage of natural history as the systematic, scientific inquiry into living organisms. Rather, it concerns what Adorno refers to in the lecture 'The History of Nature' as the question of the 'inner composition [*inneren Zusammensetzung*] of elements of nature and elements of history within history itself.'[121] The adoption of a term that already has a historically established and concretised meaning is indicative of its polemic function, but its connection to natural history as a form of scientific inquiry is never made fully explicit by Adorno. The concept 'nature' that it implies and problematises is not the (supposedly unmediated) nature examined by natural science but nature as a philosophical concept, the meaning of which cannot be defined or concretised from the outset. As Gillian Rose points out, the philosophical content of 'nature' as employed by Adorno derives from the way in which it is used to 'encapsulate the perspective of the transmutation of historical processes of formation into 'apparent' nature.'[122] However, in Adorno's works, references to first and second nature are not always distinguished from one another: he uses 'nature' *both* to refer to 'first' nature in the sense of

[119] Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 401.
[120] For an extensive examination of the underpinnings of the concept of natural history from Thomas Aquinas to Walter Benjamin, in particular with reference to Martin Luther's idea of Secunda Natura, see Robert Hullot-Kentor, 'The Problem of Natural History in the Philosophy of Theodor W. Adorno' (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1985).
[121] *HF*, 116; *GF*, 168.
[122] Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (London: Verso, 2014), 102.

the actual, physical world that exists inextricably intertwined with but separately from the socio-historical realm (and our concept of this first nature), and to refer to 'second' nature, that is, the world of convention and social 'laws' that appear as natural but that have in fact evolved historically. However, natural history does not collapse the distinction between the two; it seeks to demonstrate the way in which social laws and the sphere of convention strike us as if they were elements of first nature, but also the way in which our warped relation to second nature prevents us from being able to fully establish the difference between first and second nature because both are viewed largely in relation to domination. But the concept of nature (or nature in history) contains a further double sense; it refers to what in *Negative Dialectics* is characterised in Schopenhaurian terms as the process of devouring and being devoured[123] that has supposedly constituted history so far, but it is also that which must be recalled if we are to step out of this process. Equally, natural history as a concept is concerned with history, as in actual historical processes and also the concept 'history', that is, the various ways in which we conceptualise and define these processes. What is confusing about natural history is that it is alternatively deployed by Adorno to suggest a concept, a descriptive thesis of conditions under 'late capitalism', a descriptive thesis concerning history in general, and an interpretive procedure. But in its most general terms, it is the attempt to 'see all nature, and whatever claims to be nature, installed as history, and all history as nature.'[124] Natural history is further integral to attempts at philosophical interpretation. In the lecture 'The Concept of Progress', Adorno states:

> Interpretation (…) is criticism of phenomena that have been brought to a standstill; it consists in revealing the dynamism stored up in them, so that what appears as second nature can be seen to be history. On the other hand, criticism ensures that what has evolved loses its appearance as mere existence and stands revealed as the product of history.[125]

In this sense, interpretation from the point of view of natural history has a further purpose, which is to demonstrate that while second nature appears to be what in Lukács' diagnosis in *Theory of the Novel* amounts to a senseless objectivity, behind this nature lies the historical process, and the realm of intentionality. As a procedure, natural history opens up this supposed nature to the possibilities of criticism.

Aside from the 1932 lecture, 'The Idea of Natural-History', and in three lectures in 'History and Freedom', Adorno does not set out his concept of natural history in much detail, this

[123] *ND*, 355 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:348–349.
[124] *HF*, 124; *GF*, 179.
[125] *HF*, 135; *GF*, 190.

despite the fact the concept forms one of the nerve centres of his work. In the history model in *Negative Dialectics*, natural history is directly treated only in the two final paragraphs, in which Adorno turns from Hegel to Marx. The first line of the section is an answer to the question posed earlier in relation to Hegel; that is, how are we to continue to conceive of historical objectivity while simultaneously doubting all claims to universality on the part of the conceptual structures that we have that seek to grasp history: 'The objectivity of historical life is that of natural history'.[126] This is followed by a quotation of a passage from the preface to the first volume of *Capital*, in which Marx sets out his line of inquiry; that is, the examination of the 'natural' laws that govern the movement of society and the 'evolution of the economic formation of society' viewed as a 'process of natural history'.[127]

One way of understanding Adorno's concept of natural history is as remaining relatively unchanged from the formulation that appears in the 1932 lecture, 'The Idea of Natural-History', in which Adorno combines Lukács' idea of 'second nature' as it appears in *Theory of the Novel* and Benjamin's conception of allegory in *The Origin of the German Tragic Drama*.[128] However, for both Lukács and Benjamin these early works formed their examination of the relation between history and nature prior to their subsequent readings of Marx, and this is also true of 'The Idea of Natural-History', even though it positions itself within the field of the 'materialist dialectic'.[129] To read Adorno's early essay as simply a prototype for later formulations of the idea would be to neglect the fact that what is designated by the concept *natural history*, at least in *Negative Dialectics,* is explicitly connected to Marx's use of the term in the preface to *Capital*, and thus to fail to raise the question of the way in which natural history – as it is employed in Adorno's later work – relates to his 'Marxism'. But there is also a psychoanalytic strand that Adorno introduces in the early lecture which is only latent in *Negative Dialectics*. It is also possible to read *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an exemplar of a philosophical history that takes place from the perspective of natural history. However, while this might be true in a general sense, Adorno's development of the concept, particularly in the early lecture but also in *Negative Dialectics*, requires a separate examination because it thematises more directly the interrelation between the historical and the natural elements in the concept of 'history' from a philosophical point of view that in turn suggests a formulation for an interpretive procedure for the historical process beyond a consideration of the prehistory of the bourgeois individual. Far from showing the

[126] *ND*, 354 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:347.
[127] Karl Marx, 'Preface to the First Edition', *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy,* Vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 92.
[128] Susan Buck-Morss points out that Adorno utilises the same argumentation and quotes directly from the lecture in *Negative Dialectics* which, while true, neglects to specify the differences that demarcate the early and late formulations. See Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 52–53.
[129] *INH*, 269; *GS*, 1:365.

basic sameness of Adorno's position throughout his writings, his development of the idea of natural history indicates subtle but significant alterations in his thought. This is not only important from the point of view of intellectual biography, but rather pertains to the *criticality* of the concept and calls into question how it is to be constructed theoretically.

There is a now burgeoning literature on the concept of natural history. One tendency is to view the concept as offering a kind of productively estranging function for theory, or, as Frederic Jameson puts it, as effectuating a 'reciprocal defamiliarization of the two incommensurable poles' of the nature/history dualism.[130] Tom Whyman suggests that natural history can be read as a kind of Wittgensteinian therapeutic concept intended to 'dissolve certain philosophical anxieties', while Max Pensky views it as possessing a 'peculiar *productivity*' and focuses on Adorno's idea, found in the early lecture, that 'natural history' results in a 'shock' and thus a 'change of perspective.'[131] More recently, a further line of thought has emerged, connected to environmentalist readings of Adorno that consider natural history to be a kind of formulation of the 'Anthropocene' *avant la lettre,* or at least a concept easily assimilable in attempts to think environmental catastrophe. These will be discussed in the final section of the chapter. This chapter will attempt to show why natural history should be regarded, in Adorno's terms, as a 'critical concept', and assess its relation to interpretation, and in so doing dispute certain readings which neutralise the concept's critical import through characterising it in terms of its apparently affective dimension. I begin with an exposition of the lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History' and suggest that its criticality lies in part in its attempt to re-interpret historical time through its dialectical treatment of the idea of the 'archaic'. From there, I attempt to show the similitudes and divergences between Adorno and Marx on the question of natural history. Following on from this, I draw out the precise relation between negative dialectics and natural history and consider why the concept should not be analysed in relation to its apparently 'affective' dimension, which, I argue, occludes its criticality. I end with a consideration of the difficulties inherent in transposing the concept onto theorisations of the Anthropocene but suggest why it might nonetheless prove useful as a means by which to critique certain assumptions that often accompany this latter, which will bring me back to Adorno's critique of Heidegger in the early lecture.

[130] Jameson, *Late Marxism: Adorno or the Persistence of the Dialectic*, 99.
[131] See Tom Whyman, 'Understanding Adorno on 'Natural-History', *International Journal of Philosophical Studies,* 24.4 (2016), 452-472 and Max Pensky, 'Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno', *Critical Horizons: A Journal of Philosophy and Social Theory*, 5.1 (2004), 227-258 (p. 232).

2.2 Early Formulations of Natural History

> The most anxious concern of the [theatre] stalls is to conceal their origins in the arena…And doesn't the orchestra pit itself resemble the animal barrier which has been displaced from the centre of the arena to the edge. In our nightmares animal games are reintroduced into our respectable theatres and Bengal tigers break out triumphantly from their cloakroom-cages and go on the rampage in the aisles.[132]

In Adorno's early writings, the idea of the repressed natural dimensions of historical phenomena – always on the point of exploding outwards – is already apparent: in the essay 'The Natural History of the Theatre', Adorno makes explicit the connection between theatre, and its ritualistic, natural elements that he relates to sacrifice and exchange.[133] It is in his Kantgesellschaft 1932 lecture, given as a response to the so-called 'Frankfurt discussion' on the question of historical relativism that took place between Troeltsche, Mannheim and Scheler, in which Adorno first formulates the concept in properly philosophical terms via his critique of Heidegger's idea of historicity in *Being and Time*.[134] In the lecture, Adorno utilises Heideggerian terms and presents the concept clad in what Robert Hullot-Kentor refers to as 'conceptual lederhosen'; natural history is situated in a broader 'neo-ontological project of history' that seeks to offer an 'actual interpretation of being'.[135] In fact, Adorno goes so far as to claim that it is 'neo-ontology' in its Heideggerian form that has demonstrated the way in which nature and history are interwoven, but ultimately fails to show this as it does not go beyond considering history as a 'natural fact…under the category of historicity.'[136] A new formulation of the problem is therefore necessary, although Adorno continues to frame it in terms of historical and natural *being* (*Sein*):

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[132] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Natural History of the Theatre', in *Quasi Una Fantasia, Essays on Modern Music,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (London and New York: Verso, 1992), 70.
[133] Ibid., 66.
[134] For a clear but brief summary on the debate about historicism see Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics,* 53 and for a longer and more detailed exposition see Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 174–228.
[135] Hullot-Kentor, in the introduction to his translation of the lecture, turns to Leo Strauss's description of the way in which Heidegger pervaded all aspects of German philosophy during the twenties and thirties, and suggests that Adorno's lecture is a response to Heidegger's philosophy as a 'philosophical form of mythical terror', and in some ways a failed attempt at mastering this mythical terror in its own terms. He characterises Adorno's lecture as a form of the 'dialectic of enlightenment' amidst a 'lifelong struggle with the ontologist'. This points to the way in which Adorno seeks, in the first section of the lecture, to wrest the concept of history away from the notion of historicity via a not wholly developed immanent critique of Heidegger that continues to consider nature and history in relation to an 'ontological reorientation' of the philosophy of history. See Robert Hullot-Kentor, 'Introduction to T.W. Adorno's ''The Idea of Natural-History'', in *Things Beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 236-238.
[136] *INH*, 260; *GS*, 1:355.

> If the question of the relation of nature and history is to be seriously posed, then it only offers any chance of solution if it is possible *to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as a historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature.*'[137]

Adorno is not only suggesting that what we hold to be 'nature' and what we hold to be 'history' as concepts are thus entirely mediated by one another, but also makes a further claim from a diagnostic point of view. That is, that it is at the point at which history appears to us as most historical, and nature as most natural, that in fact forms the moment in which these concepts are at their most mediated and cross over into one another. This is later developed by Adorno in his re-interpretation of Hegel's concept of world spirit in *Negative Dialectics*, in which the latter's supposed historical unfolding is something that is experienced both 'over' and 'through' 'human beings' and takes the form of a kind of natural force as the 'relentlessness of what happens'.[138] Spirit, which, in Hegelian terms, leaves the context of blind and unreflective nature to assume a series of historical shapes is in fact entrenched in the nature from which it is supposed to have departed. In this sense, what Adorno means by 'history' at its most 'historical' is the moment at which the historical process takes on the 'qualities of blind nature' when it unfolds in its most 'uninhibited manner'.[139]

For Hegel, second nature forms a moment in the transition from determined, *first* nature to freedom. While (first) nature is an immediate form of the spirit, because it consists of the concept without its conceptual content, second nature is a form of habit:

> By habit man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its slave. Habit is not an immediate, first nature, dominated by the individuality of the senses. It is rather a second nature posited by the soul. But all the same it is nature, something posited that assumes the shape of immediacy […][140]

Christoph Menke argues that Hegel conceives of second nature as a demonstration of the mechanism of an 'inversion of something the will has freely made for itself into an independent being to which we…citizens or members of society – are subjected', and suggests that the Hegelian formulation of second nature contains a critical moment.[141] But this is

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[137] *INH*, 260; *GS*, 1:354–355.
[138] *ND*, 305 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:300.
[139] *HF*, 117; *GF*, 169.
[140] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, revised Michael Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 134.
[141] Christoph Menke, 'Hegel's Theory of Second Nature: The 'Lapse' of Spirit', *Symposium,* 17.1 (2013), 31–49 (p. 47).

reading Hegel already through the lens of Lukács and Adorno.[142] For Hegel, habit as second nature forms the moment in which spirit, moving away from the immediacy of natural determinacy (first nature), remains unfree because it remains bound to nature by itself becoming subject to unreflective and mostly conceptless habit, in which spirit remains unconscious of itself as free spirit. But it is a moment in the trajectory of spirit that will be surpassed once spirit has attained consciousness of itself as free. On the other hand, in Lukács' *Theory of the Novel*, 'second nature' is critical insofar as it points to a world in which meaningfulness has been usurped by the world of convention, connected to Lukács' analysis of the transcendental homelessness experienced by the subject in 'modernity'. While previously, the subject encounters the world as meaningful totality, something has occurred such that the world has become both senseless and incomprehensible *convention*:

> This second nature is not dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first [nature]; it is a complex of senses – meanings – which have become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority; it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities. This second nature could only be brought back to life, if ever, by a metaphysical act of reawakening the spiritual element that created or maintained it in its earlier or ideal existence, but could never be experienced by another interiority […] Estrangement from nature (the first nature), the modern sentimental attitude to nature, is only a projection of man's experience of his self-made environment as a prison instead of a parental home.[143]

Second nature as understood by Lukács in this early work is not only *habit*, in the sense of a sphere in which the subject acts unreflectively and mechanistically, but rather is that which is experienced by the subject as an 'objectivity' in which meaning has disappeared. Second nature can be distinguished from first nature because it is neither *sensuous* nor *senseless*, but the sense that it has is no longer accessible to the subject; the meaning that it possessed has now been lost, as is witnessed at the level of genre in the development from the epic to the novel form. There has thus been a historical rupture, diagnosed in what Lukács would later refer to in his subsequent preface as 'romantic anti-capitalist' terms,[144] at which point the world ceased to form a meaningful totality and the subject became alienated from first nature, and meaning comes to instead be located in the 'long-dead interiorities' that can no longer be accessed. This alienation from first nature is also connected with its idealisation; sentimentality concerning first nature appears when this nature is no longer accessible, and the subject is faced instead only with the 'self-made' yet simultaneously indecipherable

[142] Adorno considers Hegel to have already given the 'theory of second nature…a critical tinge'. See *ND*, 38 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:48.
[143] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel,* 64.
[144] Ibid, 'Preface', 19.

'objectivity'. This thus points to a realm that is created by subjects unconsciously, which is also connected to the relation between the subject and history: 'long-dead' interiorities strike the subject in the present as markers of lost historical sense. But on how these interiorities are to be deciphered, *Theory of the Novel* remains silent: it remains at the level of a philosophical history of genres.[145]

Adorno suggests that Lukács' idea of second nature and his 'general historico-philosphical image of a meaningful and meaningless world'[146] points to a world of 'estranged' things that cannot be 'decoded' (*entziffern*): we encounter them as 'ciphers' (*Chiffern*).[147] Thus, Lukács correctly identifies the 'metamorphosis of the historical qua past into nature',[148] but instead of raising the epistemological question of how these ciphers of lost significance are to be interpreted, Adorno suggests that Lukács continues to regard the return of meaning in terms of a 'theological resurrection',[149] by holding onto the possibility of a 'metaphysical act of reawakening the spiritual element', a possibility that Lukács discerns, in the final two chapters of *Theory of the Novel*, in the works of Goethe, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, in which 'nature' removed from convention can still be glimpsed alongside 'intimations of a breakthrough into a new epoch', even if these glimpses remain 'polemical, nostalgic, abstract'.[150] Adorno's criticism of Lukács thus centres on his failing to attempt to arrive at a properly philosophical interpretation of second nature, rather turning to the possibilities of returning to a 'complete totality' and leaving the world of 'absolute sinfulness',[151] and nor does he discern the way in which nature itself is historical.

It is Benjamin's examination of allegory in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that offers the second model for the interpretation of natural history in the main body of Adorno's lecture, and that he thinks demonstrates the other aspect of the 'concrete unity' of nature and history.

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[145] The concept of second nature is retained by Lukács in *History and Class Consciousness*, but it ceases to be connected to a generalised loss of meaning in a world of convention and is transposed onto a new Marxist reading of history. Thus, second nature is analysed in relation to the contrast between feudal and bourgeois society: the subject in feudal society is not yet consciously a *social* being, as social relations remained largely 'natural' and unconscious, which alters with the socialisation of society that occurs during the bourgeois epoch. But the actual class responsible for this process of socialisation through labour, the proletariat, only effect this shift unconsciously and through 'forces' seemingly more 'soulless' and 'impenetrable' than feudalism itself; these forces seem to be opposed to the proletariat 'like a second nature'. See Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness,* trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1971), 19–20. It seems that Adorno implicitly also has *History and Class Consciousness* in mind in this lecture, as he mentions the world of commodities as second nature, although analysis of the commodity is of course absent in *Theory of the Novel.*

[146] *INH*, 260; *GS*, 1:355.
[147] *INH*, 261; *GS*, 1:356.
[148] *INH*, 262. *GS*, 1:357.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Lukács, *Theory of the Novel*, 152.
[151] Ibid., 153.

The literature on Adorno's development of natural history in the lecture has a tendency to circumnavigate the detail of Adorno's interpretation of Benjamin's examination of allegory as form and natural history, although Andrew Bowie criticises Adorno on account of what he describes as his 'appropriation' of Benjamin, and suggests that he places too much significance on what is in fact a 'very circumscribed historical phenomenon',[152] that is, the plays of the German Baroque, but he does not consider how this so-called 'appropriation' functions in the context of Adorno's lecture or his later thought.[153] Adorno quotes a passage from Benjamin at length, in which Benjamin discusses the difference between symbol and allegory;

> The relationship of symbol and allegory may be incisively and formally determined by means of the decisive category of time, whose introduction into this sphere of semiotics was the great romantic insight of these thinkers. Whereas in the symbol, with the glorification of death and destruction, the transfigured face of nature reveals itself fleetingly in the light of redemption, in allegory the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history, a petrified primordial landscape. Everything about history that, from the beginning, has been, ultimately sorrowful and unsuccessful, is expressed in a face – or rather in a death's head.[154]

For Adorno, the development that Benjamin's examination of the use of allegory by German Baroque playwrights effectuates is the demonstration of the way in which the usual understanding of nature (as the eternal or essential) and history (as the ever progressing or new) in fact converge in their transience (*Vergänglichkeit*). Benjamin's interpretation of these plays, which he holds to reflect the increasing secularisation of the society in which they were written and performed, discerns the way in which nature is not presented as eternal (as it was in Greek tragic drama), but rather as something which is impermanent and as something that is presented as containing historical signification. Time is increasingly viewed in spatialised (and therefore dehistoricised) terms. Correspondingly, history is no longer viewed by these playwrights eschatologically but is also treated as something subject to the process of decay: the Renaissance view of time as marked by the future apocalypse is replaced by a hope for secular, earthly peace. The use of the death's head – a common trope in baroque drama – is interpreted by Benjamin as an example of the way in which allegory as *form* makes 'man's

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[152] Andrew Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy* (Cambridge, UK and Malden MA: Polity Press, 2013), 90.
[153] A notable exception is Beatrice Hanssen, who offers a lucid and detailed examination of Adorno's interpretation of Benjamin's idea of natural history. See Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 9-19.
[154] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 166.

subjection to nature' 'obvious';[155] in this sense, unlike the symbol, allegory is 'non-conceptual, bitter, profound'.[156] For Benjamin, in these plays, history as 'irresistible decay' is exemplified in the 'baroque cult of the ruin', in which history becomes a setting for secularised political dramas, and becomes natural history proper.

Adorno takes from Benjamin's examination of allegory in the German baroque an intimation of method that could demonstrate the unity of nature and history.[157] Unlike Lukács, who discerns but does not interpret second nature and the world of convention, it is Benjamin who demonstrates both the historical element of nature, and also provides a hermeneutic tool through which the concrete unity of nature and history can be read; that is, via the idea of transience and the decipherment of the natural-historical fragment. For Adorno, Benjamin's discovery of the moment of transience in both history and nature allows these two supposedly distinct realms to become commensurable, and in this sense, interpretable. Unlike in the symbol that supposedly points to a higher metaphysical, eternal realm by freezing a moment in time, in allegory the moment of materiality and finitude in the historical process becomes apparent and meaning itself becomes temporal, or as Howard Caygill notes, 'subject to time'.[158] The category of transience is critical, for Adorno, because it demonstrates the way in which the transfiguration of the historical into the natural is itself a process, and therefore not static, even if history comes to be temporarily petrified, and therefore demonstrates the contingency of both the historical and the supposedly natural. As Max Pensky puts it, what is transient 'loses any plausible claims to permanence, to effect, to continuity.'[159] If second nature can be deciphered through its transience, it comes to be laid open to criticism once again; as a phenomenon it is not fixed. Adorno goes on to state:

> As transience, all original history is absolutely present. It is present in the form of 'signification'. 'Signification' means that the elements of nature and history are not fused with each other, rather they break apart and interweave at the same time in such a fashion that the natural appears as a sign for the history, and history, where it seems to be most historical, appears as a sign for nature. All being, or at least all being that has been or become what it is, transforms itself into allegory; in these terms allegory is no longer merely a category of history.[160]

History, regarded as the realm of supposed novelty, when it appears in its most historical guise, in fact shows itself to be at its most natural, without purpose and containing elements

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[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid., 161.
[157] *INH*, 264; *GS*, 1:360.
[158] Howard Caygill, *Walter Benjamin: The Colour of Experience* (London: Routledge, 2005), 58.
[159] Pensky, 'Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno', 241.
[160] *INH,* 264; *GS,* 1:360.

of the old: interpreted allegorically, history ceases to be the realm of ends, but instead becomes a *sign* for the natural or the realm of natural necessity, and vice versa. This is reminiscent of Goethe's description of the Napoleonic Wars in a letter to Schiller:

> What one can observe on the whole is a tremendous view of streams and rivers which, with natural necessity, rush together from many heights and valleys; at last they cause the overflowing of a great river and an inundation in which both perish, those who foresaw it and those who had no inkling of it. In this tremendous empirical process you can see nothing but nature and nothing of that which we philosophers would so much like to call freedom.[161]

While Goethe's description is not cited either by Benjamin or Adorno, it can be read as a kind of prototype for the allegorical interpretation of history; nature becomes a sign for the historical. But history does not therefore become indistinguishable from nature. Interpreting history as containing a *sign* for nature does not imply that history simply stands in for or is the same as nature, or vice versa, but rather that natural-historical elements combine and interweave with one another in what has come to be regarded as history or nature proper. Allegory as interpretive method then attempts to decipher these elements and extract from them their meaning, which is not only temporal but also, connected as it is with decay, radically material; or rather, meaning is contained within the transient materiality that allegory points to.[162] Nature and history are thus not identical with one another, or substitutable for one another, but nor are they separable. In this way, allegory ceases to be a historically circumscribed aesthetic device used by the German baroque playwrights but generalised by Adorno in this lecture as a means by which to interpret history as such.

From the perspective of gauging the criticality of Adorno's development of the concept of natural history in the early lecture, the most remarked upon aspect in the literature is Adorno's assimilation of Lukács' idea of second nature alongside Benjamin's examination of the nature-history relation. However, to some extent, Adorno only restates these earlier formulations, and it is in fact the final part of the lecture that indicates an interrelated but distinct model that contains a psychoanalytical thread and connected to this, an undeveloped critique of historical periodisation. This final element, Adorno's re-interpretation of the archaic/new relation and

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[161] Letter from Goethe to Schiller, quoted in Karl Löwith, *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1949), 53.

[162] In the lecture, Adorno emphasises the materialistic implications of Benjamin's concept of allegory and transience, but another reading is possible: that is, to interpret *Origin of German Tragic Drama* in messianic terms, thus focusing on the possibilities of historical restitution rather than the hermeneutical potentialities of the concepts of allegory and transience, and their relation to materialism. For more on this, see Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History,* 82–83.

the emphasis on psychoanalysis as a model for the examination of history, has received little attention, yet it is here that the criticality of the concept of natural history becomes more concrete. In these passages, Adorno produces the beginnings of a critique of forms of historical interpretation that delimit epochs based on supposed similitudes and that assume that history consists of a structural whole that can be sectioned off in parts. Instead, Adorno claims that history can only be interpreted if it is viewed as discontinuous.[163] Importantly, discontinuity is formulated in terms of the relation that holds between the 'archaic' and the 'new', which Adorno likens to the analysis of the psychic development of the individual.[164]

In the lecture, he formulates the relation between psychoanalytical and historical interpretation as follows;

> Now this discontinuity, which, as I said, cannot be legitimately transformed into a structural whole, presents itself in the first place as one between the mythical archaic, natural material of history, of what has been, and that which surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new […] I would like to recall that psychoanalytic research presents this antithesis with full clarity in the distinction between archaic symbols, to which no associations may attach themselves, and intersubjective, dynamic, inner-historical symbols, which can all be eliminated and transformed into psychical actuality and present knowledge.[165]

Adorno's distinction between the unchanging and archaic and the intersubjective and 'inner-historical' appears to be a reference to Freud's idea of the 'archaic heritage'.[166] However, Adorno wants to suggest that natural history as method shows that these supposed archaic, mythical symbols are not a 'static' foundation but rather also contain an element of the historically dynamic.[167] The implication is that the 'archaic' is misunderstood if it is taken to be a kind of underlying historical substratum or originary state that is to be contrasted with the

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[163] *INH*, 266; *GS*, 1:361–362.

[164] One question that arises from this is the extent to which this broad summation of psychoanalytic theory continues to underpin Adorno's interpretive historical procedure in his later works, particularly in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* and what implications this has for Adorno's overall concept of history. The question, then, is not simply that which was formulated in the first chapter; that is, who is the individual in Adorno's conception of history, but rather, the extent to which Adorno's historico-philosophical interpretation and his concept of history is partially modelled on psychoanalytical theory.

[165] *INH*, 266; *GS*, 1:362.

[166] Freud's idea of the 'archaic heritage' is first mentioned in the 1915 essay 'Instincts and their vicissitudes', and later developed in *Moses and Monotheism*. The principal idea is that certain memories and symbols are passed down phylogenetically, in contrast to those that are formed ontogenetically, an example of which is the recollection of the primal father as theorised in *Totem and Taboo*. See Sigmund Freud, 'Totem and Taboo', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIII (1913-1914)*, trans. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1981), pp. 1–161. For an exposition of Freud's analysis of the archaic heritage, see Eric Smadja, *Freud and Culture* (London: Karnac Books, 2015),133–135.

[167] *INH*, 266–267; *GS*, 1:362–363.

new, which in fact presents itself as the archaic. This, then, is one of the tasks of a critical natural history: to offer a dialectical analysis of the archaic by demonstrating the way in which historical change that occurs through time does not necessarily involve the new, but rather elements of the old, and to show that the supposedly archaic and mythical interacts with that which presents itself as the qualititatively new. To elucidate this, Adorno points to the experience of *déjà vu,* in which the subject is apparently confronted with the new and experiences it as familiar; the recognition of the 'that-which-has-always-been' that accompanies the new.[168] In the same way, an 'archaic anxiety' is experienced when the subject is confronted with the world of convention, or second nature. Adorno states;

> An archaic anxiety descends everywhere that the illusory world of convention appears in front of us. The element of foreboding is also an aspect of this semblance; one of its mythical elements is to have the character of drawing everything into itself as into a funnel.[169]

The historical experience of second nature, then, consists in the feeling of anxiety that accompanies recognition of the old within the new. Importantly, although Hegel is not mentioned in the lecture – although 'second nature' is a Hegelian concept – Adorno's idea of the funnel-like quality of second nature contains in germ form his simultaneous critique and construction of a (negative) universal history, and the supposition of the way in which 'history' has come to leave nothing out. What distinguishes the early lecture from his later formulations of this idea is that he does not yet explicitly connect this with the domination of nature or utilise the category of universal history as the means by which to explicate this.

The idea of the archaic is further elucidated in a 1934 letter to Benjamin, in which it is contrasted with the *prehistorical*: the archaic is 'precisely nothing but the site of everything whose voice has fallen silent because of history: something which can only be measured in terms of that historical rhythm which alone 'produces' it as a kind of primal history.'[170] The supposedly archaic, therefore, is in fact historically produced; it is those elements of lived experience that have been repressed as a result of the distortions of the historical process. The archaic is thus not that which is oldest but appears as such only because it has been successfully repressed; it 'first emerges from the innermost law of time itself.'[171] While unelaborated in the letter, this suggests the beginnings of a theory of time, in which time-consciousness is formed from repressed nature, as discussed in relation to the Odysseus

[168] *INH*, 268; *GS*, 1:364.
[169] *INH*, 268; *GS*, 1:364–365.
[170] Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1940*, ed. Henri Lonitz and trans. Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 38.
[171] Ibid.

excursus in chapter one. Two things should be clarified concerning Adorno's concept of the archaic. First, the concept is critical rather than descriptive, at least as it is deployed by Adorno in this lecture. It is not a temporal designator but a means by which the myth of history is exposed because it undermines the idea of historical linearity and the usual distinctions between old/new and prehistoric/historic. Second, the idea of the 'archaic' is built into the very idea of historical time and serves to obscure certain aspects of historical consciousness that do not fit into the funnel of second nature and are instead repressed. It is a means by which the suffering that arises from the domination of nature is made palatable to historical consciousness.

Further, the idea of the archaic is not a 'first' time that can be equated with the existence of a prehistoric classless society or otherwise, but rather arises alongside the development of the commodity form.[172] Adorno does not fully develop the relation between the archaic and the commodity in his early works, aside from in the section 'Intérieur' in *Kierkegaard*, in which he suggests that in the philosophy of Kierkegaard the commodities contained within the bourgeois interior are historically 'illusory' because they are simultaneously alienated from their use-value but they also appear to be meaningful in that they stand in for nature;

> In the *intérieur* archaic images unfold: the image of the flower as that of organic life; the image of the orient as specifically the homeland of yearning; the image of the sea as that of eternity itself.[173]

Adorno's re-interpretation of the 'archaic', then, both points to the erroneous time-consciousness that arises from capitalist production and the process of commodification in particular in which the repressed comes to be represented as the originary in the object that is regarded only in relation to its exchange value, but the actually 'archaic' comes to be re-interpreted as something that is, by contrast, produced historically. Further, the 'archaic' is connected to the idea of natural history because the re-interpretation of the archaic/new distinction demonstrates the falsity of viewing nature as the bedrock from which history emerges, when in fact, following Benjamin, it is also transient and therefore subject to change. However, as Peter Osborne points out in his critique of Frederic Jameson's reading of Adorno, the relation between natural history and social history can only be thought alongside the

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[172] See Adorno's letter to Benjamin in which he critiques the latter's supposed adoption of the idea of the Jungian collective unconscious on the basis that it obscures actual objectivity, in which images are produced not by an archaic unconscious but rather by 'alienated bourgeois individuals', Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 107. For a detailed comparison between Benjamin and Adorno on this matter, see Rebecca Comay, 'The Sickness of Tradition: Between Melancholia and Fetishism', in *Walter Benjamin and History,* ed. Andrew Benjamin (London and New York: Continuum, 2005) pp. 88–101 (pp. 96-98).
[173] *KCA*, 44; *GS*, 2:65–66.

nature-history relation, which 'thematises' the emergence of temporality.[174] In this sense, while the archaic challenges the notion of a first time, in the same way that natural history challenges the idea that 'human' or 'social' history can be disentangled from a natural history that precedes it, underlying both these doubles (the archaic-new relation and the natural history-social history relation) is by necessity the nature-history relation, even if this relation remains conceptually inaccessible.

Robert Hullot-Kentor suggests that, for Adorno, the archaic/new distinction is equivalent to his usage of the barbarism/freedom dichotomy.[175] While both these conceptual doublings critique linear conceptions of historical time, the Horkheiminian inflected barbarism/freedom or barbarism/progress dichotomies refer to a different if related complex of problems that pertains less to the question of historical time, and its relation to capitalism and the commodity-form, but rather to the question of reason and its relation to social domination. It seems that Adorno's re-interpretation of the archaic/new relation and the emphasis on psychoanalysis is not a theoretical after thought, but rather points not only to Adorno's later emphasis on discontinuity and rupture as essential components of historical interpretation – and thus, the beginnings of a critique of historical periodisation – but also to the highly specific way in which psychoanalytical methods undergird Adorno's concept of history throughout his works. It should be pointed out that that the lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History' took place in 1932, the same year in which Horkheimer published the essay 'History and Psychology', which also begins with a critique of Heideggerian conceptions of history and Jungian notions of the unconscious. In this essay, Horkheimer attempts to show the necessity of incorporating social psychology alongside Marxist methodologies in order to examine the 'genesis of psychic mechanisms that make it possible to keep latent the tensions between social classes that lead to conflicts on the basis of the economic situation.'[176] While there is no evidence to suggest that Adorno had read Horkheimer's essay prior to the lecture, the idea that historical analysis ought to be informed by psychoanalytical methodology was increasingly prevalent in the Institute, largely due to the influence of Fromm. But, while there is some attempt – based on unconvincing psychological assessments of the contemporary psyche – by Horkheimer in this early essay to show how a Marxian concept of history could be combined with social psychology, in Adorno's early lecture, the relation remains inchoate, and the concluding lines in which he invokes the materialist dialectic do little to clarify the connections between Marx, Freud, and natural history. However, as I will show in the following section, this changes in

[174] See Peter Osborne, 'A Marxism for the Postmodern? Jameson's Adorno', *New German Critique*, 56.1 (1992), 171–192 (p. 179).
[175] Robert Hullot-Kentor, 'The Exact Sense in which the Culture Industry No Longer Exists', *Cultural Critique*, 70.1 (2008), 137-157 (p. 146).
[176] Max Horkheimer, 'History and Psychology', in *Between Philosophy and Social Science*, 121.

Adorno's later formulations of the idea, in which the concept of natural history comes to be more explicitly connected with Marx's theorisation of the relation between history and nature.

2.3 The Law of Motion of Unconscious Society: Marx, Adorno and 'Nature'

In the following section, I first ascertain the extent to which Adorno's concept of natural history as it is developed in his later works is in fact connected to the materialist dialectic, by outlining the way in which Adorno constructs natural history in relation to Marx in *Negative Dialectics* and in the lectures on history. I briefly return to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and suggest that the treatment of the nature–history relation in the text works to problematise the classical Marxian distinction between the time of history (bourgeois society) and the time of nature (pre-bourgeois social structures) through its treatment of the exchange relation. I suggest that this should not be read as a simple opposition to the Marxian history/nature relation, but rather that natural history as it is developed in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* seeks to challenge the supposed exceptionality of the bourgeois era and its constitution of historical time via its apparent separation from the supposedly nature-like associations that accompany pre-bourgeois social structures. I suggest that while Adorno is reluctant to fully distinguish his own conception of natural history in his later works from that of Marx, his conception differs from Marx's considerably.

While in the early lecture, Adorno positions himself in the field of what he terms the 'materialist dialectic', no direct mention of Marx or exchange appears, unlike in the history model in *Negative Dialectics*, in which the sections on natural history form a shift from a critique of Hegel's concept of universal history, to Marx. In this sense, Marx is read by Adorno as offering a kind of solution to the problem of the interpretation of history since Hegel; he recognises the natural-historical underpinnings of the economic process. Unlike subsequent interpretations of nature following Engels, for Adorno, Marx is the first to arrive at a properly 'social' understanding of nature through his analyses of commodification and value. However, Adorno discerns a tension in Marx's thought; Marx both holds onto the idea that there exist 'inexorable' laws of nature that govern society, but he also points to the way in which the supposed naturalness of these laws is an illusion.[177] Adorno takes this as demonstrative of the way in which the laws that govern society are both illusory, in that the exchange process in capitalist societies appears as though it is a natural phenomenon but is in fact socio-historic and thus not necessary (but still also 'natural' in the sense that exchange derives from the principle of equivalence that conceptual thought must maintain if it is to successfully dominate nature and therefore continue the natural growth of history), but also remains actual as the

[177] *HF*, 117-118; *GF*, 169–170.

