

**PATHOLOGIES OF RECOGNITION: THE COMMUNICATIVE TURN AND THE
RENEWED POSSIBILITY OF A CRITICAL THEORY OF SOCIETY.**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the communicative turn in critical theory, beginning with Jürgen Habermas's and Axel Honneth's criticisms of the work of the early Frankfurt school; it then analyses Habermas's ideas on language and discourse ethics (Chapter One) alongside Axel Honneth's critique of Habermas and his development of a 'recognitive-theoretical' model of Critical Theory (Chapter Two). Following Honneth's lead, I then bring the work of Michel Foucault into dialogue with the communicative turn and explore the relative merits of both approaches (Chapter Three). Despite the appeal of Habermas's and Honneth's attempts to provide a concrete model of democracy, strongly linked to the public sphere, I find their accounts of non-coercive dialogical exchange problematic. Although there are clear differences, I argue that they both end up idealising the public sphere, communication and recognition, and they ultimately reproduce procedural conceptions of freedom that abstract from difference and particularity. Foucault's work, in many ways, compensates for this, although I argue that his genealogical work displays an excessive and indiscriminate view of power, alongside an inadequate conception of subjectivity, whilst his later work on ethics/aesthetics idealises the self as a work of art and fails to adequately connect this to a more substantive account of culture, democracy, and responsibility.

The failings of both the communicative turn and Foucault's alternative critical theory point back towards the philosophy and negative aesthetics of Theodor Adorno (Chapter Four). I argue that Adorno's account of non-reified culture and ethics – as a response to the suffering produced by commodification, identity thinking and technological rationality – overcomes the shortcomings of the work of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault, whilst providing us with a more complete account of recognition and solidarity, and is therefore the most promising critical-theoretical response to the instrumentality and atomism of our late capitalist acquisitive culture. I particularly focus on Adorno's commitment to non-identity and particularity, his notion of dialectical experience, his critique of the culture industry and related politics of representation, and also his outline of an aesthetic praxis.

To my nephew and niece, Reuben and Elivia Raven.

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INTRODUCTION

Why Critical Theory?

In his essay ‘The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: On the Location of Critical Theory Today’ (in 2007, pp. 63-79), Axel Honneth provides an overview of his position in relation to earlier Critical Theory and Habermas. He outlines his commitment to a Left-Hegelian model of critique and explores the alternative possibilities for renewing Critical Theory along with their shortcomings. In the process, he provides us with a good, over-arching account of the development of ‘critical theory’ from its earlier incarnation in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer, amongst others, to its development through Habermas’s ‘communicative turn’ and towards his own ‘recognitive’ model. Despite Honneth’s criticisms of the original Frankfurt School project, he remains committed to a ‘critical theory of society’ which he refers to as:

‘that type of social thought that shares a particular form of normative critique with the Frankfurt School’s original program – indeed, perhaps, with the whole tradition of Left Hegelianism – which can also inform us about the pre-theoretical resource in which its own critical viewpoint is anchored extratheoretically as an empirical interest or moral experience’ (2007, pp. 63-64).

The ‘unrenounceable premise’ of Critical Theory, its Left-Hegelianism, demands that any (materialist) theory of society that attempts a critique of social relations must be able to identify a social source for its critique within social reality – it must be able to identify what Honneth refers to as a moment of ‘intramundane transcendence’.¹ Such a programme is identifiable in the work of Marx and Lukács but is made most explicit in Horkheimer’s ‘Traditional and Critical Theory’ essay of 1937 (in Horkheimer, 1999), where he emphasises

¹ Honneth pursues these ideas further in his ‘A Social Pathology of Reason: On the Intellectual Legacy of Critical Theory’ and ‘Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of ‘Critique’ in the Frankfurt School’ in Honneth (2009).

the need for a 'critical' theory to be able to account for its own origins in social reality (or 'pretheoretical experience') whilst also reflecting on its role in future social change. Critical theory is not therefore simply a philosophical pursuit, at least not in its original form, but requires a sociological account of its own emergence – i.e. it justifies its own emancipatory claims through recourse to a theory of society that is able to identify the emancipatory impulse at work in current social forces and, in turn, encourage us to resist domination. The difficulty with such a project is its ability to comprehend its own history and social context without succumbing to a relativist position that would compromise its 'critical' normative and political intentions. Habermas's and Honneth's work in many ways remains committed to the original project of a Critical Theory outlined by Horkheimer's 'Traditional and Critical Theory' essay, but both believe that they have successfully outlined an alternative direction in which to take this project, particularly when compared to the pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer's 1947 work, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1997). My thesis critically explores their attempts to develop the original project of Critical Theory in a communicative direction and asks whether, and in what way, such attempts are fruitful for contemporary Critical Theory and social theory conceived more broadly.

Horkheimer's division between 'traditional' theory and 'critical' theory is a response to what he saw as the key methodological problem of his time, that of the separation between the empirical sciences and philosophical thought (Horkheimer, 1999). The charge of idealism aimed at the likes of Hegel's philosophy of history, an account that had attempted to mediate between these two approaches, severed the relationship and resulted in the empirical sciences concerning themselves with discovering 'facts' divorced from philosophical self-reflection, and philosophical thought concerning itself with speculative thinking about 'essence'

divorced from any relationship to the empirical world. This division had consequences for forms of social criticism that sought to compare the world as it is, with its particular social and political relations, with the world as it 'ought' to be. But most pernicious was the way in which the empirical sciences, and their 'facts', were accepted as producing 'true' knowledge and increasingly seen as representing the whole of reason. Horkheimer turned to Marx in an attempt to expose the flaws in the conflation of the empirical sciences with 'objectivity' and sought to demonstrate the importance of social labour and its connection to the 'interestedness' of positivist science. In other words, he criticised positivism in the empirical sciences for remaining at the methodological level, neglecting epistemological issues, and thereby claiming 'objectivity' despite its practical interests in the domination and manipulation of nature for human needs. In this sense, the empirical sciences have the same interests as social labour but are operating on the level of scientific knowledge. The subsumption of facts under conceptual knowledge in scientific theory mirrors the requirements of the control of nature in societal labour². We might say that societal labour provides the practical context (or pre-theoretical resource) for the empirical sciences. Horkheimer refers to such theories, apparent as far back as Descartes, which neglect the social and practical determination and emergence of their own origins and see themselves as 'pure' theory, as examples of 'traditional theory'. In response to this he wants to outline the possibility of a 'critical theory' with emancipatory intent that is able to acknowledge its own historical and social determination along with its practical interests. Horkheimer also argued that such a conception of 'critical theory' would require an interdisciplinarity that would overcome the division between a transcendent philosophy separated from concrete social

² This is not an idea restricted to those of a 'critical theory' persuasion. For example, see Barnes, B. (1977) *Interests and the Growth of Knowledge*, Routledge, London.

reality, and those empirical sciences engaged in the positivistic pursuit of facts with no comprehension of the wider context of their activity or the possibility of transcendence.

The possibility of a 'critical' theory sought by Horkheimer relied on a philosophy of history able to justify the development and position of such a theory in the historical process, and this would in turn mean going beyond the division of knowledge into the empirical sciences and philosophical thought. At first the answer seemed to lie in making explicit what had been implicit in his criticisms and theoretical allegiances so far. By adhering to the classical Marxist theory of history, whereby developments in the forces of production necessitated changes in social relations, Horkheimer suggested that the developments in the forces of production had unleashed certain social relations, and a form of reason, able to critically outline the self-knowledge of society – this would therefore explain the historical and social determination of Critical theory along with its practical role (Horkheimer, 1999). Whereas the empirical sciences could be appealed to as authoritative knowledge in the mastery of nature, critical theory could be appealed to as authoritative knowledge in the self-reflection of a society. If reason and progress are apparent in history through the development of the productive forces, and become manifest through social conflict in the relations of production, the key issue becomes identifying the processes at work that hinder the development of reason and progress through social conflict and therefore the possibility of the 'rational' organisation of society that meets the needs of all, i.e. the processes at work in advanced capitalism hindering (or rather integrating) the consciousness of the working class.

The communicative critique

According to the criticisms made from the ‘communicative’ position of Habermas and Honneth, the development of earlier critical theory is ultimately unable to satisfy its own criteria (Honneth, 1995; Honneth, 1991; Habermas, 1992; Habermas, 1984). Given the historical context within which the Frankfurt School were writing - Stalinism, Fascism, and the decline of proletarian revolutionary activity - the ‘inner circle’ of the Frankfurt School set about trying to understand the inability of the proletariat to realise their ‘real’ interests. The ‘inner circle’ members who Honneth sees as central in carrying out this task - through elaborating theories at the level of political economy, Freudian psychology and culture - were Friedrich Pollock, Erich Fromm and Adorno respectively (Honneth, 1995). Horkheimer’s original project had sought to supplement the levels of political economy and psychology with the study of culture due to the need to explain the cultural conditions for the integration of the individual – in this case mass culture – rather than assume a direct relationship between socio-economic demands and individual conformity. Pollock’s theory of ‘state capitalism’, in the light of Nazism and Soviet Communism, reflected on the development of the planned economy as the post-liberal administration of the market by the bureaucratic state, and provided the backdrop for the analysis of cultural and psychological integration. Fromm applied this organisational change in the structure of capitalism to changes in the bourgeois nuclear family such that the patriarchal authority of the male is lost along with his economic authority, which in turn produces authority-hungry, ego-weak, conformist personalities³. In an attempt to avoid a crude functionalist connection between economic demands and psychological developments, Horkheimer originally, according to Honneth, sought to

³ See also part 3, chapter 4 (‘End of the Individual’) of Habermas (1988) *Legitimation Crisis*, Heinemann, London.

investigate 'those 'moral customs' and 'life-styles' in which the everyday communicative practice of social groups finds expression'. Had he pursued this train of thought:

'it could have been demonstrated that socialised subjects are not simply passively subjected to an anonymous steering process but, rather, actively participate with their own interpretative performances in the complex process of social integration ... [and had he realised this] ... that logically independent dimension of social action-orientations and value patterns, which cannot be viewed as a merely functional element in the reproduction of domination, would have become visible to him' (Honneth, 1995, p.69).⁴

However, a functionalist conception of culture followed according to Honneth whereby, in the form of a base-superstructure model, culture played the role of further integrating individuals into wider socio-economic demands; it increasingly lost its critical function and assumed an administrative role in the name of economic efficiency. Honneth sees this analysis of culture as particularly exemplified in Adorno's work on the culture industry.⁵

Rather than understanding this impoverished conception of social action as an accurate reflection of the times, Honneth seeks to confront what he sees as a functionalist reductionism, or a return to traditional theory, apparent in the inner circle of Critical Theory and lays the blame at the door of their philosophical-historical presuppositions (Honneth, 1995, p. 70). Notwithstanding the historical context of Stalinism and Fascism, the problem with their scenario of a totally administered society is the need to conceive of the different levels of analysis (economy, individual, culture) in terms of the functional roles each plays in relation to social labour. In a consistently Habermasian manner, Honneth outlines what he

⁴ This is also a repeat of Habermas's critique of Parsons. See section 7 of Habermas (1987b) *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume two: Lifeworld and System, a Critique of Functionalist Reason*, Boston MA, Beacon Press

⁵ Despite Honneth's broadly sympathetic account of Horkheimer here, contra Adorno, his recent work has shown signs of renewed appreciation for Adorno's work. See Honneth (2005) and his essay 'The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: The Dialectic of Enlightenment in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism' in Honneth (2007).

sees as the two key premises shared by Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse in their philosophy of history:

‘First, all three assume that human reason or rationality must be capable of being understood as the intellectual faculty for the instrumental disposal over natural objects; to this extent, all three remain bound to the conceptual tradition of the philosophy of consciousness which construes human rationality according to the model of the cognitive relation of a subject to an object. Second, all agree on the conclusion that can be drawn from the philosophical-historical premises for a theory of history: namely, that historical development takes place above all as a process of unfolding precisely that potential for rationality which is articulated in the instrumental disposal of man over natural objects. To this extent, they remain bound to the tendency already predominant in Marx, to instrumentally foreshorten human history to a developmental unfolding of the societal processing of nature’ (1995, p.71).

