Negativity and Democracy

How do we get out of here? We know that capitalism is a catastrophe for humanity, but we seem to be trapped. All our struggles seem to lead us back to the same starting point: the reproduction, in one way or another, of the logic of capital, the logic of death and destruction. We desperately need to break the grammar of capital, the conceptual and organisational framework that leads us round and round in circles. That is why Vasilis Grollios’s book is so important. It is not just an excellent development of an intellectual tradition: it confronts us with the need to break deadening, death-bringing mainstream theory. Read it.

John Holloway, Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla

The current political climate of uncompromising neoliberalism means that the need to study the logic of our culture—that is, the logic of the capitalist system—is compelling. Providing a rich philosophical analysis of democracy from a negative, non-identity, dialectical perspective, Vasilis Grollios encourages the reader not to think of democracy as a call for a more effective domination of the people or as a demand for the replacement of the elite that currently holds power. In doing so, he aspires to fill in a gap in the literature by offering an out-of-the-mainstream overview of the key concepts of totality, negativity, fetishization, contradiction, identity thinking, dialectics and corporeal materialism as they have been employed by the major thinkers of the critical theory tradition: Marx, Engels, Horkheimer, Lukacs, Adorno, Marcuse, Bloch and Holloway.

Their thinking had the following common keywords: contradiction, fetishism as a process and the notion of spell and all its implications. The author makes an innovative attempt to bring these concepts to light in terms of their practical relevance for contemporary democratic theory.

Vasilis Grollios is an independent postdoctoral researcher in political philosophy.
Democracy is being re-thought almost everywhere today: with the widespread questioning of the rationalist assumptions of classical liberalism, and the implications this has for representational competition; with the Arab Spring, destabilizing many assumptions about the geographic spread of democracy; with the deficits of democracy apparent in the Euro-zone crisis, especially as it affects Greece and Italy; with democracy increasingly understood as a process of social empowerment and equalization, blurring the lines of division between formal and informal spheres; and with growing demands for democracy to be reformulated to include the needs of those currently marginalized or even to include the representation of non-human forms of life with whom we share our planet.

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Negativity and Democracy is about a time out of joint and false promises. Conventional democratic processes have been rocked by populist assertions about making this or that political economy great and strong again. Economic strength was lost in 2008 when the global economy went into financial meltdown. Populism feeds on miserable social situations. It identifies what is wrong but does not ask about the conditions of a wronged world. Its lament is eternal and self-serving.

Negativity and Democracy recognizes that the satisfaction of human needs is not innate to a form of social reproduction in which time is money. Why really does human social reproduction take the form of money as more money? Wealth as more money comprises a form of social reproduction, in which each individual carries the bond with society in her pocket. Making more money is the necessary means of avoiding bankruptcy. Money that does not bring forth living offsprings posits no wealth. It posits unemployment, entails the risk of liquidation and renders precarious the connection between what Hegel called the class tied to work and the means of subsistence. For the sake of recovering the dynamic of abstract wealth, of money as more money, the achievement of greater labour productivity is of the essence; it increases the time available for the valorization of money. Indeed, failure to make a profit entails great danger. To the vanishing point of death, the life of the class tied to work hangs by the success of turning her labour into profit as the fundamental condition of achieving and sustaining wage-based access to the means of life. The alternatives are bleak. The struggle to sustain access to the means of life is relentless. Yesterday’s profitable appropriation of some other person’s labour buys another man’s labour power today; for the buyer it is means of profit and, on the pain of ruin, a profit has to be extracted from its employment. For the seller, the sale of labour power establishes access to the means of subsistence. She works for profit in order to live. In the form of money as more money, the wealth of nations does not recognize human needs. It recognizes the necessity of profit. In this form of wealth the satisfaction of human needs is a mere sideshow.
For the class tied to work, the class struggle is the objective necessity of the false society. That is to say, class struggle is not a positive category of history in the making. It is an entirely negative category. The struggle to make ends meet is therefore not an ontological privilege. Rather, it manifests a great misfortune. Class struggle is innate to the false society. It belongs to its concept.

Negativity and Democracy is about this misfortune, which it recognizes as the constitutive principle of capitalist society. It asks about the character of its normative forms that posit freedom, democracy and equality as the rightful norms of private property. Private property represents social propriety. The demand for a freedom from want does not. It violates the laws of private property. Democracy is the truth of private property but private property is not the truth of democracy. What then can we hope for? Negativity and Democracy thinks through the time of abstract wealth to ascertain its innate dynamic, the constitution of its political form, the state, and its organizational principle of democratic government. The contemporary crisis of liberal democracy manifests a crisis of the democratic legitimacy of the entire system of political economy. It has gone hand in hand with the resurgence of democratic appeals. This resurgence has to do with the populist tidal wave on the political right and the political left that has enlivened liberal democracy by demagogic righteousness and irrational proclamation that something can be done and will be done for the benefit of a national society, if only the people knew whom to follow. Populism is as thoughtless and dangerous as the idea that the dynamic of a definite system of wealth depends ultimately on the power and conviction of the sociopolitical forces, their parties and populist figureheads, that govern through the state. Populism personalizes the political in the role of the leader and his followers, and it identifies and personalizes the ‘wrongdoers’: Germans in Europe, Mexicans in the States, Syrian refugees in Austria, bankers and speculators globally. Populism declares what is wrong, identifies the wrongdoer and asserts the will to political action with moral certitude. Populism resents the poor. It has eyes only for power. It identifies poverty as a means for political success, berating and proclaiming. Critical thought is abhorrent to it. It feeds on misery, promises salvation and appeals with triumphalist certainty that respect for the traditional values and eternal laws of private property will reinvigorate a devitalized society to stand up for itself, making the nation strong again.

The populist illusion is real. The illusion says that the profitable accumulation of money that yields more money does not really count; what counts is the satisfaction of human needs. It suggests that the life of the class tied to work should not hang by the success of turning her labour into profit as the fundamental condition of maintaining wage-based access to the means of life; what counts is goodness. It says that debt is not a mortgage on future surplus value; what counts is consumption. It rejects
as absurd that useful things, which cannot be turned into profits, can be burned; what counts is the satisfaction of needs. What counts are community, health, existence, education, human warmth, affection, a place to live and so forth. The illusion of the epoch recognizes what really counts and, yet, does not know what it is talking about. The reality of its illusion is the perpetuation of myth and the creation of myth: the populist leader, this figure of will and charisma, commands not through the rationality of law and the legality of law-making but, rather, through the illusion of omnipotence. The idea that the crisis of capitalist social reproduction can not only be resolved by the democracy of the will but also be resolved for the benefit of the dispossessed is entirely ideological and authoritarian in its calculation and manifestation.

In his *Minima Moralia* Adorno says that ‘there is a tenderness only in the coarsest demand: that no-one should go hungry any more.’1 His observation contains both a negative judgement about the capitalistically organized metabolism with nature, the so-called capitalist relations of production, and a rejection of a politics that recognizes the dissatisfaction of basic human needs as a rallying cry for political success. There is no coarseness in electioneering and in the spoils of power, only false promise and professional achievement. Benevolence towards the dispossessed is a nickel and dime. Charity is a moral necessity. Give to the poor! Help them in their struggle to exist. There is no heroism of poverty. The poor eat their words to fill their bellies. Support for naked existence does not express a moral value. The morality of poverty is immoral. The paradox of a moral immorality calls for resolution—for Kant, reason was to lead the exodus of humanity from immaturity and he thus formulated the categorical imperative of human emancipation from conditions of human dissatisfaction. Marx argues with similar reason that all relations have to be overthrown in which Man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken and despicable being. Tenderness towards the enslaved does not resolve enslavement. It makes enslavement bearable—for the tender-hearted. Misery revolts.

Especially in miserable times, the work of the scholar is by necessity negative. Reconciliation with a system of wealth in which the satisfaction of human needs is just a sideshow is quite impossible. It does not contain affirmative values. Negativity and reason belong together. Reason demands social relations, in which humanity is no longer a means of abstract wealth but, rather, a purpose of social wealth. The negation of society entails the categorical imperative of human emancipation. Without this imperative, negation is nothing, just as Heidegger’s idea of mere being, a purposeless existence that is entirely at the mercy of those who

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dictate life and death. The turn from the freedom to compete to the freedom to dictate, select, maim and kill occurs within the framework of a single social order. The critique of the latter entails the critique of the former.

The critique of the freedom to compete belongs to the populist left. It rejects all discrimination and inequality. It also rejects economic exploitation and political domination. It seeks government to end all exploitation and domination. Most importantly, it rejects war. It stands for solidarity and collective purposes, peace and tranquillity, tolerance and understanding. The humanization of social relations is the purpose and end of the critique of political economy. However, the effort of humanizing is confronted by the paradox that it presupposes the existence of inhuman conditions. Inhuman conditions are not just an impediment to humanization but a premise of its concept. Mere rejection of discrimination, exploitation, domination and war manifests the illusion of civil society. It posits society as an ‘as if’ of civilized social relations, against which it measures the irrational, exploitative, discriminative relations of a bloodied world. Devoid of a conception of the actual relations of life that give rise to the demands for humanization, the populist appeal of practical humanism resides in the fact that it does ‘not talk about the devil’. Instead it ‘looks on the bright side’. It derives its programme of the new society from the perspective of the bright side view. In this perspective, everything good is possible. Once radicalized, it views society with a claim to moral superiority, social justice, political correctness, economic fairness and political power. In this manner the capitalist social relations remain entirely untouched by thought. The bright side view of the great society is a piece of the politics it was supposed to lead out of.

_Negativity and Democracy_ recognizes that misery revolts. It develops negative dialectics as a critique of political economy. The time of money and the time of democracy, the democracy of the communist individual, belong to different conceptions of society; the first belongs to traditional theory that regards the false totality of society as a praiseworthy object for scientific statements and calculations, and the second to the critical theory of society that recovers the actual relations of life in the false totality of abstract wealth and its political form, the form of the state. This book is about the time of democracy. The time of democracy amounts to an entirely negative critique of the time of abstract wealth. _Negativity and Democracy_ moves powerfully from Marx’s critique of political democracy as the denial of social autonomy via Horkheimer’s conception of critical theory as a critique of positivism in all its shades to the false prominence of Lukács as a thinker of the impossibility and necessity of the communist individual. Then Adorno, followed by Marcuse and Bloch: thinking cracks the illusion of false dawns, and finds hope not in the nihilism of bourgeois life but in its negation. _Negativity and Democracy_ does not look on the bright side. It does not recognize misery as an aberration
of an otherwise civilized society nor does it identify misery as a means of self-serving political ends, spoils and power. It understands that the conception of our civilized society and its abstract form of wealth are a matter of comprehending the human social practice that constitutes it. Its comprehension entails the negative reason of democracy as social autonomy.

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I would like to thank a number of persons for their help in the last seven years that the study for this book lasted. First and foremost I owe a very big thanks to professor Werner Bonefeld. He agreed to be my supervisor for the year I did a postdoctoral research in York. After a PhD on liberalism I was at an intellectual impasse regarding Marxism since many of the ideas that are usually attributed to Marx, which follow traditional Marxism, can also be met in the classical liberal tradition. He totally changed my understanding of dialectics and critical theory. He devoted a lot of time and bother in order to personally discuss issues with me, organize a reading group, read the whole manuscript and comment on it. His foreword touches on the core ideas of the book. I also would like to thank Professor Joseph Fracchia for reviewing the biggest part of the book and for sending a positive review of my book proposal to Routledge, political theorists Yiorgos Moraitis and Christos Memos for their personal friendship and discussions we had all these years, Professors John Holloway and Emmanuel Angelidis for their encouragement, Professor Tony Burns for his support and advice and my copy editor, Soren Aspina, who worked on the biggest part of the book. I also must thank the organizers of the conferences where I have presented parts of the book: Manchester Workshops in Political Theory and the Historical Materialism Toronto conference, both in 2010, the 5th International Critical Theory Conference in Rome and the Critical Theory conference in London, both in 2012, the Philosophy and Crisis International Conference at the University of Ioannina, Greece, in 2013, and the Global Adorno conference, organized by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis in 2016. I must not omit to mention how impressed I am by the impeccable professionalism of the Routledge team: Senior Acquisitions Editor Natalja Mortensen, her assistant Lillian Rand and the senior editors of the Advances in Democratic Theory series, David Chandler and Paulina Tambakaki. Finally, I must underline my gratitude to my parents.
Introduction*

The current political climate of uncompromising neoliberalism and its social effects means that the need to study the logic of our culture—that is, the logic of the capitalist system—is compelling. After the crisis of 2008 we have witnessed uprisings in Stockholm, London, Athens, Istanbul, the Arab revolutions and the Occupy movement. However, despite the crisis and the fact that many people regard bourgeois parliamentary democracy as a system that does not and cannot express their needs, the same model persists. People have become even more shackled within its intellectual framework and look for parties or politicians who will act as saviours and alter the current political situation. Instead of debunking the philosophical anthropology, the values that are adopted by those who occupy the state and by those who support the bourgeois form of democracy, people continue to embrace and reiterate their faith in these very values—growth, interpreted as the perpetual accumulation of wealth, competition and hard work—and seek politicians who will more effectively implement them for the common good. Even parties that openly declare their socialist credentials advertise their belief in ‘growth with a human face’ and promise that they can deliver a plan that will lead to the accumulation of wealth but without the phenomena of social pathogenesis that we now experience. The result is that the capitalist mode of production and its corresponding aforementioned values that sustain bourgeois-liberal culture retain their efficacy.

Through exploring and elaborating on the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, this book challenges the view that democracy should be understood as a call for a more effective domination of the people, as

another kind of power or as a demand for the replacement of the elite that currently holds power, even by a party that claims to be socialist or Marxist. In doing so, it aims to challenge all calls for the building of a state power structure that is more favourably disposed to the masses. For the critical theorist, the concept of democracy is theorized in terms of negative dialectics. Negative dialectics attempts to make us aware of the human content that lies hidden inside fetish-forms, such as the state, the bourgeois form of democracy, values as money or the trinity formula—that is, capital, rent\(^1\) and wage. The critical theory of democracy poses the question of how it is possible for people, on the one hand, to be the only subjects of history, and on the other, to be ultimately dominated by the aforementioned forms, over which they have no control. Why does human doing—that is to say, the way that we come into contact with each other and with nature to fulfil our basic needs—take forms that we cannot control, that do not express our needs and that ultimately dominate us? Why does this content take these forms? Different parties occupy states all the time yet the logic according to which we are supposed to live remains the same. To what extent is the irrational rationality of capitalism, which evaluates everything in terms of money multiplication, being produced by ordinary people who only attempt to fulfil a decent livelihood? Could one say that we ourselves built the bars of our prison? Are we the victims of capital or should we be proud of being the crisis of it? What is it which dominates us: the state and the politicians along with the big corporations and banks or a deeper dynamic that we ourselves create? Such questions point to the complexity of the concerns of critical theory: in attempting to reveal and unravel the very essence of the apparent fetish-forms, it poses much deeper questions than those posed by traditional theory.

The notion of critique is underlined not only by Marx\(^2\) and his followers in the Frankfurt School but also by German idealism. For Kant, critical reason can fulfil only the essential demands of certainty and clarity.\(^3\) In order for this to happen ‘a critique of the faculty of reason in general’ needs to take place ‘in respect of all the cognitions after which reasons might strive independently of experience’.\(^4\) ‘In the analytical part of the critique it is proved that [. . .] we can have cognition of no object as a thing itself, but only insofar as it is an object of sensible intuition, i.e.

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1 I would like to thank Joseph Fracchia for suggesting to me that perhaps a new trinity formula should be used today: capital-finance (instead of rent) labour. Although I do think that this comment is correct I cannot dismiss reference to the trinity formula exactly as it was used by Marx since this book is also a study in the history of political and social philosophy. This apt remark should be born in the reader’s mind in all references to the trinity formula in this book.
2 The subtitle of his major work, *Capital*, is *A Critique of Political Economy*.
Reason’s autonomy presupposes the knowledge of a system of a priori principles according to which we can philosophize about the world. ‘Kantian critique is the philosophical story of how our reason [. . .] rationally reconciles itself to cognitive and moral life in a messy material world.’

In close relation with Kant for Hegel, criticism requires a standard which is just as independent of the person who makes the judgement as it of the thing that is judged—a standard derived [. . .] from the eternal and unchangeable model of what really is [. . .] The idea of philosophy is itself the precondition and presupposition without which it would only be able to set one subjective view against another for ever and ever. It is because the truth of Reason is but one, like beauty, that criticism as objective judgment is possible in principle, and it follows evidently that it only makes sense for those who have the Idea of the one identical philosophy present to their minds.

Hegel follows Kant’s view ‘that reason can and must establish a court of justice that relies on a criterion immanent to reason’. Unfortunately, Hegel does not ‘spell out how the mere idea of philosophy might constitute a convincing criterion of philosophical critique’. In the Phenomenology of Spirit he accuses Kant of dualism, since for him the object one knows is independent from the process of knowing. The journey that the spirit takes in order to move forward from dualism towards the absolute knowledge and thus to certainty is described by Hegel in the aforementioned book.

For Marx, critique is the critique of the things that appear as naturalized, fetishized, transhistorical concepts, such as money as a social

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5 Ibid., p. 115.
8 Ibid., p. 276.
10 Ibid., p. 88.
relation, as ‘a mystification of capital in its most flagrant form’,\textsuperscript{12} the state as the absolute and only form that organizes common affairs, and the bourgeois parliamentary system as the only and the best possible form of representation of the people’s interests. It is a notion that debunks reification, the form of consciousness that accepts the movement of things as that to which human beings must submit.

‘[T]he truly philosophical criticism [. . .] not only shows up contradictions as existing; it explains them, it comprehends their genesis, their necessity [. . .] comprehending [. . .] consist[s] [. . .] in grasping the specific logic of the specific subject.’\textsuperscript{13}

The contradictions\textsuperscript{14} that we experience in our everyday lives through living in capitalism appear to be the real content of the foregoing entities that now should be considered as forms, as ways of appearance of these contradictions. So, instead of doing a different classification of the fetish-forms, of proposing for example another relation between the state and financial institutions, we must attempt to bring to the fore the origins of their content in alienated labour, in the contradictory way with which we sustain our livelihood. We must open the thing itself and see within it. Alienation in our everyday lives will now be connected to democratic theory.

In the concrete expression of a living world of ideas, as exemplified by law, the state, nature, and philosophy as a whole, the object itself must be studied in its development; arbitrary divisions\textsuperscript{15} must not be introduced, the rational character of the object itself must develop as something imbued with contradictions in itself.\textsuperscript{16}

This book is essentially an explanation of how critique, as the notion is used by Marx and those who expand on it, functions in relation to the claim for democracy.

The analysis of the tradition that this book covers is from a non-mainstream perspective. I endeavour to show both that the prevailing accusation that the philosophy of the early Frankfurt School theorists


\textsuperscript{14} For a focused study on the notion of contradiction in capitalism from a Marxist perspective see David Harvey, \textit{Seventeen Contradictions and the End of Capitalism}, Profile Books, London, 2015.

\textsuperscript{15} ‘Divisions’ has been translated as ‘classifications’ elsewhere. See K. Marx, Letter to His Father, in L.D. Easton and K.H. Guddat (eds.) \textit{Writings of the Young Marx on Philosophy and Society}, Doubleday, Indianapolis, 1967, p. 43.

Introduction

is non-political and non-practical is erroneous and that the Frankfurt School’s conceptualization of defetishization requires that we reject subordinating our doing to the demands of the accumulation of wealth now, without having a pre-prepared plan in place. Through turning the topsy-turvy world on its head, through non-identity thinking, we can advance a critical thinking that challenges capitalist logic by opening cracks in it, even though we cannot know with certainty where these cracks will lead. Non-identity thinking ‘only gives voice to the mystery of that reality’, and in so doing brings negativity and human suffering to the fore. Identity thinking expresses the fact that people who are forced to succumb to the logic of ‘time is money’ adopt the same values in order to continue to be haunted by the logic of profit and therefore reject any different cultural logic. Yet, the struggle for human dignity does not encompass a search for governmental stability, healthy growth, hard work, competition and the accumulation of wealth. Rather, the struggle begins with our scream, with the negative restlessness of our ‘misfitting’ to the rule of money, to a cultural logic that wants to identify everything to the ethics of a specific philosophical anthropology. Our scream unfolds in our power to say no to the pressure of socially necessary labour time, and thus to the logic of ‘time is money.’ To date, no other study has attempted to draw such a strong connection between the first generation of theorists from the Frankfurt School and Marx’s theory of dialectics, and especially his notion of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. This book’s analysis of negativity, which is the key concept of dialectical thinking, and its connection to democracy, is an issue that has been neglected by the majority of the studies that have advanced radical theories of democracy. Negativity carries two meanings. First, that of human suffering, and second, our reaction against that suffering. Putting negativity at the forefront of our democratic theory fully transforms our perspective of what is healthy, reasonable, rational and normal for a democracy.

In this philosophical tradition, which began with Marx, dialectics is neither simply the study of the laws of history nor the historical tendencies that have developed, but rather the study of the mediation, the intertwine-ment of form/appearance and essence/content. Dialectical thinking opens up the fetishized, objectified forms by revealing their origin in our alienated, objectified labour. Through this, it reveals their inherently negative character. No matter how tied together the forms/appearances are or how closed and fetishized they appear to be, they cannot hide the negation

18 “In the beginning is the scream. We scream.” Holloway, 2002, p. 1. See also the first chapter of Change the World without Taking Power, entitled ‘The Scream’.
19 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.
that lies at the heart of their essence, the fact that the system fails us. In
the tradition of negative dialectics, philosophy has a corporeal character
because all its concepts and categories are expressions of the way in which
physical pain manifests itself in inverted, perverted forms, the very forms
that are classified and reified by traditional theory. Even if the reader does
not subscribe to the practical conclusions that I reach regarding how we
might strive to bring about change, my hope is that the new perspective
that I aspire to bring to the subject will be appreciated.

In this study, I support the idea that the early theorists of the Frank-
furt School employed a dialectics that was negative and open. For these
theorists, critical theory has a specific meaning and purpose, which is to
denaturalize and thus defetishize the forms that make up the topsy-turvy
world by penetrating to their real content, thus revealing the hidden
human content of the forms. This conceptualization of critical theory is
at odds with the way in which most researchers currently use the term:
they attribute to it a vague meaning that has very little to do with how it
was perceived by the founders of the critical theory tradition—that is, the
first generation of Frankfurt School theorists.

My hope is that a critical-negative analysis can help us act in open
and negative terms towards social reality and thus understand the
non-apparent, hidden character of social fetish-forms, such as the state,
value as money and the bourgeois-liberal-representative form of democ-

This book aspires to fill a gap in the literature by providing a philo-
sophical analysis of democracy from a negative, non-identity, dialectical
and thus critical perspective. It attempts to offer a unique overview of the
key concepts of totality, negativity, fetishization, reification, contradiction, mystification, identity thinking, dialectics and corporeal material-
ism as they have been employed by the major thinkers of the critical
theory tradition—Marx, Engels, Horkheimer, Lukacs, Adorno, Marcuse,
E. Bloch and J. Holloway. Previous studies on negativity have focused on
different philosophers from those covered in this book.

20 I would like to add on this point that fetishism or fetishization is animating, giving
human attributes to things, whereas reification is a form of consciousness that accepts
the movement of things as that to which human beings must submit. Considering this
fetishism is the term to be met most frequently in my book.

21 I know of only two studies which philosophically elaborate negativity. The first is Diana
Coole’s Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructural-


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For the Frankfurt School/critical theory, democracy is elaborated in terms of the logic of the ‘topsy-turvy world’ analysed in the third volume of Capital. In brief, this ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’\textsuperscript{22} can be explained thus: as ‘personifications of economic categories’\textsuperscript{23} we live under the domination of inverted, distorted forms (e.g., the state, parliamentary representative democracy and value as money) that express the perverted form that our doing must take in order to continuously help money multiply itself. Thus, in the capitalist mode of production, the way in which people come into contact with each other in order to satisfy their basic human needs leads not to the satisfaction of their needs via money but to the satisfaction of the need for money to multiply itself via people’s work. Rather than people becoming the real subject of history, capital becomes the subject and uses people for its needs. What could be more irrational than this?

‘Modern bourgeois society [. . .] is like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.’\textsuperscript{24} In this book it will be analysed why people cannot control the powers, the fetish-forms they create by their doing in their everyday living.

Thus, fetishism is a phenomenon that is connected to more than simply the product of our labour and extends beyond the sphere of political economy. Marx’s concept of the ‘inverted’ ‘topsy-turvy world’ implies that fetishism should be understood as a general phenomenon that permeates the entire spectrum of our daily lives.

The objective conditions essential to the realization of labour are \textit{alienated} from the worker and become manifest as \textit{fetishes} endowed with a will and a soul of their own.\textsuperscript{25} [. . .] In capital, as in money, certain \textit{specific social relations of production between people} appear as \textit{relations of things to people}, or else certain social relations appear as the \textit{natural properties of things} in society.\textsuperscript{26}

Moreover, fetishism should be understood as a process that people themselves create every time they bow to the philosophical anthropology that sustains the capitalist mode of production, the ethics of this

\textsuperscript{22} K. Marx, \textit{Capital}, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 1005.
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anthropology being that of ‘time is money.’ When fetishism is viewed in this way, revolution does not simply and solely take place at the level of the state but instead becomes a revolution in our everyday life. Similarly, the demand for democracy is connected not simply to the state or to the role of the economic elite but is examined in connection to human suffering, to the contradiction underpinning our existence in capitalism. This contradiction means that people are haunted by the logic of ‘time is money’ and are forced to transform their concrete labour into abstract labour (i.e., into money) in order to survive. In so doing, they produce and reproduce the entire social structure and the reified forms that are necessary for the accumulation of money by money, through competition, to take place. The contradiction that we experience in our daily efforts to sustain a livelihood appears as the following forms: the state, the bourgeois form of democracy, values as money and the trinity formula of capital, rent and wage. It is this contradiction that is the real content of each and all of these fetish-forms.

Labour time is very important in capitalism since this is the source of profits. In summary, the capitalist buys two commodities, constant capital and variable capital. Constant capital is the machinery, land building, raw material and in general the non-human parts of the production. Variable capital is human labour. Constant capital is known beforehand in terms of how long it will last in contrast to variable capital, which is not. It depends on how fast the wage workers will work and on how disciplined they will be to the working conditions imposed on them. ‘The difference between [...] the sum of value required on average by labor-power for its own daily reproduction and the new value that the individual worker is able to produce in one day under normal conditions accounts exactly for the surplus value.’ The faster and more he works the cheaper his commodity labour power is since the more surplus value he produces. Exploitation is this ‘theft of alien labour time, which is the basis of present wealth’. ‘The were-wolf’s hunger for surplus-labour’ is insatiable. ‘The worker is here nothing more than personified labour time.’

‘Time is IN FACT the active existence of the human being. It is not only the measure of human life. It is the space for its development. And

29 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 251.
30 Ibid.
31 Capital letters are used in the original text.
the ENCROACHMENT OF CAPITAL OVER the TIME OF LABOUR is the appropriation of the life, the mental and physical life, of the worker.32

The value of the commodity labour power appears in the form of the wage as the value of labour. Commodities have a use value because of their utility33 and an exchange value, which can be expressed in terms common to them all, since ‘all are reduced to one and the same sort of labour, human labour in the abstract’.34 ‘That which determines the magnitude of the value of any article is the amount of labour [. . .] time socially necessary for its production,’35 which is the average socially necessary labour time. Just like commodities have a twofold nature, labour too is a commodity with the same twofold nature. Marx stresses that ‘I was the first to point out and to critically examine this twofold nature of the labour contained in commodities.’36 He also goes on to write that the existence of the double character of the ‘labour represented in the commodity [. . .] is, in fact, the whole secret of the critical conception.’37 ‘Labour which creates exchange value is thus abstract labour.’38 Our existence in capitalism is inherently antagonistic, contradictory, because of the twofold character of labour.39 ‘The labour time socially necessary for their [products’] production forcibly asserts itself like an overriding law of Nature.’40 Those who will not follow the demands of abstract labour,41 of the logic of ‘time is money,’ will not be able to follow the rest in the competitive race of profits and thus will finally be kicked out of the market. Marx stresses the importance of time when he maintains that ‘If we presuppose communal production, the time factor naturally remains essential.’42

The regulation of production ‘through the direct and conscious control of society over its labour time [. . .] is only possible under common ownership’.43 At the moment, Marx underlines, it takes place ‘through

33 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 46.
34 Ibid., p. 48.
35 Ibid., p. 49.
36 Ibid., p. 51.
40 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 86.
the movement of commodity prices’. Socialism or communism would be another philosophy of time. ‘Economy of time, as well as the planned distribution of labour time [. . .] remains the first economic law if communal production is taken as the basis.’ Therefore, if the twofold character of labour is the secret of critique, a critical understanding of democracy must be directly related to abstract, alienated labour. Unfortunately, this is not how democracy is investigated by mainstream social philosophy today. My book will be one of the very few which attempt to investigate the relation between critique and alienated labour and then reach conclusions on how this can change our understanding of democracy.

It should be underlined that despite the apparent differences between modern capitalism and capitalism in the period in which the Frankfurt School theorists were writing, I maintain that the ongoing post-2008 economic crisis means that the Frankfurt School’s concept of critique as theorized between the 1930s and the 1970s remains highly relevant today and that the return to critical theory can be justified in the face of a seemingly different type of capitalist structure. Nevertheless, in view of the apparently changed face of contemporary capitalism, some present-day theorists, who have caused a lot of discussion among contemporary social theorists, have either directly or indirectly put aside Marx’s dialectics and the theory of the Frankfurt School. Among the most well known are M. Hardt and T. Negri, and M. Lazzarato and L. Boltanski.

Despite Negri confessing ‘how fundamental the discovery of negativity as productive principle was in my earliest philosophical formation, as well as how fundamental such a principle has continued to be throughout my entire philosophical development’, he considers that the ‘dialectic simply constitutes a largely inadequate, constrictive, and domesticating way of dealing with negativity. The point is that precisely because negativity produces, it destroys the dialectic.’ For Negri, the ‘creative element [in Marxism] was imprisoned within its dialectical strictures, namely, power.’ Negri’s autonomist Marxism therefore holds that the postmodern era (the beginnings of which he traces to the events of 1968) cannot be theorized dialectically. Among the main characteristics of this new era has been a change in the composition of the labour process and labour power:

Laboring processes were radically modified by the automation of factories and by the computerization of society. Immediately productive labor was displaced from the central position it had occupied during

44 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 130.
the entire previous history of the capitalist organization of society. The composition of labor power was completely modified. Workers were no longer individuals bought by a capitalist. The substance of their labor became more abstract, immaterial, and intellectual and the form of their labor more mobile.

For Negri, then, the emergence of a new subject—the ‘social worker’, ‘the multitude’—must lead political thinking towards ‘post-liberal and post-socialist projects’. Thus, this new class subject—the multitude—must be defined in broader terms than the traditional ‘working class’ because ‘the working subject is today exploited not simply in the factory but at the scale of society as a whole.’ For Negri, in the dialectics developed by Western Marxism from the 1930s through to the 1960s,

the roles played by Lukacs’ *History and Class Consciousness* and the work of the Frankfurt School were complementary. The phenomenology of agency and historicity of existence were all seen as being completely absorbed by a capitalist design of exploitation and domination over life the subsumption of society under capital was definitive. The revolutionaries had nothing to do but wait for the event that reopened history.

For Negri, Adorno and Horkheimer’s approach in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* means that alienation is ‘inevitable, inescapable’, and ‘this is where the dialectic is over and done with! This is precisely the end of the dialectic! Their account does not include or allow for even a dialectic of liberation.’ It will become clear in my exposition the huge distance that there is between Negri’s view and mine about the relation of Adorno and Horkheimer’s philosophy to that of Lukacs’s.

According to Negri,

The cognitive and immaterial labour in general that is realized in the biopolitical realm cannot be completely consumed in the process

50 Ibid., p. 273.
52 Ibid., p. 257.
of capitalist exploitation [. . .] the feature[s] of the new epoch of capitalist production show it to be an epoch of crisis and of transition outside of the continuité of capitalist development.\textsuperscript{55}

Therefore, ‘there is no longer any homology between [. . .] capitalist power and the proletarian or multitudinous movements in their specific potential.’\textsuperscript{56} It appears, therefore, that, for Negri, we live within two dimensions, the first of which is connected with capitalist power, while the other is ‘outside’\textsuperscript{57} it and is constituted by our immaterial labour that is no longer dominated by capital to the extent that it was before the advent of the postmodern age after 1968. In a similar vein, in a recent paper of his he stresses that capitalism’s response to the ‘transformations induced by the class struggle from within the industrial system [. . .] was to re-seize political control from the outside and to establish the political hegemony of the monetary sphere over the totality of social production.’\textsuperscript{58}

As a consequence, Negri holds that the task of the contemporary social philosopher must be transformed to reflect this change. ‘If Marx studied the laws of movement of capitalist society, at stake today is to study the laws of working-class labour—better still, of social activity as a whole.’\textsuperscript{59}

Since, for Negri, ‘Capital thus captures and expropriates value through biopolitical exploitation that is produced [. . .] externally to it,’\textsuperscript{60} his theory is far removed from an understanding of fetishism as a process that we ourselves create if, as in Negri’s view, ‘capital is increasingly external to the productive process and the generation of wealth.’\textsuperscript{61} Then people in Negri’s postmodern world are no longer haunted by the logic of capital in order to survive or pressured to act as ‘personifications of economic categories’ as Marx claimed. Furthermore, Negri understands the notion of totality in a fundamentally different way from that of the Frankfurt School. He writes that ‘I define the totality as other than me—as a net which is cast over the continuity of the historical sabotage that the class operates.’\textsuperscript{62} In contrast to Negri’s position, I will use the key concepts of the Frankfurt School theory to show that the potential for change

\textsuperscript{55} Antonio Negri, Some Thoughts on the Use of Dialectics, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
and movement towards democracy originates not in ‘the capacities for
the multitude to determine autonomously the political diagonal of the
transition’, but inside the totality that is formed by the irrationality of
capital, which in turn is constituted and reconstituted by our doing.

In the Frankfurt School tradition, negativity constitutes the main con-
tent of dialectics. For the theorists of the Frankfurt School, dialectics is
not, as Negri maintains, a study of ‘the laws of movement of capitalist
society’ but an analysis of the existence of contradiction and negativity
in the results of human doing. In other words, it is a means of explor-
ing the results of objectified labour, which is the hidden content of the
enchanted, perverted forms that appear to be independent of us and thus
fetishized. Here, Holloway’s criticism of Negri is apposite: ‘To under-
stand the subject as positively autonomous [. . .] is rather like a prisoner in a
cell imagining that she is already free.’ Negri’s failure to theorize nega-
tivity and contradiction, in essence the irrationality of having to adopt
the logic of time is money, as the real content of the forms ‘leads the
autonomist analysis to underestimate the degree to which labour exists
within capitalist forms’. For the critical theory tradition, we ourselves
create the ‘inverted’ ‘topsy-turvy world’ by adopting the philosophical
anthropology that sustains the capitalist mode of production. According
to Marxian dialectics and its followers in the early Frankfurt School, class
struggle does not take place primarily on the factory floor, but rather runs
throughout the whole of society. Class struggle is the conflict between
the values that sustain the irrationality of the perpetual accumulation of
profit—such as competition, hard work and accumulation of wealth—and
those of solidarity, peace and putting people above profits.

The crisis of 2008 and all the crises that have taken place in capitalism
serve to demonstrate the irrationality of the way in which we ourselves
have constructed our everyday living. It is with this in mind that Holloway
argues that

working class struggle cannot really be the starting point because
‘working class struggle’ presupposes a prior constitution of the work-
ing class [. . .] Taking working class struggle as starting point leads
us easily to the pure subject (the struggle of the Working Class),
whereas the two-fold nature of labour takes us immediately to the

64 In the first chapter, I further elaborate on Negri’s understanding of dialectics.
65 For Marx labour in capitalism is ‘objectified [. . .] alien, hostile, powerful object indepen-
dent of him.’, K. Marx, Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, in K. Marx and
p. 167.
67 Ibid., p. 174.
contradictory, desperately self-antagonistic subject [. . .] The beginning is the two-fold nature of labour or the self-antagonistic existence of doing.68

Dialectics and negativity aim to show the human content of the forms—how our doing and our alienated everyday activity are at the heart of each and every category—and through this reveal the power that we have to change the seemingly bewitched world that appears as a totality over and outside of us. In his failure to identify the negativity that lies within the perverted social relation that we continuously create (i.e., capital), Negri dispenses with negativity, despite his claims to the contrary. As the reader will see, Negri ignores the fact that we are imprisoned in a spellbound social totality that we ourselves create. The fact that labour has become increasingly immaterial after 1968 does not change the fact that it is still forced to wear the straitjacket of capital and has only one purpose, the perpetual multiplication of money by money. Even workers who, by Negri’s definition, perform immaterial labour (e.g., computer programmers and the like) must still tailor their work to meet the demands of the market—that is, the demands of competition and the accumulation of wealth, the very values that capitalism’s survival depends upon.

Another theorist who follows Negri’s approach is Maurizio Lazzarato. He too embraces the idea that today it is no longer the activity of the worker that epitomizes ‘alienation’, but the activity of the cooperation between brains organized and controlled by the logic of the firm without factories.69 [. . .] Marxism and political economy enter into a crisis because the creation and realization of common goods [. . .] are no longer explicable by their conception of the productive cooperation (organized and commanded by the capitalist).70 [. . .] [T]he trade unions and institutional left [. . .] have no answers to the blackmail operated by the ‘financial holes’ of the social budgets—the deficit [. . .] because they do not understand [. . .] that the production of wealth exceeds the capital-labour relationship.71 [. . .] The logic of finance, which functions according to the majoritarian principle of opinion and not according to the principle of exploitation, blurs the dividing lines between classes by

70 Ibid., p. 200.
71 Ibid.
establishing new divisions between those who profit and those who suffer from the accumulation of capital.\textsuperscript{72}

In Lazzarato’s theory of contemporary capitalism, the ‘function of the Welfare State has thus completely changed’ so that ‘a politics of totalization and individuation of authoritarian control’ can be implemented ‘over the indebted man’.\textsuperscript{73} Social debt is being introduced as ‘it informs and configures techniques for the control and production of users’ existence, without which the economy would not have a hold on subjectivity.’\textsuperscript{74} So intense and dispersed throughout society is the variety of these techniques of subjectivity manipulation that Lazzarato defines society as ‘the correlate of governmental techniques. Society is not a primary and immediate reality but part of the modern technology of government, its product.’\textsuperscript{75}

For Lazzarato, these new characteristics lead to the conclusion that ‘Once one leaves the factory, Marx’s teachings on the “machinic” nature of capitalism seem to be lost.’\textsuperscript{76} He holds that because Marx theorized social relations according to the difference between essence and phenomenon, his theory of totality is unable to embrace the pluralism of the contemporary world\textsuperscript{77} and that Lukacs’s concept of totality, which he contends expands significantly on Marx’s view, is more applicable to the postmodern world.\textsuperscript{78} His overall conclusion is that in Marxism there is no possibility of creations that are ‘untimely and unpredictable as they are already given or implied in the structure and stem from the essence’.\textsuperscript{79} In his view, this explains why Marxism ‘always had a great difficulty in front of movements which did not refer directly or exclusively to the class relation’.\textsuperscript{80} For the foregoing reasons, he claims that ‘we are here far beyond the various theories of domination (e.g. Frankfurt School).’\textsuperscript{81}

As for Lazzarato’s approach to the concept of class, however, it is one in which

the notion of classes as pigeonholes or ‘locations’ to which the sociologist must assign individuals ultimately invokes static and
struggle-disconnected structures. Current fordist/post-fordist debates about the class significance of work at computer terminals or in the service industries are to the same effect. These are quantitative conceptions of class, presupposing that the political significance of class can be established by counting heads. The alternative qualitative conception of class, which addresses it not as matter of grouping individuals but as a contradictory and antagonistic social relation, has hitherto been a somewhat marginalized tradition of Marxist thought.  

Lazzarato’s and Negri’s concepts of class and capital are thus rigid and closed. Lazzarato maintains that since there are multiple relations that are not directly connected to capital, capitalism must therefore operate at one level of society, function within one part of society, rather than acting upon society in its totality. For Lazzarato and Negri, then, there are multiple social relations: the capital-labour relation inside the workplace and others outside it. However, if we regard capital as the rule of money that ‘vampire-like’ sucks living labour, then Lazzarato and Negri’s position becomes less tenable. In the tradition that is explored in this book, class is a critical concept, an inverted form that when examined critically/ dialectically reveals the negativity and contradiction that lie hidden in its content.

For the Frankfurt School, society is viewed as a totality, a ‘forced unity’, because it demands the transformation of the immeasurable variety of human creativity into the measurable relation of money. Capital therefore does not pertain solely to a capitalist class, and exploitation manifests itself not only in the workplace but also every time we are forced to succumb to the logic of ‘growth’, the multiplication of wealth, to the rule of money. The question that Adorno’s theory poses is how identities, social roles, that appear not to be connected with capital are formed and how their origins lie in our alienated everyday doing, our having to fit our activity to the logic of time is money. What if these roles are perverted forms, part of the topsy-turvy world?

In contrast to Lazzarato’s belief that, because government imposes manipulative techniques on society, society can be viewed as ‘the correlate of governmental techniques’, Adorno views society as the embodiment of ‘class struggle’ precisely because society is constituted by the perverted forms that express our objectified labour. The question, then, is how is the existence of government to be explained? How is debt created and what is its relation to our alienated existence? Unlike Lazzarato, who


84 This will be elaborated upon in the chapter on Adorno.
fetishizes and mystifies the notion of government and the existence of debt, I contend that Marx’s dialectical criticism of Hegel and of bourgeois thinking in general focused on how the existence of the fetishized, mystified forms can be explained. In a critical, negative dialectical reading of debt and money, ‘the speculative dimension of accumulation and the power of labour’s insubordination are two parts of the same walnut.’

As will be shown later when I differentiate the conception of totality held by Lukács from that elaborated by Marx and Adorno, totality is not a closed category presupposed upon the existence of its parts, as Lazzarato maintains. Last, essence is not a transhistorical concept with a preformed content as Lazzarato and the Althusserians believe. By shedding light on the essence, the philosopher demystifies the fetishized forms by revealing our doing, our objectified labour, as their true content.

In The New Spirit of Capitalism, L. Boltanski and É. Chiapello adopt a similar approach to Lazzarato regarding the characteristics that capitalism began to exhibit from the end of the 1960s. According to them, the end of the 1930s saw the emergence of the second spirit of capitalism, which was critical of socialist and communist parties and inspired the compromise between the civic values of the collective and industrial necessities that underlay the establishment of the welfare state [. . .] By contrast, it was by opposing a social capitalism planned and supervised by the state [. . .] and leaning on the artistic critique (autonomy and creativity) that the new spirit of capitalism gradually took shape at the end of the crisis of the 1960s and 1970s and undertook to restore the prestige of capitalism.

By the early 1970s, the ‘multiplication of identities offered by the second spirit of capitalism was deemed still too restricted,’ and voices were raised invoking ‘a breach in the narrow framework of the conventions and

85 Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway, Conclusion: Money and Class Struggle, in Werner Bonefeld and John Holloway (eds.) Global Capital, National State and the Politics of Money, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 1995, p. 214. I refer the reader to this volume for a deeper understanding of an approach (negative dialectics) to the state and debt that is in direct contrast to that of Lazzarato.


88 Ibid.
practices associated with the second spirit of capitalism’. As labour flexibility increased, changing one’s occupation became more feasible, which in turn brought about new forms of alienation. As a result, the 1980s and 1990s saw French social critique turn away from Marxist inspiration and instead move towards the humanitarian movement and the themes of citizenship and rights. Social critique, in all its forms, now became directly associated with the experience of suffering. In fact, ‘bad experience’ and ‘indignation’ became the presuppositions of critique.

Thus far, it appears that Boltanski and Chiapello’s position seems to be close to the Frankfurt School theory, which underlines that the negativity expressed as bodily suffering is evidence of the false character of the spellbound totality of bourgeois culture. Boltanski even stresses that ‘critique cannot be determined solely by its opposition to the established order of reality […] but also […] by its reference to possibilities, already identifiable in the experience of the world.’ As I will show, this is also the case for the early Frankfurt School, since hope lies in the fact that concepts and forms do not exhaust their meaning in their current content—that is, objectified labour. If we change the content, alter our doing, then forms will be defetishized and thus changed.

Upon a closer reading, however, it becomes clear that Boltanski’s ideas are in fact far removed from a critical and negative dialectical theorization of capitalism that considers the real content of the forms to be the irrationality and perversion of subjecting our doing to the demands of the continuous multiplication of exchange value. At no point does Boltanski clarify the cause of suffering, much less connect it to the irrationality of the logic of capital. His analysis does not aspire to reveal the hidden content of the topsy-turvy world but is ‘primarily intended to be descriptive’, with critique assigned ‘a “reformist” role’. Ultimately, his theory is not anti-capitalist at all since he fails to attribute capitalism’s new problems and inequalities to the fact that it is ‘inherently unjust’ and believes that capital accumulation can be compelled by critique to control itself.

89 Ibid., p. 436.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., p. 517.
92 Ibid., p. 36.
93 In addition to the meaning of suffering, ‘negativity’ is used by the members of the Frankfurt School in order to underlie the movement of history through the negation of the current form of social affairs.
96 Ibid., p. xvi.
97 Ibid., p. 35.
98 Ibid.
As will be shown in more detail later, this kind of analysis is antima-
terialistic and antidialectal in that it ignores the contradictory way in
which we sustain ourselves in capitalism: by transforming our doing into
abstract labour, into capital and into money, capital dominates people
and transforms them into personifications of economic categories rather
than people dominating wealth and using it to fulfil basic human needs.
In Boltanski’s theory, therefore, the possibilities for change are vague at
best and are unable to open new avenues in our fight to change the world.
Ultimately, despite his efforts to re-evaluate critical thinking in light of the
changes to capitalism that occurred in the late twentieth century, these
changes are insufficient in themselves to render the ideas of Marx and the
first generation of the Frankfurt School theory anachronistic or outmoded.

Unfortunately the key terms of the school, of the dialectical tradition,
have fallen into disrepute because of the dominance of the poststructur-
alist reading of Western Marxism. However, Michael Foucault confesses
his respect for the Frankfurt School theory by saying that ‘It seems to me
that in France [. . .] an era has arrived where precisely this problem of
the Aufklärung can be approached in significant proximity to the work
of the Frankfurt school’\textsuperscript{99} and ‘if I had encountered the Frankfurt School
while young, I would have been seduced to the point of doing nothing else
in life but the job of commenting on them.’\textsuperscript{100} In the same interview pub-
lished under the title Remarks on Marx, however, he accuses the Frankfurt
School of retaining a traditional conception of the subject that aspires to
‘recover our “lost” identity, to free our imprisoned nature, our deepest
truth; but instead the problem is to move towards something Other.’\textsuperscript{101}
However, as I will attempt to show, the Frankfurt School theory does not
hold the ambition of ‘recovering a lost identity’. The use of the concept
of determinate negation by the early generation of the Frankfurt School
shatters any call for certainty and thus for an end to the dialectical pro-
cess. Foucault’s criticism of bourgeois culture is therefore much closer to
that of the Frankfurt School than he believes.

Also, Jacques Derrida, in his acceptance speech for the Adorno prize in
Frankfurt in 2001, admitted that ‘I can say “yes” to my debt to Adorno,
and on more than one count, even if I am not capable of responding ade-
quately to it.’\textsuperscript{102} He also added that if he were to write a book to interpret
the history of the prize, it would include at least seven chapters, the first of
which would be ‘A Comparative History of the French and German Lega-
cies of Hegel and Marx’. The chapter ‘would be devoted to the difference

Lotringer, Semiotex(e), New York, 2007, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{100} M. Foucault, \textit{Remarks on Marx}, Semiotext(e), New York, 1991, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., p. 121.
\textsuperscript{102} J. Derrida, Fichus: Frankfurt Address, in J. Derrida, \textit{Paper Machine}, Stanford Univer-
Introduction

between critique and deconstruction, in particular through the concepts of “determined negativity”, sovereignty, totality [. . .] fetishism’. The second chapter would be an investigation into the reception of Nietzsche by the German and the French intellectual traditions. Although a direct exploration of the relationship between poststructuralism and the Frankfurt School’s non-identity thinking falls out of the scope of my current analysis, I hope that my examination of the Frankfurt School’s philosophy can be of interest also to researchers of poststructuralist French political thinking.

It should be noted that the aim of this book is not to present a diverse collection of studies on the concept of negativity and democracy. Instead, there is a common theme running throughout the book: key to the philosophy of all the major figures of the Frankfurt School/critical theory tradition is the notion of the ‘enchanted’, bewitched, ‘topsy-turvy world’, or the ‘concept of the spell and all its implications’, which can come to the fore only with a philosophical account of the dialectics between appearance/form and essence/content. The research goal that the major thinkers of the critical theory tradition shared was to investigate how fetishism is a process that is produced and reproduced by us by and through our daily doing. Irrespective of the varied conclusions that these critical theorists reached as a result of their philosophical investigations, the concepts of negativity, contradiction and their analysis of fetishism as a process played a defining role in their understanding of the spellbound social totality, a role that is not encountered in any other social theory tradition. My study elaborates on the common perspective that these theorists shared.

Since in my view Marx’s work is the foundation of critical dialectics, this study begins with an examination of his work and its connection with that of Engels. After this, the work of Horkheimer, the founder of the Frankfurt School tradition, is explored. Before focusing on the key figure of the critical tradition, Adorno, I show how Lukacs, despite him being perhaps the first to attempt to show how fetishism is a process, can be criticized from a critical theory perspective. The Horkheimer chapter deliberately precedes the chapter on Lukacs in order to familiarize the reader with the Horkheimerian critique of Lukacs that I present. It is hoped that this chapter structure will enable the reader to follow more easily the radical perspective from which I present Adorno’s philosophy. The chapters on Marcuse, Bloch and Open Marxism build on the analysis of the earlier figures of the critical theory tradition. (After I write the chapters, I can add fuller references to them at this point.)
In the first chapter of the book, I focus on Marx’s democratic philosophy and Engels’s view on the subject prior to his writings that generated the debate on his intellectual relation to Marx. The philosophical background to Marx and Engels’s concept of democracy has not been seriously analysed by the research community thus far. Rather than focusing on one aspect of the Marx-Engels understanding of democracy, my elaboration on the subject attempts to clarify the overall development of this concept in their political theory. By providing supporting textual evidence in order to generate a precise understanding of the value-laden meaning of their use of the term ‘democracy’, my analysis links democracy with the materialist character of their philosophy for the first time. In their thinking, autonomy obtains a materialistic character, meaning it is strongly connected to the conditions of society’s reproduction and thus to the question of property. For Marx and Engels, democracy was a moment of social practice, the social form taken by the most important social relationship, capital, and is therefore, like other social forms, a process. At the end of the chapter, I differentiate my understanding of what Marx and Engels bring to the discussion on democracy from other interpretations that either reject the Marxian approach to democracy or misunderstand its materialist character, as Negri does, even though he claims to be following the Marxian path.

Most interpretations of Engels’s dialectics, which must inevitably include an examination of his philosophy of history and his relation to Marx’s dialectics, have focused on his understanding of the relation between the motion of nature and that of history in order to clarify if he predicted the outcome of class struggle and historical movement in general. In contrast to such interpretations, Chapter 2 will investigate the relation of Engels to Marx by focusing on his ‘negation of the negation’. It will be argued that Engels’s dialectics does not succeed in demystifying or defetishizing the forms that dominate us in capitalism, such as the state, because he discards both Marx’s dialectic between appearance/form and essence/content and his theory of the ‘topsy-turvy world’ as expressed in Capital. The chapter will also investigate the lessons that we might take from Engels’s failure to embrace negativity and the practical relevance of these lessons to our efforts to overcome the contemporary crisis.

Contrary to the mainstream view, which holds that Horkheimer’s pessimism stems from his dialectical materialism, Chapter 3 will defend his interpretation of dialectics and will attempt to show how the concepts within Horkheimer’s dialectics—contradiction, determinate negation, non-identity thinking and mediation—form a negative dialectic with an open character that can open cracks in capitalism, a result that was underestimated even by Horkheimer himself. In my effort to offer a comprehensive defence of Horkheimer’s ‘Open Marxism’, I will differentiate my reading from Habermas’s, Honneth’s and Postone’s readings of him. I will
argue that they all repeat the ‘crime’ that Horkheimer accuses modern intellectuals of committing.

Chapter 4 aims to bring to the surface the philosophical background of Georg Lukács’s democratic theory by investigating in depth his philosophy of dialectics. It presents an innovative interpretation of his understanding of the role of the general committee of the Communist Party in the transition to socialism and his support of Stalinism. Its aim is to investigate, in a much more rigorous way than has been done before, the relation of his theory of dialectics to the Frankfurt School’s theory of dialectics. Thus, for the first time in the literature, Lukács’s understanding of the role of the party is analysed by relating it to Max Horkheimer’s understanding of the role of the traditional intellectual. The chapter concludes that Lukács’s notion of the party has all the characteristics that Horkheimer attributes to the intellectual who follows liberal-traditional theory. Therefore, it will be argued that the problems of Lukács’s theory of democracy are due not to his adopting a ‘sleight of hand’ strategy regarding the role of the party, as most researchers believe, but to the fact that his philosophy does not succeed in disengaging itself from the bourgeois-liberal identity-thinking interpretation of fetishism, totality and contradiction.

In contrast to mainstream interpretations of Adorno, in the fifth chapter I will support the view that Adorno interprets bourgeois culture—that is, the logic of the capitalist mode of production—according to the logic of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’ analysed in the third volume of Capital. Adorno confesses that his and Horkheimer’s philosophy is concerned with the ‘concept of the spell and all its implications.’

For the first time this study will attempt to demonstrate the key role that the concept of spell plays in Adorno’s philosophy and show its connection to Marx’s idea of the topsy-turvy world. It will also investigate how Adorno’s version of dialectics and materialism helps us investigate the irrationality of the ‘spellbound totality’ and how Adorno’s corporeal materialism, which underlines the importance of bodily suffering, advances the critical character of his thinking. I will also support the unique idea that not only the concept of the spell but also all the key notions in his philosophy, such as totality, identity, immediacy, fetishism, reification, negativity, dialectics and mediation, hold an inherent political meaning that can come to the fore only if they are connected to its idea that ‘society remains class struggle.’

I will expand on Adorno’s statement that ‘The whole is false’ and will attempt to clarify what is false and untrue in our culture, and how Adorno’s thinking can help us identify

107 Ibid.
it. In addition, I will elaborate on how the notion of non-identity thinking and determinate negation can help us defetishize bourgeois culture. I will also pose the question of what the practical repercussions might be for a theory of democracy if we attempt to break the spell, demystify the false totality by bringing to the fore the dynamic element that, according to Adorno, lies inside the concepts. Finally, I will support the idea that it is indeed possible for Adorno’s philosophy of the ‘damaged’ life to retain a theory of normativity.

In the sixth chapter, I will argue that Herbert Marcuse’s philosophy is much closer to Horkheimer and Adorno’s than he himself believed since his understanding of the dialectic of essence and appearance has also its origins in Marx’s ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’ and thus he also elaborated the idea that the capitalist society cannot but be a spell-bound insane society. For the first time in literature, I will highlight in my analysis Marcuse’s suggestion that alienated labour is at the essence of the capitalist system and I will attempt to connect this argument with the other key terms of his critical theory, such as materialism and negativity. In full contrast with the mainstream reading of his philosophy, I will support the idea that following Marx, he developed the concepts of determinate negation and absolute refusal that succeed in informing us on how cracks open in the one-dimensional capitalist society.

In the chapter on Bloch, I will start by explaining how Bloch identifies the social pathology of his era. A significant part of that analysis will be about the mentality of the petit bourgeois who, without being conscious of it, reiterates in her private life the logic of the system, of the social totality—namely, that of the capitalist mode of production. Unable to penetrate through the societal objectivity of the fetish-forms, she attempts to find a way out of the alienation she experiences by following the logic closer to her—that is, that of the market, of competition and accumulation of wealth. However, by so doing she is being shackled in a vicious circle that perpetuates her existential impasse. Later, I will attempt to highlight how the core concepts of Bloch’s philosophy originate in Marx’s Capital and are used by Bloch in order to demystify identity thinking—that is, traditional theory. Last, for the first time in the literature, I will suggest that the content of his famous notion of the determinate utopia and the ‘not yet’ runs in parallel to that of opening ‘cracks’ in the bourgeois establishment.

The last chapter takes the view that current work by the Open Marxist group is representative of the best and most useful contributions of the topical and practical relevance of the first generation of Frankfurt School theory. I consider Open Marxists as inheritors of negative dialectics in the twenty-first century. The best-known Open Marxists are John Holloway and Werner Bonefeld. Although not political philosophers in the strict sense of the term, their ideas contain important philosophical insights and bring to our attention unique perspectives to a variety of
issues, including the British state, politics of the European Union, processes of social change, negative practice, and meanings associated with contemporary forms of subversion.

Considering the philosophical content of this book, my focus here will tend towards a discussion of methodological issues and the philosophical background of Open Marxism rather than an analysis of its social policies. The basic purpose here is to be among the first to offer an analysis and assessment of Open Marxism’s philosophy and its relationship to the current character of the early Frankfurt School. I will begin my analysis with Open Marxism’s criticism of structuralism and then proceed with a discussion of its approach to subversion and negativity. Following an examination of its criticism and view of state theory, as represented by Bob Jessop, I will attempt to develop Open Marxism’s own theory of the state and its understanding of the struggle against the capitalist status quo along with its proposals concerning strategies of resistance.
1 Marx and Engels’s Critique of Democracy*

The Materialist Character of Their Concept of Autonomy

Introduction

Serious consideration of the socialist understanding of democracy is imperative for us today, especially considering the advance of neoliberal policy worldwide. Bearing this in mind, a philosophically elaborated understanding of the term in the classical texts of the socialist tradition can be highly constructive for our engagement with class struggle today.

What does the term ‘democracy’ denote in the capitalist mode of production? So-called bourgeois democracy\(^1\) perpetuates the contract of labour and the existence of human rights. So, as Marx famously said, in this sphere ‘rule Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham’\(^2\). Therefore, if people revolt and overthrow the ‘democratically’ elected government, they are often accused of breaking the democratic consensus between state officials and the electorate. However, according to the Marxian critique, popular revolution is justified because in the sphere of essence there is exploitation, extraction of unpaid labour, class polarization and thus injustice.

Thus, in the capitalist mode of production, democracy becomes the form of capitalist rule. Since the state is a product of capitalist social relations, it cannot be other than a moment of this social practice, meaning it becomes the executive committee of the bourgeoisie. Unavoidably, then, ‘bourgeois democracy’ is the form that the rule of this executive committee takes. According to the socialist perspective, in order to change the way that the common issues are managed, we should abolish the state form, and this presupposes a change in the form of labour, a change in


1 I use this term for the sake of the argument since Marx and Engels used it. As will be argued later, it is a self-contradictory one.

the way people produce the wealth that enables them to satisfy their basic human needs.

Why is Marx’s critique of democracy important for contemporary political philosophers? I will establish the argument that it is important because it is in Marx and Engels’s collected works that we find the philosophical background that enables us to understand that democracy presupposes the overthrow of the capitalist system. Dialectical materialism, with its materialist conception of autonomy, provides us with solid grounds for characterizing the call for the overthrow of the capitalist system as inherently democratic and for conceiving it as a necessary step towards real democracy.

Contrary to most interpretations of Marx’s materialism, which regard it as an epistemology, as a theory severed from social practice and the values that reproduce the capitalist mode of production, my analysis supports the view that the materialist element in Marx and Engels’s theory ‘allows the question of material preconditions of social existence to come to light’.4

I will prove that this is clearly evident in their understanding of democracy since they analyse this concept materialistically, meaning that while they elaborate on democracy, they try to identify the true essence, the content of this form in social relations. This permits other values, such as freedom, autonomy and human dignity,5 which even today shape social relations and the conditions of society’s reproduction, to become reality. A serious understanding of their concept of democracy presupposes their conception of capital as a social relationship and the dialectical connection between form and essence in their philosophy.

The Philosophical Presuppositions of Democracy in Marx and Engels’s Work until 1848

Because the subjects that democracy is connected to are many and all the main ideas that preoccupied their political philosophy are strongly connected with that of democracy, a researcher can find material relevant to the connection of materialism and democracy in all the major works of Marx and Engels. However, I will pinpoint only those texts in which this connection is most apparent.

3 Such as Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-Criticism and What the “Friends of the People” Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats.
From their earliest writings, Marx and Engels make the vital distinction, for the philosophical elaboration of democracy, between form and content. In an 1842 article indicating his materialist perspective, a young Engels writes that behind every principle (form), we must try to detect the material interests (content) that serve it. From this perspective, the ‘much vaunted’ principle of English freedom is one that, like others, serves specific interests. This freedom, and the laws that stem from it, is characterized as purely formal. The ‘House of Commons is a corporation alien to the people, elected by means of wholesale bribery’ which ‘continually tramples underfoot the will of the people’.  

Thus, he rhetorically questions whether public opinion has the slightest influence on government.  

For Engels, the solution to the problem of bogus democracy is not a legal revolution, already ‘vaguely present in the minds of the workers, and of the Chartists as well’, but a ‘radical overthrow of the nobility and industrial aristocracy’, a violent revolution that will be social, not political. Engels stresses here that in order for a form to change, its corresponding content must change also.

Marx first makes evident this dialectical character of the relationship between form and content and its connection to the exploration of ‘bourgeois democracy’ in his Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law. According to Marx, Hegel subordinates the person’s will to a totality, the state, which rules the person without taking into account his or her views. In this text, Marx regards democracy as the regime that is capable of bringing to an end the dissociation of state and civil society. However, he considers democracy ‘the riddle of all constitutions’ because it is simultaneously content and form and because it is founded on the actual people, established as the people’s own work. Democracy here presupposes a change in the content of social relations. Both form and content must change in order for a truly democratic government to come into being.

Second, in On the Jewish Question, the Marxian critique of democracy is structured according to the demand for change in both form and content. Marx develops a view of individuality that is contrary to the bourgeois concept of the person, which is characterized by egotism and lack of solidarity. In Marx’s view, one must examine the relationship between political (form) and human liberation (essence, content). Marx’s ultimate goal is social liberation, since only through this can the claims of Christianity and of democracy be realized.

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p. 374.
This dialectical relationship between form and essence, the fact that they are inextricably related to each other, is also shown in Engels’s comments on the social transformations in Europe. He states that

(the) French Revolution was the rise of democracy in Europe. Democracy is [. . .] a contradiction in itself, an untruth, nothing but hypocrisy at the bottom. Political liberty is sham-liberty, the worst possible slavery; [. . .] the contradiction hidden in it must come out [. . .] real equality is Communism.\textsuperscript{10}

Engels treads Marx’s path in contrasting political freedom, which he equates with democracy, with communism. He stresses that the kind of democracy that then existed in Europe, that of political and not social liberty, was a form, an appearance that corresponded to the particular content of the social relations at the time.

In the aforementioned framework, he equates Chartism with democracy\textsuperscript{11} but considers the latter merely a transitory stage towards real human liberation.\textsuperscript{12} Furthermore, he separates social from political revolution and considers the former to have been an ongoing process in England over the previous seventy or eighty years.\textsuperscript{13}

Engels asserts his conviction that democracy alone is incapable of curing social ills because

This stage too is [. . .] only a transition, the last purely political remedy which has still to be tried and from which a new element is bound to develop at once, a principle transcending everything of a political nature. This principle is the principle of socialism.\textsuperscript{14}

In this article, he equates social democracy with socialism. Thus, in this social democracy, the content will be totally different to the content that exists in political democracy, which is a perverted form of democracy.