'law of motion for the unconscious society.'[178] For Adorno, the discernment of this socio-historic contradiction is what enables Marxist theory to be critical; it both recognises the 'organic' naturalness of society via the cycles of the investment of capital, as something that is experienced as a natural process 'over people's heads',[179] but also that these supposedly organic processes are not in fact necessary. Rather, the illusion that they are so is if capitalist society is to continue to perpetuate itself over the heads of the 'individuals' that exist in that society. Thus, history as nature, or second nature, is a necessary component part of capitalist modes of exchange. If capitalist laws were to lose their apparent naturalness then they would be recognised for what they are; unnecessary, and therefore surpassable. If second nature reigns in part because it blocks knowledge that things could be otherwise and consists in the 'exclusion of possibility',[180] Marx's discovery of the contradiction provides an insight into the mechanism through which the ideology of the nature-history dichotomy comes to be (re)produced. For Adorno, Marx further recognises the way in which changes in the economic relations in history appear to us as gradual evolutionary shifts: he perceives the way in which 'changes from each constitutive economic form to the next occurred like those of animal types that rose and died out over millions of years.'[181] In this sense, Marx demonstrates the semblance of naturalness with which capitalism presents itself.

While Adorno never explicitly opposes his own conception of historical time with that of Marx, not only does he claim that the latter ultimately affirms the domination of nature,[182] but at work in classical Marxian theory is a different notion of historical time and the history-nature relation to that which is theorised by Adorno. In *Grundrisse*, Marx conceives of pre-bourgeois social structures as both nature-like and unhistorical: in pre-bourgeois times, the relation between natural and historical elements formed part of the vast context of nature, while, in the bourgeois epoch, this relation forms part of history. Alfred Schmidt, whose doctoral research on Marx's concept of nature was supervised by Adorno, characterises Marx's idea of pre-bourgeois social structures as follows:

> For measured against the concrete determinacy of the labour-process as a specifically capitalist phenomenon, there is something peculiarly unhistorical and nature-like about the forms which preceded it; their distinctions are blurred, and the transition from one to the other is no longer unmistakeably determined by the contradiction between growing productive forces and stagnating relations of production [...] Only with the

[178] *ND*, 358 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:349.
[179] *HF*, 118; *GF*, 170.
[180] *HF*, 121; *GF*, 174.
[181] *ND*, 356 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:349.
[182] *ND*, 244 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:242.

> transition to capitalism does the mastery of nature take on a new quality; only at this point does the labour-process, which Marx initially stated was identical in its general determinations for all stages of society, become a strictly *social* process.[183]

For Adorno, the bourgeois era does not signal such an exit from the natural context and an entrance into history but rather causes both further imbrication in and rupture from nature, via increasing forms of technical development and the increased possibilities of the domination of nature. As discussed in chapter one, Adorno's re-reading of *The Odyssey* demonstrates that the pre-bourgeois era itself contained historical elements that can be seen in the ruse of reason employed by Odysseus as proto-bourgeois individual, and the fraudulent exchange process that it implies. Adorno therefore diverges from Marx: while the latter recognises the natural growth of history that has so far occurred, he fails to see both the socio-historical or proto-bourgeois elements that existed prior to the emergence of capitalism, but also the way in which the natural elements of capitalist society would not necessarily be superseded through the contradictions immanent within capitalism. It is here that Adorno reads Marx through Freud; that is, through the lens of the continuities of repression and domination that have marked history even when it appears at its most historical, that is, in bourgeois social structures.

But in what way does the re-conceptualisation of historical time that is effectuated by the concept natural history serve a critical function, or does it lose the criticality that is implicit in Marx's understanding of the nature-history relation? The idea that the process of exchange and the abstraction that it involves, and its origins in the struggle for self-preservation, is not specific to capitalism does not mean that Adorno arrives at a conception of historical time that is undifferentiated. Rather, it demonstrates the way in which underlying the supposed specificity of capitalism as a socio-historic formation lies a process that arises from an unsuccessful reckoning with nature in which the latter comes to be distorted for the ends of domination. Put in another way: the development of capitalism is in part the result of the continuation of forms of thought that arose from a warped relation to nature in which certain modes of conceptuality (identity-thinking) were privileged over other types of object identification, such as mimetic responses that supposedly characterise forms of animism. This does not imply that the abstraction that accompanies the exchange relation has remained unchanged throughout history, or that capitalism does not signify a temporal rupture from previous forms of social association.[184] It takes aim at the idea that capitalism necessarily

[183] Alfred Schmidt, 'Appendix', *The Concept of Nature in Marx,* trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Verso, 2014), 169.
[184] The exchange process and exchange relation will be discussed in more detail in chapter four in relation to Adorno's concept of totality.

contains within itself the seeds of its own overcoming or the idea that it forms a clean break from the nature-like associations characteristic of pre-bourgeois social structures. To connect exchange with forms of conceptuality that arose prior to the emergence of capitalism could be said to map onto a means by which to critique conceptions of history that centre on the specificity of the development of 'modernity' in Western Europe. It is to suggest that the exchange process both produces and is produced by imposed forms of thought which, in order to secure their own constitution, sought to relegate heterogeneous and discontinuous elements that resulted in ways of viewing historical temporality in which the latter comes to be the progression of an abstract succession of units of time. In this sense, Adorno's conception of exchange opposes what Aníbal Quijano calls the 'foundational myth' of the Eurocentric version of modernity; that is, the 'idea of the state of nature as the point of departure for the civilized course of history' whose culmination is Western civilization.[185] The exchange process, for Adorno, is rather that which in part sustains our warped relation to nature.

In contrast to Marx, Adorno paradoxically thinks that a social temporality could only begin to become fully differentiated from the time of nature when subjects understand themselves as necessarily imbricated in the time of nature. This is the moment of materialism that Marxism arguably fails to address. Marxist theory omits to consider the way in which time-consciousness itself arises from the domination and repression of nature that then comes to be transposed in theory into the prehistory/history and also the mind/matter distinction, with its origins in the division of labour. Materialism must, therefore, not only recognise the natural growth of history as it has so far occurred, as Marx does, but further recognise the way in which the temporal rupture that occurred with the development of capitalism remains on a continuum with earlier forms of social organisation, because both involve the domination of nature.

2.4 Interpretation and Negative Dialectics as Natural History

Despite the literature that now exists on Adorno's concept of natural history, there is something of a lacuna in relation to the question of its epistemological import. How, exactly, does natural history (as critical concept) resist false dichotomies while simultaneously avoiding the collapse between the natural and the historical that would render a distinctive 'human' history and temporality obscured? This section will consider the possibility that the criticality of natural history lies in part in its supposed philosophical affectivity: in other words, the idea that natural history leads us to re-consider the interrelation between nature and

[185] Aníbal Quijano, 'Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America', *Neplantla: Views from the South,* 1.3 (2000), 533–580 (p. 551).

history because it leads to an experience of a kind of conceptual 'shock'. I will suggest why this kind of reading is unsatisfactory by clarifying the relation between natural history and negative dialectics.

Max Pensky, in his formidable analysis of Adorno's development of natural history, suggests that the concept possesses a 'peculiar productivity' that he characterises in part in terms of its apparently affective dimension.[186] Pensky outlines several different features that he thinks correspond to the concept of natural history as it is developed by Adorno. The final two are characterised as follows:

> (d) a pervasive and ultimately paralysing sense of dread and helplessness in the face of a homogenous and virtually irresistible history of domination, and a corollary sense of capitulation at the vision of world history as continuous catastrophe; and, (e) the most distinctive but perhaps least remarked-on aspect of Adorno's thinking, that is, his singular ability to endow even the most abstract of his subjects with an emotional charge, an affective dimension of feeling (of sadness, or disappointment, or yearning, or some synthesis of these three').[187]

This despite the fact that Adorno, even in the early lecture, pre-empts such responses when he states:

> One might object that I am proposing a sort of bewitchment of history and passing off the historical, in all its contingency, as the natural and then original–historical as the natural. The historical is to be transfigured as something meaningful because it appears allegorical. That is, however, not what I mean. Certainly the starting-point of the problem's formulation, the natural character of history is disconcerting. But if philosophy wanted to be nothing more than the shock that the historical presents itself at the same time as nature, then such a philosophy would be subject to Hegel's criticism of Schelling's philosophy as the night of indifferentiation in which all cats are grey.[188]

Adorno then adds: 'How does one avoid this night?' While Pensky recognises that Adorno does not want to connect the productivity of the concept of natural history only with the experience of the shock that it produces,[189] he continues, in his essay, to largely view the concept in these terms. However, to view natural history as a concept as in part resting on its ability to shock 'critical historians' out of their usual predilection for dualist forms of thought

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[186] For the other three features that he suggests corresponds to Adorno's concept of natural history, see Pensky, 'Natural History: The Life and Afterlife of a Concept in Adorno', 228–229.
[187] Pensky, 229.
[188] *INH*, 265–266. *GS,* 1:361.
[189] Pensky, 236.

through affect obscures its critical reach. In fact, natural history is intended to dispute precisely the idea that the natural-historical process can be viewed as 'homogeneous' as Pensky puts it. Rather, for Adorno, history as a thing is unified through its discontinuity and contains 'structural disparities', something which is borne out by the interrelation between natural and historical elements that characterise history. Nor does Adorno's treatment of the concept imply that the suitable philosophical response to the mediations of history and nature is a kind of cognitive dissonance in the face of defamiliarisation. It is better understood as the interpretation of the dialectical mediation between the concepts of nature and history that makes possible a critique of the ideological fallacies that arise from the different temporalities that we attribute to history and nature respectively. If the concept possesses what Pensky terms an 'affective' function, it would be connected to the philosophical *experience* of the mediations between nature and history, rather than an additional 'emotional charge' that natural history undialectically emits.

Further, Adorno's conception of natural history should not be understood as the thesis that social or human history has so far been indistinguishable from the history of nature, and a corresponding sense of hopelessness that this might entail.[190] As Adorno states repeatedly, the antithesis between history and nature is both true and false and, in this sense, natural history is concerned with the *re*-interpretation of what has come to be regarded as a distinctively human historical time and a natural time removed from history in order to demonstrate that i) the two supposedly distinct temporalities of nature and history interact and mutually condition one another, and meet in their transience, but that ii) we have no immediate access to a natural temporality separate from what we commonly regard to be a social temporality, i.e. history, and vice versa. But how is this connected to interpretation? It proves necessary to clarify the connection between negative dialectics as method, and the concept natural history.

As a theoretical procedure, negative dialectics seeks to demonstrate the non-identity that exists between concept and thing, while still recognising the moment of identity that occurs in the concept. In relation to history, what needs to be distinguished is the relation between history as a thing and history as a concept, and the attempt to grasp what history is amounts to comprehending the non-identity and contradiction that appears in the concept 'history' that has emerged in philosophy and the conception of a distinctly social temporality that it suggests. To consider the mediation of nature in the historical process is to discern the way in which history as a concept fails to either be identical to or subsume its object, that is, the actual

[190] This is to also dispute Bernstein's contention that Adorno's 'governing speculative proposition', or his version of Hegel's equation of subject and substance, is that 'history and nature are one.' See Jay Bernstein, 'Negative Dialectic as Fate: Hegel and Adorno', in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno,* ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 19–50 (p. 20).

historical process: as a concept, history, in the philosophical discourse that has emerged since the enlightenment period, epitomised in both Kant and Hegel's concepts of a universal history, has been intimately connected to its correlate term, 'progress', which in turn is considered to only occur once the historical subject or society moves out of natural conditions and can begin in some sense to shape history through rational means. To point to the natural conditions in which actual history has so far taken place, and the way in which reason itself has natural origins, then, is to show that historical progress, if it has occurred, might have been progress in the form of the increasing technical powers to dominate nature, but this has taken place under conditions of 'natural growth', and is therefore not actual progress. In other words, history as thing contains natural elements, and is therefore non-identical with history as concept that has been identified in the philosophy of history as a distinctly human temporality, a realm that is removed from the time of nature. This also operates in the reverse; that which we regard to be natural, when it is interpreted from the point of view of the concept of natural history and negative dialectics, shows itself to also be non-identical with nature as concept. It is also something that has evolved and is transient, and subject to historical elements.

Adorno connects the pursuit of the non-identical moment in negative dialectics with the possibility of the remembrance of nature:

> As the consciousness of non-identity through identity dialectics is not only a progressive but a simultaneously retrograde process; to this extent [Hegel's] image of a circle describes it accurately. The development of the concept is also a reaching back, the synthesis the determination of the difference which perished in the concept, 'disappeared'; almost as in Hölderlin's[191] anamnesis of what is natural, which fell away.[192]

If negative dialectics as a method aims for an awareness of the moment of materiality that is occluded by conceptual thought, the 'sensuous particular' that perished in the concept, the attempt to interpret nature as history and history as nature also involves such a 'reaching back' or process of anamnesis in which the material and natural basis of history is recalled, which

[191] In Hölderlin's poem 'Der Winkel von Hahrdt' ('The Shelter at Hahrdt'), a forest gains significance because it is the setting of the escape of a count; in this sense, Hölderlin positions the natural as a setting for the remembrance of the historical. This poem is discussed in Adorno's essay on Hölderlin, in which he states, following Beissner's interpretation of the poem, that in the poem 'nature' becomes an 'allegory for the destiny that once manifested itself on that spot' but also that the significance of this requires 'philosophical derivation'. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry', *Notes to Literature,* Vol. Two*,* ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 109–149 (p. 111). For a detailed examination of Adorno's interpretation of Hölderlin and its relation to his concept of history, see Jeffrey Bernstein, 'From Tragedy to Iconoclasm: The Changing Status of Hölderlin in Adorno's Conception of History', *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 15.1 (2010), 139-163.

[192] *ND*, 158–161; *GS*, 6:160.

also characterises the general aim of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as a 'subterranean history', that is, a history of the 'fate of the human instincts and passions repressed and distorted by civilization'.[193] But, if negative dialectics as an interpretive method depends upon the *recollection* or anamnesis of the natural historical elements that constitute the concept, what form does such a process take? Negative dialectics rests on the assumption that the material components from which the concept is formed, but from which it differentiates itself by its very nature, are in some way retrievable. This would suggest, as Ricouer says of reproduction (opposed, in his analysis, to 'retention') that the 'primary memory of a temporal object…has 'disappeared' and that it comes back.'[194] But the negative dialectical method does not consist of a mere Freudian repetition of that which is occluded by the concept, but rather would appear to lead to a process of active recollection in which the domination of nature necessary for the construction of the concept would be remembered. In this way, the retrograde process that characterises the pursuit of non-identity within the concept is directly opposed to the unreflective habit and supposed immediacy of a conceptuality formed within a second nature.

Importantly, the recollection of nature should not be confused with an attempt at what Habermas refers to as the latter's 'resurrection'.[195] While Adorno's idea of mimesis, and also his theorisation of what he refers to as the 'addendum' (*das Hintzutretende*) that he thinks in part constitutes the self-experience of freedom,[196] as well as his emphasis on bodily suffering as a means by which morality should be re-oriented, do suggest that Adorno's philosophy possesses a naturalistic frame, the point of interpretation from the point of view of natural history, as discussed in the second section, remains the critique of the semblance that emerges from the existence of second nature, and not a call to return to or resurrect a pre-existing nature:

> What is alluring as the origin, because it does not want to be assuaged by what is derived, by ideology, is for its part an ideological principle. The conservative-sounding sentence of Karl Kraus, 'Origin is the goal', also expresses something scarcely meant in its own time and place: that the static bad state of affairs of the concept of the origin must be removed. The goal would not be to find its way back to the origin, to the phantasm of a good nature, but rather the origin would devolve the goal, would constitute itself out of this latter. No origin except in the life of the ephemeral.[197]

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[193] *DE*, 192; *GS*, 3:265.
[194] Paul Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting,* trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 35.
[195] Jürgen Habermas, 'The Primal History of Subjectivity: Self-Affirmation Gone Wild', in *Philosophical-Political Profiles* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1983), 107.
[196] See *ND*, 226–230 (Ashton); *HF*, 219-228.
[197] *ND*, 156–158; *GS*, 6:158.

As discussed in chapter one in relation to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, there is no home or origin to which the subject can return, and in the same way, for Adorno, there is no unmediated nature that can be resurrected, either on a conceptual or a social level. The location of origin in the ephemeral puts paid to any attempt at returning to a prior state. The procedure of natural history has a more limited objective; that is, to recognise that there is no such thing as a distinct socio-historic temporality removed from natural elements, but further, to demonstrate that any calls for a return to a 'good' nature are themselves based on an ideological concept of origin.

2.5 Adorno as Thinker of the Anthropocene?

Adorno's conception of natural history has been deployed in more general terms in recent literature, but brought to bear on the problem of nature, rather than the problem of history. In the face of the many philosophical attempts to theorise environmental catastrophe and attempts to re-conceptualise our relation to nature that have dominated some areas of academic discourse in the last few decades, Adorno's work has been revisited as a source to be drawn upon, and in some cases, he has been held up as a kind of proto environmentalist. In *Adorno on Nature,* Cook devotes a chapter to a comparison between Adorno's conception of nature with the manifestos of radical ecology movements. The conclusion that is drawn is a cautious one; that is, Adorno can be deployed both as a kind of corrective to some of the assumptions of the latter, and also as a theorist with a 'great deal to offer the environmental movement'.[198] Maike Weißpflug has sought to establish an Adorno-informed re-interpretation of Anthropocene narratives,[199] while Peter Sloterdijk presents the concept of the Anthropocene as containing what he refers to as the 'spontaneous minima moralia of the present age', thereby suggesting a continuity between Adorno's thought with this distinctly unAdornean concept.[200]

Adorno's development of the concept of natural history does appear to share certain fundamental objectives with attempts to re-conceptualise the relation between history and nature and the new temporal schema that this would suggest that is exemplified by recent theorisations of the Anthropocene. However, beyond the obvious difficulties that arise in any attempts to connect elements of Adorno's theory to praxis, and the fact that Adorno wrote prior to the emergence of theorisations of environmental catastrophe, there is a sense in which, as discussed earlier, natural history is not a thesis concerning unmediated nature as such or

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[198] Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 122.
[199] Maike Weißpflug, 'A natural history for the 21st century: Rethinking the Anthropocene Narrative with Arendt and Adorno', in *The Anthropocene Debate and Political Science,* ed. Thomas Hickmann, Lena Partzsch, Philipp Pattberg, and Sabine Weiland (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 15– 31.
[200] Peter Sloterdijk, 'The Anthropocene: A process-state on the edge of geohistory?', in *Textures of the Anthropocene: Ray* (Cambridge, MA: London), pp. 257–271 (p. 271).

environmental catastrophe, even if Adorno is a thinker of catastrophe in a more general sense. Natural history registers a crisis of meaning in the signification of concepts that are used to denote supposedly opposing realms and temporalities, rather than a crisis in the natural world, although the two are inextricably connected. Unlike attempts to philosophically think the Anthropocene, the crisis of meaning that Adorno discerns does not emerge *from* a theorisation of a crisis of the natural world, that has been brought about by 'human' intervention in first nature, and the accompanying conception of the 'human' qua geological force, but instead a crisis that has emerged as a result of the particular way in which conceptuality has developed historically (and thus not *necessarily*) in its struggle to dominate first nature, the attempt to *conceptually* move past this taken to be the general aim of negative dialectics. In this sense, the concepts of history and nature have since their inception been related to one another by crisis, for Adorno. This is most clearly stated in the second lecture 'The History of Nature':

> The concept of a second nature remains the negation of whatever might be thought of as first nature. So it does not represent the recurrence of a nature that has been suppressed and is now being restored, but on the contrary is the totality of whatever has been completely trapped by social and rational mechanisms – the two cannot be distinguished – that nothing differing from it can manifest itself.'[201]

'Nature', in this sense, is precisely not the natural world, but rather what presents itself as the natural that is in fact what is most 'social', and Adorno's use of the term thus works to problematise the deceptive manner in which contingent socio-historic formations come to appear as fixed and unchanging structures rather than finite entities that have been produced by changeable elements. Later in the lecture, Adorno elaborates on what he means by primary nature: it is the 'objective elements that the experiencing consciousness encounters without his experiencing them as things he himself has mediated.'[202] In this sense, it is difficult to extrapolate from Adorno's thought any coherent critique of our relation with what we commonly understand to be *un*mediated nature, even though, as Bernstein notes, the significance of a first nature that precedes second nature underlies Adorno's thought by offering what he refers to as a 'permanent reflective check on the claims of conceptualism', despite the fact that we have no unmediated relation to it.[203]

However, the concept of natural history problematises some of the assumptions that have come to be associated with the idea of the Anthropocene, at least in its philosophical iterations.

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[201] *HF*, 120; *GF*, 173.
[202] *HF*, 122; *GF*, 175.
[203] Jay Bernstein, 'Concept and Object: Adorno's Critique of Kant', in *Blackwell Companion to Adorno,* ed. Peter E. Gordon, Espen Hammer, and Max Pensky (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2020), pp. 487–502 (p. 493).

This can be gauged by briefly turning to Dipesh Chakrabarty's 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', in which the first of the theses states: 'Anthropogenic explanations of climate change spell the collapse of the age-old humanist distinction between natural history and human history.'[204] In his 2015 Tanner lecture entitled 'The Human Condition of the Anthropocene' Chakrabarty postulates the emergence of a 'new epochal consciousness' – a phrase originating in the existentialist philosophy of Karl Jaspers – that arises from the perspective of a 'deep' planetary history. He explicates this new consciousness with reference to Heidegger's notion of 'thrownness', and the 'shock' and 'recognition' that is experienced concerning the 'otherness of the planet' that a sense of deep history apparently engenders.[205] It is interesting that as with certain interpretations of Adorno's concept of natural history, the onus is on the experience of the shock that takes place after a conceptual *collapse* between natural history and human history, but also that this theorised collapse is accompanied by a turn towards a Heideggerian-ontological approach to explicating our experience of this supposedly new time-consciousness that we are faced with as a result of anthropogenic climate change.

While natural history as a concept is not concerned with theorisations of a crisis of first nature, it tries to address the danger that exists in collapsing the distinction between the natural and the historical in conceptual terms, and the ontologisation of history or what Adorno refers to as the 'essentialisation of the existent'[206] that this can lead to. Natural history as a concept problematises the idea that the temporalities that we associate with nature and history respectively constitute separate realms, but without thereby suggesting that there has only been one, continuous natural-historical time, or that nature is identical with history, or history with nature. In this sense, the concept puts into question the collapse between the natural and the historical that philosophical theorisations of the Anthropocene have tended to posit. Nature and history are commensurable, but they are not therefore the same. However, even if this provides a challenge to certain philosophical tendencies that have accompanied conceptualisations of the Anthropocene, the concept of natural history, at least in Adorno's philosophy, is in need of further development if it is to do anything more than critique the ontological impulses contained in some current attempts to theorise environmental catastrophe.

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[204] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History: Four Theses', *Critical Inquiry,* 35.2. (2009), 197-222 (p. 201).
[205] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Human Condition in the Anthropocene', The Tanner Lectures in Human Values, (Yale University, 18-19 February 2015), <https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/c/Chakrabarty%20manuscript.pdf> [accessed 21 October 2021].
[206] *ND*, 351–353; *GS*, 6:352.

I have argued that the criticality of natural history as it is developed by Adorno does not rest in its supposed affectivity but rather in the way that it seeks to critique the ideological fallacies that arise from the positing of two distinct spheres of natural history and social history, *without* thereby collapsing the distinction that exists between the two. While in the early lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History', interpretation transposes elements of Freud's idea of the archaic onto the question of history, alongside a reading of Lukács and Benjamin, in *Negative Dialectics*, the pursuit of non-identity within the concept allows for a retrograde process in which the natural-historical elements necessary for the development of the concept come to be recalled. Two similitudes in the respective procedures can be discerned; first, that the possibility of both methods is connected to some form of *recollection* of something that has been repressed – although not a recollection in the everyday sense of the term – on the part of the interpreter, and second, both ultimately rely on the categories of transience, particularity and ephemerality as a means by which the discontinuity characteristic of history can be critiqued. As a method, interpretation from the perspective of natural history has a broader reach than the genealogy of bourgeois subjectivity contained in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, because it maps onto a method that draws out the more general transmutation of historical phenomenon into a seeming nature that appears to be impervious to change but is only ostensibly at a standstill. This is evidenced by the way in which Adorno's development of natural history in *Negative Dialectics* is explicitly connected to Marx's use of the term in *Capital*, and thus more directly thematises the way in which capitalism produces a 'second nature'. However, in Adorno's early lecture, interpretation of natural history takes place from the perspective of the impossibility of formulating the idea of an 'all-encompassing whole'.[207] Yet, as will begin to emerge in chapter three, an analysis of the particular in the historical process necessitates the construction of some form of whole or totality, even if this is not a construction is the usual sense of the term. What will later need to be examined is how interpretation from the point of view of natural history relates to Adorno's consideration of the process of totalisation that he thinks exists in the socio-historic present.

[207] *INH*, 260; *GS*, 1:354.

3

The Right of the Particular: Adorno with and against Hegel on the Interpretation of History

3.1 Adorno and Hegel's Doctrine of the Concept

In the history model of *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno re-casts Hegel's world spirit as 'permanent catastrophe',[208] following on from Benjamin's *Angelus Novus* who, staring at the past while being driven towards the future, sees the chain of events that comprise history as 'one single catastrophe.'[209] But while this leads Benjamin in the seventeenth thesis of 'On the Concept of History' to discard the idea of universal history,[210] Adorno instead views the catastrophe of history through the lens of universal history, as a history unified by the 'discontinuous, chaotically splintered moments.'[211] Further, he suggests that it is precisely the horror of history that *verifies* Hegel.[212] Ostensibly, this statement could be read as a re-iteration of one of the main theses of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*; that is, that the increasing predominance of self-preserving reason and consequent potentiality for the domination of nature has led to a point at which Hegel's history of reason is both confirmed and turned on its head. Yet the history model in *Negative Dialectics* offers a more complex critique of the Hegelian system than that which is found in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, examining in greater detail the way in which Hegelian metaphysics is supposedly borne out in the historical present, which partly takes place through Adorno's re-configuration of Hegel's doctrine of the concept. Adorno's critique of the Hegelian concept thematises his conceptualisation of the *structure* of the historical process. Adorno is less concerned with offering a diagnosis of concrete historical phenomenon, such as the spiritualisation of sacrifice and the development of forms of conceptuality in historical time. Rather, he is principally concerned with the question of how history should be interpreted in and as a false totality. Ideas that are only touched upon in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that rely on historically speculative claims concerning the relation between society and individual come to be solidified, largely with reference to Hegelian categories.

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[208] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:314.
[209] See Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 4, 1938–1940, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings and trans. Harry Zohn (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 389–400.
[210] Ibid, 392.
[211] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:314.
[212] Ibid.

Adorno began work on *Negative Dialectics* in 1959, which was a significant point in the history of the FDR. In the Godesberg conference that took place that year, the SDP rejected the goal of replacing capitalism, rather adopting a commitment to reform of the system. It was at that time Adorno's intention to formulate a critique of the Godesberg Programme, but he was discouraged from being overtly critical of the SDP by the fact of the increasing political predominance of ex-Nazis in government in the early 1960s and the rise of the right-wing extremist party, the NDP, and also due to Horkheimer's increasingly cautious attitude towards any overtly political interventions by the Institute and subsequent advice.[213] The abstruseness of the history model and its focus on the Hegelian system is far removed from a reckoning with events either in the FDR or outside of it, and is curiously devoid of concrete historical detail (aside from a discussion of Adorno's experience of a house search in the Nazi regime and a dissection of the relation between the immediate and longer-term causes of the French Revolution), which ostensibly appears to be at odds with Adorno's call for philosophy to become 'history'. But, as a *model,* it forms an attempt at offering a means by which history could be thought against the continued predominance of Heideggerian historicism in German philosophy and the purely factual history advocated by logical positivism. The lectures on history can be read as a companion piece to the history model, and often offer more detailed elaborations of aspects of Hegel's philosophy of history that appear only in veiled form in *Negative Dialectics* and more concrete (if still rudimentary) analyses of actual socio-economic and political developments.

This chapter explores Adorno's reconfiguration of Hegel's conception of the relation between the three interrelated moments of the concept and considers how it relates to the philosophical interpretation of history. It is one of Adorno's central contentions in the history model – but also in *Negative Dialectics* more broadly – that Hegel fails to adequately consider the specificities that demarcate and distinguish the particular from the universal both in conceptual and historical terms. Adorno's critique of Hegel hinges on the claim that the latter reduces the particular to a kind of function or 'executor' of the universal, thus occluding its potentialities, both for thought, but also, by extension, for the historical process itself. Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt have described the Frankfurt School in general as having a 'preference' for the particular while conceiving of the universal as an 'elementary undercurrent *beneath* the particular or *immanently* in the midst of the particular' which they suggest is especially 'commensurate' with Benjamin's thought.[214] But what does a 'preference' for the particular look like when it comes to the interpretation of history, and is this a correct characterisation

[213] For more on this, see Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School,* 597–598.
[214] Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy,* ed. Devin Fore and trans. Richard Langston et al (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 198.

of Adorno's reading of Hegel? As I will suggest, things are not so straightforward, and there are further implications of Adorno's treatment of the particular that are occluded by an understanding of his treatment of the particular as resulting from any kind of preference for it. An examination of the theoretical implications of Adorno's conceptualisation of the (historical) particular is especially important given that it appears to offer a productive crossover between Adorno's philosophy and the concerns of postcolonial theory, as has been noted by Asha Varadharajan.[215] But, as I will attempt to demonstrate in this chapter, this connection is something that cannot be assumed in advance and requires further substantiation, not least because Adorno occasionally appears to equate the particular with the historical individual.

Throughout his works, Adorno's expansive and diffuse critique of Hegel's philosophy of history takes the following form: First, a demonstration of the truth-content of aspects Hegel's thought, through an attempt at articulating the ways in which socio-historical tendencies have in fact shown Hegel's system to have been (only partially and in inverted fashion) borne out in actual history. This relies on Adorno's theory of the historical present, in particular, his theory of society. Second, a critique of the theodical aspects of Hegel's philosophy of history, this with reference to actual history and based on Benjamin's critique of Hegel in 'On the Concept of History'. Third, connected to the second, a critique of Hegel based on his supposed maltreatment of the individual and particular in favour of the universal. Finally, a re-interpretation of what constitutes the world spirit, developed in *Negative Dialectics* and the essay 'Aspects of Hegel', which, following Marx, views the world spirit as social labour that is unconscious of itself, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter four. The decision to focus in this chapter on the third aspect of Adorno's critique of Hegel stems in part from the fact that Adorno's source of reflection on the Hegelian idea of history does not take as its sole focus the section on world history in *Philosophy of Right,* or Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, which he rarely discusses in detail, but rather centres on the problematic of the concept more generally and the interrelation of its three moments.[216] My

[215] This will be discussed in the final section of the chapter.

[216] In the lectures on history, Adorno claims that Hegel's 'authentic statement' of a 'dialectical philosophy of history' is to be found in his *Logic* and *The Phenomenology of Spirit* rather than 'elsewhere', the 'elsewhere' presumably denoting Hegel's works on the philosophy of history. See *HF*, 5; *GF*, 11. This is in part because Adorno considers Hegel's actual attempts to think history to be profoundly unhistorical: in *Negative Dialectics,* he states that 'in few other places does Hegel pay so dear a toll to history, as where he thinks history.' See *ND*, 333-335; *GS*, 6:334. Gillian Rose notes that while Adorno utilises a Hegelian vocabulary, he omits to consider large swathes of the latter's moral and political philosophy, and the same is true of Hegel's philosophy of history. She suggests that this is partly the result of his 'sociologically diffuse concept of power'. This does not seem to be entirely accurate, at least when it comes to Adorno's inheritance and re-working of the universal, particular, and individual that re-constructs their interrelation in part to demonstrate the possibility of historically

concern is not so much to assess the veracity of Adorno's interpretation of Hegel, which has been the subject of much of the literature,[217] but rather to delineate the implications that his re-interpretation of the particular has for the philosophical interpretation of history. This chapter will largely focus on Adorno's re-working of the 'particular' and 'individual' as the concept of the (negative) 'universal' will be the subject of discussion in chapter five.

In terms of Hegel scholarship, there is a question as to how to conceive of the relation between Hegel's social philosophy and his logic. For example, Axel Honneth has sought to show that *Philosophy of Right* 'can and must be understood without using the…methodological instructions of the *Logic*.'[218] An examination of the complex debate regarding the interpretation of the relation between Hegel's *Logic* and his social philosophy is beyond the bounds of this work. However, I will work on the assumption that a separation between Hegel's logic and his social philosophy does not make sense at least in connection to Adorno's interpretation of Hegel: Adorno considers Hegel's equation of logical categories and social categories to be correct. He claims that relations between individual subjects do in fact take place in accordance with the Hegelian doctrine of the concept in the socio-historic present.[219] An attempt at assessing the implications of Adorno's re-configuration of the concept necessitates an interrogation of the analogies between Hegel's social philosophy and the logic.[220]

The chapter begins with a brief examination of Hegel's tripartite division of the concept in *The Science of Logic, Encyclopaedia Logic,* and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right.* I then give an abbreviated exposition of Adorno's critique of Hegel in the history model. This takes place through a reading of the history model in *Negative Dialectics*, alongside the lectures on history, the lectures on dialectics, the essay 'Subject and Object', and the essays assembled in *Hegel: Three Studies*. I go on to interrogate Adorno's adoption of the terms 'universal'

transformative relations, as will be discussed in chapter five. See Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science,* 70–71.

[217] To name just a few examples, see Michael Rosen, *Hegel's Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 160–178; Gordon Finlayson, 'Hegel, Adorno, and the Origins of Immanent Critique', *Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 22 (2014), 1142–1166; Alison Stone, 'Adorno, Hegel, and Dialectic', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 22.6 (2014), 1118–1141; Brian O'Connor, 'Adorno's Reconception of the Dialectic', *The Blackwell Companion to Hegel,* ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2011), pp. 537–555.

[218] Axel Honneth, *The Pathologies of Individual Freedom: Hegel's Social Theory,* trans. Ladislaus Löb (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 5.

[219] *ND*, 317 (Ashton translation); *GS*, 6:311.

[220] For more on the relation between the *Logic* and Hegel's social philosophy in particular in relation to the interpretation of *Philosophy of Right,* see Tom Brooks' chapter 'System', in which he offers a convincing but concise argument for the fact that Hegel intended for his separate works to be read 'in relation to the wider system'. See Thom Brooks, *Hegel's Political Philosophy: A Systematic Reading of the 'Philosophy of Right'* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 13–28.

(*Allgemeine/Universal*), 'particular' (*Besonders*) and 'individual' (*Einzel/Individuell*).[221] From there, I discuss Adorno's re-interpretation of the particular-universal relation. I argue that Adorno does not succumb to formulating a simple opposition between universal and particular and nor does he only negatively invert the Hegelian doctrine of the concept. After discussing Adorno's understanding of the concept of the individual and its relation to the universal and particular, I suggest why Adorno should not be read as collapsing the distinction between the individual and the particular in the historical process. I go on to argue that Adorno does not straightforwardly have a 'preference' for the particular as evidenced by his critique of the particular in the historical process, but rather considers the particular to have the same 'right' as the universal. This, I suggest, has ambiguous but potentially progressive implications for the interpretation of history, and points to the necessity of a more global form of analysis because it requires an examination of the relation that holds between particular and totality.

3.2 Universality, Particularity, Individuality in Hegel's 'Doctrine of the Concept' and the *Encyclopaedia Logic*

In 'The Science of Subjective Logic or the Doctrine of the Concept' which follows from 'The Doctrine of Essence' in the *Science of Logic,* Hegel arrives at his tripartite division of the concept into three interrelated categories: universality, particularity, and individuality. Failure to view these categories as interrelated results in abstract universality; the concept only becomes concrete when it is viewed in its unfolding and self-differentiation,[222] and it is

[221]Hegel uses two expressions for individuality, the individual, and individual: '*Einzelheit*' *(*individuality/singularity*)*, '*das Einzelne*' (the individual/the singular)*,* '*einzel*' (individual/singular)*,* and '*Individualität*' (individuality)*,* '*individuelle*' (individual) and '*das Individuum'* (the individual). The same is also true of Adorno. As Inwood points out, Hegel tends to use 'das Individuum' to refer to the world historical individual rather than 'der Einzelne'. See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 302. In his translation of the *Logic,* George di Giovanni uses 'singular' and 'singularity' as expressions for what Hegel means by 'einzel' and 'Einzelheit' and uses 'das Individuum' to specifically refer to the human individual. See Di Giovanni, 'Translator's Note' to G.F.K Hegel, *The Science of Logic,* trans. and ed. George di Giovanni (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), lxx. Following on from both the Redmond and Ashton translations of *Negative Dialectics*, I will utilise 'individual' rather than 'singular' throughout to refer both to Hegel and Adorno's concept of individual as logical entity and as the individual human but will retain 'singular' in the passages taken from di Giovanni's translation of *Science of Logic*. In the Ashton translation of *Negative Dialectics*, both 'Einzel' and 'Individuum' are translated as 'individual' or as *the* individual, whereas in the Redmond translation, 'das Individuum' has been rendered as 'the individuated', and in this sense is taken to refer to the human, historical individual rather than 'individual' as a logical category, or a non-human organism. I will use 'individual' for 'das Individuum' as 'the individuated' sounds peculiar and does not convey the full sense of the associations of 'the individual' as historical individual in English, which I think remains close to the German 'das Individuum', even though the latter more strongly emphasises the process of individuation.