According to this account – an account I will ultimately call into question - their philosophical-historical approach leads to a functionalist reductionism that only really considers social action in terms of social labour. Consequently the whole sphere of everyday communicative practice is omitted and it appears that society reproduces itself separately from the intersubjective (and creative) social action and self-understanding of its members. It is this omission that is central to the ‘communicative turn’ in Habermas’s work and becomes integral to the development of Honneth’s.

Honneth (1991) further rehearses a relatively loyal Habermasian account of the weaknesses of early Critical Theory in his criticisms of Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the further ‘repression of the social’ in Adorno’s later work. He argues that a theoretical shift occurs in the 1940s, encapsulated in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, with consequences for both the philosophical-historical approach and interdisciplinarity adopted thus far. A more pessimistic philosophy of history is assumed - in the light of Fascism and Stalinism, and the integration of the working class in the commodified and administered

society of the US - along with a turn away from the ills of capitalism (and the emphasis on the forces and relations of production) and towards issues of human consciousness and the dangers inherent in human reason. An increasing scepticism around the possibilities of progress and civilisation inaugurates a re-thinking of their philosophy of history in the direction of a 'logic of disintegration' from the origin of the species to the barbarism evident in Fascism (Honneth, 1995, p. 73). This grand philosophy of history adheres to the previous emphasis on work and the social mastery of nature but no longer in the direction of social emancipation according to Honneth. They emphasise the cognitive component of the mastery of nature that they associate with 'objectivised thinking' or 'instrumental rationality' – the reification of thought apparent in human interaction with nature. The theoretical consequences of this was the revision of Marx's broadly positive account of the emancipatory potential latent in scientific and technological developments, and the emphasis on a Weberian conception of formal rationality at work in the scientific and technological domination of nature – what they referred to as 'instrumental reason'.

It is the Marxist reception of Weber's theory of rationalisation and the 'disenchantment of the world' in Lukács, Adorno and Horkheimer that Habermas blames for the impasse reached by early Critical theory (Habermas, 1984, Chapter IV). With a notion of 'reification', borrowed from Lukács's analysis of the forms of thought that develop out of the abstraction inherent in commodity exchange, Adorno and Horkheimer build what Honneth refers to as an 'anthropology' that seeks to account for the origin and development of this logic of disintegration. Whereas from Lukács to Sohn-Rethel, the forms of consciousness of bourgeois society are traceable to the abstract nature of commodity exchange, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* commodity exchange is seen as the modern form of a broader instrumental

rationality.⁶ Commodity exchange is seen as a form of mediation that generalises the type of rationality that developed out of the aims of self-preservation in the human confrontation with nature. Honneth therefore argues that Adorno and Horkheimer base their philosophy of history on the pre-historical act of human self-preservation (1991, p.38). They argue that instrumental thinking is established with the first act of the mastery of nature – ‘myth is already enlightenment’, already a means of reducing the uncontrollability of nature – and the development of this thinking proceeds to dominate the physical and social life of humanity. This domination of nature is apparent in the ‘civilising’ process of managing the instincts, the championing of reason over sensual capacities, and the social relation of domination. Honneth claims that presupposed in this philosophy of history is the aesthetic idea, apparent in German Romanticism, of a reconciliation with nature, and therefore their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* deals with the link between the notion of the mastery of nature and the ‘self-alienation of the species’ (1995, p.74).

Honneth explains the conclusions of this work as being due to the persistence of the ‘mastery of nature’ at the centre of its philosophy of history. By inflecting the positive (or emancipatory) notion of labour from the original Critical Theory program into a negative one, he argues that Adorno and Horkheimer are unable to sidestep the key theoretical weakness of Critical Theory – namely the ‘philosophy of consciousness’. This logic of subject/object, where the human subject seeks to represent and master the object (nature), is the only lens through which early Critical Theorists perceive social action and subsequently, this ‘logic of reification’ is applied to ‘the three dimensions of societal labour, the socialisation of

⁶ For Lukács on reification and the ‘antinomies of bourgeois thought’ see Lukács (1971); for Sohn-Rethel on abstraction see Sohn-Rethel (1978).

individuals and, finally, social domination' (Honneth, 1995, p.75). Honneth expands on this by suggesting that because they:

'conceptualised from the beginning both the process of the formation of individual needs and the process of the social exercise of domination according to the model of instrumental acts of disposal, they could, in retrospect, effortlessly see the civilisation process as a whole dominated by the same instrumental rationality that underlies the act of the mastery of nature' (1995, p.75).

A key problem with this account for Honneth is that a whole range of communicative practices and social achievements, such as developments in legal equality and process along with extended individual freedoms, fall out of the picture presented by the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Honneth's criticisms also end up outlining the oft-repeated point that Adorno and Horkheimer do not consider the (autonomous) interpretative qualities of oppressed groups and are therefore unable to recognise social and cultural resistance and opposition. Their emphasis on the social domination of nature, and the parallels with social class domination and individual self-discipline, leaves them with an impoverished conception of social action. What arises here is a similar, and connected, problem to the issue of providing a theoretical justification for (rational) critique given the entwinement of rationality and domination - if society and consciousness, as the possible (social) sources for independent and critical consciousness, have become completely reified, then any attempt at social critique that grounds itself in social reality must be considered impossible. To put it another way, if mundane social experience is considered from the viewpoint of the 'administered society', then any attempt to identify a critical element of 'intramundane transcendence' will be found wanting. Honneth therefore suggests that early critical theory fails to ground its critical position in actual social experience. He argues that their reduction of social action to the realm of social labour, and their account of the administered society, impoverishes a critical

theory that seeks to ground its reflective position in practical social activity. Without a form of rationality free from domination, their theoretical position is reduced to a utopian negativity that exposes any (false) claims to social reconciliation; without a pre-theoretical resource for social emancipation apparent in *social* history, their critical position – particularly Adorno's – seeks grounds in the non-instrumental, yet rarefied, sensuous particularities of modern art. This, at least, is the communicative account of early Critical Theory proposed by Habermas and Honneth.

An additional, but connected problem, according to Honneth is the fact that the original interdisciplinary project, combining philosophical reflection and the empirical sciences, is abandoned in favour of the championing of a self-reflective philosophy over and above the 'reifying' empirical social sciences. Adorno and Horkheimer's philosophy of history based on the domination of nature alters the interdisciplinary focus of critical theory and finally leads to Adorno's conception of the inherent resistance of aesthetics. The various scientific disciplines are seen as ultimately connected in that they all arise out of the instrumental character of the human domination of nature and are therefore part of the process of the technical control of external nature and the social control of internal nature. In response to this, Adorno and Horkheimer sideline the other disciplines and prioritise philosophy. However, as their philosophy 'already makes the pure act of conceptual operation into an elementary form of instrumental reason', Honneth argues that:

'it cannot justify any form of discursive thought, even its own. Philosophy is the reflective form of a critical theory that discovers in each step of conceptual reflection a piece of the continued history of domination. Therefore, strictly speaking, it prohibits itself' (1991, p. 61-62).

Here Honneth rehearses Habermas's argument that once 'rationality' itself is implicated in the process of social domination and the domination of nature, as Adorno and Horkheimer seek to demonstrate in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, then a 'critical' theory that seeks to provide us with a 'rational' account of the possibilities of emancipation is found wanting (Honneth, 1991, p.129). Their account of the entwinement of rationality and domination places their own critical-theoretical philosophy under threat according to Honneth – how is it possible, given such entwinement, to ground a (rational) critical position able to provide an account of the (rational) possibility of emancipation? (Honneth, 1995, pp. 61-91). As philosophy itself is intimately tied to instrumental thought, Adorno and Horkheimer limit its activity to the negative task of criticising conceptual thinking and renounce the possibility of any claims to positive knowledge. This negative task of philosophy is the logical conclusion to their attempts to avoid self-contradiction and an idea that is explicitly worked through in Adorno's 1966 work, *Negative Dialectics* (1990).⁷

The question for Honneth and Habermas now becomes: How is Critical Theory possible within a philosophy of history that sees the human domination of nature, and therefore the alienation of humanity, lurking behind all attempts at conceptual knowledge? How is an accurate representation of reality possible when the only access to it is through (instrumental) conceptual knowledge? Adorno looks to the realm of aesthetics due to his belief that art, although still cognitive, allows for *non-conceptual* knowledge of reality. If conceptual objectification initiates a process of human domination over external and internal nature then art, in its non-conceptual (or rather more than simply conceptual) relation to nature, represents the possibility of freedom. Freedom here is seen as possible only once humans are able to

⁷ I return to these points in chapter 4.

have a communicative relationship with nature and each other free from coercion in the name of technical control. Art does not treat nature (and other human beings) as material for control but as an equal element in communication and emphatic experience. Once the logic of the domination of nature encroaches on social life, art becomes the only sphere able to liberate repressed nature. For Adorno, art in many ways assumes the normative tasks that Lukács had previously assigned to the proletariat. In its capacity to remain a form of reason without instrumentality, art is able to provide substantive awareness of social life without becoming subject to the critique of instrumental reason. Critical theory, to avoid self-contradiction, therefore emerges as the representative of the emancipatory element inherent in the work of art by forwarding the logic immanent to this process. In addition to this, Adorno attempts to replicate this logic immanent to art in the style of his own work that, in trying to be non-coercive, often appears to lack the usual systematic requirements of writing.⁸ However, as Honneth argues:

‘since even a philosophical aesthetic can in each case only refer to other experiential modes of artistic production, it cannot itself create this experience. The critical theory that emerges in Adorno’s post-war writings thus vacillates helplessly between philosophical reflection and aesthetic experience, not wanting to be the one and not able to be the other’ (1991, p. 69).