Critical theory, according to which you cannot change the form without at the same time changing the content, the essence, is closer to Marx and Engels’s understanding of the relationship between form and content.


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 466.


Form is a particular historical pattern in which the content is realized.\textsuperscript{15} Because Marcuse wants to stress the Hegelian origin of Marx’s understanding of the dialectical relationship of essence and appearance, he cites Hegel’s Logic: ‘By this token essence is neither in back of nor beyond appearance; rather, existence is appearance because it is essence that exists.’\textsuperscript{16} Marx follows Hegel in believing that essence is always apparent. It is an inextricable part of reality and does not exist outside of it.

This is why in social democracy a total change in the way people come to terms with nature and cooperate with each other in order to satisfy their basic needs must take place. This is the reason why real democracy can exist only in communism. If democracy existed in a bourgeois form as well as in socialism, it would have a transcendental existence, something that, of course, it does not have. Therefore, so-called bourgeois democracy cannot be other than a contradiction used by Marx for the sake of argument. Thus, in the so-called bourgeois form of democracy, ‘The content is reality in a “bad” form; it is possibility in that its emancipation from this form and its realization in a new form are still to be accomplished through men’s social practice.’\textsuperscript{17}

For Marx, democracy is appearance, a social form that presupposes a particular content. In order to decide on the true character of the form (in our case of democracy), we must explore its content, its essence.

Materialist theory thus transcends the given state of fact and moves toward a different potentiality, proceeding from immediate appearance to the essence that appears in it. [. . .] what men and things could genuinely be appears in bad, perverted form.\textsuperscript{18} [. . .] Essence is the totality of the social process as it is organized in a particular historical epoch.\textsuperscript{19}

In critical theory, the social process in the capitalist mode of production is dominated by capital, which is conceived as the social relation in the framework of which people deal with nature and with each other in trying to fulfil their basic needs. Thus, instead of fulfilling their needs, labourers fulfil the needs of capital, the self-reproduction of value, the accumulation of wealth. This is the reason why social phenomena are forms that appear inverted. Instead of people dominating wealth and using it to fulfil their basic human needs, wealth (capital) dominates them, turning them into personifications of economic categories.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 83.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 67.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 70.
In dialectics, the content of a notion [like democracy] is not fixed but acquires its content from historical contingency. Therefore, although in their early writings Marx and Engels refer to democracy primarily in negative terms because they strongly criticize its inverted bourgeois form, they considered themselves democrats from their youth. This is made clear by Engels in 1845, when he wrote,

Democracy nowadays is communism [. . .] Democracy has become the proletarian principle, the principle of the masses [. . .] all European democrats in 1846 are more or less Communists at heart.\(^{20}\) [. . .] Proletarians of all nations [. . .] are already beginning to fraternize under the banner of communist democracy,\(^{21}\) [. . .] and [. . .] democracy nowadays is communism.\(^{22}\)

Because Marx is a dialectical thinker, he endeavours to separate his kind of communism from that of Cabet, Dezamy and Weitling, which he contends is a dogmatic abstraction. Instead, he argues that social transformation must start from the forms that already exist in reality.\(^{23}\) The political thinker, says Marx, must ‘bring out the true significance underlying this [representative] system’. In this way, the starting point of philosophical criticism must be actual participation in politics—that is, real struggles. In his own words,

We develop new principles for the world out of the world’s own principles [. . .] The reform of consciousness consists only in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in explaining to it the meaning of its own actions.\(^{24}\)

A few years later, attempting to stress this point, they write that communist measures ‘ensue from the development of industry, agriculture, trade and communications, from the development of the class struggle’\(^{25}\) and that the workers ‘have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece’.\(^{26}\)

\(^{21}\) Ibid., p. 6.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 14.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 144.
In the Marxian method, theory is inextricably tied to reality:

[T]heory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it [. . .] becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter.27 [. . .] Theory can be realised in a people only insofar as it is the realisation of the needs of that people.28

Marx’s aforementioned words are a perfect summary of his dialectics. Historical data charting the development of the class struggle guided their demands. ‘We are not to philosophize about concrete things; we are to philosophize, rather, out of these things’29 as ‘dialectical logic respects that which is to be thought—the object.’30 In the negative dialectics approach, the potential does not come from outside social reality but only from inside it. The untruth of identity is revealed because ‘the concept does not exhaust the thing.’31 A remainder always remains. This is the potential we must focus on. It is the development, the enforcement of the still undeveloped power of labour that can change the essence of the society and thus also its form. That is why dialectics in its Marxian version embraces historical development, meaning the social forms take their content by the advancement of the class struggle.

What, then, was the potential that Marx and Engels saw in the historical contingency of their time? In Principles of Communism, the text on which the Communist Manifesto was based, when Engels analyses the process of the revolution, he writes that it ‘will inaugurate a democratic constitution and thereby [. . .] the political rule of the proletariat [. . .] directly in England [. . .] indirectly in France and in Germany’.32 He also emphasizes that democracy will be useful only if ‘it be used as a means of carrying through further measures directly attacking private ownership and securing the means of subsistence of the proletariat’.33 His central idea is that once the proletariat concentrates all capital, industry and production in the hands of the state and the nation, private property along with the old forms of social relations will cease to exist.34 From Engels’s

28 Ibid., p. 183.
30 Ibid., p. 141.
31 Ibid., p. 5.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 351.
point of view, democracy exists when all wealth produced by society is controlled by the majority of the population and is used for the fulfilment of human needs.

Following the development of their thinking, we should note that Marx-Engels's proposals in 1848, set out in the *Demands of the Communist Party in Germany*, follow the same line of thought. Their hopes are that the accomplishment of democracy at the political level will finally put the ‘question of property’ on the agenda. This, according to Marx, has become the most important ‘social question’. The connection of autonomy to the urge for change in the essence of social relations is also evident in their later writings, such as the *Communist Manifesto*. At the end of the text, it is also stressed that the role of communists is to put the question of private property on the agenda.

The focus on the ‘question of property’ has enormous importance for the philosophical conceptualization of democracy. Engels and Marx hold that in socialism the economy will be democratically organized by the workers themselves, and the power of the capitalists will be completely emasculated. In order for wealth to be distributed fairly, the means by which it is produced must be democratized. The workers’ goal should not be merely to take power into their own hands but to organize the economy on a new basis in accordance with a new logic of democracy, in the context of which individual autonomy will be inseparable from the satisfaction of human needs.

Moving beyond petit bourgeois thought to the attainment of real democracy can occur only when the social control of the means of production, which is at present controlled by capitalists, takes place. Marx condemns bourgeois society precisely because ‘a priori, no conscious social regulation of production takes place.’ For Marx (clearly articulated in *Manifesto*), democracy does not describe a state form. Marx conceives of democracy here as a means, a form for the maintenance of class rule at a certain stage of the class struggle.

### The Philosophical Presuppositions of Democracy in Marx and Engels’s Work after 1848

In the 1850s and the first half of the 1860s, the term ‘democracy’ did not have the revolutionary meaning that it had previously had for Marx and Engels. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to conclude that ‘after 1848, the

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term becomes much less significant in their political lexicon. The concept
does not engage their theoretical attention.\(^{38}\) I will argue that this is far
from the truth. Their analysis focuses on participation by the masses in
the decision-making process. This can be seen in *The Civil War in France*,
which is, without doubt, the text with their most developed exposition on
democracy, where Marx examines the democratic form of the Paris Com-
mune. Since this text is key to the understanding of Marx and Engels’s
democratic argument, I will now closely examine its meaning.

At the start of the third part, Marx describes the nature of the func-
tion of the state before the Commune. According to him, parliamentary
control was directly in the hands of the propertied classes:

\[
\text{[T]he Government [. . .] became not only the bone of contention}
\]
\[
\text{between the rival factions [. . .] of the ruling classes; but its politi-
\text{cal character changed simultaneously with the economic changes of}
\]
\[
\text{society [. . .] the state [. . .] organized [. . .] social enslavement [. . .]}
\]
\[
\text{class despotism.}\(^{39}\)
\]

The Commune was organized differently. It elected municipal councillors
by universal suffrage, and the majority of its members were working men
on basic wages.\(^{40}\) It guaranteed separation of the church and state, univer-
sal free education and popular election of judges.\(^{41}\) Co-operative societies
regulated national production according to a common plan, putting an
end to the anarchy of capitalist production,\(^{42}\) and all closed workshops
and factories surrendered to workers’ associations.\(^{43}\)

The Commune granted self-government to producers, placing popular
power centre stage.\(^{44}\) During the existence of the Commune, the republic
became a social republic whose goal was social transformation.\(^{45}\) It was
the *form* under which the working class assumed political power\(^{46}\) and
in which the ‘governmental [. . .] functions were not to be exercised by
a body superior to the society, but by the responsible agents of society
itself.’\(^{47}\)

\(^{38}\) Daniel Doveton, *Marx and Engels on Democracy*, *History of Political Thought*, v. 15,
n. 4, 1994, p. 558.


\(^{40}\) Ibid., p. 331.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., p. 332.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 335.

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 339.

\(^{44}\) Ibid., p. 332.

\(^{45}\) Karl Marx, *Drafts of the Civil War in France*, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Collected Works*,

\(^{46}\) Ibid., p. 533.

\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 538.
Once more we observe that ‘bourgeois democracy’ is the fetishized, perverted form that human relations unavoidably take because they are dominated by capital and because it is also the social form of society that serves the interests of capital. Thinking as dialectical materialists in the Marxian manner involves deciphering the human social content of social forms such as ‘bourgeois democracy’. We think materialistically to the extent that we attempt to understand the real essence of the social form. The best summary of the Marxian version of materialism is the eighth thesis on Feuerbach: ‘All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.’ Human practice here is not a vague, undetermined term but refers to the form that the production of wealth takes—that is, the form that the relationship between capital and labour takes in each historical moment. Considering the foregoing, we could say that ‘social phenomena have to be seen as forms assumed by class struggle, as forms in and against which social conflict obtains.’

Nevertheless, although Marx emphasizes the popular element in the administration of the common affairs of the Commune, he writes in one of his letters that ‘the majority of the Commune was in no sense socialist, nor could it have been.’ Engels, on the other hand, in his introduction to The Civil War in France in 1891, declares, ‘the Paris Commune. That was the Dictatorship of the proletariat.’

Is there a contradiction between Marx and Engels’s comments? What does Marx mean by the term ‘Dictatorship of the proletariat’? According to Soma Marik, in order to answer this, we need to take the context of Marx’s aforementioned letter into consideration. The context in which the letter was written concerned discussion of the programme for a conscious leadership, not the state form. In the Commune, the leadership was of a Blanquist and Jacobin type, and for that reason, Marx did not consider it socialist. Marx wanted to contrast the historical tendency of the Commune with the immediate deeds of its leaders. Similarly, August Nimtz maintains that the Commune was not socialist because it was the first step in a process that could not be concluded in the foreseeable future.

53 Ibid., p. 207.
For Marx, the dictatorship of the proletariat presupposes a proletariat of significant numbers, which did not exist in France in 1871.  

Indeed, by not defining their view of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’, Marx and Engels inadvertently encourage the accusation that they are imprecise in their comments on the future of democratic society. Engels, for example, in 1891, identified the form of the democratic republic with that of the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ without being more precise. Critics are swift to pounce upon this and reach the conclusion that Marx and Engels’s thinking is therefore problematic and of no use.

Is this lack of precision a problem for a Marxian political thinker? A more detailed study of ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ has been carried out by Hal Draper. According to him, the term for Marx ‘did not denote special governmental forms but only the workers’ state as such’. ‘The dictatorship term describes the class content of the state.’

For Draper, the term was reformulated by Marx when he had to confront the Blanquists. Therefore, bearing in mind Draper’s exegesis, there is nothing peculiar about Engels’s aforementioned identification between the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ and the democratic republic. Interpretations to the contrary also ignore the fact that democracy in Marx and Engels’s theory was a process and not a definite form of government, a model to be realized in all cases. Those who misunderstand this element of their philosophy appear not to realize that a basic characteristic of Marxian thought is to meet the special needs of every historical instant and every place separately.

The fact that Marx attempts to meet the specific needs of his era is also clear in his comments on co-operative societies in the Critique of the Gotha Programme. He accuses the programme of pinning its hopes for the socialist organization of labour not on the revolutionary transformation of society but on aid by the state. ‘[T]he present co-operative societies [. . .] are of value only insofar as they are the independent creations of the workers.’

57 Ibid., p. 319.
60 Ibid., p. 94.
Another point in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* that should be underlined is Marx’s call for an extension of democratic regulation to the economic sphere.\(^{61}\)

For Marx, socialist democracy abolishes the separation of economy and politics, which is the distinctive characteristic of the capitalist mode of production.\(^{62}\) In dialectical materialism,

> the political complements the economic as, together, different forms of the same fundamental class antagonism. The political guarantee of contract amounts to the containment of labour in the perverted form of wage labour, that is the commodity form through which human productive power subsists.\(^{63}\)

So, if we want to change the political and the social form of democracy, we must change its content, the economic, which means abolishing capital as the social relation under which production takes place, as the form assumed by the conditions of labour in the capitalist mode of production.

Marx’s method,\(^{64}\) dialectical materialism, enables us to detect the fact that ‘the present system simultaneously engenders the material conditions and the social forms necessary for the economic reconstruction of society,’\(^{65}\) and along with these conditions, it engenders human values, the most important among them being human dignity. Thus, Marx believes that workers, ‘Instead of the conservative motto, *A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work!* [. . .] ought to inscribe on their banner the revolutionary watchword, *Abolition of the wage system!*’\(^{66}\)

**Practical Repercussions of the Materialist Conception of Democracy in the Strategy of the Working Class Movement**

The dialectic relationship between theory and praxis has serious repercussions for the organization of the class struggle. In one of his letters, Engels stressed, ‘Our theory is not a dogma but the exposition of a process

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 88.


\(^{64}\) I am familiar with the differences that Engels has in his understanding of dialectics to Marx’s in *Anti-Dühring* and the debate about it, but there is insufficient space to expand on it here. However, I do not believe that these differences seriously compromise my assertion that they share a common understanding of democracy.


\(^{66}\) Ibid.
of evolution, and that process involves successive phases." In another letter, he reasserts his position: ‘Our theory is a theory of evolution, not a dogma to be learnt by heart and to be repeated mechanically.’ He also underlines that ‘our practice has shown that it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages.’ He therefore berated the Germans because they themselves do not for the most part understand the theory and treat it in doctrinaire and dogmatic fashion as something which, having once been learnt by rote, is sufficient as it stands for any and every need. To them it is a credo, not a guide to action.

To the extent that socialist democracy is the product of class struggle, it is an open category, a category that conceptualizes the openness of society, the open processes. Since a materialistic conception of autonomy points to the antagonistic process of the formation of society, to the destructive, defetishizing, creative power of labour, it also points to the open-ended, uncertain and dynamic nature of that process.

At this point, I must highlight that this creative power of labour will not come from a revolution in ethics, as J. S. Mill believes. In Mill’s view, a change must first occur in the behaviour of the people, and only then can democratic measures be applied. Marx and Engels’s theory, by contrast, is much more realistic. It stresses the inherently egotistic and self-interested nature of workers’ motives. In 1843, referring to England, a young Engels wrote the following: ‘Only here have the masses acted as masses, for the sake of their interests as individuals; only here have principles been turned into interests.’ This assessment is undoubtedly positive and is the reason why Engels believed that England was the only country in Europe that had a social history.

The open character of democracy also explains why, as I have shown, the term is analysed mainly in a negative sense by the young Marx and

69 Ibid., p. 9.
74 Ibid.
Engels but has a positive sense in their thought when older. Because it follows the form that class struggle takes in every historical moment, it is not, as might be believed, a vague or ‘volatile’ concept but an ‘open’ one.  

Like democracy, Marx and Engels also regard the concept of violence as an ‘open’ one and thus analyse it on the dialectical basis of the aforementioned premise—that is, the need to change one’s ideas according to the practical demands of every historical moment. In the final pages of *The Condition of the Working-Class in England*, a young Engels stresses the necessity of revolution, while at the same time expressing his sadness that this revolution is unavoidable because the time for a peaceful solution has passed. He hopes that the revolution will involve the least possible violence, which presupposes that the proletariat will absorb socialistic and communistic elements. He asserts that if this is achieved before war breaks out, the Communist Party will finally be able to ‘conquer the brutal element of the revolution’. Marx, as a good dialectician, did not support violent revolution irrespective of the historical contingency. In an 1871 interview, he declares his preference for a peaceful solution to the ‘social question’, saying that ‘Insurrection would be madness where peaceful agitation would more swiftly and surely do the work.’

**Critiques of the Marxian Approach on Democracy: A Marxian Response**

In this section, I will focus my attention on interpretations that critique the Marxian approach to democracy without appreciating its materialist background. Joseph Femia’s *Marxism and Democracy* is one of the very few books that focus on the subject of democracy in Marx, and Femia is highly critical of the Marxian approach. He maintains that Marx cannot apprehend the fact that a person can be the bearer of his or her own dignity because he contends that in Marxian thought, the individual is utterly subsumed within society. His critique is harsh. He states that absolutely no form of democracy can be compatible with Marx’s goals. According to Femia, Marx’s greatest mistake is that he does not accept the person’s

77 Ibid., p. 582.
moral priority and that, in Marxian theory, the person is obliged to identify his view of happiness with that of society.

Alan Buchanan follows the liberal current criticizing Marxian thinking of leading to totalitarianism. He charges Marx with believing that ‘In communism there will be no need for rights of man [. . .] as legal guarantees’ and alleges that Marx professes ‘that a highly productive and efficient, nonexploitative, democratic, nonmarket society, can be established and maintained without reliance on rights’.

However, Femia and Buchanan do not support their interpretations with any textual evidence. Their texts do not contain footnotes to Marx’s collected works and one is thus obliged to deem their ideas unsupported. They fail to grasp that the concentration of interests in Marx stems directly from the democratic construction of the economy. The workers, through their participation in the class struggle and their fight for the democratization of society, will be able to agree on the content of their class’s common interest and the way in which it is to be accomplished. Nowhere does Marx presuppose workers’ full agreement on the content of human happiness.

Femia also accuses Marx and Engels of determinism. Christopher Pierson launched a similar attack to that of Femia. He claims that Marx did not comprehend, and therefore did not analyse, the problems of socialist political practice, such as the status of parliamentary institutions, the nature of reformism, or the proper attitude to the bourgeois state, owing to deterministic elements in Marx’s conception of historical materialism.

In my view, however, the criticism that Marx and Engels tried to predict the future ignores the philosophical background of their conception of democracy, the fact that Marx did not provide any details about future socialist society precisely because he believed that the future could not be predicted. A possible response to these criticisms is that they have no understanding of the negative character of the Marxian dialectic: the fact that Marx does not have a predilection for unity. Besides, if he had believed in some kind of historical inevitability, Marx and Engels would

80 Ibid., p. 45.
82 Ibid., p. 143.
83 This fact is stressed by Lenin himself in his short text on Marx. See V. I. Lenin, Karl Marx, in V. I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. 21, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1977, p. 76.
Marx and Engels’s Critique of Democracy

not have worked to the point of exhaustion, nor would they have written
the thousands of pages that they finally did.

The aforementioned commentators, and many others, misunderstand
the open character of Marx and Engels’s understanding of democracy, the
fact that they were attempting to respond only to the problems of their
time, to the demands that the working class had at that particular instant.
The problems that Pierson refers to would arise mainly after Marx’s
death.

John Rawls points to a similar problem in the Marxian idea of democ-

racy. He argues that the economic plan in Marx’s scheme is extremely
vague and that in it ‘no one can be required to benefit himself only in
ways that contribute to others’ well-being. That would be coercive. It
would amount to giving rights to some people as to how other people
shall use their powers.’ Rawls makes this accusation because he cannot
understand the exploitative nature, the value-laden character, of the
capitalist mode of production. Forbidding someone to take a productive
unit as private property is, of course, coercive to that person but is, at the
same time, liberating for the workers in this unit since they will no longer
be dependent on that person’s decisions. The non-materialistic conceptu-
alization of the concept of democracy makes Rawls unable to understand
that ‘The violence of capital [. . .] subsists through the civilised forms of
law and order, of equality and freedom. These forms are the constituted
forms of violence.’ Human dignity is denied in the name of freedom of
capital. Particularly surprising is Rawls’s acknowledgement of his own
inability to provide any solution as far as ‘the importance of democracy in
the workplace and in shaping the general course of the economy’ is con-
cerned. We should appreciate Rawls’s honesty since, to my knowledge,
he is among the very few liberal philosophers of the twentieth century
who admit that this is a major difficulty. The fact that he philosophizes in
a non-dialectical and non-materialistic manner is what prevents him from
being able to tackle this issue.

Directly connected to the issue of the existence of rights is the Marx-
ian account of the issue of authority, which I will now clarify. Very few
commentators so far have appreciated that Engels had a realistic view of
authority. He poses the question as to whether authority would disap-
pear completely should the workers take social control of production. He
writes that once workers reach agreement about working hours, this

85 John Rawls, Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy, Harvard University Press,
86 Ibid., p. 368.
87 Werner Bonefeld, The Capitalist State: Illusion and Critique, p. 213.
88 Ibid.
89 John Rawls, Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, Harvard University Press, Cambridge,
agreement must be followed by all. This prescription is the same for all the other issues related to the organization of production:

[W]hether they are settled by decision of a delegate placed at the head of each branch of labour or, if possible, by a majority vote, the will of the single individual will always have to subordinate itself, which means that questions are settled in an authoritarian way. Hence it is absurd to speak of the principle of authority as being absolutely evil.

Along with democracy, I will also characterize Engels’s concept of authority as an ‘open’ category. He underlined that it does not have a fixed content and that its application depends on the development of society. The innovation, of course, is that the workers themselves will formulate the rules of their work on the basis of their own vote, thus moulding the content of their autonomy in their workplace.

**Toni Negri’s Non-materialistic Interpretation of Autonomy**

In this part, in order to better clarify my interpretation of the materialist character of autonomy, I will contrast my view on the issue with Toni Negri’s non-materialistic interpretation on autonomy. Although Negri claims to remain in the Marxian camp, he claims at the same time to be beyond Marxism. According to Negri, we must proceed ‘beyond the orthodoxy of a suffocating tradition [. . .] there is no possibility of giving a general interpretation of Marx’s thought by employing objectivist considerations and by always returning his analysis to that of the economy.’ Our political theory must go beyond determinism and homogeneity and move towards the auto-determination of the subject ‘to a greater independence of the proletarian subject’. Negri no longer considers the relationship between the self-valorization of the worker-subject and the capitalist valorization as a dialectical one but ‘as an antagonistic relation [. . .] full of risks and insurrections’. He concludes that ‘the dialectical
process opens and that its constitutive elements attain full autonomy’. 99 For this reason, he declares the end of dialectics.100

If dialectics is over, what about materialism? Is it dead too? Surprisingly, in Negri’s view, it is not. As far as Negri is concerned, Marxian materialism involves bringing materialism back into constituent power and this ‘back to living labor, which in turn means denouncing the mystification of any conception that wants to give different images and formally independent categories of the social and the political’. 101

However, Negri’s materialism seems to be very different to that of Marx. In his eighth thesis on Feuerbach, Marx does not simply say that demystification comes if we connect our categories to ‘the social’ but only if we connect them to ‘human practice’ (a point I have already cited, stressing its significance). ‘The social’ is a vague notion and is unable to portray the rich meaning of Marx’s phrase, a fact totally ignored by Negri. Marx wishes to stress the dynamic character of human practice, the fact that the form of this practice (i.e., human cooperation) in the capitalist mode of production takes the form of capital, which is an inherently contradictory relationship since it is constituted by two elements that unavoidably oppose each other. Capital is an intrinsically dialectical relationship. Bearing this in mind, dialectics is not something that we attribute to reality, as Negri falsely believes, but something we find embedded in it.

In miscomprehending dialectics, Negri’s assessment of capital distorts its nature because he is unable to appreciate that the capitalist is a capitalist because he exploits living labour and that the working class is the working class only because there is a capitalist to buy its labour power. Negri erroneously identifies dialectics with determinism, with orthodox Marxism. Labour for Negri is not a moment of capital that is unavoidably mediated with capital, existing separately but in unity with capital. On the contrary, in his view, it can acquire its autonomy in voluntarist terms if it so wishes.

In this framework, autonomy for Negri is the autonomy of the political, ‘which is subjected to the determinations of subjectivity’. 102 However, I have already underlined that in the Marxian version of dialectical materialism, the economy and the political are mediated to each other, being separate in their unity. Because the notion of mediation is totally absent from Negri’s philosophy, ‘the notion of labour’s autonomy presupposes the existence of a space already liberated from capital.’ 103

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102 Ibid., p. 334.
Behind this belief lies Negri’s new conception of the role of consciousness, which he claims ‘modernizes materialism’.104 He claims that his innovation revises historical materialism since ‘it is not the material character of the movements which generates consciousness, but collective consciousness which [. . .] established the material aspects of the [. . .] productive figure.’105

For Negri, therefore, consciousness (theory) acquires an autonomy towards real facts (praxis) and tends be independent from them, moulding them subjectively according to its will. According to this understanding, ‘the struggles themselves are demonstrations of the creativity of desire.’106

At this point, the repercussions of Hardt and Negri’s distortion of the true character of materialism and dialectics become obvious. Their political philosophy is unable to conceive theory and practice as mediated to each other, ‘as different moments of the totalisation. [. . .] We do not have two movements dualistically counterposed but a single theoretical-practical class movement which [. . .] contains differences and diversity within itself.’107

It now becomes clear that materialism in its Marxian version, as I have attempted to demonstrate, is not something different from or external to dialectics. You cannot have the one without the other, as Negri wishes. Engaging in class struggle is not a leap from social relations, from ‘the root of the matter’ (as Marx said), to the realm of subjective desire.

Conclusion

To sum up, according to Marx-Engels, equality is not only equality before the law but also, more importantly, equality of access to decision-making about how human cooperation must be structured in order for basic human needs to be satisfied. In the context of this interpretation, I have attempted to disclose, in a clearer and more concrete manner than has been attempted before, the connection between the concepts of democracy and autonomy and the materialistic character of Marx’s philosophy. The deciphering of all concepts in human relations enabled Marx and Engels to inaugurate a new path for democratic theory that connected democracy with ‘the social question’—that is, the questioning of the validity of the

105 Ibid.
institution of private property. This is the institution that must be questioned today by materialistically based democratic reasoning.

Thinking in terms of dialectical materialism means conceiving capital not as a thing but as a self-contradicting relationship that bears the power to lead to potential social change. Autonomy for the majority presupposes a total change in their conditions of labour, which entails the destruction of capital as the inverted form under which production takes place and not simply the emergence of worker’s power situated in the subjectivity of the working class and outside the dialectic of capital, as Negri believes. The materialistic analysis of the concept of autonomy is what enabled Marx and Engels to become the first intellectuals of their time to detect the revolutionary and subversive side of poverty and therefore to consider the poor, the downtrodden, as the bearers of the new demands, all those whom English radicalism feared and did not include in its concept of socialism and all those whom the contemporary mainstream analysis marginalizes when it tries to figure out the way out of the current crisis.

As I have attempted to prove, the best way to comprehend the materialist character of their conception of democracy is within a framework in which autonomy is connected with the conditions of society’s reproduction, and this is best accomplished by following the critical theory tradition.

Introduction

If we are to form some kind of radical politics for the present day, we must engage with the debate on the nature of historical movement and the transition to socialism as these concepts were understood by the founders of socialist thinking in the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels. One of the key issues in radical philosophy is the relation between their respective philosophies. The interpretation of this relation also determines the philosophy of history that can be drawn from their collected corpus of work. Therefore, an analysis of the relation of the philosophy of Marx and that of Engels in his later works is not simply a study of the history of political thought or Marxology, but a necessary task for socialist thinkers today.

The debate on late Engels’s theory of dialectics has so far focused on the question of the necessity of the specific sequence of events that might lead to socialism and the degree to which people are able to accelerate the transition to socialism by using their knowledge of the ‘laws’ of historical movement. Thus, Engels ‘laid the foundations for the worldview of Marxism, which was appreciatively taken up in Social Democratic propaganda and further simplified’. ¹

A detailed study that focuses on dialectics as something other than the movement of events characterized in Engels’s later works has not been undertaken. In this alternative view, dialectics should not be conceptualized as a study of the laws of movement, but as an investigation into what it means to take a critical, negative standpoint against the cultural system of the capitalist mode of production. This chapter will therefore question whether identifying the laws of movement actually serves to demystify

and defetishize the ‘estranged outward appearances of economic relations in which [. . .] contradictions appear’.  

In this chapter, therefore, Engels’s philosophy of history and its relation to Marx’s philosophy will be investigated by focusing on his notion of ‘negation of the negation’ in an effort to examine if Engels succeeds in demystifying and defetishizing the apparently rigid forms in capitalism that dominate us, such as the state and money. It will be stressed that the problems with Engels’s philosophy of history arise not from his comparison of the laws of history to those of nature but from the fact that he does not follow Marx’s dialectic between content and form set out in Capital and, in particular, Marx’s conceptualization of the ‘topsy-turvy world’. Moreover, it will be argued that Engels’s dialectic is shackled within the framework of traditional theory (as this is understood by Horkheimer) and is therefore far from the critical, ‘open’ dialectic that we find in Capital. As a result, the withering away of the state theory that is usually attributed to Marx is undermined and our standpoint of how to change the world takes a whole new perspective. I will first start by expanding Marx’s dialectics in order for the reader then to better understand my criticism of Engels’s divergence from it.

Dialectics, Negativity and the Transition to Socialism in K. Marx’s Capital

Marx sums up the two distinctive characteristics of capitalism at the end of the third volume of Capital. The first characteristic is that ‘being a commodity is the dominant and determining characteristic of its products,’ which implies that the ‘capitalist and the wage labourer are as such merely embodiments, personifications of capital and wage labour.’ The second distinctive feature of capitalism is ‘the production of surplus value as the direct aim and determining motive of production’, which ‘implies [. . .] the constantly operating tendency to reduce the labour time necessary for the production of a commodity’. For Marx, there is an underlying social relation between men, behind the value relation between products, ‘that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things’. This is what he terms fetishism. The money form of the commodity is the fetishized form that human labour takes.

In this fetishized, mystified, ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’, we live under the domination of the ‘estranged and irrational forms of

3 Ibid., p. 866.
4 Ibid., p. 867.
capital-interest, land-rent, labour-wages’, with the main characteristic of the capitalist mode of production being the way in which ‘production relations are converted into entities and rendered independent in relation to the agents of production’.7 This fetishized world means that a ‘tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking’8 since forms are manifestations of the mystified way in which the inherent contradiction in capitalism is being expressed. The contradiction inherent in the capitalist mode of production is that we are compelled to act as ‘personifications of economic categories’ haunted by the logic of the accumulation of wealth and hard work in order to survive, but it is precisely this subordination that perpetuates the existence of the fetish-forms that restrict our liberty. Thus, instead of fulfilling our needs—health care, education and securing a decent standard of living through our work—we are pressured into deferring the satisfaction of these basic needs until an unspecified time in the future and to accept a lower standard of living in order to attain greater production and economic growth.

However, this mystification is not merely an ‘economic mystification’9 related only to the value form of the commodity and to the sources of income, which appear to be independent of each other. As Marx makes clear,

> It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, [. . .] the corresponding specific form of the state [my italics].10

The fact that the state is understood dialectically in Marx’s works—as an irrational, mystified political form that is but one of the phenomenal forms of an underlying content—is largely overlooked by researchers.

This dialectical reading of the state in terms of form/appearance and essence/content can also be found in German Ideology, where the state is understood as an ‘illusory community’ ‘which has won an existence independent of the individuals’.11 Although the state may appear to be a separate entity, ‘it is nothing more than the form of organisation which the bourgeois are compelled to adopt’ or ‘the form in which individuals of

6 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.
7 Ibid., p. 818.
9 Ibid.
10 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 778.
a ruling class assert their common interests’. In the introduction of the 
Grundrisse where he is letting us know about the arrangement of his study, 
he plans to analyse ‘The State as the epitome of bourgeois society’. The 
basis of the state is ‘the social organisation evolving directly out of pro-
duction and intercourse’. The irrationality of having to succumb to the 
pressure of value that must beget more value, to the logic of time is money, 
to the reasoning that ‘Time is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, 
time’s carcase’, takes on the appearances of the money form-fetish and 
the state. The key notion upon which the entire capitalist mode of produc-
tion is grounded—competition—and the class conflicts to which it leads 
cannot be expressed other than in the state form. Thus, the ‘bourgeois state 
[. . .] cannot permit any struggle among the citizens except the struggle 
of competition.’ Similarly, in Grundrisse, the state is conceptualized as 
the ‘last refuge’ of the ‘harmony of economic relations’ since it embodies 
and conceals within itself the inherent contradictions of the irrationality 
of the capitalist mode of production. ‘As a tax state, it depends entirely on 
the progressive accumulation of capital.’ The state, as the police of the 
market, is necessary in order for the irrational logic of private property to 
sustain itself, since ‘its function is [to] guarantee the separation of labour 
from her means through the protection of the rights of private property.’

It must be stressed that, for Marx, the state is not a contingent form, but 
an inherently perverted form of the irrational way in which we have orga-
nized our subsistence. For Marx, then, all state forms ultimately express 
this irrationality, and there can therefore be no alternative state form that 
is consistent with an association of free producers.

One of the most recent readings of the state and its relation to democ-
ruary in Marx is Abensour’s Democracy against the State. Abensour rec-
ognizes two tendencies in Marx. On the one hand

Modern democracy is democracy against the State because [. . .] in 
democracy [. . .] political action remains what it is inasmuch as it

12 Ibid., p. 90.
14 K. Marx and F. Engels, German Ideology, CW 5, p. 89.
16 K. Marx and F. Engels, German Ideology, CW 5, p. 361.
17 K. Marx, Economic Manuscripts of 1857–1858, Collected Works, Volume 28, Interna-
18 Werner Bonefeld, Free Economy and the Strong State: Some Notes on the State, Capital 
19 Werner Bonefeld, The Capitalist State: Illusion and Critique, in Werner Bonefeld (ed.) 
Revolutionary Writing: Common Sense Essays in Post-Political Politics, Autonomedia, 
resists transfiguration into an organizing, unifying form, in short, into a State [. . .] Marx was able to show [. . .] that the struggle against the State, as a form, is inscribed in the heart of democratic logic.20

Our goal, for Abensour, would be ‘to seek the political community capable of the greatest opening’ and of expressing ‘the “more” that pushes the State beyond itself’.21 Marx aspires to bring to the fore ‘original spontaneity’ of the ‘realms of objectified life’.22 In the case of the state this is done by revealing that ‘the real people [. . .] the polymorphous life of the demos’ is the secret ‘that haunts the modern State’.23 So far the author is giving the impression that is very close to the ‘open Marxist’ reading of the state that I have attempted to provide. Nonetheless, although he does not provide textual evidence for this argument by connecting the state with dialectics, fetishism or negation, especially in Marx’s Capital, these ideas can indeed be found in Marx.

Yet, the reader should not be mistaken that this is the key point of Abensour’s reading of the subject. On the other hand, later in the book he makes clear that ‘in keeping with Marx’s argument [. . .] we find that’24 ‘in true democracy the [. . .] limited political State [. . .] exists.’25 It may cease ‘to claim for itself the authority of a form that would be equivalent to the whole’, but this does not mean that the state as a ‘political moment’ does not hold its specificity and particularity.26 It may not exist as a ‘formal universal’27 but it exists as a universal nevertheless.

Thus, ‘in true democracy [. . .] the political state does not disappear and it persists [. . .] By considering Marx [. . .] we are therefore as far from anarchism as from communism.’28 Abensour repeats many times in the book that the political realm is separate to other realms, still without explaining their connection to each other or to the totality. Also the political realm’s origin in the contradictions of people’s everyday lives is left unexplained. This is more evident at the point where he maintains that Marx’s thinking is connected to Machiavelli’s since for him ‘the political realm is raised above the facticity of everyday life.’29 Moreover, as far as Marx is concerned, ‘It is [. . .] legitimate to recognize in the political

21 Ibid., p. 37.
22 Ibid., p. 42.
23 Ibid., p. 43.
24 Ibid., p. 66.
25 Ibid., p. 67.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., p. 68.
28 Ibid., p. 69.
29 Ibid.
realm the characteristics of transcendence: the political realm is a situation distinct from other realms, on a different level.  

Abensour holds ‘it is legitimate to see [in Marx] a contradiction between an instrumental conception of the State [. . .] that the State apparatus is neutral [. . .] and the more [. . .] complex thesis that the State, far from being neutral, would engender [. . .] a relation of domination.’

My analysis so far is strongly opposed to the existence of any notion of transcendence or neutrality in Marx’s theory of the state. On the contrary, Marx accuses Hegel of setting the state, ‘the bureaucracy as mind endowed with knowledge[,] above the materialism of civil society.’

Abensour does not theorize the state as an inherently contradictory concept, as the appearance, the form of the deeper irrationality of capitalist negativity, of the fact that people are forced to live as vampires of capital. The dialectic between essence and form that is necessary in order to shed light on Marx’s dialectic is totally missing from Abensour’s argument.

Indeed, in the frame of reference of this materialistic dialectic, in an 1844 essay, Marx explicitly castigates radical or revolutionary politicians who ‘seek the root of the evil not in the essential nature of the state, but in a definite state form, which they wish to replace by a different state form’. This thinking is characterized in the essay as the ‘political point of view’, according to which social defects are attributed to ‘private life, which does not depend on the state’. In opposition to this ‘political point of view’, Marx holds that, regardless of its particular form, the very ‘principle’ of the state itself ‘is based on the contradiction between public and private life, on the contradiction between general and private interests’ and that, therefore, the ‘existence of the state and the existence of slavery are inseparable’.

At this point, it should be underlined that forms fetishes, such as the state, are processes that are constantly reproduced by the objectified labour of people as they embrace the logic of capital, competition, accumulation of wealth and the concept of time is money in their daily lives. The fact that the state sustains the rules of the game, the rights of labour contract ‘puts the state right back into the society of the burghers’.
Engels’s Dialectics and Philosophy of History

Marx, ‘the capitalist mode of production [. . .] does not merely constantly reproduce the material product, but also the social and economic relations, the characteristic forms of its creation.’

The creation of these estranged forms, which appear as rigid, closed and fetishized, is a process that takes place ‘behind the back’ of the agents of production, the subjects of history—people. ‘Human life as a process’ is ‘producing and reproducing these production relations themselves [. . .] and thereby also [. . .] their material conditions of existence and their mutual relations, i.e., their particular socio-economic form’.

Since mystification, fetishism and estrangement are a process produced by the logic of capital, then demystification and defetishization cannot take place except as a process as well, and this occurs every time people revolt against the logic of the system—that is to say, against the logic of time is money, of perpetual accumulation (usually understood as growth) and competition. According to Marx, ‘the process of material production does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely associated men.’

Thus, defetishization, ‘the realm of freedom[,] begins’ not when the proletariat occupies the state, as many Marxists believe, but ‘only where labour which is determined by necessity and mundane considerations ceases’. The aforementioned freely associated men—or as Marx calls them elsewhere ‘socialised man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, [. . .] instead of being ruled by it’—must place at the forefront of their effort the ‘shortening of the working day’.

Turning the ‘topsy-turvy world’ on its head thus presupposes an entirely different mode of producing and reproducing our means of subsistence. This, in turn, necessitates an alternative philosophy of time, one in which the logic of time as money is discarded, and time instead becomes the time necessary for freely associated men to satisfy their real needs and not the need of money to multiply itself. To the extent that the occupation of the state is a necessary stage in the process of defetishization, the state for Marx is not understood as the bourgeois parliamentary system but, as is stressed in the Communist Manifesto, as ‘the proletariat organised as the ruling class’, which will ‘centralise all instruments of production’.

At the end of the second chapter of the Communist Manifesto, this point is further clarified: ‘In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and

38 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 858.
39 Ibid., pp. 859–860.
40 Ibid., p. 805.
41 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 90.
42 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 807.
43 Ibid.
Engel’s Dialectics and Philosophy of History

class antagonism, we shall have an association. Nowhere does Marx claim that the transition to socialism must necessarily pass from a stage where the proletariat will occupy the state—that is, the bourgeois parliamentary system and its entire structure—and then use it for its own purposes. In Marx, then, political power is not identified with the state but with ‘the organised power of one class for oppressing another’.

Shortly after Marx’s death, Engels wrote,

we have always held [. . .] that the proletarian class will first have to possess itself of the organised force of the State and with its aid stamp out the resistance of the Capitalist class and re-organise society. This is stated already in the Communist Manifesto of 1847, end of Chapter II.

However, my previous analysis of Marx’s position contradicts Engels’s assessment. While it is true that Marx held the conviction that in his time the state must first be possessed by the proletariat, it must be stressed that this was not because he believed in the existence of historical laws that should be followed, laws that make the transition to socialism a predetermined process, but only for reasons that had to do with the feasibility of strategy under the circumstances of his time.

For example, in referring to the ascent of the ‘democrats’ to power in Germany in the 1850s, where capitalism was less developed than elsewhere, he and Engels acknowledged that, because of the historical circumstances, ‘the workers cannot yet propose any direct communist measures.’ Thus, although Marx and Engels explicitly endorsed the concentration of ‘the utmost possible productive forces, means of transport, factories, railways, etc., in the hands of the state’, they recognized that this measure was not in itself communist, as the workers ‘will not act in a revolutionary but in a merely reformist manner’ since they ‘must [. . .] be governed by the concessions and measures of the democrats’.

For Marx, the initial communist goal is not the occupation of the state mechanism, but control of the means of production so that workers themselves might impose another philosophy of time:

All economy is a matter of economy of time. [. . .] Economy of time, as well as the planned distribution of labour time [. . .] remains the

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46 Ibid., p. 505.
49 Ibid.
first economic law if communal production is taken as the basis. Money does not originate by convention, any more than the State does. It arises from exchange.

Since in Marx the state owes its very existence to competition, the state and classes are not abolished when the proletariat occupies the state mechanism and seizes control of the means of production from the capitalist minority, as Engels believed, but only when necessary labour time is measured not by the needs of capital, but by the needs of the people, and products are produced to serve the demands of use value rather than the demands of competition and exchange value.

In Marx’s thinking, negation does not take the form of a changing of the elite, the party that holds state power, because this would necessarily fetishize and rigidify the state due to negativity lying outside the form and not in its content. With this in mind, it becomes clear why Horkheimer argued that when negation necessarily presupposes occupation of the state, the ‘revolutionary movement negatively reflects the situation which it is attacking’ and that ‘State socialism is the most consistent form of the authoritarian state.’

Marx holds that the first negation is the negation of individual private property by capitalist private property. Then, ‘capitalist production begets, with the inexorability of a law of Nature, its own negation. It is the negation of negation,’ the ‘transformation of capitalist private property [. . .] into socialised property’.

Marx’s use of ‘law of Nature’ in this context is not opposed to the theory that forms, if read dialectically, are simply forms of human social practice. Marx’s critique ‘charges that this practice exists against itself as a mere personification of economic objectivity in the form of capital’, and

51 Ibid., p. 102.
52 For Marx, it depends on the historical circumstances if this is deemed necessary.
56 Ibid., p. 101.
57 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 751.
Engels’s Dialectics and Philosophy of History

by doing so, it defetishizes the forms by revealing their essence, their human content, the human practice that lies hidden in them. The ‘law of Nature’ in no way implies how negation will necessarily develop; rather, it simply notes that negativity is inherent to the thing itself, is contained inside the mystified, inverted, enchanted fetish-forms precisely because they are creations of a historical contingency that can change.

It should also be underlined that, in Marx’s philosophy of history, the ‘negation of the negation’ does not necessarily presuppose that demystification and defetishization of the culture of capitalism must entail the occupation of the state, as that alone would not abolish competition and the logic of time is money, which Marx considers the key values of capitalism. Notably, the theory of the ‘withering away of the state’, as it is usually understood, is not present either in Marx’s individual works or in the works that he co-wrote with Engels. We must therefore free Marx from this notion and instead stress the importance that Marx attributed to the need to occupy the means of production directly and form workers’ councils so that another theory of how our culture spends its time can come to the fore.

Hence, even in cases where Marx recognized that an alliance between proletarians and the petit bourgeoisie might arise in the face of a common enemy, petit bourgeois democrats will ultimately occupy the state and ‘exclude the proletariat from the fruits of victory’. He therefore underlined that ‘Alongside the new official governments they [the workers] must immediately establish their own revolutionary workers’ governments [. . .] in the form of [. . .] municipal councils or in the form of [. . .] workers’ committees.’ The content of the notion of workers’ government in the foregoing essay is not expressed through the form of a general committee of a party that will supposedly represent the workers and thus decide in their favour, but in the participation of the workers themselves in the management of the common affairs of society through their councils.

However, considering that Marx accepted the strategy of first occupying the state for reasons of historical contingency, I would concur that his philosophy contains an embryonic theory of the withering away of the state. It should be borne in mind, however, that this does not necessarily result from the foundations of his philosophy. Besides, the purpose of a historian of political ideas should be not simply to exonerate Marx but

59 Contrary to what most believe, Marx does refer to the existence of an essence that should be distinguished from the appearance. See K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 804 and Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 537.
60 Twenty four years ago, John Holloway made one of the first efforts to free Marx by stressing negativity. See The Freeing of Marx, Common Sense, v. 14, 1993, pp. 17–21.
62 Ibid.
to bring to the fore the rich content of his theory and its relevance to our social thinking today.

The ‘Negation of the Negation’, Historical Change and the Withering Away of the State in F. Engels’s Scientific Socialism

This section investigates Engels’s attribution of a scientific character to socialism, and specifically the role that ‘historical laws’ play in his theory and the extent to which his philosophy embraces negativity. According to Engels, Marx ‘was the first to give socialism [...] a scientific foundation’\textsuperscript{63} with the discovery of the materialist conception of history, which ‘starts from the proposition that the production of the means to support human life and, next to production, the exchange of things produced, is the basis of all social structure’.\textsuperscript{64} Thus, ‘the final causes of all changes [...] are to be sought [...] in the economics of each particular epoch’\textsuperscript{65}—that is to say, in the division of society into distinct classes, and in the struggle of these classes against one another.\textsuperscript{66} [...] The economic situation is the basis, but the various factors of the superstructure [...] have a bearing on the course of the historical struggles.\textsuperscript{67} [...] The economic trend ultimately asserts itself as something inevitable.\textsuperscript{68}

In the chapter on Lukacss it will be argued that Adam Smith had a materialist philosophy of history since he explicitly assessed progress in terms of the extent to which every stage of civilization promoted the division of labour. Thus, making economics the basis for historical explanation does not in itself mean that one has a materialistic conception of history,\textsuperscript{69} as this was developed by Marx. Rather, for Engels, this conception of history is underpinned by the recognition ‘that the material world is governed by immutable laws’, that ‘as far as he is a scientific man, as far as he knows

\textsuperscript{64} F. Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific, p. 411.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 35. The same argument can also be found in Engels to Conrad Schmidt, 27 October 1890, Collected Works, Volume 49, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 2002, p. 62.
anything, he is a materialist.’ 70 Engels held that ‘Marx discovered the law of development of human history,’ whereby economic development is the foundation upon which ideas, the state and legal institutions have developed, 71 and all historical struggles are struggles between classes conditioned by their economic position. 72 He goes on to argue that ‘This law [...] has the same significance for history as the law of the transformation of energy has for natural science.’ 73 Therefore, a materialist conception of history entails holding a scientific understanding of the laws of the development of history and thought from the moment where ‘our subjective thought and the objective world are subject to the same laws.’ 74 For Engels, this is the function of dialectics, as ‘dialectics is nothing more than the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society and thought.’ 75

For Engels, dialectics is a specific kind of knowledge of the conscious application 76 of the laws of the human mind. If we hold this knowledge, we are able to probe beneath the ‘surface chance’ to reveal ‘the ‘inner, hidden laws’ that govern history.’ 77 Thus, ‘Modern materialism sees in it [history] the process of evolution of humanity, and aims at discovering the laws thereof 78 and also reveals that ‘the production of commodities [...] has its peculiar, inherent laws inseparable from it,’ which are evident in exchange and are the ‘compulsory laws of competition’. 79 For Engels, these laws work ‘as inexorable natural laws of their particular form of production’. 80 Furthermore, ‘Laws of thought and laws of nature are necessarily in agreement with one another, if they are correctly known.’ 81 For Engels, then, since the dialectician is able to defetishize the key value of capitalism (i.e., competition), he or she is able to understand not only the motion of history but also the current form of capitalism.

73 Ibid.
75 F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, p. 131.
77 Ibid., p. 387.
79 F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, p. 259.
80 Ibid.
81 F. Engels, Dialectics of Nature: Notes and Fragments, p. 505.
To thoroughly comprehend [. . .] the very nature of this act [of universal emancipation], to impart to the now oppressed class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of [. . .] scientific socialism.82

Since scientific socialism is a particular knowledge that must be ‘imparted’ to the masses, this begs the question by whom should it be imparted? Although Engels does not provide an answer, it seems likely that this could be no other than those with a sufficiently rigorous understanding of ‘scientific socialism’, those who hold ‘true class consciousness’, the party and its general committee.83 From this, it appears that there is an inherent democratic deficit in Engels’s theory of dialectics and scientific socialism.

It is true, of course, that Marx also refers to laws when he discusses the exploitation of the proletariat as ‘accomplished by the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production’.84 He also characterizes the materialistic method as a scientific one.85 Where Marx terms competition a law in capitalism, it is to the extent that competition is ‘the inner nature of capital, its essential character, [. . .] [the] immanent tendency realised as external necessity’.86 The inherent nature of the capitalist mode of production is the contradictions that are ‘latent within it [the concept of capital]’.87

At this point it should be stressed that although Marx refers to the existence of laws in capitalism, he, unlike Engels, does not refer anywhere in his works to materialism or dialectics as a discrete method, a specific kind of knowledge that can be imparted to the oppressed masses, a science that can reveal the existence of the hidden laws of history or the capitalism of his day. In *The Poverty of Philosophy*, for instance, Marx states that the theoreticians of the proletarian class of his time ‘no longer need to seek science in their minds; they have only to take note of what is happening before their eyes and to become its mouthpiece.’88 They do not ‘improvise

82 F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, p. 271.
83 At least this is the answer that traditional Marxism gave. See the chapter on Lukacs for a critical-dialectical analysis of his view on this.
85 ‘Every history of religion, even, that fails to take account of this material basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of religion than, conversely, it is to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialised forms of those relations. The latter method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one.’ K. Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 375.
87 Ibid.
88 Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, 177.
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systems’ by ‘regenerating science’;\textsuperscript{89} rather, science ‘is produced by the historical movement’ and associates ‘itself consciously with it’.\textsuperscript{90} As we have seen in the previous chapter, this is done by revealing the human content of the mystified forms, and this is why Marx stated that ‘true materialism’ makes ‘the social relationship of “man to man”’ the basic principle of the history’.\textsuperscript{91} In The Holy Family materialism ‘coincides with humanism’.\textsuperscript{92} The extent to which Marx promoted a scientific understanding of history can be understood only in terms of past history, of the historical transformations that have already taken place, not of future ones. The following comment in the introduction of Grundrisse leaves us in no doubt: ‘The anatomy of man is the key to the anatomy of the ape [. . .] historical development rests, in general, on the fact that the latest form regards the earlier ones as stages towards itself’\textsuperscript{93} (my emphasis).

Despite Engels’s reference to the existence of laws, it is true that he indeed also stresses the fact that scientific knowledge must follow historical contingency: ‘The practical application of the principles will depend, [. . .] everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing.’\textsuperscript{94} He also strives to make clear that his and Marx’s theory was ‘a theory of evolution, not a dogma to be learnt by heart and to be repeated mechanically’\textsuperscript{95} and that ‘it is possible to work along with the general movement of the working class at every one of its stages.’\textsuperscript{96}

However, if historical evolution follows natural evolution, as Engels contends, then since nature has its own predetermined laws that men cannot change, such thinking results in a fracturing of the link between structure and agency, and men thus appear to exist outside history. Alfred Schmidt’s comments on precisely this point are apposite: ‘For Engels, nature and man are not united primarily through historical practice; man appears only as a product of evolution and a passive reflection of the process of nature, not however a productive force,’\textsuperscript{97} and thus ‘laws stand over against reality.’\textsuperscript{98} Following a similar reading, John Holloway rightly

\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., p. 178.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., p. 9.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 57.
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holds that ‘For Engels, dialectics comprehends the objective movement of nature and society, a movement outside the subject.’

Certainly, Engels contradicted Marx’s theory of materialism or dialectics when he wrote, ‘A revolution is a purely natural phenomenon which is subject to physical laws rather than to the rules that determine the development of society in ordinary times.’ In what follows, I will attempt to expand upon Schmidt’s and Holloway’s argument by focusing on the notion of negativity and contradiction.

In Marx’s work, the notion of laws plays a different role to that in the work of Engels. Marx’s use of the term ‘laws’ simply points to the tendencies inherent in the systemic logic of the capitalist mode of production. The law in Marx is a social necessity that appears as natural. It does not function like laws in nature, as happens in Engels. In the latter case the law functions under a natural determination, sidestepping subjectivity and the social. As was noted at the start of this chapter, fetishism, or mystification, is constantly created by people themselves. In the words of Marx, ‘There is a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things.’ Since for Marx no laws exist outside of everyday human action in the ‘objective world’, he did not feel the need to draw a parallel between the motion of history and the motion of nature, nor the laws of the capitalist mode of production and those of nature. A dialectician following Marx’s approach has no need to demonstrate dialectics in nature because dialectics refers not to motion or movement in general but to the contradiction inside the form—fetish—that is, the opposed class interests that promote different values. By being forced to live as ‘personifications of economic categories’, we live contradictorily in our everyday life. The contradiction is that between, on the one hand, the values that underpin the logic of the capitalist system—accumulation of wealth, competition, hard work and ‘time is money’—and, on the other hand, the values that protect human dignity, such as solidarity and putting people’s needs above profits. This contradiction lies in the content, inside the essence of reality, and appears as the different reified fetish-forms.

In the Marxian dialectic, contradiction is immanent in the reified form because the form is an expression of the class conflict that lies within the essence of reality. Form-fetishes are, in their essence, modes of appearance of the class struggle, of the collision of values that promote opposing class interests. As a result, forms and categories are open because they

101 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 83.
are products of the historical struggle between the opposed values of two different philosophical anthropologies: on the one hand, the values, such as accumulation of wealth, competition and hard work, that perpetuate the logic of ‘time is money,’ and on the other, the values, such as solidarity and putting human needs above the need of money to multiply itself, that struggle for another philosophy of time in which time is not transformed into money.

For Engels, however, dialectics is not a theory that is intended to reveal the negativity inside the form, that aims to show that our everyday life in capitalism is inevitably contradictory, perverted and therefore mystified, but rather the ‘science of the general laws of motion’. It is the only method that ‘comprehends things and their representations, ideas, in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin, and ending’. While Engels may have attempted to connect contradiction to motion, his attempt does not aim to bring to the fore the capacity that people have to demystify the estranged and irrational forms of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’, something that Marx focused upon.

This is evident in Engels’s analysis of the ‘negation of the negation’ and identity thinking. In Chapter 8 of Anti-Dühring, he states,  

Negation in dialectics does not mean simply saying no, or declaring that something does not exist, or destroying it in any way one likes [. . .] I must not only negate, but also sublate the negation. I must therefore so arrange the first negation that the second remains or becomes possible. [. . .] Every kind of thing therefore has a peculiar way of being negated in such manner that it gives rise to a development.

However, the way in which this second negation, which is enabled by the first negation, is to take place in politics and history is not elaborated on by Engels. He merely states that ‘Men thought dialectically long before they knew what dialectics was’ and that ‘The law of the negation of the negation [. . .] is unconsciously operative in nature and history and [. . .] also in our heads.’

For Engels, then, dialectics is not directly related to the distinctive characteristics and logic of the capitalist mode of production, but is innate in human thinking and has transhistorical validity. Dialectics is

102 See footnote 53.
104 F. Engels, Anti-Dühring, p. 111.
105 Ibid., p. 131.
106 Ibid., p. 132.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid.
a transthistorical method of human thought that can be applied to every era. It does not originate in the mystified estrangement that is produced only in capitalism, as Marx holds. Moreover, the second negation is a method of thinking that is not directly related to the people’s ability to rupture the social relations of capital, which are continuously reproduced by the people’s adoption of values that sustain the logic of capital, the rule of money over people: competition, accumulation of wealth and hard work. Mystification and fetishism for Engels are not a process that takes place every time people act as ‘personifications of economic categories’. Negativity in Engels’s philosophy of history is not a product of human action; it does not arise from the fact that in capitalism we as a society come into contact with each other and nature in a way that forces us to spend our time in an irrational and perverted way, bound by the logic of time is money. This explains why negativity in Engels does not come from our revolt against the philosophy of time that is forced upon us by the logic of capital. In Engels, difference and negativity are inherent to human nature and do not originate in and emerge from the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. They exist regardless of the estranged, irrational forms that Marx identified.

Engels’s effort to bring to the surface people’s ability to overthrow capitalism also included reference to identity thinking. ‘That from the outset identity with itself requires difference from everything else as its complement is self-evident.’ Once again, however, he does not clarify how non-identity thinking, which embraces the power of difference and enables us to demystify and defetishize the fetish-forms. Considering the foregoing, it seems reasonable to argue that, for Engels, dialectics, negativity and non-identity thinking are unconsciously present as part of the human psyche and have only to be understood. This understanding, however, presupposes a special kind of knowledge, which as I have argued earlier, can be gained only by the few.

Engels’s understanding of the role of the state in the process of the transition to socialism reveals the true role that negativity and contradiction play in his philosophy of history. According to Engels, competition in capitalism will inevitably lead to the monopoly of companies or trusts. But as ‘no nation will put up with production conducted by trusts,’ the official representative of capitalist society—the state—will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. The modern state is the state of the capitalists, the ideal personification of the total national capital. The more it proceeds to the taking
over of productive forces, the more it actually becomes the national capitalist, the more citizens does it exploit. The workers remain wage-workers-proletarians [. . .] State ownership of the productive forces is not the solution of the conflict.\textsuperscript{112}

Nevertheless, Engels sees within state ownership the concealed conditions of the solution,\textsuperscript{113} which entails ‘society [. . .] taking possession of the productive forces’\textsuperscript{114} and the proletariat seizing political power.\textsuperscript{115} In so doing, ‘it abolishes itself as proletariat, abolishes all class distinctions and class antagonisms, abolishes also the state as state.’\textsuperscript{116} For Engels, the proletarian revolution leads to the solution of contradiction,\textsuperscript{117} and by seizing political power

the proletariat frees the means of production from the character of capital [. . .] Socialised production upon a predetermined plan becomes henceforth possible [. . .] In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the state dies out.\textsuperscript{118}

Thus Man becomes free.\textsuperscript{119} For Engels, the fight for freedom first presupposes the occupation of state power and then the implementation of a social plan that will bring harmony to the anarchy of production. In order to abolish a social form one first has to use its power. The state is not conceptualized as a form that expresses a hidden content, an essence, which for Marx is the irrationality of the ‘topsy-turvy world’. If the key question in Marxian dialectics is why this content takes this form, then the question that one should pose in relation to the state is why should the management of human common affairs be conducted through an estranged, alienated state form? Hence, in order to change the appearance/form-fetish, one has first to change the content that is expressed through the form, and not, as Engels maintains, do the opposite. Engels’s position vis-à-vis the state thus fetishizes the form and falls foul of Horkheimer’s charge that such flawed negation means that the ‘revolutionary movement negatively reflects the situation which it is attacking.’\textsuperscript{120} Rather than first struggling to occupy the state, which is a form that corresponds to capital’s philosophy of time,
the fight should be directly for the implementation of another philosophy of time entirely.

The ‘inverted topsy-turvy world’ is not turned on its head by the implementation of a plan that will supposedly bring harmony and abolish the pressure to reduce necessary labour time. In fact, Engels’s philosophy of history makes no mention of the final goal of the socialist revolution being the reduction of working time. Even if we ignore this omission, however, his belief that the proletariat’s occupation of the means of production will automatically result in the interests of society being served and thus the plan carried out will lead to a reduction in working time still appears to be an unjustifiable leap in his argument.

From Engels’s thinking, then, the following must follow: if capitalists occupy the state and there is state ownership of the means of production, then the state will act as a ‘national capitalist’, but if the proletariat occupies the state and controls the means of production under state management, the state ceases to act as ‘a national capitalist’ and contradictions will supposedly be solved. If this were to be the case, then negativity and contradiction for Engels lie outside the form as the form-fetish state has been fetishized, rigidified. The belief that the essence or the content of the state form-fetish will change simply because it has been seized by another group of people is a pious hope, a vague moralization.

Even if the state in its capitalist form indeed does wither away, this does not mean that the management of human common affairs will necessarily take a form that is not estranged or mystified, as Engels contends, since those who wield power and formulate the ‘plan’ might still implement the logic of the authoritarian state, that of accumulation of wealth and competition, just as happened in the former USSR.

Conclusion

In Engels’s philosophy, the state is not inherently contradictory since it is not a form that expresses a perverted relationship: the inverted form that our social ‘doing’ takes—that is, the way that our time is spent in capitalism. Contradiction thus does not lie inside the apparent form-fetish, is not intrinsic to it, but outside. In Engels’s philosophy, dialectics takes on a different meaning to that presented in Marx, where dialectics reveals the human content of the genesis of the form. For Marx, then, the dialectic is open and negative because it reveals the real content of the forms and highlights our ability to shatter the form-abstractions that dominate us, such as the state. Since Engels fails to see the negativity, the non-identity, the chaotic element inside the concept, inside the form, his dialectic, if not closed, is not as open as it might first appear. Although he might emphasize motion and change, we should seriously question both the extent to which the characterization of change and motion in his philosophy is
actually radical and the practical relevance that his use of the notion of contradiction has for anti-capitalist thinking today.

The ‘sense of non-identity’\textsuperscript{121} is ‘the chaotic [. . .] that which has not been included’.\textsuperscript{122} In contrast to the dialectic formula set out by Engels, critique does not derive from our belief that things move and change, but from the contradictions that originate in our schizophrenic way of living in an innately irrational world, from our inability to totally succumb to the rule of money, to wholly identify ourselves with the logic of capital and the predetermined goal of accumulation. Practice does not derive from the ‘objective laws’ of the ‘objective world’, but from non-identity thinking.

How can laws of motion and historical transformation be identified in an inherently irrational world? In this context, the chaotic refers to the fact that we cannot predetermine human creativity, and the seizing of the state and its later withering away should not be regarded as an unavoidable stage in our fight to change the world. There are no predetermined steps or pre-existing forms of practice that correspond to specific laws, even if, as in Engels’s writings, these laws are attributed with applicability across a broad context.

Ultimately, Engels’s political philosophy, in keeping with traditional theory, gives the impression that we are dominated by the state, and not by the innate tendency in capitalism of money to beget more money. As such, it differs fundamentally from the content of Marx’s critical theory. Rather than attempting to penetrate through the ‘fact’, to look inside the form, the traditional-liberal philosopher instead classifies it and compares it to other similar forms. Indeed, the majority of the literature on Engels thus far\textsuperscript{123} has adopted a traditional theory approach in its focus on attempting to classify forms, to clarify the interrelation between the state and the economy, nature and history, and the base and superstructure. Ultimately, Engels himself is responsible for this development because in his attempt to expand on the meaning of dialectics, he classifies forms rather than defetishizing and demystifying them.