[222] For a detailed accounts of Hegel's distinction between abstract and concrete universality, see Robert Stern, 'Hegel, British Idealism, and the Curious Case of the Concrete Universal', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 15.1 (2007), 115–153. For the differences between Adorno and Hegel on the

through the particular and individual that the universal develops. The abstract universal is therefore 'opposed' to the particular and the individual.[223] 'Universality' or the 'universal concept', treated in the first section, is that which is self-identical and forms the totality of the concept. But it is also something that exists only in its particularisation into a further universality, particularity, and individuality.[224] For Hegel, determination makes a universal something 'distinctive' within the logic of the concept.[225] The particular concept both 'contains' universality but simultaneously differs from other particulars who share this universality, but these particulars comprise a 'totality' as a result of their identity with the universal.[226] The particular does not only *contain* the universal but *exhibits* the universal through its determination.[227] As Fred Moseley points out, Hegel treats the particular both as a particular form of the universal, but also as 'self-particularisations of the universal', and thus the universal is also the 'subject that creates particular forms.'[228] After critiquing the abstraction involved in the '*partitioning* of the concrete' that occurs through the consideration of the universal as a 'determinate universality' when it is in fact individuality,[229] Hegel goes on to suggest that individuality is both i) the turning back of the concept into itself and ii) the immediate loss of the concept.[230] In individuality, the concept externalises itself and 'steps into actuality',[231] and individuality simultaneously 'excludes' the universal from itself, but also 'refers to it just as essentially'; as in the *Phenomenology of Spirit,* as a 'this' the individual both refers to itself but at the same time to the universal.[232]

In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel elaborates the tripartite relation as follows:

> The *Concept* as such contains the moment of *universality,* as free equality with itself in its determinacy; it contains the moment of *particularity*, or of the determinacy in which the Universal remains serenely equal to itself; and it contains the moment of *singularity*, as the inward reflection of the determinacies of universality and particularity. This

question of the concrete universality, see Charlotte Baumann, 'Adorno, Hegel, and the Concrete Universal', *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 37.1 (2011), 73-94.

[223] *The Science of Logic*, 531.

[224] As per Inwood, 'universal thought particularises itself into specific thoughts, and eventually returns to the unity of the absolute idea.' See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992), 304.

[225] See John Burbidge, *The Logic of Hegel's Logic: An Introduction* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2006), 83.

[226] *The Science of Logic,* 534.

[227] Ibid.

[228] See Fred Moseley, 'The Universal and the Particulars in Hegel's *Logic* and Marx's *Capital*, in *Marx's 'Capital' and Hegel's 'Logic': A Reexamination,* ed. Fred Moseley and Tony Smith (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014), pp. 115–139 (p.118).

[229] *The Science of Logic,* 547.

[230] Ibid., 548.

[231] Ibid.

[232] Ibid, 549.

> singular negative unity with itself is what is *in and for itself determined*, and at the same time identical with itself or universal.[233]

Hegel does not regard the universality of the concept to be the result of a communality between various particulars, but universality rather derives from the way in which the universal 'particularises itself, remaining at home with itself in its other…'[234] In this way, Hegel distinguishes between that which is 'merely held in common' and what he refers to as the 'genuine universal', something that he suggests is exemplified by Rousseau's distinction between the 'general will' (that which is best for all) and the 'will of all' (the aggregate of each individual's particular will).[235] He goes on to state:

> But the universal is what is identical with itself *explicitly in the sense* that it contains the particular and the singular at the same time. Furthermore, the particular is what is distinct or the determinacy, but in the sense that it is inwardly universal and is [actual] as something-singular. Similarly, the singular means that it is *subject*, the foundation that contains the genus and species within itself and is itself substantial. This is the *posited* unseparatedness of the moments in their distinction…[236]

In other words, the identity of the universal with itself rests on its particularisation in the individual, while the distinctiveness of particularity depends on both universality and individuality for its actuality. The universal becomes concrete only through its particularisation and negation which occurs in the individual thing. Finally, the individual as *foundation* is that which manifests the universal in its particularity. The question is how the interrelation between the universal concept, particular concept, and individual concept is to be read in relation to the Hegelian subject, and how this connects to Hegel's attempt to move beyond the supposed epistemological atomism of the Kantian position as developed in *Critique of Pure Reason.*

In Hegel's famous formulation from *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, substance should properly be regarded as subject. What is at stake in this dictum is the tension between the universal and the individual, and the way in which consciousness mistakes the relation that holds between the two.[237] For Hegel, the subject is to be understood not as a split between the

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[233] G. F. K. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic: Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting and H.S. Harris (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 1991), 239.
[234] Ibid., 240.
[235] Ibid., 241.
[236] Ibid.
[237] As Robert Stern puts it: 'This tension (between the universal and individual) is generated because consciousness often turns out to be using these two principal categories in an inadequate way, leading it to oppose the universal on the one side to the individual on the other. It is only when this opposition

transcendental and the empirical as in Kant, but rather the self-movement of the concept via a series of negations: the subject denotes the universality that 'individuates' itself.[238] Universality, particularity, and individuality are all moments through which the subject concretises itself, eventually leading to a unified, fully self-conscious, thinking subject, a condition that has been achieved historically only through the particularisation through individuality of the universal. However, in *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel also defines the subject in terms of the (historical) individual, but in relation to the moral standpoint of abstract right,[239] a stage superseded by the realised rationality of the state and ethical life:

> Thus, ethical life is the unity of the will in its concept and the will of the individual [*das Einzelnen*], that is, of the subject […] [The] *state* emerges only at the third stage, that of ethical life and spirit, at which the momentous unification of self-sufficient individuality with universal substantiality takes place.[240]

Concrete universality is, for Hegel, the rational as it is realised in society, which is the result of the dialectic of the concept, which both dissolves the 'particularisation' of the universal, but also produces this particularisation.[241] The concept, even when it appears to be 'fragmented' through its particularisation, is 'subsequently confirmed when all its details finally return to the concept of the universal.'[242] The Hegelian subject is therefore processual and reaches a unity only once individuality has been unified with universality, even though the subject throughout its development is the universal particularising itself via the individual element. Thus, the individual is always the universal, but it is only once the concept has fully developed that it can be properly unified with universality, thus carrying out and completing the dialectic of substance as subject.

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is overcome, and the individual is seen to exemplify the universal, that absolute knowledge is attained.' Robert Stern, *Hegel, Kant, and the Structure of the Object* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 44.

[238] This phrasing comes from Herbert Marcuse's *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory,* Second Edition (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986)*,* 155.

[239] G. F. K. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* ed. Allen N. Wood and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 135.

[240] Ibid., 64.

[241] Ibid., 60.

[242] Ibid., 61.

3.3 Adorno with and against Hegel

Central to Adorno's inheritance of Hegel is the idea that the Hegelian system did not grasp its own time in thought but inadvertently grasps the historical present of the mid-twentieth century, or the fully socialised society, in thought.[243] For Adorno, this is a theoretical achievement, because Hegel infers the 'systematic character of society' from the concept, rather than from an empirical perspective. The loss of credibility in Hegel's system is thus not indicative of a theoretical catastrophe or deliverance as Paul Ricouer would later claim,[244] but rather must be thought through again on the basis that the Hegelian system has in a (qualified sense) come to pass in actuality. However, in the introduction to *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno suggests that the matters of 'true' philosophical interest 'at this historical moment' are the 'non-conceptual, the individual and the particular' or that which Hegel casts aside as 'lazy *Existenz'*.[245] In brief, Adorno contends that Hegel's philosophy correctly identifies the structure of the historical present, and the system's 'violence' is an 'expression' of the 'coercive and restrictive character which reality itself possesses'.[246] But Hegel transfigures this reality and justifies it, thereby failing to make good on his own speculative insights. What in part makes Hegel so important for Adorno is that, despite his insight into the antagonisms that manifest themselves in bourgeois society, he writes philosophical history from the standpoint of the victor, by giving meaning to the universal.

Adorno holds that the 'objective course of history' is experienced both 'over' and 'through' 'human beings'.[247] Central to Adorno's argument is that Hegel's system is confirmed by both subjective and objective tendencies and trends,[248] in that Hegel correctly discerns the predominance of the universal *over* the particular and the individual in his system, and the primacy of the universal *in* the particular and the individual.[249] This is what, for Adorno, constitutes spirit in the socio-historic present: spirit is that which 'asserts itself despite people's wishes, over their heads.'[250] Later in the lectures, he characterises Hegel's concept of the world-spirit as the 'universal that comes to prevail' but also claims that 'it is *no* world

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[243] *HTS,* 27; *GS,* 5:273.
[244] Paul Ricouer, *Time and Narrative,* Volume Three*,* trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1990), 202.
[245] *ND*, 19–21; *GS,* 6:19–20.
[246] *ID*, 78; *ED*, 115.
[247] *HF*, 26; *GF*, 41.
[248] The significance of Adorno's differentiation between trends and tendencies will be discussed in relation to his construction of the social totality in chapter four.
[249] The idea that objectivity acts upon individual and also *through* the individual suggests that some form of social psychology continues to be fundamental to the construction of history, following on from the intentions of interdisciplinary materialism and early critical theory. Adorno claims that Hegel's 'dialectic of general and particular' was 'rediscovered' by Freud who recognised that the 'core' of individual psychology rests on the 'general' and 'archaic' structures of the 'social context.' *IS*, 115; *ES*, 194.
[250] *HF,* 25; *GF*, 39.

spirit, that it is not spirit, but that for the most part it is the negativity that Hegel had shifted from the universal to its victims'.[251] Adorno offers a Durkheiminian reading of both Hegel and society: the actual predominance of the universal is *transfigured* into spirit and deified by both the Hegelian system and by subjects living in society in the historical present.[252] Thus, while Hegel was wrong to spiritualise the predominance of the universal, this is in fact what occurs in a fully socialised society, as evidenced by individual psychology.

It is, according to Adorno, Hegel's 'only delusion' that he interprets the primacy of the universal 'as if it meant the world itself were…spirit, and therefore 'good'.[253] While, for Adorno, the concept of spirit should be in tension with reality, Hegel, through his identification of spirit with reality removes the function of spirit as a 'critical authority'.[254] But, at the same time, Adorno suggests that Hegel is in fact aware of the non-reconcilement between universal and particular in reality. On Adorno's psychologistic reading, Hegel provides an ideological justification for the legal sphere – the 'primal phenomenon of irrational rationality' and related to the principle of equivalence[255] – precisely because he is both conscious of the discrepancy that exists between subjective conscience and objective morality, and because he is aware of the fact that the particular cannot be at one with reason as it is actually constituted in society.

Yet even Hegel's justifications contain a moment of epistemic truth. For Adorno, Hegel's concept of spirit avoids abstraction by embracing the 'entire realm' (including the economic) of 'humankind',[256] although contra Hegel and following Benjamin, the totality cannot be grasped via abstract concepts and large categories, but rather must be grasped via appearance itself.[257] Further, Hegel is correct to point to the fact that reason has historically brought about the possibility of the reproduction of the 'lives of all humankind to a more adequate, more human level.'[258] In this sense, Adorno holds that Hegel was in some sense right to show the 'positive' side of the 'course of the world' but ends up by casting the world spirit as an object of affirmation when it in fact consists only of the relentlessness of what happens. Adorno, by contrast, defines spirit as the 'totality of the particular'.[259] It is notable that despite Adorno's retention of the Hegelian concept of world-spirit in the history model, he fails to give an account of the 'world' of 'world-spirit'. However, in the lectures on history he suggests that spirit is in its present guise is a manifestation of 'technical rationality' that is itself the result

[251] *HF*, 46; *GF*, 69, *ND*, 297–300; *GS*, 6:298.
[252] *ND*, 309–311; *GS*, 6:310–311.
[253] *HF*, 43; *GF*, 65.
[254] *HF*, 68; *GF*, 100.
[255] *ND*, 309 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:303–304.
[256] *GF*, 25.
[257] *ND*, 297–300; *GS*, 6:298.
[258] *GF*, 99.
[259] *ND*, 301–303; *GS*, 6:302.

of the labour process and thus the material needs of actual human beings.[260] But, if spirit is now to be understood as the 'totality of the particular', how is the particular to be understood?

Adorno uses the terms 'universal', 'particular' and 'individual' in two different but interrelated ways: first, to refer to entities of conceptual thought, that is, universals as concepts that subsume particular and individual objects through a process of systematisation and classification, and second, to refer to a socio-historical process in which the particular and individual element comes to be subsumed by the general social tendency, which is equated with the universal. The fragmentation of the concept discussed by Hegel in *Philosophy of Right* is understood by Adorno to be the result of the coercive force of irrational rationality, abstraction and the exchange process that characterise the universal as social and historic *tendency*. Thus, Hegel is right to construe the particular as a mechanism of the universal but is wrong to suggest that the particular is in any way at home with or reconciled to the universal.

Importantly, while Adorno regards the particular to be something that is not *identical* with the universal, he does not succumb to what in Hegelian terms would be the construal of an abstract universal, in which, as previously discussed, the particular and the universal are regarded as unrelated or in simple opposition to one another. In the essay 'Subject and Object' he claims that the difference between the universal and the particular should not be hypostatised, but rather that the particular exists only by virtue of the universal and vice versa:

> The antithesis between universal and particular too is necessary as well as deceptive. Neither one can exist without the other, the particular only as determined and thus universal, the universal only as the determination of a particular and thus itself particular. Both of them are and are not. This is one of the strongest motives of a nonidealist dialectics.[261]

But, if this is the case, in what way does Adorno go beyond Hegel? This is a question raised by Charlotte Baumann, who suggests that if Adorno, like Hegel, understands the particular as something that is constituted by the universal and the product of a total set of relations, then arguably Adorno's position comes to be closer to Hegel than Adorno would have wished, in the form of the latter's negative mirror-image. She formulates the question as follows: 'Is the particular thus not secondary to the relations, the total, simply a spot where they happen to cross, one moment of the total net of relations?'[262] But this is to miss what makes the particular particular for Adorno; Baumann does not distinguish between Adorno's double sense of the

[260] *HF,* 16; *GF*, 25–26.
[261] *SO*, 257; *GS*, 10.2:756–757.
[262] Baumann, 'Adorno, Hegel, and the Concrete Universal', 90.

particular: that is, the particular (or particularity) as concept, and the particular as actual material entity, or what Bernstein terms the 'sensuous particular',[263] and that which the Hegelian concept of particularity, itself necessarily a universal, fails to subsume according to Adorno. The 'particular' is therefore not only the location in which total relations 'happen to' cross but is rather both i) a necessary moment in this set of relations, as a moment of the universal that determines itself, but also ii) something that exists beyond this and that is not fully reducible to this set of relations, that is, the moment of materiality that conceptual thought cannot fully identify or classify. This is the point at which Adorno's treatment of the particular diverges from Hegel's because he on the one hand accepts that it is determined by the universal in conceptual and socio-historic terms, but simultaneously holds the particular to at least in part remain outside of the purview of thought intent on its subsumption under the concept. This is what Adorno refers to as the 'utopia of the particular (*Utopie des Besonderen*)'[264] that Hegel supposedly buries under the universal that is correctly identified in Benjamin's philosophy. Adorno suggests that Hegel treats the particular as necessarily defined by the universal, which, although true, neglects to demonstrate the 'moment of something particular, something opaque.'[265] In other words, Hegel fails to treat the particular (*Besondere*) *as* particular qua material object that is non-identical to its concept, but rather examines only particularity (*Besonderheit*), which is already conceptual. The implication of this is that a re-configuration of the relations between the universal, particular and individual would be possible historically (and this only through an alteration of the universal) but that at this historical moment, for Adorno, social categories and those from the philosophy of history follow logical categories.

3.4 Particular and Individual

While Adorno suggests that the dialectic between universal and particular can only be observed in its 'historic concretion',[266] it is not immediately clear how the supposed double sense of the particular relates to its socio-historic construction. What is confusing is that, on occasion, Adorno appears to use the terms 'particular' and 'individual' interchangeably, and the particular sometimes appears in his work as directly equated with the historical individual (in this context, regarded to be that which is *opposed* to 'society', which is equated with the universal). This is most evident in the lectures on history, in which Adorno repeatedly identifies the relation that holds between the universal and the particular with the relation between 'the course' or 'train' of history' [*historischem Zug*] and the 'individual', and holds

[263] See Jay Bernstein, *Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
[264] *ND*, 311–313; *GS*, 6:312.
[265] *ND*, 320–322; *GS*, 6:322.
[266] *HTS*, 45; *GS*, 5:289.

one 'specific problem' of history to be the 'relation between the universal, the universal tendency, and the particular, that is, the individual.'[267] As discussed, for Hegel, the particular and the individual are different moments of the self-unfolding of the concept, and the distinctiveness of the particular derives from its being both inwardly universal and reaching its actuality in the form of the individual element. Adorno's apparent identification of the individual with the particular has not yet been adequately explored in the literature. The question is whether Adorno collapses Hegel's distinction and, if so, what implications this has for his re-configuration of Hegel's doctrine of the concept. A broader problem emerges with this apparent identification of the particular with the individual: that is, if historical possibility resides in the particular as Adorno seems to suggest, and the individual now only exists in shadowy form, then, if the particular is identified with the historical individual, this locates historical possibility only with this historical individual, whose substantial existence Adorno puts into doubt.

To examine this possibility, it proves necessary to distinguish between what appear to be three interrelated but distinct ways in which Adorno uses the term 'individual'. The first is the 'individual' as something excluded by classificatory thought, or that which is neglected by the Hegelian system, a sense which can both be applied to the 'individual' as historical 'human' and also to non-human 'individual' phenomena and the logical 'individual'. The second way in which Adorno utilises 'individual' is to refer to 'the individual' (*das Individuum)* in the historical present that is both biologically distinct from other 'human' 'individuals' but is also not an 'individual' in the sense of possessing any actual substantiality. However, according to Adorno, the 'individual' falsely attributes to their individuality a solidity and independence from the universal that in fact entirely defines who they are. What Adorno terms 'individual psychology', or that which is supposedly particular to the individual human as a biologically distinct entity, itself yields to the universal, which appears at the very fundament of the process of individuation.[268] In fact, the 'the' of 'the individual' already points back to the universal, just as 'the human being' points back to the species.[269] However, he also seems to hold that, even in existing individuals there remains some kind of surplus that appears to allow for some remnants of subjectivity to remain. The (human) individual is both something that no longer exists, or has sunk into irrelevance, but is also something that 'outlives itself' (*Das Individuum überlebt sich selbst*).[270] In this sense, the Adornean trope of the remainder or the surplus, as discussed in chapter one in relation to the question of subjectivity in *Dialectic of Enlightenment,* also characterises his treatment of the individual

[267] See *HF*, 11; *GF*, 19.
[268] *ND*, 344–347; *GS*, 6:344–445.
[269] *SO*, 258; *GS*, 10.2:757.
[270] *ND*, 335–337; *GS*, 6:337.

in *Negative Dialectics*. This is further connected to the third way in which Adorno uses 'individual', namely as a notion that broadly maps on to the idea of historical bourgeois individuality (now mostly lost) in which the individual is held to have possessed some powers of critical self-reflection and autonomy as a result of a development within the context of a certain cultural formative process that takes place within the bounds of the bourgeois family of the 'liberal' era.

In fact, it occasionally appears that Adorno equates the free particular with this historically lost form of individuality, at least in relation to the possibility of artistic production. Thus, in a passage in the history model that contains a blend of Hegelian and Nietzschean elements in which Adorno discusses the untimeliness of Beethoven's music, Adorno connects possible free forms of the (aesthetic) particular with the individual able to go beyond his own time, and locates the possibility of doing so firmly in the bourgeois era, following the French Revolution:

> Even the individual downfall of the individual, which is with the world-spirit, precisely because it is ahead of its time, evokes at times the awareness of what is not in vain. The expression of the possibility, that all could be well, is irresistible in the music of young Beethoven. The reconcilement with objectivity, although fragile, transcends the monotonous. The moments in which something particular frees itself, without confining others in turn through its own particularity, are anticipations of the unconfined itself; such consolation shines from the early period of the bourgeoisie well into its late phase.[271]

It is difficult to avoid the sense that in this passage Adorno places the possibility of the existence of the unconfined and 'free' particular in the bourgeois era in which certain individuals were able to aesthetically move beyond their specific socio-historic, cultural, and economic determinations in favourable historical conjunctures in bourgeois society, in part by virtue of these determinations, in opposition to the Hegelian idea that individuals cannot leap over their own time.[272] If this is the case, then Adorno appears to be guilty of another accusation that he levels at Hegel in the history model; that is, of 'rating' the individual both too high and too low, and of positing certain world historical individuals as the '*imago* of unleashed freedom, boundless productivity'.[273] However, there is an ambiguity in this passage as to whether the 'particular' refers to the potentialities of artistic production, or Beethoven as a particular individual. It is important to note that Adorno suggests that the young Beethoven's

[271] *ND*, 300-301; *GS*, 6:301.
[272] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, 21–22.
[273] *ND*, 335–337; *GS*, 6:335.

music forms only an 'anticipation of the unconfined itself (*Antezipationen des Unbeengten selbst*)',[274] and is not therefore an actual realisation of the free particular. Rather, the aesthetic moments of Beethoven's music prefigure the free particular but are not themselves examples of it.

Further, Adorno does not consider the historical individual as something existing in itself. Adorno thinks that it is Hegel who is the first to see through the myth of individuation:[275] he recognises the illusoriness of an atomistic conception of individuality that holds the individual to be capable of free and moral acts removed from the universal, but again transfigures this in his system, with the result that the individual becomes the mere executor of the universal that realises itself via the ruse of reason. But Adorno makes a further claim, that is, that individuation as a process *is* in fact the principle of the universal in a society based on exchange.[276] In this sense, he follows Hegel: the universal realises itself only through its particularisation into the individual, but he also follows Marx by connecting this to capitalist exchange. The exchange process requires individuation, and the subsequent formation of individuals as economic agents, in order to particularise itself and become actual.

For Adorno, the individual is precisely a transitory phenomenon that should not be hypostasised but is a necessary conceptual component for the interpretation of history in which the universal tendency in fact produces the individual as a product of its particularisation. If particularity in the historical present manifests itself as a mechanism of the universal, which both forms the individual subject and which the latter encounters both internally and externally as that which is heteronomous, actual particularity does not exist. The implication underlying this is that particularity could be something else if it was not at the behest of the universal, and that the 'true preponderance' of particularity would be in some sense desirable. The 'unity' which the individual subject experiences is thus particularity gone wrong; it is a 'unity' that appears only at the expense of all that could be different as particular and derives from the suppression and domination of nature. Adorno does not therefore consider the historical particular to be exhausted by actual individuals, or entirely collapse the distinction between the two concepts, but rather considers the individual to be one of the *material* manifestations of the particularisation of the universal in the socio-historic present. This implies that the particular could take different forms both in the present and in the future, a suggestion that will become central to the construction of a '"negative" universal history' in chapter five.

[274] *ND*, 300–301; *GS*, 6:301.
[275] *TSH*, 45; *GS* 5:289 and *ND*, 335–337; *GS*, 6:336.
[276] *ND*, 335–337; *GS*, 6:335–336.

3.5 The Right of the Particular

Adorno's re-configuration of the universal, particular and individual in *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history has several important consequences that are only latent in his earlier works. Most evidently, Adorno's treatment of the particular articulates the need for the examination of historical phenomena that are the result of the universal moment but that nonetheless are not entirely comprehensible via an examination of this moment alone, and furthermore can, in certain cases, point beyond it. Here Adorno is ostensibly aligned with the methodological concerns of postcolonial theory, broadly construed. As Asha Varadharajan points out, Adorno's critique of the subsumption of the particular by the universal has 'obvious resonances' with postcolonial theory because the latter seeks to 'posit an object of knowledge that will elude the universalising pretentions of occidental discourse.'[277]

But this bridge cannot be constructed too quickly, for two reasons. First, because Adorno does not properly articulate a conception of the historical particular outside of his consideration of the historical individual, even if the distinction between the two is not collapsed in his thought. Second, while Adorno's emphasis on the particular moment could be viewed as a means by which to eschew universalising forms of historical discourse that attempt to isolate large, supposedly 'universal' categories and that thereby neglect to consider the particular, material aspects of the socio-historic process, this is misunderstood if it is regarded as simply a form of interpretation in which the particular element leads to some form of accessible knowledge about the socio-historic process. In fact, the particular is to be understood as something that does not *necessarily* point beyond itself because it is often just as much a 'product of abstraction' as the universal,[278] but also the philosophical interpretation of the historical process would appear to include more than only conceptually breaking open the particular moment in order to glean an awareness of the universal.

For Adorno, the particular often does not take the form of the utopian element but rather usually takes the form of the 'particular interest', which in turn affects the universal tendency:

> He (Hegel) will not admit that, from the viewpoint of logic as well as of the philosophy of history, the universal contracts into the particular until the latter breaks loose from the abstract universality that has grown extraneous to it – while the universal he vindicates, as a higher objectivity, correlatively declines to a bad subjectivity, to the mean value of particularities.[279]

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[277] Asha Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* (Minneapolis and London: The University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 46.
[278] *ID*, 93; *ED*, 138.
[279] *ND*, 331 (Ashton translation); *GS*, 6:324.

Given the way in which the particular manifests itself in socio-historic terms as a determination of the universal tendency, this has the consequence that the universal itself becomes an agglomerate of the particular interests that have been pre-formed by the universal. Thus, it is not just that the universal's preponderance over the particular results in the particular becoming an executor of this universal, but that this then returns back to the universal whose supposed objectivity is in fact only the sum total of an aggregate of particularities (dictated by what Adorno terms the principle of 'inverted universality')[280] that have been formed from the universal moment. In the lectures on history, Adorno repeatedly returns to the bad particularity that supposedly characterises the universal, which he claims 'will be the mark of all historical movements as long as there is no such thing as what we might call a human race'.[281] Because the universal in the historical present emerges from the principle of bad particularity, as the agglomerate of particular interests that are based on the drive for self-preservation of each individual, the universal itself becomes perverted and converts the 'whole into a particular.'[282] It is through this lens, Adorno suggests, that fascist race theory can partially be understood. In this latter, the particular is transfigured into a universal, which is 'intolerant of *other* particulars.'[283]

For the purposes of the interpretation of the historical process, then, the particular must be recognised as both something that potentially points beyond itself and as something that is not fully reducible to the universal moment. However, the particular must also be viewed as something that is the result of the universal, and as something that affects the universal, rendering it particular and therefore not actually universal.[284] It is perhaps more accurate to understand Adorno not as having a 'preference' for the particular, but rather as continuously asserting, contra Hegel, that the 'particular' has the 'same right' (*Recht*) as the universal.[285] This 'right' is to be understood in both theoretical-hermeneutical and socio-historic terms. As a procedure for the philosophical interpretation of history, this entails an examination of the way in which the particular and the universal are in contradiction with one another, and therefore the non-identity that characterises the relation. But it also necessitates a form of interpretation that is both *immersed* in the particular and can in some manner 'bring together' the universal and particular despite the non-identity and contradiction that characterises their

[280] *ND*, 337-340; *GS*, 6:338.
[281] *HF*, 12; *GF*, 20.
[282] *HF*, 45; *GF*, 68.
[283] *HF*, 45; *GF*, 68–69.
[284] In the lectures on history Adorno states this in terse terms when he describes the particular as deserving the totality in which it finds itself. See *HF*, 96; *GF*, 141.
[285] *ND*, 322–324; *GS*, 6:323.

relation.[286] But how does this bringing together of the universal and particular function in relation to the philosophical interpretation of history?

One implication of Adorno's idea that the universal and particular must in some sense be brought together in interpretation is that the particular itself should be subject to critique because it can also fail to adequately 'fulfil' its concept, hence why a 'reciprocal critique' of universal and particular is to take place.[287] An immersion in the particular moment can take place as the critique of the particular moment that does not adequately realise its own potentialities as particular. In this way, the grand concepts that have dominated the philosophy of history, concepts such as freedom and reason, cannot simply be effaced from the philosophical interpretation of history, despite their untruth and ideological function in the socio-historic present. This is because the historical particular often fails to fulfil its promise and is itself caught up in relations of abstraction, but also because, as discussed earlier, there is a moment of truth in the Hegelian idea that the course of the world has led to limited forms of progress. A critique of the universal that fails to simultaneously criticise the particular moment that is in large part its product, but also that in turn affects the universal moment, would by implication be too abstract. Only a form of methodology that takes this into account can offer the means by which the universal element in the historical process can be construed, but it is this element of Adorno's analysis that is potentially neglected when the particular moment is hypostasised and regarded as necessarily containing a critical moment.

It is in Adorno's lectures on dialectics that the full implications and challenges of this form of methodology are exposed. Adorno states that the 'particular must always be grasped from the perspective of the whole', and goes onto question how this whole can be anticipated without thereby treating it as an immediately analysable or 'complete' entity that is simply available to conceptual thought.[288] In relation to the historical process, this suggests an interpretive method that requires *both* an immersion in the particular detail but also some kind of 'knowledge of the whole' even though it is precisely this form of knowledge that is not immediately given. Adorno describes this procedure as both 'extraordinarily problematic' and 'extraordinarily difficult.'[289] Some sense of the implications this has for the interpretation of history can be gleaned from the letters in which Adorno critiques Benjamin's interpretation of Charles Baudelaire and the wine tax:

> The direct inference from the duty on wine to *L'Ame du vin* imputes to phenomena precisely the kind of spontaneity, tangibility, and density which they have lost under

[286] *ID*, 155; *ED*, 219–220.
[287] *ND*, 149–151; *GS*, 6:149.
[288] *ID*, 92; *ED*, 136.
[289] *ID*, 87; *ED*, 129.

> capitalism. This sort of immediate – and I would almost say again 'anthropological' – materialism harbours a profoundly romantic element […][290]

Later in the same letter, he states that Benjamin is led to a 'superstitious tendency to attribute to mere material enumeration a power of illumination'.[291] In the lectures on dialectics, in which Adorno discusses this in relation to the idea of vulgar materialism, he concedes that he was perhaps hasty in dismissing Benjamin's analysis that attempted to trace Baudelaire's poetry cycle 'Le Vin' back to specific events pertaining to wine taxation in nineteenth-century France. However, he claims that absent from Benjamin's procedure was a proper conception of the manner in which the particular element is mediated via the totality.[292] The purported inadequacy of Benjamin's interpretive procedure thus has to do with a too hasty method in which the material, particular elements are used immediately as a means to reach 'social conclusions'.[293] For Adorno, the particularity that these elements possess can no longer be understood as unmediated aspects removed from the processes of capitalist exchange. This is one of the reasons why Hegel continues to be indispensable for historical interpretation for Adorno; he recognises the ineluctably tiered relations that hold between the universal in its particularisation and individualisation, that necessitates a double movement in which the universal is read through its particularisation, but the processes of particularisation as something that reciprocally alters the universal.

This has broader consequences for Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process. Crucially, it necessitates the conceptualisation of totality, even though this latter is not an immediately given in experience. But it is also something that makes itself known as an oppressive element.[294] Adorno's emphasis on the necessity of considering the relation of whole and parts and the particular in relation to the whole thematises the question of how history is to be conceived of in more global terms, and places into question whether this 'whole' or 'totality' is regarded to be society as a whole, or as a concept with a further reach. Adorno's consideration of the relation between particular and whole in the history model remains vague and does not seem sufficient in attempting to establish *how* the particular-whole relation is to be constructed. Further, what still needs to be addressed in greater detail is Adorno's concept of the individual and how it relates to his understanding of the subject. I suggested in this analysis that Adorno does not in fact conflate the individual with the particular. However, the question is whether he considers the individual alone as a kind of

[290] Benjamin and Adorno, *The Complete Correspondence 1928-1940,* 283.
[291] Ibid., 284.
[292] *ID*, 88–89; *ED*, 130–131.
[293] *ID*, 89; *ED*, 131–132.
[294] *ID*, 95; *ED*, 141.

repository for historical possibility and thereby fails to account for the different forms that subjectivity has taken, and could take, beyond the individual in history.

4

The Philosophical Construction of History in the 'False' Social Totality

4.1 Towards a Reconstruction of a '"Negative" Universal History'

In the history model in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno's critique of the concept of universal history begins with the assertion that the idea of universal history in its Hegelian guise becomes 'all the more problematic, the more the unified world approaches a total process.'[295] It is not immediately clear how Adorno's claim that the exchange process constrains the 'world' to the totality[296] and the idea that society presents itself as a 'false' totality, would relate to the construction of '"negative" universal history' or to Adorno's idea that 'universal history' is to be both construed and denied. If the idea of a universal history is in part made problematic by the totalising process in the present, this points to an apparent tension between on the one hand, the task of constructing a '"negative" universal history' whose conceptual ground is based on the construal of continuity, discontinuity and negation and which maintains an allegiance with the Hegelian method of tracing the universal, particular and individual element in history, and on the other, a construction of the socio-historical present that relies on an analysis of society as a 'false' totality that is becoming increasingly consolidated, and the homogeneous and static temporality that it appears to entail.

This chapter seeks to critically delineate whether and how aspects of Adorno's sociological thought can be considered alongside his philosophical treatment of history. It is premised on the idea that prior to undertaking a reconstruction of an Adornian '"negative" universal history', an examination of the relation that holds between Adorno's concept of the false social totality (and the particular temporality that it entails) and his theorisation of the historical process is required. This is because an exposition of the apparent disjunction between Adorno's conceptualisation of a false social totality, and the methods of interpretation that it entails, and his consideration of the historical process can go some way in concretising the latter theoretically. A substantial examination of this relation has yet to be undertaken in the

[295] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:313.

[296] In the following sections, I will use totality (*Totalität*) and whole (*Ganze*) interchangeably, following Adorno's own usage. In relation to Hegel's usage of the two terms, Inwood suggests that 'totality' rather than 'whole' tends to stress the completeness of the whole, partly because a whole can be part of a larger whole, whereas a totality cannot. See Inwood, *The Hegel Dictionary,* 309–311. I have not found that Adorno's usage of the two terms to be sufficiently different to make a distinction but will generally refer to 'totality'. This is more prevalent in Adorno's thought, in particular in relation to his examination of society, and it also places into question the relation between totality and the process of totalisation.

literature.[297] This investigation is in part necessary not only does because Adorno's conceptualisation of totality in relation to the historical process remains relatively vague, but also because the theoretical consequences of an examination of the idea of a 'false' social totality will become crucial to a consideration of Adorno's conception of historical time in chapter five.

The second half of this chapter interrogates an interrelated problematic; Adorno's construal of the subject-object relation. Adorno also claims in the second model that history has up until now had no 'complete', 'global' or 'total' subject, despite its construability (*Geschichte hat bis heute kein wie immer konstruierbares Gesamtsubjekt*).[298] This would imply that a '"negative" universal history' would be a history without a subject, in the sense of an active agent of the historical process. Yet, as discussed in chapter three, there is a clear sense in which the (individual) subject continues to exist for Adorno in shadowy form in the socio-historic present, whose prehistory is accounted for in *Dialectic of Enlightenment.* As Lambert Zuidervaart succinctly expresses, one of the problems of Adorno's critique of subjectivity is that, while there exists for Adorno no 'social' subject capable of effectuating historical change, he oscillates between positing the existence of a 'societally constituted individual' but also suggests the possible realisation of a futural subject, that is, 'the *Gesamtsubjekt* of a not-yet-societally actualised humanity'.[299] On this view, Adorno's conception of the subject is insufficiently 'nuanced'; that is, that while some remnants of subjectivity can still be located within the individual, these are largely vestiges of damage done to the subject by the socio-historic object and the reification necessary for the constitution of subjectivity itself that is refracted in the individual and are not the source of the historically new and do not point to the existence of a subject as agent of historical change. Yet, simultaneously, there is the figure of historical possibility contained in the idea of the *Gesamtsubjekt* that implies the potentiality for the existence of a futural subject in the shape of a unified or collective 'humanity' (*Menschheit*) capable of realising historical change. However, there is no clear sense in which

[297] In general, there is a dearth of examinations that focus solely on Adorno's concept of totality, and it usually treated in relatively general terms. For an examination of Adorno's treatment of totality in relation to Hegel, see Arash Abazari, *Hegel's Ontology of Power: The Structure of Social Domination in Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp.81–86. For an explication of Adorno's idea of 'society' as totality, see Lars Heitmann, 'Society as 'Totality': On the Negative-Dialectical Presentation of Capitalist Socialisation', trans. Jacob Blumenfeld, in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, *Volume 2: Themes*, ed. Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane (London: SAGE, 2018), pp.589–606. For histories of the concept of totality more generally in the philosophical tradition, see John Grumley, *History and Totality: Radical Historicism from Hegel to Foucault* (Oxon and NY: Routledge, 1989), and Martin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukács to Habermas* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).
[298] *GS*, 6:299. The question of the translation of this term will be central to a discussion of the subject–object relation in the fourth section of this chapter.
[299] Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, 74.

this futural subject could be realised given the negativity of the historical process in the socio-historic present.