Honneth’s history of Critical Theory is a history of the failed attempts to meet Horkheimer’s original methodological demands. It is the Marxist inheritance in the work of Adorno and Horkheimer that marks their failure, according to Honneth – specifically their attempts to base a critical theory on a Marxist philosophy of history, that grounds its critique in the ‘practical’ interests of the proletariat, or on Marx’s critique of fetishism, and is unable to conceive of any sphere of social action besides social labour. These attempts are ultimately seen to lead

⁸ I will explore and defend Adorno’s emphasis on aesthetics, as well as the political possibilities it throws up, contra Habermas and Honneth, in Chapter 4.

Adorno and Horkheimer towards a 'Marxist functionalism' that emphasises the relationship between capitalist domination and cultural manipulation to such an extent that they miss the 'mode of the *social* organisation of societies' (Honneth, 1991, p. 99) and therefore foreshorten the possibility of practical critique. The 'pre-theoretical resource for emancipation' sought in social history, and providing the grounding for critical theory, is lost and takes refuge in the sensuous particularities of modern art. For Habermas and Honneth, the promise of modern art is too rarefied an aspect of social life to represent the possibility of emancipation and is therefore a weak pre-theoretical resource for social critique. The unsatisfactory negativism associated with this account leaves Honneth in no doubt as to the pressing problem of contemporary critical theory:

'If the Left-Hegelian model of critique is to be retained at all, we must first re-establish theoretical access to the social sphere in which an interest in emancipation can be anchored pre-theoretically. Without some form of proof that its critical perspective is reinforced by a need or movement within social reality, Critical Theory cannot be further pursued in any way today, for it would be no longer capable of distinguishing itself from other models of social critique in its claim to a superior sociological explanatory substance or in its philosophical procedures of justification' (2007, p. 66)

Given the nature of the impasse of early Critical theory according to Habermas and Honneth, what is therefore needed is a non-instrumental form of rationality and evidence of a pre-theoretical ('critical') resource in social reality. An alternative form of rationality, autonomous in relation to instrumental rationality, is required such that all conceptual knowledge is not simply a reflection of the instrumental demands of social domination and the domination of nature; for them, this would avoid the contradiction of attempting to present a 'rational' critique of society while arguing for the entwinement of rationality and domination. It would also allow for the possibility of reconnecting the empirical sciences with reflective philosophy. Alongside an alternative form of rationality, Habermas and Honneth

need to reconnect to a form of practical social critique or concrete social ‘interest’ in emancipation that can provide them with a pre-theoretical resource for their ‘critical’ theories. This requires a conception of societal development very different to the notion of an ‘administered society’ where strong parallels are made between social domination and the process of the instrumental domination of nature.

Habermas and Honneth hope that these tasks are satisfied by the communicative turn. By outlining a logic of ‘intersubjectivity’ at work in an alternative ‘communicative rationality’ Habermas and Honneth hope to sidestep the philosophy of consciousness, with its subject/object logic and what they see as its reduction of reason to instrumentality, and identify a pre-theoretical resource for critique in the emancipatory possibilities at work in the ‘conditions for the communicative sociation of individuals’ (Habermas, 1984, p. 398) – be they ‘built into the linguistic mechanism of the reproduction of the species’ (ibid) or apparent in ‘identity claims acquired in socialisation’ (Honneth, 2007, p. 70). To achieve this, they need to substantiate the claim that communicative action is to some extent relatively autonomous in relation to social labour and the instrumental domination of nature. If the notion of the ‘administered society’ led early critical theory into a cul-de-sac whereby a pre-theoretical resource for their critique was not available due to their account of the extensive reification of consciousness and society, then Habermas and Honneth need to demonstrate the potentially emancipatory (and non-reified) interests at work in contemporary society. I explore the relative successes of Habermas’s and Honneth’s communicative developments in chapters 1 and 2 respectively, before then drawing their positions into a dialogue with the work of Michel Foucault.

Why Foucault?

A more radical rejoinder to the impasse of early Critical theory can arguably be found in the work of Foucault despite a lack of conscious engagement with that tradition until late in his career. Addressing the neglect of the Frankfurt school in French philosophical thought, Foucault states that:

‘Now, obviously, if I had been familiar with the Frankfurt school, if I had been aware of it at the time, I would not have said a number of stupid things that I did say and I would have avoided many of the detours which I made while trying to pursue my own humble path – when, meanwhile, avenues had been opened up by the Frankfurt school. It is a strange case of nonpenetration between two very similar types of thinking which is explained, perhaps, by that very similarity. Nothing hides the fact of a problem in common better than two similar ways of approaching it’ (Foucault in Kelly (ed), 1994, p. 17).

In many ways it is rather odd to include Foucault here in an assessment of earlier Critical Theory and the communicative turn, as I do in Chapter 3, however I believe he helps us to sharpen some of the key issues and draw out what is at stake in the differences between early Critical Theory and Habermas, and between influential post-structuralist accounts and critical theory. He has been a major source of critical engagement with Habermas and was also used in Honneth’s *Critique of Power* (1991) as an alternative ‘rediscovery of the social’ - an initial corrective to what Honneth sees as the lack of an adequate conception of both power and struggle in Habermas’s initial communicative model. In addition to this, the developments in Foucault’s later work share with earlier critical theory, particularly Adorno, an inclination towards an aesthetic critique of modernity, albeit with a different focus.⁹

The most obvious connection between Foucault and early Critical Theory is the concern with the connection between domination and reason, or power and knowledge. There are also

⁹ I will draw out this link further in Chapter 4. Honneth also explores the parallels between Foucault and Adorno’s work in his collection of essays, *The Fragmented World of the Social* (1995), chapter 6.

parallels between what appear to be non-progressive and dystopian accounts with the Frankfurt School emphasising the all-encompassing nature of instrumental reason and Foucault the all-encompassing nature of 'power'. They both recognise the way in which reason is embedded in social and cultural contexts, is historically variable, and is connected to interests and power; this also leads to an emphasis on the reflexive nature of their social theories. They also both recognise the practical context of social theory and seek to de-naturalise current social and political relations such that theory can potentially be a force for social change (see McCarthy in Kelly (ed), 1994).

However, Foucault's work displays some clear differences when compared to early critical theory and charts an alternative route out of the impasse of their work – however, rather than taking a route that would pursue the original project of Critical Theory under communicative conditions, Foucault's work arguably threatens to undermine their whole critical-theoretical project. Rather than reigniting the possibility of a domination-free rationality, or a framework for non-coercive dialogue - and therefore a more stable normative ground for critique – as Habermas and Honneth seek to do, Foucault resolutely restates the entwinement of power and knowledge and emphasises the radically historical and contingent nature of reason (Gordon, 1980). His work questions the very possibility of formulating a more adequate conception of reason and he particularly seeks to expose any pretensions to the possible context transcendence of truth. This more radical critique of reason has far-reaching consequences for the practical and theoretical grounding of a 'critical' theory and suggests that we should give up on the idea that the critique of current social practices can serve the practical goals of reducing the effects of ideology and contributing towards a more 'rational' and just society. Rather than starting from the premise that we can (rationally) distinguish between legitimate

and illegitimate exercises of power, Foucault's work emphasises that all knowledge and practices are produced by power relations, and therefore we must relinquish the idea of a power-free discourse that can provide us with the possibility of critique. Rather than exposing existing power relations from a perspective of ideology critique, and exploring the possibility of a truly rational society whereby a collectively and rationally exercised power remains accountable and transparent, we must accept the pre-ideological nature of power. Foucault's Nietzschean account sees the origin of 'the social' in power/knowledge relations rather than in terms of a communicative-democratic origin of the social in the intersubjective pragmatic of language or identity-formation.

The structure of the thesis

I begin by exploring Habermas's response to the impasse of early Critical Theory, which I've briefly stated here. Chapter 1 provides a broad outline of Habermas's social theory, exploring his attempts to move beyond early critical theory, the development of his 'linguistic turn', his notions of system and lifeworld, and the normative and ethical issues at the heart of his 'discourse ethics'. The final section of that chapter rehearses a number of key criticisms of his work, particularly those from Honneth, but also from his more Hegelian critics. Chapter 2 begins with Honneth's appropriation, and critique, of Habermas and Foucault as the starting point for his 'recognitive-theoretical' model of critical theory. Habermas is championed by Honneth for his emphasis on communicative action but criticised for reifying the categories of system and lifeworld and for neglecting the importance of social struggle and power between cultural groups. Foucault is initially adopted as a corrective to this criticism of Habermas but is ultimately charged with 'cryptonormativism' and a 'systems-theoretic solution to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*' with his 'administrative theory of power'. I then outline, in detail,

the theoretical heart of Honneth's project - his 1992 work, *Struggle for Recognition* (1996) – alongside some of his later work, followed by a brief discussion of some of the problems highlighted by recent critics.

Despite the theoretical and political appeal of Habermas and Honneth's work - through their attempts to offer a concrete institutional model of democracy strongly linked to the public sphere, civil society, cosmopolitan institutions etc - I find their attempts to outline a framework for non-coercive dialogical exchange wanting. Although there are clear differences in their work, and Honneth is critical of the reified separation of system and lifeworld in Habermas's work, I argue that both thinkers end up idealising and purifying the public sphere, subjectivity, work and consumption, and they ultimately conclude with overly procedural conceptions of freedom.

Chapter 3 outlines the main phases of Foucault's theoretical trajectory as they relate to the problematic of Critical Theory. I therefore concentrate on both his middle 'genealogical' period and the transition to his later work on 'ethics/aesthetics'.¹⁰ Critics of Foucault's genealogical emphasis on power/knowledge, which shares a number of themes with early Critical theory, have mainly focussed on the all-encompassing nature of Foucault's notion of power, with its lack of a clear conception of resistance, along with his crypto-normativism and the lack of an adequate conception of subjectivity. I outline a number of these criticisms before exploring Foucault's shift from a focus on techniques of objectivisation and domination towards an emphasis on subjectivisation and 'techniques of the self'. This phase of his work also parallels certain aspects of early Critical Theory, particularly Adorno's late

¹⁰ As a result, I spend very little time discussing his work on 'archaeology' despite the formative role it played and the continuation of a number of themes throughout his work as a whole.

work, inasmuch as he provides an aesthetic critique of modernity. However, I will argue that the nature of his aesthetic critique – the self-creation of identity as a ‘work of art’ - ends up asserting a somewhat idealised and autonomous aesthetic practice with a poorly articulated link to wider socio-historical power relations. It is also overly subjective and fails to present us with a more substantive conception of culture, democracy, recognition, and ethical responsibility.