In contrast to the position set out by Engels, thinking in dialectical terms does not mean that we should deem the economic the predominant

moment in the last instance, but that we should conceptualize the world in terms of a dialectic between form/appearance and content/essence whereby all the categories through which we understand the world are understood as expressions of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’ that our social ‘doing’ creates.

Following non-identity thinking, the role of a contemporary dialectician is to draw attention to the lessons we might take from Engels’s failure to embrace negativity in our efforts to overcome crisis, the foremost of which must be to urge people not to trust any technocrat or the supposed vanguard general committee of any party that purports to possess a ‘true class consciousness’ or to await any other form of ‘saviour’. In addition, he should question all programmes that maintain that perpetuating the existence of current forms such as the state can serve to fulfill efforts to organize our common affairs under another philosophy of time. The struggle to change the world does not presuppose knowledge of a specific science or the ability to understand the relation between base and superstructure. This can lead only to the perpetuation of closed fetish-forms that continue to express the logic of eternal accumulation. Rather, the struggle lies in the power of people to stand against the rule of money in their everyday lives, and by their own doing produce open forms that express another philosophy of how time should be spent.

3 Max Horkheimer’s Dialectics Rehabilitated
How Horkheimer’s ‘Open Marxism’ Cracks Capitalism

Introduction

Very few readings of Max Horkheimer’s dialectical materialism through the critical theory perspective have been done until today.1 The ‘Open Marxism’ tradition, which expands on the Frankfurt School theory and attempts to demonstrate its contemporary relevance,2 has so far not provided us with an interpretation of Horkheimer’s philosophy. Even those willing to study the Frankfurt School tend to focus their attention on Adorno, leaving Horkheimer’s thinking not only unexplored but also at the mercy of interpretations that, in their exposition of Horkheimer’s theory, presuppose an undialectical understanding of the world.

This chapter will attempt to fill this void by focusing on how Horkheimer uses the main concepts of the dialectical tradition: determinate negation, non-identity thinking and mediation. More specifically, I will analyse the way that these concepts are used in his philosophy, their practical repercussions and their political significance for us today. Hopefully the chapter will be of interest not only to philosophers but to all social theorists, especially those who in order to reflect on the crisis aim at a deeper understanding of the irrational character of the capitalism mode of production. I will also be among the very few to attempt to show that Horkheimer’s interpretation of dialectical materialism is not far removed from that set out in Adorno’s Negative Dialectics.

I will start my exposition from his criticism of traditional theory and then I will attempt to unearth two concepts that are of the utmost importance in negative dialectics, the notion of cracks in capitalism and the uncertainty that is included in this notion. I will attempt to defend his theory, even to the point of being at variance with Horkheimer’s own comments about its practical significance. I hope to prove two things: first, that he underestimated his own conclusions and second, that his pessimism is not the inevitable result of his methodological understanding of the capitalist mode of production.

The Irrationality of Traditional Theory

The starting point for my interpretation of Horkheimer is his best-known essay, ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’. In traditional theory, the aim is to formulate abstract principles that intermesh to form a system with harmony, one that ‘includes lack of contradictions’. Traditional theory, for Horkheimer, is shackled in dualism of thought and being, since ‘There is always, on the one hand, the conceptually formulated knowledge and, on the other, the facts to be subsumed under it.’ Since knowledge does not attempt to bring to the surface the social underpinnings of ‘facts’, theory becomes ‘absolutized [. . .] justified in some other ahistorical way, and thus it [becomes] a reified, ideological category’.

In the third volume of Capital, it is wisely and clearly stressed that ‘all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.’ What the third volume makes explicit is that fetishism is not a phenomenon that exists alongside other phenomena in the capitalist mode of production; rather, it forms the core element of the capitalist system. In capitalism, we live under the dominance of mystified forms, the essence of which must be identified. Thus, the role of the philosopher is to demystify, to defetishize social forms.

According to Horkheimer, this is precisely why traditional theorists are unable to succeed in bringing to the surface the hidden essence of the
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reified forms and thus denaturalizing them. For them, ‘The whole per-
ceptible world [. . .] as interpreted within a traditional world-view [. . .] is
seen by the perceiver as a sum-total of facts; it is there and must be
accepted.’ Rather than attempting to penetrate through the ‘fact’, inside
the form, the traditional/liberal philosopher instead classifies it and com-
pares it to other similar forms. In so doing, he unquestioningly accepts the
existence of the form-fetish and dogmatically asserts its actuality without
explaining its existence. He presupposes that which must be explained
and therefore naturalizes it. He falls ‘victim to the illusion that property
and profit no longer play a key role, an illusion carefully fostered in the
social sciences’.

The ideas through which undialectical traditional theory
explains the world are ‘free exchange, free competition, harmony of inter-
ests’. To these, I would add industry—in the sense of reverential regard
for the ‘virtue’ of hard work—and competition, as encountered in J. S.
Mill and Adam Smith, respectively.

Horkheimer thus criticizes all modern philosophy from Descartes to J. S.
Mill. He argues that English philosophy from Locke to Mill uncritically
accepted the values that sustained the existence of commercial life—that is
to say, the capitalist mode of production—and contends that Cartesianism
and English philosophy accepted the dualism of a detached ego and reality
of facts. ‘The role ascribed to thought by both Cartesianism and empiricism
was an expression of the attitude of enlightened bourgeois strata which
hoped to put all questions of life under their control.’ Liberal thinking
‘had an irrational conception of individual and community’ since it did
not question the inevitable consequences of the logic of capital, according
to which ‘the whole of social life [. . .] is withdrawn from human will.’

If this is the case, what purpose does modern philosophy serve? For
Horkheimer, its

glorification of the duty-conscious but simultaneously autonomous
person [. . .] becomes the song of praise for the meaning of suffering.
Self-abnegation and the readiness to sacrifice [. . .] become a general

8 Ibid., p. 236.
9 Ibid., p. 215.
10 Regarding their importance in J. S. Mill, see V. Grollios, J. S. Mill’s Views on Democracy
    after 1848, Critical Sociology, v. 37, n. 6, 2011, pp. 871–887 and V. Grollios, Philosophy
    of History and Philosophical Anthropology in J. S. Mill’s Views on Colonialism, Journal
11 M. Horkheimer, The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy, in M. Hork-
    heimer (ed.) Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings, The MIT
12 Ibid., p. 220.
13 Ibid., p. 252.
14 Ibid., p. 251.
sentiment and reveal the adjustment of a large part of society to its contemporary circumstances.\textsuperscript{15}

The irrationality that characterizes modern philosophy ‘[l]eaves untouched the essentials of the economic [. . .] laws and serves the ends of the economically powerful people who are merely the executors of those economic forces’.\textsuperscript{16} However, despite Horkheimer’s criticism of all modern philosophy, he certainly does not discard it since in his early writings he recognizes its critical character for the standards of its time. For example, he puts to the ‘credit side of modern positivism’ the fact that ‘[e]arly in its history it criticized the fetishistic concept of the state together with the illusory concept of God.’\textsuperscript{17} Moreover, he applauds ‘the idealistic philosophy in Germany, from its beginning with Leibniz to the present’ for not accepting that the perception of the world is ‘a copy of something fixed and substantial but [. . .] a product of human activity’ and more specifically he applauds Kant for proving that ‘the world [. . .] is not given to us by God and unquestionably accepted by us.’\textsuperscript{18}

Although Horkheimer does not expand on his conception of the irrationality of the capitalist mode of production, I believe that he understands it in terms of the logic of the ‘topsy-turvy world’ analysed in the third volume of \textit{Capital}. In brief, as stressed before, this ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’\textsuperscript{19} can be explained thus: as ‘personifications of economic categories’,\textsuperscript{20} we live under the domination of inverted, distorted forms (e.g., the state, parliamentary representative democracy and value as money) that express the perverted form that our doing must take in order to continuously help money multiply itself. Thus, in the capitalist mode of production, the way in which people come into contact with each other in order to satisfy their basic human needs leads not to the satisfaction of their needs via money but to the satisfaction of the need of money to multiply itself via people’s work. Instead of people becoming the real subject of history, capital becomes the subject that uses people for its needs. What could be more irrational than this?

In the same way, Horkheimer also recognizes ‘the irrationality of the world’\textsuperscript{21} in which ‘men must submit to conditions they themselves create

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 222.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 263.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., pp. 157–158.
\textsuperscript{19} K. Marx, \textit{Capital}, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.
as to something alien and overwhelmingly powerful.” These conditions determine the way in which the ‘topsy-turvy world’ appears—that is, in the inverted, distorted forms previously mentioned. He even calls for a ‘Marxist clarification of the concept of freedom’.

Traditional theory—that is, modern philosophy—does not succeed in penetrating the level of appearance, of noumena, but ‘contents itself with ordering and classifying supposedly pure data’. If it had penetrated the level of fetishism, of appearance, it would have revealed the fact that the prevailing mode of production nullifies the autonomy of the individual ego or the pure reason that has been celebrated by philosophers since Descartes. Modern philosophical systems were built upon the illusion that spirit or reason is fundamentally divorced from the irrational. In these systems, analysis of contradiction did not include the class interests that unavoidably come into conflict with each other. Class conflict remained outside value judgements in traditional theory, which exhausted the future content of the form-fetish to the current one. Therefore, facts, forms, objects have nothing more to reveal than their present form of appearance.

This is identity thinking, the most important characteristic of traditional-liberal theory. The bourgeois form of democracy or the state, for example, was not seen as an expression of something deeper, of a hidden essence, of the topsy-turvy world, of the irrational fact that in a system where the means of production is privately owned, the multitude has no say about the terms under which the production of necessities, the means of its own self-production, takes place. Profit through competition is the predetermined goal of the capitalist system.

By sidestepping any possible connection between value formation and the aforementioned undemocratic nature of so-called bourgeois democracy, the traditional theory philosopher makes the concepts-forms fetishized, naturalized, rigid and absolute. Any claim to a totality of knowledge of the world is a false universality, a symptom of the dogmatism of a closed system that leaves outside its analysis the most important relationship: the undemocratic, perverted way with which people come into contact with each other in capitalism in order to satisfy their most elementary needs.

22 Ibid., p. 51.
23 Ibid., p. 52.
25 Since democracy cannot exist in capitalism and in socialism at the same time, ‘bourgeois democracy’ is a contradiction in terms. Marx used the phrase purely for the sake of argument. For more on a dialectical reading of democracy in Marx see the first chapter of this book.
What traditional-liberal thought abandons

is the whole claim and approach of knowledge: to comprehend the given as such; not merely to determine the abstract spatio-temporal relations of the facts [. . .] but on the contrary to conceive them as superfluities, as mediated moments which come to fulfillment only in the development of their social, historical and human significance.\textsuperscript{26}

The task of cognition consists ‘in the determinate negation of each immediacy’.\textsuperscript{27} The negation of each immediacy takes place through a dialectical philosophy that relates the fetishized concepts to the dynamic movement of events, by understanding that the content of the concepts is not something stable, but carries in itself the dynamism of the historical change. In this dialectic between essence/content and form/appearance, essence always appears, but in a distorted, perverted form.

Horkheimer places the irrationality that lies at the core of modern philosophy in direct contrast with Marx’s philosophy, dialectical materialism. Although he rarely directly cites Marx’s work, his entire philosophy stems from it. Form-fetishes, such as the state or value as money, are the mystified appearance of the topsy-turvy world—that is, the irrational way in which people come into contact with each other to satisfy their basic human needs, the irrationality of subordinating our doing to the logic of capital, the logic of ‘time is money.’\textsuperscript{28} One of the essays in which Horkheimer’s philosophical debt and his theory’s connection to Marx are most apparent is \textit{A New Concept of Ideology}, where Horkheimer makes one of his first direct references to Marx and then states that ‘history is the recapitulation of processes that arise from the contradictory relationships of human society.’\textsuperscript{29}

Therefore, the irrationality that dialectical materialism reveals to be the content of the real historical forms invalidates identity thinking. ‘The dialectic is not closed. There is no harmony between thought and being; rather, contradiction still proves to be the real driving force.’\textsuperscript{30} Its overcoming must therefore take place not on the plane of transcendental thinking but as an immanent critique ‘in the real historical struggle

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Horkheimer himself makes a reference to this notion since this is the exact title of an aphorism from \textit{Dawn and Decline}. See M. Horkheimer, \textit{Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969}, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{29} M. Horkheimer, A New Concept of Ideology, p. 139.
between the individuals who represent those needs and capacities because the dialectic reveals that our daily life has been organized in a perverted way.

### Non-identity Materialistic Thinking

The young Horkheimer had ‘the belief that formulating the negative in the epoch of transition was more meaningful than academic careers’, a belief that he hoped would lead to his writing a book on dialectics. The fact that materialism is mainly analysed in the young Horkheimer’s essays shows how inextricably connected his interpretation of dialectics is to materialism. Indeed, when form-fetishes are perceived as the mystified expression of the topsy-turvy world, an innovative interpretation not only of dialectics but also of materialism emerges, and it is certainly worthwhile exploring how this interpretation arises in his work.

Horkheimer stressed in a 1933 essay that materialism had until then been reduced to the simple claim that only matter and its movement are real and had dismissed everything spiritual as pure illusion. However, he noted that ‘such definitive statements as that everything real is material [. . .] are minimal in content and a very general kind of extract of experience, not a rule for action.’ Hence,

> The classical materialist thesis [. . .] is of such little consequence for decisions in particular matters that some influential materialists of the Enlightenment, for example Diderot above all, could vacillate all their lives on this point, without therefore changing the character of their practical attitudes in the slightest.

What Horkheimer means is that materialism in Marx is not, as most Marxist scholars believe, merely some kind of realism, an epistemological theory underlining the importance of Matter to Ideas. On the contrary,

> Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it becomes

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31 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 19.

For Horkheimer, materialism denotes the ad hominem critique as this was mentioned by Marx, which reveals the true content of the different forms, which is human practice. Thus, as the eighth thesis on Feuerbach explained, materialism dilutes all dogma and fetishes. In the \textit{Holy Family} Marx identifies materialism with humanism.\footnote{K. Marx, \textit{The Holy Family}, in K. Marx and F. Engels, \textit{Collected Works}, Volume 4, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1975, p. 125.} This is why he believes that ‘The philosophical thought of the liberal bourgeois does not go to the root of social matters’ and that traditional theory, which was not materialistic in the aforementioned sense, served ‘the continuation of the economic process in its given form’.\footnote{M. Horkheimer, Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism, p. 288.} From this point of view, the role of the philosopher is not to formulate absolute claims or ideas that are universally and perpetually valid. Reality is not a concept existing outside history, outside class struggle. Reality does not have a stable content that can be analysed by an ‘innocent’ philosophy that retains its neutral character regardless of the nature of the social conflict. ‘It is central to Marxian materialism [. . .] not to permit vague ideas of humanity to be hypostatized as Being in a higher sense’\footnote{M. Horkheimer, \textit{A New Concept of Ideology}, p. 139.} so as to permit a ‘situationally determined’\footnote{Ibid., p. 146.} theory to be formed.

Philosophy has the task of denaturalizing and defetishizing existing forms and revealing that their origin lies in real interests. ‘Social theory therefore forms the main content of contemporary materialism.’\footnote{M. Horkheimer, Materialism and Metaphysics, p. 24.} For critical theory, philosophy is primarily a practical philosophy that inherently includes Marx’s critique of political economy and a focus on empirical social research.

Materialism, via the ad hominem critique, shows contradiction, class conflict, to be the real content of the forms and the values that justify them, and it therefore succeeds in deciphering the existing irrationality and in inverting the ‘topsy-turvy’ world. This effort cannot be conceived as something different from or external to dialectics, as it is impossible to have one without the other.

Abromeit also stresses that ‘Horkheimer rejected the notion that capitalism or Marx’s Critical Theory of capitalism were completely closed
systems” and that for Horkheimer ‘Materialism [. . .] never attains the form of a closed system, because it is historical to the very core.’ He moreover mentions that critical theory’s categories ‘retain their dialectical character insofar as they point toward their own negation’. He succeeds in bringing to the reader’s attention the open character of Horkheimer’s critical theory, by underlining the close relation Horkheimer’s thought had to contradictions in everyday life, although he does not base his reading in Marx’s idea of the ‘topsy-turvy world’ and in the dialectic between form/appearance and content/essence, like this study does. This does not mean, though, that he should not be applauded for his meticulous work on this point.

If concepts cannot sustain an ultimate meaning because they are not transhistorical entities existing above social conflict, then ‘the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived,’ and by recognizing this, dialectical materialism shows its respect to the object, as Adorno very aptly wrote. In the foregoing quotation, Adorno provides possibly the best description of non-identity thinking, but, as I will endeavour to show, this view is not limited to Adorno, but appears in Horkheimer as well. In the following pages, I will also attempt to provide a foundation for my view that one of the main reasons that Horkheimer’s philosophy is misconceived is due to the majority of its interpreters failing to appreciate the continuity between his philosophy and that of Adorno as far as non-identity and determinate negation are concerned.

_Eclipse of Reason_ contains perhaps the harshest criticism made by non-identity thinking on the two main paths followed by modern philosophy: idealism and English empiricism. In this book, Horkheimer makes it clear that the fundamental issue under discussion is the relation between the subjective and objective concepts of reason. He places English empiricism under the banner of subjective reason and the idealism of Kant and Hegel under the banner of objective reason. The first is criticized for adjusting itself to ‘the social process of reification out of fear that it may otherwise [. . .] become a mere game of ideas’ and the second for ‘asserting meaning that proves to be an illusion’.

Ultimately, not only do ‘The two concepts of reason [. . .] not represent two separate and independent ways of the mind’, but also they ‘are

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43 Ibid., p. 229.
44 Ibid., p. 328.
46 Ibid., p. 141.
48 Ibid., pp. 117–118.
49 Ibid., p. 118.
interlaced’. Both are shackled to the plane of reification, to the naturalization of the form-fetish. Hence, they are both unable to conceive that the ‘fact’ is a form-process that is being created every time people adjust their doing within the demands of the logic of the system, of the logic of ‘time is money.’ Thus, for English empiricism and for German idealism—that is to say, for almost all modern European philosophy—facts are products of social alienation, and forms are created by the fact that we succumb to the logic that creates the ‘topsy-turvy’ world. Horkheimer is therefore justified in calling modern philosophy ‘bourgeois’ because it does not ‘see through the notion of fact itself, in its development and therefore in its relativity. The so-called facts [. . .] are often surface phenomena that obscure rather than disclose the underlying reality.’ Thus, this kind of philosophy provides a ‘truth’ that ‘presupposes social processes that thinking cannot accept as ultimates’. In this framework, the concept is being identified with the fetishized, reified, alienated form that the content/essence takes—that is, it exhausts itself in the current form of the object. This means that the concept’s identity is false, and untruth therefore lies at the heart of the concepts of modern European philosophy, or as Horkheimer calls it, traditional-bourgeois theory. The real contradiction of opposed class interests is hidden behind the veils of harmony, the free subject and pure reason. This ‘indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived’. This ‘untruth of identity’ ultimately leads to vulgar materialism and to cynical nihilism. Imprisoned by identity thinking, the untruth of liberalism is more evident today than ever. In an era of economic crisis and in spite of the exploitation, panic and rising alienation experienced by people, liberal philosophers are still unable to ground these phenomena in the logic according to which we have constructed our daily life. Instead, they attribute the causes to political choices, to the characters of members of the governing elite, and form abstract principles of justice that await the brave and wise politician to implement them.

Horkheimer’s criticism of metaphysical theories is valid for the traditional-bourgeois philosophy as a whole, which harmonizes ‘well with the belief that hardship is an eternal necessity for the great majority of men’, with the logic of capital, the logic that ‘time is money.’ He also stresses that the presence of the real historical contradictions that are presupposed in the fetishized picture of the world painted by traditional theory becomes evident in the ‘conflict between the emancipated individual

50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., p. 56.
52 Ibid.
53 T. Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 5.
54 M. Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason, p. 118.
of bourgeois society and his fate within that society’. By his use of the
word ‘fate’, Horkheimer is referring to the fact that the so-called emanci-
pated individual must live as ‘a vampire of capital’, as ‘a personification
of economic categories’ in order to survive in the capitalist system. When
this is considered, it is no surprise that for Horkheimer, ‘this philosophical
belittling of science acts as an opiate.’ Although Horkheimer’s accusa-
tion is made against the metaphysical theories of Descartes, Spinoza, Kant
and Hegel in the article cited, I believe that it is valid for all trends, even
the contemporary, in traditional-liberal political theory, since the purpose
of science would be the implementation of the dialectic between form/
phenomenon and essence/content which is entirely absent from twentieth-
and twenty-first-century liberalism.

In a similar way to Marx, who wrote that ‘religion is [. . .] the opium
of the people,’ Horkheimer argues that traditional-liberal philosophy is
the opium of the ‘individual of the bourgeois society’. This is a hetero-
dox conclusion for the mainstream of political philosophy today, which
still holds that liberal theory encompasses the interests of the whole of
the population.

It is now time to reveal the positive meaning of Horkheimer’s dialectics
by moving on from the discussion of what non-identity dialectics is not
to the explanation of what it is. The best way to do so is by posing the
following questions: in practice, what does philosophizing in non-identity
terms mean for our efforts to change the world? How does it inform our
understanding of other concepts, such as totality or negativity, that are
encountered in the literature? What possible counterargument could one
formulate to the harmony and certainty of traditional theory? Finally, the
most challenging question of the entire chapter must be posed: in what
ways is Horkheimer’s understanding of Marxism differentiated from the
traditional Marxist tradition?

Negation and Uncertainty in Max Horkheimer’s
Dialectical Materialism

Concepts are the forms, the appearance of an underlying deeper social
formation—essence—which when revealed makes us conscious of the
irrationality with which we have organized our daily existence, the irra-
rationality of being forced to behave as ‘ghosts of capital’, to accumulate

56 Ibid., p. 138.
57 Ibid.
58 K. Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction,
p. 175.
as much wealth as possible through antagonistic contact with each other. ‘Accumulate, accumulate! That is the Moses and the prophets!’

If this is valid, then ‘tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking’ since forms are the mystified way in which the contradiction, the class conflict, is being expressed. Thus, critical theory—or dialectical theory, since for Horkheimer the two terms are synonymous—‘does not labor in the service of an existing reality but only gives voice to the mystery of that reality’. This mystery to which Horkheimer is referring is the ‘enchanted, perverted’ logic of capital which perverts the way in which people come into contact with each other in order to satisfy their basic needs by promoting the need of money to multiply itself rather than promoting the needs themselves. This logic totally reverses the initial intention of our doing.

Through this demystification, this deciphering of the ‘invisible hand’, the historical origins of the concepts/forms come to the fore. Because ‘the dialectical forms of the movement of thought show themselves to be the same as those of reality,’ ‘the meaning of the categories will change along with the structure of the society from which they are drawn.’

According to this methodology, the materialistic dialectic has an open-ended character that ‘does not regard the “rational” as completed at any point in history’. Instead, because ‘the rational is never totally deducible,’ the dialectic is open and negative. In identity-liberal thinking, the validity of the existing forms is presupposed; human rationality is

62 Here, class conflict should not be understood in traditional Marxism (I mean in Marxism-Leninism) terms but from an ‘Open Marxist’ perspective. This means that class conflict takes place every time we make ‘our doing-in-against-and-beyond-labour’ visible, when we deny ‘the mask of abstract labour’ (J. Holloway, *Crack Capitalism*, p. 212) and refuse to succumb to the logic of ‘time is money’ and to the values of capital: greater production-growth, hard work and competition. Although Horkheimer expresses second thoughts about the coherence in respect of the interests that the category of working class or that of the proletariat might have (M. Horkheimer, *Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969*, p. 61), he does not encourage us to abstain from thinking in class terms or from using the term ‘working class’. On the contrary, in his passage ‘The Relativity of Class Theory’ included in the *Dawn and Decline* he encourages us to keep philosophizing in class terms: ‘There are other differences, [. . .] which, given the same interest in the free development of men and justice, may appear as fundamental as social classes [. . .] Nonetheless, the distinction according to social classes is superior to the other points of view’ (Ibid., p. 103).
65 Ibid., p. 434.
66 Ibid., pp. 437–438.
absolute, the state and bourgeois democracy are forms completely capable of fulfilling human needs, and the transformation of value into money is perfectly natural. Hence, crisis and other phenomena of social decomposition are attributed not to the way that we have organized the most important social relation, the way we work, but to the incompetence of certain persons. Thus, political elites and most of those who analyse the current crisis in academia are imprisoned in identity thinking, since this is the framework of their ideas. Let us consider how the necessity of growth in economy is fetishized today, since it is considered unavoidable, even by many among those who call themselves socialists or Marxists.

Only when dialectical materialism is interpreted not as a closed system but as a dynamic concept that follows the historical process is the potential for human creativity to shape history revealed by it. ‘Yet as much as theory and practice are linked to history, there is no pre-established harmony between them.’\(^{68}\) Human creativity is not exhausted in the welfare capitalism, the welfare state, since we cannot predict how people will organize their daily existence. This insight means that a form cannot persist if essence is being transformed. A change in the foundations of the latter would necessarily result in the disintegration of the form, be it the state, the bourgeois form of democracy or the transformation of value into money. If this were not the case, then forms would become transhistorical categories that would remain in existence regardless of the historical process.

As Adorno stated in his famous 1966 book, ‘The name of dialectics says no more […] than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder.’\(^{69}\) However, in their famous discussion ten years before, Horkheimer underlined the same thought by declaring that ‘We are in favour of the chaotic, of that which has not been included.’\(^{70}\) To this, I would add that which would have been impossible to have been included.\(^{71}\) The remainder, the chaotic, is in my view the potential for the development of human nature. The chaotic refers to the fact that we cannot predict beforehand what new forms of power will exist or what form the decision-making process will take if people choose to organize their daily means of subsistence with a different logic to that of capital, to that of ‘time is money.’

We are thus doomed to live in the uncertainty that the chaotic causes. ‘The view that philosophical concepts must be pinned down, identified, and used only when they exactly follow the dictates of the logic of identity

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71 This is a crucial point from which one can infer the strong connection between Horkheimer’s dialectic and Adorno’s *Negative Dialectics*, which I attempt to prove, among other things, in this chapter.
is a symptom of the quest for certainty.”72 Any claim to certainty leads to identity thinking, to a dialectic that is closed, to a prediction of human action and thus to a limitation of human creativity. The materialist cannot have faith in any certainty since it cannot provide us with a conclusive image of reality,73 of human creativity.

If in Horkheimer’s philosophy, tension or negativity is an element inherent in the concept-form within the capitalist mode of production, then critical theory or dialectical philosophy would advise that ‘When called upon to act independently’, we should not ‘cry for patterns, systems, and authorities’.74 Instead, philosophy should pursue the defetishization, the denaturalization of the current form of reason, which gives the impression that it stands above class interests, but in fact does not. By thinking dialectically in a materialistic, ad hominem framework, Horkheimer believes that people will not only be able to connect their particular experiences from everyday life to the general ideas that are being expressed,75 but also realize that ‘the content is reality in a “bad” form’,76 and in so doing, struggle for a different content that will create a different form and bring about the fulfilment of basic human needs.

A philosophy interpreted through negative dialectics strives to make people familiar with the precariousness of their existence and the fact that this is caused by the irrationality of the system. Philosophy is ‘inconvenient, obstinate [. . .] a source of annoyance’, lacking any ‘compelling proofs’.77 Its purpose, therefore, is to help man overcome his reluctance to question the values with which he has organized his daily existence and encourage him to stop feeling ‘insecure and on dangerous ground’78 every time he makes this effort. With this in mind, the meaning of Horkheimer’s following assertion becomes clear: ‘A philosophy that thinks to find peace within itself [. . .] has nothing to do with the critical theory.’79 In such a philosophy, concepts would not be forms of historical struggle, of concrete negativity, but rigid, and its knowledge would not correspond to real human needs.

Before moving on to examine Horkheimer’s belief that his theory forms part of the council communism tradition, his use of the concept of totality must be clarified. Identity thinking contains a fragmentary picture of

73 M. Horkheimer, The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy, p. 239.
78 Ibid.
the world. Its conception of totality is fundamentally dogmatic because in it the determinations of thought disregard the historical situation, the essence of the world. In identity thinking, the concrete is not that which is concrete in a particular historical period. Hence, the liberal philosopher turns the specific forms that correspond to the capitalist mode of production current to his time and the values that underpin it into absolutes by presenting them as unavoidable.

By contrast, by defetishizing and denaturalizing the rigid forms of identity thinking and bringing to the fore the irrationality of the ‘topsy-turvy’ world, non-identity thinking (dialectical materialism) deciphers forms in terms of their human content. Through the dialectic between form/phenomenon and essence/content, the critical theorist manages to make evident the real content of the forms of our doing and thus presents a picture of the whole and not merely its mystified form. This picture of the whole can ‘only to be thought of in terms of particular interests and tasks’.

This picture does not portray a final, conclusive concept of the totality but rather a dynamic one that is conscious of the fact that any change in the essence, in the most important relation of society—how people come into contact with each other in order to satisfy their basic needs, meaning the reproduction of their means of daily subsistence—will correspondingly change the content of the fetishized forms that now appear to have a life of their own. Thus, bearing the importance of negativity and uncertainty in mind, Horkheimer is absolutely correct in claiming that ‘Knowledge of the totality is a self-contradictory concept.’ In a sense, for non-identity thinking, knowledge of the totality would be a contradiction in terms because there is always a remainder, a chaotic, a potential that cannot be identified. Disposal of this remainder would lead to a static view of human nature that shackles reason to identity thinking. As will be analysed in the following section, this is precisely what modern philosophy and traditional Marxist approaches do.

The Opening of Cracks in Capitalism According to Max Horkheimer’s Council Communism

In the second section of this chapter (on irrationality), the great importance of the concept of determinate negation in critical theory was

80 M. Horkheimer, The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy, p. 223.
81 M. Horkheimer, Materialism and Metaphysics, p. 32.
82 M. Horkheimer, On the Problem of Truth, p. 430.
83 M. Horkheimer, The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy, p. 244.
84 In my view, the best analysis of this concept can be found in Marx’s analysis of the concept of ‘concrete’ in his exposition of the method of political economy in his introduction to the *Grundrisse*, which should be regarded as one of the most important texts for interpretation of the Frankfurt School theory. See K. Marx, *Economic Manuscripts*.
underlined. This section will focus to a greater extent on its importance. Marx stresses that the concrete does not originate from the abstract but from the actual historical process. By defetishizing a concept and deciphering it on a human basis, it becomes clear that its real content is none other than that which we have created through the subordination of our doing to the logic of capital, to that of ‘time is money.’ We deny the ‘bad’ form only by examining its real mediations. This involves attempting to bring to light how its content is really a product of the ‘topsy-turvy’ world. Thus, we reveal its origin, which is no other than the way in which we as a society spend our time in order to satisfy our elementary needs.

We determine the nature of the concept, the form-fetish, by negating its current fetishized form, making it possible to demonstrate that the form is a product of a specific historical process and not something predetermined or absolute. Philosophizing through employing determinate negation vindicates Horkheimer’s assertion that ‘The more planned the society, whether in late democratic or totalitarian form, the more removed from reality are bourgeois culture and sensibility.’ Resisting the temptation to adopt a programmatic plan does not mean that demands cannot be formulated or that we should abandon efforts to change the world by engaging in class struggle. It certainly does not denote a lack of ideals.

On the contrary, it means that our ‘ideals are shaped with the needs of society as a starting point and are measured by what is possible in the foreseeable future with the human forces available.’ Horkheimer stresses precisely this point when he points out in the excerpt ‘The Truth of Positivism’ from Notizen und Dämmerung that a philosophy’s content is a symptom of social tension, and only then can it encourage resistance and revolution.

If the demands that we fight for change according to historical circumstances, then every answer about the true meaning of life or description of the autonomous ego ‘prove[s] to be abstract concepts in which are immortalized the reflection of a transitory reality’. Through the use of negative dialectics, we come to know more of what we should not fight for.

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85 Ibid., p. 39.
86 It is impossible to expand here on the connection between the logic of capital and time. For this, see S. Tischler, Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination: Some Notes, in W. Bonefeld and K. Psychopedis (eds.) Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005, pp. 131–143.
88 M. Horkheimer, Materialism and Metaphysics, pp. 45–46.
89 This is my translation in English from the Greek translation of Notizen.
for than for what we should.\textsuperscript{92} We should become familiar and feel comfortable with the uncertainty that arises from the fact that we know more of what the meaning of our existence is than what it is not. With this in mind, it should become clear that any description of a future socialist society would have to turn concepts into transhistorical categories, and the dialectic could not be materialistic. Mediations between the abstract and the concrete would not take place in a historical context but rather on the plane of transhistorical ideas. Such a conceptual construction would not be philosophy, but poetry.\textsuperscript{93} The rational must be conceived not as the a priori construction of a concept but ‘everywhere in the historical dialectic as the break with class society’.\textsuperscript{94} This is how determinate negation is understood in Horkheimer’s philosophy. Negation, the rational for which we strive, is dependent on the concrete that already exists and originates from the contradiction that is inherent in it. Since negation is the development of the existent contradiction, it sublates it, by which I mean that which we negate is contained in the other that we demand, but in a new form.

But what of action, and what form should it take? Horkheimer states, ‘Men of good will want to draw conclusions for political action from the critical theory. Yet there is no fixed method for doing this.’\textsuperscript{95} Does this mean, as the vast majority of Horkheimer’s interpreters believe, that we should abstain from every effort to change the world? I contend that it does not. Rather, it means that the content of our concepts cannot be formed in advance of the class struggle but only simultaneously with it, since concepts spring from social movements. ‘The truth about the future does not take the form of a verification of data,’\textsuperscript{96} of a content that has been formed beforehand by a working class–movement elite that has class consciousness. Horkheimer successfully underlines that ‘Man’s own will plays a part in that truth,’\textsuperscript{97} meaning that there is no specific method for opening cracks in capitalism, and certainly not one that can be formulated and followed by a revolutionary elite.

Horkheimer’s harsh criticism of traditional Marxism, which advises the working class movement to focus its efforts on the implementation of a

\textsuperscript{92} This is also stressed by a well-known ‘Open Marxist’ in a very interesting article that connects uncertainty to the understanding of the state. See W. Bonefeld, On Postone’s Courageous but Unsuccessful Attempt to Banish the Class Antagonism from the Critique of Political Economy, \textit{Historical Materialism}, v. 12, n. 3, 2004, pp. 103–124.

\textsuperscript{93} M. Horkheimer, The Latest Attack on Metaphysics, p. 139.


\textsuperscript{96} M. Horkheimer, Postscript, p. 251.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid.
rational plan after the occupation of the state takes place, can be seen in his article ‘The Authoritarian State’. In my view, this is the text that critics who dismiss his philosophy as unavoidably pessimistic should focus on, since it contains the practical repercussions of his philosophical analysis.

For Horkheimer, it is a contradiction to demand ‘at the same time both rational planning and freedom, emancipation and regulation’. For the radical parties of the bourgeois era, ‘The establishment of freedom was considered a mechanistic, natural consequence of the conquest of power, or was considered simply utopia.’ As a result, traditional Marxist theory and practice did not disentangle themselves from the logic of the authoritarian state and ‘the exorbitant needs of the power apparatus’. For example, although state socialism may have ‘freed itself from any dependence on private capital’, it increased ‘production at a rate only seen in the transition from the mercantilist period to the liberal era’, and ‘Even though the surplus value [was] no longer absorbed as profit, it [was] still the focal point.

Instead of pursuing a fundamentally different way of coming together to satisfy our needs, a way that would not be based on the logic of ‘time is money,’ the programme advanced by socialist organizations ‘appeared as the quickest means of realizing the bourgeoisie’s ideological goal of the general prosperity’. To put this in Marxian terms, orthodox theory obliged people to continue to live as ‘ghosts of capital’ and to act as ‘personifications of economic categories’ in order to implement justice and to live in liberty.

The will of the ruled, which could lead only to democratization of the system of control, was set to one side because the mass opposition parties did not threaten the principle of the authoritarian state itself. This was unsurprising given that traditional Marxism’s totality is dogmatic in that it attempts to prescribe to individuals an effective form of resistance to injustice and thus undermines human creativity. The static view of human nature that underlies traditional-liberal philosophy also underlies traditional Marxism.

Although Horkheimer does not explicitly state that traditional Marxism was shackled by identity thinking, he essentially endeavours to show that rational planning should be a goal for the long-term future, similarly to Marx.

98 In my reading he means planning for the short future on this occasion since rational planning should be a goal for the long-term future, similarly to Marx.


100 Ibid., p. 100.

101 Ibid., p. 102.

102 Ibid., p. 101.

103 Ibid., p. 102.

104 Ibid., p. 100.

105 Ibid., p. 103.

106 Ibid., p. 116.
this was the case by demonstrating that the content of its ideas did not grow out of praxis. In its philosophy, the state was not a mode of expression of the ‘topsy-turvy’ world, since the transition to socialism is dependent upon the maintenance of this inherently antidemocratic institution, of this form that has an underlying contradiction hidden in its content. In traditional Marxism, ‘Two contradictory moments, the transition to state control and liberation from it, are seized as one in the concept of social revolution.’

Traditional Marxism, then, repeated the logic of identity-liberal thinking, a logic that, in Horkheimer’s words, ultimately meant that ‘The revolutionary movement negatively reflects the situation which it is attacking.’ With this in mind, it becomes clear why Horkheimer wrote that ‘State socialism is the most consistent form of the authoritarian state.’

Horkheimer advises us not to wait for the conditions to be ripe before beginning the struggle against capital, arguing that the implementation of revolutionary logic does not begin with the occupation of the state.

Critical theory [...] confronts history with that possibility which is always concretely visible within it [...] Mankind was not betrayed by the untimely attempts of the revolutionaries but by the timely attempts of the realists [...] The consequence that flows from historical materialism today [...] is the insight that ‘now or in a hundred years the horror will come to an end’ was always appropriate.

Changing the elite that holds the state power is not enough. Adorno confesses in a letter to Horkheimer that one of the memories he considers of the greatest ‘pedagogical influence’ on him was when he maintained that if ‘those disadvantaged hitherto had their turn in power, that would suffice for the cause of justice’. However, Horkheimer ‘contradicted this by arguing that only if the entire system were to change could change be approved of; it was not enough for the injustice that had been created to be perpetuated in a new form.’

We cannot predict beforehand what form the remainder, the chaotic, the negative that currently exists inside the form-fetish will take. If people learn through their experience, this potential will be formed during the

107 Ibid., p. 107.
108 Ibid., p. 99.
110 Ibid., p. 106.
112 Ibid., p. 357.
113 Ibid.
class struggle. The result of the analysis that stems from negative dialectics is that traditional Marxism’s rationale for the maintenance of the state is in direct opposition to this non-identity, open understanding of the current form of the state.

In Horkheimer’s ‘Open Marxism’, the purpose of our existence is to break with the logic of accumulation for accumulation’s sake, with the logic of ‘time is money,’ the logic of being obliged to continuously accelerate the accumulation of money at the expense, in every conceivable way, of our needs. Can a new understanding of class struggle emerge from the break with the logic of capital called for by Horkheimer? I believe that the creation of cracks described in John Holloway’s *Crack Capitalism* brilliantly describes such an understanding. For Holloway, who I believe has incorporated the central tenets of Horkheimer’s philosophy in his analysis, negative dialectics is the dialectic of ‘misfitting’, of the discomfort that is caused by the pressure to subordinate our doing in the logic of capital, of ‘time is money.’ Every time we deny or resist this subordination, we engage in class struggle. Therefore, I contend that the ‘method of cracks’ could be considered a contradiction in terms since it cannot provide a specific strategy for class struggle, and it is therefore not really a method as such.

From the foregoing, it will not come as a surprise to the reader that Horkheimer explicitly placed himself within the council communism tradition, the roots of which he traces to 1871 and 1905 and a tradition that he hoped would continue. Council communism calls for the people to occupy the means of production and form workers councils, thus striking a serious blow to the most basic institution of capitalism, private property. Thus far, my aim has been to provide a philosophical explanation for Horkheimer’s hope that council communism would endure.

However, it may come as a surprise to the reader to learn that Horkheimer argued against his own comments. The text in which his pessimism is most evident is his discussion with Adorno in 1956, sixteen years after he wrote ‘The Authoritarian State’.

The impression of Horkheimer’s philosophy that one gets from this discussion is the opposite of that expressed in ‘The Authoritarian State’. Horkheimer wonders about the meaning of practice if there is no longer a party. ‘In that case doesn’t practice mean either reformism or quietism?’ His pessimism is evident in the following words: ‘But today we have to

115 See also note 54 for this conception of class struggle.
116 There are a number of points where I diverge from Holloway’s thinking, although in general I follow his theory. For this see the last chapter of this book.
declare ourselves defeatists [. . .] There is nothing we can do. We should not turn this into a theory, but have to declare that basically we cannot bring about change.”

As the discussion develops, he agrees with Adorno that theory is like a message in a bottle, ideas in stock, since he could see no alternative at the present time. In this sense, he appears to be more demanding than Adorno as regards the role of the philosopher. He is not satisfied with only defetishizing reality, but with showing, as Adorno notes, ‘that everything is false as long as the world is as it is.’ For Horkheimer, then, ‘a lot more has to happen. We have to point to the direction we must travel in.’

Despite this pessimism, the philosophical foundations that underpin Horkheimer’s texts written before 1940, certainly as regards the content of the key notions that are analysed in this chapter—totality, negativity, dialectics and materialism—and upon which he built his understanding of what it means to philosophize in critical terms, did not change during the last decade of his life. This becomes clear if the collection of essays in Critique of Instrumental Reason, which were written mainly in the 1960s, is read carefully. Throughout the book, but especially in the first essay, ‘The Concept of Man’, written only one year after his discussion with Adorno, negative dialectics is presupposed in the importance that he attributes to an open, dynamic conception of totality. The reader might also refer to his notes of this period: Notizen und Dämmerung. Throughout this text, the concepts of negativity and determinate negation in his criticism of bourgeois culture are even more in evidence. Bearing this in mind, J. Abromeit’s idea that in Horkheimer’s later period one meets ‘a significant loss of historical specificity vis-à-vis his earlier work, insofar as the differences between different forms of reason [. . .] essentially disappear’ could be considered unfair to Horkheimer.

In my view, Horkheimer hoped that after the Second World War, people would recognize the causes of the decay of bourgeois culture and the failures of traditional Marxism and would move towards the council communism viewpoint, described in his writings. The abandonment of that

119 Ibid., p. 90.
120 Ibid., p. 100.
121 Ibid., p. 101.
122 Ibid., p. 102.
123 I refer the reader especially to the following extracts from the English translation of Notizen und Dämmerung: ‘Against Philosophy’, written after 1958, where he explicitly refers to how determinate negation shatters any call for certainty and for an end to the dialectical process (M. Horkheimer, Dawn & Decline: Notes 1926–1931 and 1950–1969, p. 159); and ‘Function and Limits of Bourgeois Culture’, written in 1959–1960, where he holds, among other ideas, that bourgeois culture, by making the subject into an absolute, provides to the individual in theory that which it is deprived of in practice (Ibid., pp. 170–171).
hope caused Horkheimer to underestimate the revolutionary character of his own writings and led him to believe that a party was needed to lead people to the revolution.

The ‘Crime’ in Habermas’s, Honneth’s and Postone’s Reading of Max Horkheimer’s Philosophy

I could have ended my exposition at this point, but I believe that it is worthwhile analysing the main criticism levelled against Horkheimer so that the reader can better understand my arguments and appreciate the up-to-date character of Horkheimer’s philosophy. I contend that his most vocal critics125 more or less repeat the ‘crime’ that Horkheimer accuses the intellectuals of his era of committing. ‘The crime of modern intellectuals against society lies [...] in their sacrifice of contradictions and complexities of thought to the exigencies of so-called common sense.’126

From my perspective, their ‘crime’ derives from the non-dialectical nature of their philosophies. Thus, their philosophies do not aim to penetrate the plane of appearance to uncover the hidden basis and thus reveal the concrete contradiction within the form: the class conflict that is the real content of every form-fetish. Instead, their philosophies fully equate the concept with its object, whereby the form is transformed into a fetish, thus making any and every prospect of overthrowing the capitalist mode of production unthinkable. Since this approach has already accepted the logic of the system that produces the form-fetish—that is, the values that support accumulation for accumulation’s sake—such philosophy is apologetic in character rather than truly radical.

First, I will explore how Jurgen Habermas commits this ‘crime’ in his comments on Horkheimer. For Habermas, both Horkheimer and Adorno generalise the concept of reification to the extent that they cannot see any way out of it. ‘They do not consider the rationalization of the world to be only “seemingly complete”; and thus they need a conceptual apparatus that will allow them nothing less than to denounce the whole as untrue.’127 He believes that in their theory, instrumental reason, the reified consciousness, covers not only the relation between subject and object but also that between subjects and external nature. For Habermas, Frankfurt School theorists uncritically extend the subject’s technical mastery over nature to the relations between people.128 Hence, ‘The interpersonal relation between subject and subject [...] has no constitutive significance

125 This ‘crime’ is most evident in the analyses of the critics that I have chosen to include in this chapter.
126 M. Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason, p. 58.
128 Ibid., pp. 378–379.
for instrumental reason." 129 He accuses them of uncritically accepting the colonization of the ‘lifeworld’ by the system.

His criticism is so harsh that he accuses Horkheimer and Adorno of ‘renouncing the goal of theoretical knowledge’ 130 and of falling ‘into a metaphysics of reconciliation’ 131 because they cannot liberate reason from identity thinking. 132 Imprisonment in the false totality of identity thinking makes ‘materialism scepticism [. . .] a constant attitude in the thought of Horkheimer’ 133 and makes his philosophy conservative in character. 134 Despite Habermas’s claims, Horkheimer expressed his strong criticism of scepticism, accusing this line of thinking of reconciling ‘with forms of life that rest on social inequality’ and therefore of being ‘unjust and destructive’. 135 Moreover, although Horkheimer acknowledges the fact that ‘Dialectics bear a skeptical element within it,’ dialectical thought, unlike scepticism, does not regard isolated opinions as invalid or discredited and ‘then retreat to the ego that created them until the ego itself appears as a deception’. 136

Habermas commits the ‘crime’ that Horkheimer accused intellectuals of making because his reading of Horkheimer presupposes an undialectical understanding of reality. In his philosophy, the world is separated into two dimensions: that of communicative practice between individuals, which he calls ‘lifeworld’, and that of system, where ‘actions are coordinated through steering media such as money and power.’ 137 The contradiction he finds in society is far from that found in Horkheimer or Marx. 138 His conception of contradiction is a competition [. . .] between the mechanism of linguistic communication that is oriented to validity claims—a mechanism that emerges [. . .] from the rationalization of the lifeworld—and those de-linguistified

129 Ibid., p. 379.
130 Ibid., p. 385.
131 Ibid., p. 386.
132 Ibid., p. 379.
134 Ibid., p. 62.
135 M. Horkheimer, Montaigne and the Function of Skepticism, p. 295.
136 Ibid., p. 308.
138 Although he makes the same criticism of both Horkheimer and Adorno, I defend only the first, since it would be impossible in this chapter to defend the latter also. This is something that I undertake in Chapter 5 of this book.
steering media through which systems of success-oriented action are
differentiated out.\textsuperscript{139}

This differentiation between systems theory, where money and power
dominate, and action theory, where communicative action takes place, is
attributed by Habermas to ‘a dialectical concept of totality employed by
Marx himself’.\textsuperscript{140}

Although he goes on to clarify that ‘communicative reason does not
simply encounter ready-made subjects and systems’\textsuperscript{141} and that it takes
part in their structuring, this does not in itself make someone a dialec-
tical materialist. For Marx, ‘solidarity’ does not have ‘its proper place
in linguistic intersubjectivity, communication’\textsuperscript{142} separate from that of
structure. On the contrary, all dimensions of reality express the irration-
ality of the ‘topsy-turvy’ world, of the one and the same world, with
the same essence. There is no separation between structure and agency,
as Habermas believes. That would be like having two realities—one of
‘lifeworld’, agency, and one of system—that may influence each other
but are basically autonomous, with each functioning on its own terms. If
both dimensions do not stem from the same essence, then contradiction
in Habermas’s philosophy is not concrete, meaning that it does not and
cannot reveal the opposed class interests grounded in the irrationality
of the capitalist system.

Horkheimer fiercely criticizes Habermas in a letter he had written to
Adorno. He accuses him of retaining a ‘distorted image of Teddie’s and
our joint thoughts’ and of having produced a document that is a ‘vacuous
work that assesses the philosophical writings which have appeared about
Marx […] by reference to norms that […] have become frozen into cli-
ches’.\textsuperscript{143} He is ironical towards Habermas’s belief that ‘today it is possible
“to move the mass of the population to measure itself against the limits of
the possible.”’\textsuperscript{144} In the next paragraph Horkheimer holds that Habermas
‘does as much violence to philosophy as to sociology’,\textsuperscript{145} that he ‘writes
with blinkers on’ and that ‘He teaches the very thing he purports to

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., p. 343.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid., p. 398.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 345.
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid.
combat, pure philosophy." Moreover, he maintains that people like Habermas distort their efforts and that Habermas ‘employs the Institute’s time, money and personnel for purposes alien to ours’ and that ‘his conceptual fetishism perverts the principles and the sociological understanding of our students.’ At the end of the letter he proposes to ‘induce him amicable to preserve his philosophy in another place’.

Axel Honneth’s reading of Horkheimer follows precisely the same path as that of Habermas, so in order to avoid repetition, I will merely outline their points of agreement. In Honneth’s undialectical methodology labour is only one dimension of a world reduced exclusively to productive forces, not mediated to the other dimensions. According to Honneth, Horkheimer does not seriously treat the dimensions of action present in social struggle as an autonomous sphere of social reproduction. But, for that reason, Horkheimer gives up the possibility of considering sufficiently the interpretative organization of social reality. The result is [...] a sociological deficit in the interdisciplinary social science that Horkheimer views as the solution.

Honneth therefore believes that Horkheimer excludes ‘that dimension of social action in which [...] normative orientations form themselves independently’.

Therefore, because, for Honneth, Horkheimer dismisses the plane of lifeworld, he accuses him of ‘functional reductionism’, of being ‘locked within the programmatic structure of critical social research’ and of being locked in a one-dimensional understanding of the historical process. Moreover, he holds that since Horkheimer’s sociology ‘does not possess an independent theoretical mode, it is simply pushed aside in favour of political economy or psychoanalysis’. For Honneth, the content of productive activity is exhausted in the domination of nature.
However, as was stressed earlier, in Horkheimer’s philosophy, labour or productive activity is the most important relation in society, the essence of the social formation, because it is from this that our needs are satisfied. I maintain that Horkheimer follows Marx’s understanding of labour as the ‘actual material production’\(^\text{155}\) of our existence. Therefore, the meaning of ‘labour’ or ‘productive activity’ is not restricted only to our relation to nature but can express the activity through which the reproduction of our means of daily subsistence takes place. Considering this, the question that might be posed to Honneth is this: how is it possible for moral convictions and normative orientations to be formed independently of ‘labour’, of the ‘actual material production’, and how is it possible to ignore the contradiction that takes place in the essence, in the process of the reproduction of our daily existence? Again, the crime of sacrificing contradictions is repeated by Honneth.

The last interpretation that I have chosen to comment on is that of Moishe Postone and Barbara Brick because they are among the very few to have attempted to grasp the notion of non-identity in Horkheimer’s philosophy. For Postone and Brick, Horkheimer, after his early writings, supports the view that the capitalist system is not intrinsically contradictory.

He began to turn to a pessimistic theory of history. Because the laws of historical development [. . .] have led only to state capitalism, a revolutionary theory based on that historical development [. . .] could have only hastened the transition to the state capitalism form.\(^\text{156}\)

Thus, they attribute to him a deterministic concept of history as a ‘fully automatic development in which labor comes to itself—but not as the source of emancipation’.\(^\text{157}\)

However, I contend that their interpretation is based on an erroneous reading of ‘The Authoritarian State’, since this is the text they primarily refer to. Since they attribute to Horkheimer the ideas that he attributes to traditional Marxists and the Saint-Simonians, it would not be an exaggeration to claim that they distort the meaning of the text, as a careful comparison of the position that Horkheimer actually sets out on pages 107 and 108\(^\text{158}\) of ‘The Authoritarian State’ and Postone and Brick’s inter-

\(^{157}\) Ibid.
\(^{158}\) It is from this section that they quote Horkheimer and use this as the basis for their interpretation.
pretation will confirm. What Horkheimer does in the article, as I have attempted to show earlier, is distance himself from the idea that planning for the immediate future of the transitional period to socialism and state control are compatible with emancipation. He juxtaposes the idea that he attributes to traditional Marxism, that the process of emancipation depends on the ‘further acceleration of progress’, to his idea that ‘a qualitative leap out of the dimension of progress’ is needed.

Postone and Brick make a similar error in respect to Horkheimer’s intended meaning on the subsequent page, where he writes that ‘The self-movement of the concept of commodity leads to the concept of state capitalism.’ They attribute this idea as being endorsed by him, although Horkheimer clearly differentiates between it and his actual standpoint when he later writes in the same paragraph that ‘Materialistic thought, on the other hand, should not permit itself to consider this identity [between concept and reality] as a certainty in fact,’ and by doing so, it should distance itself from a ‘feeling of contentment’.

Postone’s and Brick’s interpretation that ‘he did not formulate his position in a manner that would go beyond the limits of the existing order, since he ‘no longer considered the whole to be intrinsically contradictory’, is also not substantiated. On the contrary, what one finds in the text is that contradiction for Horkheimer is still an open process that ‘deals with the common, the bad, the transitory’. Therefore, to see a ‘departure from his earlier, dialectically self-reflective epistemology’ in Horkheimer is a non-accurate comment about his philosophy.

They also argue that

The disjunction of concept and actuality Horkheimer posited rendered his own position similar to that of traditional theory, which he criticized [...] theory is not understood as a part of the social universe in which it exists but is accorded an [...] independent position. Horkheimer’s concept of disjunction of concept and reality hovers mysteriously above its object.

160 Ibid., p. 108.
161 Ibid.
163 Ibid., p. 242.
166 I have already stressed at the end of the previous section that late Horkheimer did not depart from his early epistemology since negativity and determinate negation were still the key concepts of his theory.
For Postone and Brick, then, Horkheimer was led by his pessimism to non-identity thinking, which locates ‘emancipation outside history’ and grounds the critique outside the concept.\textsuperscript{169}

Since I have already analysed the concept of non-identity thinking, my response to Postone and Brick will be short: they fail to recognize that non-identity thinking in Horkheimer stems from the irrationality and the inherently contradictory, dialectical character of the capitalist system. If forms, which appear as fetish, are products of a ‘topsy-turvy’ world, then contradiction or tension resides inside them, as I have mentioned before in my citations of ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’. The existence of this contradiction, which is essentially the opposed class interests, makes concepts the expressions of the class conflict. That is why in critical theory categories are categories of class struggle. So, if the real content that lies hidden in concepts is class opposition, concepts must be open, since we do not know the final result of class conflict. Non-identity in Horkheimer does not refer to two realities, as Postone and Brick believe, but to the dialectic between form/appearance and content/essence of the one and same reality. Thus, by not identifying in Horkheimer’s theory the existence of the contradiction inside the concept, they unwittingly commit in their reading of Horkheimer the crime that Horkheimer accused intellectuals of perpetrating. However, what Postone does in his well-known \textit{Time, Labor and Social Domination} regarding the role he attributes to non-identity and contradiction in order to develop his own social theory is another subject that cannot be discussed here.\textsuperscript{170}

\section*{Conclusion}

Horkheimer’s Open Marxism is generally regarded negatively (and with contempt at worst) largely because very few analyses have attempted to bring to light the basic concepts of his understanding of dialectics, such as non-identity or determinate negation. However, when one takes a closer look at his essays, a philosophy full of stimulating ideas emerges, one that should certainly be considered valuable and whose conclusions are worth reflecting upon even if one disagrees with them. Given the current situation and as a consequence of my argument Horkheimer’s philosophy could be appreciated as highly relevant today, since its study can easily reveal the ‘untruth of identity’ not only of politicians but even of people’s

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{169} Ibid.
\bibitem{170} For a criticism of Postone’s social theory from the standpoint of Horkheimer’s critical theory see W. Bonefeld, On Postone’s Courageous but Unsuccessful Attempt to Banish the Class Antagonism from the Critique of Political Economy, \textit{Historical Materialism}, v. 12, n. 3, 2004, pp. 103–124. See especially pp. 107, 108.
\end{thebibliography}
cry for patterns, long-term plans, certainty and stability. In addition to endeavours to rehabilitate Horkheimer’s philosophy, I have attempted to demonstrate that his pessimism is not unavoidable, nor does it lead to a withdrawal from efforts to fight the capitalist system.

My analysis also supports another non-mainstream view: that Horkheimer’s philosophy is part of the council communism tradition that stems from great revolutionary events of the past. The main goal of this chapter has been to revive the rich content\textsuperscript{171} of his philosophy, which has so far been largely left unexplored in the literature, and by doing so to provoke a philosophical dialogue\textsuperscript{172} between Horkheimer’s Open Marxism and traditional Marxism that it is hoped will prove constructive for both paths of socialist philosophy.

\textsuperscript{171} Horkheimer’s ‘characterization of psychology as an auxiliary science of history’ because the ‘development of human powers is thus psychologically codetermined’ (M. Horkheimer, History and Psychology, in M. Horkheimer (ed.) \textit{Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings}, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 1993, p. 121) is a thought-provoking idea. Considering this, his assertion that ‘Psychology must therefore penetrate to these deeper psychic factors by means of which the economy conditions human beings’ (Ibid., p. 120) is one that I find compelling. Given that today the values of competition and greater production are not in any way considered causes of the current crisis, such a study would have great contemporary relevance. Unfortunately, however, such a study falls outside the focus of my chapter.

\textsuperscript{172} I attempt to provoke such a dialogue in the next chapter in which I criticize Lukacs’s dialectics through Horkheimer’s Open Marxism.
4 Dialectics and Democracy in Georg Lukacs’s Marxism*

Introduction

One of the central figures in traditional Marxist theory is Georg Lukacs. Although many articles and books have been written on his political philosophy, very few have attempted to analyse his theory of democracy by drawing a connection between his dialectics and his theory of the state, the role he ascribes to the party in the transition to socialism, and the way in which he believes class consciousness is formed. A philosophical analysis of these parts of his social theory requires an examination of Lukacs’s use of the main notions that make up dialectical theory, such as materialism, totality, negativity, non-identity thinking, the dialectic between content/essence and form/appearance, and fetishism. The focus here will be not only to identify the obvious uses of these notions in Lukacs’s main political writings but also to unearth their implicit use.

My analysis will attempt to bring to the fore a new aspect of his relation to the Frankfurt School’s theory of dialectics by showing the extent to which his theory can be viewed as belonging to the bourgeois identity-thinking tradition. Thus, my analysis differs from the majority of the interpretations of Lukacs presented to date, which attribute Lukacs’s affinities with Stalinism to an error in his political tactics or the ‘sleight of hand’ he employs in assigning a central role to the Communist Party. I will not only argue that the theoretical foundations on which Lukacs could justify his support for Stalinism lie deep within his theory of dialectics, but also, more specifically, provide a foundation for the conclusion (a conclusion that, in terms of the existing literature on Lukacs, is ‘heretical’) that despite his harsh criticism of the philosophy of German idealism, Lukacs does not succeed in disengaging himself from the framework of liberal methodology.

The chapter’s goal is to offer a coherent view of Lukacs’s democratic theory by showing the practical repercussions of his use of the notions

* This chapter is a slightly revised form of a previously published article under the same title in *Capital and Class*, v. 38, n. 3, 2014.
that make up dialectical theory as well as their connection to each other. Therefore, I hope the chapter will be of interest not only to philosophers but also to political scientists. As we are living in an era of crisis in which people are searching for new ideas that may help them fight for human dignity and all the ideological armoury of dialectical philosophy is therefore being put to the test, an effort to better elaborate on the core ideas of the classics of socialist philosophy should be seen as a valuable exercise. Considering that we are witnessing intense social unrest, just as Lukacs was in his time, the questions his philosophy posed and the problems it tried to resolve are not dissimilar from those we face today. Moreover, many parties nowadays, especially those who call themselves socialists or communists, more or less follow the logic that lies in Lukacs’s political philosophy.

This chapter is structured as follows. First, I will investigate Lukacs’s writings that deal with aspects of the history of philosophy, including his reading of Marx’s materialism and dialectics and the notion of labour in The Ontology of Social Being. I am inverting the historical sequence through which his works were written since, in my view, analysing the philosophical foundations of this thought first would provide a solid ground for his political theory to be explained later. In the next section, I will explore his understanding of totality and the formation of consciousness that underpins his theory of the party and state in History and Class Consciousness and in his book on Lenin. Finally, via an exploration of the democratic deficit in Lukacs, the differences in his approach and that of the Frankfurt School towards the notion of negativity will be become clear.

**Karl Marx’s Dialectical Materialism in Georg Lukacs’s Ontology**

Before investigating Lukacs’s theory of democracy and the party in the third and fourth sections, it is first necessary to explore his reading of Hegel’s and Marx’s philosophies as his social theory follows and expands on Marx’s dialectical materialism in particular. Rather than putting the contrast between the tradition of materialism and that of idealism at the centre of his reading of the history of philosophy, as is usually the case, Lukacs instead places the contrast between the tradition of irrationalism¹ and the tradition that follows dialectical methodology at the centre of his analysis.

‘Irrationalism [...] hardens the limitations of perception governed by understanding into perceptual limitations as a whole’². He accuses the

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¹ In his view non-Marxist and non-dialectical theories, such as those of Schelling, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Heidegger, could be subsumed under the label of irrationalism.
irrational tradition of rejecting dialectics and fetishizing reality, since it ‘begins with this discrepancy between the intellectual reflection and the objective original’.\(^3\) It is thus shackled within the framework of dualism between thought and reality, for it sees reality as being ‘an area beyond reason’.\(^4\) Although expressed differently, Lukacs’s position is similar to what Horkheimer has to say about the undialectical nature of philosophy from Descartes until Hegel: it is undialectical because it treats reason as ostensibly neutral and is therefore unable to reveal the collision of interests lying hidden at the core of reality.