The chapter begins with a brief examination of Adorno's concept of exchange, in particular in relation to the posited ur-relation that exists between exchange and identity-thinking. It problematises the ramifications that Adorno's theorisation of exchange has for a conceptualisation of the historical process, that in turn necessitates an examination of totality as that which is produced by the exchange process. I then examine Adorno's concepts of the social totality and the historical totality. I begin by considering how Adorno's idea of history as a totality is to be understood, by turning to the early lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History' *Hegel: Three Studies*, *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history, and outline the limitations of this account. From there, I consider the way in which totality as concept functions in relation to Adorno's attempts to consider society as a process in contradistinction to what he regards to be the latter's reification in some empirical sociology. This takes place through a reading of Adorno's contribution to *The Positivist Dispute,* parts of both the lecture series *Introduction to Sociology* and *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society* and the essays 'Society' and '"Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories'. I delineate the way in which interpretation from the perspective of the 'false' social totality is to take place, according to Adorno. In particular, I will focus on an unremarked upon aspect of this procedure – the interpretation of social totality as tendency – and argue that Adorno's analysis of social totality cannot in fact be removed from a philosophy of history. I then attempt to critically construct the particular temporality that arises from Adorno's construction of the false social totality, which leads me to consider the relation between 'static' and 'dynamic' factors in his conception and his understanding of the historical process as comprised of determinate negation.

The final part of the chapter begins by contrasting Adorno's somewhat rudimentary historical account of the emergence and partial dissolution of the bourgeois individual subject with his epistemological analysis of the subject-object relation that is found in the essay 'Subject and Object'. Contra readings of Adorno that suggest that he equates the decline of the bourgeois individual with the decline of the subject and does not offer any account of the possibilities of subjectivity in the socio-historic present, I suggest that his tracing of the historical dimensions of the subject-object relation in fact leads to a conception of the possibilities of transformation beyond the bourgeois individual. I evaluate the extent to which Adorno's concept of the subject, opposed as it is to what Adorno diagnoses as the atemporal aspect of both the Kantian and Hegelian concepts of the subject, itself retains a temporal core. Following on from this, I examine both Adorno's idea of the *Gesamtsubjekt* and recent attempts to substantiate it by Deborah Cook, who, following Rodney Livingstone, translates *Gesamt* as 'global', and who

claims that, for Adorno, the critical individual capable of theoretical critique (understood as a form of social praxis) acts as a kind of 'placeholder' or 'forerunner' for humanity.[300]

4.2 Exchange, Identity, Substitution

> The natural-rootedness of exchange-society is only sardonically a law of nature; the primacy of the economic, no invariant.[301]

Adorno's conception of exchange is central to his examination of history, and yet it is also among the most problematic elements of his thought. As Brian O'Connor points out, Adorno's conception of a social totality can be grasped as something beyond a collection of facts because it is 'generated by a particular system of economic activity', that is, the exchange process.[302] Various commentators have suggested that Adorno (wrongly) reduces everything to the exchange relation, which he identifies with capitalism,[303] in part as a result of the influence of Alfred Sohn-Rethel's account of the exchange-abstraction relation in *Intellectual and Manual Labour*, and further that he fails to adequately account for the mechanism through which exchange would operate in a properly rigorous fashion, rather leaving it as a kind of imprecisely drawn backdrop from which everything else follows.[304] This section attempts to draw out the implications of Adorno's conceptualisation of exchange for the historical process, in particular with reference to the connection that is posited between identity-thinking and exchange.

Adorno follows Marx in his definition of the exchange process as involving the reduction of labour to an abstract general concept of labour time, measured in hours. It is this socially necessary abstract labour time that makes commodities exchangeable. But, following Sohn-Rethel, Adorno is particularly concerned with the idea that the process of abstraction involved

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[300] Deborah Cook, 'Adorno's Global Subject', *Critical Theory and The Challenge of Praxis: Beyond Reification,* ed. Stefano Giacchetti Ludovisi (Surrey, England and Burlington, USA: Routledge, 2015), pp. 5–18 (p. 14) and Cook, *Adorno on Nature,* 115–116.
[301] *ND*, 190–193; *GS*, 6:190–191.
[302] Brian O'Connor, 'Philosophy of History', 191.
[303] Christian Lotz has argued that Adorno wrongly assumes that exchange is the central concept of capitalism, thus occluding how it is to be derived, which leads Adorno to propound a kind of 'use value fetishism.' See Christian Lotz, *The Capitalist Schema: Time, Money, and the Culture of Abstraction* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, London: Lexington Books, 2014), 20–24. The development of the *Neue Marx-Lektüre* in the 1960s in part arose as a result of the sense that Adorno's theoretical inheritance of Marx and his subsequent critique of capitalism is limited to the domain of exchange. The implication is that he approaches capitalism from a circulationist standpoint and is thus not able to give an account of labour at the production process (and the conflict between labour and capital) but more generally of the unity of production and circulation, i.e., reproduction.
[304] Helmut Reichelt states: 'Adorno's reflections on exchange and real abstraction remain on the ''terrain of asservation'', quoted in Riccardo Bellofiore and Tommaso Redolfi, 'The *Neue Marx-Lektüre*: Putting the Critique of Political Economy back into the Critique of Society', *Radical Philosophy,* 189 (2015), 24–36 (p. 26).

in exchange through the reduction of different use values to equivalence actualises a 'real conceptual operation socially'.[305] In this way, exchange does not only consist in the reduction of use values to a false equivalence, but further creates a kind of objectivity of its own, that is both untrue as appearance, because it involves the reduction of qualitatively different things to an equivalent quantity, but also because, through exchange, a new kind of historical temporality emerges, based on the (both subjectively experienced and objectively true and false) socially realised conceptuality that arises from it.[306] Adorno's focus on exchange does not mean that he thereby ignores the class relation, even if he largely focuses on commodity circulation. Rather, he conceives of exchange as both pre-formed by the class relation,[307] but also as a process that reproduces the class relation. He states: 'As the principle of exchange, by virtue of its immanent dynamics, extends to the living labours of human beings it changes compulsively into objective inequality, namely that of social classes.'[308] The implication is that exchange is not an originary mechanism through which history is constituted, but it does imply that exchange imbues historical temporality with the particular qualities that it possesses and manifests itself historically in the formation of social classes. In particular, the exchange process gives rise to individuation in a 'radical' sense, as discussed in chapter three, and continues to determine the individual even when the latter is no longer a substantial entity (economically, psychically, or socially), and it is also the process that results in the 'abolition' of the individual through integration, as will be discussed in the final sections of the chapter.[309]

One aspect of Adorno's treatment of exchange that ought to be raised is the difference between the terms 'exchange process' (*Tauschprozess*) and 'exchange relation' (*Tauschbeziehung*). There is an important difference between these two terms: the exchange process that supposedly constitutes history is the socialisation of the exchange relation. Thus, while the exchange process is that which has come to largely determine historical processes in capitalist societies, the exchange relation is a mode of conceptuality, that is ur-related to identification, that is a *seemingly* necessary condition of conceptuality. This problematises Martin Jay's claim that the main difference between Adorno and Marx is that, while in Marx's thought, exchange was 'restricted solely to capitalism', Adorno 'extended it to a property of the entire

[305] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Theodor W. Adorno on 'Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociological Theory': *From A Seminar Transcript in the Summer Semester of 1962'*, *Historical Materialism* 26.1 (2018), 2–11 (pp. 2–3).
[306] Adorno characterises the effects of the conceptuality that arises from the abstraction involved in exchange as follows: 'Exchange value, merely a mental configuration when compared with use value, dominates human needs and replaces them; illusion dominates reality. To this extent, society is myth and its elucidation is still as necessary as ever. At the same time, however, this illusion is what is most real, it is the formula used to bewitch the world.' *PD*, 80; *GS*, 8:209.
[307] Adorno, 'Marx and the Basic Concepts of Sociology Theory', 5.
[308] *PD*, 25; *GS*, 8:307.
[309] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology', Part I, trans. Irving Wohlfarth, *New Left Review* 47 (1967), 67-80 (p. 77).

enlightenment.'[310] Rather, for Adorno, the exchange relation does occur prior to capitalism, something that Marx would not disagree with, but it is only in the latter that it comes to be the pervasive structuring principle or process underlying historical relations. This does not imply that Adorno therefore generalises the exchange relation. He can both hold onto the specificity of capitalist exchange relations, and simultaneously claim that the exchange relation is one of the structuring principles of historical conceptuality prior to the emergence of capitalism proper. In this sense, the phenomenon of exchange is not specific to capitalism; what is, however, is that the abstraction involved in the exchange relation comes to largely dominate social relations.

The significance of the ur-relation between identity and exchange that Adorno posits for his concept of history has several facets. As Frank Engster points out, the relation is 'less than a strict causality', but 'more than a mere analogy.'[311] The homology between identity-thinking and the exchange relation should not be interpreted as an account of the genesis of exchange relations *or* of identity-thinking, and thus a means by which to explicate an *origin* of a process. Rather, the relation explicates the nature of historical temporality that emerges from these two connected processes:

> The exchange principle, the reduction of human labour to an abstract general concept of labour-time, is Ur-related to the identification-principle. It has its social model in exchange, and it would not be without the latter, through which non-identical particular essences and achievements become commensurable, identical. The spread of the principle constrains the entire world to the identical, to the totality […] What the critique of the exchange-principle as the identifying one of thought wishes, is that the ideal of free and fair exchange, until today a mere pretext, would be realised. This alone would transcend exchange. Once critical theory has demystified this latter as something which proceeds by equivalents and yet not by equivalents, then the critique of the inequality in the equality aims towards equality, amidst all scepticism against the rancour in the bourgeois egalitarian ideal, which tolerates nothing qualitatively divergent.[312]

The key to understanding the relation between exchange and identity is the notion of substitution, which was discussed in relation to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in chapter one. It

[310] See Jay, *Marxism and Totality,* 269.
[311] See Frank Engster, 'Critical Theory and Epistemological and Social-Economical Critique', in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, *Volume Two: Themes*, ed. Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld and Chris O'Kane (London: SAGE, 2018), pp. 750–763 (p. 757).
[312] *ND*, 149–151; *GS*, 6:149–150.

is the conceptual operations that are structured according to substitutive logic that underlie both exchange and identity-thinking (and that have their precursor in sacrificial processes) that both realise a homogeneous temporality and also restrict the possibilities of the comprehension of historical heterogeneity. Underlying both exchange and identity thinking is the substitution of one object for another one that is qualitatively different from the first. As pointed out in relation to the formation of bourgeois subjectivity and the process of internalisation, this involves the continual sacrifice of the present to the future moment that leads to a condition of non-equivalence and a dynamically achieved historical stasis. The substitution involved in both exchange and identity-thinking, for Adorno, not only involves the subsumption of the particular under the universal – the abstraction of exchange value is 'a priori allied with the domination of the general over the particular'[313] – but also maps onto a way of viewing temporality such that time itself becomes subject to equivalence and commensurable, even when the component parts from which it is constructed are heterogeneous and discontinuous. It is precisely not Adorno's claim that no historical heterogeneity exists, but rather that a certain kind of time-consciousness, schooled in the abstraction and substitutive practices involved in exchange and identity-thinking, ceases to register these discontinuities in order to better hold onto the semblance of control proffered by substitutive acts; that is, the timelessness of bourgeois consciousness. However, this does not only occur on a subjective level, but comes to be a systemically imposed structure of time that capitalist exchange relations necessitate for their own perpetuation. While Adorno does not state this explicitly, what begins as a specifically bourgeois time-consciousness, as exemplified in Kierkegaard's rentier, forms time-consciousness in general alongside the expansion of exchange and the processes of totalisation that it puts into motion.

While I do not want to go into detail concerning the similitudes and divergences between Adorno's account and Alfred Sohn-Rethel's,[314] the latter's distinction between the two temporalities associated with exchange value and use value ostensibly appear to underlie Adorno's own conception of the particular temporality that emerges alongside the exchange process. In particular, Sohn-Rethel argues that use and exchange are 'mutually exclusive in time', and 'take place in different times':[315] While use is connected to a natural time that includes the 'material processes by which we live as bodily beings', exchange is 'purely

[313] *GS*, 8:294.
[314] For a concise examination of the similarities and differences between Adorno and Sohn-Rethel, see Frank Engster and Oliver Schlaud, 'Alfred Sohn-Rethel: Real Abstraction and the Unity of Commodity-Form and Thought Form', *The SAGE Handbook, Volume Two,* pp. 284–301.
[315] Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labour: A Critique of Epistemology,* trans. Martin Sohn-Rethel (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1978), 23–24.

social'.[316] The exchange process therefore corresponds to a particular experience of time and space that is imbued with an empty quality:

> Time and space rendered abstract under the impact of commodity exchange are marked by homogeneity, continuity and emptiness of all natural and material content…the exchange abstraction excludes everything that makes up history. The entire empirical reality of facts, events, and description by which one moment and locality of time and space is distinguishable from another is wiped out. Time and space assume thereby that character of absolute historical timelessness and universality which must mark the exchange abstraction as a whole and each of its features.[317]

It is this 'unhistorical time' and 'ungeographical space' that result in the conceptualisation of an opposition between nature and society.[318] In Adorno's terms, the time of exchange would appear to correspond to the condition of natural history. However, Adorno, unlike Sohn-Rethel, does not connect use value to an uncritical conception of a 'natural' time unmediated by the historical process. The whole point of interpretation from the perspective of natural history is to demonstrate the imbrication of historical and natural elements, and the impossibility of conceptualising distinct temporalities, one that would be 'natural' and the other 'historical'. But he does, in various passages, elude to the possibility of escaping or leaving the exchange process that he considers to be the *telos* of history.[319] Such an escape can only be achieved by surpassing the false naturalism of exchange – or exchange as 'law of nature' – without thereby erroneously succumbing to either a false concretion or a superficial abolishment of the equivalence and comparability that constitute exchange, which would itself form new injustices.[320]

There is an uneasy sense that Adorno's concept of exchange remains too crude to be of use in attempts to construct a concept of history that would discern the universal and particular tendency, either as an economic category or as a means by which to consider the conceptual processes that accompany this latter. One of the problems of this account is that, for Adorno, exchange appears to be both a critical category, as the conceptualisation of the 'prerequisite' or 'precondition' (*Voraussetzung*)[321] that is to be analysed in order to gain an understanding of the historical process and a kind of overarching structuring principle, the scale of which seems to elude critical judgement. Thus, in the lecture '"Negative" Universal History', Adorno states: '[it is] as if the macrostructure, the macro-cosmic nature of history, were itself just one

[316] Sohn-Rethel, 27.
[317] Sohn-Rethel, 48–49.
[318] Sohn-Rethel, 56.
[319] *HF*, 93; *GF*, 137.
[320] *ND*, 149–151; *GS*, 6:149–150.
[321] *IS*, 31; *ES*, 57.

great exchange relationship in which penance follows the act of taking.'[322] The generality of this statement, and its quasi-theological undertones, appears to preclude the possibility either of conceptualising history in a way that would allow for more specific analyses of the discontinuities (and continuities) and ruptures that supposedly constitute it. Further, the use of the term 'macrostructure' seems to assume that history in general, or history in a global sense, can be understood through the exchange relation, thus implying that exchange is a kind of universal framework from which all history is to be constructed.

However, in other places, Adorno refers to the 'spread' (*Ausbreitung*) of the exchange principle as that which 'constrains the entire world [*ganze Welt*] to the identical'.[323] This suggests that while exchange is that which has come to largely determine the historical process, it was not always and is not yet everywhere so.[324] The mention of the 'entire world', although unsubstantiated, implies that the exchange process, while once a globally localised phenomenon, has increasingly come to be in some sense 'total'. Importantly, Adorno also casts doubt on the idea of the all-consuming nature of the exchange principle when he questions 'how far present society is still an exchange society and how far it is no longer that.'[325] The exchange process is thus to be held up as a determining process, one that has become in some sense 'total', but simultaneously must itself be subject to scrutiny as it is not necessarily the sole determinant of socio-historical processes. In terms of constructing a '"negative" universal history', then, it is an open question to what extent the exchange process possesses a determining function or not.

Importantly, for Adorno, exchange is both static and dynamic, and thus does not entail that history is to be understood as a kind of monolithic, unchanging structure. He states:

> Exchange is the rational form of mythical eternal sameness. In the tit for tat of every exchange, each act revokes the other; it's a zero-sum game. If the exchange was fair, then nothing has happened […] At the same time, the assertion of progress, which conflicts with this principle, is true to the extent that the doctrine of tit for tat is a lie […] For one of the parties to the transaction, the more powerful party, always received more than the other. Thanks to this injustice, one that had been codified as early as

[322] *HF*, 93; *GF*, 137.
[323] *ND*, 149–151; *GS*, 6:149.
[324] As Cook points out, Adorno distinguishes between societies in which exchange has come to be pervasive and those in which exchange remains episodic. In this sense, Adorno's more generalised statements concerning the exchange relation, such as his remarks on macrostructure, should not be read as a kind of universalising judgement concerning all of history. See Cook, *Adorno on Nature,* 92.
[325] *IS*, 143; *ES*, 238–239.

> Aesop's fable about the lion, something novel takes place in the course of the exchange; the process that proclaims its own stasis becomes dynamic.[326]

This suggests that the exchange process produces a condition of staticity in the socio-historic present, even if the exchange process is 'dynamic' in the limited sense that it produces new relations that themselves further entrench existing antagonisms. The implications of this for a deeper mapping of the historical process are ambiguous. It would appear to be at odds with the construction of history that attempts to delineate the discontinuities of the historical process in favour of a consideration of the continuities that are generated by the exchange process. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the following sections, the idea of the 'false' social totality appears to suggest that the socio-historic present is static only at the level of appearance.

4.3 Totality as Critical Concept

The following sections undertake an examination of the way in which Adorno's reformulation of totality operates critically in relation to the construction of history and the construction of society via an examination of the distinct modes of analysis that they entail, one historico-philosophical and one sociological, that nonetheless must meet in order for to cohere. As I attempt to show, while the idea of the false social totality requires for its analysis a process of what Adorno refers to as a 'physiognomics' of the false state of things that involves the examination of the objective illusion of appearance and the discernment of society as tendency, based in part on the micrological examination of the way in which the exchange process pervades all aspects of social existence, the interpretation of historical totality is, first, based on the pursuit of the non-identical moment within the historical process, but, second, necessitates viewing history as a process that fails in being total as a result of the diremptions that characterise the condition of natural history.

Jay's study of the concept of totality in what he refers to as the 'tradition' of 'Western Marxism' has been particularly influential on subsequent commentary. In his chapter on Adorno, Jay suggests that the former's critical use of totality forms a break with the idea of an expressive totality, in which a 'meta-subject' could be both subject and object, as in Hegel, Marx, and Lukács, which leads to a view of history in which the latter is no longer a 'coherent whole'.[327] Importantly, Jay ends his discussion by claiming that Adorno's 'overwhelmingly

[326] *HF*, 170; *GF*, 237.
[327] It should also be pointed out that Habermas is characterised by Jay as having some conceptual tidying up to do after Adorno's re-conceptualisation of totality. Jay states: 'it was left to Habermas to pick up

critical' concept of totality ends in an impasse: '[Adorno's] insistence on the utter 'falseness' of the present totality, which, even allowing for the gap between concept and object, left little sense of the persistence of unresolved tensions and contradictions beyond the isolated negations of art and critical philosophy.'[328] However, as I attempt to demonstrate, for Adorno, contemplation of the totality, from the perspective of both the theoretical construction of society and history is aimed at examining this gap between concept and object. It is thus what Jay refers to as the 'persistence of unresolved tensions and contradictions' that is the object of interpretation in both Adorno's conception of history as totality and society as totality rather than a neglected outcome of the positing of the falseness of the present totality, and is what, in socio-historical terms, threatens the closedness of totality.

4.3.1 A Historical Totality?

For Adorno, history cannot be understood as a totality in any straightforward sense. The idea of a historical totality suggests that human history can be regarded as a self-sufficient and coherent whole that proceeds removed from other determinants. In this sense, the historical totality, for Adorno, is a failed project both in theoretical and in actual terms that is confuted by history. This is partly because the processes that correspond to the concept 'history' are in fact natural-historical. To briefly return to the early lecture 'The Idea of Natural-History',[329] Adorno frames interpretation from the point of view of natural history against attempts at discerning the historical process via the formation of 'a structural unity or totality'[330] that supposedly allows the observer to 'know adequately the existing in itself'.[331] Instead, Adorno suggests that nature and history need to be viewed in their 'unity' which is in fact a disunity, and he contrasts a 'structural unity' with a 'concrete unity' from the point of view of ontology, the latter of which is something that is 'developed from the elements of real being itself…as the existing itself.'[332] This leads to the articulation of a new starting point for the examination

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the analysis of unreconciled and displaced contradictions in Pollock's theory of State Capitalism, which both Horkheimer and Adorno ignored. It was also left to him to re-establish a more affirmative concept of totality.' Jay, *Marxism and Totality,* 274.

[328] Andrew Bowie also claims that Adorno appears to 'argue' as if the 'totality is so dominant' that alternative perspectives are blocked. See Andrew Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy,* 121.

[329] Adorno's early suspicion towards attempts at grasping the totality appears in the Benjaminan inflected lecture 'The Actuality of Philosophy' in 1931, where he begins by putting into doubt the sufficiency of the 'power of thought' to 'grasp the totality of the real.' Of course, this statement does not entail that totality does not exist for thought, but rather that the 'real' [*Wirklichen*] cannot be understood via a direct examination of the totality. See Theodor W. Adorno, 'The Actuality of Philosophy'*,* trans. Benjamin Snow, *Telos*, 31 (Spring, 1977), 120–133 (p. 120); *GS*, 1:325.

[330] *INH*, 258; *GS*, 1:352.

[331] *INH*, 258; *GS*, 1:352.

[332] *INH*, 259; *GS*, 1:354.

of history that attempts to overcome the division between nature and history via an assertion of their (dis)unity and discontinuity:

> I myself would not attempt to synthesise this division of the structure of history into a so-called unity […] Now this discontinuity, which, as I said, cannot be legitimately transformed into a structural whole, presents itself in the first place as one between the mythical archaic, natural material of history, of what has been, and that which surfaces as dialectically and emphatically new.[333]

As discussed in chapter two, the examination of the historical process from the perspective of natural history views the former as consisting of natural and historical phenomena that are welded together in ways that do not cohere, and whose relation to a whole is oblique, because the whole itself – understood as the interrelation between the supposedly 'natural' and the 'historical' regarded as separate processes – is dirempted and negative. The concept 'history' thus points to a failed process of totalisation in which the 'social' historical process is conceptually separated from its other, that is, nature, when it has never in reality departed from this latter because the historical process has always taken the form of the largely unconscious domination of nature. The false separation between nature and history gives rise to a posited historical social temporality that appears as separate from the natural realm but is in fact all the more dependent on it. It fails to be total because of those aspects that it leaves out (but that have their revenge by constantly re-appearing in supposedly 'historical' phenomena) in order to constitute itself. Nature and history can never fully form a totality for interpretation because our relation to nature (but also our relation to history) is always mediated and thus cannot be analysed in itself. Interpretation from the point of view of natural history thus takes place precisely because neither 'history' nor 'nature' can be examined as a totality.[334]

However, there is a sense in which Adorno's usage of totality (thought in relation to history) alters in his later work, notably in his essays on Hegel, in the history model of *Negative Dialectics* and in his lectures on history, which corresponds to his theoretical shift away from Benjamin and towards Hegel. This shift is already apparent in his critique of Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk* manuscripts, in which, Adorno argues, supposedly contra Benjamin's method, that the 'materialist determination of culture traits' is possible only when 'mediated through the *total social process*.'[335] In fact, Adorno's idea of natural history and its critique of totalisation, at least in its early formulation, is not sufficient in extrapolating how totality

[333] *INH*, 266; *GS*, 1:362.
[334] As Hammer points out, this is why Adorno's thought cannot be easily absorbed with the concerns of deep ecology, because this latter has a tendency to reify nature as a totality and would thus form a 'return to myth, rather than a way out of it.' See Hammer, *Adorno and the Political,* 174.
[335] Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence 1928–1948*, 283.

functions in relation to his later thought because it suggests that 'totality' or 'whole' functions only as a synonym for non-identity, in that, by demonstrating that the historical whole is also always 'nature' or contains natural elements, it therefore fails in its claims to be total in socio-historic terms.

Adorno's treatment of Hegel's system suggests a revised concept of totality and a new formulation of the problem, in which totality comes to be something that can be posited from the perspective of its disunity (*Totalität der Entzweiung*),[336] which relies on Adorno's Marxian re-interpretation of the Hegelian spirit as social labour. There a sense in which, for Adorno, Hegel comprehensively describes the structure of the totality – in logical terms – in that he discerns the 'primacy of the whole over its finite parts' and the necessity of parts to the whole, and further demonstrates the way in which the 'whole realises itself in and through the parts' via 'discontinuity, alienation, and reflection' as is witnessed in the relations between the universal, particular and individual.[337] But the problem lies in Hegel's unconscious codification of a metaphysics of labour,[338] in which spirit as totality is removed from its actual material ground, which is the process of negation effectuated by social labour. This is, then, a re-framing of the problematic that 'The Idea of Natural-History' attempts to solve via its amalgamation of Lukács, Benjamin and the development of Freud's idea of the archaic, now addressed via a critique of Hegel's speculative thesis concerning the identity of subject and object in his system and the spiritualisation of the material basis of social labour into spirit.

For Adorno, Hegel 'inflates' the concept of world spirit in such a way that it comes to be identified with historical totality and argues that spirit viewed as the historical progression of reason can only be interpreted as 'negativity', as discussed in chapter three. Inherent in Hegel's identification of spirit with totality is a 'violence' that accompanies any view of history as a 'self-realising totality',[339] yet Adorno also claims that the transfiguration of spirit into the historical totality that is effectuated by Hegel is itself the philosophical justification for the way in which the 'human race' can only perpetuate itself *through* the totality.[340] From this perspective, historical totality is posited both as something that is necessary for the perpetuation of the species, but that only proceeds through the 'negativity of the principle of the course of the world'.[341] Hegel's attempt to transfigure the 'totality of historical suffering'

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[336] *GS*, 5:267.
[337] *HTS*, 4; *GS*, 5:253–254. This appears to be based on Hegel's discussion of totality in *Science of Logic*: 'The whole thus consists of the parts and apart from them is not anything. It is therefore the whole relation and the self-subsistent totality, but, for precisely this reason, it is only a relative, for what makes it a totality is rather its other, the parts; it does not have its subsistence within it but in its other.' Hegel, *Science of Logic,* 451.
[338] *HTS*, 24; *GS*, 5:270–271.
[339] *HF*, 47; *GF*, 72.
[340] *HF*, 47; *GF*, 71.
[341] *ND*, 311–313; *GS*, 6:313.

into the 'positivity of the self-realising absolute'[342] and the absolute subject that absorbs everything into itself is not only an abstraction, but is viewed in terms of Hegel's efforts to absorb non-identity into the identity that characterises a 'seamless' totality, from which nothing is excluded. This is connected to Adorno's critique of Hegel's idea of a universal history as a continuous and coherent totality, which is belied by the discontinuity and negation that he thinks characterise the historical process. Hegel's idea of a historical totality fails in conceptual terms because it attempts to absorb that which is in fact opposed to the totality: the non-identical moment and the particular, the latter of which only appears in its negative form in history as the 'totality of the particular' that is then raised to the universal as the particular interest. Hegel mistakenly transfigures the negative, understood in terms of both labour and suffering, into spirit, and views history as a progressing, coherent and continuous totality in which all moments are equally present.

However, if, as discussed in the third chapter, the examination of the particular element in the historical process necessitates an underlying conception of the totality in order to be thought at all, then it raises the question of how it is possible to think totality in relation to the historical process. In the lecture '"Negative" Universal History', Adorno states:

> We might say that history is *discontinuous* in the sense that it represents life perennially disrupted. However, because history constantly repeats this process of disruption [*Zerrüttung*], and because it clings to the resulting fragments instead of its deceptive surface unity, the philosophical interpretation of history, in other words, the construction of history, acquires a view of the totality that the totality fails to provide *at first sight*. At the same time, history detects in these fragments the trace of possible developments, of something hopeful that stands in precise opposition to what totality appears to show.[343]

This passage has two important implications. First, that the interpretation and construction of history relies on an examination of the discontinuous, disrupted elements within the historical process in order to be able to gain a sense of the totality that is occluded through its more direct examination. Second, that this methodological process can begin to demonstrate that the totality contains within itself the possibility of its own overcoming through the fragments that are never fully subsumed under it. This could further demonstrate the way in which the totality appears as 'unified' only as a result of the repetitions of disruption that constitute the historical process. It is thus a methodology that is premised on the potential for openness

[342] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:314.
[343] *HF*, 91; *GF*, 134.

within the historical process, precisely because the historical totality is comprised of the semblance of unity that derives from this repetition of discontinuity that threatens the unity of the whole. In this sense, it is those elements that cannot be subsumed under the totality in history that also push beyond it. The construction of history can therefore only demonstrate the openness and contingency of the totality by examining those elements in the historical process that the latter fails to fully incorporate into itself, which also has as its precondition a sense of the openness of the totality in relation to the future. However, while evocative, this raises further questions. What are these discontinuities, and how are they to be analysed? Given that the exchange relation produces new relations only in a limited sense, how can this openness be understood? As I will attempt to demonstrate in the following section, it is only through Adorno's construction of the 'false' social totality that this passage acquires an interpretive concreteness.

4.3.2 No Social Atlas: Social Totality as 'False'

In Adorno's paper 'German Contemporary Sociology', from 1959, he claims that it is only possible for sociology to comprehend society as a philosophical idea, which is in tension with the 'empirical determination of fact' that is, however, also necessary in order to avoid 'wild ideas' and 'mythology'.[344] Gillian Rose interprets this as demonstrating four interrelated points: first, that 'society' is not identical with its object and thereby requires non-identity thinking to interpret it; second, that this requires a 'correct view' of the mediation between subject and object; third, that these ideas cannot be 'translated into empirical terms', precisely because they rely on the idea of 'totality' which, as Adorno claims, is 'necessarily philosophical.'[345] Rose goes on to argue that Adorno's concept of totality is 'simply another way of stating the basic character of non-identity thinking', because it demonstrates how social phenomena fail to be subsumed by the concept of 'society' partly as a result of the unequal relations produced by the process of commodity exchange that proclaim to be equal.[346] Importantly, she interprets Adorno's *philosophical* concept of totality as distinct from the thesis that capitalism has become more total.[347] On this reading, while the concept 'totality' possesses a critical, philosophical function, the latter is a descriptive claim pertaining to the actual social conditions in the socio-historic present. This somewhat deflationary account of

[344] Adorno, 'Contemporary German Sociology', trans. Norman Birnbaum, in *Transactions of the Fourth World Congress of Sociology,* Vol. 1 (London: International Sociological Association, 1959), pp. 35–56 (p. 35).
[345] Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 101.
[346] Ibid.
[347] Ibid., 102.

Adorno's concept of totality needs to be re-examined, as it suggests that totality is only an alternative term for the procedure of non-identity. However, it seems that the concept 'totality' also has to retain some of the content of the descriptive claim, that is, that society is becoming total, in order for society to be thought at all.

In fact, Rose's reading seems to cover only one layer of Adorno's idea of society as a 'false' totality, underlying which seems to be a stronger socio-historic claim; that is, that the object that the concept 'society' refers to is a 'false' totality because it is not in fact a closed total system – at least in the usual understanding of the latter idea – but rather is either approaching one or has the potential to develop into one. In this second sense, the idea of society as a 'false' totality does not only point to the way in which the social process is based on antagonism and the inequality that stems from the exchange relation, and is therefore not harmonious, but also points to the way in which society is not in fact structured as a wholly integrated and closed totality, even if it presents itself as such. It seems that, for Adorno, a 'closed' totality must be held to be both something that exists, and yet, paradoxically, as something that does not yet exist.[348] Simon Jarvis discerns this apparent contradiction.[349] He suggests that totality for Adorno is both 'false' and 'real'; it is not 'false' in the sense that the 'philosophical emphasis' on totality is a 'mistake' but 'false' in the sense that there exists a process of what he refers to as 'self-absolutising production' for which the concept 'totality', in its Hegelian guise, has 'come to apologise.'[350] This difficult idea requires some further unpacking in relation to Adorno's concept of 'society'.

For Adorno, the concept 'society' fails to subsume its object, because the *object* that it refers to is not 'rationally continuous',[351] and thus cannot be comprehended as an entity in which various discernible and immediately interpretable interrelations hold between a 'sum total of people' at a given point in time.[352] Social totality is false, then, insofar as its object – society

[348] I take 'closed' to refer to two separate ideas. First, a totality is 'closed' if it is not open to the historically new. Second, I follow Alfred Schmidt's idea of a 'closed' system as something that can be examined 'irrespective of its historical origin', following his discussion of Marx's examination of bourgeois society. I thus take 'closed' in part to refer to the idea that a system or totality is one that is 'explicable in terms of itself.' See Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theory of History*, trans. Jeffrey Herf (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1981), 44. Adorno conceptualises totality as something that is not entirely explicable in terms of itself, precisely because of the historical (and natural) phenomena that continuously appear within it.
[349] Jarvis claims that it is one of the most 'striking discontinuities' in Adorno's social thought that he both holds that society is a closed totality but also that it is not yet a closed totality. He takes this to reflect that society is 'not an example which can be subsumed under thinking, but is rather indissociable from the framework for subsumption.' See Jarvis, 'The ''Unhappy Consciousness'' and Conscious Unhappiness: On Adorno's critique of Hegel and the idea of an Hegelian critique of Adorno', *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain*, 15.1 (2015), 71–88 (pp. 77–78).
[350] Simon Jarvis, *Adorno: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), 172.
[351] *S*, 144–145; *GS*, 8:9.
[352] *IS*, 33; *ES*, 61.

construed as a rationally continuous whole – does not exist. The concept 'society' is always a reification that attempts to solidify and freeze in time a mediated and dynamic process that resists theorisation.[353] However, if theory is to avoid the positivist trap of the analysis of isolated facts, then 'society' must still be thought as an idea: it is not a relic. Thus, in *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, Adorno states the task of theory as follows:

> Theory today is forced to be at once system and non-system – a system in so far as it must express the wholeness and unity of society that we encounter, or at least encounter as a potential, […] but on the other hand also a non-system in so far as it has transpired that this wholeness itself reproduces the antagonisms, that this unity itself, in its absoluteness, creates precisely this division by its own nature.'[354]

Interpretation of society must effectuate a double movement: to both construct society in the historical present as a self-presenting totality, but simultaneously to analyse this construction from the perspective of society's failure to be total. Society as totality is 'false' because it is reproduced through antagonism,[355] and thus does not cohere with its own concept and is therefore untrue to its own idea of a harmonious whole in which all parts are transparently related to each other and the whole in various degrees of (inter)dependence, as is demonstrated by Rose. But it also seems to be false because the idea of wholeness that corresponds to a theorisation of society but also our actual experience of society is encountered as a 'potential' wholeness, because it is in fact a process. Throughout Adorno's work, society is often regarded from the perspective of something that is in the process of becoming total, or as a growing power. This would suggest that Adorno's idea of society as totality is a projection to a future or possible state in which the process of totalisation will have in some sense been completed, and, as Adorno states at the end of the essay 'Society', subject and object will have reached an 'ultimate' (false) reconciliation.[356] This implies a further way in which the social totality is false, because it appears as if it were total but is in fact still in a process of becoming, and thus is in some sense not a totality. This is in part because the apparent reconciliation between subject and object in the socio-historic present is in fact no such thing, which itself belies the ostensible closedness of the totality.

There is a sense in which Adorno's concept of totality contains parallels with Kant's concept of totality. In Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, totality does not exist as a given in experience,

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[353] *IS*, 149; *ES*, 249–250.
[354] *PETS*, 77; *PETG*, 125–126.
[355] Adorno states: 'The totality of society is maintained not by solidarity but by the antagonistic interests of human beings, by its antithesis, and not by the existence of such a thing as a unified social subject, society is advanced by advancing irrationality, side by side with its advancing rationalisation.' See *IS*, 44; *ES*, 79.
[356] *S*, 152; *GS*, 8:18.

and is rather a regulative idea that is demanded by reason.[357] Totality for Kant always remains incomplete and therefore open because something can always be added to the series. Adorno suggests that while Kant seeks to comprehend reality as a whole – to 'decode the totality'[358] – he also thinks that philosophy is unable to do so. He states:

> It [Kant's philosophy] is the attempt to give an account of the totality, while simultaneously conceding that this totality is no such thing, that subject and object do not seamlessly fit together – and that ultimately the absence of this seamless fit, which is what the block amounts to, is itself what a Romantic artist once named the innermost life of the world. I should like to emphasize that…this seems to provide the justification for the procedure I have adopted in this course of lectures. This procedure is one that places far greater emphasis on the ruptures […] than upon its harmonious, synthetic form. This is because these ruptures can almost be said to *constitute* the Kantian philosophy, for the reason that they reveal the innermost core of this thinking. This core is encapsulated in the idea that the totality that the mind is just able to encompass is no more than the fact that as *mind* it is *unable* to comprehend the totality; but that it somehow contrives after all to comprehend what it does not comprehend and the fact that it cannot comprehend it.[359]

Adorno's own conception of totality follows Kant's in the sense that, unlike Hegel, he does not consider totality (in either its societal or historical guise) to be something that can be known in itself. But he also suggests that it possesses a regulative function: that is, it must still be postulated in order that socio-historical phenomena can be thought at all. For Adorno, the 'core' of Kant's philosophy is the moment at which totality is held as something that cannot be comprehended but that 'mind' strives all the more to comprehend despite this block.