The problems encountered in Foucault’s work, and my criticisms of Habermas and Honneth, lead us to reconsider the impasse of early critical theory outlined above and the contemporary relevance of Adorno’s work. In the final chapter I tackle the communicative critique of Adorno’s position and outline a number of aspects of his work that might help us overcome the idealisation and proceduralism that ultimately hinder the communicative turn, whilst also providing us with the tools to resolve some of the problems encountered in Foucault’s overly totalising genealogical period and the overly aesthetic and subjective conclusions of his later work. To this end, I focus on three areas of Adorno’s work. Firstly the (Hegelian) notion of ‘dialectical experience’, and the importance of contradiction and aporia, which is neglected by Habermas and Honneth and is absent from Foucault’s work; secondly, the ways in which such dialectical experience is threatened by the culture industry and the forms of representation it produces, and how this might help us to question Habermas and Honneth’s faith in the public sphere and their version of communicative autonomy; finally, Adorno’s (political) aesthetic critique of modernity and the notion of non-reified culture it produces. The ethics of non-identity that emerges from his work on aesthetics – an ethics predominantly responding to the damage and suffering produced by identity thinking and its regime of rational-technological administration - leaves us with markedly different conceptions of culture, autonomy,

community and instrumentality than Habermas and Honneth, but also a more fragile version of 'spirit' than that found in their work. However, despite the shared inclination towards an aesthetic critique of modernity in the work of Foucault and Adorno, and a shared tendency to criticise the kinds of idealisation and proceduralism found in Habermas and Honneth, I argue that Adorno's political aesthetics offers us a more substantive conception of culture, democracy, ethical satisfaction and responsibility.

CHAPTER 1: JÜRGEN HABERMAS & THE COMMUNICATIVE TURN

This chapter explores the origins of the communicative turn in Critical Theory led by Jürgen Habermas. It seeks to grasp what is at stake in the differences between earlier Critical Theory and the communicative turn, which has come to dominate the development of Critical Theory as a project, and sets the scene for the further developments outlined in Honneth's work.

Given the extent of Habermas's work in a number of disciplines, I will not be trying to give a comprehensive overview of the whole of his oeuvre in this chapter¹. What I will attempt to do is provide an outline of what I believe to be the core of his project and the central theoretical impasse in his work. To this end I will explore some of the formative ideas leading up to what is arguably his central theoretical work, *The Theory of Communicative Action (1984, 1987)*, alongside the pragmatic theory of meaning and theory of communicative rationality contained in this work, and his later programme of discourse ethics. The chapter is divided into five sections: 'Beyond Marx and Critical Theory' sets the scene for my discussion of Habermas's later work, and deals with Habermas's relationship to Marx and the Frankfurt School and his early formative innovations; 'The Linguistic Turn' concentrates on his theory of meaning and his theory of communicative rationality; 'System and Lifeworld' tackles the core of his 'critical' social theory; and 'Discourse Ethics' looks at the normative and ethical issues at the heart of Habermas's more recent work. Having provided an overview of his work, the final section briefly explores some of the criticisms that have been aimed at Habermas's philosophy, and it is here that I argue that Habermas's 'critical' theory is excessively

¹ I will particularly neglect his work on religion and Europe which has been at the heart of his more recent publications. See Habermas, J. (2006) *The Divided West*, Cambridge, Polity Press; Habermas, J. (2007) *The Dialectics of Secularization* (with Joseph Ratzinger), San Francisco CA, Ignatius Press; Habermas, J. (2008) *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*, Cambridge, Polity Press; Habermas, J. (2009) *Europe: The Faltering Project*, Cambridge, Polity Press; Habermas, J. (2012) *The Crisis of the European Union*, Cambridge, Polity Press.

idealising and abstracted from concrete social experience, and that he provides us with an overly procedural account of freedom.

Beyond Marx & the Frankfurt School

In response to what he sees as the limitations of earlier critical theory, Habermas seeks to provide a new critical theory that is again able to account for its own socio-historical context while providing a rational foundation for critique in relation to a pre-theoretical, critical moment in social reality. He also seeks to reinvigorate the original interdisciplinary project of Critical Theory by reconnecting his philosophical concerns with developments in a range of empirical sciences. His first attempts, and ones that retain significance for much of his later work, are concerned with establishing a form of rationality markedly different from instrumental rationality. This project is apparent in his works of the early 1960s, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) and *Theory & Practice* (1988). Here Habermas makes clear his debt to the classical Greek conception of politics in its separation from the question of technical skill. Politics was considered a honourable pursuit, concerning itself with human ends, ethics and the possibility of a virtuous collective life; the technical aspects of production and their relationship to the exact sciences, on the other hand, were considered far removed from the educational and cultivated sphere of politics. Also removed were related questions of economy and contractual relations that were themselves considered as technical questions requiring means-end logic and involving legal issues concerned with the protection of the interests of private individuals. In contrast to such technical issues, politics here is *pure* politics and, echoing Arendt, Habermas conceives of it as a space for the free and uncoerced exchange of opinions. It is this intersubjective form of communicative action, unencumbered

by instrumental issues, that is at the very heart of political community for Habermas and provides a starting point for an alternative form of rationality.

Given the complexity of modern societies, Habermas accepts that modelling the modern state on the Greek polis would be both impractical and ethically undesirable, especially given the desirable modern extension of 'freedom' beyond the boundary between political and socio-economic concerns. However, he finds a promising model for normative progress, relevant to contemporary societies, in what he calls the 'bourgeois public sphere'. Habermas defines it as:

'a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion-that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions-about matters of general interest.' (Habermas, 1974b, p. 49).

Originating in the eighteenth century as a result of newly acquired political rights to freedom of association and press, and developing out of the literary salons and coffee houses of Europe, the 'bourgeois public sphere' came to fill the gap between the state and civil society owing to the increasing number of wealthy individuals excluded from significant positions in government but with clear interests in the organisation of public life. Their political goal was to ensure that the State worked in the interests of more than the traditional ruling groups and that it did this in an open and accountable manner, a goal the participants of the public sphere pursued through the newly developed media of newspapers and learned journals (Habermas, 1989, p. 43)

Despite these being points of historical interest, Habermas is centrally concerned with the key characteristics that distinguish the public sphere and provide a model for what we might see as political progress. He argues that above and beyond the legal rights that protect the private individuals of civil society, political liberty requires a free and active public sphere where these individuals can voluntarily engage in public debate and also transcend their private role, as economic ‘person’, and be involved in the formation of a public opinion, as ‘citizen’, linking the general interest to the activity of the state. Firstly, the public sphere plays a key role in the formation of public opinion, again as a political pursuit in itself rather than a technical one, and this public opinion involves the deliberation over the activity of the state as the governing institution and provides the state with democratic legitimacy. The public sphere also aims to ensure that such public opinion is formed freely with the process and outcome of debates being decided by the force of the (rationally) better argument rather than by traditional privilege or custom². The freedoms presupposed by the public sphere are to be guaranteed by a series of liberal political freedoms – of speech, assembly and press – which are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for a fully democratic society. Without an *active* public sphere, without the free and critical space that provides public opinions on matters of the state, such freedoms are susceptible to the influence and interests of the few in the form of managed ‘public opinion’ and ‘public relations’, and they become merely formal freedoms lacking in substance. The modern State may still appear democratic by defending the freedoms of speech, assembly and press, but without the underlying public sphere the State will lack legitimacy. Unfortunately this has been the historical fate of the public sphere for Habermas. His account of the decline of the modern public sphere argues that the increasing

² Gadamer (2006) presents an alternative view to Habermas and challenges this Enlightenment argument as a ‘prejudice against prejudices’ and suggests that ‘The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the Enlightenment, will prove itself to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness’ (p. 277). I will return to this criticism of Habermas at the end of the chapter.

demand for newspapers and other forms of mass communication led to their subsumption under capitalist interests and a gradual decline in their autonomous and critical function (Habermas, 1989, p.180)³. In relation to the mass media, he suggests that they have:

‘become autonomous, to obtain the agreement or at least acquiescence of a mediatized public. Publicity is generated from above, so to speak, in order to create an aura of good will for certain positions. Originally publicity guaranteed the connection between rational-critical public debate and the legislative foundation of domination, including the critical supervision of its exercise. Now it makes possible the peculiar ambivalence of a domination exercised through the domination of nonpublic opinion: it serves the manipulation *of* the public as much as legitimation *before* it. Critical publicity is supplanted by manipulative publicity’ (Habermas, 1989, pp. 177-178).

Alongside the increasingly privatised and consumer-based public sphere there developed the manipulation of public opinion, in the interests of ‘legitimacy’, for increasingly self-serving economic and political institutions.⁴

In his *Toward a Rational Society* (1971), Habermas sees the decline of the bourgeois public sphere, with its democratic process and its concern with the good life and ideals of equality and justice, alongside the rise of what we might call ‘technical’ politics. Rather than governments pursuing *practical* – i.e. normative and ethical - goals legitimated by the deliberations of a public sphere, Habermas suggests that we see the increasing collapse of the distinction between practical and instrumental concerns as governments busy themselves with technical questions concerning the management of economic stability and growth divorced from the norms and values of a free and open public sphere. Social problems are increasingly

³ However, we might want to question the unnuanced nature of this assertion, or at least the general level at which Habermas tackles it, given the separation of ownership and control, the rise of journalism as a profession etc.

⁴ It is important to note here that throughout his work Habermas makes ‘legitimation’ an issue of all systems of inequality. He tends to fluctuate between emphasising ‘inequality’ as the key problem on the one hand, and the ‘rational justification of inequality’ on the other. It seems reasonable to suggest that his emphasis on rational justification is a veiled concern for the problem of inequality.

seen as requiring technical solutions and, although scientific and technological developments have significantly improved many aspects of social life, Habermas argues that they have dire political consequences once they are accepted as the only way to deal with political questions⁵. The suppression of normative and ethical questions in favour of technical solutions is in danger of depoliticising the populace, devaluing the political importance of the public sphere, and ultimately robbing us of the reflective and interactive practices that distinguish the human intersubjectivity of pure politics from the (technically driven) human relationship to the material world.