The philosopher that Lukacs most admires for making an effort to dispel this dualism is Hegel, because for him appearance ‘contains law but more besides’\(^5\). For Lukacs, dialectical thinkers like Hegel and Marx endeavoured to identify the essence of reality by defetishizing appearance and sought to ‘fathom the laws governing the course of history and socio-historical progress, to discover [...] the reason behind the autonomous movement of collective history’.\(^6\)

According to Lukacs, the remarkable thing in Hegel’s philosophy was that he treated ‘the questions of subject and object, ego and world, consciousness and being, as historical problems [...] as forms of the historical development of human consciousness’.\(^7\) The phenomena that Hegel analysed were, for Lukacs, not abstract philosophical notions, but ‘forms of consciousness for the Germany of that time’.\(^8\) For Hegel, philosophical notions such as alienation were not external to appearance but rather part of it. Even more crucial is that ideas in Hegel’s philosophy do not represent forms of consciousness as they exist, but instead expose them ‘in their contradictoriness: as moments of a process in which [...] the contradictions [...] produce the objective possibility of the [...] sublation of the contradictions’.\(^9\)

According to Lukacs, Hegel is the most important dialectician before Marx because he ‘managed to lay the foundations of knowledge of a complex, dynamically contradictory reality, consisting of totalities’.\(^10\) Through the notion of mediation, which is the ‘categorical summarization of all the forces, processes, etc. that objectively determine the coming into being,

\(^3\) Ibid., p. 99.
\(^4\) Ibid.
\(^5\) Ibid., p. 98.
\(^6\) Ibid., p. 125.
\(^8\) Ibid., p. 212.
\(^9\) Ibid., p. 214.
the functioning, and the facticity of a complex’.\textsuperscript{11} Hegel attempts to proceed from immediacy to the contradictions that lie deeper within reality and thus to connect the aforementioned totalities dialectically. However, the dialectical process in Hegel ‘finally petrifies to yield a metaphysical, non-dialectical object’ and ‘thereby abolishes itself as a process’.	extsuperscript{12} For Lukacs, Hegel’s social philosophy does not succeed in moving beyond the ‘historical prejudices of his time’\textsuperscript{13} and remains imprisoned within the plane of the fetish-form and is therefore unable to defetishize reality fully. According to Lukacs, however, Hegel’s inability to transcend the fetish-form in his philosophy occurs to a lesser extent than the other major figures of the philosophical tradition before Marx.	extsuperscript{14}

We should now turn to how Lukacs adjudges Marx to have succeeded in defetishizing the forms that appear as fetishes in the capitalist mode of production. After setting out Lukacs’s ideas, I will evaluate and critique them. According to Lukacs, the bourgeois conception of economics ‘isolates the so-called phenomena of pure economics from the total inter-relations of social being as a whole’\textsuperscript{15} and is thus unable to provide a picture of totality. Marx’s breakthrough in the study of materialism was ‘the discovery of the ontological priority of the economy’\textsuperscript{16} to the study of the totality of social being. For Marx the economic is the ‘prominent moment’\textsuperscript{17} in his treatment of reciprocal action, since ‘extra-economic transformations are in the last instance economically determined’\textsuperscript{18}

In Marx’s materialism, as in the wider tradition of materialism, Lukacs believes that being has ontological priority over consciousness, meaning that ‘the forms of consciousness are thus conditioned by the process of social, political and intellectual life’.	extsuperscript{19}

The way in which Lukacs interprets materialism is unavoidably strongly connected to how he understands Marx’s dialectics. He contends that dialectics in its Marxian sense refers to an interaction between economic and extra-economic phenomena in social life.\textsuperscript{20} However, since the economic moment is predominant, ‘Extra-economic moments [...] emerge with a necessity that is dictated by the law of value itself.’\textsuperscript{21} Similarly, Lukacs holds the view that in \textit{Capital} one encounters the continuous interaction

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 89.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} G. Lukacs, Moses Hess and the Problems of Idealist Dialectics, p. 215.
  \item \textsuperscript{13} G. Lukacs, \textit{Hegel’s False and His Genuine Ontology}, p. 110.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} This tradition is characterised by Lukacs as bourgeois and by Horkheimer as bourgeois and ‘identity thinking’.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 10.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 67.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 31.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 34.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 35.
\end{itemize}
between the strictly law-like character of the economic, and [. . .] the relations [. . .] of the extra-economic’.  

In Lukacs’s understanding of the dialectical relation between form/appearance and essence/content, ‘the essence of the ontological development consists in the economic progress [. . .] and [. . .] the ontologically necessary and objective contradictions involved in this are its forms of appearance.’  

Lukacs is clear that the innovative aspect of Marx’s dialectical method is that ‘abstractions and thought experiments are not determined by epistemological or methodological [. . .] standpoints, but by the thing itself, i.e. the ontological nature of the material in question.’  

For Lukacs, Marxian dialectics reveals the different reified forms that the economy takes because it considers the economic dimension of reality ‘the primary dynamic centre of social being’ and ‘the Marxist ontology of social being assigns priority to production’.  

Lukacs also stresses that the totality formed by the dialectical and contradictory unity of society should not be understood as ‘a unity that emerges as the end product of the interaction of [. . .] heterogeneous processes’. He emphasizes the open character of the Marxian dialectic, in contradistinction to the closed Hegelian dialectic. Lukacs attempts to make the open character of his interpretation of Marx’s dialectics more evident by highlighting that although productive relations are predominant in the last instance, this does not mean that we should reduce non-economic relations to their dependence upon technology. To do so would lead to a fetishized and reified view of productive relations, and for Lukacs, therefore, production also has a socio-economic character.  

In the following I will attempt to prove that contrary to his saying, this is what he does.

The discussion should now turn to the meaning of mediation in Lukacs’s thinking, since this is the term used to express and clarify the connection between the different dimensions of reality. In Lukacs’s view, the base and superstructure have a dialectical relation to each other because labour, ‘as the original form of practice’, is the essence of reality. He stresses that Marx’s materialism is not mechanical, because men are able to change the course of the dialectic of nature through their labour, and that Marx differentiated himself from earlier materialism by putting labour at the

22 Ibid., p. 36.
23 Ibid., p. 47.
24 Ibid., p. 49.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., p. 59.
27 Ibid., p. 60.
28 Ibid., p. 66.
centre of the relation between theory and practice.\textsuperscript{30} For Lukacs, human’s mediation to nature must take place through labour because only through it can man consciously transform natural causality. Therefore, the immanent tendency of the economy to develop into a closed system is neutralized.\textsuperscript{31} By attributing an ontological priority to the economic dimension of reality, Lukacs contends that people’s ability to intervene in the immanent tendencies of the economy is of primary importance and considers that he has therefore succeeded in attributing an open character to the dialectical development of his philosophical categories.

According to Lukacs’s reading of the history of philosophy, idealism fetishized phenomena because in its framework, ‘Only those forms of social practice that are far removed from the metabolism between society and nature are taken into account.’\textsuperscript{32} He therefore believes that by making labour the basis of one’s social theory, the social character of the philosophical categories comes to the fore.

Closely related to the notion of mediation is that of antithesis. In the aforementioned framework of mediated totality antithesis takes place. For Lukacs, ‘The most acute antithesis’ in the capitalist mode of production is that ‘between objective economic progress [. . .] and its human consequences.’\textsuperscript{33} This antithesis refers to the collision between the values that stem from economic development and those that stem from the protection of human needs. The heterogeneity and opposition of these values lead to ‘the uneven clarity of meaning of the overall socio-historic process’ and to the fact that this entire process is a ‘dynamic totality’.\textsuperscript{34} In his thinking, the collision of values is responsible for the fetishization of the forms—that is to say, for the fact that it is difficult to penetrate the essence that lies hidden inside the immediate appearance of forms.

Lukacs attempts to protect himself from any accusation of determinism by indirectly contending that class struggle is not a mere reflection of productive relations, but ‘is always a synthesis of economic law and extra-economic components [. . .] it is a question here of whether and to what extent moments of chance intervene in the functioning of economic laws’.\textsuperscript{35} While he may stress that, in his philosophy, scientific laws are nothing else but tendencies,\textsuperscript{36} it appears that Lukacs regards class struggle as taking place in an extra-economic dimension, thus raising the suspicion that Lukacs retains the idea of the separation of structure and agency encountered in traditional-liberal identity thinking.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., p. 54.  
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., p. 87.  
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 68.  
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., p. 91.  
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 97.  
\textsuperscript{35} G. Lukacs, \textit{Marx’s Basic Ontological Principles}, p. 97.  
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 103.
This suspicion grows with Lukacs’s contention that ‘Marx correctly ascribed economic regularities a similarly general validity to that of natural laws.’ Throughout his chapter on ontology in Marx, he reiterates the argument that although the superstructure is an autonomous entity, an autonomous dimension, its existence presupposes the process of economic reproduction. Despite this, Lukacs’s economy and consciousness (the superstructure) remain two different entities, two different dimensions, however strongly interrelated they may be.

This anti-dialectical separation of structure and agency can also be seen towards the end of his chapter on Marx in *The Ontology of Social Being*, where he argues that Marx regards socialism as the ‘necessary product of the internal dialectic of social being, of the self-development of the economy [...] as well as of the class struggle’. The economic is ‘a second nature [...] an objectivity completely independent of individual alternative acts’. In one of his last interviews, Lukacs stated that ‘Nature—organic as much as inorganic nature—runs its course [...] according to its own dialectic, independent of the teleological projects of men.’

Before moving on to examine Lukacs’s account in *History and Class Consciousness*, some further criticisms should be made. Contrary to Lukacs’s analysis, nowhere does Marx identify materialism with the pre-eminence of the economic dimension or of the forces of production. In the *Holy Family*, Marx distinguishes his materialism from the French materialism of the eighteenth century, by stressing that the latter ‘will be defeated forever by materialism, which [...] coincides with humanism’. At the heart of humanism is the fact that men, by drawing all their knowledge from experience, from the significance of industry or enjoyment, are able to assert their true individuality, which presupposes the coincidence of true human interests and the interest of humanity.

In his criticism of Hegel, Marx underlines that criticism of speculative philosophy should focus upon practice:

Theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses. Theory is capable of gripping the masses as soon as it demonstrates ad hominem, and it demonstrates ad hominem as soon as it

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37 Ibid., p. 149.
38 Ibid., p. 159.
39 Ibid., p. 160.
42 Ibid., pp. 130–131.
becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp the root of the matter. But for man the root of the matter is man himself.\footnote{43}

The centrality of human practice to Marx’s materialism is reiterated in his eighth thesis on Feuerbach.\footnote{44} Lukacs’s interpretation that the economy or productive forces fully define or express Marx’s meaning of practice appears unsustainable.

In fact, the interrelation between the economic and the political that Lukacs focuses on is not a distinctive characteristic of Marx’s philosophy, but rather a typical feature of liberal philosophy. It could be argued that Adam Smith had a materialist\footnote{45} philosophy of history since he explicitly assessed progress in terms of the extent to which every stage of civilization promoted the division of labour. Smith adjudged those countries with ‘the highest degree of industry and improvement’ as having progressed further than those where ‘the separation of different trades and employments from one another’ did not take place.\footnote{46} He also pointed to the inextricable connection between consciousness and labour by stressing that ‘the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments.’\footnote{47} J. S. Mill also made the same connection, as can be seen by the subtitle of his main work on economics, \textit{Principles of Political Economy}, as well by the title of its fourth book.\footnote{48}

Hegel had a more insightful appreciation of the social decomposition that the capitalist mode of production inevitably causes than perhaps any other liberal thinker because he put labour at the centre of his philosophy. He held that in the capitalist mode of production, the ethical principle of the business class (the class that Marx would call ‘capitalists’ a few years later) vanishes and that a part of this class succumbs to barbarism.

\begin{itemize}
\item \footnote{44} ‘All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.’ K. Marx, Theses on Feuerbach, in K. Marx and F. Engels, \textit{Collected Works}, Volume 5, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1976, p. 8.
\end{itemize}
‘This happens most necessarily, or rather immediately, through the inner constitution of the class’. 49 He also considers possession of property so important that he asserts that ‘Not until he has property does the person exist as reason’. 50

Contrary to such liberal thinking, Marx’s dialectic of essence/content and form/appearance seeks to show that the constituted forms under which we live—such as value as money, the bourgeois parliamentary system or the state—are forms constituted by the way in which people come into contact with each other and with nature to satisfy their elementary human needs, meaning that these forms are nothing but forms of human social practice. Marx’s critique ‘charges that this practice exists against itself as a mere personification of economic objectivity in the form of capital’, 51 and by doing this, it defetishizes the forms by revealing their essence, their human content, the human practice that lies hidden in them.

Form-fetishes, such as the state or value as money, are the mystified appearance of the topsy-turvy world—that is, the irrational way in which people come into contact with each other in order to satisfy their basic human needs. The irrationality stems from the fact that this contact takes place via the subordination of our ‘doing’ to the logic of capital, the logic of ‘time is money.’ This results in the irrational fact that people’s daily practice does not fulfil the initial goal of their actions—that is, to satisfy their needs—but rather satisfies the need of money to multiply itself. Thus, thinking in materialist terms does not mean that we should attribute priority to the economy or that we should deem it the predominant moment in the last instance, as Lukacs believes.

Moreover, in Open Marxism, which has its basis in the Frankfurt School theory and is the interpretation of Marxian thought that I follow, thinking in dialectical terms does not mean that we should strive to connect the economic and the extra-economic dimensions of reality, as Lukacs’s analysis attempts to do. Rather, dialectical thinking signifies our awareness of the irrationality of having organized our existence under the logic of ‘time is money;’ a logic that gives rise to many different forms that appear rigid and natural. This is why Marx states in volume 3 of Capital

49 G.W.F. Hegel, System of Ethical Life (1802/3) and First Philosophy of Spirit (Part III of the System of Speculative Philosophy 1803/4), edited by H. S. Harris and T. M. Knox, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1979, p. 171, 491§.
that we live in ‘an enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’\textsuperscript{52} that is in its essence contradictory.

The contradiction of opposed class interests that promote different values is hidden behind every form-fetish. The contradiction is that between, on the one hand, the values that underpin the logic of the capitalist system—accumulation of wealth, competition, hard work and ‘time is money’—and on the other hand, the values that protect human dignity, such as solidarity and putting people’s needs above profits. This contradiction lies in the content, the essence of reality, and appears as all these different reified fetish-forms.

In the single reality in which we live, the economic dimension cannot be separated from the extra-economic dimension, as such a view would necessitate the existence of two realities rather than one. Value or money is not a purely economic form, as Lukacs contends, but a social relation, a fetish, a reified form of appearance of the logic according to which we have organized our daily existence. Therefore, the essence that produces the many different reified, perverted fetish-forms is not that of only one dimension of reality (in Lukacs’s thinking this would be the economic) but the way we have organized our life in order to satisfy our most elementary needs.

When the foregoing is considered, it is clear that Lukacs remains shackled to an undialectical separation of reality into structure and agency, logic and history. The economic dimension of reality does not have a separate internal dialectic that can be modified by people’s consciousness or class struggle, which ostensibly occur in another dimension. On the contrary, the economic, the political, ideology and ethics are mediated to each other; they exist through each other; they are separate in unity, being forms of the same essence, of the most important relationship in society—namely, the way people connect their doing in order to satisfy their most basic needs. Class struggle takes place in the essence of reality, a reality that appears as many form-fetishes, and all the forms of appearance are forms of expression of the class struggle. Society is class struggle. When this is taken into consideration, we are able to move beyond the trivial notion that all forms are interrelated or that a specific dimension of reality is always predominant in the last instance.

Lukacs’s understanding of contradiction is closer to liberal methodology than to the critical dialectical perspective. Liberal philosophers like Hegel or J. S. Mill would concur with Lukacs’s idea that, after a certain point, the values that stem from economic development run counter to the protection of human needs. This explains why they adopt a lukewarm attitude towards the values of accumulation of wealth and competition.

For them, it is the state’s responsibility to restrict the excesses of capital accumulation and to promote ‘capitalism with a human face’. J. S. Mill goes so far as to suggest that after a point economic growth would no longer be necessary and that people would no longer be pushed to become Marx’s ‘vampires of capital’.

Merely diagnosing the incompatibility of the two value systems does not make a methodology dialectical, nor does it explain either the ‘uneven clarity of meaning of the overall [. . .] process’ that Lukacs refers to (i.e., the mystified, perverted form that essence takes) or the dynamic character of totality. Totality is dynamic and inherently contradictory because a ‘tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking’. Forms are the mystified way in which the contradiction is being expressed. This contradiction means that, on the one hand, we have to act as ‘vampires of capital’ haunted by the logic of the accumulation of wealth and hard work in order to survive, but on the other, this subordination perpetuates the existence of the fetish-forms that dominate us.

For the Frankfurt School theory, contradiction is immanent in the reified form, since the form is an expression of the class conflict that lies within the essence of reality. Form-fetishes are in their essence modes of appearance of the class struggle, of the collision of values that promote opposing class interests. As a result, forms and categories are open because they are products of the historical struggle between the opposed value systems.

Lukacs’s theory of dialectics differs radically from the foregoing interpretation. He contends that his dialectic can be considered open because people are able to change the course of development of the economy. In the interaction between the economic and the extra-economic realms, the latter can cause a change of course in the former. This does not mean, however, that Lukacs succeeds in dereifying or denaturalizing form-fetishes. An optimistic liberal such as J. S. Mill might follow Lukacs in agreeing that people can transform the economy so that their basic needs are finally met. Nevertheless, forms such as the state, the bourgeois-democratic parliamentary system, or abstract labour that must be transformed into money retain their validity and existences in such thinking, remaining rigid, fetishized and naturalized no matter what changes are made to the way in which the economy functions. This is identity thinking, since the content of the forms is exhausted in their current form: forms have been transformed into transhistorical entities because, despite dereification,

53 On J. S. Mill’s stationary state, see Book 4, Chapter 6 of the Principles of Political Economy.
54 G. Lukacs, Labour, p. 97.
they retain their existence. Considering the foregoing, it seems that total-
ity for Lukacs is not open after all, as the basic structure of bourgeois
identity thinking about democracy remains untouched in his theory.

In the following section, I will attempt to show in greater detail how
this occurs in Lukacs’s theory. I will expand on how the democratic deficit
in his thought is the result of his adopting an understanding of the notion
of contradiction that, as previously mentioned, liberal philosophers would
have no problem consenting to.

Totality and the Formation of Class Consciousness
in Lukacs’s Marxism

Now that Lukacs’s understanding of dialectical materialism has been
briefly explored, it is time to investigate the practical repercussions of his
theory of totality and dialectics by focusing on how class consciousness
is formed.

Lukacs’s main goal in *History and Class Consciousness* is to set out
what it means for someone to have class consciousness and to analyse
how this is formed. For Lukacs, having class consciousness means to be
able to dereify, to defetishize reality. But what does it mean to defetishize
the plane of immediate appearance? Since Lukacs does not regard contra-
diction as existing inside the form, then the form (e.g., the state) cannot be
defetishized. This happens when the state is not being understood as the
police of the market, as a form that the organization of common affairs
needs to take in order for the logic of private property, that of time is
money, to perpetuate itself. For Lukacs, the form is not a perverted, mys-
tified mode of appearance of an essence that lies deeper within it. Rather,
mystification, or the ‘uneven clarity’ 56 that Lukacs refers to, is caused by
the heterogeneity and opposition/contradiction of values to each other,
values that lie outside the form.

Mystification, which is caused by the phenomenon of the topsy-turvy
world, is caused in its turn by the fact that the human content from
which the form stems appears as something different than it really is. The
undemocratic, perverted way with which people come into contact with
each other in capitalism to satisfy their most elementary needs under the
logic of time is money causes the collision of class interests—the essence
that appears as many fetishized forms. The many different fetishized
forms are forms of appearance of class struggle. Therefore, fetishism is
caused not by a collision of economic and non-economic values, as in the
view held by liberals and Lukacs, but by the fact that the contradictory
way in which we as a society have organized our time does not become
immediately apparent.

In Lukacs’s theory, defetishization takes place when one has a theory of the whole and thus becomes aware of the real tendencies of the whole process. To comprehend it is to recognize the direction taken (unconsciously) by events and tendencies towards the totality. It is to know the direction that determines concretely the correct course of action at any given moment. To have class consciousness means to be able to ‘develop a dialectical contradiction between its immediate interests and its long-term objectives, and between the discrete factors and the whole’; ‘it means to advance beyond what is immediately given.’ Only those who make the distinction between ‘the momentary interest and the ultimate goal’ can become conscious ‘of the historical role of the class’ and thus have class consciousness.

For Lukacs, those who have authentic class consciousness are capable of showing that although immediacy appears objective, it is the product of man. By doing this, the economic structure of society is revealed, ‘the fetishistic forms of the commodity system begin to dissolve,’ and the proletariat is ‘able to point out the road along which the dialectics of history is objectively impelled’.

Class consciousness is equated to the dialectic which is a specific kind of knowledge that, through a diagnosis of the immanent tendencies of capitalism, leads to the knowledge of the totality of the social process and thus can indicate to the proletariat the necessary strategy. Dialectics is a method that can be applied after it has been taught. By being taught the dialectic one can learn to ‘observe the perpetually new phenomena constantly produced under the laws of historical development; [. . .] to find in historical necessity the moment of activity’.

As expected, Lukacs holds that only a very few are able to acquire this special knowledge. ‘Some sections of the proletariat have quite the right instincts as far as the economic struggle goes,’ but ‘when it comes to political questions they manage to persist in a completely utopian view.’ There is a ‘distance that separates the consciousness of even the most revolutionary worker from the authentic class consciousness of the

58 Ibid., p. 23.
59 Ibid., p. 71.
60 Ibid., p. 72.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., p. 73.
63 Ibid., p. 159.
64 Ibid., p. 168.
65 Ibid., p. 197.
Dialectics in Lukacs’s Marxism

The result of this is that ‘In the absence of a real understanding of the interaction between politics and economics a war against the whole economic system [. . .] is quite out of the question.’69 The very few who have authentic class consciousness, a view of the totality, must ‘unite the spontaneous discoveries of the masses, which originate in their correct class instincts, with the totality of the revolutionary struggle, and bring them to consciousness’.70 This knowledge is brought to the working class ‘from outside’.71

[O]ne must [. . .] teach people in the water how to swim [. . .] among the most progressive groups of the working people, this awareness already exists today, and their mass-organisations can bring this consciousness even more powerfully into the masses.72

The gap between the elite and the mass of the proletariat is so large that the elite, as the bearer of true class consciousness, is able ‘to infer the thoughts and feelings which men would have in a particular situation if they were able to assess [. . .] the interests arising from it’ and their impact ‘on the whole structure of society’.73 Lukacs therefore differentiates between empirically given thoughts and the ‘imputed class consciousness’ that comes from outside and must be learnt by the masses.74 Because ‘the objective economic situation is not immediately apparent in its objective correctness, then the guidelines [. . .] must be found deliberately’75—that is, it must be learnt from those who have imputed consciousness,76 from those who know the laws-tendencies that are immanent in the economy but are not apparent in immediacy.

[P]lanning will only be more than [. . .] daydreaming if we truly recognise the laws of this spontaneous movement on the basis of Marxist economic theory. (For example, the laws that govern the movements from one determinate terrain—market, concentration of capital, the rate of profit on capital—to another, and so on).77

68 Ibid., p. 80.
69 Ibid., p. 78.
70 G. Lukacs, Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought, p. 88.
71 Ibid., p. 99; T. Pinkus, Conversations with Lukacs, p. 87.
74 Ibid.
76 Lukacs stresses that only ‘imputed consciousness’ ‘corresponds to the objective economic position of the proletariat’ (Ibid., p. 66).
One can infer from the foregoing that ordinary workers, who by their daily activity are forced to perpetuate the social relation of capital via the surplus value they produce, cannot play any part in the process of dereification, denaturalization or defetishization of the forms but only accept the decisions that come from above, from the elite, from the labour aristocracy that possesses the authentic truth.

In Lukacs’s social philosophy, form-fetishes are not expressions of the contradiction within which every worker is forced live in order to sustain their existence. This contradiction means that workers are haunted by the logic of ‘time is money’ and are forced to transform their concrete labour into abstract labour (i.e., into money) in order to survive, and in so doing, they produce and reproduce the entire social structure and the reified forms that are necessary for the accumulation of money by money, through competition, to take place. Since for Lukacs this contradiction lies outside the reified forms, they are not understood, as they are by Marx, as perverted, mystified, inherently contradictory expressions of the topsy-turvy world.

By employing traditional-bourgeois identity thinking rather than attempting to penetrate through the ‘fact’, and inside the form, Lukacs classifies the form and compares it to similar forms. In so doing, he accepts the existence of the form-fetish and dogmatically asserts its actuality without explaining its existence. He presupposes the existence of that which must be explained and thus naturalizes it. He falls ‘victim to the illusion that property and profit no longer play a key role’ in the formation of the reified forms, since the conflict of values is not in their essence. To put it another way, for Lukacs, reified forms, such as the state, do not stem from the logic according to which we, as a society, have chosen to spend our time—the logic of ‘time is money,’ the logic upon which the capitalist mode of production depends.

If the contradiction under which ordinary workers are forced to live in their everyday life does not play any role in the process of fetishization/reification, then solving this contradiction cannot play a role in the process of dereification/defetishization. If fetishism is caused by the collision of economic and extra-economic values, as Lukacs maintains, then only those who possess the true understanding of the immanent tendencies of the economy can point the way towards dereification/defetishization. For Lukacs, then, class struggle presupposes the possession of a specific

78 John Holloway elegantly describes this contradiction in the third part of Chapter 28 of Crack Capitalism, which is subtitled ‘We Who Are Schizophrenic and Repressed’ (J. Holloway, Crack Capitalism, Pluto Press, London, 2010, p. 219). In this chapter, he writes, ‘we are all permeated by this antagonism, we are all self-contradictory, torn internally by the struggle between the reproduction of capitalist relations and the impulse to refuse-and-create’ (Ibid., pp. 221–222).

79 M. Horkheimer, Traditional and Critical Theory, p. 236.
kind of knowledge that only an elite few can have. When this aspect of
Lukacs’s reasoning is acknowledged, the democratic deficit in his theory
becomes clear.

As previously noted, Lukacs gives the false impression that he adopts
an open dialectic similar to that of the Frankfurt School. For example,
he stresses that ‘dialectics is not imported into history [. . .] but is derived
from history made conscious as its logical manifestation at this particular
point in its development’ 80 and that ‘every phenomenon is recognized
to be a process.’ 81 However, when Lukacs’s words and philosophy are
viewed through the analytic prism that I have presented in this chapter, a
different conclusion must surely be reached.

The fact that Lukacs’s reading of fetishism does not stem from Marx’s
dialectic of the topsy-turvy world explains why Lukacs does not regard
class struggle as taking place every time ordinary workers pit their
human dignity against the rule of money. For Lukacs, class struggle
occurs only when workers attempt to control the totality by retaining
the fetish-form that they wish to abolish at some undetermined stage
in the future. Since totality can be known and controlled, he ignores
the ‘untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the
thing conceived’, the remainder that is left when objects ‘go into their
concepts’, the ‘sense of non-identity’, 82 ‘the chaotic [. . .] that which has
not been included’. 83

The chaotic refers to the fact that we cannot predict beforehand what
form the decision-making process will take if people choose to organize
their daily means of subsistence by a different logic to that of capital, to
that of ‘time is money.’ We are thus destined to live in and against the
uncertainty that the chaotic causes. Any claim to certainty leads to iden-
tity thinking, to a closed dialectic, to a prediction of human action, and
thus to a limitation of human creativity. This also provides a justification
for the claim that the end justifies the means and ultimately for the position
that the party is always right. The dialectical materialist cannot have
faith in any certainty, much less the privileged knowledge of totality that
Lukacs presupposes, since no knowledge can provide us with a conclusive
image of reality 84 or of human creativity. The materialistic dialectic has an
open-ended character that ‘does not regard the “rational” as completed

80 G. Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, p. 177.
81 Ibid., p. 184.
84 M. Horkheimer, The Rationalism Debate in Contemporary Philosophy, in M. Hork-
heimer (ed.) Between Philosophy and Social Science: Selected Early Writings, The MIT
at any point in history’. Instead, because ‘the rational is never totally deducible’, the dialectic is open and negative.

Lukacs’s abandonment of the critical open-ended character of dialectics is also apparent from his reading of class in Marx. Lukacs interprets Marx’s phrase ‘class for itself’ as meaning that ‘the class struggle must be raised from the level of economic necessity to the level of conscious aim and effective class consciousness.’ However, this interpretation does not accurately reflect Marx’s meaning in *The Poverty of Philosophy*, which Lukacs cites. Here, Marx highlights that although the mass of workers has common interests and is ‘already a class as against capital’, it is only ‘In the struggle [. . .] [that] this mass becomes united, and constitutes itself as a class for itself. The interests it defends become class interests.’ Nowhere in his writings does Marx presuppose a specific knowledge, such as that of the whole or of long-term objectives, that could be considered a ‘true class consciousness’ or an ‘authentic class consciousness’ that might make the class struggle effective. For Lukacs, then, class is a closed category. In Marx, however, we see that class is an open category that forms its content during the process of the struggle and thus cannot have a presupposed ‘authentic content’.

**Defetishizing the Party: Negativity in Lukacs and Frankfurt School Theory**

Because Lukacs regards the attainment of class consciousness as possible ‘only gradually and after long, difficult crises’, with the proletariat having ‘to suffer before it achieves ideological maturity, before it acquires a true [. . .] class consciousness’, the power of negativity is essentially postponed until the future. For Lukacs, since ‘The proletariat’s real productive energy can only awaken after its seizure of power,’ defetishization and negativity can come to the fore only when this has been achieved, as ‘the mental achievements essential to the conduct of the economy and

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90 Ibid., p. 80.
93 Ibid., p. 76.
the state will only become apparent to large sections of the proletariat after it has come to power. In Lukacs’s reasoning, then, dereification can occur only at a point sometime in the future because:

Until the objective crisis of capitalism has matured and until the proletariat has achieved true class consciousness and the ability to understand the crisis fully, it cannot go beyond the criticism of reification.

This does not mean, however, that the proletariat should patiently wait for the crisis to develop by itself. In such a case “the natural laws” governing the economic process [...] would not lead to the simple downfall of capitalism or to a smooth transition to socialism. Instead, the proletariat must accelerate the development of the existing tendencies through its conscious action and provoke the crisis, since ‘crisis always signifies a point of—relative—suspension of the immanent laws of capitalist evolution.’ After the crisis has begun to develop, the economy will presumably be consciously directed.

For Lukacs, the elite of the labour movement, those with the requisite understanding of the dialectical method so as to be able to make the most accurate diagnosis of the dialectical development of the immanent laws, must assume leadership of the proletariat in the form of the vanguard party. ‘The Party is assigned the sublime role of bearer of the class consciousness of the proletariat and the conscience of its historic vocation’ and must be ‘always a step in front of the struggling masses, to show them the way.’

Considering that the class consciousness of the masses is likely to develop slowly even under the guidance of the vanguard elite, the party is sometimes forced to adopt a stance opposed to that of the masses; it must show them the way by rejecting their immediate wishes. It is forced to rely upon the fact that only post festum, only after many bitter experiences will the masses understand the correctness of the party’s view.

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96 Ibid., p. 76; see also ibid., p. 70.
97 Ibid., p. 306.
98 Ibid., p. 250; see also G. Lukacs, *Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought*, p. 32.
100 Ibid., p. 251.
101 Ibid., p. 41.
‘Its politics may not always accord with the empirical reality of the moment [. . .] But the ineluctable course of history will give it its due’. 104 Given the aforementioned gap between the consciousness of the elite and the masses and ‘the stratification of consciousness within the class’, 105 the detachment of the Communist Party from the rest of the proletariat—its ‘temporary isolation’ 106—is a risk that Lukacs considers unavoidable.

However, Lukacs stresses the fact that the party must not impose its views on the masses from above in a one-dimensional way, but must have the ability to be self-critical, to learn from the spontaneous creativity of the masses and not ‘function as a stand-in for the proletariat’. 107 However, no matter how good the party’s disposition towards the masses, ‘Party organization must [. . .] be of the utmost severity and rigour in order to put its ability to adjust into practice,’ an adjustment that ‘is impossible without the strictest party discipline.’ 108

What happens if there is a disagreement between the masses and the vanguard party? Can the masses stand up to the decisions of the party and reveal their opposition? Although Lukacs does not pose the question directly, what emerges from his analysis is, I believe, a negative answer, and any scope for disagreement is therefore eliminated. The masses must subordinate themselves to the ‘conscious collective will’, which for Lukacs could not be other than the Communist Party. 109 Furthermore, since ‘history will give it [the party] its due,’ 110 the masses must succumb to the rule of the party, accept their intellectual inferiority and patiently wait for time to reveal the correctness of the party’s decisions. In every instance where the ideas of the party and the masses diverge, therefore, the masses are to be considered wrong in advance, because as we have seen, the party can predict the ideas that the masses would have if they were ideologically mature. Thus, contrary to Lukacs’s contention, a dialogue that might prove stimulating for all cannot exist because one of the two participants, the general committee of the party, 111 holds the one and only truth, since only it can see through reification, whereas the proletariat is stuck in reified consciousness. The ordinary worker can participate in perceiving the totality only by accepting the ideas of the party, of those who hold the

104 Ibid., p. 42.
105 Ibid., p. 326.
106 G. Lukacs, Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought, p. 35.
108 G. Lukacs, Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought, p. 35; see also G. Lukacs, History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics, p. 316.
110 Ibid., p. 42.
111 J. Fracchia (The Philosophical Leninism and Eastern “Western Marxism” of Georg Lukacs, Historical Materialism, v. 21, n. 1, 2013, pp. 69–93) has written a rigorous study, which is critical of Lukacs’s use of the concept of the party.
authentic truth, or as one might say, the monopoly of class consciousness. The ideas that can lead to a transformation of the world are not those of the ordinary worker but those of the party.

Lukacs’s democratic deficit becomes even more evident when it is noted that even his avowed support for the role of workers’ councils is essentially hollow, since they must act ‘under the leadership of the Communist Party’. 112

Unfortunately, thus far none of the foregoing observations have been made by Lukacs’s interpreters. For instance, for one of the best-known interpreters of the democratic deficit in Lukacs, Istvan Meszaros, there is an ‘unrealistic overemphasis placed on political and ideological factors’ in Lukacs that ‘goes hand in hand with fatefuly underestimating capital’s power of recovery and continuing rule’. 113 Thus ‘the neglect of the material factors’ 114 and an ‘uncritical attitude towards the concept of the class itself’ 115 lead Lukacs to the ‘hypostatization of class consciousness and collective will in the form of an idealized party’. 116

Along similar lines, Andrew Feenberg contends that Lukacs ‘confused emergency measures taken in the shadow of a revolution in a backward country with fundamental changes in the nature of the public sphere under socialism’. 117 As a result, he ‘underestimated the validity of the classical teachings concerning the political and legal preconditions of democracy’. 118

In contrast to these interpretations, I have reached the conclusion (one that is ‘heretical’ in terms of the existing literature on Lukacs) that Lukacs’s support of Stalinism and overestimation of the role of the party were not for reasons of political strategy, as he himself claims and as Meszaros and Feenberg believe, but for reasons that are deeply embedded in his understanding of contradiction and its role in the formation of class consciousness.

Paul Piccone supports the view that because in Lukacs ‘the interaction between the whole and part remains again limited to the domain of the self-objectifying Spirit and proceeds a priori,’ 119 his materialism

114 Ibid., p. 320.
115 Ibid., p. 324.
116 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
never penetrates to the living dimension and, as a result, ends up with an imposing metaphysical system’. Thus ‘he slides in the romantic totality in articulating his theory of political organization.’ Contrary to the reasoning of Piccone and others, I do not believe that the problems in Lukacs’s philosophy have their origin in his leanings towards Hegel’s dialectics, although they are of course related to it. The problem in Lukacs is not that he was led astray by Hegel’s spirit and therefore overestimated the role of the party; the problem is bigger and much more deeply ingrained in his social philosophy. As shown in the analysis thus far, Lukacs’s problem stems from his liberal identity-thinking reading of contradiction, with the consequence that he is unable to retain the logic of the topsy-turvy world in his theory of defetishization.

Very few studies have attempted to take on board this viewpoint. Guido Starosta’s reading of Lukacs is one of the most recent and stimulating. In Starosta’s analysis, the ‘gap between empirical and imputed class consciousness persists’ in Lukacs because his dialectic was ‘too general and vague’ and does not provide ‘a clue about the actual determinations of the existence of the proletariat’. This is because ‘for Lukacs the revolutionary consciousness of the working class is not an alienated consciousness that becomes aware of its own alienation [. . .] but an abstractly free consciousness.’ Starosta’s analysis closely follows Simon Clarke’s reading of Lukacs, which observes that ‘Lukacs did not derive the ideological form of the fetishism of commodities from the alienation of labour, but if anything the other way round,’ with the result that he was led ‘to an inverted interpretation of Marx’s theory of alienation, according to which the alienation of labour is not the source of mystified and estranged social relationships’.

In advance of these readings, I have attempted to add a broader scope to the analysis of Lukacs’s philosophy in order to highlight how its imprisonment in identity thinking leads to a social theory that suppresses the core of dialectics—that is, the negative element—and to a position where the abolition of the irrationalism that forces people to live

120 Ibid., p. 126.
121 Ibid., p. 127.
122 One of the most characteristic readings of this line of thinking, beside Piccone’s, is, I believe, Moishe Postone’s. See M. Postone, The Subject and Social Theory: Marx and Lukacs on Hegel, in A. Chitty and M. McIvor (eds.) Karl Marx and Contemporary Philosophy, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2009, especially pp. 208–212.
124 Ibid., p. 56.
125 Ibid.
127 Ibid., p. 317.
as personifications of economic categories must be postponed to an indefinite time in the future. As Adorno aptly underlines, dialectics in Lukacs ‘are paid lip-service [. . .] all has been decided in advance [. . .] The core of his theory remains dogmatic’. 128 As a result, Lukacs’s thinking mirrors the main characteristic of bourgeois identity thinking: ‘When called to act independently, we cry for patterns, systems, and authorities.’ 129

Lukacs’s theory of the state also demonstrates that negativity has been suppressed in his theory. In Lukacs, the state has not been defetishized; it is not an unavoidably perverted form, an expression of the irrationality under which we live in our topsy-turvy world. ‘It is perfectly possible that a balance of economic power between two classes in competition may produce a state apparatus not really controlled by either [. . .] so that the economic structure is by no means simply reflected in the state.’ 130 For Lukacs, the state is not an inherently undemocratic form that will immediately be abolished when its real content has been overthrown, when people have organized the satisfaction of their basic needs in a different way to the irrationality of ‘time is money.’ As a result, Lukacs’s state appears as a neutral institution that takes its class character from the class that succeeds in occupying it. Its abolition is therefore postponed to an indefinite point in the future.

For Lukacs, the state is ‘relatively autonomous’ 131 and after the proletariat comes to power, it still needs to use the state to ‘overcome by education the inertia and the fragmentation of these strata and to train them for active and independent participation in the life of the state’. 132 Lukacs needs the state in order to control totality, to guarantee certainty, the

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131 G. Lukacs, Marx’s Basic Ontological Principles, p. 146. Considering that this understanding of the state has been taken up by Nikos Poulantzas, who is one of the most well-known state theorists, it would be worthwhile for the reader to read Simon Clarke’s article on him (S. Clarke, Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas’ Theory of the State, Capital and Class, v. 1, n. 2, 1977, pp. 1–31). I consider that most of what Clarke has to say about Poulantzas is also applicable to Lukacs.
132 Here, Lukacs is referring to other exploited strata besides the proletariat.
133 G. Lukacs, Lenin: A Study in the Unity of His Thought, p. 67.
134 Holloway carries out an excellent analysis of totality and its relation to the state in Crack Capitalism. See especially Chapter 27, part 3, entitled ‘The Totality Cannot Be Seized from Above’, pp. 205–208. Although Holloway’s analysis of Lukacs covers only eight pages (J. Holloway, Change the World without Taking Power, Pluto Press, London, 2002, pp. 81–88), it is impressive that he succeeds in focusing on the most important aspect of Lukacs’s philosophy, which is the connection between fetishism and the formation of class consciousness. However, he does not expand on how negativity and
implementation of another pattern. ‘The function of the proletarian state is to lay the foundations for the socialist, i.e. the conscious organization of the economy.’\textsuperscript{135} Although it is not mentioned by Lukacs, it goes without saying that the state, at least in the first stages after its control passes to the proletariat, will be run not by the masses but by those who have authentic class consciousness—that is, the general committee of the party. The self-confidence that Marx considers essential if society is to be transformed into a democracy is discarded.\textsuperscript{136}

In retaining the form of the political state in his theory, Lukacs therefore ‘assumes that reason has been realized’.\textsuperscript{137} However, precisely because categories are open in dialectical theory, ‘the rational is never totally deducible,’\textsuperscript{138} and the ‘view that philosophical concepts must be pinned down, identified, and used only when they exactly follow the dictates of the logic of identity is a symptom of the quest for certainty’.\textsuperscript{139} In Lukacs, then, we encounter an inverted configuration of the authoritarian-bourgeois theory of the state, or in Horkheimer’s words, the ‘revolutionary movement negatively reflects the situation which it is attacking’.\textsuperscript{140} Horkheimer’s comment that ‘State socialism is the most consistent form of the authoritarian state’\textsuperscript{141} could equally apply to Lukacs’s state socialism.

Contrary to Lukacs’s perspective, the abolition of irrationality does not presuppose that a kind of knowledge that can be obtained before the occupation of the state,\textsuperscript{142} nor a change in the elite who run the fetish-form of state. Negativity does not presuppose that the knowledge of totality can be obtained only by the very few, the elite, beforehand. ‘Self-criticism (critical philosophy)’, Marx stressed, should ‘be gained by the present time of its struggles and desires’.\textsuperscript{143} ‘We develop new principles for the world out of the world’s own principles. We do not say to the world:

\begin{quote}

contradiction in Lukacs lead to a theory of fetishism that includes ‘the creation of a new fetish: The idea of a Hero (the Party)’ (Ibid., p. 84). It is hoped that my chapter expands on this issue in a stimulating way and better clarifies the philosophical background to the democratic deficit in Lukacs.

\textsuperscript{135} G. Lukacs, \textit{History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics}, p. 281.


\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 143.


\textsuperscript{139} M. Horkheimer, \textit{Eclipse of Reason}, p. 113.

\textsuperscript{140} M. Horkheimer, \textit{The Authoritarian State}, p. 99.


\textsuperscript{142} Contrary to most readers of the Open Marxism tradition, I maintain that it does not follow from this line of thinking that we should be indifferent towards occupying the state. For more on this, see my review of \textit{Crack Capitalism} in V. Grollios, Review of John Holloway, \textit{Crack Capitalism}, Pluto Press, 2010, \textit{Critique: A Journal of Socialist Theory}, v. 40, n. 2, 2012, pp. 283–288.

\textsuperscript{143} K, Marx, Letters from the Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher, CW 3, p. 145.
Cease your struggles, they are foolish; we will give you the true slogan of struggle.\textsuperscript{144}

The fight for human dignity starts ‘dialectically, but not with a dialectic understood as interaction but rather as the negative restlessness of our misfitting’\textsuperscript{145} to the rule of money, ‘which unfolds in our power to say No!’\textsuperscript{146} ‘In the beginning is the scream,’\textsuperscript{147} not a specific kind of knowledge. The fight for dignity cannot wait until the proletariat has precipitated the capitalist crisis (Lukacs’s first stage) in anticipation of its occupation of the state (his second stage) so that then the contradiction under which we live can be solved.

Conclusion

In a very short chapter about Lukacs in \textit{Negative Dialectics}, Adorno focuses on what I have attempted to expand on—that is, how Lukacs’s theory dispenses with negativity\textsuperscript{148} Adorno wants to make clear to the reader the closed character of Lukacs’s dialectics, the fact that the categories in his dialectics have nothing else to reveal about themselves because the chaotic, the uncertain, the not yet known element that constitutes their content, their non-identity character is discarded. For Adorno, Lukacs’s focus only on reification foresees the end of contradictions, a reconciliation that subsumes the alien and thus abolishes the core of dialectical thinking—that is, negativity.\textsuperscript{149}

By contrast, in the dialectic between essence/content and form/appearance, the essence that constitutes the content of the form-fetishes (i.e., the fact that we do not know in advance exactly how people will decide to come into contact with each other to satisfy their basic needs) is alien to us because it ‘remains what is distant and different, beyond […] that which is one’s own. The tireless charge of reification resists that dialectics’.\textsuperscript{150}

Lukacs did not succeed in revealing the open character of Marxian dialectics and consequently misinterpreted the Frankfurt\textsuperscript{151} School theory, accusing it of being ‘a kind of interesting academism […] a secessionist academism’, a theory that ‘is contradictory in the sense that there is

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., p. 144
\textsuperscript{145} J. Holloway, \textit{Crack Capitalism}, p. 85.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{147} J. Holloway, \textit{Change the World without Taking Power}, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid., pp. 191.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} For a positive account of what we can gain today from the dialectics of Frankfurt School theory, see Holloway’s \textit{Crack Capitalism} and W. Bonefeld, \textit{Negative Dialectics in Miserable Times: Notes on Adorno and Social Praxis}, \textit{Journal of Classical Sociology}, v. 12, n. 1, 2012, pp. 122–134.
nothing to be learned from it’. In my view, however, Lukacs’s conception of the party has all the characteristics that Horkheimer attributes to the intellectual who follows traditional theory.

Contrary to Lukacs’s interpretation, dialectics is not merely a method of classification different from that of the bourgeois-liberal static view of categories. Dialectics makes us aware of the human content of the forms, their inherently inverted, contradictory character, and, by extension, the fact that we cannot impose on reality any ideas or long-term projects constructed in advance by an elite that purports to hold an authentic and true knowledge. Defetishization requires that we reject subordinating our doing to the demands of the accumulation of wealth now, without having a pre-prepared plan in place. Through turning the topsy-turvy world on its head, through non-identity thinking, we propel a class struggle that can overturn capitalist logic by opening cracks in it, even though we cannot know with certainty where these cracks will lead us. Non-identity thinking ‘only gives voice to the mystery of that reality’ and in so doing brings negativity to the fore. This is the mystery that identity thinking seeks to eliminate. I hope to have shown how this happens in Lukacs by explaining the inherent connection between Lukacs’s theory of contradiction and dialectics and the democratic deficit in his social theory. Given this, it is hoped that my non-mainstream interpretation of Lukacs—that his political philosophy does not follow Marx’s dialectical materialism but could be considered a radical version of traditional-liberal identity thinking—has been justified in this chapter.

152 T. Pinkus, Conversations with Lukacs, p. 100.
153 For this, see M. Horkheimer, Traditional and Critical Theory.
154 Ibid., p. 217.
Introduction

According to the mainstream reading of Adorno, the key concepts of his philosophy—non-identity, the universal, the particular, totality, negativity and essence—are not primarily intended to deepen our understanding of the capitalist mode of production and, moreover, are not directly related to political thinking at all. Other scholars note that while Adorno’s intended goal was to penetrate capital’s logic, they conclude that his effort was unsuccessful. As a result, Adorno’s philosophy has rarely been connected to his idea that ‘society remains class struggle,’ to anti-capitalist democratic theory, much less to a socialist theory that has the ambition to open cracks in today’s capitalist logic. However, I maintain that Adorno’s philosophy is particularly relevant for those seeking to penetrate the logic of contemporary capitalism, especially given the current crisis of capital and the need to theorize the contradictions that have become so apparent since the 2008 international financial crisis. In what follows, I endeavour to elucidate the nature and the key features of his thought.

Adorno declares that his and Horkheimer’s philosophy is concerned with the ‘concept of the spell and all its implications,’ and, as will be seen, this concept plays a key role in Adorno’s philosophy. With this in mind, my analysis will support the idea that all the key concepts contained in his critical theory have an inherent political meaning that does not come to the fore unless they are connected directly with Marx’s theory of dialectics and fetish-forms. Unless this explicit connection is made, readers of Adorno will underestimate the practical relevance of negative dialectics. In order to elucidate this connection and the relevance of Adorno’s conceptual framework to modern capitalism, I will begin by explaining Adorno’s view of the main characteristics of the inversion, the irrationality that takes place in the bourgeois cultural system in capitalism. After

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this, I will attempt to throw light on the possible contribution that his critical theory can make to our efforts to produce a democratic political theory that, despite being carried out in terms of negativity and discarding normativity, still has practical relevance.

The Irrationality of the Exchange Principle

For Adorno, ‘the standard structure of society is the exchange form’; 3 ‘its rationality constitutes people.’ 4 He maintains that industrial labour is the model for his contemporary society and that ‘people are still what they were in Marx’s analysis [. . .] appendages of the machine [. . .] workers who are compelled [. . .] to subordinate themselves to the mechanisms of society and to adopt roles without reservation.’ 5 Like Marx, who believed that the main goal of this topsy-turvy world was ‘accumulation for accumulation’s sake’, 6 Adorno contends that the law of this world is ‘universal individual profit’. 7 Adorno emphasizes that his theory differs from conventional social theory or sociology due to its recognition that ‘the specific constitution of society in which we live [. . .] is governed by a dynamic principle’ 8 that has been overlooked by traditional social theories. This dynamic is the fact that ‘[i]t is an inherent law of capitalism that that which is can only maintain itself by extending itself, by expanding.’ 9 For Adorno, society in capitalism cannot be ‘true’ in a sense, as ‘the true society will grow tired of development,’ 10 weary of the pressure to sustain perpetual ‘growth’, which is usually understood as the interminable need for accumulation of wealth.

Following Marx’s analysis on fetishism, Adorno stresses that ‘earning a living [. . .] reduces [all activities] to interchangeable, abstract-labour time. The quality of things ceases to be their essence and becomes the accidental appearance of their value.’ 11 Drawing on Marx’s Capital, he goes on to call this accidental appearance of the value of things the ‘equivalent form’. 12 The logic of capital and the values that constitute

4 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 40.
11 Ibid., p. 227.
12 Ibid.
its content—that is, competition, the pressure to constantly accumulate wealth, and to shape our daily lives by the logic of ‘time is money’—are expressed by Adorno as ‘the exchange principle’. This conceptualization of the exchange principle is found within many of Adorno’s works and is not value-neutral; it refers not to the form of exchange common to all kinds of cultures but rather to the specific characteristics of the culture of the capitalist mode of production. For Adorno, it is this exchange principle that is the main cause of reification and fetishism:

The reification of the consciousness that deserts and defects to the world of things, capitulates before that world and makes itself resemble it, the desperate conformity of the person who is unable to withstands the coldness and predominance of the world, except by outdoing it if possible, is grounded in the world that is reified, divested of the immediacy of human relations, dominated by the abstract principle of exchange.  

It is surprising that the majority of Adorno scholars have failed to recognize the direct connection between his thought and Marx’s theory of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. An excerpt from *Minima Moralia* illustrates this connection clearly:

Only when the process that begins with the metamorphosis of labour-power into a commodity has permeated men through and through and objectified each of their impulses as formally commensurable variations of the exchange relationship, is it possible for life to reproduce itself under the prevailing relations of production.  

The ‘deformations’ that man suffers from are not caused by ‘conditions of production external to him’, but are a ‘sickness [. . .] in the society’. For Adorno, a ‘perversion of real life[16] takes place in capitalism. ‘The culture industry’, which has sprung from ‘the profit-making tendency of capital’ and has ‘developed under the law of the market’, has solidified and petrified[17] (one might say has fetishized) ‘the existing forms [. . .] of the intellectual status quo’. Adorno depicts this perversion—the ‘economic insanity’ that has ‘bracketed [people] to such a degree within the process

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15 Ibid.
17 These are the words Adorno uses to describe this process. See ibid., pp. 152–153.
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of commodity production”—as having led to a state in which ‘men
must act in order to change the present petrified conditions of existence,
but the latter have left their mark so deeply in the people [. . .] that they
scarcely seem capable of the spontaneity necessary to do so.’

The result is that ‘[t]opsy-turviness perpetuates itself: domination is propagated by
the dominated.’

In its current inverted, perverted form, therefore, society ‘stays alive,
not despite its antagonism, but by means of it; the profit interest and
thus the class relationship make up the objective motor of the production
process which the life of all men hangs by’. In contrast to the view held
by the majority of his readers, who tend to disregard the class-oriented
character of his philosophy, Adorno stresses that ‘society remains class
struggle.’

Notions of the general or the particular also have an unavoid-
able political character in Adorno’s theory, but this is evident to the reader
only when it is recognized that his philosophy draws upon and develops
Marx’s theory of the topsy-turvy world. The inherent political character
of these notions for Adorno is made explicit by the following: ‘the abstrac-
tion implicit in the market system represents the domination of the general
over the particular, of society over its captive membership.’

Traditional-bourgeois theorists ‘overlooked the immense, autonomous
role played by the relations of production [. . .] they overlooked the fact
that the much-vaunted rationality of bourgeois society [. . .] or industrial
society, is in reality irrational.’

For Adorno, the basis of this irrationality is the way in which society is arranged to run counter to the purpose of
sustaining people and their ability to live freely. Instead of people coming
together to satisfy their essential needs in solidarity and peace, they
come together as personifications of economic categories, as vampires
haunted by the logic of competition and ‘time is money,’ in order to satisfy
the need for money to beget even more money out of people’s doing. This
abnormality, perversion, contradiction or irrationality is situated within
the realm of reification and standardization that resides in the plane of
fetishism. There is a sickness in the normal. ‘The conviction that
rationality is normality is false. Under the spell of the tenacious irrationality

19 The Frankfurt School Institute for Social Research, Aspects of Sociology, Heinemann
21 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 183.
22 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 320.
23 Theodor Adorno, Society, p. 149.
24 Theodor Adorno, Society, p. 148.
25 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 132.
26 Ibid., p. 133.
27 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 65.
28 Ibid., p. 60.
of the whole, the very irrationality of people is normal.”29 The result is that those who resist the ‘mechanisms of conformity [. . .] are looked at askance: as deformed, crippled, weaklings’.30

The Fetishized and Spellbound Bourgeois Culture

In this intrinsically contradictory culture, democracy cannot but take a perverted form also. In an interview, Adorno directly connects the ‘self-alienation of society’ to democracy:

because of the preponderance of innumerable societal processes over the particular individuals, people in their societal role are not identical with what they are as immediate living people. Democracy [. . .] promises people that they themselves would make decisions about their world. But democracy actually prevents them from this ‘deciding for oneself about the world’.31

The content of democracy in bourgeois culture unavoidably contains a contradiction. On the one hand, we are seemingly free in a democracy to make decisions according to the values that we have chosen to follow. On the other hand, however, we are forced to bow before the logic of capital and the market; that is, we are forced to bow down to the values that perpetuate the capitalist mode of production, the values of accumulation of wealth, hard work, competition and ‘time is money,’ in order to sustain ourselves.

‘The democracy of the earnings-principle contribute[s] to the persistence of what is utterly anti-democratic, economic injustice, human degradation. It occurs to nobody that there might be services that are not expressible in terms of exchange value.’32 Adorno’s notion of ‘the democracy of the earnings-principle’ should be understood as analogous to what Marx has to say about the ‘Eden of the innate rights of man’, where ‘Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham’ rule.33 While in appearance we are equal and free, we are in reality little more than slaves to the rule of money. Like Marx, Adorno holds that the origin of the enchanted world of bourgeois culture, ‘in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their

32 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 195.
33 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, CW 35, p. 186.
The False Totality in Adorno’s Negative Dialectics

The reason that democracy is transformed into oligarchy under capitalism should not be attributed to a political immaturity on the part of the people but to ‘the inhumanity that inscribes privilege in the objective necessities of history’. In Adorno’s philosophy, democracy in the capitalist mode of production is expressed in a perverted form, a fetish-form whose content resides in the objective necessities that constitute the perverted way in which we live under the logic of ‘time is money.’ Thus, the origins of the bourgeois form of democracy—an inverted form of democracy—should be viewed not as a result of the will of the people but rather as a consequence of the inherent contradiction that permeates everyone’s life in bourgeois culture. The intrinsically contradictory way in which people come together in order to sustain themselves in capitalism means that democracy takes the form, the appearance, of oligarchy. This idea takes us back to Marx’s dialectical reading of the state in terms of form/appearance and essence/content. Indeed, Adorno’s conceptualization of democracy is underscored by Marx’s view of the state as ‘the social organisation evolving directly out of production and intercourse’.

Fetishism and reification—or what Adorno also calls standardization—originate in ordinary, everyday people. ‘We are not only spectators looking upon this predominance of the institutional and the objective that confronts us; rather it is after all constituted out of us, this societal objectivity is made of us ourselves.’ Fetishism should be understood as the phenomenon where ‘relationships between men which have grown increasingly independent of them, opaque, [are] now standing off against human beings like some different substance.’ Capital, the pressure that money imposes upon us in order to multiply itself, is a social relationship that originates in our current form of social doing, in our objectified labour. In other words, we are capital. Our current doing, which takes the perverted form of abstract labour-time, is the content of the topsy-turviness, of fetishism, of social objectivity. For Adorno,

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35 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 356.
37 K. Marx and F. Engels, German Ideology, CW 5, p. 89.
38 Theodor Adorno, Discussion of Professor Adorno’s Lecture ‘The Meaning of Working through the Past’, p. 298.
39 Theodor Adorno, Society, p. 147. See also Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 151, § part II, p. 239.
40 As far as I am aware, the best analysis of objectivity in Adorno that directly connects it to Marx’s Capital occurs in the second part of Werner Bonefeld’s Negative Dialectics in...
‘the objective spirit of manipulation asserts itself in experiential rules [. . .] economically inevitable calculations, the whole specific weight of the industrial apparatus.’ 41 ‘The objective spirit’ is the ‘truly irrational predestination of a society held together by brutal economic inequality’. 42

The study of culture is not something that can be easily analysed separately and then connected to the study of the objective spirit, the economy or the function of the capitalist mode of production. Adorno’s criticism of cultural critics who dispense with fetishism or capital, whether they be sociologists, philosophers or political theorists, is emphatic. For Adorno, ‘[t]he task of criticism must be [. . .] to decipher the general social tendencies which are expressed in these [cultural] phenomena and through which the most powerful interests realize themselves.’ 43 Therefore, the study of society presupposes the study of economy because society

is not merely a functional interrelationship between the socialized people [. . .] but is determined, as its functional precondition by exchange. What really makes society a social unity, what constitutes it [. . .] is the relationship of exchange. 44

Socialization first occurs through ‘the specific form of the exchange process’. 45 In late capitalist societies, which Adorno refers to as ‘developed societies’, 46 ‘exchange takes place [. . .] through money as the equivalent form’ of the ‘average necessary amount of social labour time’. 47 In these circumstances, ‘the specific forms of the objects to be exchanged are necessarily disregarded [. . .] The abstraction, therefore, lies [. . .] in society itself.’ 48 ‘The logic of capital, the principle of the rule of money, is ‘the unfolding of the exchange process’ and is ‘objectively located within society itself’; 49 it constitutes society’s content, its real essence.

The definite form in which the social labour time prevails as decisive in the determination of the value of commodities is of course connected with the form of labour as wage labour and with the [. . .] form of the means of production as capital [. . .] The specific distribution

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41 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 205.
42 Ibid., p. 186.
44 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 31.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., p. 32.
49 Ibid.
relations are thus merely the expression of the specific historical production relations.\(^{50}\)

Given this, the ‘task of sociology is [. . .] to explain [. . .] the discrepancies between essence and appearance in terms of the essential.’\(^{51}\) Distribution relations are the apparent form in which the social labour time takes place at the essence of society.

At this point, given that Marx and Adorno share similar lines of reasoning on this issue, the validity of Gillian Rose’s comments that ‘[m]issing from Adorno’s work [. . .] is any notion of human activity and praxis’\(^{52}\) and that his theory is ‘severely hampered because he has no concept or theory of society or of a mode of production’\(^{53}\) must surely be questioned.

In keeping with Marx’s philosophy, Adorno contends that the ‘liberal doctrine’ overlooks ‘that this conflict of interests, as manifested in competition, is itself a dilute derivative of much deeper conflicts: those between classes [. . .] which take place after the central conflict, over the control of the means of production’.\(^{54}\) This conflict ‘should be affirmed as an essential constituent of a vital societal life’.\(^{55}\) Therefore, to pay attention to the ‘objectified economic form’\(^{56}\) of relationships between people or to ‘the question regarding the tendency of capital, the concentration of capital [. . .] is not only a question of economic calculation [. . .] It is also the question on which the development of society, and of specifically social forms, decisively depends.’\(^{57}\) In the fetishized society the concentration of capital has reached a magnitude and acquired a weight of its own that enables capital to present itself as an institution, as the expression of society as a whole [. . .] this overall social aspect of capital is the end-point of the old fetish character of the commodity according to which relations between men are reflected back to them as relations between things.\(^{58}\)

Adorno believes not only that the culture industry derives its categories and contents from liberalism\(^{59}\) but also that ‘the culture industry [. . .]
proves to be the goal of liberalism.\textsuperscript{60} Furthermore, he attributes the culture industry’s origins to ‘the general laws of capital’.\textsuperscript{61}

When cultural criticism ‘rejects the progressive integration of all aspects of consciousness within the apparatus of material production’, then it has failed ‘to see through the apparatus’\textsuperscript{62} and to reveal the inherent irrationalism of a culture that is ruled by capital, by the rule of money, by a philosophy of time that venerates the logic of socially necessary labour time. If this is the case, then ‘the greatest fetish of cultural criticism is the notion of culture as such.’\textsuperscript{63} Its insistence on independence and autonomy ‘implies [...] the promise of a condition in which freedom were realized’.\textsuperscript{64} In such an instance, cultural criticism has degenerated into mere ideology.

At this point, the criticisms of Adorno made by Habermas and Honneth should be raised and addressed. Since their criticisms of Adorno follow a similar line to their judgements on Horkheimer (which I have discussed in a previous chapter), I will deal with their criticisms only briefly here. Habermas maintains that in Adorno ‘nothing more than instrumental reason is retained when we think through “the basic process of conscious life” [...] in the categories provided by the philosophy of consciousness.’\textsuperscript{65} Furthermore, he maintains that ‘Horkheimer and Adorno failed to recognize the communicative rationality of the lifeworld that had to develop [...] before there could be any development of formally organized domains at all.’\textsuperscript{66} Thus, Habermas holds that Adorno confused system rationality with action rationality\textsuperscript{67} and argues that the ‘earlier critical theory merely repeated the errors of Marxist functionalism’\textsuperscript{68} since it considered reification to be the one phenomenon that dominates the whole of society. For Habermas there is a dimension—the lifeworld—‘in which processes of reification do not appear as mere reflexes—as manifestations of a repressive integration emanating from an oligopolistic economy and an authoritarian state’.\textsuperscript{69} Habermas essentially implies that there is a part of our culture—communicative reason—that is not directly related to the irrationalism of bourgeois culture and that therefore does not follow capital’s logic.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 132.
\textsuperscript{62} Theodor Adorno, Cultural Criticism and Society, p. 201.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., p. 200.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 391.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
Honneth accuses Adorno of a certain reductionism, arguing that Adorno is imprisoned within ‘a one-dimensional picture’ as ‘[n]either the cultural institutions of collective self-understanding [...] nor the organizations for securing collective interests [...] receive appropriate conceptual consideration.’ Because he follows Marx’s functionalism, ‘Adorno did not make room in his social theory for an autonomous sphere of cultural action.’ He thus did not comprehend the existence of ‘another dimension of social action alongside the sphere of the market’.

However, Habermas and Honneth’s readings of the early generation of the Frankfurt School totally discard what Adorno maintains is the key concept of his philosophy—that is, the ‘concept of the spell and all its implications’. When it is understood that this concept is connected to Marx’s philosophy of the ‘topsy-turvy world’, Habermas and Honneth’s accusations prove to be unfounded.

Adorno places his thinking solidly in the tradition of Nietzsche and Marx, noting that ‘culture creates the illusion of a society worthy of man [...] the notion of culture as ideology [...] appears at first sight common [...] both to Nietzsche and Marx.’ In my reading, Adorno underlines the primary importance of embracing the dialectic between appearance/form and essence/content in order to defetishize, dereify and destandardize the ideology of the prevalent apparent forms, since ‘ideology means society as appearance.’ This takes place only when the social theorist penetrates through the forms to reveal the essence of our existence: the class struggle that originates in the conflict between two opposed philosophies of time. On the one hand, the philosophy of time under capitalism produces and reproduces a way of living that is structured by spending our time according to the logic of socially necessary labour time. In contrast to this, there is an alternative philosophy of time, one in which the logic of time as money is discarded, and time instead becomes the time necessary for freely associated men to satisfy their real needs and not the need of money to multiply itself. Adorno attributes the origins of the capitalist ideology of time to an ‘abstraction, which is of the essence of the barter process’.