However, Adorno also seems to hold that the social totality is real or presents itself as such at the level of appearance and is thus not only a potential whole but an actual whole. In the introduction to *The Positivist Dispute,* Adorno states:

> In sociology, *interpretation* [*Deutung*] acquires its force both from the fact that without reference to totality – to the real total system, untranslatable into any solid immediacy – nothing societal can be conceptualised, and from that fact that it can, however, only be recognised in the extent to which it is apprehended in the factual and the individual.

[357] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. and ed. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 402.
[358] Adorno, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 177.
[359] Ibid., 178.

> It is the societal physiognomy of appearance [*die gesellschaftliche Physiognomik des Erscheinenden*]. The primary meaning of 'interpret' is to perceive something in the features of totality's social givenness. The idea of the 'anticipation' [*Vorgriffs*] of totality, which perhaps a very liberal positivism would be prepared to accept, is insufficient. Recalling Kant, it envisages totality as something in fact indefinitely relinquished and postponed, but something in principle to be fulfilled through the given, without regard for the qualitative gap between essence and appearance in society. Physiognomy does better justice to it since it realises totality in its dual relationship to the facts which it deciphers – a totality which 'is', and does not represent a mere synthesis of logical operations.[360]

This has several implications. First, the concept 'totality' is necessary for sociological interpretation and is the only way in which society can be thought, because society presents itself as a closed totality, but in turn society must be discerned via a contemplation of the (mediated) facts and individual phenomena, rather than the overarching structures that seem to constitute society. Interpretation as the 'physiognomy of appearance' must therefore read off these supposedly isolated, surface phenomena the constitution of society as a self-presenting totality, because while they appear as 'given' moments, they are in fact entirely mediated by the total set of relations that constitute the social present at a particular socio-historic moment. For this reason, it is insufficient to consider totality as something potential or postponed, because this wrongly suggests that society is on the road towards some form of harmony and completeness by virtue of those phenomena that are in fact already the products of the diremptions that constitute the antagonistic social whole. It seems, then, that we are left with two unreconcilable claims. The first is that theory must be non-system, in part because society is encountered as a 'potential' wholeness; the second is that social totality is in fact 'real' and is thus not a potentiality but an actuality and must be constructed in order for society to be thought at all. How can these two claims be thought together? The key to answering this question is what Adorno means by 'a totality which 'is''. First, Adorno holds that the social totality is real in the sense that 'individuals' 'obey it', but is simultaneously 'illusion' in that it is the 'sum of individuals' social relations which screens themselves off from individuals.'[361] Totality is an illusion produced by capitalist society, based on the mental configuration that derives from the exchange process that then comes to dominate reality, so it is something that actually exists as objective illusion, as discussed in relation to Adorno's seminar on Marx. Second, a 'totality which 'is'' must be understood from the perspective of Adorno's theorisation of 'tendency'. Finally, a 'totality which 'is'' relates to his contention that the

[360] *PD,* 32; *GS*, 8*:*315.
[361] *PD*, 12; *GS*, 8:292.

notion of totality is a 'category of mediation, not one of immediate domination and subjugation.'[362]

In the lectures *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society*, Adorno states that the totality can only be discussed in terms of tendency (*Tendenz*): 'we can speak of the whole only in the sense of a tendency'.[363] In the first paragraph of the history model,[364] Adorno suggests that 'common sense' rejects the idea of objectivity, but subjects are continually exposed experientially to the objective tendency (understood as negativity), both externally and internally.[365] It is important to briefly distinguish between Adorno's usage of the term trend (*Trend*) and tendency, although he occasionally uses the terms interchangeably. While the discernment of a tendency involves grasping that which is qualitatively new rather than the simply existent, a trend is something that already manifests itself in subjective reactions.[366] Thus, by implication, in terms of theory, a tendency is a more elusive category to grasp as it aims for that which has not yet unfolded. In this sense, the discernment of a tendency – while used in some passages in orthodox fashion to refer to basic laws that govern society and history (connected to exchange value) following Marx's usage – appears to contain a Nietzschean moment of untimeliness in which what is required is a reading of the present beyond the merely existent, and in relation to the future, because it attempts to delineate the 'element which qualitatively differs from the state itself.'[367]

Adorno's idea of a 'tendency' thus points to the existence of contingencies in the historical process. While 'trends' diagnose processes that have already come to pass, tendencies appear to refer to elements in the historical process that do not necessarily lead to a particular state of affairs but are nonetheless necessary in the unpicking of historical causation. Thus, Adorno suggests that the 'historical expansion' of the French bourgeoisie was a tendency than nonetheless required more immediate factors, such as the financial crisis and the excesses of the monarchy, in order for it to generate the French Revolution as a 'historical moment of rupture (*historichen Bruchstelle*)'.[368] The idea of a 'tendency' is further connected to the possibility of the negative dialectical method itself: 'Tendency is the ability of theoretical

[362] *PD*, 107; *GS*, 8:549.
[363] *PETS*, 22; *PETG*, 41.
[364] Confusingly, the subtitle to this section is translated by Ashton as 'Trends and Facts' when it should be translated as 'Tendency and Facts'. This is rectified in the Redmond translation.
[365] *ND*, 300 (Ashton); *GS*, 6:295–296. Adorno defines an 'objective tendency' as 'what in fact people experience when they find themselves caught up in a maelstrom of the so-called great historical epochs.' See *HF*, 10; *GF*, 17. Yet the experience of this objectivity is that which is simultaneously dismissed as a 'metaphysical sleight of hand'. *HF*, 18; *GF*, 29.
[366] *PETS*, 24; *PETG*, 42–43.
[367] *PETS*, 24; *PETG*, 43.
[368] *ND*, 295–297; *GS*, 8:296.

thought to grasp the non-identical quality of a concept within the concept itself.'[369] Adorno later states:

> One can only ever speak of a system of society as a tendency, and not as something fully realised, and this, strictly speaking, already means that society *tel quel*, society as it is, is not the system that, according to its own concept, it should be. But this difference exposes itself, in keeping with a theory of tendency, not as a mere epistemological deviation of the accidental from its law but as a law of its own […] the way things are, one can say that the deviations and contradictions which seemed only particular and quite deep in the past have, on the one hand, developed so far that they can no longer be deduced in the same form from the uniform concept of society, as is attempted in Marx's theory, but that, on the other hand, they have expanded to such a degree in empirical terms that the very idea that a theory of society, in the sense of systematic unity, has become extremely problematic.[370]

It is via the discernment of 'deviations and contradictions (*Abweichungen und Widersprüche*)'[371] that the (false) social totality is to be interpreted; the characterisation of society as a total system based on exchange is in fact insufficient, even if the socio-historic present forms a totality as a result of the abstractions of the exchange process, because it neglects the phenomena that ostensibly diverge from the exchange process but that, at the same time, all the more readily lead back to 'society' as concept. Nor should Adorno's idea of tendency be equated with the Marxian idea of tendency as the rate of profit to fall or as a strictly economic category. Tendency rather points to the way in which society cannot fully be described from the vantage point of the historical present, but involves an attempt at perceiving the 'direction in which this whole process is seeking to move, and to deduce from that whether and how one might intervene in this tendency.'[372] The interpretation of the social totality as tendency is thus a critical diagnostic principle that seeks to analyse the social present from the perspective of the possible movement that constitutes it, and is directly opposed to the reification of society in which the social process is solidified by fixing its 'merely momentary' manifestation, which is then rigidified into what Adorno refers to as a 'concrete

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[369] *PETS*, 21; *PETG*, 40.
[370] *PETS*, 27; *PETG*, 48.
[371] *PETS*, 27; *PETG*, 48. Adorno provides some examples of these deviations and contradictions, such as state intervention, the welfare state and public employment programmes, which are 'natural breaches of the pure competition principle inherent in the liberal model'. These deviations cannot be understood 'with the tradition terms of a liberal exchange society' but end up consolidating the latter. See, *PETS*, 29; *PETG*, 51–52.
[372] *IS*, 149–150; *ES*, 250. For a discussion of law and tendency, see Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?' in *Can One Live After Auschwitz*, ed. and trans. Rodney Livingstone and others (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 111–125 (p. 122).

totality', in which different parts of the whole can simply be organised in the form of a kind of 'social atlas (*Sozialatlas*)'.[373]

Lars Heitmann argues that Adorno's concept of social totality 'no longer has a systematic basis in the philosophy of history', but rather forms the 'analysis of modern, capitalist society…as an 'irrational system'.[374] On this view, the construction of society as totality can be deduced from the irrationally organised absolutising production (via an interpretation of individual phenomena) that Jarvis suggests forms the moment of reality of totality in the historical present. But what this occludes is the way in which the social totality can only be interpreted as something that has come to be, and, in this sense, it necessitates a form of historical interpretation: 'society as such cannot be understood without reference to the historical elements implicit within it.'[375] Although Adorno claims that a theory of totality is always a theory of the 'existing capitalist society of its respective time',[376] this cannot be separated from the 'constitutive character of history for society.'[377] If societal physiognomics examines the appearance of social phenomena as a means by which to reach the essence, this is an attempt to discern the traces of history that are contained within the latter:

> History mediates between the phenomena and its content which requires interpretation. The essential which appears in the phenomenon is that whereby it became what it is and what, in painful stultification, releases that which yet becomes. The orientation of physiognomy is directed towards what is silenced, the second level of phenomenon.[378]

While the interpretation of society as totality thus requires the discernment of the possible movement of the social process, this must simultaneously take place in relation to an analysis of appearance as something that has come to be, because in society 'everything that is, has become'.[379] The problem with the wrong kind of sociology is that it neglects to do either of these things, instead contenting itself with fixing the 'here and now' into an analysable ahistorical object. However, Adorno is also cautious concerning the relation between historical interpretation and sociology, because he suggests there has been a qualitative shift in the structure of society such that it cannot be straightforwardly compared to the past because, as he claims, the latter was not so 'totally determined by economics or so thoroughly

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[373] *IS*, 61; *ES*, 106.
[374]See Lars Heitmann, 'Society as ''Totality'': On the Negative-Dialectical Presentation of Capitalist Socialisation', in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, Vol. Two, pp. 589–606 (p. 603).
[375] *IS*, 145; *ES*, 243.
[376] *PETS*, 47; *PETG*, 79.
[377] *IS*, 148; *ES,* 249.
[378] *PD*, 36; *GS*, 8:319.
[379] *SD*, 39; *GS*, 8:228.

socialised as our epoch.'[380] But, if the social totality is 'totally determined' and 'thoroughly socialised', how does this relate to the construction of temporality in the historical present?

First, while Adorno often suggests that society has ceased to be historical, the social totality cannot be regarded as something that is simply 'static'. Based as it is on antagonism, it is also dynamic.[381] What this suggests is that, while the totality can grow and continuously expand and integrate ever more areas that were previously outside it, the process of expansion in the historical present is not transformative in the sense that it leads to qualitatively new relations. But, while the totality continually attempts to integrate individuals in society, it does not do so precisely because its principle is particularity. Thus, the idea of the social totality as false points to the way in which capitalist societies seek to integrate everything under their concept but cannot do so. Following Horkheimer's early analyses of the family in 'History and Psychology' and 'Authority and the Family', Adorno continues to posit the existence of 'enclaves' such as the family in industrial capitalism that exist at a (partial) remove from the totality.[382] But, unlike Horkheimer, in the passage in question, these ('non-capitalist') enclaves are not valorised by Adorno, or examined from the point of view of the possibility of forms of oppositionality contained within them. Rather, it raises the question as to the extent to which these supposed enclaves are themselves necessary for the perpetuation of the totality.[383] This suggests that the social totality is formed by a plethora of heterogenous moments that are both discontinuous with one another but simultaneously mediated by one another and bound together:

> In the democratically governed countries of industrial societies, totality is a category of mediation, not one of immediate domination and subjugation. This implies that in industrial market societies by no means everything pertaining to society can simply be deduced from its principle […] Societal totality does not a lead a life of its own over and above that which it unites and of which it, in its turn is composed. It produces and reproduces itself through its individual moments. Many of these moments preserve a relative independence […][384]

[380] *IS*, 150; *ES*, 251–252.
[381] Following Adorno's essay on static and dynamic, 'dynamic' as category is here understood in the sense of the trend towards the 'ever increasing control of nature' and as something that 'moves in aimless circles', thus containing static elements, rather than as something that necessarily produces qualitatively new, transformative relations. The category of the 'dynamic' cannot thereby be immediately equated with the 'historic' because there is something 'unhistorical' about it, but equally, it problematises the idea of the historical as something that produces new relations.
[382] *PD*, 107; *GS*, 8:549.
[383] *PD*, 107; *GS*, 8:549.
[384] *PD*, 107; *GS*, 8:549.

In the essay 'Society', Adorno also discusses the existence of these enclaves but this time with reference to colonialism and non-capitalist areas that he describes as 'by no means something alien' but rather as 'vital necessities' for the capitalist system. This, he suggests, occurs as a result of the 'universal extension of the market system' that works through antagonism.[385] While he offers no substantial account of the manner in which these enclaves are absorbed into a functional relation with the 'economies of the advanced capitalist countries', it suggests that vital to a concept of totality and to the process of totalisation would be an account of the means by which totality relies on areas that are supposedly outside of it but that actually form necessary moments within it. This will be discussed in detail in chapter five in the consideration of the 'negative' universal.

Adorno's postulation of the existence of diverse enclaves has several important implications for his theorisation of the historical process. First, if not everything pertaining to the social process can be deduced from totality (and this is a further way in which totality is 'false', because not everything in society follows from it), then this leaves open the possibility of the existence of different moments within the totality that retain (some) independence from the latter. The process of totalisation implies a temporality that would be both homogeneous and unilinear, but because of the posited non-identity between human beings and the totality formed by capitalist societies, there appears to be room left in Adorno's account for the existence of different temporalities that are non-synchronous and discontinuous with one another. Following on from this, it appears that the totality actually requires these different moments or heterogeneity in order to constitute it, despite the social process itself appearing as a homogeneous whole. If society as a self-presenting totality is in fact constituted by these distinct and heterogeneous moments, this also suggests the possibility of openness.[386] Further, it seems that, for Adorno, society's present closure does not entail that it will necessarily remain closed, and it is in the 'unresolved' contradictions discerned by Jay that the possibility of contingency within the socio-historic process is located. This thereby begins to concretise Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process as something that is constituted by the continuity of discontinuity, because it is demonstrative of the non-identical and antagonistic aspects that nonetheless are bound together through the process of totalisation.

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[385] *S*, 149; *GS*, 8:14.

[386] As Jean-Marie Vincent rightly notes, the false totality, for Adorno is 'neither static, nor one-dimensional. It is shot through with unforeseeable, irregular dynamics that destructure and restructure social relations and individual situations.' See Jean-Marie Vincent, 'Adorno and Marx', *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism,* ed. Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 489–502 (p. 495). This is something that is also discerned by Alex Demirović when he claims that, for Adorno, the totality is constituted by 'historically specific configurations' that can, in the future, allow for the 'possibility for the open to emerge'. See Alex Demirović, 'What Does It Mean to Speak of the Actuality of Critical Theory?', in *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies,* 12.2 (2013), 366-379 (p. 376).

However, there is a question as to how Adorno's idea of the historical process as something that is constituted by determinate negation should be read alongside his sociological analyses and whether there is a disjunction between the two modes of analysis; Adorno's sociological writings appears to suggest that society is on the verge of becoming 'static', because it is becoming increasingly timeless given the homogeneous temporality that emerges as a result of the prevalence of the exchange process and the uniformities of technical rationality,[387] while his examination of the historical process in *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history depends on the idea that the historical process keeps negating and is thus – in a limited sense at least – 'dynamic'. But the static and dynamic aspects are, for Adorno, mediated with one another. Thus, in his critique of the concepts of static and dynamic in sociological theory following Comte, Adorno argues that these concepts are to be retained but subjected to dialectical critique, and suggests that the supposedly static elements in society are those that lead to dynamism and movement as a result of the requisites that emerge from the moment of stagnation and are necessary constituents of the dynamic moment, and further that the dynamic aspects contain a moment of stasis because they are continuously based on the need for increasing expansion, and the quest to absorb ever more elements into them, and thus the dynamic moment is peculiarly static. Despite the way in which society increasingly appears to be moving towards a static condition, Adorno's point is that the ostensibly static condition of the socio-historic present can only be viewed in relation to the movement of history, that is, of the process of determinate negation:

> A sociologist cannot adopt the point of view of an impartial observer. History does not allow him to, and truth and falsehood would present to him the same appearance. If he is allowed to venture a prediction from his partial point of view, then it is at least improbable that society will freeze into immobility. History will not come to rest, as long as there will be antagonism in the social order, and as long as humans are not ''subjects'' of society, but remains its agents […] The chances of total destruction are greater than the chances of stagnation on the Ancient Egyptian scale. But there is something unhistorical in the dynamic force which moves in aimless circles.[388]

Adorno thus views society or the social process that presents itself as a false totality as something whose supposedly static features are those that interweave with and give rise to the dynamic features. Further, the social process itself can only be examined in relation to the continuous negations that constitute history, which themselves contain an unhistorical moment because they are driven by the objectives of absorption and integration and are thus the effects of a particular form of socio-historic domination. Importantly, in this passage,

[387] *SD*, 41– 42; *GS*, 8:230–231.
[388] *SD*, 48 (translation amended); *GS*, 8:236–237.

Adorno directly connects the idea that individuals are not 'subjects' but rather 'agents' of the historical process with the idea that history has not come to rest. This would suggest that the movement of the socio-historic present in part derives from the way in which individuals are merely agents rather than subjects. If, however, Adorno's idea of the false totality is partially a projection to a future or possible state in which the process of totalisation will have been completed, and subject-object will have reached a (false) reconciliation, but that this has yet to fully transpire, then how should the subject-object relation be constructed in relation to the historical process?

4.4 History Without a Subject?

4.4.1 The Individual Subject in History

It is one of Adorno's central tenets that the concept of the 'subject' necessarily contains within itself indelible traces of the 'individual humanity',[389] and throughout his work he often refers to the individual as either the 'individual subject' or the 'subject'. This is not a mere slippage between the concept of the 'individual' and the concept of the 'subject', even though there are passages in Adorno's work in which they appear to be utilised interchangeably. For Adorno, these concepts are not the same but both, from a historical perspective, necessarily entail the other. Thus, it possible to talk of 'individual subjects', even if only in a limited sense, limited because the concept of the 'subject' points beyond its mere individual realisation and refers to what, in Kantian terms, consist in the 'universal attributes of consciousness in general.'[390]

As examined in the first chapter, Adorno's account of the prehistory of subjectivity in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* traces the way in which the drive to self-preservation and the domination of nature that the latter entails not only *leads* to the reification of the subject, but rather the emergence of subjectivity, at least in its historically developed form, itself requires reification for its constitution.[391] However, as I argued, this should not lead to the conclusion that there is no possibility of novelty within the subject, or that as Dews claims, the subject is therefore condemned to an 'inevitable, totalising process of reification.'[392] Rather, neither the concept of the subject, nor the individual subject itself, is exhausted by self-preservation or

[389] *SO*, 245; *GS*, 10.2:741.
[390] *SO*, 245; *GS*, 10.2:741.
[391] In the lectures on Kant, Adorno states: '…reification is a function of subjectivisation. In other words, the more subjectivisation you have, the more reification there is. There is a reifying quality in the very attempt to relate all phenomena, everything we encounter, to a unified reference point and to subsume it under a self-identical, rigid unity, thus removing it from its dynamic context.' Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 114.
[392] Peter Dews, 'The Return of the Subject in Late Foucault', *Radical Philosophy,* 51 (1989), 37–41 (p. 38).

conceptuality by self-preserving reason, because the individual subject 'never quite fitted the mould',[393] and there remains what Adorno in his notes for the preparatory lectures on *Negative Dialectics* would later describe as the 'mimetic residue' or the 'quasi-archaic'[394] that should not be hypostasised but that fails to be registered by and is in fact banished from the Kantian and Hegelian conceptions of subjectivity. Despite the reification of the subject in the socio-historic present, the former always contains a surplus, connected to its being both a subject and an object, and therefore a material, particular thing that has the potential to resist the pervading abstractions that derive from the exchange process that forms subjectivity in the socio-historical present.[395]

One question that arises is whether the surplus contained within individual subjectivity could itself further the ends of historical transformation. Adorno states elsewhere that the individual subject is 'separated into the inner continuation of the machinery of social reproduction and an undissolved remainder which, as a mere preserve powerlessness in the face of the wildly expansionist 'rational' component, degenerates into mere curiosity'.[396] There is thus a duality to the individual subject that consists in, first, the internalised processes that lead to the reproduction of objective socio-historic conditions, and, second, the surplus moment that cannot be subsumed under these processes, but that does not in itself necessarily possess a historically transformative function. This duality remains largely at the level of asservation in Adorno's thought, but, for the purposes of this analysis, the postulated non-identity between the individual subject as *homo economicus* who is shaped to its 'innermost core' by the objective illusion that is produced by the exchange process of society, and the existence of the (individual) subject as a reflective, particular and material entity that is both subject and object, is – taken alone – insufficient in gauging the historical dimensions of Adorno's account of the subject-object relation.

While it is Adorno's *pre*history of the subject that tends to be the subject of examination in the literature, there also exists a rudimentary *history*[397] of (individual) subjectivity in his work,

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[393] *DE*, 9; *GS*, 3:29.
[394] Adorno, *Lectures on 'Negative Dialectics'*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 143; Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2016), 185.
[395] Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology' I, 80.
[396] Adorno, 'Sociology and Psychology' I, 80.
[397] As discussed in chapters one and two, Adorno does not think that we can sufficiently distinguish between prehistory and history because the latter has never left the former. Despite this, I think it is important to note that there exist two accounts in Adorno's thought of the formation of subjectivity that have different emphases. While *Dialectic of Enlightenment* traces the constitution of subjectivity in relation to the experience of fear at a non-specifiable temporal juncture that is disconnected to any clear periodisation, the history of the individual subject in the bourgeois age is directly connected to the emergence of capitalism. The question of the relation of these two accounts has not yet been properly investigated, but it would seem to be a fruitful line of inquiry given that it could further substantiate Adorno's concept of historical time.

that relies on Adorno's somewhat simplistic periodisation, in which the emergence of the (individual) subject is located at the beginning of the bourgeois age in which the former escapes the bonds of tutelage that characterise the feudal age and comes to possess some degree of autonomy as an economic agent. In a lecture he states:

> Individuals and even the category of the individual – which as you will recollect is a relatively recent development, dating back only to the beginning of the Renaissance in Europe […] are the products of history. Given the nature of history […] this implies that the individual is also a transitory phenomenon. Please note that by individual here I do not mean the biological division into individual beings […] What I mean is that individuality is a reflective concept, that is to say, we can only speak of individuality where individual subjects become conscious of their individuality and singularity, in contrast to the totality, and only define themselves as individuals, as particular beings in the consciousness of this opposition. In this particular sense, we can say that the individual is a product and, as I said, may be a transitory phenomenon.[398]

The historical form of subjectivity that is connected to the emergence of the economic individual subject is necessarily stunted,[399] even if it appears retrospectively to possess a greater substantiality than the form that subjectivity takes in the socio-historic present. This is because the corresponding subjective freedom was also untrue based as it was only on the abstract autonomy accorded to individuals as economic subjects. Further, it is this meagre freedom which is then extinguished in the socio-historic present, as a result of this same process: 'The process by which what is individuated becomes autonomous, the function of the exchange society, terminates in its abolition through integration.'[400] The economic injunction that first leads to the differentiation that gives rise to individuals subjects able to pursue their own interests and the limited freedom that this entails, that is, the 'economic principle of appropriation', becomes the definitive attribute of individual subjectivity itself, and in this sense, 'anthropological'.

Here it is necessary to return to the problematic that structured the examination of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in chapter one, that is, the extent to which Adorno's history of the individual subject is in fact only a history of the bourgeois individual subject. It is indisputable that Adorno's claims concerning the emergence of the individual subject is inextricably connected with his theorisation of bourgeois society, and that he mostly does not consider the possibilities

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[398] *HF*, 70–71; *GF*, 103–104.
[399] Adorno states that 'even in the high-bourgeois phase in which the sovereign freedom of the perceiving human subject is at its greatest, his freedom is vastly more circumscribed than appeared to be the case.' *HF*, 23–24.
[400] *ND*, 258–262; *GS*, 6:259.

of other forms of historical subjectivity.[401] Joel Whitebook argues that, for Adorno, the end of the bourgeois individual is in fact the 'end of the individual as such', and suggests that Adorno refuses to 'countenance any images of post bourgeois subjectivity.'[402] This objection, which has been repeated in different forms in the literature on Adorno, is both true and false. It is true insofar as Adorno's rudimentary sketches concerning the emergence of the bourgeois individual, its limited economic freedom, and the loss of this freedom in the socio-historic present suggests that subjectivity is itself connected to the bourgeois individual that has (almost) ceased to exist. But it is false because it fails to account for the historical dimension of the relation between subject and object that suggests that the historical process itself could lead to new configurations between the two.

4.4.2 The Subject–Object Relation as Historical

For Adorno, the diremption between subject and object is both real and semblance. The sense in which the separation is 'real' is because it is the 'result of a coercive historical process.'[403] In other words, subject and object have in fact become separated as a result of the way in which the subject has attempted to constitute itself over and above the object that it seeks to dominate (which includes the natural-historical object, other subjects as objects, and also itself as object). This in part takes place as a result of the requisites of preservation that are themselves historically driven, both on an individual and social level. In this sense, it is the negativity of the historical process that leads to the chasm between the subject and object,

[401] This is something that Buck-Morss points out when she suggests that Adorno statements about the subject were largely unconcerned with considerations of class origin or the subject's position within the social relations of production. See Buck-Morss, *Origins of Negative Dialectics,* 83. From the perspective of the present, it should also be pointed out that Adorno's statements regarding the subject and the individual are also unconcerned with questions of race and gender. This is something that is problematised in Fumi Okiji's claim that Adorno's critique of the individual is an abstraction when considered from the point of view of black America. See Fumi Okiji, *Jazz as Critique: Adorno and Black Expression Revisited* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 5. This casts doubt on using Adorno's critique of the individual subject in the present context. However, I think Adorno's point that the individual is a historical category that cannot be ignored but might be surpassed remains important in critiquing the process of individualisation in the socio-historic present because it could raise the question of the way in which the socio-historic process leads to individualisation, but also how this differs in varying contexts. This would have to be specified and developed further in relation to the consideration of other historical forms of subjectivity, something that will be discussed in the conclusion of this work.

[402] Joel Whitebook suggests that lacking in Adorno's account of subjectivity is a consideration of different forms of 'psychic synthesis' that could 'constitute new forms of postconventional selfhood', which he suggests could be rectified through a development of Freud's concept of sublimation. Missing from this account, however, is any consideration of the Marxist aspects of Adorno's analysis that necessarily entails that no new forms of subjectivity can be thought without a concomitant change in the material structuring of society. See Joel Whitebook, 'Weighty Objects: On Adorno's Kant-Freud Interpretation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno,* ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 51–78 (p. 59).

[403] *SO*, 246; *GS*, 10.2:742.

because the subject consolidates itself as a subject in part as a response to the perceived dangers implicit within the socio-historic object. Its self-constitution derives from the way in which it constructs itself in opposition to heterogenous objectivity and what Adorno terms the state of 'undifferentiatedness' [*Ungeschiedenheit*][404] that would otherwise pose a threat to the subject's survival, but at a later historical stage, its false independence. The coercive historical process, or the negativity of history, then, has the consequence that the subject develops in a certain way, that is, as a 'mind that appears as absolutely independent' to historical objectivity, as is manifest in bourgeois subjectivity,[405] and fails to understand or 'forgets' that it is itself an object and also the extent to which it is determined by the socio-historic object.[406]

However, despite the way in which subject and object are in fact separated in and by the negativity of the historical process, this is semblance in part because this 'historical separation cannot be hypostasised' or 'magically transformed into an invariant.'[407] The separation appears as static, but precisely because it is historical, it is in fact subject to change.[408] The relation between subject and object is both historically constituted, but it is not therefore historically fixed, the implication of this being that the relation could be altered in the future and is therefore open to the historically new.[409] In this sense, despite the way in which subject and object have, according to Adorno, attained a 'false identity'[410] in the socio-historic present, this too is semblance not only because the identity between subject and object is in fact the result of integration and diremption, and thus only seemingly an identity, but because it is a historical relation and therefore subject to change. It is thus the point of theory to continually reflect on the category of subject (and object) as it shifts in history; Adorno states: 'Objectivity can be made out solely by reflecting, at every historical and cognitive stage, both upon what at the time is presented as subject and object as well as upon their mediations.'[411] Given that the negative dialectical method is premised on the intention of breaking through 'the delusion of constitutive subjectivity' by means of the 'power of the subject', in order to attempt to theorise in accordance with the 'priority of the object' (*Vorrang des Objekts*), the dissolution

[404] *SO*, 246; *GS*, 10.2:743.
[405] *SO*, 246; *GS*, 10.2:742.
[406] As Asha Varadharajan puts it: 'Adorno wants to emphasise the historical truth contained in this separation of subject from object, that the object has continually receded from consciousness because the subject's claim to supremacy over the object ironically 'defrauds' it of the object.' See Asha Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak,* 61.
[407] *SO*, 246; *GS*, 10.2:742.
[408] In his critique of the idea of historicity in *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno states: 'Historical conditions undergird the inner composition and constellation of the subject and object.' *ND*, 134–136; *GS*, 6:135.
[409] In the lectures on Kant, Adorno states this as follows; 'the distinction between subject and object is dynamic; it has the character of process, but should not be made into an absolute…this distinction [between subject and object] is not given for all time; it enters into *history* and is therefore capable of being historically determined in its various phases.' Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,* 163.
[410] *ND*, 340–343; *GS*, 6:342.
[411] *SO*, 253; *GS*, 10.2:751.

of the bourgeois individual does not entail that the category of the subject should simply be rescinded: as Adorno states in a lecture, it is in fact the case that the 'abolition of the subject failed to take place.'[412] Further, it is the subject that 'contains the potential for the sublimation of its own domination.'[413]

It should be pointed out that the relation between subject and object cannot simply be regarded as equivalent to the individual-history relation. To simply install history as the object, and the individual as subject, neglects the mediations between the two, not only because the concept 'subject' refers to more than only the individual and because individuals are themselves material objects, but also because the differentiation of human beings into 'individuals' is itself a historical moment that then becomes historically determining.[414] In this sense, the process of individualisation is part of the object that the subject confronts. Further, history itself contains subjective elements, as its process derives from the particularity of subjective interests that appear as universal. History, as a concept that is non-identical with the socio-historic process or actual history, cannot simply be equated with the object, as this would form an all too easy passage to materialism in which, as Varadharajan notes, history as object would become a kind of 'dead thing'[415] rather than a dynamic process that is itself subject to change and not abstractly opposed to individual subject. Following Adorno's statement concerning the lack of a total subject in history, Adorno quotes Marx in *The Holy Family* in which the latter states that 'history' is '*nothing* but the activity of man pursuing his ends.'[416] In this sense, 'history' as object makes no sense considered apart from the individual subjects that comprise it and act in accordance with their own interests: 'history' is the accumulation of the acts of individuals and their 'spontaneities'.[417] This is a warning against installing history as a first thing or ground. The subject, as product of the socio-historic process, is as much object as subject, but elements in the historical process themselves become the subject.

For Adorno, despite the differences between the Kantian and Hegelian concepts of the subject, both converge because they theoretically extinguish the temporal core of the subject: 'the fundament of both is the subject as concept, excluding its temporal content.'[418] The question

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[412] Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics,* 43; Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, 69.
[413] *SO,* 256: *GS*, 10.2:755.
[414] Adorno states: '…in the history of modern, i.e., bourgeois, society the category of the individual is socialised: in the first instance, so that formally at least it becomes the *decisive* form of the social process.' *HF*, 86; *GF*, 128.
[415] Varadharajan, *Exotic Parodies,* 62.
[416] Karl Marx, *The Holy Family or Critique of Critical Criticism. Against Bruno Bauer and Company*, in *Collected Works, September 1844–November 1845, Volume 4*, trans. Jack Cohen, Richard Dixon, Clemens Dutt, Barbara Ruhemann, Christopher Upward and Florence Kelley-Wischnewetzky (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 93.
[417] *ND*, 297–300; *GS*, 6:299.
[418] *ND*, 324–328; *GS*, 6:325.

is where the temporal core of the subject resides for Adorno. Hammer suggests that, for Adorno, the subject can 'go beyond itself and break with its normal sense of homogeneity and homogeneous time' in what he refers to as 'moments of temporal disruption.'[419] He points to Adorno's examination of natural beauty in *Aesthetic Theory* in which the subject becomes aware of 'suspended history, a moment of becoming at a standstill.'[420] Hammer's suggestion – that Adorno's conception of the subject can break with the homogeneity of time through certain moments of aesthetic experience – can further be elucidated with reference to the historical dimension of the subject-object relation. If the subject contains within itself the potentiality of 'sublimating' its own domination, as Adorno claims in 'Subject and Object', this would imply the possibility of forms of historical experience in which the subject-object relation in the socio-historic present could be transformed. The temporal core of the subject would correspond to the moment of neglected materiality that the bourgeois individual attempts to control in its attempts to secure a false independence; that is, the moment of transience and contingency that connects the individual as subject to its own finitude and that breaks through the seeming homogeneity of time characteristic of the socio-historic present, instead allowing itself to experience the discontinuities of historical temporality.[421] But can a different framework, outside of Adorno's conception of aesthetic experience, be utilised as a means to gauge the potentialities of other forms of subjectivity? The question is whether Adorno's philosophico-historic thought offers a means by which to begin to construct an alternative historical subject.

4.4.3 The Global Subject?

If, for Adorno, the possibilities of historical and futural forms of subjectivity are not limited to bourgeois individuality, how can we theoretically move beyond the societally constituted individual? One figure of futural subjectivity does exist in Adorno's work, which is the somewhat ill-defined concept of the *Gesamtsubjekt* that appears repeatedly in Adorno's works. The most detailed account occurs in the lecture 'History of Nature' in which Adorno

[419] Espen Hammer, *Philosophy and Temporality from Kant to Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 214–215.
[420] Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 71.
[421] Something of what this could mean can be found in Adorno's description of Thomas Mann when he notes that the 'rhythm of [Mann's] sense of life was unbourgeois: it was not continuity but rather an oscillation between extremes, an alternation of rigidity and illumination.' Adorno, 'Toward a Portrait of Thomas Mann', in *Notes to Literature*, vol. 2, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 12–19 (p. 16).

suggests that the possibility of progress in the socio-historic present lies in the prevention of catastrophe. He states:

> Humanity's survival is threatened by the form of its global constitution, unless humanity's own global subject becomes sufficiently self-aware to come to its rescue after all. The possibility of progress, of averting the most extreme total calamity, has migrated to this global social subject alone. And I have no need to tell you that what I mean by this global subject of mankind is not simply an all-embracing terrestrial organisation, but a human race that possesses genuine control of its destiny right down to the concrete details […] To repeat, the possibility of progress, the avoidance of total catastrophe, has migrated to such a real, not merely formal, global social subject. Everything else involving progress would have to crystallise around it. Material want which long seemed to mock progress has been potentially eliminated…hunger and want must be attributed to the forms of social production, *the relations of production,* not to the intrinsic difficulty of meeting people's material needs [...] Whether there will be further want and oppression – the two things are identical: humanity must and will, certainly *will*, continue to be oppressed until the question of material needs has been resolved – will be decided solely by the avoidance of a calamity through the rational organisation of society as a whole in a manner befitting humanity.[422]

Cook has developed an account of the *Gesamtsubjekt*, in which the latter term is translated as 'global subject' following Livingstone's translation of Adorno's lectures. Cook argues that Adorno utilises the process of determinate negation to the 'current form of self-preservation' in order to demonstrate the way in which the latter becomes rational only when it comes to 'serve […] the preservation of the species as a whole.'[423] She then suggests that Adorno considers that only 'extreme individuation is the placeholder for humanity',[424] following on from his remarks on Altenberg,[425] which leads her to conclude that Adorno considers that individuals possessing critical consciousness can act 'temporarily as stand-ins for the species'. These individuals are the 'forerunners of humanity to the extent that their concerted attempts to think for themselves' is already 'a form of praxis.'[426] The idea that individuals capable of undertaking determinate negation act as 'forerunners of humanity' is problematic, not only because of the deep individualism that such a view implies, but also because it threatens to be

[422] *HF*, 143–144; *GF*, 202–203. A similar formulation appears in the essay 'Progress', albeit with a slightly different emphasis, in which the Marxian dimension is less apparent. See *P*, 144; *GS*, 10.2:617–618.
[423] Cook, 'Adorno's Global Subject', 10.
[424] Cook, 14.
[425] *P,* 151; *GS,* 10.2:626.
[426] Cook, 'Adorno's Global Subject'. 14, and also Cook, *Adorno on Nature,* 115-116.

a simplification of Adorno's understanding of the relation between subject and object in the historical process. It suggests that historical possibility at the present stage is located within the individual subject able to undertake theoretical work, which shifts emphasis away from Adorno's idea that the only way in which historical change could be effectuated is through a transformation of the socio-historic conditions that lies implicitly behind his account, and in which he follows Marx.