Despite the pessimism of Habermas's account, he is clear as to what the alternative, emancipatory path should have been or should be. It is here where his position is a clear alternative to the negativism of Adorno and Horkheimer, and also a noticeably different to the work of Marx regarding the relationship to the liberal ideals of justice, equality and legal personhood prevalent in the *idea* of the bourgeois public sphere. For Marxists, such ideals are inevitably and inescapably attached to their ideological origin, in that they are a reflection of the needs of the market society of capitalism and aim to protect the contractual relations that have exploitation at their heart. Habermas on the other hand suggests a degree of autonomy, and emancipatory potential, for such ideals. They are not reducible to the ideological demands of market capitalism, although he accepts that this clearly played a role in their origin, but are to be seen as emanating from the public opinion formed out of the relatively free deliberation of the public sphere. Whereas Marxists would argue that such ideals are merely formal and lack substance, Habermas argues that this is only the case once such ideals are divorced from an active public sphere. Habermas's attempt to sever such ideals from the context of market

⁵ This division between technical and non-technical solutions might be challenged on the grounds that it is an overly neat and idealised separation. A similar criticism has been aimed at Habermas's distinction between system and lifeworld and I will explore this in more depth towards the end of the chapter.

relations though is questionable and I will argue plays a role in the developing proceduralism of his later work. Not that Habermas is uncritical of the historical bourgeois public sphere *in reality* as he is keen to point to the obvious discrepancy between the egalitarian claims of the bourgeois public sphere and its exclusionary practices. Deliberations over matters of state and moral-political possibilities were confined to a section of the population distinguished by education, property and sex, and arguably the proposed notions of common interest merely reflected the partial interests of those involved. However, he is keen to defend the principles of the public sphere and to suggest that we should look to revive and extend them.

Habermas takes his analysis of the public sphere, at the level of institutions, and the distinction between technical interests and communicative politics, and attempts to translate them into an analysis of different forms of human interests and related forms of knowledge. In his 1968 work *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1987a), he takes his lead from Marx's distinction between the forces of production and the social relations of production, while trying to avoid what he sees as the Marxist reduction of the latter to the former, i.e. the reduction of sensuous, practical activity to technical activity. For Habermas, Marx is guilty of reducing the relatively autonomous sphere of interaction, carried out by language-using humans, to the realm of production⁶. In response to this, Habermas develops an account of how the scientific and technological developments that have greatly increased human control over nature, came to dominate intersubjective communication; in other words, how one aspect of reason, in the form of instrumental rationality, came to dominate another aspect of reason, human interaction or 'communicative action'.

⁶ However, as we shall see, Habermas struggles to clarify what the relative autonomy of work (from interaction) and interaction (from work) might mean.

Habermas's distinction between instrumental action and communicative action seeks to outline two key features, or anthropological 'interests', of human experience. The kind of action or 'interest' reflected in instrumental rationality is that geared towards technical control and the exploitation of nature for the purposes of social reproduction, and manifests itself in socially organised labour and work. The empirical knowledge of the hard sciences provides the measure of validity for instrumental action (1987a, p. 195). 'Communicative rationality' on the other hand reflects the human interest in mutual understanding and manifests itself in interaction mediated by ordinary language. Processes of communication and socialisation contain agreed upon norms, often backed up by social sanctions should anyone exceed their boundaries, and their measure of validity does not have the exactness of instrumental rationality but is determined by intersubjective understandings about mutual obligations and expectations. The 'hermeneutical sciences', particularly the work of Dilthey and Gadamer, are seen by Habermas as the form of knowledge reflecting this 'interest' in understanding and consensus. These sciences seek to 'grasp interpretations of reality with regard to possible intersubjectivity of action-orienting mutual understanding specific to a given hermeneutic starting point' (ibid). A key distinction here for Habermas, as already mentioned, is that between the subject-object logic of instrumental rationality, whereby an object is constituted and treated according to instrumental rules, and the subject-subject logic of communicative rationality, whereby intersubjectivity reigns and there is reciprocal action between subjects. The additional, and central, claim that Habermas makes here relates to the primacy of intersubjectivity in social life and the way in which our own self-relation and individual self-consciousness is formed out of communicative action. So not only is communicative action concerned with the relationship between subjectivities, but Habermas argues that individual subjectivities are only possible within the context of intersubjective relations, such that one

only has a sense of self through one's sense of difference from others and through the ways in which others see you, and how we internalise these social perceptions.

Although Habermas accepts that in concrete historical circumstances both instrumental action and communicative action are often linked, he is keen to distinguish the logics of each and emphasise that the removal of scarcity would not necessarily entail freedom from servitude and repression. What has to be guarded against, according to Habermas, is the encroachment of technical, instrumental knowledge and action on reflective and communicative knowledge and action, or what is often the ideological denial of the very distinction between the two. In relation to material forms of reproduction, and instrumental action, oppression is conceived of as the constraint placed on human action by external nature; emancipation from such constraints is achieved by the development of the forces of production or the technical control over nature and related labour processes. For cultural reproduction, and communicative action, oppression is conceived of as the inhibition of our fundamental 'social' nature by 'the unreflected, 'natural' force of social dependence and political power, which is rooted in prior history and tradition' (1987a, p. 53). Emancipation in this instance would be through the replacement of institutions based on force and 'necessity' with social relations organised according to communicative relations free from domination; the wellspring for such emancipation would come from the political struggles of oppressed groups and the 'critical' work of what Habermas calls the 'reflective sciences' – the third of his types of science that reflect knowledge constitutive interests.

However, the exact nature of these 'critical' reflective sciences is yet to be determined. They would need to be able to identify their own social-historical determination, in the same way

that the origins of the empirical and hermeneutic sciences have been determined, while also being able to justify a 'critical' relationship to current social relations. Here marks Habermas's clear continuation of the Frankfurt School project. The empirical sciences are not in a position to do this due to their instrumental concerns and lack of reflexivity and, although the hermeneutical sciences are promising in this respect, Habermas is cautious of what he takes to be their idealisation of everyday interaction, and of the self-interpretations of those involved.⁷ He wants to reinstate the possibility of normative criticism by making the kind of distinction apparent in Marx between appearance and reality or, in this case, between 'true' communication and 'false' or inhibited communication. He wants to highlight the fact that there are complex structural factors at work behind the backs of social actors who are unable to grasp them in their totality, and also unable to grasp the power complexes that determine their own understanding of the world. He wants to connect the understanding of the hermeneutical sciences (i.e. the self-interpretations of social actors) to the underlying social relations that inhibit true communication so that individual and collective actors are in a position to clearly perceive the sources of social domination. Highlighting the inconsistencies and contradictions in current forms of communication will hopefully therefore contribute to their transformation.

Habermas sees Marx's work as promising in many respects here, but as he argues in *Knowledge & Human Interests*, Marx's emphasis on the determination of ideas by the material conditions of production leads to the primacy of labour in the possibility of 'critical reflection'. If the autonomy of social reflection on our experiences is compromised by the link

⁷ This is at the heart of Habermas's critique of Gadamer. Gadamer is taken to task for being unable to incorporate a critique of ideology and recognise the ways in which language is used for the purposes of social domination. See Habermas's 'Review of Gadamer's *Truth and Method*' in Dallmayr, F. and T. McCarthy (eds.) *Understanding Social Inquiry*, Indiana, University Press.

to our socio-economic position, then the danger arises of the kind of mechanical view of history and class struggle prevalent in orthodox Marxism. Habermas argues that Marxist thought tends to suggest that certain 'objective' conditions have to be in place for the possibility of 'subjective' reflection and political practice – in other words, only once the productive forces have developed to a certain level of development and come into conflict with the relations of production, would the scene be set for critical reflection and struggle by those in a particular socio-economic position to benefit from the overthrow of capitalist relations. Habermas suggests that this leaves no form of 'critical' knowledge separate from natural-scientific knowledge with its concern for the technical control of nature in the production process. He argues that Marx's work is therefore partial due to its being caught within the logic of the 'empirical-analytical' sciences and being unable to incorporate alternative forms of reason, action and knowledge. As Habermas had already argued in *Theory and Practice*, 'Marx does not actually explicate the interrelationship of interaction and labour, but instead, under the unspecific title of social praxis, reduces the one to the other, namely: communicative action to instrumental action' (1974a, p. 129).⁸ Habermas seeks to resist what he sees as the reduction of human relations to labour on the grounds that it would reduce human relations to instrumental subject-object relations rather than the non-instrumental relations between subjects. Rather than a history of the species in terms of material activity, labour and instrumental action, Habermas proposes an alternative history that incorporates these factors within a broader context of normative structures and moral consciousness. The sphere of labour and work can be contrasted with more normative areas of social life, such as the family and the public sphere, which are arguably less concerned with means and ends and more concerned with the attainment of 'understanding'. Emphasis on

⁸ Habermas argues further that 'liberation from hunger and misery does not necessarily converge with liberation from servitude and degradation, for there is no automatic developmental relation between labour and interaction [yet] there is a connection between the two dimensions' (1974a, p. 169).

these normative spheres allows for a less instrumental conception of culture too, i.e. one not premised on labour, and also a reconstructed version of historical materialism that acknowledges the negative effects of exploitation on communicative relations without reducing social, political and power relations to the economy (or strictly material forces).

So in addition to our technical interests, characterised by labour and instrumental action and expressed in the empirical sciences, and our practical interests, characterised by interaction through language and expressed in historical and hermeneutic sciences, Habermas is keen to outline the interests and forms of action that might be expressed in a 'critical' social science. Again, in line with Horkheimer's original programme for a 'critical' theory, Habermas has to be able to account for his 'rational' critique with recourse to a pre-theoretical source for his critical viewpoint. In response to this problem he proposes a third, 'quasi-transcendental' knowledge-constitutive interest that sits alongside those of labour and interaction. He suggests a human interest in 'self-reflection' and the capacity to act autonomously and 'rationally':

'In self-reflection, knowledge for the sake of knowledge comes to coincide with the interest in autonomy and responsibility (*Mündigkeit*). For the pursuit of reflection knows itself as a moment of emancipation. Reason is at the same time subject to the interest in reason. We can say that it obeys an *emancipatory cognitive interest*, which aims at the pursuit of reflection' (1987a, p. 198).

The ability of humans to reflect on their own social development, Habermas argues, allows them to act with greater consciousness and autonomy, and this is why this form of 'interest' is what he calls an 'emancipatory interest'. By reflecting on previous experience human beings, both individually and collectively, are able to recognise the influence of previously unacknowledged forces that have negatively influenced their lives. Also, it is only through

self-reflection that we have been able to identify the relationship between knowledge and interests, or theory and practice, in the first place.⁹

‘Critical’ social science therefore seeks to encourage the process of self-reflection and challenge any barriers to the formation of self-consciousness. Habermas initially turns to psychoanalysis as a promising model for the critical, self-reflective, sciences. The significance of psychoanalysis, and what Habermas refers to as its ‘depth hermeneutic’, is that it goes beyond the surface-level interpretations of the hermeneutic sciences to uncover the repressed needs and wants of the analysand. However, this is not simply a case of the analyst providing a correct ‘scientific’ interpretation of the analysand’s symptoms, rather the analysand has to *accept* this version of events in the process of reliving particular past experiences. In other words, psychoanalysis involves a complex mixture of causal explanation, through meta-psychological theory, and ‘dialogue’ (1987a, p. 237)¹⁰. Scientific verification in this case is not about agreement concerning an observation, as in the empirical sciences, nor a consensus about an interpretation, as in hermeneutics, but involves a self-reflective acceptance by the analysand of a reconstruction of her life history in such a way that her neurotic symptoms can be overcome. This process of defining a problem, engaging in dialogue, developing general theories that interpret the causes of repression, and then testing these theories to see if they are able to remove the communicative distortions, becomes the model for a ‘critical’ theory of society.¹¹

⁹ This is a point of contention in the debate between Habermas and Gadamer as, despite their agreement about our ability to transcend tradition, Gadamer criticises Habermas’s ‘formal’ account of the process of reflection freeing us from tradition and suggests that our reflection on tradition can only be carried out from within some other tradition.