73 Ibid., p. 96.
74 Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, p. 43.
75 Theodor Adorno, *Cultural Criticism and Society*, p. 207.
76 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 354.
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In other words, Adorno considers ideology to be a phenomenon of mystification, of fetishism as this was elaborated in *Capital.* Since the primary goal of

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\text{[s]cience should be the recognition of the truth and the untruth of what the phenomenon under study seeks to be } \ldots \text{ the critique of ideology is thus not something peripheral } \ldots \text{ limited to the } \ldots \text{ products of the subjective mind. Philosophically, it is central: it is a critique of the constitutive consciousness itself.}\]

The aim of philosophers, therefore, should be to debunk truths that claim to be absolute or notions that claim to be valid. It should be borne in mind, however, that the philosophy of knowledge is not a field that is simply related to political philosophy, but is of itself inescapably political philosophy. Furthermore, given that philosophy does not take place on a plane of theory severed from praxis, the philosopher’s critique cannot but be inherently social and political. Thus, if philosophy aspires to be of a critical kind, it should aim to have radical or even revolutionary consequences.

As noted earlier, the fact that people are haunted by the logic of capital in order to survive is expressed by Adorno through his notion of the spell and ideology: ‘Present ideology [. . .] is the ceaseless reproducer of the universal in the individuals. Spell and ideology are one and the same.’ Key to Adorno’s conceptualization of ideology as the spell is his insistence that there is an inversion that takes place in bourgeois democracy whereby the rule of money imposes its needs on the real subjects of history—people—rather than people using money to fulfil their needs. This means that ultimately ‘human beings are modeled on the methods of production.’ According to Adorno, ‘that is the way of the world as long as human beings stand under the spell of social production instead of being its master.’ Adorno’s concept of the spell should be understood as being synonymous with fetishism, reification: ‘In human experience the spell is equivalent of the fetish character of merchandise [. . .] In the spell,
the reified consciousness has become total.’ The ‘spellbound subjects’ reproduce the enchanted inverted society that is formed according to the exchange principle. For Adorno, then, ideology ‘is not superimposed as a detachable layer on the being of society; it is inherent in that being. It rests upon abstraction, which is of the essence of the barter process.’ Fetishism, the existence of the spell, the reified consciousness, is the reason for the failure of culture, a failure that ‘is the result of its own persistent character as a natural entity’—namely, as a fetishized entity.

In Adorno’s insistence that the phenomenon of fetishism must be analysed by considering ‘why human beings are still sworn to the playing of roles’, it seems clear that Adorno embraces Marx’s idea that people are forced to act as personifications of economic categories in the topsy-turvy world. He makes his intellectual debt to Marx even clearer when he confesses that the origins of his thought lie in Marx’s notion of the character masks, a concept he praises as ‘deduc[ing] and found[ing] [the notion of roles] socially’. Adorno also has a clear idea of the unavoidably contradictory way in which we currently live. He underlines that the ‘hardships of the division of labor are hypostatized as virtues in the concept of the role [. . .] The liberated ego [. . .] would no longer be condemned to play roles.’ Roles or character masks contain in their essence the rationale of the ‘hardships of the division of labour’, the principle that in a society where people are spellbound, haunted by the logic of capital, they are merely ‘agents of value’, and ‘[t]ime is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcase.’ For Adorno, then, ‘the concept of the role sanctions the bad, perverted depersonalization of today,’ and the adoption of social roles perpetuates the ‘destructive’ character of the ‘perverted, topsy-turvy world’, in which ‘a loss of identity’ takes place ‘for the sake of abstract identity [social role], of naked self-preservation’. This depersonalization is characterized by Adorno as ‘the bourgeois devaluation of the individual’ precisely because its cause is the fetishism, the reification that unavoidably takes place in capitalism, in bourgeois culture.

83 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 346.
84 Ibid. The fact that people are spellbound is also referred to in Negative Dialectics, p. 363.
85 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 354.
87 Theodor Adorno, Society, p. 148.
88 Ibid.
89 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 278.
90 Ibid., p. 311.
92 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 278.
93 Ibid., p. 279.
94 Ibid.
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Only those who are able to penetrate through the petrified fetish-forms to reveal their essence and thus defetishize them will be able to theorize the horror of depersonalization\(^{95}\) and to realize that in the ‘administered world’ ‘schizophrenia is the truth about the subject.’\(^ {96}\)

Identity Thinking and the False Social Totality

In Adorno’s philosophy, the spellbound subjects reproduce a totality.\(^ {97}\)

This is because

industrial labor has everywhere become the model of society [. . .] It has developed into a totality because methods modeled on those of industry are necessarily extended by the laws of economics to other realms of material production, administration, the sphere of distribution, and those that call themselves culture.\(^ {98}\)

In late capitalism, the boundaries between material production, distribution and consumption are blurred because they are jointly administered.\(^ {99}\)

This blurring takes place from the moment when ‘[t]he totality of the process of mediation [. . .] amounts in reality to the principle of exchange.’\(^ {100}\)

Similarly, ‘totality is the drastic expression of the power of the exchange relation,’ which is ‘the objective abstraction to which the social process of life is subject’.\(^ {101}\)

Adorno explains the existence of the totality not in terms of contingency but in terms of social necessity. This explains why he writes about an objective abstraction. For Adorno, totality is inherently connected with the phenomenon of fetishism, of reification: ‘The more total society becomes, the greater the reification of the mind.’\(^ {102}\)

Just like reification, totality is unavoidable since it also owes its existence to the intrinsic logic of the capitalist mode of production. Thus, Adorno concludes that our ‘world is objectively set for totality’\(^ {103}\) because the totality is a ‘socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the universal pressed out of individual human beings’.\(^ {104}\) The totality is created by the objectified labour of

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95 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 280.
96 Ibid., p. 281.
97 Ibid., p. 346.
99 Ibid., p. 124.
100 Ibid.
101 Theodor Adorno, *Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?*, p. 120.
103 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 17.
104 Ibid., p. 323.
the people themselves—that is, by labour formed and conducted according to the dictates of ‘time is money.’ This essential contradiction at the heart of our social doing ultimately results in there being

innumerable times when unavoidable motives of self-preservation force people, even conscious people capable of criticizing the whole, to do things and to take attitudes which blindly help maintain the universal even though their consciousness is opposed to it [. . .] because, to survive, they have to make an alien cause their own. 105

For Adorno, it is this pressure to abide by the dictates of the ‘social principle of unreflected self-preservation—the very principle which makes up the bad universal’106 that makes the universal a ‘coercive social mechanism’. 107

Given the foregoing, the reader should be better able to grasp the meaning of Adorno’s idea that ‘mankind preserves itself not despite all the irrationalities and conflicts, but by virtue of them.’ 108

Society becomes totality by virtue of its contradictions since ‘the societalization of society, its consolidation into what [. . .] is truly more like a system than an organism, [. . .] has survived, reproduced, and extended itself [. . .] only through its division into opposing interests of those who command and those who produce.’ 109

The ‘consolidation of all partial moments and acts of civil society into a whole’ takes place for no other reason than to guarantee and perpetuate ‘the principle of exchange’. 110 The very existence of the totality is attributed to the intrinsic ‘perpetual antagonism’, 111 and sickness of the capitalist mode of production. It should now be clear that Adorno’s conceptualization of the totality as a ‘contradictory totality’ 112 cannot be the product of a theoretical philosophy that has sidestepped consideration of the economic or the study of capitalism. Indeed, Adorno uses the phrase ‘social totality’ 113 in order to bring to the fore the inherent political meaning, the intense value-laden content that the capitalist mode of production

105 Ibid., p. 311.
106 Ibid., p. 283.
107 Ibid.
108 Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, p. 50. See also Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectic, p. 320.
110 Ibid., p. 87.
112 Theodor Adorno, Theory of Pseudo-Culture, Telos, n. 95, 1993, p. 36.
contributes to the concept of totality. ‘The idea of the objective nature of the total social process and of the totality encompassing the whole society’ should be understood in terms of the ‘distinction between appearance and essence’, despite the fact that ‘by definition essence is not a fact, not the sort of thing that you can put your finger on in any immediate physical sense, but something that transcends all the facts [. . .] [and has] very real functions.’ This philosophy of appearance and essence is considered by Adorno to be the ‘implicit premise underlying the whole Marxian theory’. Given this, his theory’s origins in Marx’s philosophy are apparent once more. This connection, however, has gone unnoticed by the majority of scholars of the theories of the first generation of the Frankfurt School because, in contrast to Adorno, they do not read Marx’s philosophy in terms of a dialectic between fetish-forms/appearance and essence/content.

Given the foregoing, the totality cannot be other than a ‘bad totality’ since its existence is rooted in the alienation of our everyday lives. In light of this, the use of the word ‘bad’ in the phrase ‘bad totality’ might be considered pleonastic. Adorno also characterizes social totality as a ‘veil’ because, among other things, it conceals ‘the frozen modernity of monopoly and state capitalism’. Social totality expresses mass culture, the apotheosis of profit and the exchange principle that forces the logic of capital upon people. As a consequence, ‘the totality forces everyone who wishes to survive into consciously going along with the process. This is what happens under monopolistic mass culture.’ Totality, then, is directly identified with the culture industry in Adorno’s work. Domination in capitalism, which is expressed through the culture industry, entails rigidity, stringency, totality, necessity and generality. Given this, it is not difficult to conceive why Adorno describes totality as a ‘forced unity’.

Since the ‘profit interests from which [the culture industry] originated [. . .] have become objectified in its ideology [. . .] [w]hat parades as progress in the culture industry, as the incessantly new which it offers up,
remains the disguise of the eternal sameness’. The content of progress in bourgeois culture entails control and oppression over external or human nature. This oppression ‘has its highest form of intellectual reflection in the identity principle of reason’. The values that the logic of capital imposes so that it can reproduce itself must always be the same: competition, accumulation of wealth and hard work. Thus, in bourgeois society, ‘exchange is the rational form of mythical ever-sameness.’ Adorno clarifies that ‘the mastery of nature [...] which continues in the mastery of men by other men [...] finds its mental reflex in the principle of identity, by which I mean the intrinsic aspiration of all mind to turn every alterity [...] into something like itself.’ All variety of human doing must therefore bow before the values that perpetuate the logic of capital, and thus the picture of humankind, human culture, must remain the same regardless of the course of historical events. In the profit-oriented bourgeois culture, the ‘life process itself ossifies in the expression of the ever-same [...] [T]he more the system expands, the more it hardens into what it has always been.’ Progress and expansion in capitalism are translated in terms of a thriving economy, ‘growth’ and accumulation of wealth, not in terms of another way of living, of doing things that would dispense with socially necessary labour time and thus better fulfil people’s needs, imagination and creativity. Under bourgeois mass culture, all creativity and imagination that do not follow the goal of multiplication of money are condemned and discredited.

Identification expresses the spell of the totality since both notions express the plane of appearance of the fetish-forms. Identification is not simply a philosophical phenomenon that exists at the level of theory, but rather owes its existence to the specific kind of domination and power that we encounter in capitalism. Identity thinking expresses the fact that the ghosts of capital must adopt the same values in order to continue to be haunted by the logic of profit. ‘That all men are alike is exactly what society would like to hear. It considers [...] differences as stigmas.’ Identity thinking presupposes unity, security and certainty. Its concepts and categories are rigid and closed since they dispense with alterity; concepts and forms are thus fetishized, mystified and naturalized. They appear as natural phenomena, as concrete entities that have always existed. Thus,
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the people who act as personifications of economic categories, as ghosts of capital, cannot question the enchanted world and its mystified forms, since that would presuppose the possibility of alterity, of otherness. This serves to explain why Adorno also characterizes the totality as ‘a closed system of compulsion’ and bourgeois culture as a ‘totalitarian culture’. The totalitarian element in the culture is experienced as the spirit of capital, as the rule of money, which ‘represents [. . .] an autonomous objectivity which stands opposed to them [as individuals]’.

Like all the key notions in Adorno’s work, totality and identity thinking can be understood only if they are interpreted via the dialectic between fetish-form/appearance and its intrinsic essence/content. For Adorno, ‘there is no such thing as a choice between essence and appearance’, essence is always apparent because it ‘is disclosed in phenomena themselves’, and ‘[a]ppearance is always an appearance of essence and not mere illusion.’ Essence and appearance, therefore, should not be regarded as two independent dimensions of the world that are in some way interrelated. Rather, the world, our reality, is a unified whole, but because it is inherently an irrational and contradictory capitalist world, its contradictions express themselves under a veil, as ciphers, as fetishized and mystified forms. Essence and appearance are mediated; they exist through each other since they express the same praxis—that is to say, the movement that exchange value makes in order to multiply itself at the expense of people’s needs. To couch this in different terms, we might talk about the existence of a dialectic, a mediation between the petrified appearance and its underlying dynamic. Adorno holds that for Hegel and Marx the dynamic is ‘unified with its opposite, with something steadfast, in which alone a dynamic first becomes legible at all’. This unification with its opposite is precisely what the term ‘mediation’ denotes. The dynamic element is the human content inside the form, the totality and the identity. The underlying contradiction between the two opposed philosophies of time penetrates our existence and appears as totality and identity, which are composed of fetish-forms that dominate us, such as the state, the bourgeois form of democracy, mass culture or value as money.

Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that people themselves have created this social totality, this social objectivity that ‘binds people

131 Theodor Adorno, Theory of Pseudo-Culture, Telos, n. 95, 1993, p. 28.
132 Ibid.
133 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 38.
134 Ibid., p. 20.
135 Ibid., p. 21.
136 Theodor Adorno, Sociology and Empirical Research, p. 84.
137 Ibid., p. 22.
138 Theodor Adorno, Progress, p. 144.
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together only by virtue of their alienation from each other’. 139 ‘The world is systematized terror’ 140 because inside the system, the totality or ‘forced unity’ there is a schizophrenia to the way in which we live in capitalism due to the inherent contradiction of the two opposed philosophies of time. In the ‘right state of things [. . .] [there would be] neither a system nor a contradiction’. 141 The ‘unifying principle ‘of this system is ‘the irreconcilability of the general and the particular. Its essence is abomination.’ 142 One might also identify the ‘totalizing character of society’ with ‘an all-encompassing reification’ that has in its essence ‘a process of dehumanization’. 143 Dehumanization or abomination in this context refers to the formation of our doing under the dictates of socially necessary labour time, of profit, and not under the dictates of human dignity or the satisfaction of needs. 144

An apolitical reading of Adorno’s concept of totality has been carried out by two well-known commentators on Adorno’s philosophy, Gillian Rose and Martin Jay. Rose holds that ‘his analysis of the underlying processes of society is not based on any notion of society as a “whole”. The emphasis on commodity exchange means that the “whole” of society cannot be the object of analysis.’ 145 She comes to the conclusion that not only does Adorno’s conceptualization of totality add ‘little or nothing [. . .] to the theory of value (reification) and to the theory of identity and non-identity thinking’, 146 but also Adorno’s position is contradictory because ‘[h]e stressed the necessity of understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the “totality”, yet denied the possibility of grasping the “totality”.’ 147 In a similar fashion, Jay maintains that Adorno is ‘open to the charge of inconsistency because he combined an increasingly gloomy analysis of the totality on the macrological level with a call for theoretical and artistic resistance to it on the micrological’. 148 For Jay, therefore, Adorno’s theory ‘must [. . .] be understood as an untotaled “forcefield” of apparently contradictory statements, which both reflects

139 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 43.
140 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 113.
141 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 11.
142 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 113.
143 Theodor Adorno, Reflections in Class Theory, p. 109.
144 The contrast between exchange value and use value and how this constitutes the principle of contradiction that lies at the heart of the life process can be found in Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, pp. 50–51.
146 Ibid., p. 79.
147 Ibid., p. 8.
and resists the reality it tries critically to analyze’. However, both of these interpreters fail to recognize the centrality of the dialectic between appearance-form and content/essence in Adorno’s thought. In contrast to the oversights of such critics, I have attempted to clarify that Adorno’s concept of the totality expresses the plane of appearance, reification and fetishism while noting that the plane of appearance is an expression of essence in a distorted form. Since contradiction and the irrational are the essence of his concept of totality, the totality is, like all other notions in Adorno’s theory, an open category that includes within it the uncertain and chaotic. In Adornian terms, one might say that those who will fight to break the spell, to turn the ‘topsy-turvy’ world on its head, are those who live inside the spellbound, ‘topsy-turvy’ society, not those outside of it. The criticisms of Rose and Jay can thus be seen as unfounded when totality is read as an open concept with contradiction at its essence.

If contradiction, the abnormal and the chaotic are inherent to the essence, then they are also unavoidably included in the fetish-forms, which constitute the ‘realm of reification and standardization’. In such a totality, then, human creativity, variety of thought and action, and ‘the incommensurable’ must take a very specific form—abstract labour, exchange value—and thus be made ‘commensurable’. For Adorno, then, the ‘tighter [philosophy] connects arguments, the more airtight and unassailable its propositions become, the more it becomes identity thinking.’ By contrast, the concept of non-identity consists of the chaotic, the incommensurable human element. The more philosophy dispenses with the chaotic, the schizophrenic nature of our existence, the more superficial it is. For Adorno, this superficiality means that ‘[t]hinkers lacking in the paranoid element [. . .] have no impact or are soon forgotten.’ That ‘there arises that appearance of reconcilement’ is only because people, in order to survive, ‘have to make an alien cause their own’. However, given that the universal is not above antagonisms, alienation lies at the very heart of this apparent reconcilement. As a result, the totality is a ‘false totality’, and the immediacy, the apparent forms that constitute the plane of fetishism, is a ‘deceptive immediacy’, a ‘false

149 Ibid., p. 266.
150 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 65.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Theodor Adorno, Progress, p. 143.
154 Theodor Adorno, Messages in a Bottle, p. 41.
155 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 311.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., pp. 311–312.
158 Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, p. 262.
identity’. \(^{159}\) In accordance with Horkheimer, who wrote that a ‘tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking,’ \(^{160}\) Adorno maintains that ‘[t]hought is a force-field.’ \(^{161}\) Horkheimer’s ‘tension’ and Adorno’s ‘force’ refer to the non-identity element that lies in the essence of our existence. This non-identity element is the remainder, the residue of the essence that is not absorbed into the abstract world of fetish-forms. It is this non-identity element that points to the fact that it is impossible for us to formulate our social doing solely in terms of commensurable abstract labour and act purely as personifications of economic categories, as ghosts of capital.

In order to underline the fundamental untruth, the false character of the identity that rules, Adorno stresses that

> The position is not that an identity rules which also contains non-identity, but non-identity is a non-identity of the identical and the non-identical [. . .] [the] acts of subjugation and submission in which identity is torn apart, forge the identity of history. \(^{162}\)

Just as totality owes its existence to the underlying irrationality of the world around us—that is, the pressure to transform our doing into the commensurable exchange value—so the notion of identity also rests upon the same irrationality. Both notions owe their existence to the capitalist mode of production.

‘A truly achieved identity [. . .] would have to be the creation of a reconciled non-identity.’ \(^{163}\) This is clearly a utopian position, however, since people cannot fully equate their entire existence with the needs of capital, with the principle of ‘time is money,’ because they are still human beings with certain needs that cannot be met by the goals of expansion, ‘growth’ and accumulation of wealth. Since totality is false, ‘[t]he whole is the false,’ \(^{164}\) and our life in capitalism is necessarily a ‘false life’ \(^{165}\) that contains antagonistic interests in its content. For Adorno, then, ‘[i]llusion dominates reality. To this extent, society is myth.’ \(^{166}\) It should be noted that Adorno’s use of illusion here should be interpreted in terms of Marx’s theory of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. Adorno finds in Marx the idea that ‘[b]arter as a process has real objectivity and is

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159 Theodor Adorno, Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?, p. 124.
161 Theodor Adorno, Messages in a Bottle, p. 40.
162 Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, pp. 92–93.
163 Ibid., p. 55.
164 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 50.
166 Theodor Adorno, Sociology and Empirical Research, p. 80.
objectively untrue at the same time [. . .] This is why, of necessity, it will create a false consciousness: the idols of the market.”¹⁶⁷ This false character, this illusion should not be understood as something that is not valid or real: ‘Reification itself is the reflexive form of false objectivity’¹⁶⁸ and is real. Rather, the false, the illusionary or the reified reveals the inverted nature of the world that dominates us. However, in its essence lies the hidden content of untruth: contradiction. ‘Contradiction [. . .] indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.’¹⁶⁹ If the concept exhausted the thing conceived, then identity thinking would exhaust reality, and thus the apparent form of the thing would be its only dimension. If this were the case, our world would not be topsy-turvy, and science would not aspire to recognize the untruth inside the phenomenal truthfulness of the world. We would not have to make the reflective effort to bring to the fore the essence hidden inside the form since everything would already be crystal clear to us. ‘Only if the physical urge were quenched would spirit be reconciled and would become that which it only promises.’¹⁷⁰ If the topsy-turvy world were turned on its head and the basic human needs were fulfilled there would be no false or untruthful elements inside the mystified forms for philosophy to reveal, and philosophy as understood by Adorno¹⁷¹ would have a totally different goal and character that of course we cannot now predict.

However, society fails in its promise of perpetual growth, accumulation of wealth, since the expansion that occurs takes place because capital, ‘vampire-like’,¹⁷² sucks living labour. ‘Capital has one single life impulse, the tendency to create value and surplus value, to make its constant factor, the means of production, absorb the greatest possible amount of surplus labour.’¹⁷³ People do not adopt the logic of the ‘social totality’, of identity thinking, of private property, of competition, of capital, of time is money, of the one-dimensional profit-oriented perspective of their own free will. Rather, people are compelled to embrace this logic, at least to an extent, in order to survive, and it is this naked sense of self-preservation that imposes identity thinking upon us. The content of self-preservation ‘is the tautology of identity: what ought to be is what is anyway’.¹⁷⁴

At this point, it should be readily apparent that, for Adorno, we are the non-identity. Indeed, my aim is to make the case, in a more explicit way

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 5.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 207.
¹⁷¹ As I have attempted to show previously, this is also the case for Marx and Horkheimer.
¹⁷³ Ibid.
¹⁷⁴ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 349.
than has been attempted previously, that, for Adorno, non-identity is caused by our inability to fully adopt the logic of capital. Since Adorno openly identifies identity with the exchange principle and self-preservation, it goes without saying that non-identity also lies in our doing. No matter our inclinations, we must sell our labour power in order to sustain a living; thus we must succumb to the logic of the market, to identity thinking that transforms our doing into abstract labour, into money. Transforming our incommensurable doing into commensurable value in the form of money is a prerequisite of our survival in capitalism. The more spellbound people are, the easier it will be for them to adopt the logic of the spellbound totality, the logic of identity thinking.

For Adorno, ‘[t]he spirit of failed identification’ is the spirit of the ‘pseudo-culture’.175 The failure of identification is attributed by Adorno to the loss of ‘virtually all of [. . .] the qualities [of the society] as a result of the domination of the exchange principle’.176 As a consequence, ‘the individual gains neither form nor structure,’177 which are the elements that would enable him to cultivate himself. The pseudo-cultured person does not differentiate between appearance and essence; instead, ‘[e]verything mediated turns into immediacy.’178 She or he is so much haunted by the systemic logic that his or her ‘alienated consciousness [. . .] is always fixated on its own view of things’.179 She or he uncritically accepts the values that sustain the exchange principle, which are competition, hard work and accumulation of wealth. His or her identity is formed by the ‘character masks’, the roles she or he is asked to play in our estranged, mystified world in order to survive. She or he remains ‘trapped in the identities of abstract labour’.180 She or he has no knowledge of the fact that she or he herself or himself creates his own prison, the ‘totalitarian culture’.

Adorno’s Corporeal Materialism: Opening the Closed Concepts

In previous sections, I have underlined the fact that the human content is the underlying content, the non-identity element that is inescapably inside the categories that make up the notion of identity, of totality. ‘No matter how reified both categories are [culture and administration] in reality,

177 Ibid., p. 24.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid., p. 35.
180 Ibid.
neither is totally reified; both refer back to living subjects." The same applies to all the categories that we use to understand the world since none of them lie outside the social totality but rather exist as fetish-form parts of it. This fact makes categories and concepts open because they include the incommensurable, the chaotic, the uncertain and the contradiction between the two philosophies of time that is embedded in our doing in capitalism. Contradiction appears as the state, as bourgeois democracy, as value as money, as the trinity formula of capital, wage and rent. The 'enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy' nature of our world is revealed through its deliberate obscuration of suffering: 'It is part of the mechanism of domination to forbid recognition of the suffering it produces.' The fact that we suffer proves the untruth and false character of our culture. It proves that the system fails us, that totality and all the other categories are indeed inverted and therefore open categories. The reality of suffering shatters and opens all identities, all closed fetishized categories. 'The physical moment tells our knowledge that suffering ought not to be, that things should be different. [...] Hence the convergence of [...] materialism with criticism, with social change in practice.' Experience forms not only our answers but also the questions that we pose, and the questions that philosophy poses should be shaped by its experience so that its 'answers are [...] the recoil of the unfolded, transparent question.' The field and the content of philosophy are not predetermined but shaped historically. Philosophy, even in its pure form, which for Adorno is 'the cult of Being' of the 'fundamental ontology' (or metaphysics in its classical form), cannot conceal pain:

The metaphysical principle of the injunction that ‘Thou shalt not inflict pain’ [...] can find its justification only in the recourse to material reality, to corporeal, physical reality, and not to its opposite pole, the pure idea. Metaphysics, I say, has slipped into material existence.

Adorno’s comment that ‘Marx, disgusted with the academic squabbles, went rampaging through the epistemological categories [which are supposed to be formulated in a plane outside politics] like the proverbial bull in the china shop’ should once again raise suspicions about the claims

183 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 63.
184 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 203.
185 Ibid., p. 63.
186 Ibid., p. 65.
187 Theodor Adorno, Metaphysics, p. 117.
188 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 206.
of those who dispute the relationship between Adorno’s philosophy and that of Marx.

Philosophy has a moral demand at its core that cannot be ignored. Philosophical thinking cannot aspire to have any meaning for our lives if it diminishes the fundamentality of morality as its raison d’être.

A precondition of all truth [is] [...] the need to lend a voice to suffering. For suffering is the weight of objective realities bearing down on the individual. Whatever he experiences as his innermost subjectivity [...] is mediated objectively.\(^{189}\)

Materialism sheds light on the alienation that is grounded in material conditions.\(^{190}\) The critical thinker must treat the object ‘in accord with its significance and importance’.\(^{191}\) By so doing, the critical character of his or her reflection ‘is not only formal but also material’.\(^{192}\) Similar to Marx’s view of materialism as the ‘ad hominem’\(^{193}\) demonstration analysed in previous chapters, Adorno embraces the same idea by writing that the ‘\textit{reductio ad hominem}’ which inspires all critical enlightenment is substantiated in the human being [...] In contemporary society, however, its sole indicator is the socially untrue.’\(^{194}\) Adorno’s corporeal materialism dereifies, denaturalizes things and thus opens concepts that appear to be closed by shedding light on to the socially untrue. ‘Materialism is not the dogma indicated by clever opponents, but a dissolution of things understood as dogmatic; hence its right to a place in critical philosophy.’\(^{195}\) The demand for the abolition ‘of production for production’s sake [...] is the materialistic ground of the traits which in negative dialectics rebel against the official doctrinal concept of materialism’.\(^{196}\) Because materialism has

189 Theodor Adorno, \textit{Lectures on Negative Dialectics}, p. 190. The same idea can be also found in Theodor Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}, pp. 17–18.
190 Theodor Adorno, \textit{Introduction to Sociology}, p. 3. On the same page, Adorno confesses that he has ‘put a moratorium on’ the concept of alienation because by putting emphasis ‘on a spiritual feeling of strangeness’, it conceals its material conditions. So long as this is borne in mind, however, I feel that I can continue to use the word throughout the remainder of the chapter.
192 Ibid. Immediately after this comment, Adorno underlines the direct relation of his understanding of critical theory to that of Horkheimer’s.
an inherent social content, it is far from being an analysis in terms of formal epistemology.

Materialism respects and brings to the fore human suffering, pain, the tangible feelings, the corporeal element that exists in the ‘social facts’, in the ‘objectivity of cognition’. 197

As thinking, dialectical logic respects that which is to be thought—the object [. . .] Thought need not be content with its own legality; without abandoning it, we can think against our thought, and if it were possible to define dialectics, this would be a definition worth suggesting. 198

The passage to materialism takes place by the object’s preponderance, because of the corporeal materiality which lies in the things. By doing so, materialism becomes dialectical, since contradiction also has a corporeal character. 199 ‘Materialist dialectics’ makes the ‘process of becoming [that] is inherent in the object’—‘its internal history’—the measure of the immediacy of the object. 200 Objects, social entities, should thus be understood not as physical entities but as fetish-forms that are dissolved, defetishized and destandardized when we examine their becoming, when we investigate the historical conditions that create them. By examining the internal history of the immediacy of an object, we in fact examine the history of its human content, that which lies within the forms. In so doing, we ‘think against our thinking’ by reflecting on the internal history that lies hidden in the immediacy of the reified appearance. Such reasoning is employed when one poses the question of how it is possible for people to be the sole agents of history yet at the same time appear to be dominated by categories (e.g., value as money) that appear to have a life of their own beyond people’s control. Materialist dialectics, as they are set out in Adorno, questions why this content takes this specific form: how and why is people’s doing, the way they spend their time and their labour, objectified in the form of the state, money and the trinity formula?

In order to make my point clearer, I must now point out how my approach differs from that of other interpreters of Adorno’s materialism. Deborah Cook, in a study focused on Adorno’s materialism, reads Adorno’s references to objects in Negative Dialectics not so much in terms of the process of social objectivity that lies in the objectified labour produced by people themselves, but chiefly in terms of ‘material objects’ and

197 Ibid., p. 140.
198 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 141.
199 Ibid., p. 192.
200 Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 175. The same idea can also be found in Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 52.
‘the preponderance of matter over mind’. 201 Although she writes that the ‘priority of the object, then, refers to the priority of both the natural and social worlds over the subject,’ 202 she does not expand at all on the social and political character that Adorno’s social materialism has in regard to its origin to the untruth and false element that the veil of social objectivity covers. Her aim is ‘to demonstrate that history and nature are dialectically entwined’, 203 and she attributes the critical character of Adorno’s materialism both to the fact that the subject is at the same time dependent and independent from the object and (at least in her reading) that Adorno’s theory urges us to acknowledge that ‘our experience is impoverished and nature damaged precisely because we have failed to recognize the degree to which we are part of nature even as social and historical beings.’ 204

In contrast to Cook’s position, I have attempted to bring to light that Adorno’s materialism should be read not as an effort to connect human subjects to nature but as a reflection on the irrationality that lies in the concepts. Central to my view on Adorno’s theory is his recognition that forms and concepts are inverted, perverted appearances of the human content that lies at their heart—that is, the abnormal way in which we as a society spend our time. Our experience is damaged not, as Cook holds, because we have failed to realize the necessary extent of our coexistence with nature but because of the inherently contradictory way in which we live our lives in capitalism. The failure of the concept of recognition that Cook writes about (but does not explain) is not a subjective feeling. According to Adorno’s materialism, all misrecognition of our connection to nature or to each other lies in our adherence to the alienated barter process that generates the veil of social objectivity.

Brian O’Connor’s view of Adorno’s materialism is very close to that of Cook. In fact, Cook cites O’Connor’s book and bases much of her reading upon it. For O’Connor, Adorno’s materialism means that ‘matter should be taken to include all the processes of our experienceable reality in which meaning emerges for human beings.’ 205 In O’Connor’s reading, then, Adorno’s world view is materialistic because it theorizes objects only through the processes of the social totality. 206 In other words, it ‘sees the world as explicable entirely in terms of human beings attempting to

202 Ibid., p. 725.
203 Ibid., p. 730.
204 Ibid., p. 734.
206 Ibid., p. 171.
understand and order their existence’. Our physical relation to objects in turn gives rise to the issue of non-identity.

While what O’Connor argues is not inaccurate, I do not believe that it adequately conveys Adorno’s purpose for his use of the concept of materialism. I hold that the notion of the object for Adorno should be read not in terms of physical matter but rather in terms of the fetishized, reified forms created by our own doing. Why else would Adorno have underlined that for materialist dialectics the ‘process of becoming is inherent in the object’? In *Negative Dialectics* he expands on the meaning of dialectics in terms of the ‘contradiction once experienced in the thing’. The object, the thing, is the form that our doing takes in capitalism.

The critical character of materialism is due to the fact that it debunks things previously understood as dogmatic. Why would Adorno write this if materialism did not have an inherent political meaning that comes to the fore only if is read as ad hominem critique that opens the closed appearance of categories and objects and thus reveals the falseness—the objectified labour—that is the true content of the mystified fetish-forms? Adorno’s praise of Horkheimer corroborates my reading. In a letter to Horkheimer, Adorno praised him for having ‘emancipated materialism from the realm of the apocryphal’ by following ‘a critique of the objective structure of society’.

A reading closer to my approach is Simon Jarvis’s interpretation, but it still leaves me unsatisfied. For Jarvis, Adorno’s materialism carries the meaning that our reflection starts with the wish to end suffering. He emphasizes that Adorno embraces the analysis of *Capital* since it ‘offers the phenomenology of a systematic illusion’. He is also correct to stress that Marx’s materialism attempts to undo from within the systematic illusion through an openness to historical change. Jarvis also clarifies that ‘what finally matters to Adorno is [...] to evolve a practice of thinking in which these impurities in thinking [physical suffering] [...] can be acknowledged rather than compulsorily suppressed.’

However, we should bear in mind that the call to end physical suffering is not limited to materialist philosophers; it extends to other philosophers.

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207 Ibid.
208 Ibid., p. 172.
212 Ibid., p. 90.
213 Ibid., p. 91.
214 Ibid., p. 94.
215 Ibid., p. 98.
who fight for a better world in which humans do not suffer. I am sure that the majority of these philosophers do not consider the origins of their philosophy to derive from Capital or even as belonging to the materialist philosophical tradition at all. Jarvis, like the majority of Adorno’s readers, fails to recognize the dialectic between appearance/mystified form and essence/content in Adorno’s philosophy. As a result, they fail to appreciate that suffering is the real content of the mystified form. They do not see the process of fetishization as being caused by the underlying alienation of our doing in our everyday life, a process that we produce and reproduce every time we accept the transformation of our doing into abstract labour, into money that must be multiplied. As a consequence, Jarvis fails to understand Adorno’s materialism as a method that questions why this content takes that form. He fails to appreciate that in so doing, Adorno’s approach debunks and denaturalizes the apparently ineluctable forms that dominate humans, such as perpetual growth, the state and bourgeois parliamentary democracy, and in consequence defetishizes the whole of bourgeois culture. As a result, like Cook and O’Connor, Jarvis fails to appreciate fully the radical character of Adorno’s materialism and its intrinsic connections to the concept of dialectics.

Thinking Dangerously without a Safety Belt: How Adorno’s Dialectics Breaks the Spell

The ability of Adorno’s materialism to open the apparently closed and fetishized concepts is essentially what dialectics is all about. ‘To proceed dialectically means to think in contradictions [. . .] A contradiction in reality, it is a contradiction against reality.’ 216 It is possible to penetrate the meaning of the latter statement only if reality is thought of in terms of two planes—those of appearance and essence. However, these planes should not be thought of as independent or somehow simply related to each other. Rather, they are mediated to each other; they exist in and through each other as parts of the one and only reality. Furthermore, essence should not be conceived as a tranhistorical category as it is ‘nothing other than the history stored up in [. . .] [social] phenomena’. 217 In the essence of the reality lies a contradiction that proves false the apparent form of that reality—that is to say, the rigid, closed, fetishized categories. If contradiction resides within the essence of our reality, then contradiction must be ‘in the concept, not merely between concepts’. 218 This contradiction, this

216 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 145.
217 Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 146.
218 Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 2. The same idea can also be found in Theodor Adorno, Problems of Moral Philosophy, Polity, Cambridge, 2000, p. 127.
conflict between the two opposed philosophies of time, appears as the various forms fetishes. ‘A dialectical concept of meaning would [...] the societal essence which shapes appearances, appears in them and conceals itself in them,’ 219 and the ‘dialectical contradiction expresses the real antagonisms.’ 220 By revealing the historical process of the formation of the contradiction, we defetishize the phenomena by recognizing that they are products of specific historical circumstances and are therefore susceptible to change.

Our effort to gain an understanding of things—that is, a comprehension of the fetish-forms—in their totality presupposes our embracing of a dialectical approach. Viewing things in isolation means that we see only their apparent mystified plane, and because we do not shed light on their underlying essence, we cannot recognize them as products of our concealed doing, our abstract labour. For Adorno, ‘[d]ialectical thought [...] designates isolation as precisely a product of the universal.’ 221 Likewise, dialectics ‘is the experience of the mediation of all that is individual through the objective societal totality’. 222 These excerpts can be understood as meaning that what appears isolated appears so because of the existence of the universal, the social reified totality. Its isolation is proven false the moment that we penetrate its apparent form and see its concealed essence. In other words, we see that which appears in isolation as a moment of the underlying schizophrenic way in which we live as ‘personification of economic categories’ in capitalism. Congruent with Marx, who stated that ‘true materialism’ makes ‘the social relationship of “man to man” the basic principle of history’, 223 Adorno proves the materialistic character of his dialectics by stating that one lesson from dialectics is that ‘there is no category, no concept, no theory even, however true, that is immune to the danger of becoming false and even ideological in the constellation that it enters into in practice.’ 224 Historically, since the content of the concepts and forms is created through people’s practical relation to each other and towards nature in order to satisfy their basic needs, theory changes constantly. Concepts correspond to people’s actual needs at a specific historical point in time.

The immanent character of Adorno’s dialectics aims at unearthing the practice, the human content that generated the concept. ‘Dialectics means

220 Ibid.
221 Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 71.
224 Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, p. 57.
nothing other than insisting on the mediation of what appears to be imme-
diate [. . .] Dialectics is not a third standpoint but [. . .] an immanent
critique. 225  Dialectics is not a method that has been formed and has its
origin outside class contradictions that later aspires to regulate them.
Since for Adorno, as we have seen, ‘society remains class struggle,’ dialec-
tics cannot but be immersed in the class struggle and be formed from it.
Here, however, class struggle should be understood not in the traditional
sense of open confrontation between people demanding the imposition of
their demands via a power struggle, but as the conflict between the inher-
ently opposed interests of the two philosophies of time that in turn pro-
mote their opposed values. In other words, it should be understood as the
antagonism between two opposed philosophical anthropologies: one pro-
motes hard work, competition and accumulation of wealth, even in their
mitigated forms, while the other promotes the values of solidarity, peace,
cooperation and free time. The first of these philosophies of time is pro-
moted by traditional theory—that is, liberal political philosophy—while
the other is advanced by critical dialectical theory. It is the contradiction
between these two philosophical anthropologies that we experience as
class struggle in our everyday lives.

We are now in the position to better understand the meaning that
Adorno gave to the concept of dialectical theory when he stated,

I would not hesitate to define the idea of a dialectical theory of society
as [. . .] the effort to restore the experience which is denied us both
by the social system and by the rules of science [. . .] [as] a rebellion
of experience against empiricism. 226

This rebellion of experience that Adorno refers to is the fact that we
experience the untruth and falseness of the values of bourgeois culture
every time the system fails in its promises to us. The rebellion of experi-
ence opens the closed categories and brings to the surface the inherent
untruth, the false character of identity thinking, the false logic of the
system. Immanence means that ‘[d]ialectics is not a method independent
of its object,’ 227  and as such, ‘[d]ialectical thought is an attempt to break
through the coercion of logic by its own means’ 228  by revealing the contra-
diction inside the fetish-form. For Adorno, breaking through the coercive
logic is equated to breaking the spellbound totality, to negating the logic
of the mystified ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. In order to

225  Theodor Adorno, Why Still Philosophy, in Critical Models, Interventions and Catch-
words, Columbia University Press, New York, 2005, p. 12. The importance of imma-
nence is also stressed in Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 145.
226  Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 51.
228  Theodor Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 150.
do this, Adorno maintains that the dialectician must adopt a two-sided approach: ‘The dialectical critic of culture must both participate in culture and not participate.’ 229 Again, this sentence can be understood only if we approach it in terms of a dialectic between appearance and essence. The thinker who wishes to conduct a deep analysis of culture must participate in it in order to ‘decipher the general social tendencies which are expressed in [the cultural] phenomena and through which the most powerful interests realize themselves’. 230 Simultaneously, however, she or he must not become subsumed in it to the extent that he or she then becomes incapable of dispelling its veil by embracing dialectics.

For Adorno, ‘[d]ialectical critique seeks to salvage or help to establish what does not obey totality, what opposed it or what first forms itself as the potential of a not yet existent individuation.’ 231 Dialectics reflects the movement of the fetish-forms historically—that is to say, as moments created by our doing, by our efforts to sustain a living in an intrinsically irrational mode of production whose normal function presupposes the perpetual accumulation of wealth. ‘Dialectics is the consistent sense of nonidentity. It does not begin by taking a standpoint. My thought is driven to it by its own inevitable insufficiency.’ 232 This sense of non-identity has to do with the fact that even if we wanted to fully obey totality, this would be impossible since it is not possible to act entirely as ‘character masks’, as personifications of economic categories.

Dialectics is the exposure of this impossibility, the uncovering of the remainder that is left from the failed identification. This notion of the remainder is central to Adorno’s dialectics: ‘The name of dialectics says no more [. . .] than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder.’ 233 This remainder derives from the fact that the variety of human creativity and thought necessarily extends beyond the values of the culture that generate the fetish-forms. This failure to fit our doing entirely to the demands of capital is the very reason for the existence of dialectics. ‘Dialectics is the ontology of the wrong state of things. The right state of things would be free of it: neither a system nor a contradiction.’ 234

Since dialectics emphasizes the importance of the historical circumstances that have generated the fetish-forms and identifies the human creativity, our doing, as the true content of the concept, the dialectical method enables us to appreciate that ‘the content [of the concept] is not

229 Theodor Adorno, Cultural Criticism and Society, p. 209.
230 Ibid., p. 207.
232 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 5.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid., p. 11.
closed, not predetermined by a skeleton and that ‘Thought is [. . .] a piece of existence extending [. . .] to that which is not.’ ‘That which is not’ is the remainder, the chaotic and unknown element of our doing that bourgeois culture continuously attempts to restrain and place in the procrustean bed of values that constitute the foundation of the capitalist mode of production. The dialectic is open because it reveals the irrational and mystified character of what appears normal and rational. For Adorno, then, the “open” can be conceived only as the undiminished consciousness of being thwarted, of the perversity of things, and it is ‘possible to think philosophically only where thinking can go awry, where it is fallible [. . .] Its true actuality [. . .] consists in the resistance it offers to the prevailing need for security.’ This is in full agreement with Horkheimer’s belief that ‘philosophy is [. . .] a source of annoyance’ since revealing the inherent irrationality inside the apparently rational fetish-forms makes people feel ‘insecure and on dangerous ground’. Again, the insecurity that philosophy should engender was raised by Adorno in his lectures on negative dialectics, where he argued that ‘knowledge that is not dangerous does not deserve to be thought’ and that ‘people fear that, in escaping from the spell, they will lose everything because they know no happiness, not even the happiness of thought apart from the ability to hold onto something.

The practical relevance of this idea for us today could not be more evident. Almost all ideas that question the necessity of growth, accumulation of wealth and the promotion of competition as means of overcoming the current worldwide economic crisis are considered irrational and are immediately excluded from the dialogue. However, Adorno warned us that truth can be found ‘only in whatever throws itself away without [a] safety belt, à fonds perdu’. ‘It is in the concept of openness [. . .] that the possibility of disappointment lies.’ Concepts are open precisely because we cannot be sure if our struggle to protect our dignity against the rule of money, against the forms that the social relation of capital takes in order to multiply itself, will be successful. Since we can have no predetermined plans or a priori ideas to impose on reality, we must walk into the unknown. Thus, thinking in terms of non-identity and dialectics

235 Ibid., p. 56.
236 Ibid., p. 57.
237 Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 122.
238 Ibid., p. 85.
240 Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 85.
241 Ibid., p. 146.
242 Ibid., p. 145.
243 Theodor Adorno, Metaphysics, p. 141.
causes panic since it doubts everything that is (and has been) considered to promote certainty, security, stability, all that bourgeois culture regards as standard, all that seems to be rigid. This is why “[d]ialectical reason is, when set against the dominant mode of reason, unreason.”\(^\text{244}\) The entire content of the philosophical anthropology upon which the current form of our culture has been built is being shattered by such a materialistic dialectics. ‘Once [the dialectic] has recognized the ruling universal order and its propositions as sick [. . .] then it can see as healing cells only what appears, by the standards of that order, as itself sick, eccentric, paranoia—indeed, “mad”.’\(^\text{245}\) As far as Adorno is concerned, the existence of ‘the alien thing’—non-identity—was preserved ‘in the moment of planning’ by the mature Marx.\(^\text{246}\)

In my opinion, it is impossible for the readers of Adorno to appreciate the rich content of his philosophy and to reflect on the practical relevance of his work if they do not connect it to anti-capitalist thinking. Maureen Melnyk’s recent study is of the very few to have emphasized the uncertainty that must be embraced by the immanent critique.\(^\text{247}\) She underlines that the

undeterminable and non-conceptual component of all things [. . .] is precisely the space in which [. . .] a better relationship between individuals and the social world, together with drastically altered relations of labor and commodity production, emerges.\(^\text{248}\)

She also recognizes that the contradictions in Adorno’s identity thinking are analogous to those in reality, ‘particularly at the intersections of subjectivity with commodity exchange and freedom with capitalist production’.\(^\text{249}\) Nevertheless, despite her alluding to the idea, albeit not in a direct way, that we are the non-identity, she fails to mention anything about corporeal materialism—the physical suffering that is caused when the reified social totality fails its people—and its connection to the concept of dialectics. In addition, despite making reference to the capitalist mode of production, she makes no mention of why Adorno condemns this system. As a result, her analysis fails to appreciate the practical significance that Adorno’s philosophy has in regards to defetishizing the current systemic logic.

\(^\text{244}\) Theodor Adorno, \textit{Minima Moralia}, p. 72.
\(^\text{245}\) Ibid., p. 73.
\(^\text{246}\) Theodor Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}, p. 192.
\(^\text{248}\) Ibid., p. 660.
\(^\text{249}\) Ibid., p. 662.
Negativity and Critique in Adorno’s Philosophy

If philosophy and sociology are going to achieve anything [. . .] they must face up to the task of employing methods that have not succumbed to universal fetishism, and thus make [. . .] their contribution, however modest, to breaking the spell. For thought there is no other possibility [. . .] than [. . .] to work one’s way through the darkness without a lamp, without possessing the positive through the higher concept of the negation of the negation, and to immerse oneself in the darkness as deeply as one possible can. [. . .] The joys of interpretation [. . .] consist in refusing to be blinded by the semblance of immediacy.

In order for our thinking to break the spell of immediacy, to defetishize the products of our objectified labour (e.g., the state, bourgeois parliamentary democracy, value as money or the trinity formula), it need only present the inherent contradiction in things. By doing this, it presents things in their negativity. Negativity is the central concept in Adornian dialectics: ‘Thought itself [. . .] is negativity and to that extent negativity, and especially dialectical thinking, is negative dialectics from the outset.’ If one aspires one’s thinking to be penetrating and insightful, it ‘is negative already — a revolt against being importuned to bow to every immediate thing’. By revealing the human suffering that is the real human content of the reified, objectified forms, ‘[t]hought as such [. . .] is an act of negation, of resistance.’

An open dialectic cannot but be a negative one. ‘In the unreconciled condition, nonidentity is experienced as negativity.’ Theory does not come from a plane that exists outside of the class struggle between the two opposed philosophies of time, nor can it impose its own values or regulate contradiction and the opposed class interests. ‘Theory does not contain answers to everything; it reacts to the world, which is faulty to the core.’ When the negative dialectician differentiates between the rational façade and the irrationality, he or she presupposes openness, presupposes that things can be different, that humans can come into contact with

250 Theodor Adorno, Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?, p. 125.
251 Theodor Adorno, Metaphysics, p. 144.
252 Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, p. 137.
253 Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 11.
254 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 19.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid., p. 31.
257 Ibid.
258 Theodor Adorno, Trying to Understand ‘Endgame’, p. 283.
each other and the natural world in ways that defy the logic of capital, the
logic of the perpetual accumulation of wealth, hard work and competi-
tion. In transgressing the logic of the reified social totality, ‘[w]hat we dif-
ferentiate will appear divergent, dissonant, negative.’ Negativity is not
a concept invented by the armchair philosopher but rather something that
we experience in our everyday lives. We experience negativity every time
the system fails us, when it urges us to accept a lower standard of living
in order for growth to take place, for money to be more easily multiplied.

Such thinking in terms of openness and negativity causes a ‘vertigo’, a
shock, because ‘all the things that mean familiarity, home and security
in the false world are themselves aspects of the spell.’ For Adorno, this
loss of balance and security ‘is an index veri’. Philosophy must there-
fore dare to plunge into the abyss. It does this by revealing to us the
precariousness of our lives in the current form of culture. Philosophy in
the current historical conjuncture has an inherently negative character
since its role is not just to classify or ‘juggle concepts, arranging, and
rearranging them as neatly as possible like a stamp collection’ so as to
describe the things, the fetish-forms. Rather, its purpose is to reveal the
concealed content of the concepts and forms. Its role is not to help us
fit into a world that inexorably insults our dignity but to safeguard and
preserve difference from suffocation by the totalitarian bourgeois culture.
The purpose of philosophy is therefore inherently negative, and as such,
it is non-systemic, anti-capitalist, ‘the force of resistance’. A formal
epistemology that does not take into consideration the alienation of our
every life would be a shallow form of thinking with no serious practical
relevance. By contrast, Adorno holds that ‘open thinking points beyond
itself [. . .] as a configuration of praxis which is more closely related to a
praxis truly involved in change than in a position of mere obedience for
the sake of praxis.’ In my view, this can be read as Adorno stressing the
importance of a praxis that must fight not for the repetition of the same
logic couched in ostensibly more compassionate terms—see, for example,
the ‘growth with a human face’ mantra so typical of many political party
slogans—but for goals whose content is not predetermined, for ideas that

259 Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 5.
260 ‘The shock of the open’ is equated to ‘negativity’. See Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on
Negative Dialectics*, p. 198.
261 Ibid.
262 Theodor Adorno, *Lectures on Negative Dialectics*, p. 198. The same can also be found
263 Ibid., p. 199.
264 Theodor Adorno, *Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, Stanford University Press, Stanford,
CA, 2001, pp. 81–82.
265 Theodor Adorno, Resignation, in J. M. Bernstein (ed.) *The Culture Industry*, Rout-
266 Ibid.
cannot form definitive plans A or B, for values that do not and cannot guarantee any success in our fight for our dignity.

To employ an analogy: just as an X-ray is performed to see biological processes that are not readily apparent, the dialectician performs a comparable investigation of society to reveal the concealed processes within the social body that are hidden from the traditional theorist. It should be stressed that the hidden essence is as much part of this reality as its apparent fetish-forms but appears in a distorted form, as a bewitched, enchanted world where abnormality is considered to be normality. Dispensing with negativity would mean that we are reconciled to the irrationality, the abnormality, that we are resigned to our doing necessarily becoming transformed into abstract labour, into money that must beget even more money.

As has been shown, Adorno praised Horkheimer in regard to key notions of his theory, and his praise for Horkheimer’s conceptualization of the notion of negativity was again generous. In a letter to Horkheimer, Adorno admitted his debt to him and stated that he too set out to criticize the bad universal and to immerse himself in the particular:267

Through you I have learned to appreciate the gravity of negativity in an undiluted form.268 [. . .] You ascribe no substantial reality to spirit; you seek its essence, truth and freedom, in its self-denial. Your basic feeling is that the adventitiousness of the world is definitive [. . .] Your talent in countless situations derives from the constellation of worldly knowledge, the power of resistance, and a quality of always remaining a little detached from reality [. . .] The freedom I associate with you can be measured by the resistance it offers [. . .] People are more in their potential than they are in fact. This ‘more’ is no abstraction. It appears sporadically again and again even in what we actually are.269 [. . .] We are not entirely the products of that mastery of nature that we have invented, that we have inflicted on the world and ultimately on ourselves. This surplus becomes manifest in you, constantly renewing itself.270

The ‘adventitiousness’ referred to here can be understood as the unknown human potential, the chaotic, the uncertain that exists in the essence of reality. The idea that there is a quality in ‘remaining a little detached from reality’ can be read as a reflection on the fact that
as dialecticians we are aware of the false social totality that appears before our eyes and that its origin lies within a deeper plane of the same reality—the plane of essence, the plane of our perverted doing that lies concealed in the fetish-forms. We are detached not from reality in general but from its apparent and enchanted plane. The comment that ‘people are more than they are in fact’ underlines the falseness of what appears as fact. The values that sustain the appearance of the spellbound totality, those values of competition, accumulation of money and hard work, are not absolute, do not have transhistorical validity and correspond only to a specific cultural conjuncture. Finally, Adorno’s use of ‘more’ and ‘surplus’ refers to the open character of the dialectical and negative view of our culture. It emphasizes the irrationality and untruth that exists inside the concepts and the forms within our culture; it points to the non-identity nature and negative character of our divergence from this logic. This negativity is no abstraction, since it has a materialistic content. It is not an arbitrary concept into which we demand that reality fits itself. On the contrary, it springs entirely from our negation, our disobedience to the actual, our resistance to what dominates us in the present.

He also praised Kant and Hegel for the prominence that they gave to negativity but noted that ultimately they placed negativity to one side and raised totality to the dominant position in their philosophies. By contrast, Adorno considers that in Marx’s work negativity retains a much more pronounced role. Adorno argues that Marx praised negativity and that his dialectic ‘includes [. . .] a kind of negative ontology of a society which advances through internal conflict’. Further, he holds that Marx’s theory was formed ‘in determinate negation of the system he found before him’ and that even ‘his view of natural history was critical in essence.’ He also defends Marx from ‘a perverter of Marxian motives as Diamat who [. . .] falsif[ied] Marx’s polemical concept of natural legality [. . .] into a scientivistic doctrine of invariants’. Adorno is among the very few political philosophers who hold that

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271 For an analysis of negativity in Kant and Hegel, see Chapters 1 and 2 in Diana Coole, *Negativity and Politics: Dionysus and Dialectics from Kant to Poststructuralism*, Routledge, New York, 2000. Another useful analysis can be found in Nina Belmonte’s *Evolving Negativity: From Hegel to Derrida*, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, v. 28, n. 1, 2002, pp. 18–58.


273 Theodor Adorno, ‘Static’ and ‘Dynamic’ as Sociological Categories, *Diogenes*, v. 9, n. 33, 1961, p. 44.

274 Theodor Adorno, *Late Capitalism or Industrial Society?*, p. 115.


276 Ibid.
The False Totality in Adorno’s Negative Dialectics

With Marx [. . .] the tendency is for the negativity contained in the very naturalness of immediacy [. . .] to come to the surface; he assigns to the reflective mind the task of [. . .] uncovering the true reality in the hidden laws of motion, in what lies concealed, what does not lie on the surface. 277

Researchers who have failed to acknowledge the negative character in Marx’s dialectic of appearance/forms and essence/content will have difficulty in grasping the gist of Adorno’s philosophy given that the core of both of their philosophies—the conceptualization and the analysis of the enchanted, spellbound world—is very similar.

Philosophizing the world negatively marks an attempt to shed light on the historical formation of the contradictions embedded in its innermost structure. Negativity is ‘located in the fundamental strata and not just in ephemeral surface phenomena’ 278 and is intrinsically connected to materialism because both notions stress that contradiction is experienced by us in our everyday lives as the conflict of the two opposed philosophies of time in a world turned upside down. Materialism is not a concept that should be analysed in the context of formal epistemology. Instead, it is a social materialism that draws our attention ‘to the confrontation between man and nature and to the objective forms of sociation, which cannot in any way be traced back to mind or spirit in the sense of the inward state of man’. 279 Only when materialism is viewed in this way can it ‘bring out the objectivity of what is actually the case socially’. 280 The objectivity referred to here is the social objectivity mentioned earlier in this chapter: the content of the praxis, which is what our thinking aims to penetrate. But by penetrating the praxis and revealing the social objectivity that we ourselves create we reveal the negative 281 moment, the suffering that we have to endure in order for ‘growth’, the multiplication of money, to take place.

Dialectical contradiction is caused by the barter principle, 282 and due to its materialistic character, Adorno also calls it ‘objective contradiction’ 283 because it is ‘experience[d] in the thing’. 284 Thus, he states that the ‘aporetical concepts of philosophy are marks of what is objectively, not just cogitatively unresolved’. 285 For Adorno, since philosophy gives voice to

277 Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, p. 137.
278 Theodor Adorno, Metaphysics, p. 126.
280 Ibid.
281 In Aspects of Sociology, praxis is connected to ‘the negative moment’. Ibid., p. 127.
282 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 152.
283 Ibid., p. 153.
284 Ibid.
285 Ibid.
The expression of our objective and very real suffering—the pressure to accept the irrationality of living as ghosts of capital—the entire content of his philosophy (not just his conceptualization of materialism) has a corporeal character. It should be stressed, however, that this corporeality is not elaborated outside the exchange process, the barter principle. If it were, then the corporeality itself would be formed outside the contradiction and thus fetishized and mystified. The physical suffering results directly from the fact that in the capitalist mode of production we are forced to act as personifications of economic categories. We experience our own negativity through our inability to identify entirely with and to subsume each and every aspect of our existence in the universal, the social objectivity. In short, there is inevitably an aspect of our thinking that remains independent of and unsubsumed within the social objectivity; we are ‘more’ than the universal allows. The person ‘experience[s] this “more” as his own negativity’. 286 The ‘more’ concerns the otherness, the alterity, the ‘“more” of the concept compared with his need’. 287 This need cannot be fulfilled through the current form that the fetishized concepts take, and this reveals the non-identity, the negative, the corporeal human content inside the concepts. ‘The subject too is hidden in dialectics, since its real rule brings forth the contradictions.’ 288 From the foregoing, it seems clear to me that while the validity of the content and the conclusions of Adorno’s philosophy might be questioned by the reader, the accusation made by many scholars that his philosophy does not have an inherently anti-capitalist content is groundless.

By revealing the untruth of the social totality and thus ‘the negativity of the whole, philosophy satisfies [. . .] the postulate of determinate negation’. 289 It is crucial here to separate what Adorno terms determinate negation from abstract negation. Adorno claims that Marx would have ridiculed ‘the mere mistrust of ideology [. . .] as abstract negation’. 290 For Adorno, like Marx, a mere mistrust of the social totality or a superficial analysis that fails to unveil the fetish-forms, reveal things as appearances, expose the irrationality that we experience in our everyday lives and uncover the social necessity that makes capital ‘a perennial pumping-machine of surplus labour for the capitalist’ 291 would be an abstract negation. In such a case, negation and contradiction would not exist in the essence of the fetish-form, in the thing itself. It would therefore not have a materialist content. By contrast, a refutation of capital that exposes negation as existing because of our unavoidable inability to fully

286 Ibid., p. 151.
287 Ibid.
288 Ibid., p. 161.
289 Theodor Adorno, Hegel: Three Studies, p. 79.
290 Theodor Adorno, On the Logic of Social Sciences, p. 115.
291 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 809.
obey the systemic logic is defined as determinate negation. Adorno clearly equates determinate negation with the immanent critique, arguing that ‘refutation is only fruitful as immanent criticism’ and that dialectics ‘is the self-consciousness of the objective context of delusion [...] the context of immanence’. The ‘objective context’ is the historical dynamic stored up in it. Furthermore, he argues that ‘the construct of criticism [...] can [...] already imply the solution; the latter hardly ever appears from without. It was to this that the philosophical concept of determinate negation referred.’ Negation is determinate because the contradiction lies in the thing itself, in the essence of the fetish-form. Determinate negation is by definition historically specific: ‘The task of cognition does not consist in mere apprehension, classification, and calculation, but in the determinate negation of each immediacy.’ We determine something by negating it. We negate its apparent inverted form in order to shed light on its essence, its real content. Determinate negation thus opens the fetish-form by demonstrating that the form is a historically specific mystified expression of our distorted doing—the real content of the form. Thus, to understand why this content, this human doing, takes the form of the state or the bourgeois form of democracy, it is necessary to negate the fetish-form’s appearance by penetrating its hidden content. Understanding the concept of determinate negation therefore presupposes a familiarity with the dialectic between appearance/form and essence/content.

The same applies to the concept of critique. ‘Negative dialectics [...] is in its essentials identical with a critical theory [...] [N]egative dialectics as critique means above all criticism of precisely this claim to identity.’ We therefore elaborate a critical viewpoint of the world when we resist standardization and rigidity. Thus, a critical perspective on society is one that is not satisfied to remain at the level of role-playing through the character masks. The definition of critique or criticism in critical theory differs radically from more conventional philosophical approaches. In pseudo-cultural theory, for example, ‘[c]riticism [...] degenerates into mere cleverness which is deceived by nothing and fools its adversaries—a means of getting on.’ In the framework of traditional theory, which remains bound purely to the plane of social totality, criticism refers to a process of classifying, regulating and endeavouring to discover the
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common interest that would eliminate particular class interests and thus render the notion of society as class struggle invalid. However,

if the social totality is recognized as a socially necessary semblance, as the hypostasis of the universal pressed out of individual human beings; if its claim to be absolute is broken—only then will a critical social consciousness retain its freedom to think that things might be different some day.301

Only if the things and the forms that dominate us are theorized as perverted, mystified forms and manifestations of an underlying alienation can our thinking penetrate inside them. Critique thus reveals the inherent contradictions in the thing, in the fetish-form. It brings to light that what led to the creation of the forms is the contradictory way in which we organize our common affairs in order to fulfil our elementary needs. It makes apparent what is hidden in the shadow behind the character mask—the human content of the form, its historical creation by the sole subjects of history, people.

For Adorno, ‘[c]ritical thought must let itself be guided by the concrete forms of consciousness it opposes and must go over again what they have forgotten.’302 In a similar vein, Adorno also states that ‘[a]ll objectification is forgetting.’303 What, then, does Adorno mean by these statements? John Holloway contends that Adorno’s position is as follows: ‘Past struggles that pointed towards something radically different from the present are forgotten.’304 While I have no objection to this interpretation, my reading of the phrase ‘what they have forgotten’ contains an additional, and I would argue more important, idea. I believe that Adorno is referring here to the historical process of the creation of the forms, a process that is hidden in traditional theory and is thus ignored/forgotten in its analysis. Furthermore, if we accept that fetishism is a process that people create every time they succumb to the logic of capital, what has been forgotten is the fact that we are capital, that the fetish-forms are created continuously by our perverted doing in capitalism, our transformation of our concrete labour into abstract labour.

It appears to me that Adorno’s concept of criticism is in full accordance with Marx, who wrote that ‘truly philosophical criticism [. . .] not only shows up contradictions as existing; it explains them, it comprehends

301 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 323.
303 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p. 230.
their genesis, their necessity.\textsuperscript{305} The importance of experience is also stressed by Adorno. Adorno clearly places his notion of critique in the Marxist tradition when he confesses that

\begin{quote}
...criticism ensures that what has evolved loses its appearance as mere existence and stands revealed as the product of history. This is essentially the procedure of Marxist critique [. . .] Marxist critique consists in showing that every social and economic factor that appears to be part of nature is in fact something that has evolved historically.\textsuperscript{306}
\end{quote}

As in Marx’s theory, the role attributed to history in critical theory is of the utmost importance. Indeed, Adorno notes that the ‘most decisive of the differences between a critical theory of society, represented prototypically by that of Marx, and sociology in the restricted sense [. . .] is the importance attributed to history’.\textsuperscript{307} It seems clear to me, therefore, that Marx’s philosophy is not merely one influence among many for Adorno but actually the primary influence on both his elaboration of the concept of critique and all the other concepts in his philosophy. Fundamentally, he shares with Marx a critical conceptual framework in which all concepts are tied together in revealing human suffering. This critical theory theorizes the world in negative dialectical terms and thus reveals that the foundations of the fetish-forms lie in negativity, in human suffering.