The question of the translation of the *Gesamtsubjekt* cuts to the core of the question of Adorno's critique of subjectivity, and its conceptual ramifications for his concept of history. First, there is something anachronistic about the translation of 'Gesamt' as 'global', and it fails to capture the sense of 'Gesamt' as more akin to a collective and complete entity, rather than something that is simply spatially realised. The translation of the *Gesamtsubjekt* as 'global subject' at once thematises the question of how some kind of historical agency could be spatially realised, but it is clear that, in Adorno's work, there is little that can be said about this, even if it is the case that this is in part what the term is supposed to convey, given his reference to the insufficiency of international organisations at effectuating historical change in his lecture.[427] Adorno's allusions to the increasingly homogeneous qualities of different parts of the world that have arisen as a result of the universal elements in the historical process are never developed, and their spatial manifestation remains unelucidated. These lacunae will be discussed in more detail in chapter five. In this sense, despite Adorno's references to a singular 'human race' and 'humanity', it is not clear how they would be constructed in relation to the 'global', at least in the philosophical sense that the latter term holds today.[428] Further, while the concept of a '"negative" universal history' implies that the tendencies demarcated by Adorno in the socio-historic process are in some sense 'global', this is something that must be shown through an examination of how both the 'negative' and the 'universal' relate to his concept of history, rather than assumed in advance.

The difficulty of translating 'Gesamt' does not apply only to Adorno. It is probable that Adorno's idea of the *Gesamtsubjekt* is an allusion to Marx's concept of *Gesamtkapital* (also, *gesellschaftlichen Gesamtkapital*), that appear in Volumes II and III of *Capital*,[429] and thus

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[427] *HF*, 143; *GF,* 202–203.

[428] Importantly, Adorno tends to utilise 'world' rather than 'globe', the former of which implies what he refers to as the 'social or cultural or mediated world' that is internally contradictory. The closest characterisation of 'world' is given in his lectures on dialectics, in which he suggests that the point of convergence between Hegel and the 'materialist version of the dialectic' occurs in the idea of world as that which is 'construed as a unity, produced as a socialised totality which is internally unified down to its ultimate particular features, through the very principle by which it is also divided.' See *ID*, 74.

[429] See Karl Marx, *Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 2: the Process of Circulation of Capital*, ed. Friedrich Engels and trans. David Fernbach, (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1992) and *Capital: Critique of Political Economy, Vol. 3: the Process of Capitalist Production as a Whole*, ed. Friedrich Engels and trans. David Fernbach (London and New York: Penguin Classics, 1991).

the idea that capital itself is a subject for Adorno that operates at the level of history, as is signalled in his re-interpretation of the Kantian transcendental subject.[430] In relation to Marx, these terms have often been translated as 'total capital' and 'total social capital' respectively. Importantly, as Mezzadra and Nielson note, caution should be applied when translating the term.[431] They quote Marx, when the latter states that capital is 'not a thing, but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things',[432] and in this sense, the translation of *Gesamtkapital* as 'total capital' might serve to hypostasise what is in fact a discontinuous and dynamic process made up of discrete parts. In order to stress what Mezzadra and Nielson refer to as the 'dynamic, unstable and open character' of the parts that comprise *Gesamtkapital* in *Capital*, they instead opt for translating the term as 'aggregate capital.'[433] This is not to suggest that the *Gesamtsubjekt* should also be translated in this way, given that the reference to *Gesamtkapital* remains implicit rather than something that is developed in full, but rather that the difficulty of translating the term points to a theoretical ambiguity in the attempt at arriving at an English iteration of the complex of meanings that 'Gesamt' gives rise to. But, in relation to Adorno's concept of *Gesamtsubjekt*, the 'total' subject also does not sit right, given that this evokes a bad concept of totality, and would neglect the way in which Adorno ultimately calls for the abolition of a totality as the only means by which a state of reconcilement could be achieved: the concept of a 'total' subject too closely resembles the societally constituted, rigid, and reified individual formed by the integrative forces of the socio-historic present that has obtained or will soon obtain a false identity with the object.

A second interconnected question concerns Adorno's concept of 'humanity' (*Menschheit*) and his idea of the 'human being'. In the passage quoted at the beginning of the section, Adorno alludes to 'humanity' as something that is threatened by its own constitution. This is interesting, because the 'human being' appears in his work as something that has not yet come to exist. Thus, in the lectures on dialectics, he states that 'the individual does not really do justice to the concept of the human being in the emphatic sense'[434] and that the 'right and genuine human being' would require the 'right and genuine arrangement of the world in

[430] Adorno's re-interpretation of the Kantian transcendental subject appears in *SO*, 247–248, *ND*, 176–177, 180–182, 'Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*', 133 and 172. For commentary on this see, Bernstein, *Disenchantment and Ethics,* 139; Bowie, *Adorno and the Ends of Philosophy,* 47; and Werner Bonefeld, 'Negative Dialectics and the Critique of Objectivity', *History of the Human Sciences,* 29.2 (2016), 60–76 (p. 62). For a more general critique of Adorno's interpretation of Kant, including his re-interpretation of the transcendental subject see Howard Caygill, 'No Man's Land: Reading Kant Historically', *Radical Philosophy* 110 (2001), 31–35 (p. 33).
[431] Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Nielson, *The Politics of Operations: Excavating Contemporary Capitalism,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2019), 59.
[432] Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 932.
[433] Mezzadra and Nielson, *The Politics of Operations,* 59.
[434] *ID*, 69; *ED*, 103.

general.'[435] He goes on to add that the concept of the 'human being' is thus more than 'the mere generic concept or species.'[436] In *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno states that 'Humanity continues to drag itself along as in Barlach's statue and Kafka's prose',[437] but also, in his discussion of Kant's usage of the term, that 'humanity' does not refer only to the 'sum of all human beings', but rather the 'human potential in human beings.'[438] It would follow that the concept 'humanity' as with the concept 'human being' also contains such an emphatic sense that has not yet been realised in history. The relevance for this for an interpretation of the concept of the *Gesamtsubjekt* is that the latter suggests a conception of subjectivity that is not simply the total number of individuals that exist on a global level, but rather that it contains a sense that could perhaps better be translated as 'collective', despite Adorno's theoretical aversion to the *imago* of the collective (at least in its historically realised forms).

To return to Cook's argument, I want to further examine the suggestion that, for Adorno, 'extreme' individuation itself is a source of historical possibility or 'placeholder' in relation to constructing the *Gesamtsubjekt*. There is a certain sense in which this interpretation is correct because Adorno does consider extreme individuation to point to historical possibility. Thus, in the third lecture on progress, in which he traces the connections between decadence, the Jugendstil and individualism, he states that 'only through this extreme of differentiation [*Extrem von Differenzierung*], of individuation, and not as an all-exclusive generic term, it is possible to conceive of humanity today.'[439] This would suggest that the concept 'humanity' and the thing itself, which has yet to form anything like a collective subject, but that cannot be simply connected to the sum total of individuals existing in the world at a particular socio-historic moment, can be thought with reference to its negative form that is contained in the extreme differentiation that the process of individualisation gives rise to**.** However, as I suggested, the idea that the residue or surplus that exists in the individual is in some sense the marker of the historically new limits Adorno's account of the historical nature of the subject-object relation, and the possibility of its transformation, and further neglects the extent to which the realisation of the *Gesamtsubjekt* can only be thought in the present with reference to the alteration of material conditions, namely, the relations of production. In his discussion of Hegel's concept of mediation in the lectures on dialectics, Adorno interprets the former as demonstrating the extent to which there is 'nothing human which is not determinately marked by the moment of human labour.'[440] In this sense, the concept of the 'human being' or

[435] *ID*, 69; *ED*, 103.
[436] *ID*, 69; *ED*, 103.
[437] *ND*, 337–340; *GS*, 6:338.
[438] *ND*, 252–257; *GS*, 6:254.
[439] *HF,* 156; *GF,* 219. In 'Progress', Adorno states: 'Humanity can be thought only through this extreme form of differentiation, individuation, not as a comprehensive generic concept.' *P*, 151; *GS*, 10.2:627.
[440] *ID,* 77–78; *ED*, 114.

'humanity' is necessarily an abstraction when it is removed from its basis in social labour, as it is the product of the mediations of the process of labour. A humanity capable of producing a collective subject would require a transformation of the relations of production and the process of labour. What can be concluded from this is that while the process of differentiation that comprises individuals can perhaps offer a faint image of historical possibility, actual historical novelty – and the realisation of a subject as agent of the historical process – would require the transformation of the relations of production, and, as Adorno mentions, the elimination of need.[441] The differentiation that gives rise to the individual, mediated and formed by the labour process of the totality in the socio-historic present, is too firmly entrenched in these relations of mediation to offer a secure model for the *Gesamtsubjekt*. Thus, the gulf between these two subjects; the first, the damaged individual subject buffeted and falsely unified by the negativity of the socio-historic process, whose prehistory is traced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and the second subject, in control of its 'destiny' and in some sense collective or complete cannot be papered over by conceptual means alone. It is a theoretical impasse that is the result of an actual impasse, that arises from the historical process itself.

There is something distinctly Horkheiminian in Adorno's concluding remarks on the *Gesamtsubjekt*, found in the lecture, in which he evokes the possibility of the realisation of the 'rational organisation of society as a whole in a manner befitting humanity.' In his early *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* essays such as 'Materialism and Morality', Horkheimer alludes to the existence of a possible future society in which the 'life of the whole and of the individuals […] is produced not merely as a natural effect but as a consequence of rational designs that take account of the happiness of individuals in equal measure.'[442] In 'Traditional and Critical Theory', he describes a future age in which the rational intentions on the part of the individual will be met with its 'realisation.'[443] In such a 'rationally organised society', 'mankind' 'will for the first time be a conscious subject and actively determine its own way of life.'[444] As Breuer points out, Horkheimer is close to a variant of Left Hegelianism, replacing the idea of world spirit with emphasis on the historical activity of self-conscious

[441] For Adorno, the category of need is itself a social one, mediated by the total social process. In this sense, need contains a critical moment because of the impossibility of distinguishing between natural and historical needs. See, Theodor W. Adorno, 'Theses on Need', *New Left Review* 128 (March/April 2021), trans. David Fernbach; *GS*, 8:392–396.
[442] Horkheimer, 'Materialism and Morality', 29.
[443] Horkheimer, 'Traditional and Critical Theory', in *Critical Theory: Selected Essays of Max Horkheimer*, 217.
[444] Ibid., 223.

subjects.[445] In 'Bourgeois Egoism and the Freedom Movements', Horkheimer views a future society from the point of view of an actual, historical, 'rational' re-structuring in which the 'archaic egoistical principle of the economy' would be surpassed. But the way in which the future is in fact conceived of is as a 'liberation from ascetic moralities'.[446] Nietzsche is thus best placed to offer a means of thinking a future in which drives could lose their 'demonic power'.[447] As discussed in the first chapter, this leads Horkheimer to the conclusion that materialism must be oriented to the question of the survival and the self-preservation of the individual: in an irrationally constituted society, the drive for individual self-preservation cannot be ignored or transcended via supposedly empty calls for forms of communality. Self-preservation is therefore understood in a double sense: it is both symptomatic of an irrational whole in which the ego instincts are manifested in their most miserable form, but despite and because of this, it must serve as a cornerstone for materialist theory itself. In this sense, the task of materialist theory is not to overlook the egoistical impulses but rather to eliminate the fact that these instincts are in contradiction to the social whole.

It seems that Adorno carries forward this image of the possibility of the realisation of a rational society but considers it not in opposition to a descent into *barbarism*, but rather the future is viewed in relation to catastrophe, following Benjamin, and its prevention. Importantly, as discussed in relation to the *subject,* the latter has the potential to affect the *sublimation of its own domination,* and this would suggest that underlying the idea of the *Gesamtsubjekt* is some kind of collective entity in which the individuals that comprise it would be liberated from the repressive aspects of ego constitution that are prevalent in the socio-historic present. The latter possibility is not something that can be achieved through theory as a form of social praxis, but rather only through the alteration of the relations of production. For Adorno, the concept of the 'subject' contains within itself both an indelible reference to the individual, but also necessarily a universal aspect, which suggests that the figure of the *Gesamtsubjekt* would form a historical agency in which these two aspects would be reconciled, in which the interests of the individual (and its self-preservation) and the interests of the universal (and its self-preservation) would meet and the bad particular interest would be extinguished. But Adorno's remarks concerning the *Gesamtsubjekt* could also be interpreted in a more limited sense, given

[445] Stefan Breuer, 'The Long Friendship: On Theoretical Differences between Adorno and Horkheimer', in *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, Wolfgang Bonss, and John McCole (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995), pp. 257–280 (p. 261).
[446] Horkheimer, 'Egoism and Freedom Movements', 108.
[447] Ibid, 108.

that the parameters of historical possibility are narrowed to the prevention of catastrophe as the only form of hope for the future.[448]

The problem that remains is that despite the way in which, as I argued, the subject-object relation is a historical one, and Adorno does not reduce historical subjectivity to the bourgeois individual, to which the idea of the *Gesamtsubjekt* attests, no other model of subjectivity can be said to exist in his thought. In a letter to Benjamin in which Adorno critiques the former's utilisation of the idea of the Jungian idea of the collective unconscious, he states:

> If I reject the idea of a collective consciousness, this is naturally not in order to leave the 'bourgeois individual' untouched as the real substratum here. The interior should be rendered transparent as a social function and its apparently autarkic character revealed as an illusion – not vis-a-vis some collective consciousness but vis-a-vis the actual social process itself. The 'individual' is a dialectical instrument of transition which must not be mysticised away, but only superseded.[449]

Theoretically, then, the 'individual' is a category that must be retained because it is the form that socialisation takes in the socio-historical present. If the concept of the 'individual' is a 'dialectical instrument of transition', it is theoretically ineliminable, and in this sense any attempts to conceptualise a more collective or complete form of subjectivity cannot do without it. However, the problem remains that Adorno fails to properly probe the diversities of the form that individuality takes in the socio-historic present beyond bourgeois society in Europe and North America, instead relying on what can now only be regarded as a defunct imago of the bourgeois individual that was already staid and problematic in Adorno's own time.

4.4.4 Towards a Conception of the 'Negative' Universal

At the start of the chapter, I suggested that in order to properly map Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process, and to substantiate it theoretically, it proves necessary to turn to his sociological thought, in particular to his conceptualisation of the false social totality. This is because there appears to be a disjunction between Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process and social totality that I suggested could in fact be understood by a careful examination of the temporality that the false social totality implies. But secondly, Adorno's conceptualisation of the false social totality begins to offer a means by which historical discontinuity can be thought, via the conceptualisation of the various enclaves and aspects of the socio-historic process that resist ready absorption in the totality,

[448] Adorno's inheritance of Benjamin's idea of catastrophe will be discussed in relation to his conceptualisation of 'progress' in chapter five.
[449] Adorno and Benjamin, *The Complete Correspondence*, 112–113.

and that could be said to point beyond it. This highlights the way in which society is only ostensibly static and homogeneous and demonstrates the openness of totality to the historically new. However, this is a necessary but not sufficient condition for extrapolating the critical dimensions of Adorno's retention of the concept 'universal history', that will rely on a deeper comprehension of the negativity of the historical process. This is because, as it has so far taken place, the delineation of the existence of the discontinuous aspects of the socio-historical process remains a descriptive thesis concerning the historical process, rather than a means by which to critique the latter.

Further, a deeper analysis of the three concepts that took place in this chapter problematise Adorno's conceptualisation of space. First, because Adorno holds the exchange process to be expanding to ever new areas, without substantiating how this process occurs. Second, because Adorno's concept of 'totality' suggestively thematises the way in which the socio-historic process relies on the absorption of new elements, but without offering a detailed theorisation of how this process occurs. Third, because Adorno's concept of the *Gesamtsubjekt* appears to rest on the hope for the possible emergence of some kind of a historical agency that is not only global but also in some sense collective. These questions will become central to an attempt at constructing a '"negative" universal history', and an assessment of how Adorno's thinking on this – in particular in relation to his construal of the 'negative' universal – could be said to relate to the task of thinking history in the wake of postcolonial theory, broadly construed.

5

The Construction of a '"Negative" Universal History'

5.1 Adorno and Universal History

This chapter is premised on the idea that the most promising means by which to fully grapple with both the theoretical possibilities and also the limitations of Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process from the perspective of the present is through an examination of his somewhat arcane treatment of the concept of universal history, in which the diverse threads that have been covered in this work are drawn together. Can universal history – as it is treated in Adorno's work – offer a conceptual framework for grasping history that is not housed in a progressivist and Eurocentric shell and be deployed as a way of critiquing the universal (and particular) element in history that it posits and discerns? In the last two decades, various studies have examined the conceptual possibilities offered by Adorno's thought for postcolonial theory. Commentators have suggested that elements of Adorno's philosophy, most notably, his emphasis on the non-identical, the particular and the suffering subject, suggest a productive similarity with certain concerns of postcolonial theory, in particular, questions of difference, diversity and even the possibility of a non-Heideggerian form of authenticity.[450] There is thus a question as to how Adorno's philosophy as a whole could be thought alongside the concerns of postcolonial theory and whether anything productive is to be gained from such an encounter.[451] More generally, there has been a (qualified) rehabilitation of the idea of universal history. After many decades of wallowing in the shadows of the history of philosophy, a return to this problematic was effectuated by two principal texts: Thomas McCarthy's *Race, Empire and the Idea of the Human* and Susan Buck-Morss'

[450] Perhaps the most comprehensive argument for Adorno's relevance for postcolonial theory is also one of the earliest, see Asha Varadharajan's chapter on Adorno in *Exotic Parodies: Subjectivity in Adorno, Said, and Spivak* pp. 34–74. For a quasi-existentialist reading of Adorno, see Keya Ganguly, 'Adorno, authenticity, critique', in *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies,* ed. Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 240–256. Another standpoint is to view Adorno's focus on the 'negative' as in itself an antidote to historical apathy, see Robert Spencer, 'Thoughts from Abroad: Theodor Adorno as Postcolonial Theorist', *Culture and Critique,* 51 (2010), 207-221.

[451] Another approach to this question is represented by Amy Allen, who suggests that not only is Frankfurt School critical theory itself in need of being 'decolonialised' but that the developments effectuated by second generation critical theorists, notably Habermas and Honneth, demonstrate a deepening and furthering of the Eurocentric and progressivist assumptions of earlier critical theory. She suggests that this problem could in part be solved by a kind of informed return to Adorno (in conjunction with Foucault, the latter considered as Adorno's 'other son'). In the last section of this chapter, I examine Allen's suggestion that Adorno can be viewed as offering a means by which to begin to 'decolonise' critical theory through what she terms his conception of a 'forward-looking' progress. See Amy Allen, *The End of Progress,* 163–203.

Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History.[452] Karen Ng and Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo have both suggested that Adorno can be read as theorising a '"negative" universal history'.[453] Ng examines Hegel, Adorno and Fanon for this purpose, and her essay largely centres on the question of 'whether…we can still learn something from Hegel with respect to historical self-consciousness and universal freedom.'[454] Vázquez-Arroyo argues that an Adornean '"negative" universal history' could form a 'critical narrative category'.[455] My approach will differ from both these accounts not only from an interpretive point of view but also because I seek to critically gauge the limitations of the possibilities of such a construal in the hope that this might itself shed light on the enterprise of attempting to critically retain the concept of universal history beyond Adorno.

This relates to the second, connected line of inquiry that is pursued in this chapter, which concerns the question of Adorno's Eurocentrism. Edward Said's damning verdict that Frankfurt School Critical Theory (the designator used, in this context, to refer to both the first and second generation) remains 'stunningly silent' on questions of race[456] and imperialism cannot be theoretically eliminated or wished away despite the adaptability of elements of Adorno's critique of universal history for the project of thinking history in the wake of postcolonial theory.[457] It is indisputable that Adorno neglects colonialism and imperialism aside from in various undeveloped remarks whose very form and brevity seems to be sufficient in precluding an attempt at developing them further. However, the Eurocentric elements of Adorno's thought are rarely discussed in detail. It is thus a necessary but delicate task to simultaneously consider the parameters of Adorno's Eurocentrism in such a way that it is not

[452] While Thomas McCarthy attempts to re-think cosmopolitanism and universal history in relation to Kant, Susan Buck-Morss examines the idea of universal history in relation to the proposed significance of the Haitian Revolution for Hegel's thought. See Thomas McCarthy, *Race, Empire, and the Idea of Human Development*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

[453] See Karen Ng, 'Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History: The Dialectics of Species-Life', *Creolizing Hegel*, ed. Michael Monahan (London and New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), pp. 113–134 and Antonio Y. Vázquez-Arroyo, 'Universal history disavowed: on critical theory and postcolonialism', *Postcolonial Studies,* 11.4 (2008), 451-473.

[454] Ng, 'Hegel and Adorno on Negative Universal History', 113.

[455] Vázquez-Arroyo's essay will be instructive in attempting to articulate the suppositions that might underlie a reconstruction of Adorno's '"negative" universal history, especially with regard to the question of suffering.

[456] This chapter does not offer a sustained examination of Adorno's theorisation of race. This would necessitate its own study that would have to both take into account Adorno's analyses of anti-Semitism and fascism while problematising his neglect of other forms of racism.

[457] It is worth bearing in mind that Habermas appears as the main target of Said's critique in this text, in particular his seemingly wilful neglect of questions of colonialism and imperialism. Said also suggests that Adorno, alongside Lukács, Jameson, Derrida, Sartre and Foucault, comprehend the 'processes of regulation and force' by which 'cultural hegemony reproduces itself', but that, for all these thinkers, their theoretical insights co-exist unhappily alongside a lack of any kind of consciousness about the 'ongoing and historical imperial experience.' Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1994), 278 and 304.

treated only as an unfortunate element that can be brushed to one side in favour of those aspects that appear to be amendable to the tasks of the philosophical construction of history from the perspective of the present without thereby doing Adorno the disservice of failing to evaluate his methodological insights as stemming from an optics that were focused on a different historical reality and thus at a partial remove from the concerns that have come to dominate theory since.

This chapter critically reconstructs Adorno's conception of a negative universal history in order to gauge both the potentialities and limitations in their mediation.[458] While Adorno's conceptualisation of the different temporal moments that are non-identical to one another but nonetheless negatively unified in an ongoing process of totalisation, and the idea of the openness of totality to the historically new, as discussed in chapter four, certainly thematise the necessity of articulating an understanding of something akin to a critical *world-history*, Adorno never fully develops a conception of this latter. But, at the same time, it is clear that Adorno's consideration of the socio-historic process is intended to articulate phenomena and tendencies that are not reducible to his understanding of society. This chapter explores *how* Adorno conceives of the universal moment within the historical process, and whether the reconstruction of Adorno's idea of a negative universal history could inform attempts at retaining the concept beyond Adorno. This chapter focuses on four specific problems: the articulation by Adorno of the continuity/discontinuity relation in connection to his idea that universal history is to be constructed but also denied; Adorno's conception of space and the implications that this has for his examination of universal history, in relation to the question of his Eurocentrism; a reconstruction of a negative universal history, in relation to Adorno's concept of suffering and his critique of integration; and a re-interpretation of Adorno's concept of progress.

5.2 The Discontinuity-Continuity Relation and The Critical Retention of the Concept of Universal History

This section considers the conceptual stakes that derive from Adorno's claim that universal history is to be constructed and denied and examines how this relates to Adorno's theorisation of discontinuity in the history model of *Negative Dialectics* and in the lectures on history. I first argue that, for Adorno, the 'unity' (*Einheit*) of the historical process is not something that is simply retrospectively accorded to history in interpretation. Rather, it denotes an actual unity within the historical process. I then interrogate Adorno's conception of discontinuity which, despite its centrality to his critique and retention of the concept of universal history, has seen

[458] I will use '"negative" universal history' without inverted commas for the remainder of the chapter.

little sustained discussed in the literature. This is in part perhaps because Adorno's references to discontinuity remain abbreviated and gnomic. I examine the possibility that while Adorno claims that history is both continuous and discontinuous, or that it is continuous in its discontinuity, these claims are in fact belied by his focus on the domination of nature as the seam that binds history together. Following on from this, I argue that Adorno does not subordinate discontinuity under continuity. I suggest a way of interpreting the claim that universal history and discontinuity are to be thought together.

The claim that universal history is to be constructed and denied appears in slightly different forms in Adorno's work. In the second lecture on history, Adorno states that 'we can say neither that there is such a thing as a universal history, nor, as is the general fashion today, that there is no such thing.'[459] Later in the lectures Adorno claims that the 'task is both to construct *and* to deny universal history, or, to use yet another Hegelian term, universal history is to be *respected* as well as *despised*'.[460] In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno argues that 'universal history is to be both construed and denied (*Universalgeschichte ist zu konstruieren und zu leugnen*).'[461] Finally, Adorno suggests that discontinuity and universal history must be thought together.[462] What needs to be unpicked is the relation that these connected but distinct claims have to one another. This is because they complicate the immediate meaning that the idea of a simultaneous construction and denial of universal history appears to possess. The first claim sounds a note of interpretive caution, bordering on what could be viewed as a kind of scepticism, that derives from Adorno's unwillingness to cede meaning to the historical process from without. Given that he later claims that universal history must be constructed, it seems that the idea of universal history possesses a kind of regulative function; while we cannot *know* that there exists a historical universal, in part because of the obfuscatory nature of socio-historic process, we cannot deny that it exists. Further, in a certain sense we must assume that it does if the historical process is to be viewed as something more than only a collection of random events.

There is a question here as to whether Adorno neglects other possible ways in which the philosophical interpretation of history could take place. After all, the avoidance of viewing history only as a collection of events or facts does not in itself point to the necessity of retaining the concept of a universal history: universal history as a concept is not the only way in which to think history without lapsing into randomness or adhering to the 'cult of the facts'. However, this need not concern Adorno, for two reasons. Firstly, because he thinks that the

[459] *HF*, 14; *GF*, 22.
[460] *HF*, 93; *GF,*136–137.
[461] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:314.
[462] *ND*, 313-315; *GS*, 6:314.

universal moment is something that is experienced historically. We are all harnessed to the objective trend, which is experienced as 'blind fate'. This is despite what he considers to be the varying degrees of self-deception and narcissism that prevent individuals from being conscious of their being mere agents of the universal moment. Secondly, as discussed in chapter three and four, Adorno holds the universal moment to be the determining factor in relation to individual psychology: 'even the most specific aspects of individuality are pre-formed by the universal, and this includes even those elements that diverge from the universal…this influence is in general negative.'[463] The argument for partially retaining the universal history as a concept thus does not rest solely on its hermeneutical function. Rather, it is confirmed by the (possibly unconscious) experience of objectivity by the individual subject and is manifest in the latter's psychology that despite its claims to autarky is in fact wholly at the behest of, and determined by, the historical universal.

In the section on universal history in the history model, Adorno states:

> Universal history is to be construed and denied. The assertion that an all-encompassing world-plan for the better manifests itself in history would be, after past catastrophes and in view of future ones, cynical. This however is not a reason to deny the unity which welds together the discontinuous, chaotically fragmented moments and phases of history, that of the control of nature, progressing into domination over human beings and ultimately over internalized nature.[464]

Universal history is to be constructed because the historical process does in fact possess a kind of unity, that is, a unity of discontinuity. A question that arises is whether this unity is something that is to be retrospectively construed in interpretation or whether it inheres in the historical process. Jay Bernstein understands unity in the former sense. It is worth quoting his interpretation in full:

> This is a 'construal' in the weak sense in that it interpretatively unifies the past in relation to the disposition of present institutions and forms of rationality without claiming that what provides that unity has been an *active agent continuously operative in history*. The exclusivity of this unity, its interpretative priority for us, is that *now* no other forms of social and historical practice are evident as real alternatives. In fine, there is no deep or dynamic unity in history; what unity it has can be retrospectively constructed in the light of the (negative) totalization of experience that is occurring.

[463] *HF*, 70; *GF*, 103.
[464] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:314.

> Other readings of the unity of history hence must overplay its unity, generating a philosophy of history thereby.[465]

However, Adorno's idea of the unity of the historical process appears to be more than something that is retrospectively accorded to history in interpretation. Rather, the historical form of rationality – technical rationality[466] – that has as its aim the domination of nature alongside the exchange process act as a kind of agent in the historical process and produce a form of historical unification. This would suggest that Adorno's understanding of unity in relation to the historical process is not only a narrative unity at the level of events, but rather a deeper, structural one. But the unity that is produced by these processes is not a unity in the usual sense of the term, insofar as it is formed from and produces moments of discontinuity as well as continuity and the moment of unification therefore is accompanied by its opposite, that is, a disunity.

Further, it seems that, for Adorno, the moment of unity is something that actually inheres in the historical process, but it is not a *total* unity, formed as it is from its opposite. In his essay on Aldous Huxley, Adorno suggests that, while the latter provides an 'incisive physiognomy of total unification', he fails to decipher 'its symptoms as expressions of an antagonistic essence, the pressure of domination, in which the tendency to totalisation is inherent.'[467] Huxley's mistake in *Brave New World* is to construe a universal history of technical reason without considering the way in which history in fact fails to be properly unified because of its basis in antagonism and diremption. This leads Huxley to arrive at a conception of a simplified linear unfolding of history in which an 'intrinsically non-self-contradictory total subject' appears at the end of the process, that is, a total subject of 'technological reason.'[468] Thus, the task of constructing and denying universal history is an attempt to avoid such a totalisation of the historical process. It points to the way in which the unity that inheres in the historical process is comprised of its opposite, that is, disunity, and further, an absence of such a total subject. It proves useful to briefly turn to Adorno's lectures on dialectics in which he discusses the moment of unity in relation to the dialectical method. Here, he presents unity as both

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[465] Jay Bernstein, *Disenchantment and Ethics*, 237.
[466] In this chapter, I follow Adorno's usage of 'technical rationality' in the lectures on history, where he defines the latter as the 'evolution of the technical forces of production *in toto*,' which is the 'reason that dominates nature' that is characterised by an 'absence of reflection'. See *HF,* 16; *GF*, 26. This term has broader connotations than 'instrumental rationality' that appears infrequently in both *Negative Dialectics* and in the lectures on history, because it thematises not only the forms of thought that utilise means-end reasoning that have emerged historically, but also the means by which they are instantiated materially. This is connected to the exchange process. As Brian O'Connor points out, rationality is what is 'required for the effective operation of exchange', which is the 'prevailing social rationality.' See Brian O'Connor, 'Philosophy of History', 191.
[467] Theodor W. Adorno, 'Aldous Huxley and Utopia', in *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1981), pp. 95–118 (p. 114); *GS*, 10.1;118-119.
[468] Ibid.

something that 'represents the moment of compulsion' but also as something that has the 'potential to drive towards its own demise.'[469] This too can be said of the unity of the historical process: it is precisely those elements that unify history that could but do not necessarily lead to the historically new: progressive reason itself possesses an 'element of self-destruction' (*Moment der Selbstzerstörung*),[470] while the development of the forces of production could lead to catastrophe but also to the elimination of need.

Paul Ricouer, in his examination of universal history, discusses what he terms the 'rupture effect' that was theoretically accorded to the French Revolution by the 'nineteenth century European intelligentsia'. He goes on to question whether the unity of history can be 'produced by the very thing that ruptures it.'[471] For Adorno, it seems that it can: the unity of history can be said to be produced by the thing that ruptures it because the vagaries of the exchange process and the domination of nature that results in the unity that we experience in the present also paradoxically break the historical process apart. But importantly, from the perspective of the construction of history, this unity cannot be examined in and of itself, but must be analysed via the discontinuous which methodologically forms the means by which to reach the 'unity and interconnectedness.'[472] But there is a question as to whether Adorno properly conceptualises discontinuity, or whether because of his emphasis on the domination of nature as the seam running through history, continuity comes to be privileged over discontinuity. This is something that Jean-Marie Vincent discerns:

> One sometimes has the impression that [Adorno] construes capitalism as an essential break with many pasts and a reorganisation of part of these pasts by selection and assimilation to the present and the temporality of capital in incessant, endlessly new syntheses. The absorption of the past thus renders its reconstruction uncertain. It can now hardly be grasped other than via traces and ultimately pertains more to an archaeological endeavour than to vast historical syntheses contributing to universal history. This is how we might interpret certain critical remarks on the philosophy of history. But, at other times, discontinuity is denied, in favour of a continuity of domination.[473]

The suggestion is that despite Adorno's attempt to demonstrate the necessity of thinking discontinuity and continuity together in relation to the historical process, there exists a tension between first, the attempt to show the way in which history cannot be understood on a

[469] *ID*, 80; *ED*, 117.
[470] *HF*, 17; *GF*, 27.
[471] Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 302.
[472] *ID*, 149; *ED*, 213.
[473] Jean-Marie Vincent, 'Adorno and Marx', 501.

continuum or through large categories that point to a basic uniformity of the historical process via an emphasis on the diremptions that constitute the historical process, and second, the perceived need to demonstrate that the historical process does in fact form a continuous trajectory because it is bound together by the domination of nature.[474] This points to a methodological tension in Adorno's thought that derives from his attempt to read Hegel through Benjamin and Benjamin through Hegel in both the history model and the lectures on history. Adorno argues that Hegel's concept of universal history does not, contra Benjamin's critique of historicism, seek to muster 'a mass of data to fill the homogeneous, empty time.'[475] But he then incorporates Benjamin's idea of discontinuity and the permanence of catastrophe, as well as the idea that Hegel sides with the victor, into his attempt at retaining the idea of a universal history.[476] The question is whether this leads Adorno to under-theorise the way in which the discontinuous and continuous elements that comprise history are mediated by one another, instead alternating between emphasising one aspect over the other.

Vincent's criticism appears to conflate Adorno's presentational method of alternately examining two separate moments that are then shown to be mutually determining, and in which the extremes are viewed as reciprocally mediated, with the substance of the idea that the structure of history consists in the continuity of discontinuity. This further neglects to examine the way in which continuity of the historical process is in fact the continuity of the process of determinate negation (*bestimmte Negation*) that is the motor of history for Adorno.[477] In his early essay on class, Adorno states that the 'power of the negative' is that which 'sets history in motion', in this essay framed in quasi-Marxian terms as the 'power of what exploiters do to the victims'.[478] The historical process keeps negating, and this is what

[474] Brian O'Connor also problematises this tension when he suggests that Adorno's narrative of the domination of nature is not in fact discontinuous. He suggests that, for Adorno, 'time is commensurable because it shares the dimension of destruction.' He further claims that Adorno ultimately subordinates discontinuity to continuity. See Brian O'Connor, 'Philosophy of History', 185–186.
[475] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 396.
[476] As Vázquez-Arroyo points out, in his preparatory notes for 'On the Concept of History', Benjamin also suggests that that universal histories are not 'inevitably reactionary'. See Walter Benjamin, 'Paralipomena to 'On the Concept of History', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings,* Volume 4, 404 and Vázquez-Arroyo, 455.
[477] Examinations of Adorno's use of determinate negation tend to focus on its place in his dialectical method in relation to Hegel, and the differences between determinate negation and immanent critique. Michael Rosen argues that Adorno fundamentally misunderstands Hegel's idea of determinate negation, because he wrongly views it as a double movement rather that as consisting of a single movement that entails both the positive and the negative. See Rosen, *Hegel's dialectic and its criticism,* 162–164. O'Connor argues that Adorno conflates determinate negation as the 'actual experience of contradiction' with immanent critique. See Brian O'Connor, 'Adorno's Reconception of the Dialectic', *Blackwell Companion to Hegel,* ed. Stephen Houlgate and Michael Baur (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2011), pp. 537–55 (p. 535). However, these accounts say little about the relation between determinate negation and history for Adorno. Iain Macdonald is an exception to this in his essay on Adorno's philosophy of history, but he largely focuses on the way in which, for Hegel, determinate negation plays out in world history. See, Iain Macdonald, 'Philosophy of History'*, A Companion to Adorno*, 197.
[478] *RCT*, 95; *GS*, 8:375.

produces the continuity of discontinuity. The negations that characterise the historical process do not necessarily lead to the historically new, but to what in *Negative Dialectics* is referred to as the 'return of what is negated' (*Wiederkunft des Negierten*), and to what in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is framed in Freudian terms as the return of the repressed, as discussed in chapter one and two.[479] In this way, Adorno follows Hegel because he considers that in the result of determinate negation that which is negated is preserved, but holds that this element can neither be transfigured as redemption or in Hegelian terms as the moment of synthesis, and nor is the result of the process known in advance.[480] Thus, in the false totality of the socio-historic present, the supposed novelty that is produced by the negations of the historical process does not form an ontological novelty but rather the return of the negated element in new forms, and thus the old, as the 'old in distress'.[481] In relation, then, to the question of discontinuity, history ceases to be viewed in terms of a process of a continuity of change, but rather as the continuity of the process of negation that reproduces the old in ever new forms that are nonetheless discontinuous with prior formations and with one another.