¹⁰ Both Gadamer (in 2006 and 2008) and Ricoeur (1977), contra Habermas, emphasise the hermeneutic nature of psychoanalysis’ constructs and question its claims to science. Gadamer also challenges the extension of the psychoanalytical model to society as a whole.

¹¹ For an insightful and sympathetic reading of Habermas’s use of psychoanalysis in his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, see chapter 3 of Bernstein, J. M. (1995) *Recovering Ethical Life*, London, Routledge.

Responding to some criticisms in the reception of his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, Habermas seeks to clarify his idea of a critical social science in a way that will prove decisive for the future development of his ideas, and decisive for our analysis of his work. Partly he had problems clarifying the very nature of his three interests, and critics certainly were not satisfied with them being referred to as ‘quasi-transcendental’, particularly his hermeneutic critics (McCarthy, 1978, p. 95). On the one hand they could be seen as ‘transcendental’ in the Kantian sense, as they were considered as *a priori* presuppositions of knowledge, while on the other hand they were arguably ‘empirical’ due to their development in the context of human history. The emancipatory interest was considered the most problematic of the three, partly due to its reliance on the other two, but was crucial if Habermas was to defend a ‘critical’ theory from what he saw as the relativism of hermeneutics. However, dissatisfied with the uncertain nature of the psychoanalytical dialogue and its ability to justify a strong ‘critical’ position, Habermas attempts to clarify his position by making the distinction between ‘the reflection upon the conditions of potential abilities of a knowing, speaking and acting subject’ and ‘the reflection upon unconsciously produced constraints to which a determinate subject (or a determinate group of subjects, or a determinate species subject) succumbs in its process of self-reflection’; what he calls ‘rational reconstruction’ and ‘self-reflection’ respectively (1987a, p. 377). Rational reconstructions aim to establish general human competences in areas such as language use or cognitive development, and can tell us what ‘know-how’ is required for successful engagement in particular contexts. They are theoretical, in that they abstract from everyday communication to establish the conditions of ordinary action, while remaining attached to the empirical in outlining the everyday exercise of competences by subjects in interaction. Self-reflection, in the form of psychoanalysis, on the other hand is intimately tied to *practice* as it is concerned with the particular formative processes of

individuals or groups, and depends upon its capacity to produce a *practical* transformation through dialogue. Habermas suggests that this form of self-reflection itself depends upon rational reconstructions to aid the process of understanding, e.g. therapy requires the rational reconstructions of Freudian meta-psychology.

To translate all this into critical-social theoretical terms, ‘critical’ reflection on the forms of distorted communication is only possible, according to Habermas, with a (transcendental) rational reconstruction of what ‘undistorted communication’ might look like. Habermas’s work now increasingly shifts away from the idea of ‘reflection’ and towards the idea of ‘reconstruction’, and it carries with it some significant changes in his conception of power relations. Whereas *Knowledge and Human Interests* saw power at work in the reified (or unconscious) processes that inhibit autonomous action, and conceives of emancipation in terms of the psychoanalytical dialogue between analyst and analysand, Habermas is increasingly concerned about the inherent power differential between analyst and analysand, or theorist and society, and its possible political consequences. His response to this is to replace the power relationship of the Freudian model of dialogue with the idea of a ‘community of scientists’ taken from the work of Peirce.¹² Dialogue is now explicitly concerned with openness and equality, and power is conceived of as that which prevents participants from exercising their ‘communicative competence’ by excluding them from engaging in communicative discourse.

¹² I return to Habermas’s appropriation of Peirce in the section on ‘discourse ethics’.

The Linguistic Turn

The appeal of the hermeneutical sciences for Habermas relates to the emphasis they place on meaning and to their sensitivity to the norms and values of (everyday) social interaction, an area often neglected in the empirical, structural social sciences. He is sensitive to the claims of the hermeneutical sciences that all meaning is contextual, and that to know the meaning of an action or utterance is not to understand it in relation to some universal criteria but rather to understand it in relation to what Wittgenstein would call a 'form of life', i.e. to its own language and culture. However, to understand an action or utterance or symbolic expression in its wider context also raises the question of the possibility of 'understanding', as we inevitably grasp the meanings of others according to our own meaning-contexts. So what makes communicative action distinctive from instrumental action is that it is not geared towards identifying 'causes' or constructing general laws from empirical instances, as is the case with the natural sciences, but is rather concerned with dialogue and with the kind of understanding that seeks a horizon of shared meanings. As we have seen, the problem with hermeneutics, according to Habermas, is the tendency to idealise everyday communication, and the self-interpretations of those involved, and make it impervious to broader normative criticisms in the process. To avoid what he sees as the dangers involved with the full acceptance of the hermeneutic view of the world, Habermas believes that a 'critical' account is only possible if it can maintain some sort of transcendental or universalistic criteria. If the communication of meaning between subjects, which is at the heart of the hermeneutic account, is open to distortions resulting from social inequalities or from the market system or bureaucratic demands, then a 'critical' theory needs to go beyond the immediate self-interpretations and meanings of subjects to demonstrate the links between these meanings and broader structural deformations. By outlining the 'causes' of such deformation, a critical

theory is in a position to encourage the self-reflection of individuals and collective subjects such that they re-evaluate their own self-interpretations and meanings and remove the causes of communicative distortion.

Habermas's own version of 'critical' theory, after his *Knowledge and Human Interests*, attempts to make the distinction between appearance and reality, false freedom and 'true' freedom, pseudo-communication and 'true' communication, through recourse to an 'ideal speech situation' (Habermas, 1974a, p. 19). He is keen to emphasise that 'true' freedom is not achievable without the possibility of real, free and open communication leading to consensus. However, he has to be able to distinguish between true and false communication by setting out a critical standpoint from which actual (and particular) forms of public discourse and consensus can be critically exposed as illusory. Habermas outlines his ideal speech situation as follows:

'...the ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor simply a construct, but a reciprocal supposition unavoidable in discourse. This supposition can, but need not be, counterfactual; but even when counterfactual it is a fiction that is operatively effective in communication. I would therefore prefer to speak of an anticipation of an ideal speech situation... this alone is the warrant which permits us to join to an actually attained consensus the claim of a rational consensus. At the same time it is a critical standard against which every actually realised consensus can be called into question and tested' (Habermas, 1973 in McCarthy, 1978, p. 301)

This critical standpoint has to be perceivable in mundane interaction, as well as being potentially perceivable by those involved, whilst being sufficiently disruptive of the assumptions of current forms of (false) consensus. To make the critical standpoint a normative 'ideal', too far removed from actual forms of communication in everyday life, is in danger of alienating those involved and placing the social theorist in the position of

prescribing what their 'true' interests might be regardless of what they actually believe themselves. To make a critical standpoint reflect too closely the actual forms of communication in everyday life runs the risk of merely reflecting the status quo, i.e. reflecting the false consensus of an unequal social relationship¹³.

To formulate the 'ideal speech situation' as his critical standpoint, Habermas turns to the assumptions at work in everyday communication and language. Here he constructs the competences that we all use in everyday communication and outlines a theory of 'universal pragmatics' in the hope that it will be robust enough to justify a theory of society whilst also justifying a normative critique of society¹⁴. Habermas's turn to the everyday use of language is appealing in critical-theoretical terms inasmuch as he appears to meet the criteria of a 'critical' standpoint that avoids both an abstracted idealism and an acceptance of the world as it currently is. He avoids the charge of abstracted idealism by identifying certain ideals for communicative understanding that, he claims, are already implicit in our everyday use of language, i.e. our ability to understand a language and to communicate with others already assumes certain competences. However, he avoids the charge of merely reflecting the status quo by suggesting that current forms of communication and consensus do not adhere to the implicit ideals of communicative understanding; adhering to such ideals would require that a variety of extra-discursive forms of force and constraint be excluded from open dialogue geared towards understanding. To distinguish between 'true' communication and false communication, Habermas seeks to outline what we might mean by a successful communication of meaning from one person to another. Here he identifies certain consensual

¹³ Again, it is worth noting that Habermas tends to emphasise inequality as the measure here rather than consensus.

¹⁴ Central here is his essay 'What is Universal Pragmatics?' in Habermas, J. (1979) *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, Boston, Beacon Press.

background assumptions, which he refers to as ‘validity claims’, involved in the process of communication geared towards understanding.

By distinguishing between the propositional aspects of meaning, concerned with the ‘truth’ conditions of sentences, and the pragmatic aspects of meaning, concerned with shared understanding and consensus, Habermas believes that he can identify the ‘universal’ presuppositions of communication via speech. Rather than accepting the propositional aspect of speech as providing the fundamental function of language, Habermas suggests that it is the ‘pragmatic’ aspect of speech, which he sees in terms of seeking consensus and understanding, which is fundamental¹⁵. Inherent in this pragmatic aspect of our speech-acts, according to Habermas, are ‘cognitively testable’ validity claims that ensure that our utterances are (i) true (and we can provide grounds), (ii) right (and for which we can provide justification), and also (iii) truthful (for which we can demonstrate trustworthiness) (1979, pp. 59-68)¹⁶. When I, as speaker, attempt to communicate with someone, as listener, the listener has to be able to understand what I am trying to communicate, and this assumes that we can agree on the meaning of the terms used in communication, and that I will use certain grammatical and semantic rules. Should the listener not understand what I am saying, she could ask for examples or ask me to re-phrase my original utterance. The listener will also expect that what I say will have some claim to being true and therefore that my relation between language and reality is the same as hers. Should this not be the case, the listener will be in a position to ask

¹⁵ Although, of course, Habermas’s notion of ‘pragmatism’ differs markedly from ‘old’ pragmatism (or Gadamer’s version) where the focus is on problem solving. It is also notable that Habermas’s reference here to ‘truth’ (as a validity claim) is at odds with the pragmatist tradition.