**Normativity and the Ineffable Integrity in Adorno’s Philosophy of the ‘Damaged Life’**

Philosophy is dialectical and critical not only towards the world but also towards itself. Since theory and praxis are mediated, fully intertwined with each other, ‘philosophy contains an inner contradiction, that is, it is inwardly dialectical in itself.’\textsuperscript{308} Since our thinking is open, formed by the process of fetishism, of the historical dynamic of our coming into contact with each other and nature in terms of negativity, otherness, alterity, then philosophy must ‘hold itself open to whatever experience presents itself to mind’.\textsuperscript{309} This means that ‘philosophy consists in the effort to say what

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{305} Karl Marx, Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Law: Introduction, p. 91.
\item \textsuperscript{306} Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, pp. 135–136. In the Theory of Pseudo-Culture, Telos, n. 95, 1993, p. 37, Adorno underlines that ‘Marx and Engels conceived the critical theory of society.’
\item \textsuperscript{307} Theodor Adorno, Introduction to Sociology, p. 145.
\item \textsuperscript{308} Theodor Adorno, Lectures on Negative Dialectics, p. 74.
\item \textsuperscript{309} Ibid., p. 75.
\end{itemize}
The ‘false totality’ in Adorno’s Negative Dialectics cannot be said, in particular whatever cannot be said directly [. . .] but only in a context.\textsuperscript{310}

The ‘remainder’ that lies in the concept due to failed identification refers ‘to non-conceptualities that [. . .] [are] characteristic of the concept’.\textsuperscript{311} The issue of non-conceptuality is, as far as Adorno is concerned, ‘of true philosophical interest at this point in history’.\textsuperscript{312} Precisely because Adorno’s philosophy is a philosophy of life that reflects the irrationality of our doing in our everyday life, its non-conceptual character does not lie in the supposedly isolated plane of theory but in the spellbound topsy-turviness of the capitalist mode of production. The ‘possibility of something true that cannot be conceived of anymore [. . .] undermines the absolute claim of the status quo, that which simply is the way it is’.\textsuperscript{313} The ineffable, the non-conceptual, is the ‘potential that waits in the object’.\textsuperscript{314} To ‘immerse oneself in the darkness’, to think dangerously ‘without a seatbelt’ is accepting the existence of the ineffable in the concept itself. ‘If thinking is to be true [. . .] it must also be a thinking against itself.’\textsuperscript{315} Bearing in mind the foregoing, the philosophy of negative dialectics ‘would be infinite in the sense of scorning solidification in a body of enumerable theorems’.\textsuperscript{316}

The existence of the ineffable originates in the inherent class contradiction, in the underlying clash between two different philosophies of time that promote opposed interests. ‘If it is the case that philosophy’s only raison d’être today is to gain access to the unsayable, then it can be said that [. . .] the world of Auschwitz [has] made clear [. . .] that culture has failed to its very core.’\textsuperscript{317} Similar to the other concepts in Adorno’s philosophy, the notion of the unsayable, the non-conceptual, cannot be appreciated without understanding the concept of the spell, the ‘enchanted topsy-turvy world’. Adorno supports the view that the ‘appearance of identity is inherent in thought itself, in its pure form. To think is to identify.’\textsuperscript{318} Likewise, ‘[i]f philosophy can be defined at all, it is an effort to express things one cannot speak about, to help express the nonidentical despite the fact that expressing it identifies it at the same time.’\textsuperscript{319}

However, Adorno’s reference to Auschwitz should lead us to the conclusion that this does not mean that non-conceptuality is an unavoidable, transhistorical characteristic that can be found in all the concepts that

\textsuperscript{310} Ibid., p. 74.
\textsuperscript{311} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., p. 8.
\textsuperscript{313} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Trying to Understand ‘Endgame’}, p. 292.
\textsuperscript{314} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{315} Ibid., p. 365.
\textsuperscript{316} Ibid., p. 13.
\textsuperscript{317} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Metaphysics}, p. 118.
\textsuperscript{318} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}, p. 5.
\textsuperscript{319} Theodor Adorno, Hegel: Three Studies, pp. 101–102.
have ever existed. Rather, its origin lies in the non-identity character of concepts in the objectified spellbound totality. If non-identity is the human content that remains unfulfilled by the fetish-form, the non-conceptual refers to this remainder—that is, to all the unknown variety of human creativity that cannot fit to the demands of the rule of money. If the full breadth of human potential is unknown, then it is absolutely reasonable that the concept will not be able to express it. Adorno’s notion of non-conceptuality is thus in full accordance with his dialectics. If concepts could express the human potential, which is currently unthinkable, then the dialectic between appearance/form and essence/content or the mediation between theory and praxis, the historical dynamic that is stored up in the concept, would be annulled. In that case, the concept would include a prediction of the future. It would then be a closed, fetishized, rigid, non-dialectical concept, and fetishism would not be understood as a process that we create by our objectified labour.

One of the best-known interpretations of Adorno’s concept of non-conceptuality is by Gordon Finlayson. He maintains that non-identity in Adorno can be construed as the figure of something wholly beyond reason and completely other to discursive thought, and hence ineffable [...] the non-identical has to be radically other than [...] the totally administered social world. 320 Moreover, he sets out the idea that ‘Adorno seeks to transcend the social world’ and that he ‘is motivated by a concern to break out of a nexus of immanence that has, he thinks, regressed to a nexus of delusion that blinds us to the depredations of a totally administered [...] society’. 321 My reading of Adorno, however, conflicts with Gordon Finlayson’s interpretation. The key difference lies in the fact that I hold that, for Adorno, non-identity lies in the concept, in the fetish-form, not outside of it in another dimension. Non-identity and non-conceptuality refer to the hidden, non-apparent content of the one and only social world, and most definitely do not lie beyond it in another transcendental dimension, as Gordon Finlayson’s reading of Adorno suggests.

In discarding Adorno’s philosophy of the spell, the dialectic between appearance/form and essence/content, Gordon Finlayson transforms Adorno’s social philosophy into a kind of theology. In addition, I believe that he misinterprets the notion of immanence. In my reading, immanence reveals how Adorno’s corporeal materialism can defetishize the spellbound totality. For Gordon Finlayson, however, immanence regresses into delusion and is thus incapable of any practical use. What blinds us to the depredations of the administered society is not a delusion, as

321 Ibid., p. 30.
Gordon Finlayson holds, but a false consciousness, as is clearly stated by Adorno himself. False consciousness refers to something real—to the plane of appearance, to the enchanted perverted fetish-forms, to a shallow view of the world—not to a delusion. The irrationality of the topsy-turvy world is, unfortunately for us, all too real. Therefore, the concept of false consciousness here should be read not as something unreal, as a delusion, but rather as the consciousness that exhausts the entire potential meaning of the world in its own logic. False consciousness is the claim that the fetish-form is the only form human doing can take. False is the consciousness that claims that any change of the world must pass through the procrustean bed of the logic of capital, of the philosophical anthropology that sustains the capitalist mode of production. This is exactly what we are experiencing in the current moment: despite our direct experience of human suffering due to the worldwide economic crisis, most people still adopt the logic of competition, accumulation of wealth and hard work.

The ineffable, that which does not fit the conceptual origins of the current fetish-forms, the non-identity element, the other, is where hope is concentrated.\textsuperscript{322} ‘The nonidentical is not [. . .] obtainable by a negation of the negative. This negation is not an affirmation of itself [. . .] To equate the negation of the negation with positivity is the quintessence of identification.’\textsuperscript{323} We negate the negative—that is, bodily pain, human suffering—by refusing to bow to the rule of money. By saying no to the transformation of our doing into abstract labour and thus to money, by refusing to embrace the logic of ‘time is money,’ we open a potential, a possibility that things can be done differently. Fetish-forms are expressions of the way in which things are done under and through the current content that is our alienated, abstract, objectified labour. If we negate the negation, we put a brake on the process of fetishism and start breaking the spell. We bring the human element to the surface. We drag the upside down world back on to its feet. ‘The positive meaning of freedom lies in the potential, in the possibility, of breaking the spell or escaping from it.’\textsuperscript{324}

We do not and cannot know exactly how the spell will be broken in the long term. To claim to do so would be like predicting the content of the human potential or forming an a priori plan to change the world. That would be like attempting to impose another totality on reality. Dialectical thinking warns us of this danger. For Adorno’s materialistic dialectics, ‘[w]hat is crucial is this substantive factor: are you prepared constantly to let your experience be guided by the concrete possibilities available in

\textsuperscript{322} Theodor Adorno, Culture and Administration, p. 131.
\textsuperscript{323} Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{324} Theodor Adorno, History and Freedom, p. 174.
The False Totality in Adorno’s Negative Dialectics

The idea that a set plan A or B can be implemented to bring about change necessarily embraces certainty and places limits—a safety belt—on our thinking by discarding the unknown that the rebellion of experience brings. By embracing certainty, the categories remain rigid, closed, planned and preformed. In contrast to this certainty, freedom, ethics and democracy are negative categories since their only aim should be to break the current form of the spell, not to reassure people of the effectiveness of another long-term policy designed for them. For Adorno, ‘[f]reedom can be defined in negation only, corresponding to the concrete form of a specific unfreedom.’

The main question that should be posed at this point is this: how is it possible to formulate a normative moral and political theory given the non-conceptuality and uncertainty of any plan, of any counterargument to the systemic logic? Gordon Finlayson maintains that the ineffable and the ethical relate to each other in a way that is compatible with Adorno’s negativism: ‘The practical upshot of [. . .] [the ineffable] is to prevent the Mündigkeit of rational beings from degenerating into rational self-assertion.’ In Gordon Finlayson’s reading, then, forsaking certainty makes one ‘modest and capable of affection’. However, Gordon Finlayson makes no effort to clarify exactly how being modest and capable of affection is able to defetishize the current form of domination of the false social totality nor how this totality is connected to the alienation that we experience in the capitalist mode of production.

Freyenhagen’s criticism of Gordon Finlayson parallels mine in that he accuses him of not relating or contrasting ‘the radical evil of late capitalism in a way that would ground resistance to the latter’. He is also correct to stress that ‘the materialist dimension of Adorno’s philosophy gets somewhat lost in Finlayson’s reconstruction of it.’ Although his study is closer to my standpoint comparing to many others and one of the best I have read, our analyses diverge as Freyenhagen does not expand on the gravity of the concept of materialism in Adorno, nor on its corporeal character, nor on its origin in negativity. Although he maintains that ‘we suffer from the objectification and alienation to which our social world subject us,’ he also believes that the ‘objective negativity of our social world is experienced subjectively as suffering, but the social world is objectively negative not just because of the suffering it causes, but because of its

325 Ibid., p. 57.
326 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 231.
328 Ibid.
330 Ibid., p. 144.
inhumanity more generally.' He seems to presuppose the existence of a concept of negativity that is outside of us in another dimension and that is later experienced subjectively by us. He also differentiates suffering from inhumanity and thus does not underline the corporeal element of Adorno’s materialism. I find this aspect of this reasoning particularly questionable since how else does inhumanity manifest itself if not by suffering? Furthermore, Freyenhagen does not stress to the same extent as I do the human content of the non-identity character of the concept. If non-identity and negativity come to the fore only when people stop succumbing to the rule of money and put the fulfilment of peace, solidarity, respect for their fellow human beings and more free time at the centre of their activities, then there is clearly no need to design a scientific plan on how to change society because the means by which the fetishized closed categories can be opened are already known. We should focus only on how the particularity of our doing could resist the pressure to live haunted by the logic of accumulation of wealth. The materialist deficit in Freyenhagen’s reading can also be found in his comment that ‘[w]e are largely unable to think outside the given social possibilities and options, which are too limited to provide genuine possibilities to act in the way morality requires.’ In my reading of Adorno’s theory, this is not entirely accurate, because our effort to change the world does not start after we have embraced the correct theory. Moreover, our aim should not be to think ‘outside the given options’, but rather to think inside them by penetrating their fetishized form. This occurs when we reveal that they are grounded in our objectified labour, in our alienated doing in our everyday lives.

Morality in Adorno once again rests totally on a materialist motive. According to Adorno, the ‘new categorical imperative [. . .] to arrange [. . .] actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself [. . .] gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum [. . .] It is in the unvarnished materialistic motive only that morality survives.’ Adorno’s negative morality is not abstract moralizing, as many believe, but owes its existence to the way that people have organized the production and reproduction of their subsistence in the capitalist mode of production. ‘The only social morality that remains would be at last to finish off the bad infinity, the vicious system of compensatory barter.’ Our negation of the negation is determinate precisely because it is not an abstract ‘bad infinity’ that we are supposed to negate, but the specific domination of the capitalist mode

332 Ibid., p. 94.
334 Ibid., p. 299.
of production, the logic of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’, the spellbound social totality.

In the context of the ineffable integrity in Adorno’s philosophy of the ‘damaged life’, ‘morality has transformed itself nowadays into the resistance against this blind force, against this predominance of the merely existent, under which in fact we all suffer today.’335 At the same time, Adorno confesses that ‘[t]his is of course very abstract and unsatisfying’336 but goes on to state that this is ‘no fanfare at all’.337 I would like to emphasize that this is indeed unavoidably abstract and unsatisfying since, as I have repeatedly stressed, uncertainty and non-conceptuality are intrinsic to the essence of the current form of our ‘damaged life’. Concepts are open, not rigid, because they include unpredictability in their content. We cannot have a stable a priori knowledge of the future content of the values that might be adopted or of the choices people will make when they organize their daily subsistence without being pressured to follow the current systemic logic of the perpetual accumulation of wealth. It is impossible to make predictions on how people would think if they were to come together in order to decide how to fulfil their basic needs outside the realms of capital. We cannot envisage how people will answer the key question of democracy: what we will produce, how and on what terms? This question cannot be posed in capitalism, in a system that maintains private property in the means of production. Moreover, regarding normativity,

No one can promise that the reflections that can be entertained in the realm of moral philosophy can be used to establish a canonical plan for the good life because life itself is so deformed and distorted that no one is able to live a good life in it [. . .] the only thing that can perhaps be said is that the good life today would consist in resistance to the forms of the bad life that have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds. Other than this negative prescription no guidance can really be envisaged.338

It should be noted here that, in contrast to the dialectical critical theorist, the so-called critical thinker within traditional theory makes no attempt to open, dissect, debunk and bring to the surface the false character of the current fetish-forms that dominate us. She or he thus ‘fails to see through the apparatus’ and so ‘turns towards the past’,339 yearning for the values

335 Theodor Adorno, Discussion of Professor Adorno’s Lecture ‘The Meaning of Working through the Past’, p. 297.
336 Ibid.
337 Ibid.
338 Theodor Adorno, Problems of Moral Philosophy, p. 168.
339 Theodor Adorno, Cultural Criticism and Society, p. 201.
that have been lost or for the great statesmen of the past. Moreover, in respect to materialism, she or he ‘furthers the belief that the sin lies in man’s desire for consumer goods, and not in the organization of the whole which withholds these goods from man’.\textsuperscript{340}

To return to the matter at hand, however, Adorno admits that he is anxious to correct that misunderstanding, to avoid giving the impression that the social theory of which I [. . .] give you [. . .] only fragments is quietistic. The appearance of quietism can easily arise because the difficulties of change naturally stand out far more clearly if one has the whole society in view.\textsuperscript{341}

Here, I wish to defend Adorno against such charges of quietism. If fetishism is a process that we create by embracing the logic of capital in our everyday doing, then defetishization, demystification, cannot but also be a process with, as I have repeatedly stressed, an unpredictable course and results. While this may give the impression that Adorno and those who subscribe to his theory are apolitical, this is not an accurate portrayal. The only purpose of a critical theorist is to make us aware of the antinomies\textsuperscript{342} inherent in our schizophrenic way of living in capitalism. Bearing this in mind,

no one can promise that the reflections that can be entertained in the realm of moral philosophy can be used to establish a canonical plan for the good life because life itself is so deformed and distorted that no one is able to live the good life in it [. . .] even the simplest demand for integrity and decency must necessarily lead almost everyone to protest [. . .] The only thing that can perhaps be said is that the good life today would consist in resistance to the forms of the bad life that have been seen through and critically dissected by the most progressive minds.\textsuperscript{343}

We cannot hold the illusion that people are free to live in integrity and decency in the way that they would wish. ‘Wrong life cannot be lived rightly.’\textsuperscript{344} What possible room for integrity and resistance to the logic of fetishism and capital has the minimum wage worker who is forced to do unpaid overtime in the knowledge that his or her refusal will result in dismissal and unemployment, a frightening prospect in the current

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{341} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Introduction to Sociology}, p. 27.
\textsuperscript{342} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Problems of Moral Philosophy}, p. 167.
\textsuperscript{343} Ibid., pp. 167–168.
\textsuperscript{344} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Minima Moralia}, p. 39.
economic climate? What chance has the worker’s employer to resist the logic of time is money when the extreme competition that his or her business faces from other companies is simultaneously driving the employer to increase productivity and reduce labour costs? In such a state of affairs, Freyenhagen is correct to hold that ‘[d]ecency is basically the least bad level of living possible within our radically evil social world.’ To resist in negative terms means to resist to the maximum possible extent within the historical contingency in which one lives.

For J. M. Bernstein, ‘[w]rong life cannot be lived rightly because in order to live one would have to be able to know what to do.’ While attributing our inability to live rightly to a lack of knowledge on our part, Bernstein fails to analyse this through the lens of a materialist critique of the logic of capital, through the lens of the ad hominem critique outlined earlier. Doing so would necessitate further explanation on how our inability to live rightly and our lack of knowledge are generated by the irrational way with which we come into contact with each other and with nature to fulfil our elementary needs. It would necessitate a critique of the logic of time is money. As a result of this oversight on his part, Bernstein maintains that

Negative dialectics [. . .] begins with an experience of ethical guilt [. . .] and makes sense of that experience as one in which damaged sensuously particularity is raising a claim which can be acknowledged only by undoing the form of conceptuality in which the claim arises. Adorno hence attempts to show [. . .] how it is a failure of rationality and recognition that is existentially self-defeating.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that Bernstein ignores the schizophrenic way in which we live our everyday lives, disregards the conflict between the two opposed philosophies of time that permeates our entire doing. He therefore considers the cause of the ‘damaged sensuously particularity’ to be the ‘failure of rationality and recognition’ rather than the domination of the ‘abstract principle of exchange’, the key role of which I have underlined earlier. The fact that he discards the corporeal character of Adorno’s concepts is evident from the way in which he conceives negativity. He contrasts the ‘reification or stultifying of a complex concept’ with the concept that has been reactivated and put in motion via negativity. This is in stark contrast to the way in which I treat negativity:

345 Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy*, p. 91.
negativity dereifies and deciphers the mystified topsy-turvy world and gives us hope by revealing the human content of the apparent reified forms. It will probably not surprise the reader to discover that Bernstein holds that ‘Adorno’s appropriation of Marx tends to be through the Weberian reading of Capital provided by Georg Lukacs’s History and Class Consciousness’ and that ‘his [Adorno’s] own position seems to develop more out of Weber’s than Marx’s.’ In the chapter on Lukacs, I presented an argument that demonstrates how far from accurate Bernstein’s comment is.

If one misreads Adorno’s materialism and holds that ‘while there is a certain Marxian sensibility to Adorno’s materialism, there is no broader Marxist theory of capital,’ one might also reach the conclusion that Adorno’s characteristically pessimistic diagnoses of our modern condition are perhaps best understood as a kind of scare tactic intended to provoke our interest, sustain our attention, and focus our concern on the material conditions in which we necessarily think and act.

However, if we keep in mind the key importance in Adorno’s theory of the ‘concept of the spell and all its implications’ then we must attribute Adorno’s lack of a coherent normative plan of how to change the world to his awareness of the open character of categories due to the inherent irrationality of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. Adorno’s refusal to provide any directions on practical action should be seen in a similar light. While maintaining that ‘[c]ritique and the prerequisite of democracy, political maturity, belong together,’ Adorno cautions us against failing into pseudo-activity. ‘If one really understands the world of today as one of total entrapment’ then thinking in critical, dialectical, negative terms will avoid the trap of pseudo-activity. ‘Pseudo-activity is the attempt to preserve enclaves of immediacy in the midst of a thoroughly mediated and obdurate society.’ A possible reading of ‘preserving enclaves of immediacy’ would be to act through ‘the means of industrial production’ which ‘arouse in unfree individuals, hampered in their spontaneity’. Political action that is based on the values that underpin industrial production (e.g., increasing GDP, hard work and

350 Ibid., p. 7.
352 Ibid.
354 Theodor Adorno, Metaphysics, p. 126.
355 Theodor Adorno, Resignation, p. 201.
356 Ibid.
competition), such as that which took place in the former ‘Russia and in the orthodoxy of other countries’, simply reiterates the insanity of the administered world. This kind of political action also takes place today, with almost all political parties and most political theorists urging us to submit to the demands of ‘growth’. Even so-called radical thinkers such as Habermas talk of ‘growth with a human face’.

‘Political acts of violence can also sink to the level of pseudo-activity, resulting in mere theatre.’ The leap into praxis will not cure thought from resignation. While non-conformist ideas and political acts may appear radical, Adorno holds that they do not always defetishize ‘the forms of the bad life’. The existence of the spell, on the one hand, ‘urges people to take action which they believe will break the spell’, but on the other hand, ‘it prevents the reflection on themselves and the circumstances which might really break it.’

According to Adorno, such cases of pseudo-activism took place in the occupation of the Institute of which he was director by students in December 1968. Adorno is usually condemned for having called the police to evict the students. For some, this incident is cited as an example of his theory’s inability to embrace practical action. He justified his decision to Marcuse by writing that ‘the case cited by you, “if there is a real threat of physical injury to persons, and of the destruction of material and facilities serving the educational function of the university” was exactly applicable here.’

357 Ibid., p. 200.
358 Habermas pins his hopes for a democratized Europe on an abstract call for solidarity that reiterates the context of the capitalist mode of production: ‘If one wants to preserve the Monetary Union, it is no longer enough, given the structural imbalances between the national economies, to provide loans to over-indebted states so that each should improve its competitiveness by its own efforts. What is required is solidarity instead, a cooperative effort from a shared political perspective to promote growth (my emphasis) and competitiveness (my emphasis) in the Eurozone as a whole.’


It is little wonder, then, that Adorno did not consider him a proper member of the Institute. In a letter to Marcuse, he wrote the following about Habermas: ‘Though he is the co-director of the sociology department, he is not formally part of the Institute.’

359 Ibid., p. 201.
360 Ibid.
361 Theodor Adorno, Metaphysics, p. 126.
362 Ibid.
graffiti and so on."\textsuperscript{364} While he clarified that he did not ‘underestimate the merits of the student movement’ since ‘it has interrupted the smooth transition to the totally administered world,’\textsuperscript{365} he nevertheless held that at the same time ‘it is mixed with a dram of madness in which the totalitarian resides teleologically’ and that ‘the German situation really is different.’\textsuperscript{366}

He also maintained that the German student movement ‘inflames an undiminished fascist potential in Germany [...] as it breeds in itself tendencies which [...] directly converge with fascism’, that its ‘mode of behavior [...] is regressive’\textsuperscript{367} and that it contains ‘features of just such a technocratization that they claim to oppose, and which \textit{we} actually oppose’.\textsuperscript{368} In another interview, he defended himself against accusations of reactionary behaviour by underlining that he had taken part in demonstrations and by stressing that ‘throwing stones at the windows of university institutes’ was ‘half crazy affairs’.\textsuperscript{369} In general, his assessment of the student protest movement in Germany was that it did not have ‘even the tiniest prospect of effecting a social intervention’.\textsuperscript{370} My conclusion is that one should not assess the possible practical relevance of Adorno’s philosophy purely in terms of his reaction to the student movement of his time. If he was indeed genuinely afraid of suffering physical harm, then he surely was justified in calling the police.\textsuperscript{371}

Adorno’s opposition to bourgeois parliamentary democracy is evident in his praise of Horkheimer’s guidance when Adorno was ‘yet ignorant of socialist theory’. Horkheimer challenged Adorno’s idea that if ‘those disadvantaged hitherto had their turn in power, that would suffice for the cause of justice’ by insisting ‘that only if the entire system were to change


\textsuperscript{366} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{368} Ibid., p. 132.

\textsuperscript{369} Theodor Adorno, Of Barricades and Ivory Towers: \textit{An Interview with T. W. Adorno}, \textit{Encounter}, v. 33, 1969, p. 67.


could change be approved of’, as otherwise theories are drawn ‘back under the spell of eternal sameness’. In my view, the whole philosophical spectrum upon which this idea is presupposed is of particular relevance to us today. Despite the serious impact of the worldwide economic crisis, the perspective from which most so-called progressive thinkers reflect upon possible social change still rests upon the pillars of the capitalist logic. They hope that another party, another elite, will occupy the state and implement a mitigated form of the capitalist mode of production, a plan that they hope will solve current class differences and bring harmony and certainty. The so-called socialist or Marxist parties hold similar views and hopes, with the chief difference being that after the vanguard party occupies the state, it will relinquish the tremendous power that it will hold and will cede it to the people or to the workers’ councils.

Adorno’s philosophy underlines the fact that socialism or our fight for democracy should not be understood as a call for a more effective domination of the people, for another kind of power or for a replacement of the elite that currently holds power. It should instead be theorized as a distinct philosophy of culture, an entirely different value system that will discard the values of accumulation of wealth, hard work and competition. Democracy is a social theory of material reproduction that is based on a revolution in the way in which we live our everyday lives, and as such, it can be actualized only by fighting for the materialization of a total different theory of how society spends its time. This course of this process is open and undefined, but it begins here and now, not after a supposedly legitimate elite takes power. This process, this negative dialectics, will not reproduce the mystified forms that estrange us from our dignity, such as the state, but will instead reveal the non-identity element, the human content of the mystified, fetishized things that currently take the form of social characters. While Adorno, unlike Horkheimer, does not draw a direct connection between his theory and the council communist tradition, I believe that his philosophy expands on the council communist ideas expressed by Horkheimer.

After having set out the case for my reading of Adorno throughout this chapter, I must point to an idea expressed in Negative Dialectics that might challenge my conclusions:

Only a mind which it has not entirely molded can withstand it [the administered world]. Criticizing privilege becomes a privilege [. . . ] it would be fictitious to assume that all men might understand, or even perceive, all things [. . . ] If a stroke of undeserved luck has kept

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373 Ibid.
the mental composition of some individuals not quite adjusted to the prevailing norms [. . .] it is up to these individuals to make the moral and [. . .] representative effort to say what most of those for whom they say it cannot see.\textsuperscript{374}

In response, I maintain that one does not need to be a privileged intellectual in order to resist that which dominates the individual—capital’s tendency to transform ‘time for living in peace and solidarity’ into ‘time for making money’. Despite Adorno’s pessimism and limited trust in the possibility that the masses can act in terms of negativity, we, in our everyday ordinary lives, witness various examples of people who resist, demonstrate or refuse to succumb to money’s tendency to multiply itself at the expense of their human dignity. People do directly experience the failure, untruth and negativity of bourgeois culture. They can and very often do open cracks in the social totality via spontaneous expression and without pinning their hopes to any party or to any other elite that might present itself as their saviour. People all over the world today abstain from voting because they feel that the bourgeois parliamentary system cannot fulfil their needs, and many of those who do vote are often unsatisfied with how ‘democracy’ works. I believe that Adorno’s philosophy is very rich, is highly relevant to us today and enables us to theorize democracy from a totally different perspective compared to even the other non-mainstream theories of democracy that are usually considered radical.

\textsuperscript{374} Theodor Adorno, \textit{Negative Dialectics}, p. 41.
6 Determinate Negation of the One-Dimensional Society
How Herbert Marcuse’s Great Refusal Cracks Capitalism

Introduction
The scope of Marcuse’s philosophy has generally been considered to be closer to the realm of political practice than is the case for the other thinkers of the Frankfurt School, and because of this has often been regarded as more straightforward and less problematic. He himself says so in a letter: ‘I have always found Teddy’s [Adorno’s] “political” utterances rather abhorrent.’¹ In spite of this, Marcuse’s theory is still considered by most researchers to have a problematic relation to democracy and social change. Although he was one of the most prominent political philosophers of his generation, nowadays his work is mainly studied by those who have only a historical interest in radical theories, not by those who aspire to develop a contemporary radical theory of social change.

In what follows, I will attempt to prove otherwise. In my view, Marcuse’s philosophy is much closer to Horkheimer and Adorno’s than he himself believed, since his understanding of the dialectic of essence and appearance also has its origins in Marx’s ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’.² Moreover, Marcuse’s philosophy encompasses fetishism as a process and uncertainty in a way similar to Horkheimer and Adorno’s non-identity theory.

I will start by expanding on Marcuse’s idea of a dialectic of appearance and essence and its connection to the mystified repressive social totality. For the first time in the literature, I will place Marcuse’s suggestion that alienated labour is the essence of the capitalist system at the centre of the analysis. I will then attempt to connect this argument with the other key

Marcuse’s Determinate Negation and Great Refusal

terms of his critical theory, such as materialism and negativity. After this
connection has been established, I will then turn my attention towards
analysing the practical implications of his concepts of determinate nega-
tion and ‘absolute refusal’ for a radical democratic theory today. Within
this context, and in contrast to the mainstream reading of his philosophy,
I will support the idea that, following Marx, Marcuse’s Open Marxism
succeeds in opening cracks in capitalism and defetishizing and demystify-
ing the state fetish-form. He succeeds in doing this by theorizing the state
as a way that the notion of time, as this is practised in capitalism, forces
our social relations to be formed.

Alienation and Identification in Marcuse’s Theory
of Advanced Industrial Society

According to Marcuse, the main characteristic of capitalism is that it con-
stitutes a repressive and closed social totality. In order to break this total-
ity, we must first reveal how its foundations lie in alienated labour, since
for Marcuse ‘full time alienated labor is the foundation of the system.’ 3
In following Marx’s theory of alienated and objectified labour, Marcuse
primarily draws on the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,
underlining the importance that Marx attributed to the twofold character
of labour and the fact that the value of commodities is determined by
the quantity of abstract labour embedded in them—that is to say, by the
socially necessary labour time required to produce them. 4 For Marcuse,
Marx succeeds in showing that ‘actual human relations [are] warped to a
“negative totality”,’ since he demonstrates that ‘the law of value [is] the
general “form of Reason” in the existent social system.’ 5

Because of this, the ‘worker alienated from his product is at the same
time alienated from himself’ 6 and so the ‘process of alienation affects
all strata of society’. As a result,

Marx’s analysis of labor is [. . .] deep seated, going further than the
structure of economic relationships to the actual human content. 7
 [. . .] What is here [. . .] described [as alienated labour] is not merely

3 H. Marcuse, A Revolution in Values, in Herbert Marcuse, Towards a Critical Theory of
4 H. Marcuse, Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory, Routledge,
New York, 1941, p. 298.
5 Ibid., p. 304.
6 Ibid., p. 277.
7 Ibid., p. 278.
an economic matter. It is the alienation of man, the devaluation of life, the inversion and loss of human reality.\(^8\)

Private property and alienation are ‘the basic concepts of the critique’\(^9\) in general and of Marx’s critique in particular.\(^10\)

The inversion that Marcuse refers to earlier is the inherent irrationality of the aforementioned general ‘form of Reason’. Our freedom is a fake freedom: ‘Free choice among a wide variety of [. . .] goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear—that is, if they sustain alienation.’\(^11\) The affirmative character of culture in capitalism consists in making bearable the daily reproduced shock that arises from the contradiction between the constant sermon of the inalienable freedom, majesty, and dignity of the person, the magnificence and autonomy of reason, the goodness of humanity and of impartial charity and justice, on the one hand, and the general degradation of the majority of mankind, the irrationality of the social life process, the victory of the labor market over humanity, and of profit over charity, on the other.\(^12\)

Essentially, we experience a ‘schizophrenic existence, that constantly vacillates between [. . .] experiencing the evils of society, and at the same time enjoying the relative comfort and the relative easiness of society’.\(^13\) We live in an ‘empty prosperity’,\(^14\) in the context of which the ‘internal contradictions of the system are more acute than ever: [. . .] immense social wealth on the one hand and its repressive and destructive use on the other.’\(^15\) People are slaves of the ‘performance principle’, by which Marcuse means the logic of capital—namely, the accumulation of wealth, competition and the idea that ‘time is money.’ People strengthen and perpetuate this alienated system through their abstract labour.

\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 94.
\(^14\) Ibid., p. 274.
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[T]heir labor is work for an apparatus they do not control, which operates as an independent power to which individuals must submit if they want to live. Men do not live their own lives but perform pre-established functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs [. . .] but work in *alienation*.

Under the rule of the performance principle, body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor. Man exists only [. . .] as an instrument of alienated performance.

What ordinary people believe to be the natural goals of their lives—comfort, business and job security—enforce a system that enslaves them. In such a system, the ‘insanity of the society is rational to the degree to which it is efficient, to the degree to which it delivers the goods.’ By accepting the pre-established social roles that originate from the need of money to multiply itself at the expense of human needs, people reproduce their own servitude. While people accept the capitalist expropriation of social wealth, ‘Capitalism reproduces itself by transforming itself, [. . .] in the improvement of exploitation.’

Nevertheless, Marcuse admits that ‘in accepting the socially preformed and preconditioned needs and satisfactions, the individuals actually live better than ever before.’ However, this should not lead us to the conclusion that contradictions have been eliminated or even reduced. On the contrary, they have risen, making the schizophrenic character of our existence even more apparent.

Within this affluent society the permanent contradiction prevails between overflowing productivity on the one hand, and its restricted and perverted use on the other; between the historical possibility

17 Ibid., p. 46.
18 Ibid., p. 47.
24 At the time of writing, toll gates are being introduced on Greek roads constructed in the last decade and road toll increases are being implemented. As a result, many drivers still use the old and dangerous slow roads. Another result of the restricted use of ‘overflowing productivity’ is the restricted access to high quality in regard to technology and health care services in the United States.
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of peace and the actuality of war. But this contradiction is covered by the technological veil. The irrational in this society appears as rational because more people indeed have more comforts [. . .] Domination appears as freedom because people indeed have the choice of prefabricated goods and [. . .] candidates.25

By adopting the form of reason—namely, the standards of the affluent society, which is that of socially necessary labour time—we are asked and forced to play ‘a rigged and a brutal game’.26 Even education, as long as it does not question the established cultural framework, is an education ‘in the knowledge and goals of a sick society’.27 How, then, are contradictions perpetuated in this ‘perverted and topsy-turvy’ society? According to Marcuse, these contradictions are sustained

By systematically [. . .] creating and reproducing the need for alienated labor, not through any terror, but through the scientific preconditioning of individual needs [. . .] by closing itself against qualitatively social change, namely the emergence of qualitatively new forms of human existence.28

In this kind of society, consent is manufactured.29 ‘[T]he continuing exploitation is [. . .] hidden behind the technological veil,’ and ‘the choice between social necessities appears as freedom.’30 Marcuse characterizes contemporary industrial society as ‘totalitarian’ in the sense that it embraces ‘non-terroristic economic-technical coordination which operates through the manipulation of needs by vested interests. It thus precludes the emergence of an effective opposition against the whole.’31 False needs32 that ‘perpetuate obsolete forms of the struggle

29 This is also supported by Noam Chomsky. See Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, Vintage Books, London, 1994. In Chomsky’s thinking, however, the argument is not grounded on Marx’s theory of alienation, as it is in Marcuse.
31 H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 5.
32 The distinction between true and false needs is mentioned in ibid., p. 7. ‘Essential needs’ are considered to be ‘the abolition of anxiety, the pacification of life, and enjoyment’, in H. Marcuse, From Ontology to Technology: Fundamental Tendencies of Industrial
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for existence'\textsuperscript{33} are so instilled into the mindset of the population that even when people believe that they are reacting against the current status quo, they tend to demand yet more of the same. By and large, they fail to differentiate their demands qualitatively from the existing fetish-forms that dominate their existence. They ask for a better government that will implement a path to ongoing accumulation of wealth, to growth with a human face, increase of the gross national product, competition within moral limits. The philosophical anthropology that underpins this world view—the irrational and distorted image of man that underlies the capitalist mode of production—functions as a ‘second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form’\textsuperscript{34} as ‘the needs generated by this system are thus eminently stabilizing, conservative.’\textsuperscript{35} Imagination is stifled. The ‘fixed, petrified sensibility of the individuals’ is an invisible ‘prison’.\textsuperscript{36} This situation explains why Marcuse discouraged an interviewer from asking him anything on American election politics with the following words: ‘I don’t think it’s a terribly important subject.’\textsuperscript{37}

Even when it appears that social and political developments are taking place, such as in pre-election periods, society remains static ‘despite all its dynamism. Its non-stop expansion, its soaring productivity, its incessant growth produce nothing but more and more of the same, without [. . .] any hope of qualitative change.’\textsuperscript{38} However, this ‘static system of life’, which is ‘self propelling in its oppressive productivity’,\textsuperscript{39} does not owe its existence to a conspiracy by the upper classes. The multitude itself participates and creates its own prison by adopting the dominant logic of everyday life in capitalism, or as Marcuse terms it, the developed industrial society. As explained in previous chapters, this happens when people act as ‘personifications of economic categories’ by bowing to the logic of socially necessary labour time.

Thus, individuals are not innocent victims of the perversion or the irrationality they experience. ‘Capital [. . .] [makes] the entire human being—intelligence and senses—into an object of administration, geared to produce and reproduce not only the goals but also the values and

\begin{itemize}
\item H. Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, p. 6.
\item H. Marcuse, \textit{An Essay on Liberation}, p. 20.
\item Ibid., p. 21.
\item H. Marcuse, Socialism in the Developed Countries, in H. Marcuse, \textit{Marxism, Revolution and Utopia}, CP 6, p. 171.
\item H. Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, p. 19.
\end{itemize}
promises of the system." Capital is not a transhistorical entity that functions in a dimension outside reality, outside people’s everyday lives. It is, instead, a social relation created by people as they attempt to secure a decent livelihood within the capitalist mode of production. As previously elaborated, Marx asserts that capitalism’s main characteristics are that, first, it is a system in which products are produced as commodities. Likewise, for the majority of the population, labour appears as a commodity in the form of wage labour. Second, the direct aim of economic activity in capitalism is the production of surplus value. Thus, ‘the institution of private property has blunted, brutalized, and perverted man’s sensibility, and this perverted sensibility has produced the alienated object world of class society.’ The logic of private property is the logic of capital since private ownership of the means of production is a necessary precondition for the existence of wage labour.

Given the foregoing, it will come as no surprise to the reader that, for Marcuse, ‘the Enemy is permanent. He is not in the emergency situation but in the normal state of affairs. [...] he is thus being built into the system as a cohesive power [...] he is [...] the real spectre of liberation.’ In my reading, the enemy that Marcuse mentions here refers to a qualitatively different way of social doing, a rejection of the predetermined logic of accumulation of wealth, competition and toil.

The reason that underpins the system has become co-extensive and conformist with the existing [...] organization of man and things, and the critique itself, wide-spread and free in the democratic areas, comes to terms with this organization [...] Reason is turned into submission to the facts of life and to the dynamic capability of producing more and bigger facts of the same sort of life. [...] Rational behavior [...] guarantees getting along in the prevailing order.

41 See the start of the section Dialectics, Negativity and the Transition to Socialism, in K. Marx’s *Capital*, Chapter 2.
45 By the notion of system, Marcuse and I are referring not to the parliamentary system and its connection to the mass media, as is usually thought, but to the capitalist system in general, which includes and focuses on the values that underlie everyday living.
Marcuse thus characterizes the systemic logic as a ‘totalitarian rationality’\textsuperscript{48} that makes ‘protest and liberation appear not only as hopeless but as utterly irrational’.\textsuperscript{49} The reason that ‘has found its resting place in the system of standardized control, production and consumption’\textsuperscript{50} is the identity thinking that Horkheimer and Adorno condemn. The ‘immediate identification of the individual with his society [is a] new immediacy.’\textsuperscript{51} The process of identification is the meaning carried by the one-dimensional character of the civilization in advanced capitalism. Identity, or one-dimensional thinking, is a positive unified thinking that marginalizes alterity, difference in regard to the foundational logic of how we come into contact with each other in order to satisfy our basic human needs. Social entities appear as ‘the object world [. . .] in reified, petrified forms [. . .] purged of social content’.\textsuperscript{52}

Social thinking that is shackled at the level of appearance, description, immediacy, identification, fetishization and perverted sensibility accepts the dominant values of the system, according to which ‘[t]ime is everything, man is nothing; he is, at the most, time’s carcase.’\textsuperscript{53} In such thinking, the essence of the forms is identified with their apparent form and exhausted in it. By embracing this concept of time, people reproduce the operational, administrative, alienated, ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things’.\textsuperscript{54}

**How Marcuse’s Dialectics of Appearance and Essence Demystifies the Repressive Social Totality**

To liberate our thinking from immediacy, to open the closed and rigid forms and thus defetishize them, one must bring to the fore the ‘abstract labor time [that] is not immediately intelligible’.\textsuperscript{55} Only ‘the explication of the total system’\textsuperscript{56} can make its hidden content apparent. Only rec-


\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., p. 49.

\textsuperscript{51} H. Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, p. 12.


\textsuperscript{54} K. Marx, \textit{Capital}, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.

\textsuperscript{55} H. Marcuse, \textit{Value and Exchange Value}, in H. Marcuse, \textit{Marxism, Revolution and Utopia}, CP 6, p. 73.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
ognition of the twofold nature of labour can demonstrate the falseness of immediacy, the false character and the deceptive harmony of the social totality. The capitalist social totality is ‘a bad, a false system’\textsuperscript{57} since we experience a ‘deceptive harmonization of [...] societal contradictions’.\textsuperscript{58} ‘The falsehood of bourgeois culture’\textsuperscript{59} consists in the fact that there is a ‘false harmony between the individual and his society’.\textsuperscript{60}

For Marcuse, totality is false because is repressive, totalitarian and one-dimensional. As with Adorno, Marcuse maintains that falseness is not a concept that can be analysed strictly at the epistemological level, since it refers to the phenomena of social pathogenesis that we experience by living in an unavoidably contradictory culture that fails to fulfil its promises. He clarifies this point by stating that ‘[e]pistemology is in itself ethics, and ethics is epistemology [...] the experience of an antagonistic world guides the development of the philosophical categories.’\textsuperscript{61} This explains why, in direct contrast to the view currently dominant in academia, Marcuse regards social and political philosophy as not simply a part of philosophy but its very core.

In contrast to the usual understanding of the concept by many Marxist thinkers, false consciousness in Marcuse’s philosophy is not false in the sense that it fails to correspond to reality or that its calculations are inaccurate. Instead, for Marcuse, the concept of false means that consciousness remains centred only at the level of immediacy, at the level of the apparent fetishized forms, and thus contributes ‘to the preservation of a false order of facts. And this false consciousness has become embodied in the prevailing technical apparatus which in turn reproduces it.’\textsuperscript{62}

Social totality, as the ‘authoritarian reorganization of existence’, ‘represents—in a bad form and to the increasing unhappiness of the majority—the interest of all individuals whose existence is bound up with the preservation of this order’.\textsuperscript{63} It is very important, if one wants to familiarize oneself with Marcuse’s philosophy, to understand his reference to the phenomenon of the inversion that takes place in capitalism. In order to explain the fact that the results of labour are turned into fetishized objects or forms that appear to rule over people, he fully follows Marx’s concept of the perverted, enchanted, topsy-turvy world. In my view, most

\textsuperscript{57} H. Marcuse, Liberation from the Affluent Society, in H. Marcuse, \textit{The New Left and the 1960s}, CP 3, p. 76.
\textsuperscript{58} H. Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., pp. 136–137.
\textsuperscript{61} H. Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, p. 129.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., p. 149.
\textsuperscript{63} H. Marcuse, The Affirmative Character of Culture, p. 126.
misreadings of Marcuse’s philosophy originate in this lack of connection between Marcuse and Marx in relation to this concept. Marcuse argues that

Basic to [...] the antagonisms of the capitalist production process, is the fact that the central phenomena connected with this process do not immediately appear to men as what they are ‘in reality’, but in a masked, ‘perverted’ form [...] the form in which they appear conceals their origin and their true function in the total social process.64

In the current state of affairs ‘the new totalitarianism manifests itself precisely in a harmonizing pluralism.’65 Nevertheless, this ostensible pluralism exorcizes difference and alterity in regard to how this society understands time. All those who do not succumb to the demands of socially necessary labour time will have to live on the margins of society. Alienated, objectified labour is the real content of the fetish-forms, of the universals. ‘The disharmony between the individual and the social needs [...] lead[s] to the reality of such universals as the Nation, the Party, the Constitution, the Corporation, the Church [...] Such universals express various degrees and modes of reification’ (my emphasis).66 In addition to the universals mentioned by Marcuse, I have emphasized throughout this book that the state, the bourgeois parliamentary form of representation, money as a social relation and capital are likewise universals. They are all fetish-forms that express the appearance of the contradiction inherent to the system: the contradiction between concrete labour and abstract labour, between the fact that, on the one hand, people must succumb to the dominant systemic logic of time is money in order to survive in an antagonistic society, while on the other, they must also strive to defend their human need for peace, security and dignity. ‘The hypostatized whole [...] behind particular entities [...] is the concrete, objective ground of their functioning in the given social and historical context. As such, it is a real force, felt’, not a ‘mythical entity’.67 ‘[T]his whole is not merely a [...] metaphysical absolute (as in Hegel), nor a totalitarian state (as in poor political science)—it is the established state of affairs which determines the life of the individuals.’68

65 H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 64.
67 Ibid., p. 211.
68 Ibid., p. 212.
As with Marx’s notion of the enchanted world and Adorno’s concept of the spellbound totality, Marcuse believes in the existence of a mystified social totality. He asserts that there is a ‘technological and ideological veil which conceals what is going on, which covers the insane rationality of the whole’. For Marcuse, mystification takes place within the context of a ‘self-propelling productivity’ in which ‘life is [. . .] a means and man [. . .] [is] determined by the instruments of his labor.’ The mystification of the social world consists in the fact that ‘the laws, the forces which move this society as a whole are still experienced as “blind” forces, operating behind the backs of the individuals, since the appearance still conceals the essence.’

The importance of shedding light on the concealed essence becomes more apparent if one considers that ‘[t]he entire dimension that has been neglected in Marxian theory [. . .] [is] how social institutions reproduce themselves in the individuals, and how the individuals, by virtue of their reproducing their own society, act on it.’ Marcuse’s position here should be regarded as a follow-up argument to that of Marx, who stressed that ‘the determination of values itself [. . .] is [. . .] a process that takes place behind his [the capitalist’s] back and is controlled by the force of circumstances independent of himself.’ While here Marx is specifically referring to the formation of commodity values and how this takes place behind the back of the capitalist, I maintain, as I have argued in previous chapters, that fetishism is in fact a general social phenomenon that takes place behind the back of every individual in this inverted, mystified society. It is related not only to commodity values but also to any kind of social form. This conceptualization of fetishism is most evident in the early Frankfurt School theory, and in Marcuse in particular.

In our effort to analyse the bewitched world, one of the key questions is: ‘how can [someone] satisfy his needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus which [. . .] perpetuates his servitude?’ If fetish-forms are created and recreated by ordinary people, then the hidden content of these forms must be the contradictions and the alienation that

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70 H. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 131.
72 H. Marcuse, The Relevance of Reality, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 5, p. 179.
73 H. Marcuse, Heidegger’s Politics: An Interview, in H. Marcuse, Heideggerian Marxism, p. 175.
74 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, pp. 859–860. The same argument can be found on p. 167.
people experience in their ordinary life. The fetish-forms at the plane of ‘bad immediacy’ are so rigid and so closed that they appear as ‘second nature’. Thus, fetishism is a process that is sustained by our everyday practice and has increased in intensity in advanced industrial societies because of the progress in technology. In this inverted culture, the meaning of technology has also been perverted. ‘It is through man’s own practice that the technical world has crystallized into a “second nature”.’ Instead of projecting instrumentality as a means of freeing man from toil and anxiety [. . .] technique, in the process of being developed as “pure” instrumentality, has disregarded this final cause [and] [. . .] pure instrumentality, without finality, has become a universal means of domination.

‘[A]dministrative practice organized by technology’ becomes ‘[t]he most fundamental experience’, and technology cannot therefore be thought about in distinction from the rest of the society. ‘Industrial society clearly developed a notion of technology which undercuts its inherent character.’ Instead of people using technology to fulfil their needs, technology as pure instrumentality has dominated them, since ‘technical progress remains the progress of an alienated labor.’

The process of fetishism and mystification originates not in technology but in alienated labour, in ‘[t]he enslavement of man by the instruments of his labor’. The key question now is, how is it possible for people to be the real subjects of history yet be dominated by their own creations (e.g., the state, capital or money) that have taken the place of the real subjects?

As regards the fetishized mystification of democracy, Marcuse holds that ‘the democratic process is blocked in democratic forms, and the objectivity, neutrality, and tolerance of the democratic society tend to perpetuate the status quo.’ The process by which people might come into contact with each other in order to arrange their common affairs in equality and mutual respect is blocked by the supposedly democratic forms that this process takes, such as the bourgeois parliamentary system. This happens

77 H. Marcuse, World without Logos, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 5, p. 142.
78 Ibid., p. 143.
80 Ibid., p. 137.
81 Ibid., p. 138.
82 H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 45.
because the logic of the system remains the same no matter who may hold state power. The logic of growth, interpreted as the perpetual accumulation of wealth, and competition takes precedence over everything. Even the welfare state—a policy set and range of institutions that aim to produce ‘capitalism with a human face’—depends on capitalists’ profits. In order for the trickle-down effect to occur and wealth to be distributed, a trickle up in profits needs first to take place. As a consequence, the twofold character of labour is perpetuated along with our contradictory way of life.

The political philosopher or a social scientist who mistakes immediacy for normality cannot reflect on the contradiction inside the fetish-form since they fail to see the alienation, misery and falseness that constitute the real content of the forms. This failure to probe the fetish-forms and reveal their hidden content is identity thinking, the key characteristic of traditional theory. Such a theory is undialectical because

the object of dialectical logic is neither the abstract, general form of objectivity [. . .] nor the data of immediate experience. Dialectical logic [. . .] denies the concreteness of immediate experience [. . .] It attains its truth if it has freed itself from the deceptive objectivity which conceals the factors behind the facts [. . .] historical practice [. . .] is also the reality which dialectical logic comprehends.\(^84\)

Only the ‘ontological tension between essence and appearance’ can reveal the “inner negativity” of the object-world and so contradict ‘the established order [. . .] on behalf of existing societal forces that reveal the irrational character of this order’.\(^85\) One cannot appreciate the radical social implications of the Marxian philosophy of dialectics, therefore, if one ignores that the ‘discrepancy between essence and phenomena is a cornerstone of the Marxian method’.\(^86\) An inherently alienated, perverted world must unavoidably be contradictory at its essence ‘because contradiction belongs to the very nature of the object of thought, to reality where Reason is still Unreason, and the irrational still the rational’.\(^87\)

The role of dialectic is not to reveal the supposedly objective economic or social laws. Marx did not develop ‘dialectic as a general methodological scheme. The first step towards this direction was made by Engels in his Dialectics of Nature.’\(^88\) Later ‘in Soviet Marxism, the function of dialectic itself has undergone a significant change: it has been transformed from a mode of critical thought into a universal “world outlook” and universal

\(^{84}\) H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 145.
\(^{85}\) Ibid.
\(^{87}\) H. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 146.
method with rigidly fixed rules and regulations. In Marxian and Marcussian social theory, dialectic owes its existence to the ‘inner negativity’, the negative, perverted way that people connect to each other and reproduce their existence in capitalism—namely, through the sale of their labour power commodity form according to the standards of the market in each historical period. The function of ‘Dialectical thought [. . .] is [. . .] to demonstrate that unfreedom is so much at the core of things that the development of their internal contradictions leads necessarily to qualitative change’. Dialectic is unavoidably historical and materialistic from the moment that it sheds light on to the human, historical character of the forms. A ‘crucial aspect of Marx’s theory [is] the breakthrough from economic fact to human factors, from fact to act and the comprehension of fixed “situations” and their laws [. . .] in motion, in the course of their historical development’. Since dialectic is open to the dimension of the historical process, Marxist thinking is necessarily open, and Marcuse, along with the other members of the early Frankfurt School, is one of the founders of the Open Marxist tradition. However, this is not how Marxism was understood in Marcuse’s day. As Marcuse himself stated, ‘if I look around and see what calls itself Marxist today, I would rather not use the term.

The existence of negativity and falseness—that is, the fact that our culture’s promises are contradicted by the reality of everyday life—should make us conscious of the fundamental distinction between essence and appearance. Form-fetishes such as the state, the bourgeois form of democracy or wage labour are demystified, defetishized and de-rigidified only when the concealed human element of their content becomes apparent. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, who stressed that ‘All objectification is forgetting’, Marcuse underlines that ‘objectivity may fulfill a very different function, namely, to foster a mental attitude which tends to obliterate the difference between true and false [. . .] right and wrong.’ Objectivity is constituted by fetishized, rigidified, closed forms since our alienated daily action is the real, though concealed, content that comprises the true essence of these supposedly objective forms, and it is fetishism, a process

89 Ibid., p. 137.
91 H. Marcuse, New Sources on the Foundation of Historical Materialism, in H. Marcuse, Heideggerian Marxism, p. 93.
92 Nor is this the way in which Marxism is generally understood today.
93 H. Marcuse, Critical Philosophy: A Personal Perspective with Dr. Herbert Marcuse, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 5, p. 226.
that is sustained by people themselves, that is the reason for the obliteration of the difference between true and false, right and wrong.

In an effort to break from the oppression that fetishism and objectivity subject us to, Marcuse calls for a

return to an imaginary temps perdu in the real life of mankind: progress to a stage of civilization where man [. . .] checks [. . .] his incessant struggle for existence [. . .] and decides [. . .] that it is time to enjoy [. . .] what can be reproduced [. . .] with a minimum of alienated labour. 96

The foregoing quote led Martin Jay, in his well-known study, to reach the conclusion that Marcuse was

introducing a myth of original wholeness [. . .] of the “remembering” of what had been dismembered, whose roots [. . .] were in remembered desire [. . .] Marcuse’s exhortation [. . .] allowed him to smuggle an a priori philosophical anthropology into Critical theory. 97

It should be noted, however, that Marcuse does not specify this ‘imaginary temps perdu’ in positive terms, but rather in negative terms, by seriously questioning the foundations of our culture. I therefore fail to see a reason to accuse him of introducing an ‘original wholeness’ or of smuggling ‘an a priori philosophical anthropology into Critical theory’. In my view, Jay underestimates the radical character of Marcuse’s philosophy because he sidesteps the negative character of Marcuse’s dialectics.

For Marcuse, we ‘can recognize the facts and respond to the facts only by “going behind” them’. 98 In other words, only by penetrating the fact, the fetish-form, and trying to reveal its concealed essence in a dialectical fashion are we capable of liberating our social doing from the spell of fetishism. By doing this, dialectics helps us realize that ‘it is we ourselves who are behind the curtain [. . .] as the subjects and objects of the historical struggle of man with nature and with society.’ 99 In a similar way to Marx’s comment that the determination of value is ‘a process that takes place behind [the capitalist’s] back’, 100 Marcuse writes that ‘[t]he construction of the world occurs behind the backs of the individuals; yet it is their

98 H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 189.
99 Ibid., pp. 189–190.
100 Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, pp. 859–860.
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work[^101] and that ‘[m]an remained [. . .] subordinated to the omnipresent productive and political apparatus, which he himself had created.’[^102]

This conception of essence and of dialectics is materialistic because it is historical.[^103]

> Essence is conceivable only as the essence of a particular ‘appearance’ [. . .] This relation [. . .] originates in history and changes in history.[^104]

[^104]: This relation [. . .] originates in history and changes in history.

[. . .] Form and content can be separated, for the former is only a particular historical pattern in which the latter is realized.[^105]

In capitalism, the content is ‘the actual process of production and reproduction, based on a given level of the productive forces and of technology’, and the form is ‘the realization of capital’.[^106] The latter is value as money that must be multiplied. In order for value to be transformed into money, human relations must be bound by the fetish-forms of the state, bourgeois democracy and the trinity formula of the apparently different forms of revenue. If no distinction existed between essence and content, then the purpose of our existence would correspond solely and directly with the dominant value in our capitalist world—that is to say, money accumulation. Given that this is not the case, ‘Critical Theory’s interest [. . .] is at one with philosophy in maintaining that man can be more than a manipulative subject in the production process of class society.’[^107]

The revealing of the human and historical content of the forms makes us aware of the fact that man can be more than ‘time’s carcase’ and ‘personification of economic categories’. Critical thought (i.e. materialist dialectics) ‘strives to define the irrational character of the established rationality and to define the tendencies which cause this rationality to generate its own transformation’.[^108]

In identity thinking, where ‘philosophy has [. . .] made its peace with man’s determination by economic conditions,’ we find a ‘bad materialism’. This is the materialism of bourgeois practice or idealism. In non-identity critical thinking, however, ‘[t]he bad materialism of philosophy is overcome in the materialist theory of society.’[^109]


[^104]: Ibid.

[^105]: Ibid., p. 82.

[^106]: Ibid.

[^107]: H. Marcuse, Philosophy and Critical Theory, p. 70.

[^108]: H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, pp. 231–232.

[^109]: H. Marcuse, Philosophy and Critical Theory, p. 70.
because it ‘means to show only the specific social conditions at the root of philosophy’s inability to pose the problem in a more comprehensive way’. Negativity and suffering are intrinsic elements in the affluent society. ‘As industrial society begins to take shape under the rule of the performance principle, its inherent negativity permeates the philosophical analysis.’ Similar to my argument that Adorno’s materialism is corporeal because it brings to the fore human suffering, Marcuse’s materialism is also social and corporeal since it demonstrates that negativity and physical pain are a result of the performance principle.

The body [stands] against [. . .] the machine which has taken over the mechanism: the political machine, the corporate machine, the cultural and educational machine which has welded blessing and curse into one rational whole. [. . .] Under the rule of the performance principle, body and mind are made into instruments of alienated labor.

Thus, in his the analysis of corporeal materialism and its connection to fetishism, Marcuse goes one step further than Adorno and Horkheimer. In addition, he maintains that ‘the existing society is reproduced not only in the mind, the consciousness of men, but also in their senses,’ which essentially constitute a ‘prison’, a ‘fixed, petrified sensibility of the individuals’. This happens because ‘[i]n a society based on alienated labor, human sensibility is blunted: men perceive things only in the forms [. . .] in which they are given, made.’

Since reproduction of the affluent society takes place because its logic has occupied not only the mind but also the senses and the satisfaction of needs, ‘the debunking of the capitalist productivity of work, the affirmation of the sensibility, sensuality of the body [. . .] contribute to the weakening of the Performance Principle.’ So,

liberation seems to be predicated upon the opening [. . .] of a depth dimension of human existence [. . .] underneath the traditional material base [. . .] a dimension even more material than the material base

110 Ibid., p. 68.
111 H. Marcuse, Eros and Civilization, p. 186.
112 Ibid., p. xvii.
113 Ibid., p. 46.
114 H. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 71.
115 Ibid., p. 72.
116 Ibid., p. 71.
118 H. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 31.
[... This new dimension [...] means finally taking account of the fact that society has invaded [...] even the unconscious of man.  

Negativity and Uncertainty in Marcuse’s Council Communism

In order for dialectical, critical theory to elaborate on the aforementioned new and deeper dimension of materiality, an abstraction from the plane of identity thinking—namely, from that of the deceptive harmony of the immediacy—must take place. ‘[A]bstraction from the appearance still is the first step toward gaining concreteness, namely, the new concreteness which is that of liberation.’  

Abstracting from the plane of fetishism, of immediacy, is the first step of critical theory since ‘it deals first with the camouflage and misinterpretation that characterized the discussion of man in the bourgeois period.’  

State, bourgeois democracy, value as money that must be accumulated to the utmost extent, profit, wage labour and financial markets are all camouflaged, fetishized social forms that express the irrationality of the notion of ‘time is money,’ or in other words, all aspects of the alienation that we experience in our everyday lives. They are all appearances of objectified labour, of the ‘irrational character of the established rationality’. Abstracting from these forms, the visible manifestations of the enchanted, topsy-turvy world, does not mean that we put them to one side, ignore them and attempt to find spaces of freedom away from them. 

On the contrary, it means that we attempt to find their essence, their content, their origins in our everyday living—namely, in our acceptance of the demands of socially necessary labour time. This ‘intellectual opposition [...] breaks the spell of total assimilation and standardization and reaches the brute foundations of present-day experience.’  

These brute foundations are essentially the ‘brute materialistic content’ of the forms, which when revealed ‘negates all repression, sublimation, internalization of class society’.  

By thinking in terms of Marcusian dialectical materialism, we can open the fetishized forms and break the spellbound totality of the enchanted, perverted world. We can break the ‘automatism of immediate experience’,

120 H. Marcuse, The Relevance of Reality, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 3, p. 179.
121 H. Marcuse, Philosophy and Critical Theory, p. 66.
123 Ibid., p. 203.
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In the context of the bewitched world, ‘[t]he more rationally the individual behaves [. . .] the more he succumbs to the frustrating aspects of this rationality [and] [. . .] is losing his ability to abstract from the special form in which rationalization is carried through.’

To philosophize in terms of abstraction, in terms of the dialectic between appearance and essence, means to view society in non-identity terms. The ‘philosopher, who already knows that men live in untruth [. . .], does not go beyond experience; it only shakes experience, setting it in motion in order that it reveals its own contradiction.’ Thinking in terms of abstraction, of non-identity, means to think in terms of the difference between the facts in their apparent, camouflaged, closed, fetishized and rigid form and their essence, bearing in mind the possibilities that lie dormant in it. If we open dialectically the ‘concepts of Reason, Freedom, Knowledge, Good [. . .] a range of possibilities’ are circumscribed inside them, ‘derived from the analysis of the actual manifestations of Reason, Freedom, etc.’

The philosophical concepts abstract from given reality in order to point out the non-yet-given but nonetheless possible reality, which should become the true reality. Thus they have a concrete direction of abstraction: not abstraction into emptiness but rather into the continuum of history as the continuum of real possibilities.

To think according to identity thinking implies the

Coincidence of words and things: This would mean that all potentialities of things would be realized, that the ‘power of the negative’ would have ceased to operate—it would mean that the imagination has become wholly functional: servant to instrumentalist Reason.

Without the irrationality of ‘time is money,’ bad materiality and negativity—that is, without the phenomena of social disintegration—there would be no need to differentiate between form/appearance and essence/

126 H. Marcuse, The History of Dialectics, in H. Marcuse, Marxism, Revolution and Utopia, CP 6, p. 133.
129 H. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, p. 107.
content. The logic of the topsy-turvy world would not be valid. Therefore, there would be no reason to ‘deny the claim of the given reality to be all the reality and the entire reality’. However, since this is not the case and reality is not exhausted in its apparent form, where we live under the ‘estranged and irrational forms of capital-interest, land-rent, labour-wages’, [words, images, tones, gestures [. . .] deny this claim in the name of the suppressed possibilities of human relationships, of man and nature, of freedom.]

Marcuse’s reference to ‘suppressed possibilities’ brings to mind Adorno’s reference to the notion of the remainder in Negative Dialectics. As was seen in the chapter on Adorno, in our enchanted, crazy capitalist world the ‘name of dialectics says no more [. . .] than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder [. . .] [Dialectics] indicates the untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived.’ Similarly, in Marcuse

the facts do not correspond to the concepts imposed by common sense and scientific reason. [. . .] [T]o comprehend reality means to comprehend what things really are, and this in turn means rejecting their mere factuality. Interpretation of that-which-is in terms of that-which-is-not, confrontation of the given facts with that which they exclude—this has been the concern of philosophy [. . .] Reality is other and more than that codified in the logic and language of facts.