While Adorno does not arbitrarily alternate between emphasising continuity over discontinuity and vice versa, what remains unclear is how his idea of discontinuity relates to the stated need of critically retaining the concept of universal history. In the section on universal history in *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno suggests that Hegel's concept of universal history itself gained its uniformity solely 'by virtue of its contradiction.'[482] Yet while Hegel recognised something akin to discontinuity because of his view of the historical process as something that is formed from contradiction, it is, according to Adorno, only in the materialist interpretation of history that discontinuity becomes a central locus for historico-philosophical interpretation, with its emphasis on 'what is not consolingly held together by any unity of the Spirit and concept', in other words, the material moment that cannot be subsumed under the concept but that negatively forms the motor of history. But it is not clear in this particular passage whether Adorno is referring to an orthodox Marxist materialism or its Benjaminian form. Adorno goes on to state:

> The assertion that an all-encompassing world-plan for the better manifests itself in history would be, after past catastrophes and in view of future ones cynical. This however is not a reason to deny the unity which welds together the discontinuous, chaotically fragmented moments and phases of history [*diskontinuierlichen, chaotisch zersplitterten Momente und Phasen der Geschichte]*, that of the control of nature,

[479] *ND*, 324–328; *GS*, 6:326–327.
[480] *DE*, 18; *GS*, 3:40-41.
[481] *RCT*, 95; *GS*, 8:375.
[482] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:313.

> progressing into domination over human beings and ultimately over internalised nature. No universal history leads from savagery to humanity, but one indeed from the slingshot to the H-bomb. It culminates in the total threat of organised humanity against organised human beings, in the epitome of discontinuity.[483]

This much-quoted passage raises the question of Adorno's inheritance of Marxian categories in relation to the concept of universal history. Adorno follows Marx in that he considers there to exist structural mechanisms in the historical process – notably, as discussed later in this same passage, the class relation and the exchange relation – that generate the contradictions that result in the fragmentation of historical time and the discontinuities and ruptures that constitute the historical process. But the Marxian aspects of the analysis remain inchoate. Discontinuity is primarily viewed in relation to the domination of nature and the threat (*Drohung*) that is posed by the irrational development of technical rationality. In particular, it is not entirely clear what Adorno means when he refers both to the fragmented or broken (*zersplitterten*) moments (*Momente*) and phases (*Phasen*) of history and whether this points to a basically Marxian conception in which the different modes of production comprise the phases of history and that form the discontinuity or whether the discontinuity is produced by some other mechanism.

The idea of discontinuity is further extrapolated in the lectures on history in which Adorno claims that the 'consciousness of [historical] discontinuity' is 'that of the prevailing non-identity', the latter here understood as the 'opposition between whatever is held down and the universal domination that is condemned to identity.'[484] The discontinuity-continuity relation is to be understood as the temporalisation of the non-identity–identity relation. Adorno interprets the 'Benjaminian materialist' as arriving at something akin to a 'motif' that has a 'unifying aspect' in a 'negative' sense as the 'unbroken history of oppression' (*ununterbrochene Geschichte der Unterdrückung*).[485] Consciousness of discontinuity, for Adorno, makes possible a critical construction of history because it allows for the discernment of the elements of the historical process that give the lie to idealism because they demonstrate the non-correspondence between the historical process and the concept 'history' in which history is viewed as a series of events that are assimilable under one master narrative. This includes declinist philosophies of history that themselves contain an affirmative element. It also demonstrates the way in which history is formed by the universal moment that attempts to render all phenomena identical but which continuously fails to do so. It is thus a form of construction that must be geared towards an apprehension of the 'acts of subjugation and

[483] *ND*, 313–315; *GS*, 6:314.
[484] *HF*, 92; *GF*, 135.
[485] *HF*, 90–91 (amended); *GF*, 133.

submission in which identity is torn apart' but that nonetheless 'forge the identity of history.'[486] But there is a question, raised earlier, as to whether Adorno fails to properly carry this forward because of his focus on the identical aspect that is formed from the continuity of the domination of nature. In other words, is the continuity of the domination of nature privileged at the expense of those elements of history that point beyond mere identity and continuity?

Vincent and O'Connor's objection that Adorno fails to properly conceptualise discontinuity because he holds history to be unified to the extent that it is bound together by the domination of nature relies on a somewhat generalised conception of what Adorno means by the latter idea. It suggests that Adorno considers history to be continuously driven by the domination of nature in a linear way. This perhaps stems from the image of history as viewed through the lens of the development from the slingshot to the H-bomb[487] rather than the idea that the varying (largely unconscious) *attempts* throughout history to subsume the object, both socio-historically and conceptually, give rise to discontinuity. This is because these attempts to dominate nature achieve this only in false form, or sometimes fail altogether, which points to the non-identity between a linear understanding of history and the actual historical process that is formed from breaks and ruptures. On this reading, the imago of the slingshot and H-bomb is not intended as a cipher for history in toto but rather as a demonstration of the universalising element within history that is at every moment attempting to subsume the particular moment but because of the form of its subsumption often fails to do this. Here it is important to once again return to a passage that was discussed in relation to Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical totality in chapter four, because it now takes on a new significance:

> Because history constantly repeats this process of disruption, and because it clings to the resulting fragments instead of its deceptive surface unity, the philosophical interpretation of history, in other words, the construction of history, acquires a view of the totality that the totality fails to provide *at first sight.* At the same time, history detects in these fragments the trace of possible developments, of something hopeful that stands in precise opposition to what the totality appears to show.[488]

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[486] *HF*, 92-93; *GF*, 136.
[487] The immediate meaning of this is already subverted in Adorno's essay on progress, in which he states, contra to those who do not hold that progress exists, that despite the 'satanic laughter' that accompanies belief in the progress between the slingshot and the H-bomb, 'in the age of the bomb a condition can be envisaged for the first time in which violence might vanish altogether.' See *P*, 153; *GS*, 10.2:629.
[488] *HF*, 91; *GF,* 134.

While Adorno does not state this explicitly, the idea that history forms a linearly unfolding movement of the continuous domination of nature could itself be regarded as a philosophy of history that stems from an uncritical acceptance of the 'deceptive surface unity' with which the totality presents itself. in this sense, an incorrect emphasis on the surface unity of the historical process can occur both in affirmative and in declinist philosophies of history, because both fail to discern the non-identical moment that demonstrates the antagonism underlying the unity. This leads to the neglect of the fragments that demonstrate the breaks within this process and thus an awareness of alternate ways in which the trajectory of history could have gone. It is through the historical fragments that it is possible to discern the mechanisms by which the domination of nature fails in its aims and thereby lacks continuity with the concept of history viewed as a single stranded progression. As discussed in relation to Adorno's critique of Huxley's idea of a total unification, the idea that universal history is to be both constructed and denied belies the conception of history in which it can be viewed through the lens of one sole determinant. There also exist what Adorno refers to as 'great countervailing tendencies' [*grosse Gegentendenzen*][489] in the historical process that do not simply correspond to the universal, although they may ultimately consolidate it in particular historical moments.

Further, in his essay on Spengler, Adorno critiques the latter for suggesting that history can be understood solely via the category of domination. Adorno states:

> His [Spengler's] entire image of history is measured by the ideal of domination. His affinity for this ideal gives him profound insight whenever it is a question of the possibilities of domination and blinds him with hatred as soon as he is confronted by impulses which go beyond all previous history as the history of domination.[490]

While Spengler views all history through the lens of domination because of his affinity with the concept and the thing itself, this is false to the extent that it ignores what is in this essay conceptualised in terms of 'impulse'. Adorno does not expound on what he means by these 'impulses' but it suggests that there are moments within the historical process that point beyond the continuity of domination. To think discontinuity alongside universal history, then, is simultaneously to hold that there exists a universal element in the historical process that moves towards identity but to also discern the ways in which this identical moment is not only formed by non-identity but also produces it. It is an attempt to retain the concept of universal history without succumbing to a view of history in which all phenomena can be reduced to the universal moment, in part because the universal is in fact non-identical with itself and can only

[489] *HF*, 15; *GF,* 24.
[490] Adorno, 'Spengler after the Decline', in *Prisms*, pp. 51–72 (p. 61); *GS*, 10.1:57.

be formed by what it is not. But, as will be discussed in the following section, there is a question as to whether Adorno's injunction to think discontinuity and universal history fails because his own understanding of the latter idea remains Eurocentric in its structure.

5.3 Airports, Diplomatic Breakfasts and That Which Lags Behind: Spatialisation, Convergence and Universal History

> Why come to Trude? I asked myself. And I already wanted to leave.
> "You can resume your flight whenever you like," they said to me, "but you will arrive at another Trude, absolutely the same, detail by detail. The world is covered by a sole Trude which does not begin and does not end. Only the name of the airport changes."[491]

There is a sense in which Adorno seems to hold that universal history *comes* to exist at an unspecified historical point. This suggests that the concept itself has a temporal core and does not apply to all history:

> You can see something of a convergence towards a kind of universal standard at the level of technical rationality, and this is particularly marked in countries which had previously been excluded from what Germans think of as the pull of universal history. You only have to travel abroad a little to see the uniformity of the airports and compare them with the differences between cities that lie far apart from one another. These differences then seem to have an anachronistic air, almost like that of a fancy-dress ball. Once you experience this it takes little to convince yourself of the power of this trend towards universal history. To this extent there does seem to be an element of truth in the much criticised idea of universal history, at least in terms of its *telos*. And doubtless this element of truth can be traced back to periods in which such a universalist element did not yet exist, at least not one implicit in the processes indispensable for the reproduction of life and the social formations contained in them or in the forms taken by the forces of production.[492]

History as a whole cannot simply be categorised into an overarching universal history in which the universal can be traced back through historical time.[493] The implication is that Hegel's

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[491] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities,* trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1972), 128.
[492] *HF*, 15; *GF*, 24.
[493] This passage brings to mind Marx when he states: 'World history has not always existed; history as world history is a result.' Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft),* trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 109. Étienne Balibar also claims

construction of a universal history is false not only because it justifies the horror of history by absorbing it into a history of self-realising spirit but because it is in fact premature: the historical process had not, in Hegel's time, become properly 'universal'. As I discussed in chapter four in relation to the distinction between Adorno's idea of the exchange relation and the exchange process, while the former can be said to exist throughout history, the exchange process expands not only in social terms but also in spatial terms; it increasingly spreads and universalises itself in an ongoing process of totalisation. This, then, is another sense in which universal history is to be both constructed and denied. It is to be constructed because it maps onto the present in which the spread of the exchange process and technical rationality have come to be universal, but it is to be denied insofar as these elements were not always universal and may cease to be so. For Adorno, phenomena such as the homogeneity of airports, the strange similitudes that characterise the decoration of cafes in different places at a given point in time and the masquerade of difference that accompanies diplomatic breakfasts all point to the existence of the universalising process that creeps over the world.[494] These phenomena belie the ostensible dissimilarities between the cities and countries in which they are located.

However, Adorno does not fully consider the structural parameters (economic or otherwise) of the process of universalisation and what he terms the 'convergence' (*Konvergenz*)[495] that occurs on a global level.[496] The problem is that his thesis concerning convergence appears exegetically inadequate because no real account is given of the mechanisms of the process of universalisation on a global level. It is easy to note the homogeneities that characterise the appearance of airports, but more difficult to precisely diagnose the means by which they have come to be so. It is notable that while Adorno holds that there exists a universalising process that has its basis in exchange, a mention or consideration of Marx's idea of the world market is conspicuously absent from his analyses, despite the way in which a conception of the latter appears to implicitly underlie Adorno's account. As Chattopadhyay notes, for Marx, the world

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that universality did not always exist, because the world as a single entity was not always conceivable, as it had yet to become unified. By contrast, what he refers to as 'real universality' today ceases to be an 'ideal notion' but rather an 'actual condition' when confronted with 'humankind as a single web of interrelationships.' Like Adorno, he also considers this universality from the perspective of a 'generalised pattern of conflicts, hierarchies and exclusions.' See Étienne Balibar, 'Ambiguous Universality', in *Politics and the Other Scene,* trans. Christine Jones, James Swenson, Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 154–155.

[494] *HF*, 109–110; *HF*, 26; *DE*, 169; *GF*, 159–160; *GF*, 40; *GS*, 3:230.

[495] *HF*, 110; *GF*, 160.

[496] Interestingly, someone as theoretically at odds with Adorno as Karl Jaspers also utilises the idea of convergence as a means to understand the historical condition of the socio-historic present but he conceives of this process as a positive outcome of the gradual overcoming of what Marramao, in his comparison between Max Weber and Jaspers, refers to as the 'presumed *dualism* of *Western Knowledge* and *Oriental Wisdom*' rather than the result of the spread of technical rationality. See Karl Jaspers*, The Origin and Goal of History*, trans. Michael Bullock (Oxon and New York, Routledge, 2010) and Giacomo Marramao, *The Passage West: Philosophy After the Age of the Nation State,* trans. Matteo Mandarini (London and New York: Verso, 2012), 47-50.

market is the 'pre-supposition' and the 'result' of capitalist production and the 'tendency to create world markets' is 'inherent in the concept of capital itself.'[497] But Adorno is also open to the charge of Eurocentrism because he seems to rely on the assumption that the historical process can be understood on the basis of what Samir Amin refers to as an interpretation of history in which evolution is viewed only in relation to the 'techno-economic processes of centres' with no account given of the way in which the spaces outside of the 'centres' come to themselves interact with these processes.[498]

There are a number of missed opportunities in which questions of colonialism and imperialism could have been broached in relation to the question of universalisation.[499] In Adorno's consideration of class in 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society', he suggests that while theories of imperialism have not become 'obsolete' despite decolonisation, the conflict has been transposed onto the antagonism that exists between the USSR and the capitalist West as the 'two great power-blocs'.[500] He then poses a question which he leaves unanswered: 'Whether and to what extent class relations were displaced onto the relations between the leading industrial states, on the one hand, and the vigorously courted underdeveloped nations, on the other, is not a question I can go into here.'[501] It appears that Adorno is both aware of the necessity of re-thinking the concept of class in relation to the global but does not carry this through. This is particularly problematic given the way in which he also argues, in his examination of the nation in the lectures on history, that, contra Hegel, cosmopolitanism is a more accurate summation of the socio-historic present than the belief in the autonomy of individual nations, because of the convergence that occurs in the world as a result of industrial production.[502]

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[497] Paresh Chattopadhyay, 'Marx on Capital's Globalisation: The Dialectic of Negativity', *Economic and Political Weekly,* 37.19 (2002), 1839-1852, (p. 1840).
[498] Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, 271–272.
[499] It is noteworthy that the only mention of imperialism in *Negative Dialectics* occurs in relation to *philosophical* imperialism when Adorno states that the 'reconciled condition would not annex the alien by means of philosophical imperialism but would find its happiness in the fact that the latter remains what is distant and divergent in the given nearness.' *ND*, 190–193; *GS*, 6:192. This has a certain parallel with Habermas' later theorisation of the 'colonisation' of the life-world, and his failure to make any explicit theoretical connection with this concept and historical forms of colonialism. Without wishing to resort to a crude psychoanalytical explanation there nonetheless appears to be a certain element of the return of the theoretically repressed in the choice of vocabulary utilised by both Adorno and Habermas in these two contexts. See Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, Volume One, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981).
[500] Adorno, 'Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?', 116; *GS*, 8:360.
[501] Ibid; *GS*, 8:361.
[502] *HF*, 110; *GF*, 160. Adorno is of course under no illusion that nationalism has lost its potency despite the economic and political insubstantiality of individual nations, because it is the *idea* of the nation that 'alone has sufficient force to mobilise hundreds of millions of people for goals they cannot immediately identify as their own.' Adorno, 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', 97–98; *GS*, 10.2:565–566.

There is a sense in which Adorno's examination of society as a self-presenting reified totality displaces considerations of the *world-historical* in Adorno's thought. In the lectures on sociology, Adorno distinguishes a concept of 'society' 'in the strong sense' from typologies of forms of society in the socio-historic present (here conceptualised as capitalist, Soviet, Chinese and 'Third World' societies) that are based on what he refers to as the definition of societies via a delineation of the 'basic types of arrangement by which people gain their livelihood and which define the forms of their coexistence.'[503] By contrast, 'society in the strong sense' refers to the 'functional connection…which leaves no one out, a connectedness in which all members of the society are entwined and which takes on a certain kind of autonomy in relation to them' that is based on exchange.[504] Adorno's point seems to be that the ongoing process of socialisation and functionalisation that is characteristic of society in the 'strong sense' does not yet exist to the same degree in all 'societies'. However, because of the exchange process and the development of technical rationality, integration and functionalisation are occurring in those areas that had previously been removed from these processes, and this points to the universalisation of 'society in the strong sense'. Yet these claims are removed from any philosophical or historical considerations of space, including the question of the means by which 'society' in the 'strong sense' increasingly comes to be imposed on a global level on 'societies' in the plural. There is thus a current of ahistoricism in Adorno's account of the universalising process in his sociological thought, as well as a complete neglect of questions of the way in which these integrative processes of socialisation rely on forms of domination that derive from imperialistic processes in which areas that are not yet integrated have come to be subsumed under but also interact with the 'centres'. This omission is particularly stark given the way in which Adorno, as discussed, views universal history in Benjaminian terms as an 'uninterrupted history of oppression'. If retaining a concept of universal history is in part necessitated by the fact of ongoing domination and oppression, the absence of a consideration of actual forms of historical domination on a global level limits in advance the methodological grounds for asserting the existence of a universal element within the historical process.

However, in the notes and sketches section of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno's suggestion that the standardisation of the world can be gauged according to the false particularity of diplomatic breakfasts is subsequently turned on its head: 'actual national particularity is experienced primarily by the millions hungering for rice who have fallen through the narrow meshes'.[505] Particularity, then, can partially be understood as consisting in

[503] *IS*, 29; *ES*, 54-55.
[504] *IS*, 29–31; *ES*, 55–57.
[505] *DE*, 169; *GS*, 3:230.

the existing material discrepancies such as the way in which some experience hunger and others do not. This gives a new sense to Adorno's understanding of the historical particular than that which was discussed in chapter three and confirms that it is not solely restricted to the historical individual. Particularity is also to be understood as the mark of a socio-historic process in which certain groups struggle for sustenance and the basic requirements necessary for their preservation. Thus, for Adorno, while the world is becoming standardised, this is in fact only a false standardisation, because underlying it remains the fact of the vast discrepancy that exist between the 'basic types of arrangement' that constitute the coexistence of societies in the plural. This suggests an interesting double movement in Adorno's thought that needs to be drawn out. On the one hand, the world appears to be increasingly homogeneous which seems to *confirm* the existence of a universal element within the historical process, but, on the other, this is in fact belied by the actual vast discrepancies that show this homogeneity to be false. However, these material differences do not *disprove* the existence of the universal but rather point to the fact that this universal, because it is also particular, continues to create actual historical difference, which it seems to actually require for its own continuation, as discussed in chapter four in relation to the theorisation of totality and in chapter two in relation to Adorno's re-configuration of Hegel's doctrine of the concept.

Further, in his lectures on dialectics, Adorno outlines a conception of historical time in which the latter is not viewed as homogeneous, but rather as something that is comprised of heterogeneous moments that are non-reducible to any conception of continuous development.[506] In this sense, despite the existence of a tendency towards standardisation, this is belied by the actual non-simultaneity that exists within the socio-historic process. Adorno states:

> In relation to historical reality it may specifically be one of the deepest insights open to dialectical thought that it need not regard the non-simultaneous character of what has lagged behind yet still persists simply as an obstacle upon the smooth path of historical progress. Rather, it is capable of recognising what for its own part resists or cannot comfortably be accommodated within this so-called progress and grasping it in terms of the principle of development itself. If the idea of dialectic does indeed possess a temporal core […] this means that it is also essentially a dialectic of non-simultaneous aspects, namely a dialectic which must also try to understand, in terms of ongoing

[506] Adorno is here indebted to Ernst Bloch's idea of nonsynchronism, but he unfortunately does not make this explicit. If he had done so, it might have also led him to elaborate on how the idea of nonsynchronism relates to his conceptualisation of the historical process, that is clearly not one that he shares with Bloch. See Ernst Bloch, 'Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics', trans. Mark Ritter, *New German Critique*, 11 (1977), 22–38.

> temporal development, precisely what has, if you like, proved unable to keep pace historically speaking.[507]

It should be noted that the moments that resist absorption under the idea of a continuous development are not to be valorised in and of themselves, as is made clear by the fact that Adorno discusses fascism and the reactionary currents of bourgeois society in this context. He suggests that race theory and those elements that supposedly lag behind can be understood in part as a result of the 'dynamic factors' in history. The idea is that certain groups who have been dispossessed in bourgeois society by what he refers to as 'large-scale industrial production'[508] but who have previously been acquainted with a 'materially and ideologically preferable form of life' then turn to a false conception of the past as a result of the experience of the contradiction between these possible forms of life and their own socio-economic reality.[509] This idea takes on a new significance in our own time, in particular in relation to attempts to understand the re-emergence of nationalisms that has occurred in the last decade.

While Adorno in this context considers that which lags behind in relation to the emergence of fascism and the reactionary tendencies of the bourgeoisie, the idea that dialectics is geared towards apprehending those aspects in historical time that are co-eval and yet distinct from one another, and that further *resist* absorption under the rubric of continuous development demonstrates that Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process in fact leaves room for temporal moments that are both distinct from one another and simultaneously unified in an ongoing process of totalisation: these are the historical concretisations that Adorno refers to in his essay 'Progress' as the 'resistance of the non-identical.'[510] As discussed in chapter four, these disjunctive moments are presupposed by the concept of the 'false' social totality. There is thus a productive crossover between the interpretation of society and the dialectical method as both are premised on the articulation of totality as something that can only be examined via the deviations and contradictions that form it. Importantly, from the perspective of a consideration of Adorno's consideration of the universal element in the socio-historic process, this also undercuts an understanding of history in which all socio-historical phenomenon can simply be understood in terms of a continuous path to development. In this sense, it is not just that Adorno thinks that the universal is in large part a negative phenomenon, but that the particularities that it subsumes underneath it do not completely converge, even if they appear to do so at the level of appearance.

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[507] *ID*, 143–144; *ED*, 204–205.
[508] *ID*, 145; *ED*, 206.
[509] *ID*, 144; *ED*, 205–206
[510] *P*, 149; *GS*, 10.2:623.

5.4 '"Negative" Universal History' and Suffering: Lending a voice to *all* that has been sacrificed to history?

The question is to what extent Adorno offers a critical means by which the category of universal history can be redeployed in the service of thinking history today. To answer this, I examine the idea that Adorno theorises a negative universal history. This will involve a constructive element, because Adorno does not offer a sustained analysis of the term. One question that should be clarified at the outset is whether the idea of a negative universal history is in fact a fitting term for Adorno's examination of universal history. In his work, it forms only the title of one lecture in *History and Freedom* in which he simultaneously admonishes Benjamin's supposed dubious grasp of the theoretical tenets of Marx, in which the former is said to wrongly assume that materialist historiography does not utilise the idea of universal history, but in which Adorno ultimately affirms the content of 'On the Concept of History'. Oddly, the term is absent from *Negative Dialectics.*

The stated task of simultaneously constructing and denying universal history is not necessarily the same thing as formulating a negative universal history. As discussed, the former thematises the perceived necessity of retaining a conception of the universal in the historical process, and thus not succumbing to a view of history in which the latter appears as a mere collection of disparate facts or events, without thereby neglecting these elements, while also still denying the idea that the universal moment is necessary or finding in it some kind of meaning in which it is transfigured or justified, as in Hegel. This points to a hermeneutic procedure that Adorno claims should accompany the philosophical interpretation of history. On the other hand, the idea of a *negative* universal history is already a construction of a universal history of sorts, even if the 'negative' element points to the impossibility of articulating a universal history in the sense that it holds in the philosophical tradition. It is not simply an interpretive procedure but is rather already a formulation of a philosophical history.

In the lectures on negative dialectics, Adorno critiques Hegel's thesis that the negation of the negation is the positive, by distinguishing between two senses of the 'positive':

> On the one hand, 'positive' means what is given, is postulated, is there – as when we speak of positivism as the philosophy that sticks to the facts. But, equally, 'positive' also refers to the good, the approvable, in a certain sense, the ideal […] Now, when I speak of 'negative dialectics' not the least important reason for doing so is my desire to dissociate myself from this fetishization of the positive […] We have to ask *what* has to be or has not to be affirmed, instead of elevating the word 'Yes' to a value in itself, as was unfortunately done by Nietzsche with the entire pathos of saying yes to life […] For this reason, therefore, we might say, putting it in dialectical terms, that what appears

> as the positive is essentially the negative, i.e., the thing that is to be criticised. And that is the motive, the essential motive, for the conception and nomenclature of a negative dialectic.[511]

These two senses of the 'positive' allow for a clear reconstruction of what the 'negative' would be in a negative universal history. Firstly, it would suggest the idea that history is not simply the given: it cannot be postulated in advance as a series of events or facts that can easily be fitted under general historiographical categories. This problematises the idea that the socio-historic process can be described and examined 'as it happened' as in Ranke and the subsequent historiographical tradition. Historical facts and singular events are always mediated by the totality[512] and cannot be postulated as the given from which history as a whole can be constructed. Rather, they are to be grasped via an analysis of the complex interrelation and mediation that exists between events, causes, trends and tendencies. In relation to the construction of a negative universal history, this aspect of negativity puts into question the means by which the universal element is to be construed in relation to the historical process. In the same way that the moment of unity in the historical process can only be gauged methodologically via an examination of the discontinuous moment alongside its mediations with the continuous moment, the universal element in history is to be examined via the particular manifestation that is both formed by and yet non-identical with the universal. However, as discussed in chapter two, this particular moment cannot be hypostatised and itself must be subject to critique. This points to a procedure involving the reciprocal critique of universal and particular. A negative universal history, then, would be premised on the eschewal of a simple schema in which events and historical 'facts' are assimilated under a master-concept from which everything else follows. This could further be connected to the interpretive method that corresponds to the condition of 'natural history'. Given the way in which historical and natural phenomenon interweave in the historical process proper, this suggests that necessary to any construal of the 'negative' universal would be an awareness of the semblance that characterises actual historical events and facts. The necessity of interpretation from the point of view of natural history, as discussed in chapter two, in part derives from the moment at which we continue to try to conceive of historical objectivity

[511] Adorno, 'Lectures on *Negative Dialectics*', 18-19; Adorno, *Vorlesung über Negative Dialektik*, 33–34.

[512] Adorno attempts to demonstrate this via his cursory examination of the relation between long-term cause and short-term effect in the French Revolution. This account is somewhat unsatisfactory from a historiographical point of view, and arguably already demonstrates the difficulties latent in the idea that philosophy must become a form of history, given that the 'history' remains basic and relatively unphilosophical. See *ND*, 295-297; *HF*, 34-37; *GS*, 6:296; *GF*, 54–55.

while simultaneously doubting all claims to universality on the part of the conceptual structures that we have that seek to grasp history.

The second sense of 'negative' corresponds to Adorno's idea of history as something that is bad, meaningless and connected through horror. In his critique of Hegel's concept of progress, which, he suggests is simply the 'migration of peoples puffed up into metaphysics', he states: 'The unity of world history, which animates philosophy to trace it out as the path of the world-spirit, is the unity of what rolls over, of horror, the immediate antagonism.'[513] Given actual history, the belief that there exists any meaning in the historical process can no longer be maintained. For Adorno, Auschwitz as both event and 'system' is the exemplification or instantiation of both the absence of meaning and the horror of the historical process.[514] However, it is important to point out that that despite the centrality of Auschwitz for Adorno's later thought, it receives relatively little sustained attention in his direct treatment of the structure of the historical process even though he holds that universal history in its Hegelian guise and the concept of progress is partially disproven by the Holocaust.

In the lectures on sociology, Adorno suggests that Auschwitz is in part a 'prototype of something which has been repeated incessantly in the world since.'[515] This rather general and vague claim offers little sense of the theoretical requisites of philosophico-historical interpretation and construction in the socio-historic present and its reckoning with the Holocaust, and, by extension, events and tendencies that have followed the Holocaust and arguably form repetitions of it or differ from it in important ways. While Adorno conceptualises Auschwitz as a moment of rupture or as a break within the historical process that necessitates a complete re-orientation of thought (although it is also understood as the culmination of tendencies that existed prior to it and thus cannot be interpreted as a singular event or as a historical exception), he does not fully articulate how historical events after Auschwitz are to be read in its wake.[516] This is not true from the perspective of his theoretical interventions on questions that pertain to the actual continuation of aspects of the fascist culture in post-war Germany. In essays such as 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past' and 'Education After Auschwitz',[517] Adorno diagnoses the remnant elements of fascism and attempts to demonstrate the psychopathological susceptibility of individuals that leads them to accept both fascist and totalitarian ideologies and explores the way in which the supposed

[513] *ND*, 333-335; *GS*, 6:335.
[514] *HF*, 4; *GF,* 9–10.
[515] *IS*, 18; *ES*, 35.
[516] I am referring here to the new categorical imperative that Adorno famously formulates in *Negative Dialectics* in which he suggests that, following the Holocaust, it is necessary for 'humanity' to 'arrange their thinking and conduct, so that Auschwitz never repeats itself, so that nothing similar ever happen again.' *ND*, 358–361; *GS*, 6:358.
[517] Adorno, 'Education after Auschwitz', in *Critical Models*, pp. 191–204.

reckoning with the Nazi past had largely been a failure in Germany. A partial solution to this failure, Adorno suggests, is located in education (in particular, the right kind of sociology and historical research) and psychoanalysis in order to 'educate the educator's themselves.'[518] But while this forms an important intervention into the examination of the possible means by which Germany could deal with its Nazi past, it is less clear in these essays how history more broadly is to be construed in the aftermath of the Holocaust. This is particularly problematic given that a negative universal history would be premised on an understanding of the historical process that takes heed of the discontinuities that structure it. The danger is that by over-emphasising the way in which the historical process since the Holocaust repeats its cardinal features, a loss of critical-interpretive acuity would invariably be the result. This is because of the difficulty of retaining a sense of the specificities that have demarcated history since the Holocaust and also the specificities of the Holocaust itself that renders comparisons with other histories, in particular, subsequent genocides, potentially fraught with historical simplification.

Yet Adorno's sense of the openness of the historical process and his emphasis on the non-identical relation that holds between universal and particular suggests that Auschwitz as historical event is not to be superimposed onto subsequent history as a blueprint through which the latter is to be understood, even though it must inform both historical interpretation and construction, and necessarily re-orients subsequent thinking. A negative universal history does not hypostasise the continuity or discontinuity of history. Rather it seeks to comprehend it in its mediations with the continuity of determinate negations in the historical process, and thereby *both* demarcate the structural developments of the historical process in their relation to the phenomena that are in different degrees falsely assimilated or break apart from the moments of continuity. This would suggest a way of constructing history from a postcolonial perspective, precisely because it could form a philosophical interpretation of history that does not reduce particular histories to the universal moment, but neither does it give up on attempting to comprehend the means by which socio-economic structures that have developed in the 'West' have increasingly been imposed on a global level as a result of colonialism and imperialism. Further, it is important to draw out the way in which Adorno sometimes refers to the universal as the 'universal tendency'.[519] If Adorno's conceptualisation of tendency, as discussed in chapter four, is not intended as a mere description of that which has happened but rather forms an attempt to consider how the socio-historic process will develop, this suggests that a construction of the universal element in the historical process would not merely attempt to retrospectively attribute to the historical process a structure from which everything else can

[518] Adorno, 'The Meaning of Working Through the Past', 100; *GS*, 10.2:569.
[519] *HF*, 11; *GF*, 19.

be understood, despite the existence of an actual unity in the historical process, but rather forms an attempt to delineate – through the examination of the possible future that constitutes the socio-historic process – the way in which it might move.

Antonio Vázquez-Arroyo offers an incisive argument for the idea that Adorno's idea of negative universal history forms a 'critical narrative category'. He suggests that the moment of continuity in Adorno's idea of 'universal history' is formed from suffering, with the appendage that the manifestations of suffering have 'varied historically.'[520] In this sense, it is the ongoing suffering that could be said to negatively unify history on a narrative level. Suffering is that which is continuously produced by the historical process in which the domination of nature holds sway. On this understanding, the continuity of suffering is that which allows for a narrative understanding of history because it offers a structural unity with which the historical process can retrospectively be gauged. Vázquez-Arroyo further suggests that, as a critical narrative category, Adorno's idea of negative universal history is 'infused with a critical historicism that seeks to historicise particular histories in their concrete local manifestations', without thereby removing a 'universal comprehensive moment in the cognitive experience of apprehension and representation.'[521] It is a conceptual stretch to claim that Adorno's construal of a negative universal history immediately historicises particular histories in their local manifestations, but the basic point is right: as discussed in the preceding section, the idea that dialectics is to be geared towards a historical reality in which the various particular temporalities remain non-identical with the universal moment but nonetheless are subsumed under it in more or less successful ways appears to corroborate the possibility of constructing a negative universal history as a critical narrative category because it remains sensitive to the shifting particularities of the historical process without thereby collapsing the historical process into particular histories, because of the retention of the universal moment as a 'negative' element. This is critical both because it takes into account the non-correspondence between universal and particular within history, and yet also examines particular histories in relation to trends and tendencies that exhibit moments of universality, and their interaction. However, I want to further consider Vázquez-Arroyo's suggestion that the moment of continuity in Adorno's idea of a negative universal history is formed from suffering, and that this is in part what renders it a 'critical' narrative category.

Firstly, as I claimed earlier in the chapter, the continuity that exists in the historical process must be understood in part with reference to Adorno's concept of the domination of nature and the exchange process as those aspects which produce a deeper structural unity. I further suggested that one problem with Adorno's conception of the universalisation of the exchange

[520] Vázquez-Arroyo, 464.
[521] Ibid.

process is that it neglects to consider the way in which exchange spreads and universalises itself. This problematises using the concept of exchange, at least as it is developed by Adorno, as a means by which to consider history as unified. In a similar vein, the mechanisms of Adorno's concept of suffering should be further interrogated before assuming that this is what can retrospectively unify history for interpretation. There is an element of caricature latent in Raymond Geuss' characterisation of Adorno's philosophy as the 'philosophy of the suffering spirit' in which excerpts of *Minima Moralia* are leveraged to demonstrate that Adorno's idea of suffering is partially based on an 'effete' and too stringent 'sensibility' in which 'society is said to fail because it fails him [Adorno]' as an 'archetypical bearer of spirit'.[522] However, Geuss convincingly elaborates the parallels between Adorno's concept of suffering and what he terms the 'concerns of contemporary liberalism', and suggests that there is something undialectical about Adorno's call to 'just abolish suffering.'[523] Similarly, Lambert Zuidervaart raises the problem that Adorno's idea of suffering as the 'condition of all truth'[524] does not stand up to actual historical experience in the wake of imperialism and ethnic conflicts, because the expression of suffering is not 'self-authorising.'[525] If a construction of a negative universal history in part relies on the idea of suffering as a means by which history is retrospectively unified, then these criticisms should be taken seriously, in contrast to the assumption that Adorno's focus on suffering is necessarily critical, in part because of it attempts to recuperate the somatic and material dimensions of historical experience. The concept's generality leads to the question of *whose* suffering negatively unifies history.

It is important to note a shift that occurs between Adorno's early and later works with regard to the concept of suffering. In his earlier works, the concept appears infrequently and in the essay 'Reflections on Class Theory' the 'power' of the negative is connected to exploitation.[526] As Hullot-Kentor points out in his comparison between the first circulation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the later 1947 edition, exploitation (*Ausbeutung*) is replaced by suffering (*Leid*) in the later edition.[527] These terminological alterations might have had more to do with the exigencies of publishing the later edition, and the need to excise the overtly Marxian elements, rather than an actual shift away from these categories. However, this is not merely a question of terminology, but rather thematises how negativity is to be understood in relation to history, given the theoretical prominence accorded to the concept of suffering in *Negative Dialectics.* Suffering is connected to a more generalised sense of domination, while

[522] Raymond Geuss, 'Suffering and Knowledge in Adorno', in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 111–130 (pp.114–115).
[523] Geuss, 128-130.
[524] *ND*, 27–29; *GS*, 6:29.
[525] Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, 68.
[526] *RCT*, 95; *GS*, 8:375.
[527] Hullot-Kentor, 'Back to Adorno', *Things Beyond Resemblance,* 24.

exploitation, following Marx, thematises the manner in which capitalism results in injustice, which has profound but ambiguous implications on how history is to be rendered as a unified and negative narrative.

In the lectures on history, Adorno only briefly examines the idea of narrative, when he suggests that the philosophy of history, as the interpretation of history, 'moves in the direction of history-writing' in the explication of events.[528] If the 'need to give voice to suffering' is the 'condition of all truth', and the philosophical interpretation of history should become a form of history writing, then this would suggest that integral to a negative universal history as a narrative category would be a philosophical-historical examination of forms of historical and present forms of suffering, in the service of a different future, that would have as their object the 'subterranean' rather than 'known' histories, as elaborated by Adorno and Horkheimer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. However, in this text, this distinction is limited to a consideration of European history. This latter point is important and connects back to Edward Said's criticism, discussed in the introduction, that Adorno has no awareness of the experience of historical and present-day forms of imperialism. While I have suggested, earlier in this work, that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* ought not to be read as a stand-alone exemplar of Adorno's philosophy of history, the following passage should alert us to the possibly inextricable connection between Adorno's concept of suffering and a conception of history as the history of Europe:

> Beneath the known history of Europe there runs a subterranean one. It consists of the fate of the human instincts and passions repressed and distorted by civilization. From the vantage point of the fascist present, in which the hidden is coming to light, the manifest history is also revealing its connection to the dark side, which is passed over in the official legend of nation states, and no less its progressive critique.[529]

However, there is an ambiguity to this passage. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, suffering is examined in connection with the repression and domination of nature that is 'European' and perhaps North American, because it concerns the repressions and sufferings of the bourgeois individual from the standpoint of the text's specific historical present, that is, fascism and the Second World War, even if, as I suggested in chapter one, Adorno's idea of sacrifice could be read in a more generalised sense. If this is the case, then the question of the centrality of the bourgeois individual as a theoretical category would again have to be raised in connection with Adorno's theorisation of suffering. But this passage can also be read in another way. Subterranean histories could also be considered in a global sense in connection with the way

[528] *HF*, 40; *GF*, 60.
[529] *DE*, 192; *GS*, 3:265.

in which imperialism and colonialism have distorted and repressed instincts and passions on a global level, which remains obscured by narrative forms of 'known' history as the history of European nation-states, which would fit with the earlier call in the notes and sketches section for a 'philosophical world history' to derive its categories from the 'domination of nature'.