¹⁶ The three validity claims (truth, rightness, and truthfulness), that Habermas suggests are presupposed in our speech acts, map neatly onto the three differentiated value spheres (science, morality/legality, aesthetics) that he, following Weber, suggests emerge in the wake of cultural rationalisation in Europe whereby modern natural science, with its mathematisation of nature and experimental observation, supplants religious worldviews and transfers authority from the Church to these separate realms of validity. These validity claims and value spheres also clearly link to what he calls theoretical, moral and aesthetic discourses. See Habermas (1984, chapter 2, particularly pp. 157-68). I will discuss this distinction further in the final chapter.

for further details of my claim or further evidence for my claim. Sincerity, on the part of the speaker, is therefore also expected by the listener, although the listener may come to mistrust my intentions and believe that I am trying to mislead her in some way or even that I am deceiving myself in putting forward my claim. Under these circumstances, the listener may expect me to assure them in some way of my sincerity or take further action to convince her. Finally, the listener will expect that my utterances are morally justifiable and therefore in line with certain standards of behaviour as part of a wider normative context. Should she doubt this, she will be in a position to question whether the underlying norms expressed in my assertions are justified. The key point in relation to these validity claims is that it is the justifiability of the reasons given that provides an utterance or action with meaning; the question of meaning cannot be separated from the question of understanding, as meaning is attained intersubjectively.

The validity claims Habermas identifies are clearly at work in our everyday communication and we are familiar with the expectations they entail. We are also familiar with the ways in which conflict over certain validity claims in our interactions can lead to a number of outcomes: either we attempt to reach a consensus or an acceptance of difference, or we seek to deceive or even coerce others, or we cease communicating with them. On a broader collective or discursive level, Habermas argues that such validity claims are exposed to thorough testing regarding their empirical or normative validity; for example, he suggests that we think of the institutionalisation of modern science as being concerned with empirical validity and the public and legal spheres as dealing with normative validity (and the arts as being concerned with aesthetic-expressive truthfulness). He suggests that these institutionalised forms contain certain assumptions when it comes to investigating our

collective knowledge of the natural world and our moral and political beliefs. The key point he makes here is that we can come to some sort of ‘rational’ consensus about empirical and normative validity claims, and that this consensus will be achieved through no other means than the force of the better argument (Habermas, 1990, pp. 89-90). Although this state of affairs is rarely, if ever, achieved, Habermas claims that its status, as the underlying assumption of rational discourse, makes it into an ideal of ‘true’ communication against which we can identify and criticise forms of pseudo-communication¹⁷. It is Habermas’s theory of communicative action and discourse that links up his pragmatic theory of meaning and his social theory. To put it rather crudely, we could say that at the very heart of all human action is the use of language, and when we use language we commit ourselves to a number of (universal) validity claims that we may be asked to justify on the basis of defensible ‘reasons’. These unavoidable validity claims introduce a *moral* commitment into our interactions with others and provide the possibility of consensus and social order. Should our communication break down in some way, we will (or should) move to a level of ‘discourse’ with the aim of reaching a new level of understanding and consensus. The discourse we engage in over particular validity claims can be characterised as theoretical (truthful), moral-practical (right) or aesthetic (sincere) discourse. I will discuss these issues further in the section on ‘discourse ethics’ below, however I will firstly turn to the relevance of these issues for Habermas’s ‘social’ theory.

System & Lifeworld

Despite the diversity and interdisciplinarity of Habermas’s work, the central consistent theme running from his work on the public sphere to his more recent political and legal theory, via

¹⁷ It is worth noting here that Habermas’s appeal to rational consensus in relation to the empirical validity claims of science differs from Adorno and Horkheimer’s criticism of empirical science as a form of ‘pseudo-communication’.

his linguistic turn, is arguably the ‘pathological’ consequences of the encroachment of ‘system’ imperatives on the communicative ‘lifeworld’¹⁸. Habermas’s key work, and in many ways a culmination of what has gone before, is his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981, 1984), and it is here where he focuses on this distinction.¹⁹ He pursues the division between instrumental forms of rationality and communicative rationality and emphasises the priority of the latter in terms of the need for social co-operation, whilst also highlighting the origins of instrumental forms of strategic action in communicative action. The ‘rationalisation of the lifeworld’ leads to the development of instrumental forms of interaction, along with the strategic interests of money and power, and can come to obstruct the ideals implicit in the different validity claims, i.e. the possibility of understanding and consensus achieved through meaningful, and democratic forms of communication. These strategic forms of interaction produce a distorted (or false) consensus, or even invalidate the need for consensus in the first place given the superior knowledge of ‘experts’. It is against this ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’ that Habermas further develops his ‘critical’ theory of society.²⁰

Consistent with earlier Critical Theory, Habermas sees instrumental action as based upon the means-ends logic of instrumental rationality whereby one works out the most efficient means to achieve a specified goal. It involves taking an objectifying attitude towards the world and manipulating objects (social and material) to succeed in attaining one’s goal. To make someone do something through coercion or subterfuge would be a form of strategic action as they have not given their consent or agreed to act based on acceptance of your reasons for

¹⁸ His first real engagement with the notions of ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld’, via systems and action theory, is in chapter one of his 1973 work, *Legitimation Crisis* (1988).

¹⁹ For a thorough overview of Habermas’s oeuvre, see Outhwaite (1994); Chapter 7, pp. 109-120, provides a particularly good, critical assessment of *The Theory of Communicative Action*.

²⁰ It is worth noting that Habermas’s argument against colonisation depends on a functional analysis – i.e. a notion of structural differentiation, where colonisation is de-differentiation.

action²¹. Communicative action on the other hand is concerned with attaining mutual understanding with other subjects; it is action achieved through communication, and on the basis of agreement through the mutual acceptance of reasons given in response to validity claims. Here means and ends coincide, as the ‘end’ of mutual understanding cannot be separated from the ‘means’ used to achieve it. Habermas builds on this distinction in linguistic terms with reference to Austin’s division of speech-acts into ‘illocutionary’ effects and ‘perlocutionary’ effects (Habermas, 1979, p. 36). The illocutionary aspect of speech is concerned with the understanding and acceptance of what is spoken, and is thereby geared towards consensus, whereas the perlocutionary aspect of speech is concerned with the strategic deployment of language, e.g. using it to manipulate others into complying with our wishes. However, Habermas is keen to establish the reliance of the perlocutionary aspects of speech on what he sees as the prior illocutionary aspects, i.e. the strategic use of language is only successful if it is able to *appear* as if the validity claims raised in the speech-act are redeemable. What Habermas is trying to do with this argument is to establish the primacy of communicative action and, in the process, outline a form of rationality more fundamental than the strategic forms of rationality prioritised by the likes of Weber and Adorno and characterised as increasingly pervasive, and inescapable, in modern culture.

The significance of this distinction between instrumental and communicative action, and the primacy of the latter, is further taken up by Habermas at the level of a theory of society. He distinguishes between different ‘forms of life’ that correlate with the internal characteristics of language: the forms of life that provide the context for instrumental action and communicative action are the ‘system’ and ‘lifeworld’ respectively. The ‘lifeworld’ is

²¹ However we could also argue that persuasion, with good reasons, would also potentially be strategic if it was to secure someone’s goals.

understood as the repository of the kind of knowledge that subjects require, in addition to the universal aspects of communicative competence, to act in particular social situations.

Habermas gives the example of the interaction between builders on a building site where an older builder asks a new, and younger builder to fetch some beer for their break (1987b, p. 121-3). In terms of communicative competence and the issue of validity claims, the younger builder is in a position to challenge the older builder over how the request was phrased, whether he is in a 'rightful' position to request that someone fetch it for him, or whether there is truthfulness to the request, e.g. the availability of beer at that time or from a nearby shop. However, additional issues are raised should the young builder refuse to comply with the request – maybe he doesn't understand the hierarchy of the building site, maybe they both have different conceptions of when a break should be etc²². Contextual knowledge of the situation is required here rather than just the validity claims of utterances. What Habermas is getting at is that particular meaningful situations rely upon taken-for-granted assumptions or cultural presuppositions that subjects bring to their understanding of the social world. When relatively stable forms of communication and understanding break down, these taken-for-granted assumptions come to the fore and certain beliefs might be challenged in such a way as to repair the interaction. These beliefs and assumptions that make up the lifeworld are then defended or criticised or transformed through language.

Habermas moves from this level of analysis to try and identify the structural characteristics of 'lifeworlds' more generally. He suggests that the lifeworld is made up of those spheres outside of formal economic and political life that serve the function of symbolic reproduction,

²² Here we might ask whether Habermas considers this hierarchy to be legitimate – i.e. that the builders accept that it is appropriate for young builders to fetch the beer. Couldn't we say that the exertion of authority, by the foreman, is strategic? We might also enquire about the possible legitimacy of accepting authority, and therefore the status of false consensus.

e.g. family, cultural tradition, media, community groups, social movements etc. It provides shared meanings, consensus and social integration - whilst also being open to challenges - and transmits knowledge and traditional beliefs. He argues that it is structurally very complex and serves a number of functions that have increasingly become separated over the course of social evolution: specifically cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation (1987b, p. 152). Introducing a Durkheimian thought-experiment, he suggests that we could think in terms of a gradual emergence out of a totally integrated society - where cultural beliefs, social practices and individual identities are uniform - towards an internally differentiated society where people increasingly come to distinguish their own perspectives from those of others. This occurs as a result of what Habermas calls the 'linguistification of the sacred' whereby the development of what he calls 'communicative competence' opens up traditional beliefs to rational debate (1987b, p.77)²³. Once agreement is no longer guaranteed in advance by cultural traditions, linguistic communication and the validity claims contained therein come to take their place. Habermas suggests that the resultant weakening of social integration leads to a 'rationalisation of the lifeworld' whereby social conflict and crises are less able to be contained by cultural traditions and require more abstract forms of resolution. The functions of cultural reproduction, social integration and socialisation become increasingly separated from each other and each comes to require universal and abstract forms of justification. Cultural traditions are increasingly subject to rational scrutiny, normative legitimacy is determined by democratic and rational procedure, and individual identities are increasingly autonomous.

²³ It goes without saying that, for all his criticisms regarding the separation of system and lifeworld and the increasing 'colonisation of the lifeworld', Habermas sees the development of secular morality as a broadly positive one whereby individuals are no longer tied to traditional values but come to base their co-ordinated actions on discourse and communication.