The parallels between Adorno and Marcuse do not end there. The ‘other’, the ‘more’, the ‘not-yet-given’ or even the ‘alien and antagonistic’ mentioned by Marcuse are ‘the remainder’ found in Adorno. They all stress the inherent possibilities for people to establish another way of connecting with each other that will not follow the standards of socially necessary labour time, of instrumental reason. In regard to poetry, Marcuse holds that ‘[n]aming “the things that are absent” is breaking the spell of the things that are; moreover, it is the ingress of a different order of things into the established one.’ The same role is attributed to art in general:

130 H. Marcuse, Beyond One-Dimensional Man, in Herbert Marcuse, Towards a Critical Theory of Society, CP 2, p. 117.
131 Marx, Capital, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.
135 Ibid., p. 446.
136 Ibid., p. 447.
137 H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 186.
138 Ibid., p. 71.
Art [. . .] is [. . .] a living Form which gives word and image and sound to the Unnameable, to the lie and its debunking, to the horror and to the liberation from it, to the body and its sensibility as the source [. . .] of all ‘aesthetics’ [. . .] as the first ‘apperception’ of the spirits, Geist.  

We should bear in mind that this is not only the role of art but also the role of critical theory in general.

Critical Theory [. . .] did more than simply register and systematize facts. Its impulse came from the force with which it spoke against the facts and confronted bad facticity with its better potentialities [. . .] it always derives its goals from the present tendencies of the social process.

Again, it should be evident that the Marcusian ‘unnameable’ carries the same content as the Adornian ‘unsayable’. For Adorno, ‘it is the case that philosophy’s only raison d’être today is to gain access to the unsayable.’ Marcuse goes further, noting that the more ‘descriptive [. . .] or operational’ critical theory’s categories are, the less negative they become, and as a result the less capable they are of ‘expressing the essential contradiction to the given state of affairs’. Critical, non-identity theory does not reflect upon reality by shackling its analysis to the mere scrutiny of the current social forms. The promotion of a better functioning capitalist welfare state or more efficient control of the banking system by the state does not challenge the validity of the current forms, but instead endorses and supports them. Such identity thinking merely argues for a better systematization, classification of the fetishized social forms within the context of the operational standards of the capitalist system, of the social totality. The unreasonable logic of the system, that of competition, perpetual accumulation of wealth and hard work, sustains itself. As traditional, identity-thinking categories are closed and rigid, so ‘exploitation disappears behind the façade of objective rationality.’ These categories do not contain in them the ‘other’, the ‘not yet’, the ‘antagonistic’, the negative, the remainder, the unknown, the unnameable or ineffable which breaks the apparent harmony of the spellbound social totality. ‘[T]he only
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sense in which thought can be free in the administered world [is] as the consciousness of its repressive productivity, and as the absolute need for breaking out of this whole.’ 145

The problem is not who holds state power. ‘It is the society that is insane.’ 146 If human relations were no longer formed by that which essentially dominates us—the standards of abstract labour, of ‘time is money’—then the content ‘would no longer function as the realization of capital’ and would enter ‘the mode of real possibility [. . .] [I]t is possibility in that its emancipation from this form and its realization in a new form are still to be accomplished through men’s social practice.’ 147 In a historical materialistic theory, potentialities ‘can be derived from reality as forces and tendencies’. 148 Marcuse underscores that ‘Marxian categories [. . .] are historical categories which try to define tendencies and counter-tendencies within an antagonistic society’ 149 and shares with Marx the idea that if we stop acting as ‘personifications of economic categories’, we can then liberate ‘the possibilities immanent in’ the essence of the ‘given state of affairs’. 150 In so doing, the content of the forms—namely, human doing—will stop perpetuating the existence of estranged forms, and fetishism as a process will end.

The starting point of our struggle to change the world should be the rejection of the existing bad negativity. 151 ‘The theory that can stand up against the contemporary established reality [. . .] must move through a negativity that renders visible the foundations of this reality’s coercive force.’ 152 If that which dominates us in our daily lives is the power of money to multiply itself at the expense of human needs, then the negation of the bad negativity is the negation of the performance principle. ‘This negation cancels the rationality of domination and consciously “de-realizes” the world shaped by this rationality.’ 153 Thus, ‘Reason is the negation of the negative,’ 154 and people’s refusal to continue to bow to the rule of money is the negation of the negation. ‘The negativity and its

145 Ibid., p. 257.
148 Ibid., p. 75.
150 H. Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 315.
152 Ibid., p. 166.
154 H. Marcuse, A Note on Dialectic, p. 447.
negation are two different phases of the same historical process, straddled by man’s historical action.\footnote{Marcuse, Reason and Revolution, p. 315.}

This de-realization, the opening of the rigid, closed, fetishized and estranged forms of our doing, must start from ‘the reduction of the working day to a point where the mere quantum of labor time no longer arrests human development’.\footnote{Ibid., p. 152.} Standing up to the rule of money accumulation, to the logic of ‘time is money,’ does not entail a simple revolt against the government, the elite that occupies state power in each historical moment. ‘What is at stake is our entire way of life, and the very principles which govern our culture [. . .] this rebellion [. . .] involves all spheres of the human existence—sexual, moral, political, economic.’\footnote{Marcuse, The Role of Religion in Changing Society, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 5, p. 185.} In order for people to come in contact with each other to fulfill their need for peace and harmony rather than with the express purpose of multiplying value as money, ‘a total trans-valuation of values, a new anthropology’\footnote{Marcuse, Liberation from the Affluent Society, in H. Marcuse, The New Left and the 1960s, CP 3, p. 82.} that will liberate ‘human sensibility and sensitivity’,\footnote{Ibid.} is required as a precondition. If people wish to liberate themselves from the dominant values of competition, hard work and money accumulation, ‘the need of “undeserved” happiness’ needs to be brought to the fore as a social need ‘that can be activated through the direction and disposition of productive forces’.\footnote{Marcuse, The End of Utopia, in H. Marcuse, Marxism, Revolution and Utopia, CP 6, p. 253.} Happiness that is not a result of a life of toil and competition is inextricably connected with the notion of ‘freedom no longer based on [. . .] the necessity of alienated labor’.\footnote{Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, p. 259.}

For Marcuse, the negation of the foundations of the current form of culture and civilization takes the form of ‘the “absolute refusal”—a refusal which seems the more unreasonable the more the established system develops its productivity’.\footnote{Marcuse, The Failure of the New Left?, in H. Marcuse, The New Left and the 1960s, CP 3, p. 188.} This kind of negativity—‘absolute refusal’, the ‘revolt against imposed needs and pleasures’\footnote{Marcuse, Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 5, p. 211.}—aspires to put ‘an end to role playing’\footnote{Marcuse, Ecology and the Critique of Modern Society, in H. Marcuse, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis and Emancipation, CP 5, p. 211.}—that is, to people acting as ‘personifications of economic categories’ or as ghosts of capital. Such a negativity would ‘undermine the daily routine [. . .] and rationality for the continued
functioning of the society". In order for people to stop acting as ‘time’s carcase’, the first form of revolt in everyday life must be the reduction of working time:

The realization of freedom is a problem of time: reduction of the working day to the minimum which turns quantity into quality. A socialist society is a society in which free time, not labor time is the social measure of wealth and the dimension of the individual existence. Such redistribution of socially necessary labour (time), incompatible with any society governed by the Profit and the Performance Principle, would gradually alter society in all its dimensions.

At this point, it is perhaps helpful to examine briefly Espen Hammer’s criticism of Marcuse’s position. He suggests that ‘Marcuse has no other means to conceptualize mutual recognition than that which is entailed by his account of narcissistic love [. . .] and has little or no sense of how agents’ [. . .] self-understandings may be conditional upon being [. . .] capable of sacrificing the immediate interest in favor of the pursuit of some larger good’ and that he had a ‘disregard for the open-endedness [. . .] of democratic politics’. To my mind, Hammer’s criticism is unconvincing, and I maintain that the opposite is actually the case. Mutual recognition comes from the fact that the agent recognizes that her doing in terms of abstract labour imprisons her within a specific social role, that of being a ghost of capital, which, while it sustains her economic needs, does not contribute to the common good and instead sustains society’s insane and topsy-turvy character. Cultivating another sensibility does not necessarily entail narcissistic love but awareness of the contradictory position that the agent, the person, faces in the context of our alienated existence in capitalism: on the one hand, she has to embrace the key attitude of the system in order to maintain her existence, that of ‘time is money,’ but on the other hand, she has to protect her needs for respect, peace and quality human relations, which stand in opposition to the standards of socially necessary labour time.

In Marcusian thinking, the classical understanding of revolution, which focuses on the occupation of the state, is incapable of championing the necessary total opposition to the system, of embracing the ‘absolute
refusal’, or enabling the ‘emancipation of imagination from the restraints of instrumental reason’. Occupying the state should not, and cannot, be the primary target of the movement to change the world, since the very existence of the state is predicated upon capitalist logic, the drive for money accumulation; even the so-called socialist state would necessarily have to be a tax collection body with the goal of redistributing socially produced surplus value. For Marcuse, the ‘social distribution of labor time [. . .] [should] be determined by collective decision of the producers of the societal wealth [. . .] There would be no coercive state organs separate from and above the associated laborers.’

We have now come to the point where Marcuse’s concept of cracks or interstices in capitalism can be highlighted. I am not aware of any other study that stresses the crucial role of this notion in his social theory or even refers to it. If the capitalist system and the process of fetishism, which produces the topsy-turvy world, cannot be broken all at once, does this mean that there is no hope, or that people should stop fighting for an anti-capitalist world? Contrary to what most believe about the early Frankfurt School and Marcuse, my analysis shows that the answer to this question is a resounding no, since, as Marcuse maintains, ‘[t]he interstices within the established society are still open, and one of the most important tasks is to make use of them to the full.’ The most important question, then, is ‘how can we imagine these new concepts even arising here and now?’ Is it possible that these concepts might be immanent in the present, rather than emerging only at an unspecified point in the future after the revolution has overthrown the government and replaced the existing power elite?

In the established societies there are still gaps and interstices in which heretical methods can be practiced without meaningless sacrifice, and still help the cause. [. . .] [I]t is necessary to feel out every possibility of a crack in the enormously concentrated power structure of existing society. [. . .] [I]t is on the enlargement of such small spots that the chance of change depends. The forces of emancipation cannot

171 It is surprising that not even John Holloway, who brought the concept of cracks into the spotlight in Crack Capitalism, makes any reference to the centrality of the concept of interstices to Marcuse’s theory.
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Ibid., p. 258.
be identified with any social class which, by virtue of its material condition, is free from false consciousness. Today, they are hopelessly dispersed throughout the society.  

For Marcuse, then, hope is preserved in negativity—that is, in our refusal to follow the systemic logic, in the cracks that we open every time we do not follow the demands of socially necessary labour time. What possible form might these cracks take? Marcuse responds that ‘[t]he dissolution of social morality may manifest itself in a collapse of work discipline, slowdown, spread of disobedience to rules and regulations, wildcat strikes, boycotts, sabotage gratuitous, acts of non-compliance.’  

We should encourage a moral disintegration, in the daily practice, at work and outside work. Not revolution but revolt: by individuals and small groups, throughout the society; too spontaneous, too isolated, even too criminal to be an avant-garde [. . .] and not ready for political organization.  

The change itself could then occur in a general, unstructured, unorganized, and diffused process of disintegration [. . .] this is not a Lumpenproletariat, [. . .] the unemployed, etc.: this stratum includes employed workers, blue and white collar, intelligentsia, women, etc.  

Since the closed, fetishized social forms open only when the human content inside them becomes apparent, ‘the structure behind the veil [. . .] can be brought down only by those who [. . .] constitute its human base, who reproduce its profits and its power.’ Marcuse therefore rejects the argument for an avant-garde, an elite that will diffuse political or socialist consciousness to the people, much less the creation of a vanguard party. Instead, the development of such a radical, critical consciousness should be the task of ‘individuals and groups from all classes [. . .] who [. . .] have had the liberating experience: on campus, on the streets, in the shops, in the ghettos’. 

176 H. Marcuse, Repressive Tolerance, pp. 111–112.  
183 Ibid.
tors?’ his answer is straightforward: ‘the educators educate themselves. The theory is there, the historical [. . .] experience [is] there, the lessons [. . .] can be learned.’

In the same text in which Marcuse supports these ideas, which stand in complete contrast to the standard reading of Marx’s social philosophy, he confesses that the origins of his thinking are to be found in Marx’s theory. We should not forget that Marx did not base his philosophy of social change on the concept of a vanguard party that will lead the masses to the revolution after it has inculcated in them the correct class consciousness. The fact that Marcuse explicitly considers his theory to be Marxian, even though his position appears to be so at odds with orthodox Marxist thinking, demonstrates to me that the breadth of Marx’s fruitful ideas and the critical core of his theory have remained largely unexplored by much of the academic left.

Despite the fact that anyone can develop a negative, critical attitude towards the Establishment, Marcuse does not delude himself that this in fact did take place in his era. Indeed, he noted that ‘at present, only a small part of this huge, truly underlying population [. . .] is aware.’ Since he held that ‘the first form in which this explosive potential comes into consciousness is [. . .] by the political activation of minorities on the margin of integration,’ he believed that those on the social and cultural margins, ‘the ghetto population [. . .] the middle-class intelligentsia, especially [. . .] the students’, the unemployed and the underdogs in general could easier develop values that might crack the deceptive spellbound social totality of the enchanted world. In light of this, Marcuse declared that ‘it seems [. . .] wrong to go around looking for agents of historical change. They probably will arise [. . .] during the process of change.’ Marcuse recognized, however, that these ‘outsider’ groups alone could not bring about change. He concluded that as anti-systemic defetishization develops among the aforementioned groups, their opposition can become an ‘agent of radical change [. . .] only if it is sustained by a working class

184 Ibid., p. 179.
185 Ibid., p. 176.
186 Marcuse underlines this argument in H. Marcuse, 33 Theses, in Herbert Marcuse, Technology, War and Fascism, CP 1, p. 226.
188 H. Marcuse, Beyond One-Dimensional Man, in Herbert Marcuse, Towards a Critical Theory of Society, CP 2, p. 119. The same idea can also be found in H. Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, pp. 260–261.
which is no longer the prisoner of its own integration and of bureaucratic trade-union and party apparatus’. 191

In view of this, Marcuse was at pains to point out that the power of negativity, ‘the force of negation [. . .] rebels against this system as a whole from within the “society of abundance”’. 192 ‘[I]t is a fact that you can change society within the established system. There is no outside [. . .] where do you want to go?’ 193 Since negativity goes hand in hand with the development of the inherent contradictions that lie concealed in the essence of our existence in capitalism—with the fact that in order to fulfil their basic human needs people must disobey the coercive imposition of the demands of money accumulation, of abstract labour—everyday people are indeed the crisis of the system. We constitute the crisis of capital, and we must be proud of it. We cause crisis every time we rise up and say with pride, ‘We don’t want to play the game anymore. We consider it a rigged and a brutal game.’ 194

The analysis that I have presented thus far counters criticisms that Marcuse’s critical theory seems to ‘no longer be anchored in the laws of history but rather in the laws of human nature’. 195 Not only is it clear that his theory is not based on a vague or romantic view of human nature, but also the notion of ‘the laws of history’ is not encountered at all in Marcuse. Moreover, the fact that Marcuse makes no claim that there is a recognized 196 subject that is able to apprehend fully critical theory’s ‘knowledge of the society and of its alternatives’ means that we cannot and should not be led to the conclusion that critical categories become ‘the property of an imaginary witness, of an individual who no longer exists’. 197 When Marcuse is understood in the way in which I have proposed, then all such criticisms dissolve.

Nevertheless, Marcuse does not hold false hopes on how difficult is to open cracks in the Establishment. One of his main preoccupations was that

for new, revolutionary needs to develop, the mechanisms that reproduce the old needs must be abolished. In order for the mechanisms

191 H. Marcuse, Re-examination of the Concept of Revolution, in H. Marcuse, Marxism, Revolution and Utopia, CP 6, p. 203.
196 Ibid., p. 274.
197 Ibid., p. 351.
Despite the difficulty in providing a convincing response to the foregoing question, Marcuse’s Open Marxism has nevertheless helped us to obtain a much more elaborated perspective on the thorny issues that we must face in our effort to break the fetishized standardization of the bourgeois democratic establishment. One reason that Marcuse provides for the fact that people continue to submit to the system is that they embrace a ‘sado-masochistic syndrome’. I am sure social psychologists could expand on this idea. Such an elaboration, however, falls outside the purpose of my study and of my field of research.

It must be clarified at this point that the encouragement to open cracks in capitalism is part of Marcuse’s council communism. For Marcuse, if negativity becomes sufficiently diffused among the working class, then ‘conditions [will] have matured in which the taking over of individual factories and shops and the self-organization of work can occur’. At the same time, while we must keep in mind that the game of bourgeois democracy is rigged, we must also be aware of the need for an ‘injection of extrademocratic, extraparliamentary actions’. For Marcuse, a ‘forcible occupation of buildings and the invasion of private property [are] a part of the democratic process,’ for if businesses were to remain as private property, it would be impossible for people to collectively control the production and distribution of wealth.

The Marcusian view of an alternative future still falls within Marx’s orbit:

The alternative is still [. . .] the socialism Marx really conceived of: [. . .] men and women themselves, who do the work in a producing society, would have the responsibility of their work, and would determine what to produce, how to produce, and how to distribute the product. [. . .] [T]he most important point, small groups, concentrated on the level of local activities [. . .] foreshadowing [. . .] the

to be abolished, there must first be a need to abolish them. That is the circle in which we are placed, and I do not know how to get out of it. 198

200 Ibid., p. 184.
201 H. Marcuse, Democracy Has/Hasn’t a Future . . . a Present, in H. Marcuse, The New Left and the 1960s, CP 3, p. 93.
202 Ibid., p. 94.
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basic organization of libertarian socialism, namely councils of manual and intellectual workers, soviets, if one can still use the term and does not think of what actually happened to the soviets, some kind of what I would like to call, [...] organized spontaneity.204

The actions described earlier symbolize the meaning of revolution for Marcuse.205 He admits that it contains a ‘very strong element of anarchy’206 and anti-Leninism207 and that ‘a strong element of anarchism should be incorporated into Marxism.’208 Nonetheless, he denies that he subscribes to anarchism or that he thinks himself an anarchist because he ‘cannot imagine how one can combat a society which is [...] organized in its totality against any revolutionary movement [...] without any organization. It won’t work.’209

I contend that, in Marcuse’s view, there are three options for managing common political affairs. The first is ‘the vicious circle of bourgeois democracy’,210 which I maintain is what we experience today in the twenty-first century, especially now in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. In this context, the radical left, which has defetishized the logic of the capitalist system,

must combine, and strengthen its extra-parliamentary strategy with a parliamentary opposition. But a different government can only be elected by a popular majority, and this is a conservative majority. In other words, at best, only a representative of the Establishment [...] would have a chance to be elected—i.e., a lesser evil (which may even further stabilize the Establishment).211

As a consequence, the radical left will be forced by the tendencies embedded in the parliamentary bourgeois democracy to compromise its ideals to the extent of accepting the logic of ever increasing economic growth, ever increasing gross national product as the ultimate goal of its politics.

205 H. Marcuse, Counterrevolution and Revolt, pp. 43, 53.
207 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
This is what the so-called communist or socialist parties have done and still do in Europe.

The second option is ‘the traditional idea of revolution’, which, like Marcuse, I also believe is an ‘outdated’ one. It has been ‘simply surpassed by the development of our society’. ‘[T]he idea that one day [...] a mass organization or mass party [...] could march on Washington and could occupy the Pentagon and the White House and set up a government is utterly fantastic.’ The problems that I have identified in this conception, especially in the chapter on Lukács, remain. The idea of waiting to break the bourgeois Establishment by a single revolutionary act, when the proper historical circumstances permit it, is imprisoned in traditional theory.

The third option is Marcuse’s council communism, which, even though its developed form (i.e., the organized council republic) might be considered utopian, still reveals the irrationality of the apparent instrumental reason and underlines the importance of totalizing opposition through attempts to crack and open the estranged social forms (which are the results of our social doing) through our ‘absolute refusal’ to accede to the dictates of capitalist logic in our everyday lives. When the Marcusian reading of the ‘Marxian concept of revolution’ is actually explored, it is clear that it is ‘neither a utopian nor a romantic concept, [since] it insists on the real basis of power, on the objective and subjective factors which can alone elevate the idea of qualitative change above the level of wishful thinking’.

Nevertheless, uncertainty is a concept embedded in Marcuse’s philosophy, as it is in the philosophy of the other members of the Frankfurt School. Marcuse welcomes the slogans that were used in May 1968, such as ‘[b]e realists, demand the impossible’ and ‘[p]ower to the imagination’. He even considers these to contain ‘an important lesson: that truth is not only in the rationality, but just as much and perhaps more in the imaginary’.

Marcuse’s support for such slogans should be understood in relation to the topsy-turvy world in which we live. In this world, it is impossible for the affluent capitalist society to distribute wealth and so raise the standard of living for the majority of the population if first socially produced

wealth has not been appropriated by the capitalists. It is impossible in such an insane society, in a period of crisis in which many capitalists have gone bankrupt and competition among them is fierce, for working hours not to be raised, despite the undoubted technological progress that has been made. People who are realists and demand the logical for their human needs—such as distribution of wealth without being forced to succumb to the demands of abstract labour or to have to submit to the same working conditions in a period of crisis, all for the sake of profit—indeed demand the impossible when confronted by the logic of the system. Thus, the imaginary for Marcuse is that which cannot be integrated into the systemic logic and thus negates it. Crucially, we should not conclude that Marcuse holds that ‘[s]ocial philosophy must transform itself [. . .] into a philosophy (or sociology) of symbolic forms that treats these “fictions” as creations of the productive imagination.’ By ‘fictions’, Marcuse means ‘a general, pre- and transhistorical, indeed ontological message’. Given the indeterminacy of Marcuse’s vision of a future society, a question arises: should the fact that our efforts to crack capitalism cannot lead us with certainty to another known reality discourage or disappoint us? For a well-known commentator on Marcuse’s work, Douglas Kellner, the answer is yes.

By failing to show adequately how the one-dimensional tendencies that he analysed were a function of specific historical conditions, and by failing to specify in more detail counter-tendencies, Marcuse blurred the distinction between temporary containment of crisis-tendencies, revolt and struggles in contrast to permanent transcendence in a new social order characterized by the intensification of technological rationality.

In my view, such criticisms fail to appreciate that Marcuse is explicit in his criticism of efforts to map out the future or set out an inflexible programme for a future society: ‘[s]pecific institutions and relationships [. . .] cannot be determined a priori; they will develop, in trial and error, as the new society develops.’ The people who were engaged in the French Revolution of 1789 or those involved in the English or the Bolshevik

218 Ibid., p. 124.
revolutions ‘didn’t have the vaguest idea what the outcome would be’.\textsuperscript{221} If people knew the concrete forms that the management of common political affairs would take, they could predict their future way of thinking or of feeling. Such prescience is of course impossible.

Some things have to remain vague because the theoretician is not a prophet. It’s more important to say things in a vague way than not to say them at all.\textsuperscript{222} [. . .] But critical theory is not concerned with the realization of ideals brought into social struggles from outside.\textsuperscript{223}

In my view, Marcuse’s refusal to commit to a distinct vision of how a future society might look and the means by which it might be achieved should not be considered a weakness\textsuperscript{224} of his philosophy, but a strength. In a moment of humility, Marcuse openly admits that he is not a ‘spiritual adviser’ to the student movement and that any ideas about its possible direction ‘should be left to the movement’.\textsuperscript{225}

In general, the political philosopher can offer ‘no consolation that reconciles one to the present’.\textsuperscript{226} No one can predict if the contradictions in our everyday lives will be solved, or if they are to be solved, what the precise solution might be. No one can foresee what people would think or want if the average working time were to be reduced to half of its current level, for example. No effort to open cracks in the one-dimensional society can guarantee anything. Our fight to protect our human dignity from what directly and now dominates us—namely, from the force to adapt our doing to the demands of abstract, objectified labour—cannot wait for the formulation of any long-term plan or for any guarantee or promise to be provided.

Nothing indicates that it will be a good end [. . .] The critical theory of society possesses no concepts which could bridge the gap between the present and its future; holding no promise and showing no success, it

\textsuperscript{223} H. Marcuse, Philosophy and Critical Theory, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{226} H. Marcuse, The Affirmative Character of Culture, p. 118.
remains negative. Thus it wants to remain loyal to those who, without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal.\textsuperscript{227}

For example, it might be considered logical for people to hold a general strike in order to fight for the protection of their needs and rights. But if this happens, the gross national product is seriously reduced and growth is damaged. As a consequence, the ability of the state to distribute wealth to the people via the welfare state is weakened. Does this mean that since their fight will have uncertain or perhaps even detrimental results for the economy, it would be unwise for the people to strike or that it would be acceptable for state officials to criminalize a possible strike in order to prevent such results? Such issues are representative of the unsolvable contradiction inherent in the capitalist mode of production.

A clear example of such a dilemma from Marcuse’s time can be found in US president Lyndon B. Johnson’s ‘Special Message to the Congress on the Impending Nationwide Rail Strike’ in 1967. He proposed ‘\textit{that Congress approve a joint resolution to extend the 60-days “no strike” period in this case for an additional 20 days}’\textsuperscript{228} due to fears of what might happen if the national rail strike were to take place:

\begin{quote}
A one-month strike would reduce the gross national product by 13 percent. That would nearly be four times as great as the total decline that occurred in the Nation’s worst post-war recession. It would drive the unemployment rate up to 15 percent [. . .] putting millions of workers out of jobs.\textsuperscript{229}
\end{quote}

More recently, the Greek government banned four strikes within an eighteen-month period, from January 2013 to June 2014, in order to force workers to bow to the demands of the troika and the world financial system. In January 2013, the government threatened that it would press criminal charges against striking Athens Mass Transit System workers. This ultimatum was extended to dockworkers in February 2013, to secondary education teachers in June 2013 and to electricity workers in July 2014. These government actions strongly suggest that the protection of recognized civil rights, such as the right to strike, cannot be guaranteed in the capitalist order, since the logic of growth, of money accumulation, orders otherwise.

\textsuperscript{227} H. Marcuse, \textit{One-Dimensional Man}, p. 261.
\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., p. 440.
Since negation originates from the concrete contradictions that people encounter in their effort to sustain a decent living in an unavoidably insane society, it is a determinate. ‘The negation is determinate if it refers the established state of affairs to the basic factors and forces which make for its destructiveness, as well as possible alternatives beyond the status quo.’230 In Marcuse’s analysis, dialectic is ‘a theory which demonstrates negation as a political alternative implicit in the historical situation’.231 ‘Negativity as the moving principle [and] the unfolding of opposites’ is a movement in ‘real human history’.232

This means that the political work would begin with the discussion and collective decision on specific problems facing the community: school, child care, rents, utilities, ecology, etc. They are decidedly ‘reformist’ issues, unpolitical, but as the work proceeds, each of them would reveal its political character within the whole.233

In my view, the foregoing shows that Marcuse’s ‘absolute refusal’ is a realistic concept. It should be stressed, however, that my use of the term ‘realistic’ here does not refer to the meaning of ‘realism’ ascribed to by traditional theory. In the context of traditional theory, Marcuse’s ‘absolute refusal’ cannot be seen as a realistic project because it absolutely refuses to concede to and compromise with the dilemmas that shackle people in the framework of the topsy-turvy and estranged world. Instead, it rejects the logic of the perverted, topsy-turvy world and is therefore realistic234 in the critical theory sense. It is realistic by being concrete and determinate since it attempts to shed light on the concealed contradictions in everyday living and thus explode, debunk and thus open from the inside the fetishized social forms that alienate us.

230 H. Marcuse, A Note on Dialectic, p. 449.
231 Ibid., p. 450.
7 Finding Hope in the Nihilism of Bourgeois Life

Ernst Bloch’s Open Marxism Reconsidered

Introduction

The mainstream reading of Bloch’s philosophy does not consider it able to question seriously the capitalist mode of production nor have its foundations in Marx’s dialectics. Consequently, Bloch’s ideas have been sidelined by the vast majority of those who aspire to develop an anti-capitalist democratic theory of social change. In contrast to interpreters of the Frankfurt School tradition and to many of the radical political theorists of contemporary political affairs, I will support the view that Bloch’s understanding of alienation, falseness and the spellbound character of capitalist culture builds upon the train of thought that derives from Marx’s concept of the ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’ and continues the philosophy of the other members of the early Frankfurt School. I will also argue that his theory must be seen as integral to a modern democratic theory project.

In what follows, I will first explain how Bloch identifies the social pathology of his era. A significant part of that analysis will concern the mentality of the petit bourgeois, who, without being conscious of it, reiterates in his private life the logic of the system, the social totality, the capitalist mode of production. Unable to penetrate through the societal objectivity of the fetish-forms, she attempts to find a way out of the alienation she experiences by following the logic closest to her—that is, that of the market, of competition and accumulation of wealth. By so doing, however, she is caught in a vicious circle that perpetuates her existential impasse. Later, I will highlight how the core concepts of Bloch’s philosophy originate in Marx’s Capital and are used as a means to demystify identity thinking. Last, for the first time in the literature, I will suggest that Bloch’s notions of utopia and the ‘not-yet’ derive their origins from negative dialectics and can open cracks in the bourgeois establishment.

1 Some of the most well-known contemporary radical theorists who do not focus at all on Bloch are Slavoj Zizek, Judith Batler, Étienne Balibar and Alain Badiou.
Emptiness and Falseness in Bourgeois Nihilism

Bloch’s philosophy has an inherent social character since it starts its analysis from the problems of everyday living. He does not focus on the apparent fetish-forms, such as the state or the bourgeois parliamentary system, but on the way of thinking that the average citizen, the petit bourgeois, has developed in order to deal with the challenges she meets in her daily life. It should be noted, however, that his expansion on this theme is not a mere sociological or psychological description, since he connects alienation in ordinary life with social totality—that is, the hidden logic of the capitalist mode of production. In Bloch’s understanding,

Liberty, equality, fraternity became the doorways to wage slavery and to a competitiveness that dealt with its brothers only as enemies, by necessity [. . .] Of liberty, equality and fraternity there remained little more than the reality of the stock exchange.²

Following Marx, he contends that in the ‘bourgeois economy [. . .] the word profit [. . .] conceals surplus value’ and that ‘bourgeois economy has become ideology itself, an apology.’³ He may not have written a study of the history of political economy, like Marx, but even his short comments are succinct and clearly show his distance from traditional theory. He underlines that

Adam Smith’s selfish system distinctly incorporated features of an even inwardly false consciousness [. . .] features [. . .] of the respected businessman and employer, showing how he actually believed in honest profit, how he above all felt himself to be a kind of benefactor to [. . .] those wealthy consumers through whom the surplus value extorted from the workers can be made into money by selling the product of their labour [. . .] [A]ll human beings were regarded as free traders [. . .] whose evident self interest balanced itself out in the overall benefit thus produced. With all this, the capitalist economy appeared the only natural one.⁴

Bourgeois economy is one of the ideologies that ‘justify existing social conditions by denying their economic roots and disguising exploitation’.⁵ In the same context, he also criticizes Hegel’s Phenomenology: ‘So that

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⁵ Ibid., p. 153.
the subject was schooled [. . .] in the composed world of law and order. Pacified and reassuring in a reactionary sense as well [. . .] with a cynical and resigned conformism’.6 Phenomenology may stress the power of negativity, but ultimately it conciliates ‘towards the object’.7 Kant and Fichte also made peace with the bourgeois establishment of their times: ‘the transcendental subject of Kant and Fichte knew how to postulate ethically [. . .] although in an abstract way, void of content, in conjunction with German misery’.8

Bloch does not analyse capitalism according to a party’s political manoeuvres or politicians’ strategic choices, but rather seeks to unearth the intrinsic rationale of the system: ‘monopoly capitalism needs to intensify an abstract record-drive for the purpose of whipping on, for otherwise the maximum profit could not be so quickly squeezed from the workers.’9 ‘In capitalist society health is the capacity to earn.’10 For Bloch, alienation is not a subjective feeling that a person might consciously develop. On the contrary, as in Marx, it is a social phenomenon that develops in all people regardless of whether they are conscious of it. ‘Both classes, the masters and the servants [. . .] experience a related self-alienation that spreads and grows due to the prevailing category of exchange value.’11 Even capitalists are alienated and lack freedom, since ‘[i]t is even a self-deception here that the capitalist really acts and decides in business. He is tied to unfathomed and uncontrolled movements of commodities which stand opposite him and permit only the taking of chances.’12 It is the very dominance of exchange value and the commodity form over both the worker and the capitalist that explains the ‘gigantic rise of alienation, objectification and reification in late capitalism’.13

Although Bloch does not make explicit use of the notion of fetishism, I maintain that fetishism is the core idea behind his philosophy and the concepts that constitute it. Bloch holds that, in Marxism, ‘the appearance vanishes of that fate which has been produced by human beings themselves, in class society and ignorantly made into a fetish’.14 An inversion, a topsy-turviness takes place in capitalism since the fact that social forms

7 Ibid.
8 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 108.
11 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 28.
13 Ibid., p. 1063.
appear stable,\textsuperscript{15} closed, objectified, reified and rigidified is attributed to the inversion that occurs when exchange value dominates use value, that is to say, when real human labour is transformed into abstract, objectified labour. ‘Time-by-the-clock is abstracted from time-as-it-is-lived […]; it wholly rectifies time lived, but at the price of formal rigidity’.\textsuperscript{16} The variety of human doing must fit within the inflexible notion of ‘time is money.’ I believe that the foregoing demonstrates Bloch’s connection to Capital.\textsuperscript{17}

Following the dialectic between essence/content and form/appearance, Bloch underlines that ‘[t]his kind of objectivity’ follows from the ‘big business style of thinking’ and ‘corresponds to the ‘capitalist planned economy’.\textsuperscript{18} Alienation is the real content of and originates from the logic of capital, that is, an incessant money accumulation that appears as a fetishized ideology. Yet this is ‘nothing but a sheer façade; behind the in-built rationalities the total anarchy of the profit economy remains. Under cover, of course, many things are stirring even here’.\textsuperscript{19}

That Bloch’s philosophy has an unavoidably practical, historical and thus anti-capitalist character is indirectly made evident from his comment that ‘there is no longer any philosophy without an orientation to praxis, that is, to the production of a classless society: the elimination of human alienation and reification’.\textsuperscript{20} Alienation is the main pillar of Bloch’s critical theory, as it is in Marcuse. In capitalism, people are haunted by the logic of money accumulation and turned into ghosts of capital in order to survive. They live behind the veil of a social role that they have not chosen in this crazy, enchanted society. ‘[S]ince no kind of exploitation can reveal itself openly, the ideology is [… the sum of ideas with which society justifies and glorifies itself with the aid of false consciousness’.\textsuperscript{21}

For Bloch, then, ‘the lonely man has a feeling of falling, or of being spellbound over a bottomless abyss.’\textsuperscript{22} In my reading, Bloch’s use of the notion of the spell follows that of Adorno, for whom, as we have seen, the fact that people are haunted by the logic of capital in order to survive is expressed through the notion of the spell and ideology: ‘Present ideology [….] is the ceaseless reproducer of the universal in the individuals.


\textsuperscript{16} Ernst Bloch, \textit{A Philosophy of the Future}, p. 125.

\textsuperscript{17} Given the foregoing, Ivan Boldyrev, in one of the most recent studies published on Bloch, appears mistaken in his assertion that ‘Bloch […] was not […] an interpreter of Marxist philosophy’ because his ‘primary motive was undoubtedly ethical’. See Ivan Boldyrev, \textit{Ernst Bloch and His Contemporaries: Locating Utopian Messianism}, Bloomsbury, London, 2014, p. 26.


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{21} Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Utopian Function of Art and Literature}, p. 115.

\textsuperscript{22} Ernst Bloch, \textit{Traces}, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 2006, p. 75.
Spell and ideology are one and the same.\textsuperscript{23} As ideology does not question the logic of the system but instead glorifies it, the ‘spell is admittedly shrewd enough not to go back any further than the desire for property and freedom.’\textsuperscript{24}

However, it is our daily activity, our social doing, that is the true cause of our role as ghosts of capital since

the powers produced by mankind, but not comprehended as produced, have broken away and become reified. Hence, they appear as an uncontrollable fate [. . .] The so-called iron logic of events proceeds behind the backs of the individual actors and their consciousness.\textsuperscript{25}

These words are a perfect analogy to Marx’s comment that ‘the determination of value itself [. . .] is from the very outset a process that takes place behind his [the individual capitalist’s] back.’\textsuperscript{26} Precisely because people live as ghosts of capital, ‘[m]ost are kept dark and hardly see themselves. The man on the assembly line who performs the same motion eight hours a day is as hidden as the miner.’\textsuperscript{27} What is hidden behind our creations is human doing, human content—that is, our alienated, objectified labour. Bloch endorses the fact that in Marx

Instead of the different reifications (commodity, interest, capital), which are fetishized by bourgeois economics, and which all appear to take precedence over and above the people who first produce them, the focus here\textsuperscript{28} is on work, the work process.\textsuperscript{29}

Although he may not directly cite Marx’s idea that in capitalism we all live, at least to an extent, as ‘personifications of economic categories’\textsuperscript{30} this idea is nevertheless still to be found in his analysis. I contend, therefore, that Martin Jay’s assertion that Bloch’s theory is disconnected from the whole of Marx’s philosophy,\textsuperscript{31} that it paid no attention to social and

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24 Ernst Bloch, \textit{Heritage of Our Times}, p. 49.
27 Ernst Bloch, \textit{Traces}, p. 17.
28 ‘Here’ is used to mean Marx’s work \textit{The Poverty of Philosophy}.
29 Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Utopian Function of Art and Literature}, p. 21.
\end{flushright}
economic relations and that ‘he had no real theory of politics’, is far from accurate. On the contrary, as I have attempted to show, Bloch’s concept of social totality is constructed around a well-founded understanding of exploitation and alienation in people’s everyday lives.

At this point, it must be highlighted that Bloch treats not just commodities but all cultural creations and social forms as fetishes. For Bloch, then, our whole culture is a perversion and all social forms are fetishes. Our entire social world is turned upside down. In addition to what I have already set out earlier, his comments on the state substantiate this reading: ‘The state [...] is determined by the division of labor and the oppositions that are directly engendered by this division. It functions as the powerful suppressor of these contradictions.’ Thus, the contradictions in the way we satisfy our elementary needs—the fact that we have to alienate our human doing and transform it into objectified, alienated labour—take on the appearance of the state fetish-form and are its true content. In other words, the state form corresponds to the particular content of abstract labour. ‘[P]arliamentary democracy is in this way the hated guarantor of free competition and its corresponding political form.’ If the essential element of our daily life, the true content—that is, the way in which we choose to earn our livelihood—does not change, the state form will not disappear. Thus, there is still ‘state capitalism beneath the mask of state socialism [...] what is lost in the way of free time and freedom seems to come in again through a guarantee, through guaranteed employment.’

No matter what the system calls itself, we are able to unmask it, to demystify it through the dialectic between form/appearance and essence/content. Only by doing this can the ‘illusion of collectivism’ upon which the state form depends be revealed. ‘This illusion can even mean that the capitalist economy controlled from above claims to be socialist.’ Therefore, according to the dialectic between form/appearance and essence/content, ‘the collective after achieving its socialist content, will have a fundamentally changed form [...] [T]his will have nothing in common [...] with the state in bourgeois society; for in the latter generality existed only in abstract form.’

Nevertheless, in contrast to the previous references, he holds that for ‘Marxists the state [...] dies out of its own accord, in Engels’s famous

32 Ibid., p. 191.
33 Ibid., p. 195.
37 Ibid., p. 900.
38 Ibid.
phrase, with the disappearance of classes. This interpretation is an economically realistic one.\textsuperscript{40} However, he does not expand on how this process of the state dying out will take place. At this point, I believe that he contradicts himself, or maybe his thought was in transition, and if Bloch’s work is taken as a whole, it is the first interpretation—that of treating the state as a fetish, as the form of appearance of the underlying contradictions, as a social form that does not die out gradually after it has been occupied by a party or a coalition of parties—that prevails in his philosophy.

Our alienated human doing is ‘under cover’,\textsuperscript{41} hidden below the immediacy, the ‘new objectivity’, ‘this veiled life, below the nihilism of this modern age’.\textsuperscript{42} Since we have naturalized the ordinary, which is the apparent form of the alienation, ‘living in mere immediacy [. . .] we are still immediate to ourselves and not so clearly visible.’\textsuperscript{43} ‘[E]verything within is wrapped in its own darkness.’\textsuperscript{44} We live behind the shadow, the character mask that the system has imposed on us. Our desires, ambitions, dreams and thoughts cannot be realized in this one-dimensional civilization that wants to transform all of human doing into profit and are thus doomed to remain unfulfilled. ‘[W]hat is most inward in us itself simply lies in deep shadow [. . .] in a moral-metaphysical incognito, as it [. . .] never lets the deepest authenticity totally succeed.’\textsuperscript{45}

‘Unfreedom’ should be understood not in terms of a state public policy, as is generally the case in traditional theory, but as an existential perversion. Social pathology is not simply the result of wrong policy choices by politicians or a malfunctioning of the state’s bureaucracy. Such an understanding would remain at the level of the fetish-form, of immediacy, of identity thinking. By contrast, a theory that questions the foundations of our culture and society and penetrates appearances reveals that the causes of social pathology are ingrained in the very core of our existence, since we come into contact with each other and nature not to satisfy our basic human needs in peace and solidarity but to satisfy the need of money to multiply itself to the maximum possible extent. We therefore reach an existential impasse, as in attempting to fulfil our basic needs; we build the bars of our own prison, a one-dimensional society that pushes everything aside except the values that perpetuate the systemic logic: hard work, competition and accumulation of wealth. In this topsy-turvy world that

\textsuperscript{40} Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 2, p. 573. The idea that the state dies out can also be found in ibid., p. 534.
\textsuperscript{41} See note 15.
\textsuperscript{43} Ernst Bloch, \textit{A Philosophy of the Future}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., p. 1.
\textsuperscript{45} Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Spirit of Utopia}, p. 172.
we cannot control, we cannot escape ‘the nihilism of bourgeois life, this becoming-a-commodity, becoming alienated from the entire world’.46

We live in a lie, in falseness. As with the members of the Frankfurt School, whose philosophy has been analysed in the previous chapters of this book, falseness in Bloch denotes the fact that our culture’s promises are contradicted by everyday life, by the embedded irrationality of the social system. ‘Capitalism has been so little able to drain the irrational that it has become ever stronger precisely as a “contradiction” to its objectivity and rationalization.’47 We experience ‘the continuing untruth, imperfection, unreality in the real’.48 While we adopt the logic of the system, that of ‘time is money,’ we become pawns of a rigged game without realizing it. Our existence remains hidden behind the naturalized reified forms. We live enshrouded in a darkness caused by fetishism:

[W]e are located in our blind spot, in the darkness of the lived moment, whose darkness is ultimately our own darkness, being-unfamiliar-to-ourselves, being enfolded, being-missing.49 [. . .] Together with its content, the lived moment itself remains essentially invisible [. . .] at this root, in the lived In-itself, in punctual immediacy, all world is still dark.50

According to Bloch, social pathology should not be attributed to the fact that state policy lacks a coherent plan or is managed by politicians who lack the capability or the enthusiasm to devise a regulatory system that would reform the relationship between the state, the banks and non-governmental organizations. Such an approach would not question the reason of the system, its topsy-turviness, its irrational rationality. By identifying the cause of social pathology to be the alienation in everyday living, we cannot help but recognize that ‘most people around us, particularly since they have been entangled in a money economy, are so lethargically filthy that none of them [. . .] comes near any more difficult inner stirrings.’51 The fact that most people do not identify the sickness in the normal52 and do not feel the need to diverge from the value system presupposed in capitalism—hard work in order to accumulate wealth by ruthlessly competing with one another—proves that capitalism corrupts

46 Ernst Bloch, Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics, p. 30. The fact that nihilism in Bloch is an ‘ideological parallel to’ fetishism and reification in capitalism can be seen in the same article on p. 32.
47 Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Times, p. 62.
48 Ernst Bloch, Dialectics and Hope, p. 6.
51 Ernst Bloch, The Spirit of Utopia, p. 165.
the essence of our existence and makes our culture sick right down to its deepest layer. In being forced to live as zombies of capital in a spellbound enchanted society,

we do not know who we are [. . .] Nobody is what he would like to be or could be [. . .] Most people are not even familiar with their inclinations, above all because nobody can get himself straight when all relations between people are in a mess.53 [. . .] The man usable in bourgeois terms is required to be little, [. . .] artificially faceless and totally devoid of colour.54

He is faceless because in order to survive in a spellbound world, he is forced to put on the mask of capitalistic values, of the social role that will enable him to sustain a livelihood:

[I]n his dream he bought the thriving shop on the corner, expanded it, brought it up to date [. . .] Long ago the shop was sold again, the great world takes him on board, as it is shown in the films, the hunting lodge in the forest, the castle by the sea, his own yacht.55 [. . .] The little man, the petit bourgeois, proletarianized [. . .] dreams considerably more castles in Spain than the bourgeois man of property who knows what he has [. . .] The wish [. . .] merely wishes to break out of the world somewhat, not that it wants to change it.56 [. . .] Middle class virtue [. . .] does not hate exploitation but only the fact that it is not itself an exploiter.57

Even ‘the proletarian today is usually just an unsuccessful petit bourgeois.’58 He reaches an existential impasse due to being immersed in the vanity of his existence, which comes from the fact that he is pressured into adopting the logic of capital, into continuously accumulating to the maximum possible degree. He becomes fettered to objectivity, to identity thinking, to ‘the bourgeois emptiness’ and consequently to ‘the illusory existence of its own bad immediacy’.59 He deceives himself that if he adjusts more to the systemic logic, he will no longer experience its social pathology. Yet the opposite happens. The more he aligns his aspirations, dreams and human doing with the demands of the irrational rationality of the system, the more estranged and alienated from his fellow human

54 Ibid., p. 928.
56 Ibid., p. 33.
57 Ibid., p. 31.
58 Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, p. 17.
beings he becomes. ‘Modern capitalism [. . .] produces this emptiness, this freezing homelessness.’ He cannot win a rigged game even by choosing to play by its rules. He is caught in a vicious circle but believes that by ‘being objective’ and realistic, he can formulate a feasible plan that will enable him to escape from this circle. However, what he actually succeeds in doing is becoming even more immersed in the ‘emptiness’, the ‘deception’ and the ‘despiritualization of life, [where] the process of human beings and things becoming commodities [. . .] is polished up as if it was in order, indeed order itself.’ While he hopes that he will liberate himself by complying with the terms dictated by the demand for social standardization, he contributes to making ‘everything administered and [. . .] trivial’ to a greater extent than it already is. Bloch’s use of the concept of the administered society fully follows Adorno’s and Marcuse’s use of it.

In this context, even happiness has been normalized, so that happiness now has no other purpose than to facilitate the reproduction of labor power [. . .] From the well-advanced nullity of the participants there follows easily the uniformity as well as the banality of general existence [. . .] which corresponds [. . .] to the objective state of boredom.

The despair felt on Sundays is a clear sign of this banality.

**Ernst Bloch’s Dialectical Materialism**

The fact that the promises of our culture are proven false by everyday life, no matter how much people attempt to fit to the standards of the system by following the values that perpetuate capital, substantiates the idea that the world as it exists is *not true*. There exists a second concept of truth [. . .] which is not founded on a declaration of facticity [. . .] but which is instead loaded with value [. . .] And if that doesn’t correspond to the facts— and for us Marxists, facts are only reified moments of a process—in that case, *too bad for the facts*.  

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60 Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, p. 130. The same idea, that we are ‘unhoused’, can also be found in Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, p. 170.
62 Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, p. 44.
We cannot trust facticity, since the ‘status quo is covered up by the glitter of a deceptive harmonization.’

The plane of immediacy, of ‘givenness’, originates to the ‘thought pattern of commodities’. Behind this ‘normality’, however, lies human suffering, the contradiction between concrete labour and abstract labour, between the fact that, on the one hand, people must accept the logic of the system, that of time is money, in order to survive in a totally antagonistic society, but on the other hand, they must also strive to protect their human needs for peace, tranquillity and dignity. The existence of the contradiction proves the ‘untruth, imperfection, unreality in the real’ and the fact that ‘[r]eality becomes. Existence can have many gradations.’

If the meaning of our existence could be identified only with that of immediacy, that of living like a zombie haunted by the logic of capital, then reality would be one-dimensional. Everything would be transparent, and so philosophy, at least as understood by Marx, the early Frankfurt School, and Bloch, would have a completely different character and role. But since this is not the case, the critical character of philosophy in Marx consists in

a renewed demystification [...] of final, anthropological fetishization [...] In order to do this, the glance at the processes which really underlie alienation was necessary. [...] In Capital he carried out an analytical demystification by means of economics, and offered [...] a mediation of the subjective with the objectively real contradictions.

One demystifies the reified, fetish-forms by unveiling the historical process of human action that created them. Only by doing this does the human content of the forms reveal itself and the subjective content of the objectified, reified forms come to light. ‘[T]he all-propelling, all-concealing moment has arrived and [been] broken open’ through penetrating the plane of appearance and throwing light on the alienation and human suffering that were hidden inside the social fetishized forms. The fetish-forms that constitute the darkness and nihilism of bourgeois life are exploded, opened only if their content is attributed to our alienated labour—that is, to labour conducted according to the terms of socially necessary labour time. ‘Marxism [...] has been since its inception “humanity in action”,

66 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 110.
67 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 100.
68 Ernst Bloch, Dialectics and Hope, p. 6.
69 Ernst Bloch, Man as Possibility, Cross Currents, v. 18, Summer 1968, p. 275.
71 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 170.
73 Ibid., p. 222.
the human countenance coming to fulfillment [. . .] The humane element must be brought out into fresh and bracing air. 74

The crucial thing to be stressed is that at the core of our existence in the capitalist mode of production, a battle of interests takes place between those who promote the logic of ‘time is money,’ that time for living should be captive to the demands of time-by-the-clock, and those who promote the logic that time for living should follow the logic of time for protecting human needs and living in peace and solidarity. Thus, revealing the human content of the forms does not mean that we attempt to reveal a general abstract idea of the human being and its condition, but rather the critical importance of class struggle, which constitutes the essence of our existence in capitalism.

As a materialist Marx emphasizes, precisely within being itself, the subjective factor of productive activity [. . .] The working man, the vital subject-object relationship [. . .] belongs [. . .] to the material basis; the subject within the world is the world as well. 75

In Bloch, as with the other members of the early Frankfurt School analysed in this book, materialism is not a theory than can be established in the context of epistemology in regard to matter as a physical entity, and is thus not a theory that can be read apolitically. On the contrary, it is fully embedded in human relations, in the unavoidable clash between social interests—namely, class struggle. For Bloch, Marx’s materialism had ‘a powerfully demystifying rigor’. 76 ‘[H]istorical materialism can be historical precisely because nothing but “interests”, i.e. nothing but purposes of will, have a place in it.’ 77 Bloch’s materialism is, like Marx’s, innately corporeal. ‘[E]motions [. . .] reach so deeply into the ontic roots that concepts which appear to be so inherently abstract [. . .] become synonymous with hunger, desperation [. . .] confidence.’ 78 Concepts originate from human pain, from negativity, from our struggle to survive in an enchanted, topsy-turvy world, not from a pure state of mind. Habermas’s inability to determine the corporeal character of Bloch’s materialism has led him to the conclusion that

Bloch’s materialism remains speculative [. . .] Metaphorically speaking (and utopia always retains a measure of metaphor), Bloch’s thought processes are derived from the development of a pregnancy of the

74 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 23.
75 Ibid., p. 73.
world which is generally assumed rather than attempting to free us from the societal immobility of existing contradictions.\(^79\)

By contrast, I hold that all the notions of Bloch’s philosophy are corporeal, since they originate from social materiality, human suffering, from the negativity and the inherent contradictions we experience in everyday reality in capitalism. Bloch is not, as Habermas contends, a romantic philosopher who assumes freedom by speculation, but, as will be shown later in greater detail, a thinker who has a much more elaborated notion of reality than most political philosophers.

In identity thinking, cultural production is closed, static and predictable since whatever political and societal developments take place do not question or change the one-dimensional innate logic of the system, do not challenge the values of accumulation for accumulation’s sake, competition and hard work that underpin the enchanted world. Consequently, the phenomenon of the transformation of human doing into social fetish-forms, such as bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the state or the trinity formula, will continue to perpetuate itself. This happens because in the capitalist mode of production, in a system where the logic of private property rules, human doing will still be constituted by the aforementioned values. In identity thinking, the concepts of hope and possibility cannot survive. ‘The category of the Possible [...] has so far remained perhaps the most uncertain of the concepts which have been worked out philosophically in the course of the centuries.’\(^80\)

Only in non-identity thinking, in a philosophy that differentiates \textit{form/appearance from essence/content}, could the category of the possible flourish. Nevertheless, in order for this to happen, philosophical reflection must question what has been accepted as normal, ordinary and standard. ‘[T]he real Possible, which is homeless in every contemplative-static philosophy, is the real problem of the world itself: as the still undialectical character of appearance and real essential being, ultimately of existence and essence within it.’\(^81\) In order for the notion of hope and the possible to be brought to the fore, the essence, the foundations of the whole bourgeois establishment must be seriously challenged. This cannot be avoided as hope and the possible presuppose a wholly different way of satisfying human needs to that of the social relation of capital.


\(^{81}\) Ibid., p. 246. The differentiation of essence from appearance is also mentioned in Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 2, p. 533.
The real nature or the essence is not something already found in a finished form [. . .] The real or the essence is that *which does not yet exist, which is in quest of itself in the core of things, and which is awaiting its genesis in the trend latency of the process*.\(^8^2\)

Most of those who refer to the concept of essence in the context of Marxist philosophy theorize it as an entity with a predetermined content that can be known beforehand. As can be seen from my study, however, this interpretation cannot be found in Bloch’s Marxism. In Bloch’s view, the real challenge for philosophy is to integrate in its context of reference the notion of possibility and hope.

\[\text{[P]hilosophy [. . .]} \text{ has consciously to bear the responsibility of prefiguration [. . .] of hope itself [. . .] [T]he latter remains uniquely based in matter [. . .] in that-which-is-in-accordance-with-possibility [. . .] and as such has a substantively opening effect. To perceive this genesis is the function of philosophy.}\(^8^3\)

The notion of possibility and hope is inextricably connected to that of materialism, since ‘all these Marxist categories have as background the so far insufficiently explored category of objectively real possibilities, and so ultimately man himself.’\(^8^4\) The possibility of a different way of doing things is based on a different philosophy of time from that which forms the core of the current perception of man, of her existence and culture. For Bloch, this perception of man, which is different to the current one, ‘this human element or the complexities of a realm of freedom as a whole are not rigid genera, but ensembles of social conditions, and [. . .] do not stand behind history as an unchangeable essence.’\(^8^5\) This quote reveals the open and uncertain character of Bloch’s materialism, which is far from a mechanical materialism containing a predetermined teleology.

Bloch maintains that Marx’s use of the concept of critique ‘displays all the more sharply the recesses, fissures, cracks, and contrasts incorporated in the objectively existing economy’\(^8^6\) and that, for Marx, critique involved ‘a critical and evaluating look at the total nature of the entire existence of humankind’.\(^8^7\) The role of critique, therefore, is to help the contradictions that lie hidden in the spirit of capital to reveal themselves.\(^8^8\) Critical theory makes apparent the utopian character of our society, the

\(^{8^2}\) Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, p. 41.
\(^{8^3}\) Ibid., p. 43.
\(^{8^6}\) Ibid., p. 620.
\(^{8^7}\) Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, p. 22.
\(^{8^8}\) Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, p. 63.
utopian belief that value as money can multiply itself incessantly and growth, as accumulated wealth, can continue indefinitely. Therefore, the character of such a critique is ‘immanent’ and ‘negative’.\(^8^9\) Immanence denotes the fact that ‘the ideal [. . .] must [. . .] be historically mediated, and it must be possible to demonstrate that [. . .] [its] tendency and [. . .] possibility [lie] in the course of society.’\(^9^0\) Only if it is immanent can a ‘penetrating, concrete critique of a degenerated and discredited realization’\(^9^1\) take place. For Bloch, then, materialist critique is inherently economic and historical,\(^9^2\) and philosophy in Bloch’s Marxism is grounded in the social sciences. Despite the literary and utopian character of his writing, there is no gap between theory and practice in his philosophy. In contrast to the foregoing, Wayne Hudson holds that Bloch’s ‘emphasis [. . .] on the need for meta-political perspectives, implies that Marxism alone was inadequate, and that it was necessary to take account of the secret transcendental elements in socialism which Marx had overlooked’\(^9^3\) and that ‘[t]o overcome the practicist foreshortening of the goal which has occurred in the Marxist tradition, Bloch attempts to supplement Marxism with a new conception of reality or Marxist metaphysics.’\(^9^4\) He also suggests that ‘Bloch’s emphasis on utopia [. . .] involves a radical shift of emphasis from the “materiality” of the actual to the “materiality” of the “not yet”,’\(^9^5\) and because of this, he ‘fails to elucidate precisely what “materialism” involves’.\(^9^6\)

My analysis of Bloch’s materialism, however, suggests that Hudson’s comments are inaccurate and unfair towards Bloch. Hudson fails to acknowledge the open character of Bloch’s categories and his materialism. In contrast to my study, Hudson makes no mention of the human content of the forms precisely because he ignores the dialectic between form/appearance and essence/content in Bloch and in critical Marxism in general. He therefore reaches the wrong conclusion that in Bloch’s philosophy, ‘there is no security available on which to base the militant optimism which it embodies,’\(^9^7\) accusing Bloch of holding a position that


\(^{9^0}\) Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, p. 198. The fact that critique is also ‘anti-static’ is stressed in Ernst Bloch, *Man on His Own: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, Herder and Herder, New York, 1970, p. 117.

\(^{9^1}\) Ernst Bloch, *Natural Law and Human Dignity*, p. 198.

\(^{9^2}\) In *Literary Essays* (p. 126), Bloch writes that criticism must follow an ‘economic, causal analysis of the situation and the tendency’.


\(^{9^4}\) Ibid., p. 67.

\(^{9^5}\) Ibid., p. 207.

\(^{9^6}\) Ibid., p. 208.

\(^{9^7}\) Ibid., p. 102.
did not and could not hold, since it is outside the frame of reference of his social theory.

Since, as noted earlier, the purpose of critique is to fight fetishism by shedding light on the contradictions that lie hidden in the fetish-forms, its power and character are negative. Precisely because the petit bourgeois cannot defetishize the forms and thus think critically, she cannot apprehend ‘the basic contradiction between capital and work’. 98 ‘The contradiction must be seized [. . .] actively. This is only possible when it stands in [. . .] deeply interwoven material historical contexts.’ 99 Only when it is shown that contradictions lie in people themselves, since on the one hand they are meant to act as ‘personifications of economic categories’, while on the other hand they cannot escape their humanity (the fact that they must fulfil the basic human needs of respect, dignity, peace and solidarity), can it be made clear that the ‘subjective negative power [. . .] intensifies the productive, explosive character of the objective contradictions.’ 100

The more people fight against alienation in their everyday lives by resisting the pressure to fully follow the demands of socially necessary labour time, the more they intensify the already existing contradictions within the system by creating obstacles to value multiplication and transformation in its various forms.

Nevertheless, the force of democratic social change is located within contradiction. 101 For Bloch, its foundation will be ‘the “triple alliance” between the proletariat and the immiserated peasants and the immiserated middle class, under proletarian hegemony’. 102 It becomes evident that the negative character of critique does not lie ready-made waiting to be used. Negativity comes to the fore every time people react against the pressure to accept the specific image of man that the capitalist mode of production needs in order to perpetuate itself—that is, an image that accepts the values of inexorable accumulation of wealth, competition and hard work. Taking into consideration the existence of the contradictions that are doomed to remain unresolved in capitalism, and in the same vein of thinking to Adorno’s idea that ‘Wrong life cannot be lived rightly,’ 103 Bloch writes that ‘no one gets used to living here [. . .] It is hardly possible or necessary to live the right way any more.’ 104

98 Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Times, p. 65.
100 Ibid., p. 308.
101 Ernst Bloch, Nonsynchronism and the Obligation to Its Dialectics, p. 36.
102 Ibid.
103 Adorno, Minima Moralia, p. 39.
104 Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Times, p. 209. A clear example of this that I have experienced is as follows. One of the measures that the Greek state has taken in an effort to repay its debt has been to increase taxes for everyone, but especially for self-employed workers. This has led them, in many cases, not to issue receipts for their services,
The concept of contradiction is inherently connected to that of dialectics.

For Marx [...] dialectics is never a method according to which he reworks history, but is identical with history itself [...] [A]ll these contradictions engendered in contemporary society [...] belong, as Marx taught, to the dialectics of its essence.105

Dialectical thinking owes its existence to alienation, which in turn causes contradictions. ‘[D]ialectical materialism is nothing if it is not philosophical, that is, proceeding towards great open horizons. This intervention is theoretical-practical work against alienation.’106 ‘Common sense, typically undialectical’, remains firmly on the plane of fetishism, of immediacy, of identity thinking and thus cannot demystify ‘petit bourgeois prejudices’.107 If the purpose of critique is to pull the veil from the social forms, open them and reveal their true content, which is suffering, exploitation and conflict of interests, then the role of critical theory and dialectical theory is one and the same.

‘Dialectical reality is reality criticizing itself [...] The dialectic is the critical method of the world itself [...] so that one knows what sort of contradictions are taking place.’108 Critical theory or negative dialectics shatters the façade of deceptive harmony and normality, as this is understood by identity thinking, systemic logic and traditional theory. When examined dialectically, the social forms, which are now closed and presuppose a specific way of conducting human activity—that which is done under the terms of time-by-the-clock, the terms of socially necessary labour time—open themselves to the possibility of another kind of human activity that would take place under the terms of time-as-is-it-lived, of time for satisfying human needs and not for satisfying the need of value to multiply itself. ‘That which is still open keeps it running dialectically, criticizes all its alien forms [...] of alienation [...] and leaves the horizon of its “where to” and “what for” still sufficiently unregulated to be productive.’109

which is of course illegal. It should be noted, however, that, in the main, they have done so not in order to attain a life of luxury or even to increase their living standards, but rather simply to be able to cover their tax and social insurance expenses, which if not done is also illegal. According to a statement by the Greek minister of finance in March 2014, 2.6 million Greek citizens and businesses owed 62.5 billion euros in total to the Greek state. See the Greek newspaper To Vima at http://www.tovima.gr/finance/article/?aid=575551 (in Greek).

105 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 112.
106 Ernst Bloch, Dialectics and Hope, p. 10.
107 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 34.
108 Ernst Bloch, Man as Possibility, p. 279.
109 Ernst Bloch, Man on His Own, p. 91.
If so understood, dialectical theory is intrinsically historical from the moment that it presents the concrete way in which people react against the rule of money and the historically specific manner in which they revolt in their everyday life against the pressure that is applied by the social relation of capital to transform them into ‘personifications of economic categories’.