This more generalised sense of 'suffering' is borne out in Adorno's later works. In the section on physical suffering in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno claims that 'all pain and all negativity [*Aller Schmerz und alle Negativität*]' comprise the 'motor of dialectical thought.'[530] The 'all' immediately suggests that dialectical thought is set into motion by any extant forms of suffering that are not limited to the individual. Contra Hegel, Adorno asserts that the unhappy consciousness is the spirit's 'sole authentic dignity' when faced with the split between mind and body, and the corporeal moment that registers any form of suffering, however small, is that which should prompt the urge for the transformation of conditions, and forms the moment at which the material moment 'converges with what is critical, with socially transforming praxis.'[531] While this corporeal moment, in which suffering is recognised, is something that takes place on an *individual* level, which is corroborated by the fact that Adorno discusses the way in which the 'trace' of 'senseless suffering' is discerned in the '*experienced* world', he then goes on to suggest that this individual awareness of suffering is not sufficient. He states:

> The abolition of suffering, or its mitigation to a degree which is not to be theoretically assumed in advance, to which no limit can be set, is not up to the individual who endures suffering, but solely to the species that it belongs to […] All activities of the species make reference to its physical continued existence, even if they fail to recognise this, becoming organisationally autonomous and seeing to their business only as an afterthought. Even the institutions which society creates in order to exterminate itself are, as unleashed, absurd self-preservation, simultaneously their own unconscious actions against suffering […] [The] purpose which alone makes society into a society demands that it be so arranged, as what the relations of production here and there relentlessly prevent, and as what would be immediately possible to the productive forces right here and now. Such an arrangement would have its telos in the negation of physical suffering of even the least of its members…[532]

This passage returns to the theme of the way in which the historical process has developed such that the drive to self-preservation has historically taken on an irrational form, but it

[530] *ND*, 202–204; *GS*, 6:202.
[531] *ND*, 202–204; *GS*, 6:203.
[532] *ND*, 202–204; *GS*, 6:203.

suggests that it has, to an extent, succeeded in its aims, despite engendering forms of historical suffering. But Adorno here goes further, and directly connects self-preservation with the attempt to prevent suffering, however failed this attempt has historically come to be. In this sense, suffering is both the result of a bad self-preservation that fails to be placed in the service of actual historical individuals, and yet it is also that which ultimately stems from the thwarted attempt to prevent historical forms of suffering. This provides a new sense to history as the history of self-preservation, in which its result is the continued reproduction of suffering but that ultimately has as its unconscious *telos* the prevention of suffering.

In the lectures on dialectics, Adorno further elaborates the connection between forms of thought and suffering, and states that 'this whole separation of thought from happiness, or of thought from suffering…must be revoked by a thinking which is fully aware of its own historical conditions, conditions which are comprised in the totality.'[533] Despite Adorno's own neglect of questions of imperialism and colonialism, this suggests that the possibility of constructing a negative universal history would be premised on an awareness of the historical present in which it is located, and thus would have to take into account the suffering produced by processes of imperialism and colonisation. In 'Theses on Need', Adorno connects the question of need with the 'question of the suffering of the vast majority of all humans on earth.'[534] In this sense, the concept's lack of specificity is that which lends itself to the construction of a negative universal history, because it is to take into account the universality of suffering in history and is not thereby inherently localised or Eurocentric in its scope.

5.5 A Million-fold web: Domination and Integration

Suffering as a form of retrospective unification is not itself sufficient to construct a negative universal history as a *critical* narrative category. As discerned by Geuss and Zuidevaart, the very lack of specificity of Adorno's concept of 'suffering' can itself be subject to misuse, and further, from an interpretive point of view, it is not the sole category by which history is to be regarded as unified. A history unified retrospectively in relation to past forms of suffering is not sufficiently critical because it neglects to consider the structural mechanisms that generate suffering and fails to distinguish between different forms of historical suffering. If a negative universal history is to be constructed to be placed at the service of a future that could be different, integral to its construction is an account of the structural means by which forms of suffering, both on an individual and social level, are generated. This raises the question of how Adorno's political concepts, such as domination, oppression, exploitation, repression,

[533] *ID*, 43; *ED*, 67.
[534] Adorno, 'Theses on Need', 81; *GS*, 8:395.

absorption and integration, are to be understood in connection to historical forms of suffering. Each of these concepts have a different remit that are in need of further substantiation if the concept of suffering is to be sharpened in relation to the construction of the historical process, and their relation to capitalism clarified. While I cannot here go into all of these terms in detail, an extrapolation of Adorno's implicit distinction between domination and integration is important in relation to the construction of a negative universal history because it offers a possible means by which suffering could be more precisely delineated.

For Adorno, domination (*Herrschaft*) precedes capitalism, but takes on a new form as a result of capitalist modes of production. Domination is, temporally, a broad historico-political category that denotes the way in which throughout history there has been a split between the rulers and the ruled, as well as the continuing condition of natural history that arises as a result of the domination of nature. This is the history that is traced in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in which domination is connected to the beginning of property relations and the abandonment of nomadic forms of life. In *Negative Dialectics,* domination is more clearly connected to capitalism and the commodity form:

> What appears as formless to a constitution of the existent modelled solely after subjective reason is what subjugates the subjects, the pure principle of being-for-others, of the commodity form. For the sake of universal equivalence and comparability it debases all qualitative determinations in all places, levelling tendentially. The same commodity form however, the mediated domination of human beings over human beings, solidifies the subjects in their lack of autonomy; their autonomy and the freedom towards the qualitative would go together.'[535]

The commodity form becomes one of the principle means by which domination is mediated socio-historically, and it is that which also reproduces domination. It is not an originary form of domination but becomes its chief purveyor as the socially realised descendant of earlier conceptual processes that were based on equivalence that come to be objectified through economic means. While the suffering that arises from domination predates capitalism and is in part connected to the means by which subjectivity is constituted, it comes to take on a new form as a result of commodity exchange.

On the other hand, Adorno's concept of integration, that follows from his consideration of Spencer and Durkheim, is a more temporally specific category. While Adorno's analysis of integration largely centres on his consideration of the purported decline of class consciousness in the proletariat and the means by which the latter have (only ostensibly) come to be part of

[535] *ND*, 100-103; *GS*, 6:101.

bourgeois society, it appears that in socio-historic terms, Adorno considers integration to be amongst the most fundamental categories through which to understand the present, in which 'moments intertwine into a constantly more complete functional context.'[536] This has deep theoretical implications because as a result of integration, socio-historical causality can no longer be isolated and delineated, thus rendering the base-superstructure relation almost redundant as a conceptual model for understanding history.[537] It should be noted that Adorno considers that integration itself is accompanied by disintegration, which pluralism as a political idea attempts to paper over.[538] This is important from the perspective of the construction of a negative universal history because it suggests that *new* forms of suffering have arisen in the socio-historic present that are directly connected to the processes of integration and the ensuing 'logic of adaption' that renders individuals into 'microcosmic replicas of the whole.'[539] This is thus a form of domination that is not only theoretically more difficult to diagnose and trace than earlier forms of more direct domination, given that the 'threads hang together horizontally as vertically with all others',[540] but also, by implication, integration renders suffering itself less visible, given that its direct consequences are the (conscious or unconscious) attempts by individuals at seamless adaptation to the conditions in which they find themselves.

It seems that Adorno's differentiation between society in the strong sense and societies in the plural, as discussed earlier, and the increasing subsumption of the latter under the former, implicitly transposes the concept of integration that Adorno thinks takes place within bourgeois societies onto a global framework. Adorno's idea that society in the strong sense is characterised as much by the failure of the process of integration as its realisation, which results in those that are left behind and thus an 'uneven development' could also be applied to the way in which the supposed peripheries come to be only ostensibly integrated into a global capitalist system that results in but simultaneously masks the persistence of antagonisms in the ongoing process of totalisation. This would suggest a means by which the concept of suffering could be more precisely delineated in the socio-historic present and rendered critical, because it would no longer be interpreted in relation to the more generalised sense of domination that appears throughout history and would itself raise the question of the means by which integration has been effectuated through colonialism and imperialism. In relation to a negative universal history, a concept of suffering based on an awareness of its own historical conditions would have to be constructed through an analysis not only of the suffering that is

[536] *ND*, 166–168; *GS*, 6.168.
[537] *ND*, 262–266; *GS*, 6.264–265.
[538] *HF*, 95; *GF*, 140.
[539] *IS*, 41; *ES*, 74.
[540] *ND*, 262–266; *GS*, 6:264.

caused by the requisites of individual adaptation, as Adorno himself attempts to do, but of the enforced adaptation by societies to a functional, global context in which nothing is left out, but in which antagonism and contradictions remain, without thereby succumbing to a vague theory of modernisation in which the peripheries wait in line for their subsumption under the universal.

5.6 An insect flying towards the light collides with a windowpane: Progress, Catastrophe and the New

Thus far, I have sought to construct the idea of a negative universal history in relation to the question of what negatively unifies history for Adorno. While Adorno's conception of historical temporality could be utilised as a means by which to think history from the perspective of particular histories that are themselves negatively unified by the universal moment, this leaves open the question of where the historically new is to be found. If, as discussed, the negations of the historical process in the socio-historic present themselves simply reconfigure the old, as the old in distress, then where could the genuinely new located? The following section will interrogate Adorno's critique of the concept of progress, through an examination of the essay of that name and the lectures on history. In particular, I will consider in more detail the claim found in the essay on progress that the 'possibility of wrestling free is effectuated by the pressure of negativity (*Die Möglichkeit des sich Entringenden wird vom Druck der Negativität gezeitigt*).'[541] Does this point to a conception of historical time in which the determinate negations of the historical process could give rise to new socio-historical formations?

For Adorno, the progress that has in fact occurred in history is largely limited to the advancement of technical forms of rationality. This is the form of progress that Benjamin critiques in 'On the Concept of History' when he discusses the orthodox Marxist conception of labour that 'recognises only the progress in mastering nature', that is later to be found in the 'technocentric' features of fascism,[542] a theme that is central to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Importantly, as Hullot-Kentor points out, this form of progress is connected to 'domination as regression', but, as he suggests, regression is not understood in the sense of going backwards to earlier epochs, but rather to what he refers to in psychoanalytical terms as the 'choiceless return to what was never solved in the first place', that is, the 'struggle for self-preservation.'[543] Regression is thus to be understood as a form of historical repetition that accompanies

[541] *P*, 152; *GS*, 10.2:627.
[542] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 393.
[543] Hullot-Kentor, 'Things Beyond Resemblance', in *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 60

supposedly new developments. While progress in technical rationality does result in the new in a limited sense, because of the sameness of its underlying structure it fails to effectuate an alteration in the actual historical dynamic of domination. Understood in this way, Adorno's idea of the regressive movement of history is what happens when the negations that constitute the historical process continuously produce the old (the drive for self-preservation and its socialisation) under the guise of the new while history 'in its natural course remains constantly the same',[544] rather than a declinist conception of history in which regression is postulated as form of going backwards to a previous era. Rather, regression has *always* accompanied progress, for Adorno, because the actual form progress has taken has been limited to advances in the means by which nature is controlled and is therefore only progress in the pernicious sense of continued domination. Regression as repetition is therefore inherent to progress in the domination of nature.

Amy Allen, in her critique of Habermas and Honneth's concept of progress, claims that their idea of historical progress is connected to an 'imperialist metanarrative',[545] and argues that critical theory in turn needs to be 'decolonised', which can in part be effecutated via a return to Adorno, Benjamin and Foucault's critiques of progress. An examination of this question in relation to Habermas and Honneth is beyond the bounds of this work. However, Allen's work is instructive in evaluating several problematic assumptions that characterise interpretations of Adorno's idea of progress. Allen holds Adorno to arrive at what she terms a 'negativistically-framed, forward-looking conception of progress' that 'presents us with a set of minimal conditions that are necessary for averting catastrophe.'[546] These 'minimal conditions' are considered by Allen in conjunction with the idea that Adorno arrives at an 'ethics of resistance' that can be elaborated by turning to his so-called negative injunctions.[547] She further suggests that Adorno's critique of progress can be utilised as a means by which to distinguish the belief in what she refers to as 'backward looking progress', in other words, the idea that progress has already happened in history, or progress as a 'fact', as promulgated by Habermas and Honneth, with a 'forward looking progress', that is, the idea that progress can in fact occur in history.

Allen is right to suggest that Adorno does not subscribe to a 'backward' looking conception of progress as a 'fact' in any clear sense because it is his contention that the movement of

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[544] *HF*, 140; *GF*, 198.
[545] Allen, *The End of Progress: Decolonizing the Normative Foundations of Critical Theory,* 4.
[546] Allen, 176.
[547] The idea that Adorno can be understood as propounding, or at least offering the tools for formulating, an 'ethics of resistance' has gained currency in recent scholarship. See, Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political*, 179; Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013) and Gordon Finlayson, 'Adorno on the Ethical and the Ineffable', *Journal of European Philosophy,* 10.1 (2002), pp. 1–25.

history has only been progressive in a limited and regressive way. However, for Adorno, so-called backward- and forward-looking conceptions of progress must be regarded as dialectically mediated with one another. Adorno claims that the idea of progress as the increasing domination of nature and the idea of progress that has its telos in redemption 'communicate with each other' because they both have as their goal the aversion of the 'ultimate disaster' and the aim of 'easing the persistent suffering.'[548] This is an important aspect of Adorno's treatment of progress because it suggests that actual progress, both in terms of the concept and the thing itself, cannot be conceived of without reference to actually existing progress as the advance of technical rationality, and thus must also be in some sense 'backward-looking'. Actual historical progress, or progress as regression, is also dialectical in that it results in 'historical setbacks' that themselves 'provide the condition needed for humanity to find the means to avert them in the future.'[549] This is elaborated in the lectures on history in which Adorno states:

> The explosive tendency of progress is not simply the flipside of the movement towards the progressive domination of nature; it is not the abstract negation of that tendency, but calls for the development of reason through the domination of nature. Only rationality, the principle of social rule as applied to the subject, would be capable of eliminating that domination. The possibility of the emergence of such a principle is brought about by the pressure of negativity.[550]

Allen does in fact cite this passage and takes this to suggest that 'progress as a moral-political imperative can only be achieved through a *rational* reflection on reason's own limits and blind spots.'[551] But, importantly, Allen does not cite the final line of the passage, which significantly changes the way in which the preceding lines should be read; it is the 'pressure of negativity', that is, the negations that constitute the historical process that might make possible the emergence of new forms of rationality that would allow for actual progress to occur. This suggests that rational reflection itself is necessary but not sufficient as a means by which progress could be effectuated.

Secondly, the idea that Adorno's conception of progress as reconciliation is 'forward–looking' sits uneasily with the Benjaminian aspects of the essay on progress. In 'On the Concept of History', Benjamin's berates social democratic party politics for attempting to render the working class solely into a 'redeemer of *future* generations', thus neglecting the way in which its 'hatred' is in fact 'nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than by the ideal of

[548] *P,* 154; *GS,* 10.2:630.
[549] *P*, 154; *GS,* 10.2:630.
[550] *HF*, 157; *GF,* 220-221.
[551] Allen, 176.

liberated grandchildren.'[552] This complicates the distinction between 'forward' and 'backward' understandings of progress, because, at least for Benjamin, the idea that progress can be postulated as something that could be achieved in the future neglects the past's constitutive role in the present and for the future.[553] In the early essay on class, Adorno follows Benjamin when he states:

> Theory knows of no 'constructive force' but only of one that lights up the contours of a burned out prehistory with the glow of the latest disaster in order to perceive the parallel that exists between them. The newest is always the old terror, which consists in the blind continuum of time that constantly retracts itself […][554]

In this sense, theory is not forward looking but rather constructs the socio-historic present in relation to the similitudes between the past and present, and this is what gives theory its force, rather than attempting to arrive at abstract conceptions of future betterment.

Allen's second claim – that Adorno's concept of progress offers a 'minimal set of conditions for the prevention of catastrophe' – is true insofar as he does partially conceive of progress in relation to the aversion of catastrophe. But Allen's reading obscures not only Adorno's own reservations concerning the potentialities of individual action, but also the Marxian dimensions of Adorno's thought, and the way in which futural progress is regarded as stemming from an alteration of the relations of production. Further, there is another, more maximalist conception of progress that underlies Adorno's critique, which is progress as leaving the spell or bane (*die Bann*) that would transpire from the abolition of exchange, or in Adorno's terms, the realisation of an 'exchange that has been brought to itself.'[555] This other progress, or progress as reconciliation, sits problematically alongside the more limited progress that we are supposedly constrained to in the socio-historic present, and raises again both the question of historical agency and the role of negation in the historical process. As discussed in relation to the *Gesamtsubjekt* in the previous chapter, the conditions for the former's realisation, as the only form of historical agency that could properly prevent catastrophe, do not seem so minimal after all, given that these conditions require alterations in the relations of production and the elimination of need. In this sense, progress as the

[552] Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', 394.
[553] David Hoy Couzens makes this point when he suggests that Benjamin's critique in 'On the Concept of History' draws out the way in which universal histories such as Kant and Hegel's 'assume that we are going into the future facing forward' which he contrasts with the conception of history that underlies Benjamin's interpretation of Klee's *Angelus Novus* and what he terms the 'backward-looking orientation of critical theory.' David Hoy Couzens, *The Time of Our Lives: A Critical History of Temporality* (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2009), 153–154.
[554] *RCT*, 95 (translation amended); *GS*, 8:375–376.
[555] *P*, 159; *GS*, 10.2:637.

aversion of catastrophe and progress as the abolition of exchange seem to converge in the conditions that are required for their realisation.

It appears that underlying Adorno's conception of the historical process lies the idea that the negations that constitute history themselves might produce the conditions under which progress could begin to occur. In *Negative Dialectics,* Adorno states:

> It is not entirely improbable that the bane is thereby tearing itself apart. What would like to provisionally gloss over the total structure of society under the name of pluralism, receives its truth from such self-announcing disintegration; simultaneously from horror and from a reality, in which the bane explodes. Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* has a content, which was scarcely available to him; it is not solely in the psyche of the socialised that the aggressive drives accumulate to the point of openly destructive pressure, but the total socialisation objectively breeds its counterforce [*Widerspiel*], without to this day being able to say, whether it is the catastrophe or the emancipation [*ob es die Katastrophe ist oder die Befreiung*].[556]

If the ongoing process of socialisation produces a counterforce, this suggests that there is a kind of ambivalent potential latent within the integrative and totalising tendencies of the socio-historic present that themselves point to the possibility of different socio-economic reconfigurations. While Adorno does not subscribe to the idea of the existence of any necessity to the historical process, he does hold that negativity itself and the pressure exacted by it leads to new possibilities: 'progress would be the establishment of humanity in the first place, the prospect of which opens up in the face of its extinction.'[557] For Adorno, this extinction is conceptualised as stemming from the possible consequences of atomic warfare rather than environmental catastrophe. Contra Moishe Postone, who argues that for Adorno, the 'dynamism of history' fails to 'point beyond itself',[558] it appears that it is the very conditions that create a kind of 'hell on earth' that result from the ongoing catastrophes that might suggest a possible overcoming of these conditions. This is not to suggest that Adorno's concept of progress is based on what has been termed by Ulrich Beck in the context of environmental crisis as an 'emancipatory catastrophism',[559] in which only total catastrophe is viewed as providing the conditions for progress, despite certain passages suggesting a certain affinity with this idea. Rather, Adorno opposes any simplified conception of catastrophe when he

[556] *ND*, 337–340; *GS*, 6:340.
[557] *P*, 145; *GS*, 10.2:619.
[558] Moishe Postone, 'Critical Theory and the Historical Transformation of Capitalist Modernity', in *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Theory*, ed. Michael J. Thompson (New York: Palgrave, 2017), pp. 137–164 (p. 159).
[559] Ulrich Beck, 'Emancipatory Catastrophism: What does it mean to Climate Change and Risk Society?', *Current Sociology,* 63.1 (2014), 75–80.

suggests that the 'intellectual hubris' that accompanies the postulation of a 'total catastrophe' serves a similar ideological function to the conceptualisation of 'abstract utopia.'[560] As discussed earlier in the chapter in relation to Adorno's treatment of atomic warfare, the historical process has always been catastrophic, but what is structurally new in the socio-historic present and thus the historical dynamic is the existence of *both* the increasing possibility of the production of catastrophe, but also the increased possibility of the aversion of catastrophe.

Contra Postone, then, it might be a more accurate summation to suggest that for Adorno the historical dynamic does indeed point beyond itself, because the consequences of the non-identity that holds between the universal and the particular in the socio-historic present could give rise to new socio-economic formations, but that we cannot gauge from this whether a change in the historic process will in fact be effectuated. It is this ambiguity that offers the critical moment in Adorno's reappraisal of the concept of progress because it brings to surface the tension between the actual *material* potential for a change in the historical dynamic, and thus the historically new, and the socio-historic structures that prevent it. In this sense, it is a simplification to view Adorno's concept of progress as either backward or forward looking; his reconceptualisation of progress rather points to the necessity of considering future possibilities in relation to the similitudes and repetitions that have characterised the past and present, which includes tracing the mediations between forms of historical progress as the advance of technical rationality and the potentialities that arise from the setbacks that occur as its result, alongside the idea that the determinate negations of history could produce the historically new in the *future*.

Adorno's conceptualisation of the historical process as at once containing a (negative) universal element that must continue to be thought but that cannot be regarded as immediately accessible for historical interpretation thematises the necessity of attempting to gauge the structural elements of the historical process in a global sense without assuming that they are straightforwardly discernible through their immediate analysis. The critical retention of the universal moment suggests that central to any substantial examination of the historical process lies an attempt at examining particularity and discontinuity as reflections of deeper, structural processes rather than as moments in history that taken alone can be said to lead to theoretical insights. There is a certain humility to this method that is premised on an awareness of the fallibility of deriving any immediate judgements from an examination of the historical process but that attempts nonetheless to criticise history. This theoretical humility is at odds with accusations that are levelled at Adorno and his supposed construction of a negative philosophy

[560] *HF*, 94; *GF*, 138–139.

of history that views all history in broad brushstrokes as the history of the domination of nature. What I have sought to show in my analysis is the existence of a plethora of different concepts that Adorno utilises in order to comprehend the historical process, even if certain concepts (notably, exchange) appear to play a too important function for a mapping of the historical process without the full substantiation that they require in order to be properly critical.

Although Adorno himself arguably fails to properly delineate a satisfactory conception of the historical universal, because of the limitations of his account that must in part be attributed to his Eurocentrism, the very attempt at critically retaining a conception of universal history while also still denying it expresses the very difficult task that the construction of history faces today. This is the attempt to grasp historical universality without reducing histories in the plural in their entirety to the universal moment in a world that is increasingly 'global'. My suggestion that Adorno's critique of integration in particular could be further developed in this context arises from the way in which Adorno seems genuinely untimely in his idea that the process of integration in the historical process points towards a disintegration. This maps onto a central problematic of our own time, which is that despite ongoing globalisation, the resultant processes do not create a homogeneous one time (this view would appear to be akin to an acceptance of the 'deceptive surface unity' with which the social totality presents itself) but rather is formed precisely from socio-historic disintegrations and fragmentations that themselves threaten the fixity of the socio-historic present and point to the emergence of the new in the future, whether this 'new' element is regarded as catastrophe or as a potentiality for genuine transformation. The caution with which I treated Adorno's concept of suffering as a means by which to unify history retrospectively derives from the way in which such a focus remains uncritical if it is not met with an elaboration of the specific means by which historical suffering is produced. A further development and translation of Adorno's concept of 'integration', and its re-instatement into a broader problematic beyond (but not neglecting) a consideration of the false assimilation of the working class into bourgeois society could lead to insights concerning the fragility and contingency of the supposed homogeneity and mono-cultures that are belied by the very real divergences and discontinuities that characterise the socio-historic present, but that are also produced by processes of unification and appear to be necessary to it.

Conclusion

In the essay 'Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy', Adorno criticises the approach of certain Kant and Hegel scholars that ask the 'loathsome' question as to whether the work of dead philosophers has 'any meaning for the present' by distinguishing between the supposedly living and the dead in these thinkers, and thus to be both above but therefore not in the subject material.[561] What this line of inquiry occludes, Adorno suggests, is the pressing and perhaps more difficult question of what the present means 'in the face' of the Hegelian system.[562] In the same way, an interrogation of Adorno's concept of history contains the theoretical requisite to consider the socio-historic present *after* and *through* Adorno's attempts to reconceptualise the historical process. It is precisely the tension that exists between on the one hand, the internal limitations that prevent Adorno's thought from being easily absorbed into theorising about history from the perspective of our own socio-historic present, and on the other, those aspects that appear to still offer a critical means by which to do so that is potentially productive in terms of theory. A consideration of this tension does not consist in the attempt to isolate the living aspects of Adorno's thought from those that are supposedly dead. Rather, to put it in Adornean terms, one question that it raises is whether those aspects of Adorno's thought that appear today to be 'old' might themselves contain elements of the 'new' for theory, and vice versa. By way of conclusion, I want to consider this tension in relation to the three broad problematics that I suggested in the introduction would continuously appear in different configurations in this work: the first, Adorno's treatment of the individual and the particular within the historical process; the second, the relation between Adorno's sociological and historico-philosophic thought; the third, Adorno's conceptualisation of the historically new.

The distinction that I drew between three different methods for the philosophical interpretation of history in the first part of the thesis emerged out of the requisites of the material. These methods do not exactly correspond to a set of divergent procedures that exist in isolation from one another in Adorno's work, but they point to various shifts in theoretical emphasis between Adorno's earlier and later thought, characterised by a move towards Hegel and Marx and to the solidification of his sociological thought. This has particularly important implications for Adorno's theorisation of the 'universal', 'particular' and 'individual'. *Dialectic of Enlightenment* remains largely confined to an interrogation of the prehistory of the bourgeois individual, despite the way in which the conceptualisation of substitution and sacrifice

[561] *HTS*, 1; *GS*, 5:251.
[562] Ibid.

understood as the conceptual precursors to the exchange process has wider exegetical implications for Adorno's construction of history, as discussed in chapter four. But it is in the history model of the *Negative Dialectics* and the lectures on history that the theoretical consequences of Adorno's inheritance of Hegel's tripartite division of the concept become apparent. As I suggested, while Adorno does not collapse the distinction between the historical particular and the historical individual, he often equates the two, particularly in the lectures on history. This has problematic implications for utilising Adorno's critique of Hegel as a means by which to immediately construct a bridge between his philosophical conception of history and the concerns of postcolonial theory. This is not only because Adorno's individual is undoubtedly often connected to the bourgeois individual, but also because his critique of Hegel omits a careful consideration of the broader implications of historical universality beyond the damage that it inflicts on the individual. Despite this, however, I suggested that Adorno's conception of the particular as that which is to be accorded the same 'right' as the universal in relation to philosophico-historical interpretation begins to offer a means by which to consider the historical process in a more global sense, because it necessitates the examination of the relation that holds between the particular and 'whole', and also requires that the particular itself is to be critiqued as that which emerges from the historical universal, but also affects this latter, rendering it particular.

Crucially, Adorno's refusal to rescind the concept of the 'individual',[563] and his emphasis on its theoretical ineliminability, cannot straightforwardly be dismissed as a blind spot in his thought, arising from nostalgia for the 'liberal period' or otherwise. Rather, the ineliminability of the individual as concept must be understood as arising from Adorno's idea that *despite* the way in which the idea of the 'individual' as a substantial entity (which it never in fact was) has becomes increasingly otiose in the context of the integrative processes of the twentieth-century, individuation as a process remains the chief form of socialisation in capitalism, which is in fact in part what blocks the possibility of the historical realisation of collective forms of subjectivity, and, by implication, attempts to conceptualise the latter. But this insight is in tension with Adorno's idea that *some* historical potentiality is contained in the differentiation that individuality gives rise to. In chapter four, I criticised Deborah Cook's focus on this aspect of Adorno's account in relation to the concept of the *Gesamtsubjekt* not because it is entirely inaccurate as a reading of Adorno, but rather because it has a tendency to obscure the idea that, for Adorno, the process of individuation is in large part a negative, bad result of the historical process, and thus only something that points to historical possibility in a very limited sense. Adorno's focus on the individual as something that 'survives' itself must be understood

[563] I am referring to Adorno's concept of the 'individual' as signifying the 'individual member of the human species' rather than 'individual' as a logical category.

in relation to the Marxian dimensions of his analysis, and the actual material transformations (understood as a change in the relations of production) that would need to take place for any real collective form of subjectivity to emerge. But, in terms of theory, and the philosophical construction of history, Adorno's emphasis on the individual points to the continued necessity of raising the question of the role played by individualisation, and its relation to capitalism, within the historical present rather than simply stepping over it in attempting to formulate the possibilities of more collective forms of historical subjectivity. The concept of the *Gesamtsubjekt* is in this sense a necessary theoretical gap or empty space, for Adorno, that points to the impossibility of theoretically substantiating an entity that relies on actual material change, at least from within the bounds of Adorno's thought. But the *Gesamtsubjekt* also points to the figure of a possible realisation of a *collectivity* in Adorno's thought, where the 'collective' would be entirely different from 'society'. Despite the concept's inadequacy for attempts to formulate the possibility of a more collective subjectivity from the perspective of our own socio-historic present, it exercises an important function in conceptual terms. It suggests that theorisations of the realisation of more collective forms of subjectivity cannot simply step over the idea of the individual given that it has itself become part of the 'object' that the 'subject' confronts, as well as that which might contain traces of a more shared subjectivity. Developing further the idea of a negative universal history would require a re-consideration of the relation between individual and the universal, particularly in relation to forms taken by subjectivity that are not only limited to the bourgeois individual.

In terms of the second problematic, while Adorno's sociological and historico-philosophical thought cannot be thought in their separation, as sociological claims underlie Adorno's philosophico-historical claims and vice-versa, it appears that certain insufficiencies in Adorno's philosophical consideration of history stem from his reliance on ideas that are too quickly transposed from his theory of society. As I suggested in the fifth chapter, this is particularly true when it comes to Adorno's consideration of the *world-historical* and his idea of 'society' in the 'strong sense'. Thus, in lieu of an examination of the means by which the negative universal has in fact come to be 'universal', or accounting for the processes that lead to the spread of the exchange principle, underlying which seems to be some conception of Marx's concept of the world market, Adorno focuses on the increasing integration and functionalisation of society. But while this has problematic implications for substantiating the concept of the negative universal and leaves Adorno open to the charge of Eurocentrism, his sociological concept and critique of integration could usefully be developed further, by moving it beyond an analysis of the integration of the working-class in bourgeois society to an examination of the integration that occurs on a global scale, which Adorno himself appears to regard as necessary but does not undertake. This would thematise both the manner in which

various divergent areas come to be co-opted in an ongoing process of totalisation and the resulting process of adaptation that itself has problematic implications for the mapping of historical causation, and also the *failure* of this process and the disintegrative processes that are its result. I further suggested that Adorno treatment of 'universal history' points to an interesting problematic, which is that, while the 'world' appears to be increasingly homogeneous which seems to *confirm* the existence of a universal element within the historical process, this is contradicted by existing discrepancies that show this homogeneity to be false. However, these differences do not *disprove* the existence of the universal element but rather points to the fact that this universal, because it is also particular, continues to create actual historical difference.

In fact, as I argued in chapter four, Adorno's concept of the social totality has important implications for the theorisation of historical temporality, in particular, the relation that he posits between the static and dynamic elements that can in fact be read alongside his conception of history as a process that consists of determinate negation. Society understood as a 'false totality' requires a form of historical interpretation, because it has come to be, but an examination of its constituent parts also brings to surface the discontinuous elements of the historical process, as the various enclaves and 'relics' that remain non-identical with the whole, and yet are required for the latter to function at all. This is then what partially allows for the construction of a negative universal history. The consideration of society as false totality is that which leads Adorno to propose the existence of particular temporalities that are non-synchronous with one another, but that are nonetheless negatively unified in an ongoing process of totalisation. Such considerations are largely absent from his philosophical treatment of the historical process that tends to omit a more substantial analysis of how the theorisation of historical temporality relates to the task of thinking history, although as I suggested in chapter five, his conception of the dialectical method is premised on this idea, as evidenced in his lectures on dialectics. Adorno's consideration of the relation that holds between whole and parts suggests a means by which the historical process can be constructed critically today because it i) offers a theorisation of the process of totalisation that continuously absorbs, both successfully and unsuccessfully, non-identical aspects, and also suggests that ii) this process relies on this co-option of elements that appear to be outside of it and are internally antagonistic, and finally suggests that iii) the socio-historic discontinuities and internally antagonistic relations that are the result of this process of (false) totalisation can but do not necessarily point to the new. Yet, as fragments of the total process, these aspects only point to the possibility of the new in an oblique way.

From Adorno's earliest writings to his latest, the new-old relation or the new-archaic relation, and its correlates the prehistory-history and the natural history-social history relation, form

recurring conceptual doublings. It is one of Adorno's central contentions that historical phenomena that present themselves as *new* are in fact often the old in disguise, or, on a more minimal level, that the new contains elements of the old, and vice versa. While generative from an interpretive point of view, the implications of this for historical construction remain ambivalent. Adorno's early development of the concept of natural history in 'The Idea of Natural-History' and the history of (pre)subjectivity that appears in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* criticises the particular kind of consciousness of historical temporality (that is itself societally constituted) which continually misidentifies and represses natural phenomena and misrecognises elements that could lead to an altered conception of the historical process as embedded in nature. In Adorno's later thought, this is connected to the negative dialectical method and the anamnestic procedure that should underlie the pursuit of the recollection of the elements of repressed nature latent within concepts that contain within themselves traces of the (natural) history of their own formation. The implication is that this conceptual process of attempting to recuperate the seemingly 'old' could lead to the possibility of recalibrating the relation that holds between history and nature, at least in theoretical terms.

This last point is fundamental to considering Adorno's development of the concept 'history' from the vantage point of the present. I suggested in the second chapter that Adorno's concept of natural history cannot easily be foisted on to theorisations of environmental catastrophe given that as a concept and as an interpretive procedure it registers a crisis of meaning in the signification of concepts that are used to denote supposedly opposing temporalities and does not arise from a theorisation of a crisis of first nature, at least not in a direct sense. It rather forms a means to critique both false naturalisations and false historicisations and counters the idea that that either 'nature' or 'history' can be installed as a ground that could allow for the possibility of some form of return to an origin, either theoretically or socio-historically. Furthermore, reading Adorno as a proto environmentalist would simply be anachronistic given that an awareness of climate change and theorisations of environmental crisis had only just began to emerge in the 1960s and had yet to become widely disseminated in his own lifetime.

However, for Adorno, the necessity of interpretation from the point of view of natural history is also indisputably bound up with an underlying conception of the way in which first nature is dominated and exploited for the purposes of preservation, both on a societal and individual level. The importance of this for theorisations of the historical process today is clear. It suggests an explanatory framework through which environmental crisis can partially be understood; that is, as the outcome of a mostly unconscious historic process that emerged largely from attempts to dominate first nature (internal and external) and the ensuing production of a second nature that results in historical repetition because of the underlying and unresolved (bad) particularity and universality that structure this process. Adorno's idea of

history as the domination of nature could therefore be said to have taken on a new timeliness and significance in the socio-historic present, even though, as I argued in chapter one and chapter five, this idea is misunderstood if it is taken to signify that history in toto can simply be understood as a linear process that is solely constituted by the continuity of domination.

The construction of a negative universal history is in part premised on the need to discern the contradiction that exists between the material conditions that could lead to actual progress and transformation, and the structure of the socio-historic process that prevents these potentialities from being realised. This takes place not only as the philosophical interpretation and critique of the historical process and the concept 'history' itself, but also through the theoretical attempt to identify the way in which the 'whole process is seeking to move, and to deduce from that whether and how one might intervene in this tendency',[564] as discussed in chapter four in relation to Adorno's conceptualisation of tendency. It is a pity that the brief comparison Adorno draws between non-identity thinking and the delineation of 'tendencies' in the lectures *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society* is not further elucidated and developed outside of Adorno's lectures. It appears to express an idea that is fundamental to Adorno's examination of the historical process but that remains only latent in *Negative Dialectics*; that is, the idea that historical phenomena are to be interpreted and criticised in relation to the possible future developments that could emerge from them, rather than only as parts of an unchangeable past, and that this offers the possibility of forms of intervention, both theoretical and practical, in the socio-historic present.

[564] *IS*, 149; *ES*, 250.

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