Dialectical materialism or Marxism in general is absolutely nothing but the struggle against the dehumanization which culminates in capitalism [. . .] Alienation, dehumanization, reification, this Becoming-Commodity of all people and things [. . .] in Marx is the old enemy which in capitalism [. . .] triumphed.\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 3, p. 1358.}

At this point, it should be clear that dialectical criticism, at least as Bloch analyses it, is also immanent by its nature. ‘The total explanation of the world from within itself, which is called dialectical-historical materialism, also posits the transformation of the world from within itself.’\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 1, p. 267.} The immanent and historical character of the negation makes it a concrete, determinate negation. This kind of negation is opposed to abstract negation, which does not originate from the thing itself—that is, from the study of how people themselves, by their everyday activity, create a perverted world composed of social forms that appear to move on their own. ‘Marxism explodes the abstractness and supposed eternal character of the standards of reason [. . .] It takes the standards [. . .] from dialectical, concrete history instead of [. . .] the ahistorical idea that is introduced from outside real history.’\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \textit{Natural Law and Human Dignity}, p. 207.} According to Bloch, ‘[t]he very power and truth of Marxism consists \textit{sic} in the fact that it has [. . .] strengthened [the pillar of fire in dreams] with concreteness.’\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 1, p. 146.} The hope of the new will be based upon the ‘immanently ascending, materially-dialectically transcending light’.\footnote{Ibid.} The determinate character of negation in Bloch is another point of convergence with Adorno, for whom ‘the construct of criticism [. . .] can [. . .] already imply the solution; the latter hardly ever appears from without. It was to this that the philosophical concept of determinate negation referred.’\footnote{Theodor Adorno, On the Logic of Social Sciences, in T. Adorno, H. Albert, R. Dahrendorf, J. Habermas, H. Pilot and K. Popper (eds.) \textit{The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology}, Heinemann, London, 1976, p. 113.}
Since the concrete and determinate character of the negation is grounded in real historical struggles, ‘real possibility encloses the open dialectical tendency-latency.’\(^{116}\) In this context, Bloch refers to ‘communist cosmology’ as ‘the problem area of a dialectical mediation of man and of his work with the possible subject of nature.’\(^{117}\) If the necessity of bourgeois nihilism, which is a ‘total mechanism’, is deciphered along with the ‘so-called naturally ordained order’, then “history” must be founded anew in the physics of a still open totum.\(^{118}\)

When the Greek stock market opened on 4 August 2015 after having been closed for twenty-five days because of the capital controls imposed on Greek banks, financial news articles stressed that the Greek stock market must fight for a return to normality. The same concept, that of normality or ordinariness, was used at the start of 2014 by the representatives of the Greek bourgeois establishment when the Greek state finally succeeded in selling bonds with an interest of below 5 per cent on the world financial markets after a long time of having to sell bonds at much higher interest rates. The reader of Bloch’s Open Marxism will be aware, however, that, in the one-dimensional logic of the capitalist mode of production, the content of ‘normality’ is predetermined, closed and predictable as people’s doing will continue to take the form of abstract, alienated labour, thus producing and reproducing the irrationality of the spellbound ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’.

For the social theory that accepts capital’s logic as standard, reality is one-dimensional, since the possible contained within it will still not change the key components of that logic. For Bloch, however, ‘there is no true realism without the true dimension of this openness.’\(^{119}\) True realism presupposes the possibility that if the inherent contradictions that we experience are intensified by social/class struggle, cracks will be opened in the standard way of doing things. Openness is thus being theorized by Bloch as the opposite pole of the dark moment.\(^{120}\) Only dialectical materialism can throw light on the dimension of uncertainty and openness that lies inherent in the apparently static normality.\(^{121}\)

What a stinking contradiction it is to speak of corrupt capitalism and yet to organize five-year plans to catch up with and surpass the West, i.e., capitalism, thus increasing the putrefaction! This leads to capitulation to the capitalist mode of production, thought, and trade, so that socialism becomes only a small new invention to procure the

\(^{116}\) Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 155.


\(^{118}\) Ibid., p. 1175.


\(^{120}\) Ibid., p. 289.

\(^{121}\) Ibid., p. 336.
blessings of capitalism in a socialist manner.\textsuperscript{122} […] That we are not the people we seem to be, that we contain unexplored land […] how much this idea would mean to me.\textsuperscript{123}

If people stop playing their social role in this rigged game, stop accepting their role as ‘personifications of economic categories’, as zombies of capital, then contradictions will come to the fore even more emphatically, along with the prospect of ‘unexplored land’. If we fight to change the world and protect our dignity by following the logic of negative dialectics, of negativity, by promoting the process of contradictions that can crack and ultimately shatter the current form of reality, objectivity, it means that we can have no fixed idea of what socialism will be and no set plan to achieve this end. ‘It means we have no true idea of socialism.’\textsuperscript{124} There are no guarantees in this process or any new standards or plans to follow. Nevertheless, this should not deter us from promoting this process. ‘Reality without real possibility is not complete, the world without future-laden properties does not deserve a glance.’\textsuperscript{125} Openness presupposes uncertainty. ‘The fact that we can thus sail into dreams […] indicates the great space of the still open, still uncertain life in man.’\textsuperscript{126}

The future does not have a linear relation to the present. The two cannot be separated as if one stage ends and only then the other follows. Their borders cannot be clearly delineated at all. The future is contained within the inherent tendency of current social affairs. ‘Only the horizon of the future, as Marxism brings it into knowledge and relates it to the past as the corridor to the future, gives reality its dimension of reality.’\textsuperscript{127} The fact that Marx’s materialism is social materialism and that it therefore refers not to physical matter but to social fetish-forms can also be inferred from the fact that

Dialectical materialism now envisages matter as being dynamically active in the direction of the future […] It interprets matter […] as something which has not yet entered into full phenomenal existence: that which not only permits the possibility of being, but exists in possibility.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{122} Michael Landmann, Talking with Ernst Bloch: Korčula, 1968, p. 172.
\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., p. 180.
\textsuperscript{124} Ernst Bloch, The Spirit of Utopia, p. 247.
\textsuperscript{125} Ernst Bloch, The Principle of Hope, Vol. 1, p. 223.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p. 195.
\textsuperscript{127} Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., p. 108.
If we follow this line of reasoning, we can acquire a complete picture of reality since ‘Marxist reality means: reality plus the future within it.’ If we adopt a Blochian version of the dialectical materialist theory of historical continuity. Some commentators have consistently underestimated this aspect of Bloch’s thought. For example, Kolakowski reaches the flawed conclusion that in Bloch ‘it is never clear in what sense the present really “contains” the future—in what sense our “knowledge” of the future world relates to that world’ because he fails to recognize the contradiction in the concept, which opens it and creates the multidimensional character of reality. The same goes for Ivan Boldyrev, who holds that, in Bloch, the ‘future is not addressed in any precise way [. . .] we hardly learn anything about it.’ Again, it is the lack of focus on the notion of contradiction that prevents Boldyrev from identifying the anti-capitalist character of Bloch’s philosophy.

Whenever we come into contact with our fellow human beings and with nature to experience time in peace and solidarity, then objectivity, the plane of fetishism, and immediacy are cracked. This changes our relation not only to the future but also to the past. As Adorno argues, ‘[a]ll objectification is forgetting.’ Bloch underlines that ‘[a]lienation generally is a sign of a lost relation to that which produces and to its contents’ and that ‘[b]ecause of this “facticity” [. . .] it was possible to forget the producer because of the reified product.’ The lost relation in this context is the producer’s perverted doing—her abstract labour—which is the true content of the fetish-form. Bloch reminds us, just as Adorno did, that we are the real subjects of history, we are capital, although this is hidden in the reified, fetishized, bewitched world in which ‘Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time as mere things.’ While Bloch may not have explicitly asserted that fetishism is a process created by human subjects, we can nevertheless conclude that he, at least indirectly, supported this view when we read that ‘every object of our normal environment reveals itself to be by no means sheer datum. It proves itself instead to be the end result of

131 Ivan Boldyrev, *Ernst Bloch and His Contemporaries*, p. 35.
134 Ernst Bloch, *On Karl Marx*, p. 100.
previous work-processes.” As with other categories, which are turned into fetish-forms in identity thinking, the same happens to the past. “Past that is grasped in isolation [...] is a mere commodity category, that is, a reified Factum without consciousness of its fiery and of its continuing process.”

In my unique reading, then, the core notion that enabled Bloch to develop a non-mainstream interpretation of historical progress is fetishism. According to the theory of fetishism as a process, the rigid, reified categories open and their true content/essence—namely, the contradiction between the two different theories of time—comes to the fore. Time as money is contrasted to time as lived experience. In this framework, “The basic theme of philosophy [...] is the still unbecome, still unachieved homeland, as it develops outwards and upwards in the dialectical-materialistic struggle of the New with the old.”

If we bear in mind what was stressed in the chapter on Adorno—that the ‘name of dialectics says no more [...] than that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder”—then the very close relation between Bloch’s and Adorno’s understanding of dialectics is once again confirmed when we read in Bloch that ‘great art or great philosophy is not only its time manifested in images and ideas, but it is also [...] that which is not yet fulfilled. It is from this element of utopia alone [...] that the continual impact of the surplus is derived.” As the reader has seen, the notion of surplus was also underlined by Adorno in a letter to Horkheimer:

People are more in their potential than they are in fact. This ‘more’ is no abstraction. It appears sporadically again and again even in what we actually are. We are not entirely the products of that mastery of nature that we have invented, that we have inflicted on the world and ultimately on ourselves. This surplus becomes manifest in you, constantly renewing itself.

137 Ibid., p. 9.
138 For a different reading of time in Bloch that is unconnected with Bloch’s idea of ‘time by the clock’, see Peter Thompson, Ernst Bloch, Ungleichzeitigkeit, and the Philosophy of Being and Time, New German Critique, v. 42, n. 2, 2015, pp. 49–64.
140 Theodor Adorno, Negative Dialectics, p. 5.
141 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 38.
143 Ibid., p. 362.
Indirectly, Bloch also indirectly refers to the notion of surplus or remainder when he declares that ‘Marxist dialectics [. . .] has [. . .] as its most material driving force the fact that the main thing, namely real human life, has not come into being as yet in any class condition’ and that ‘the genuine reference-and-return is towards what is still in the future, and therefore what has not come to be in the past; ultimately it is a return to the still underived derivation of all that happens.’ The underived surplus can be derived from what happens, from the current fetish-forms, since it is the tendency that lies dormant when people bow to the logic of time is money but appears and causes cracks in bourgeois culture when people attempt to fulfill their needs by following the logic of time as lived experience, time for respect and solidarity with our fellow human beings.

How Hope Cracks Capitalism

The concept of surplus is dependent on that of utopia.

Without the utopian function it is impossible to explain the intellectual surplus that went beyond the status quo [. . .] Therefore, all anticipation must prove itself to the utopian function, the latter seizing all possible surplus content of the anticipation.

Since Bloch’s philosophy, as I have attempted to show, is embedded in the conflict of social interests in everyday life and class struggle, then it should be clear that utopia, as it is used by Bloch, is also grounded in social materiality. His use of the concept of utopia, therefore, is unconventional in that it does not describe a fundamentally different future disconnected from the current reality.

For Bloch, Marxism ‘rescued the rational core of utopia, and made it concrete [because] [. . .] Marxism was first to bring a concept of knowledge into the world which [. . .] refers [. . .] to the tendency of what is coming up.’ Utopia therefore refers to the properties of reality that contain the future and to the objectively—that is, the historically—based possibility, anticipation. The open character of reality, which contains in its core the possibility of a radically different way of doing things, provides reality its process-like, fluid character. If fetishism is a process created by our everyday human doing, then reality, which is composed of fetishized forms, is also constructed via process. ‘[T]he concrete imagination and

144 Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Times, p. 367.
145 Ernst Bloch, Man on His Own, p. 83.
146 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 111.
148 Ibid., p. 145.
the imagery of its mediated anticipations are fermenting in the process of the real itself."^{149}

In relation to this point, Marcuse clarifies that ‘Bloch’s notion of concrete utopia refers to a society where human beings no longer have to live their lives as means for earning a living in alienated performances."^{150} Although he does not expand on this idea as far as Bloch is concerned, he is the only commentator to have connected concrete utopia in Bloch and the fight against alienation. Through this comment, he also verifies my earlier explication of the central role that alienation plays in both Marcuse and Bloch. Marcuse also considers Bloch ‘the real Marxist of the twentieth century’ because he ‘tried to conceive theoretically [...] the unfolding of human essence in a changed historical setting’ and ‘could see in Marxism more than political orientation’.\footnote{H. Marcuse, ‘A Conversation with Herbert Marcuse: On Pluralism, Future, and Philosophy’, in H. Marcuse, \textit{Marxism, Revolution and Utopia}, CP 6, Routledge, Oxon, 2014, p. 422.} Unfortunately, he does not go on to clarify this opinion further in the interview from which the foregoing quote is taken. Given the negative and open character of his theorizing of Marxism, however, I would suggest that by human essence he is referring not to a rigid, transhistorical concept, but to the human content of the forms, which is derigidified when it is brought to the fore. When this occurs, Marxism is theorized as a fight for true humanism, not for a change in those who hold hegemony.

Materialism, the existence of human content inside the reified social forms, leads us to the idea that \textit{truth} is also not statically placed somewhere outside human doing. For those who follow Bloch’s dialectical materialism,\footnote{The term ‘dialectical materialism’ is usually used to describe orthodox Marxism. That does not mean, though, that it cannot also be used in terms of critical theory, considering that the reader keeps in mind the content of the terms that has been previously set out.} ‘truth is apparent in process. Not in motionless objective facts, not—as the true truth—in a hypostatized ascension, but in process.’\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \textit{Man on His Own}, p. 117.} There is not a gap separating reason, whose content is traditionally identified with truth, and hope. ‘Reason cannot blossom without hope, hope cannot speak without reason, both in Marxist unity.’\footnote{Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 3, p. 1367.} If utopia, as the radically different way of coming into contact with each other in order to fulfil our fundamental needs and managing our common affairs, can be found in the essence, as the true content of what seemingly appear to be perpetual and independent social forms, then it is unsurprising that Bloch confesses that he ‘attempted to find the concept of
the utopian everywhere. Human life, history and culture are full of it.'  
Hope and utopia provide the foundation of our whole culture from the moment that they arise in everyday human praxis. Hope lies in the human content of the mystified and closed forms, met at the plane of immediacy. ‘Hope is in the darkness itself,’ in the nihilism of bourgeois life:

While it [the well-founded utopia] is a not-yet-being par excellence, something not already present and thus not available to be experienced, something that cannot be exhaustively determined—even so, its direction, [...] which is that of genuine humanism, can be determined [...] Even when the content of this ‘true being’ still finds itself in a condition of latency, and thus manifestly incapable of expression, its existence is adequate for determining what is not true humanism.

One can see here the negative role that utopia and hope play in Bloch’s philosophy. If ‘Utopia that has become concrete provides the key to this, to unalienated order,’ then it chiefly expresses the immanent possibility, the direction towards true humanism—that is, the movement towards a world that will not be upside down, enchanted or topsy-turvy and where the subject of history will not be capital but people’s choices. Bloch holds that ‘[T]he essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present,’ and Adorno agrees to that by adding that [U]topia is [...] in the determined negation of that which merely is. Similarly, ‘hope is not confidence’ but ‘the determined negation of that which continually makes the opposite of the hoped-for object possible’. If fetishization is a process created by daily human doing, then defetishization, dereification or demystification is the true content of hope and utopia. Every time people negate the negativity they experience by revolting against the rule of money—that is, when they react in terms of negative-critical dialectics—they also react in a utopian and hopeful manner. I know of no study besides this one that has attempted to explain why Bloch stressed that ‘[c]oncrete utopia is bound up with dialectical materialism’ and that ‘the dialectic agent of the Not, which drives forward through all the

155 Ernst Bloch, Man as Possibility, p. 282.
156 Ernst Bloch, The Spirit of Utopia, p. 201. The same comment can also be found in ibid., p. 276.
157 Ernst Bloch, Literary Essays, p. 343.
159 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 12.
160 Ibid.
161 Ibid., p. 16.
162 Ibid., p. 17.
163 For Bloch, hope is directly connected to demystification. See The Spirit of Utopia, p. 191.
164 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 172.
stagnation and reification[,] [. . .] is [. . .] nothing more, but certainly noth-
ing less, than hope.' 165 Given the foregoing, I contend that it is a distortion
of Bloch’s theory to suggest that it is unclear ‘how Bloch’s categories of
“false” and “true” utopia are ultimately grounded in anything more than
taste and goodwill’166 and that ‘he rips the concept of possibility from any
determinate analysis of existence and turns it into the property of pure
consciousness.’167

Hope and utopia are thus indispensable categories of non-identity
thinking, of the dialectic between form/appearance and essence/content.
In fact, they are so much ingrained in the concept of philosophy, as this
notion is understood by Bloch, that he holds that ‘philosophy may char-
acterize itself as docta spes, as hope conceived in materialistic terms.’168
Just as negation becomes determinate and concrete because we negate
the immediate, apparent form of the social forms by shedding light on to
their hidden human content, hope and utopia also become negative and
crude when we negate the current fetishized forms and bring to the fore
their concealed human content. If defetishization, utopia and hope are
processes dependent on historical struggles against the rule of money over
our daily life, then hope can indeed be disappointed. This is, of course,
no reason for not engaging with class struggle and fighting for another
world. Since hope depends on historical contingency, ‘hope holds eo ipso
the condition of defeat precariously within itself: it is not confidence.’169

The ‘imagination of the utopian function [. . .] differs from mere fantasy
in that only the former possesses an expectable not-yet-existence.’170 The
historically immanent character of utopia and hope can lead us to con-
clude that ‘hope’s methodology [. . .] dwells in the region of the not-yet,
a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an
enduring indeterminacy.’171 The not-yet-conscious is not a dream or a
fantasy, and its content is not arbitrarily determined. ‘[T]here is within
it [the not-yet-conscious] a content of consciousness which has not yet
become wholly manifest, and is still dawning from the future.’172 It
‘exists only in this space, a space of concrete anticipation’.173 The cur-

165 Ernst Bloch, Dialectics and Hope, p. 8.
166 Stephen Eric Bronner, Utopian Projections: In Memory of Ernst Bloch, in Jamie Owen
Daniel and Tom Moylan (eds.) Not Yet: Reconsidering Ernst Bloch, Verso, London,
167 Ibid., p. 171.
168 Ernst Bloch, On Karl Marx, p. 139.
169 Ernst Bloch, Literary Essays, p. 341.
170 Ernst Bloch, The Utopian Function of Art and Literature, p. 105.
171 Ernst Bloch, p. 341.
173 Ibid., p. 127.
rently not-yet-conscious, that which is not yet, ‘awaits its genesis in the
tendency-latency of process’,\textsuperscript{174} like the objective real hope.

Bloch uses another term to express ‘the real possibility of the
not-yet-known, not-yet-wrought-into being’,\textsuperscript{175} the \textit{Novum}. The sphere
of the Novum, of fear and hope, is identified to that of not-yet being.\textsuperscript{176} It
should be stressed at this point that Bloch refers to a ‘mediated Novum’\textsuperscript{177}
in order to highlight the historically immanent character of the term, the
fact that it originates from the process by which reality is constructed.
This sphere is essentially the one of ‘critical enlightenment’.\textsuperscript{178} Critique
shatters the rigid, closed social forms by throwing light on their negativ-
ity, their alienated content, and revealing the alienated, objectified human
labour that created them. Therefore, it opens wholly new horizons of
possibility in them from the moment that it reveals the existence of the
sphere of the not-yet-being, of the Novum within them. John Holloway
is the only theorist that I am aware of who refers to Bloch, albeit only
once, while underscoring that ‘[n]ot-yet-ness is the struggle to de-congest
time, to emancipate power-to.’\textsuperscript{179} Not-yet-ness decongests time—that is, it
cracks, defetishizes time-by-the-clock, time is money and the social forms
that come from it—in order to reveal potentiality, the inherent possibility,
the fact that ‘the world is seen to be full of negative subjunctive.’\textsuperscript{180}

The existence of the not-yet, the Novum, hope or utopia as the real
content of the forms opens cracks in them. Only by critical thinking can
the existence of ‘the crack of Here and Now in the depictions of the
world context [be] finally grasped’.\textsuperscript{181} Cracks show the way towards an
‘ungrasped existere itself’.\textsuperscript{182} Bloch once again verifies his philosophy’s
direct connection with that of Marx when he holds that ‘Marx’s critique
[. . .] displays all the more sharply the recesses, fissures, cracks, and con-
trasts incorporated in the objectively existing economy.’\textsuperscript{183} ‘The existence
of cracks in our capitalist culture confirms the critical, negative element
latent within it. These fissures and cracks make the world under our feet
tremble because they make us aware, or at least suspicious, of the inher-
et irrationality in capitalism and its unavoidably contradictory character.
Cracks exist even if people attempt to fully adopt the logic of the system,

\textsuperscript{175} Ernst Bloch, \textit{On Karl Marx}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{176} Ernst Bloch, \textit{Man as Possibility}, p. 280.
\textsuperscript{177} Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 1, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., p. 158.
p. 153.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{181} Ernst Bloch, \textit{The Principle of Hope}, Vol. 1, p. 299.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
of time is money, and obey the rules of the game. Cracks unavoidably exist since we cannot live only as ‘personifications of economic categories’ and fully be haunted by capital, as the capitalist social system would like. No matter how successfully the logic of capital is impressed into the minds of people, there will still be human needs that will remain unsatisfied, even for the affluent society, a situation that proves the falseness of the system. As we have seen in the chapter on Horkheimer, the philosophy that can unveil the abnormality that exists within the so-called capitalist normality will make men ‘insecure and on dangerous ground’ and will be ‘a source of annoyance’. According to my unique reading of Bloch’s work, this is the case for his philosophy.

Douglas Kellner is the only reader of Bloch that I know to have stressed that Bloch’s ideology ‘contains a utopian residue or surplus that can be used for social critique’ and that, for Bloch, ‘ideology critique should be a critique of everyday life’. In this study, I have expanded upon Kellner’s position by showing that all of Bloch’s categories, not only ideology, are open and contain a utopian element in their content. Later in his study, Kellner asserts that this utopian surplus is presented ‘in terms of the rise and fall of social classes’ and ‘appears when a class is rising’ and that his Marxism is ‘overly dogmatic’. From my reading of Bloch’s work, however, I believe that his Marxism is far from dogmatic and that Kellner’s assertion derives from the fact that he has not identified the negative and open character of Bloch’s philosophy as I have. Had he done so, he would have been able to stress the notion of cracks that can be opened by everyone in capitalism, and not only by classes during a revolutionary period.

In addition, exactly like Horkheimer, who maintained that a ‘tension characterizes all the concepts of the critical way of thinking,’ Bloch argues that there is an ‘unresolved utopian tension constantly undermining everything shaped’. This tension is the key characteristic of the non-identity character of their philosophy, of the fact that shaped social forms conceal within their appearance irrationality and exploitation. In direct connection to the utopian tension within the form, Bloch, exactly
like Adorno, refers to the unsayable, the ineffable. While Adorno referred to the ineffable by underlining that ‘philosophy’s only raison d’être today is to gain access to the unsayable,’191 Bloch stressed that there is an ‘individualum ineffabile [. . .] a spirit of unconcealed utopia, as the spirit of the hidden human being, finally, shines in’192 and that an ‘unsayable’ lies ‘deeply hidden, uncanny within the concept’.193 This is the utopian, the unknown, the not-yet-conscious element within things. The existence of the ineffable in Bloch was recognized by Adorno himself, although Adorno did not analyse and connect it to Bloch’s dialectics.194 Consequently, Adorno also confesses his admiration for the open character of Bloch’s philosophy, which is linked with the ineffable, when he writes that Bloch ‘refuses to allow this [the way of things] to harden out into any positive form; instead it stays open-ended, waiting for a happiness which remains in the offing.’195 Moreover, Adorno indirectly pinpoints the sphere of the not-yet, upon which utopia is based, when he argues that Bloch ‘is forced to think of it [utopia] as something which manifests itself. It is neither true, nor is it non-existent.’196 Nevertheless, he criticizes Bloch, suggesting that

his transcendental realm becomes an idea. In consequence, his philosophy returns to the prison of the very idealism from which it was designed to escape [. . .] Bloch’s obsession with the quasi-existence of the imaginary is the source of the remarkably static nature of his thought, at the heart of all his dynamism.197

In my reading, Adorno’s criticism of Bloch in regard to the existence of the imaginary in his theory is unfair. I have attempted to show that the imaginative is identified to the surplus, the remainder that lies in the form, in the thing itself, as the possibility inherent in it. It is my belief, therefore, that Adorno underestimated the social materiality in Bloch’s social theory.

Conclusion

Bloch maintains that since ‘the surface’ of the ‘empirical’ or ‘phenomenological findings’ ‘has cracked [. . .] it can no longer bear any calculation,

193 Ibid., p. 193.
195 Ibid., p. 54.
196 Ibid., p. 56.
197 Ibid., p. 59.
let alone any ontology of the immediate given fact." It follows that there is not a fixed point of reference from which people could derive the meaning of their lives. Truth does not exist anywhere in a stable form ready to be implemented. Instead, truth is made in the aforementioned ‘tendency-latency of process’ along with and because of the existence of the cracks and fissures provoked by our fight against the rule of capital in our daily human doing. When this is recognized, the philosopher or social scientist’s attention is no longer restricted to analysing the appearance of the social forms or the big ideas, but is instead turned to the marginal material, to the irrational, perverted way with which people connect with each other and with nature in their daily lives in order to sustain their livelihood in the capitalist mode of production. For the first time, I have attempted to show that all the concepts used by Bloch, such as dreams, hope, utopia, critique and dialectical materialism, originate from the theory of topsy-turviness as it is presented in Capital, a theory that regards the world in capitalism as inherently irrational. As my special analysis has shown, all the foregoing concepts in Bloch’s philosophy can be seen to link with each other in a coherent manner only if their origins are attributed to Capital and the idea of fetishism as a process.

198 Ernst Bloch, Heritage of Our Times, p. 288.
8  The Descendants of Negative Dialectics*

Dialectics and Democracy in Open Marxism

Introduction

It would appear that mainstream contemporary critical theory and the majority of anti-capitalist and radical social theorists are no longer interested in the scholarship and insights produced by the early Frankfurt School. Despite this recent lack of attention, stimulating contributions to critical theory can still be found in the work of a select group of political theorists in the name of ‘Open Marxism’. Probably the best known among this group are John Holloway and Werner Bonefeld, both of whom employ the intellectual tools of the early Frankfurt School in their development and elaboration of state theory.

Although not political philosophers per se, Holloway’s and Bonefeld’s ideas contain many important philosophical insights. While their brand of political philosophy is perhaps atypical and out of the mainstream, it nonetheless brings to the fore a number of important and timely issues concerning the British state, European Union politics, processes of social change, negative practice, and the meaning and significance of contemporary tactics of subversion. In consideration of the subject of this book my emphasis will focus on the methodological concerns and philosophical background of Open Marxism rather than its presentation of social policy. My basic objective is to situate the philosophy of Open Marxism within the context of the early Frankfurt School.

I will begin this chapter with an analysis of Open Marxism’s criticism of structuralism, followed by a discussion of Open Marxism’s assessment of subversion and negativity. Attention will then be directed towards an examination of Open Marxists’ criticism of state theory as represented by Bob Jessop. I will then expand on Open Marxism’s theory of the state and its understanding of the struggle against the capitalist status quo by creating ‘cracks’ in its edifice.

According to Open Marxists, structuralist thinkers, despite their radical and anti-capitalist perspectives, are tied to traditional methods of theorizing. This means they endorse a bourgeois-liberal theory of politics. I would contend that Open Marxism’s analysis and criticism of structuralism has succeeded in shedding light on the potential social implications that already exist in the negative dialectics tradition.

Open Marxism and the State Derivation Debate

Two of the best-known state theorists in the Marxist tradition are Bob Jessop and Joachim Hirsch. Their reading of dialectics, and consequently of the state, runs contrary to the readings offered by Open Marxists. In order to better understand Open Marxism it is necessary to first familiarize ourselves with the debate.

For Hirsch, ‘the attempt to systematize concrete functions of the state [. . .] must focus on the development of class relations and class struggles mediated by the transformations in the economic base.’¹ Hirsch also sets out the claim that ‘the first problem to explore is the question of the state apparatus’s capacity to “manage” the economic and social reproduction process.’² Hirsch implicitly claims that the contours of the state are formed in another realm apart from the economic base—namely, the superstructure, which is, in some way, also related to class struggle. Such an approach is representative of undialectical, two-dimensional thinking analysed previously in the book, mainly in the chapter on Lukacs. Hirsch follows the classification logic of traditional theory. He attempts to change the form of classification by proposing another kind of relationship between the state and economic base, or class struggle. Yet, he does not determine the fetishized state form negatively. In that case he would consider, as his ‘first problem’, bringing to the fore the underlying content of the state form which lies in the contradictory way of satisfying our needs under capitalism. His purpose would involve demonstrating the state’s ability to survive as a result of contradictions in everyday living.

Hirsch also points out that ‘State measures’ should not be evaluated ‘as detached strategies of a political instance, understood finally as being indeed “autonomous”, i.e. as obeying independent laws of motion’.³ Curiously, Hirsch’s starting point sidesteps the obvious question ‘what is it about social relations in bourgeois society that makes them appear in

² Ibid., p. 98.
³ Ibid., p. 99.
separate forms as economic relations and political relations?’ Beginning with that question would have required embracing the dialectic between appearance/form and essence/content concerning aspirations towards the dereification of the state. As such, his starting point would involve assessing ‘the antagonistic relation between capital and labour in the process of accumulation’ and the forms that this relation takes in appearance. Maintaining that the regulation approach follows Marx’s Capital, Jessop believes that the state is ‘a form-determined social relation’. In his view both approaches share a common ‘concern with the dialectic of form and content’. In this context, he argues that

The most important general aspect of the form of the capitalist state is its particularization (its institutional separation from the circuit of capital) [. . .] The state is required by the value form insofar as there are certain extra-economic preconditions of the circuit of capital that must be secured through an impartial organ standing outside and above the market.

In his theory the state is ‘relatively autonomous from the particular class interests’ and ‘helps to secure economic as well as political class domination’. For Jessop, the content of Marxian dialectic means that there is a dialectic between ‘the structural and the strategic moments [. . .] Their dialectic is nothing more [. . .] than the structural conditioning of strategies [. . .] and the strategic transformation of structural ensembles.’

Thus far we can discern that Jessop, similar to Hirsch, attempts a complex classification scheme in the frame of reference of traditional theory. The state is theorized as a relatively autonomous entity that has some kind of interaction with the value form and the economic base. Yet, the

8 Bob Jessop, Accumulation Strategies, State Forms, and Hegemonic Projects, p. 98.
state stands apart as another realm ‘outside and above the market’. The fact that an overdetermination\textsuperscript{11} takes place does not mean that the state form has been defetishized or demystified.

Jessop’s refusal to base his argument upon the contradictions in everyday living can also be deduced from his argument that

The most significant subjects, [. . .] identities, and [. . .] demands need not be expressed in ‘class’ terms [. . .] What is really important is their repercussions [. . .] on capital’s ability to continue its self-valorisation [. . .] this is why we must start out with the categories such as commodity, value, money and capital [. . .] before we can even begin to grasp the significance of particular class struggles.\textsuperscript{12}

As is evident from this passage, Jessop adopts a dualism that shows the non-dialectical character of his thinking. For Jessop, categories such as value and money are closed. In other words, these categories are reified since they do not have, as their content, alienation in everyday living. They do not contain an inherent contradictory character that reveals the unavoidable class conflict that lies within them. Class conflict in Open Marxism’s theory is understood in terms of two opposed philosophies of time (time is money versus time for doing things in solidarity and peace) that constitute the content of the categories and not as the struggle for power between groups of people with opposed social interests, as understood by Jessop and most Marxist scholars.

The fact that he discards the philosophy of fetishism as a process, which is the key idea for Open Marxism, leads Jessop to the view that the treatment of ‘iron laws’

as ‘objective laws’ is not intended to separate them off radically from the realm of ‘subjective action’. Instead they are treated as ‘objective’ to emphasize their emergent, quasi-natural and independent operation ‘behind the backs’ of the producers.\textsuperscript{13}

Jessop’s understanding of dialectics is shackled to the logic of dualism, of the traditional theoretical approach between structure/system and agency/action externally related as two distinct modes of social existence. The fact that the two realms are interrelated in his studies does not mean that he escapes dualism. In my view, for Marx and the early Frankfurt School, laws do not operate as ‘quasi-natural and independent’. The real content

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., p. 79.

\textsuperscript{12} Bob Jessop, Polar Bears and Class Struggle: Much Less Than a Self-Criticism, pp. 152–153.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p. 160.
of all the categories that constitute capital’s logic is human. People
themselves unconsciously create the logic of capital that only appears
as an iron law. Jessop does not take into consideration the notion of
the spellbound character of capitalism that has been emphasized in the
negative dialectics approach. This approach indicates that, while people
attempt to satisfy their basic needs, they also inadvertently promote the
need of money to multiply itself. People’s concrete labour occurs under
the dictates of socially necessary labour time and is thus turned into
alienated, abstract labour. The different fetish-forms are expressions of
this perversion. In this context, people act as ‘personifications of eco-
nomic categories’.14 This is the reason that capitalism is an ‘enchanted,
perverted, topsy-turvy world’.15 Jessop cannot explain Marx’s idea of
topsy-turveness and perversion nor does he raise ‘the fundamental ques-
tion of the substance of value’. Instead, and ‘[c]ontrary to Jessop, that
which proceeds behind the backs of the subjects is the movement of the
social totality of value or, in other words, the abstract category of labour
in action.’16

For Holloway, Jessop, Hirsch and Poulantzas ‘[e]conomic analysis is
seen as providing an analysis of the objective conditions of struggle,’ and
categories such as value, crisis and surplus value ‘are understood as eco-
nomic categories, as having an objective validity which does not depend
on class struggle’.17 The importance of struggle may not be denied by
regulation theorists but, in their state theory, Marxism ‘becomes a theory
not of struggle, but of the objective conditions of struggle, [which is] a
very different thing’.18

The primary question should not be the correct relation between struc-
ture and strategy/agency, as Jessop argues, nor should it be about the
state’s capacity to manage the economy, as Hirsch holds, but rather

what is peculiar about the social relations of capitalism that gives rise
to the rigidification (or particularization) of social relations in the
form of the state? [. . .] What is it that gives rise to the constitution

14 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 1, Collected Works, Volume 35, Lawrence and Wishart,
15 K. Marx, Capital, Volume 3, Collected Works, Volume 37, Lawrence and Wishart,
16 Werner Bonefeld, The Recomposition of the British State during the 1980s, Dartmouth,
17 John Holloway, From Scream of Refusal to Scream of Power: The Centrality of Work,
in Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, John Holloway and Kosmas Psychopedis (eds.)
18 Ibid., p. 160.
of the economic and the political as distinct moments of the same social relations? 19

The “dialectics of structure and agency” gives dialectics a bad name since this is a ‘vicious circularity of definitional thought that seeks to render terms coherent by external reference to one another’. 20 Our focus should be on what happens in our doing in everyday living and the forms it takes by way of fetishized, reified entities, such as the state, from which we feel estranged. Here one can pose the fundamental question concerning why humans create perverted forms like the state, capital and credit for managing their human affairs. Only this kind of focus can shift our attention to the contradictory nature of social relations in capitalism and shed light on alienation in everyday life.

Bonefeld is correct in stressing that Jessop ‘destroys the Marxian notion of a contradictory constitution of social relations’ where ‘[t]he result is that the focus of analysis shifts from a conceptualization of class struggle to a conceptualization of the structural framework of struggle.’ 21 Bonefeld also states that Jessop dismisses class struggle. 22 However, this is not exactly accurate. Jessop is correct in defending himself, emphasizing, as we have already seen, that he does not ignore struggle since it is a vital component of his dialectic between strategy and structure. In my view a more accurate assessment would be that Jessop undermines the role of struggle since struggle is no longer the essence that lies hidden in the concepts and, therefore, does not constitute the content of the categories.

Bonefeld is correct, though, to accuse Jessop of adopting the view ‘that the essence of society is not the human being [since] [. . .] capital is the subject’. 23 In the regulation approach capital is not an alienated, objectified form. It does not originate from a hidden essence, content, or more specifically, from alienated objectified labour, but operates in another dimension to that of the state and is turned into ‘a transhistorical subject’. 24

According to approaches that aspire to better classify the relation between the political and the economic—economic base and state or ideological superstructure, or structure and agency/subjectivity—the concept

22 Ibid.
24 Werner Bonefeld, Crisis of Theory, p. 33.
of labour does not play a central role in historical progress since it is separated from capital.\textsuperscript{25} Unfortunately this kind of dualist reading of Marxism is all too prevalent in the literature on this topic.\textsuperscript{26} Therefore, the mainstream reading of Marxism cannot account for the intrinsic irrational character of the capitalist mode of production since its forms remain closed and reified. They are not theorized as products of the irrationality of the logic time is money, of the pressure to continuously conform human \textit{doing} to the demands of socially necessary labour time. This kind of mainstream Marxist reading is very similar to

the conventional view of modern economic theory, according to which economics is the study of the distribution of scarce resources among different people [. . .] rather than one of the peculiar capitalist forms of social wealth, and the manner of its production and reproduction, which is the subject matter of Marx’s critique of political economy.\textsuperscript{27}

Mainstream Marxism also cannot retain the concept of totality. The unity of the different forms or spheres is left unexplained. Its inability to see the unavoidably contradictory character of the essence of our existence in capitalism leads to a fragmentary image of the world. ‘[S]ocial reality is seen as determined by multiple causes and effects, the integration of which is ensured by the imposition of a dominant hegemonic logic of capital.’\textsuperscript{28} What should be kept in mind, however, is that with structuralism the hegemonic logic of capital is not formed by people’s everyday reality—that is, through their interactions with each other in a contradictory manner in order to sustain their livelihood. Rather, ‘in structuralism the contradiction obtains in the form of structural inadequacies and/or dysfunctionalities as between different regions such as the “economic” and “political”.’\textsuperscript{29}

For Bonefeld, the same line of criticism can be followed for autonomist Marxism, whose key representative is Toni Negri.\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., p. 42.
\textsuperscript{27} Werner Bonefeld, \textit{Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy}, pp. 34–35.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. I have also attempted to follow this angle in my reading of Negri in the introduction and in the first chapter.
Structuralist and autonomist approaches are complementary because both depend on the notion of ‘capital’ as a logical entity [. . .] Both approaches depend on a determinist view of capital inasmuch as capital is perceived fetishistically as an extra-human thing.\textsuperscript{31}

Both autonomist Marxist and structuralism cannot identify the human content of forms, ‘the contradictory character of capital in and through the constitutive power of labour, a constitutive power which exists in and against and beyond capital’.\textsuperscript{32} Class struggle is seen outside the concept of capital. They offer a fragmentary picture of the world that remains restrained in the frame of reference of classification, identity reason and of course fetishism.\textsuperscript{33} In this world capital rules. The mystified character of the world is never explained by using the concept of people’s ordinary and daily \textit{doing}. The fact that people cannot control the products-forms-social entities of their \textit{doing}, and are enslaved by them, is not identified as the main problem in the capitalist mode of production. Consequently the enchanted, topsy-turvy character of the world remains a mystery.

In contrast, the starting point of our theory should not be strategies of accumulation or the hegemonic logic of capital but ‘the social constitution of the historical movement of labour’.\textsuperscript{34} Subjectivity and objectivity are mediated to each other, exist through each other and are moments of the same relation. ‘[H]uman relations exist, contradictorily, in the form of relations between things [. . .] in and through these forms.’\textsuperscript{35} Form and content, objectified forms and subjectivity, are both parts of the same relation, are different in unity. In the capitalist mode of production subjectivity takes place in a perverted way, since it must subject itself to socially necessary time. This produces an objectivity that appears to be constituted by autonomous forms that hide human \textit{doing}. So, structuralism cannot offer a view from the perspective of totality since it remains only on the plane of appearance, of form-fetishes. Its world picture is partial and limited.

In the introduction\textsuperscript{36} we saw that for Marx, state and law are objects with a ‘rational character’ that ‘must develop as something imbued with contradictions in itself’\textsuperscript{37} and that the existence of the double character of ‘labour represented in the commodity [. . .] is, in fact, the whole secret

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Werner Bonefeld, Human Practice and Perversion, p. 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{32} Ibid., p. 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{33} John Holloway, \textit{Change the World without Taking Power}, p. 96.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Werner Bonefeld, Human Practice and Perversion, p. 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 50.
  \item \textsuperscript{36} I refer to the introduction of the book, not of this chapter.
\end{itemize}
of the critical conception.'\textsuperscript{38} The contradictory character of the state form can be explained only if it is theorized as a product that originates from the double character of labour—that is, from the fact that labour in capitalism, just like the commodity, has use value and exchange value that, in the end, dominate.\textsuperscript{39} Employing this train of thought, philosophizing on the contradictory character of the state is to shed light on how hidden contradictions in labour express themselves. I cannot see how the structuralist understanding of the dialectic, as a dialectic between ‘structural and strategic moments’, can explain this connection.

The Screams of the Force of Dignity: Subversion and Negativity in Bourgeois Democracy

Open Marxism’s philosophy is based on negativity and alienation, which exist because of the perverted notion of time that, unavoidably, is embraced by capitalist society. We are capable of opening form-fetishes, and thus demystifying them, only if we identify negativity, human suffering, as their content. Open Marxism does not aspire to better describe human affairs nor does it aspire to aid us with forming a political plan that can better regulate them. On the contrary, it aims to illuminate, in its different apparent forms, the concealed suffering that unavoidably permeates the essence of our existence in capitalism. Similar to other philosophers influenced by Frankfurt School theory, Open Marxists’ thinking is imbued with corporeal materialism. They seek to show the utopian character of the ‘administered’ society whose normal function is based on the illusion of the incessant multiplication of profit. Since profit is dependent on the production of surplus value, the pressure to subject ourselves even more to the logic of ‘time is money’ will remain unstoppable. The richness of human experience will still need to submit itself to the homogeneous time of capital.\textsuperscript{40} Yet, we are still human beings with needs that cannot be made to fit to the dictates of capital, of profit. No matter how much we would like to fully act as agents of value, as personifications of economic categories, we cannot. We are doomed to be misfits in capitalist society and thus to struggle against the rule of money, since it is utopian to fully identify the meaning of our lives to that of capital. In that case the only meaning our lives have would be to produce the maximum possible profit. Still, no matter how hard we try, it is impossible to fully adjust our life

\textsuperscript{38} Marx Letter to Engels, 8 January 1868, CW 42, Lawrence and Wishart, London, p. 514.
\textsuperscript{39} Marx himself makes the connection between the double character of the commodity and labour in the aforementioned letter (ibid.).
\textsuperscript{40} Sergio Tischler, Time of Reification and Time of Insubordination: Some Notes, in Werner Bonefeld and Kosmas Psychopedis (eds.) \textit{Human Dignity: Social Autonomy and the Critique of Capitalism}, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005, p. 132. This article is the best I have found on the notion of time in Marxist thinking.
towards that purpose. Therefore, our culture is intrinsically non-identical and contradictory:

[T]he idea that market failure is a consequence of too little or too much regulation is deceitful in that it identifies the cause of crisis in the adopted means of economic regulation, as if crisis resolution is a matter of technical fine-tuning.\(^41\)

The constant pressure to identify ourselves with the rule of money, to the dictates of growth, means that we will always live in a state of uncertainty, crisis and struggle. We live in and through a relation of struggle. As we saw in the previous chapter on Bloch, this is the nihilist element in our culture. We produce the bars of our prison during our efforts to sustain a livelihood. We are not victims of irresponsible politicians or bankers or of a force that lies outside us, of a different plane outside everyday life. That could be the conclusion only of a superficial political theory. In contrast, we make capitalism. For critical/Open Marxists, class struggle does not take place after subordination has been established, after the fetishized forms of social relations have been constituted; rather it is a conflict [. . .] about the fetishisation of social relations [. . .] Class struggle does not take place within the constituted forms of capitalist social relations: rather the constitution of these forms is itself class struggle [. . .] Class struggle, then, is the unceasing daily antagonism [. . .] between alienation and dis-alienation [. . .] between fetishisation and de-fetishisation.\(^42\)

We are far from the mainstream understanding of class struggle as the struggle that takes place only when groups of people with opposed class interests attempt to occupy the state or to somehow influence its policy to their advantage. For Open Marxism ‘[w]e exist against-in-and-beyond capital [. . .] everyone is torn apart by the class antagonism.’\(^43\) On the one hand we have to follow the rule of money in order to survive in this bewitched world, while on the other hand we are still human beings with needs that cannot fully conform to the logic of ‘time is money.’ ‘We classify ourselves in so far as we produce capital, in so far as we respect money [. . .] [yet] [w]e simultaneously struggle against our class-ification in so far as we are human.’\(^44\) Bearing this in mind, class is not a category that


\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 36.

\(^{44}\) Ibid.
applies only to economy. If the content of the concept is a specific notion of how we spend time, then class struggle determines our entire existence. This is what some critics of Open Marxism have not understood. Thus, it is wrong to accuse Open Marxism ‘of upholding a somewhat heroic vision of class struggle that collapses into an essentialist “workerist” interpellation of identities and interests divorced from everyday lived experience’\(^{45}\) or of succumbing to the ‘temptation of proclaiming a singular constitutive source of human social practice’.\(^{46}\) That is because class is under no circumstances sufficient as well as necessary for analyzing human social practice in capitalist societies (as argued by Open Marxism). Much more work needs to be done on conceptualising both how a plurality of unequal social relations [. . .] are anchored in the material basis for existence.\(^{47}\)

This criticism is also repeated by Simon Susen, who holds that it is ‘reductive to suggest that there is one dominant rationality that governs differentiated societies [. . .] one of the strengths of liberal-pluralist societies is their capacity to allow for rational dialogue.’\(^{48}\) For this reason he accuses John Holloway of ‘economic reductionism’, for considering ‘capitalist domination as more significant than other forms of social domination’.\(^{49}\)

My opposition to this line of reasoning\(^{50}\) is that class struggle, in its Open Marxist guise, takes place continually in our everyday world, whose appearance is only that of ordinary life. Classes exist because of the inherently contradictory way capitalist society reproduces itself. If our way of life were not contradictory and anomalous there would not exist any opposed social interests perpetuated during the process of social reproduction. And classes would not exist either. That is why class is a negative category derived from an inverted world. Class is a negative category of a false totality—the world. Society remains class struggle, as Adorno had pointed out. If the capitalist mode of production does indeed provide people with the opportunity to live in accordance with other

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47 Ibid., p. 347.


49 Ibid., p. 299.

50 This reasoning is also followed by Post-Marxists and many so-called radical democratic theorists today.
values that have no bearing on the accumulation of assets and still allow one to exist without starving, then why do people not choose them? The only explanation that Susen can provide is that people have been deceived into accepting this alienated kind of life. However, I do not believe this to be the case. Most people would definitely choose to work fewer hours, less intensely, and to work at different jobs than their current ones if such conditions would allow them to continue to sustain a decent livelihood.

The starting point of the negation of this negativity cannot be a focus on capital, its accumulation strategies or the state. 'To follow the agenda of capital is to accept that it is the Subject, to lose sight of our own power — to do (and capital’s absolute dependence on that power).’\(^{51}\) Fetishized forms, be they as state, capital, class or money, are processes, forms of struggle. If we were happy with our lives and the way social affairs are managed, philosophy would have very little practical relevance. During the second Republican presidential candidates’ debate in November 2015, Marco Rubio claimed, ‘We need more welders, less philosophers.’ This is a completely accurate comment for a perverted society that privileges increases in GDP as its primary goal. Philosophers cannot be productive while making a living as welders. To philosophize, at least in the manner of critical theory/early Frankfurt School theorizing, definitely runs contrary to the ‘reasonable’ standards of an ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world’. To think in Marxist terms, dialectically and critically, is to investigate society from the standpoint of struggle and contradiction.

Traditional/bourgeois theory on the other hand takes the standpoint of constituted forms, for which social forms, capital or structures are conceived as constituted things, presupposed.

The standpoint of constituted forms entails an inversion of the relation between object and subject: the system-properties become a subjective power and the human being transforms into the executor of the demands emanating from the ‘system’ [. . .] Humanity thus becomes a resource for structural reproduction.\(^{52}\)

However, in critical theory ‘[i]t is from rage that thought is born [. . .] The starting point of theoretical reflection is opposition, negativity, struggle [. . .] In the beginning is the scream. We scream.’\(^{53}\) At this point I would like to include in my analysis Marcel Stoetzler’s criticism of Crack


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Capitalism. He maintains that the endorsement of anti-capitalism for the sake of it might in fact turn out to be regressive and accuses Holloway of it. In Stoetzler's view Holloway identifies ‘revolution-as-the-negation-of-capital’ and ‘communism-as-the-negation-of capital’ and consequently ‘us-as-capital’ and ‘us-as-not-capital’. As a result Holloway does not ‘take reactionary forms of anti-capitalism, especially fascism, stronger into account’. For me, these two dimensions are mediated to each other and exist in parallel. Every time we stand up to the rule of money and revolt against capital we promote the process of communism. I do not think that this separation is necessary. Holloway’s anti-capitalism is not reactionary, as Stoetzler seems to believe.

Anti-capitalist struggle takes place (as a process) when we come out of the shadows, when we make ‘our doing-in-against-and-beyond-labour’ visible, when we deny ‘the mask of abstract labour’. Holloway’s point is that everyone can participate in this struggle, not only those who are consciously politically committed to a party. In Crack Capitalism he provides numerous examples of this form of struggle, from the mother who chooses to work fewer hours in order to spend more time playing with her child to the man who skips work in order to cultivate his own garden. ‘Rather than looking to the hero with true class consciousness, a concept of revolution must start from the confusions and contradictions that tear us all apart. There is no pure, revolutionary subject.’ There is no need to identify the revolutionary subject because all of us are this subject to the extent that we refuse to bow to the rule of money in our everyday life. The need to identify the revolutionary subject appears when the primary goal is occupation of state power. To keep state occupation as our primary goal in our struggle to fight for the protection of our dignity means that we have misdiagnosed that which actually restricts our freedom, which is not the state but the social relation of capital, the rule of money. Capital is like a noose around our neck, dictating that we should always work faster and seek to work longer hours.

Dignity entails the human need for time, as against a life consisting solely of labour-time [. . .] and the need for [. . .] solidarity, against the isolation of and indifference between individuals seeking to make ends meet as personifications of economic categories. [. . .] Dignity [. . .] is anti-capitalist in the profound sense of breaking capitalist
time, in confronting the faster-faster-faster of capitalism with a ‘whoa, let’s slow down, let’s discuss whether we really want a new highway, whether we want the mechanisation of agriculture.’

This is a materialist and dialectical understanding of dignity since it originates from the social constitution of the term, from the way we connect with each other in order to sustain social reproduction as the most basic form. Dignity is not a concept of an empty moralizing theory but of a social theory with origins in the contradictions we encounter in everyday living. This reflection of dignity will consequently transform the idea of democracy. Democracy unavoidably entails ‘the democratization of social time, transforming it from its reduction to product and cash into human social time. Time as measure of social wealth and time as human self-determination belong to different worlds.’

The perverted concept of social wealth maintained in capitalism is underlined by Marx in the first sentence of the first volume of *Capital*: ‘The wealth of those societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails presents itself as “an immense accumulation of commodities”, its unit being a single commodity.’ A critical dialectical theory that continually questions, which deciphers appearances as social, cannot but ask why does this happen in capitalism and what could be the meaning of wealth in a non-capitalist society. Although we cannot fully predict what people would consider to be the meaning of wealth in some kind of non-capitalist society, we can say that it would definitely not mean accumulation of commodities. It would likely mean, among other things, more time for meeting human needs.

If we retain the state form in our theory of social change, we remain imprisoned in the logic of the party.

Party cages the multitude [. . .] For the party to be the party, it has to expropriate, contain, and control this alternative public sphere—the sphere where the multitude determines itself in the course of its own democratic becoming [. . .] [T]he party transforms the not-yet of

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social autonomy in action into a well ordered, thoughtlessly thinking voting bloc.\footnote{Werner Bonefeld, Notes on Movement and Uncertainty, in David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott and David Watts (eds.) \textit{Shut Them Down! The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and the Movement of Movements}, Autonomedia, Brooklyn, 2005.}

Human variety and creativity cannot be restrained to the demands of the party. We should also always bear in mind that ‘[T]he state as the political force of the law of value [. . .] is a tax state [and thus] it depends entirely on the progressive accumulation of the wealth of the nation.’\footnote{Werner Bonefeld, \textit{Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy}, p. 174.} This would suggest that in the capitalist mode of production no matter how much state officials would like to promote people’s interests at the expense of capitalists, they remain nonetheless dependent on, and tethered to, the capitalist’s profits to maintain the welfare state. When capitalists go bankrupt so too does the state. The ‘enchanted, perverted, topsy-turvy world in which Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre do their ghost-walking as social characters and at the same time directly as mere things’\footnote{K. Marx, \textit{Capital}, Volume 3, CW 37, p. 817.} continues to strike a blow to human dignity. In the bourgeois form of democracy people are conceived as property owners endowed with abstract rights, as agents of value, not as human beings with needs.

A critical understanding of the state employs the key concept of determinate negation. We determine the social entity of the state, or whatever it may be, by negating its apparent form that is met at the plane of immediacy. We negate the immediate mystified form by searching for its content, its origins on a social basis, for the contradictions of our alienated existence in our everyday life. This is the nihilist character of bourgeois culture. State exists in the form of the one-dimensional, myopic society that functions ‘rationally’ only by following the rule of money. State and all other categories that bourgeois thought uses in order to describe the world are symptoms of a perverted understanding of normalcy. For traditional theory, state provides cohesion in a crazy capitalist world, but only in appearance.

In contrast, for critical theory, which finds the content of concepts in how human basic needs are satisfied in our everyday living, the determining factor that gives cohesion to capitalist society is not the state or the economy but the way our doing is organized. This happens by submission to the dictates of abstract labour, to the accumulation of money. Thus, in capitalism social cohesion becomes a power that cannot be controlled by anyone. It appears to have its own dynamic, although this dynamic exists because our everyday living is organized in such a way that we give life to
its autonomy. What appears, though, is not an illusion; it is real. Fetishism is real, not false consciousness. Our current totality has its own logic, that of capital, and has but one goal: the creation of money by money.

Bearing this discussion in mind, I now turn my attention to the following sorts of questions: How can we stop making capitalism and prevent the reproduction of an inverted, perverted world that imprisons us in its seemingly invisible dynamic? How can we produce a different social cohesion that respects human dignity? How can we come together not as negated subjects or as subjects who are separated from the result of their doing but as subjects whose creations promote solidarity and peace? These are questions that open our horizons of the meaning of politics. Needless to say, traditional theorists are incapable of posing such questions.

For Open Marxism fetishism is the centrepiece of Marx’s philosophy because the term describes the ‘rupture of the social flow of doing’, the fact that ‘in capitalism, the done is severed from and turned against the doing’ (italics mine). 66 People, as the sole subjects of this world, create a world with forms that enslave them, that appear to have an autonomous logic of their own. As a result, people’s doing is hidden in the content of these forms that now appear as the real subjects of history. We are forced to follow the rule and logic of money, instead of our need for peace and respect for each other’s needs. In the context of this inversion, criticism, or critique, is defetishized and demystified since its goal is to explain the mystery of the existence of autonomous forms, which appear as such at the plane of immediacy. ‘Genetic criticism involves the [. . .] understanding that those alien objects are the product of our own self-alienated subjectivity.’ 67 Considering this, the thought-provoking question to be posed by critical theorists would be ‘[h]ow do we disrupt and recreate these forms each day?’ 68 Social forms-entities are now opened and proven to be nothing but ‘historical modes of existence of social relations [. . .] highly volatile, highly unstable, constantly challenged, disrupted, re-formed’. 69

The negation of the subordination of our everyday activity in this totality is the dialectical element within the Marxian notion of dialectical materialism. Negative dialectics is the dialectics of our misfitting, 70 ‘the negative restlessness of misfitting’ 71 that unfolds in ‘the power of No’. 72 It is our refusal to participate in the material reproductive process of society as it occurs within the moment. ‘Negativity, our refusal of capital,
is the crucial starting-point [. . .] For the scream to grow in strength, there must be a recuperation of doing, a development of power-to’ (italics mine).\textsuperscript{73} Every time we scream and say, ‘That’s it, I’ve had enough. I cannot work faster, more intense and in a manner that its only goal is to produce more profit. I will form my doing only with respect to the fulfilment of my fellow people’s needs, ignoring the need for profit’\textsuperscript{74} the system is left in tatters (italics mine). ‘Crisis is [. . .] the expression of the force of our dignity [. . .] We are the crisis of capital and proud of it.’\textsuperscript{75}

Those who will act in this manner do not contribute to progress in the way this concept is understood in contemporary culture. They will not be friendly towards investment opportunities. They will obstruct the flow of money. The cost of national bonds will skyrocket since the state will prove unreliable with respect to its debt. Money will not flow into the state’s coffers; its deficit will grow and recessions will appear. Businesses will be incapable of repaying their debt to their lenders; these banks will go bankrupt. In this bleak scenario of crisis, growth will appear as the only solution. Yet, even if growth takes place it will happen only until the next crisis occurs and when money can no longer be multiplied.

When the prime minister of Greece announced a referendum for 5 July 2015, on the troika, capital control was immediately imposed the following day. As a result of fiscal and monetary uncertainty, in the following three months 30,102 more Greek workers were fired than employed as the recession grew, along with the state’s debt.\textsuperscript{76} This took place despite the fact that, in the end, the Greek government succumbed to the troika’s plan. Capitalism’s logic permeates our lives to such an extent that it becomes completely incapable of tolerating expression of opinion on matters of economic planning. Capitalism cannot tolerate democracy.

People participate in a thriller whose development and unfolding cannot consciously be controlled; they appear spellbound, as pawns of autonomous forces. The more a person embraces the logic of the spell and becomes a zombie of capital the greater the possibility of survival in this mad, spellbound society, even if survival is dependent on leading an alienated life. While promoting the spellbound dynamic that imprisons them, individuals continue to indirectly applaud the ‘Madness in a world ruled by money and in which the bounds of reality and rationality are set by money’.\textsuperscript{77}

If we theorize capitalism ‘from the perspective of its crisis, its contradictions, its weaknesses’ we come to the conclusion that ‘we ourselves are

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 208.
\textsuperscript{74} John Holloway, A Note on Hope and Crisis, Sociology, v. 48, n. 5, 2014, p. 1072.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} John Holloway, A Note on Hope and Crisis, p. 1071.
those contradictions. This is crisis theory, Critical Theory. Critical/crisis theory is the theory of our own misfitting.' 78 Critical theory is scientific and materialistic since ‘[t]he establishment of true materialism and of real science’ takes place ‘by making the [alienated and contradictory] social relationship of “man to man” the basic principle of the theory’. 79 In the context of critical/crisis theory the central question is not how to describe, regulate or find solutions but how we can reclaim our dignity, which then leads to that ‘of how we assume [. . .] the responsibility of breaking with capital here and now’ 80 since ‘dignity is itself an exploration, a shifting process of creating social relations against-and-beyond-capital.’ 81

The question that critical/crisis theory asks is not ‘how do we understand the patterns of domination’ but ‘how do we find hope in a black night?’ ‘How do we see crisis where it appears that there is not crisis?’ 82 How do we liberate human creativity, doing, from the dictates of profit-making? How do we break identity through our doing and defetishize, denaturalize, demystify, dereify social forms? How do we tear apart the straitjacket that the power of movement of money, which is the force of cohesion in capitalism, imposes on us?

We create this straitjacket, the logic of social cohesion, our prison, since it is the product of our abstract labour. 83 Holloway is right in asserting that we do not know exactly how we will change the world. Considering the dialectic between form and content, we cannot know beforehand what precise form our doing will take if the content, the essence of reality, changes—that is, if the way in which people come to terms with each other and with nature in order to satisfy their most basic needs changes. The fight for our dignity cannot take certain, predetermined steps, since we cannot predict the result of the cracks. Dignity is thus ‘a leaping [. . .] swinging, dancing, never a marching’. 84

If we had the answers perhaps we could form a transition plan to socialism. However, in that case we would not take into consideration the unpredictable nature of human creativity and heterogeneity, difference, the variable forms that human doing might take. We would have predicted how our fellow humans would think and act after their liberation from the restraints of money accumulation. We would have annulled the democratic process of debating on how we will come together with each other in order to satisfy our basic needs. We would have discarded the fact that

78 John Holloway, Crack Capitalism, p. 9.
80 John Holloway, Crack Capitalism, p. 28.
81 Ibid., p. 43.
82 Ibid., p. 193.
83 Ibid., p. 165.
84 Ibid., p. 76.
in a democracy ordinary people must take part in the decision-making process about what they will produce and on what terms, something that cannot possibly happen when the means of production are privately owned, as in the capitalist mode of production.

Nevertheless, the fact that we do know the answers does not mean that we must passively accept the current systemic rationality. In spite of the uncertainty of our actions we are encouraged by Open Marxism to react against it by putting human needs above the need to accumulate wealth to the maximum extent possible. This should be done despite awareness that revolting will likely cost individuals their jobs and lead them to starvation. Still, this is how we open cracks in the system. We defetishize forms by bringing the non-identity element to the fore, by doing things differently than the current way, whose purpose is only profit.

There are a multitude of examples one can think of from everyday life: chefs who would cook with higher-quality ingredients, researchers who would choose topics of research without caring whether they receive funding, lorry drivers who would drive more carefully since they would drive slower and lesser hours, advertisers who would endorse only products they thought useful and of high quality, city councils who would make empty grounds into parks and playgrounds instead of renting them to investors to build shopping malls. Since Holloway does not provide specific examples of cracks in his books readers might think Open Marxism is only empty moralizing. As I have attempted to demonstrate to this point, that would be a wrong conclusion. Holloway becomes very specific when he states that

House occupations, social centres, community gardens, alternative radio stations, free software movements, teachers who encourage students to be critical, doctors who think about their patients and not just about money, peasant rebellions in which the people say ‘Enough! Now the people will rule’, factory occupations.  

For Open Marxism, revolution is the opening of cracks, it is the letting of the negation of an irrational rationality burst out of us, it is the revolution in everyday living. ‘It is the revolt of the creative doing that exists against alien determination and pushes beyond, towards social self-determination’ (italics mine). Revolution is about how we bring to a halt the reproduction of the existing reality. The cracks that we open in the one-dimensional

86 John Holloway, Crack Capitalism, p. 225.
spellbound society are moments of a different ‘communization, moments in which we try to create a different way of doing things’.  

We are fully aware of the precarious character of this fight. As stressed before, in the chapter on Adorno, what possible room for resistance to the logic of capital has the wage worker who is forced to do unpaid overtime in the knowledge that his or her refusal will result in dismissal and unemployment? The Open Marxist is fully aware of the difficulties subversive theory has to deal with. In contrast to traditional theorists the Open Marxist does not carry any illusions about what it means to fight for democracy. The fight for our liberty and dignity does not start from searching for the elite who will hold a sound plan, whoever this elite might be—the vanguard Communist Party or smart liberal economists who promise long-term growth. The fight starts from, and hope lies in, exploring the doing of our self-antagonistic selves at the same time that we attempt to make a living in a spellbound, inverted society. ‘To learn to hope is to see the force in the present of a world that does not yet exist but could: the strength here and now of that which does not fit, of that which screams.’  

This fight has historically ‘assumed the form of the Council, the Commune [. . .] the Soviet, the Assemblies and now the squares’. Holloway also refers to the need for forming ‘councils, communes, assemblies’. Open Marxist theorists openly place themselves within the council in communist tradition in the same way that, as mentioned in previous chapters in this book, their predecessors in the critical Marxism/negative dialectics path did.

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88 John Holloway, A Note on Hope and Crisis, p. 1070.


90 John Holloway, Variations on Different Themes, p. 342.
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