However, Habermas introduces the notion of the 'system', in contrast to the lifeworld, in an attempt to move beyond the kind of 'pure hermeneutics' that an argument purely concerned with the lifeworld is in danger of producing. If we were to understand social reproduction purely in terms of the social competences of social actors, and the lifeworld resources they draw on, we would ignore the processes of material reproduction on which the lifeworld depends and therefore the possibility of 'systematically distorted communication' (1987b, p. 388). Habermas suggests that social evolution is not simply a process of rationalising in terms of the lifeworld but entails an increasing lack of transparency in social relations as society becomes more complex²⁴. The development here is one whereby processes and mechanisms above and beyond mutual understanding and interpretation, i.e. beyond lifeworld relations, come to increasingly hold society together, and these processes are problematic for Habermas as they are not amenable to the questioning of validity claims apparent in communicative action. These processes and mechanisms are referred to by Habermas as the 'system', and whereas the lifeworld is the home for communicative action, he uses the term 'system' for those aspects of modern society that co-ordinate strategic action geared towards the material, rather than symbolic, reproduction of society. He argues that the system has, necessarily, become 'uncoupled' from the communicative context of the lifeworld and become institutionalised in the form of the modern state and modern economy, with money and power as the 'steering media'. Despite the instrumental logic embodied in these system institutions, Habermas recognises the necessity of uncoupling to 'fulfil conditions for the maintenance of socio-cultural lifeworlds' (1987b, p. 152), and he emphasises the ways in which the 'system

²⁴ Here Habermas is implicitly suggesting that transparency not only reveals the necessity of connections, but also the need for their transformation. Rather than seeing transparency as a means of reconciliation to social and material necessity, he is committed to a view that transparency necessarily uncovers problems. A more hermeneutical position might suggest that (transparent) authority could be accepted as necessary without being 'false'.

integration' characteristic of these subsystems is crucial for the co-ordination of social cohesion in complex modern societies.

However, despite the necessity of forms of system integration, Habermas focuses on the inherent dangers of what he terms 'the colonisation of the lifeworld'. Money, as the co-ordinating mechanism for the capitalist economy, and power, which determines the organisation of the State and its subsidiary institutions, are the instrumental 'steering media' at the heart of the 'system' according to Habermas. They take on the form of a 'second nature' in that they are often determined independently of collective consensus – left instead to the impersonal mechanisms of markets and the remote, non-democratic decisions of administrative experts - and often pass unnoticed as we automatically adopt the instrumental requirements they dictate. As Habermas argues:

'The transfer of action coordination from language over to steering media means an uncoupling of interaction from lifeworld contexts. Media such as money and power attach to empirical ties; they encode a purposive-rational attitude toward calculable amounts of value and make it possible to exert generalized, strategic influence on the decisions of other participants while *bypassing* processes of consensus-oriented communication. Inasmuch as they do not merely simplify linguistic communication, but *replace* it with a symbolic generalization of rewards and punishments, the lifeworld contexts in which processes of reaching understanding are always embedded are devalued in favor of media-steered interactions; the lifeworld is no longer needed for the coordination of action' (Habermas, 1987b, p. 183)

The compulsions often experienced by people in the face of complex economic and administrative functions, that are primarily concerned with means rather than questioning ends, leaves them devoid of the kind of understanding and autonomy Habermas argues is necessary for the social integration of the lifeworld. The economic system of exchange, although developing out of the material needs of the lifeworld, becomes a 'delinguistified'

system with a life of its own and threatens to subsume the lifeworld in line with its own instrumental demands. The system then tends to be experienced by social actors as a ‘quasi-natural reality’ (1987b, p. 154), outside the realm of mutually recognised validity claims, with its own autonomous logic above and beyond human control and responsibility. Although the economic and political subsystems of the ‘system’ developed out of the lifeworld, and continue to rely on it for normative reproduction, they tend to invade and dislocate it and produce a series of ‘social pathologies’ in a process that ultimately leads to a crisis in cultural reproduction – anomie, alienation, disintegration, instability, and lack of personal responsibility (1987b, pp. 142-5).

In many ways, these broad social experiences provide the empirical basis for Habermas’s ‘critical’ theory of society – a theory that accepts the necessary role of the system but seeks to police the boundary between it and the communicative lifeworld. His solutions to the problems associated with the ‘colonisation of the lifeworld’ tend to involve the containment of markets and power, and the attempt to make them answerable to democratic decision-making through fostering a stronger public sphere. Civil society generally, and new social movements specifically, are seen as offering the most promise in terms of redeeming the immanent feature of communicative action and building ‘a democratic dam against the colonising encroachment of system imperatives on areas of the lifeworld’ (Habermas in Calhoun, 1992, p. 444). However there is no clear-cut Marxian or Lukácsian agent of change in this scenario, and this role falls neither to the State itself or New Social Movements; the former being politically powerful but compromised by systemic demands, and the latter being politically promising but relatively powerless and often in danger of compromising its values once in a position of power.

Discourse Ethics

‘There is only one reason why discourse ethics, which presumes to derive the substance of universalistic morality from the general presuppositions of argumentation, is a promising strategy: discourse or argumentation is a more exacting type of communication, going beyond any particular form of life. Discourse generalizes, abstracts, and stretches the presuppositions of context bound communicative actions by extending their range to include competent subjects beyond the provincial limits of their own particular form of life’ (Habermas, 1990, p. 202).

Habermas’s distinction between the system and lifeworld is at the heart of his later ‘critical’ theory but in many ways draws upon aspects of his earlier work discussed above. To further clarify the normative content of Habermas’s ‘critical’ theory we have to look to the project of a ‘discourse ethics’ contained in his 1983 work *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (1990) and his 1991 work *Justification and Application* (1994); I will concentrate on the former. A useful, and common, way to understand Habermas’s work in this area is to see it in terms of its relationship to Kant. In many ways, Habermas’s conception of the ideal-speech situation is the linguistic and social equivalent of Kant’s categorical imperative. Kant’s ‘critical’ philosophy produced a specifically ‘modern’ conception of morality in that it attempted to produce a ‘rational’ account of normativity that no longer relied on the dogmatic conceptions of morality inherited from religious or other positive authorities, i.e. legislative reason was to rely on nothing but itself.²⁵ Kant is also seen by Habermas as reflecting the increasing split in modernity between ethical questions of the ‘good’ and the formal issues of justice and morality. Whereby Kant’s uniquely ‘modern’ conception of morality sought to equate moral authority, and the freedom of the will, with the universalisability of maxims guiding individual action however – ‘act only on that maxim by which you can at the same time will it to be a universal law’ - Habermas conceives of morality in ‘intersubjective’ terms

²⁵ As Habermas suggests, ‘Modernity can and will no longer borrow the criteria by which it takes its orientation from the models supplied by another epoch; *it has to create its normativity out of itself*’ (1992, p. 7)

as the possibility of reaching free and open consensus about what we accept as universal norms. However, Habermas's work has to be understood in terms of its relationship to Hegel too, and its sensitivity to Hegel's critique of Kant's formalism.²⁶ Regarding his theory of discourse ethics, Habermas claims that it 'takes its orientation for an intersubjective interpretation of the categorical imperative from Hegel's theory of recognition but without incurring the cost of a historical *dissolution* of morality in ethical life' (1994, p. 1). So on the one hand Habermas seeks to maintain Kant's pretensions to the universality of morality, so as to avoid falling into a historically relativist account that reduces moral life to substantive conceptions of the good. Whilst on the other hand he uses Hegel's intersubjective theory of recognition to avoid the excessive formalism and individualism of Kant's *monological* project: a project whereby solitary individuals, with recourse to the categorical imperative, can determine for themselves whether or not a moral norm is valid. Habermas's *dialogical* project seeks to establish the *intersubjective* nature of determining whether a norm is (universally) valid or not.

A key political difference follows from contrasting Kant's monological account and Habermas's dialogical account. Kant's individualistic account of morality sets up a distinction between private interests and public good and assumes that individuals determine their own interests and desires, and are able to decide whether they are acting morally, in isolation from wider social relations. If it is the autonomous individual that determines her own interests, and is able to act morally according to the categorical imperative, then negative freedom becomes the political priority, i.e. we have to ensure that others are not able to impose their values and priorities on us. Habermas on the other hand, following Hegel, argues that individual interests

²⁶ Hegel's account of political and philosophical formalism can be found in Chapter 2 of his *Science of Logic* ('Determinate Being').

and desires are socially constituted, and therefore that there is not quite the clear distinction between private interests and public good²⁷. If we accept that wider social relations determine the content of individual interests, desires and the validity of moral norms, then the political priority for Habermas is to guarantee that certain conditions are in place to ensure that the process for the formation of these interests, desires and norms, is open and equitable. An 'ideal speech situation' aims to outline the social conditions necessary to guarantee the freedom of *social* beings in the formation of their interests, desires and moral norms.

To avoid the 'historical *dissolution* of morality in ethical life', which Habermas sees as one of the key problems with Hegel's thought, he attempts to defend an interpretation of modernity with recourse to a notion of 'discourse ethics' and a reconstructive science in the form of a theory of moral development. There are echoes of Kant here, particularly in his attempt to build a theory of ethics by appealing to rationality alone without reference to particular cultural traditions; yet Hegel's argument about the way rationality is rooted in cultural traditions is also present.²⁸ However Habermas turns away from what he sees as the 'philosophy of history' option adopted by the later Hegel. This account of the entwining of reason and subjectivity in social evolution is taken to task for sacrificing concrete historical experience and individual subjects in the name of a teleological account of 'absolute subjectivity' and *Geist* (Habermas, 1992, p. 40-42); we will see this critique of Hegel repeated in Honneth's work on recognition. The problem with the later Hegel's 'philosophy of consciousness', and a key problem in the work of Marx and earlier critical theory according to Habermas, is the tendency to concentrate on the issue of subjective representations of

²⁷ However a more hermeneutical account might question whether Habermas does in fact take seriously the *social* constitution of individual interests and desires, as he tends to construct the social modelled on a dyad – i.e. he begins with the standard form of an individualistic account, with an imagining ego encountering an alter ego.

²⁸ As we will see, this tension between Kantian and Hegelian traditions has resonance for both Honneth and Adorno, albeit in different ways and with different outcomes.

objectivity, and the attempt to provide an account of the possibility that subjects are able to make (increasingly) valid claims about objects outside of their own (inter-subjective) conscious states. The logical extension of this is that Hegel's philosophy is said to seek some sort of total explanation, one adverse to the possibility of 'otherness', by recourse to a self-determining Spirit²⁹. Habermas's (and Honneth's) answer to such problems lies in the appropriation of the early Hegel's theory of intersubjectivity, and for Habermas this takes the form of a linguistic account of the possibility of communicative understanding. His approach here claims to solve, or at least sidestep, the problem of scepticism by shifting from a subject-object model to a subject-subject model. It also, hopefully for Habermas, is sufficiently sensitive to concrete historical context whilst avoiding historical relativism.

Habermas claims to have overcome the contextualist dilemma with a notion of 'discourse ethics', that appeals to a Kantian form of argumentation, alongside a 'universal' conception of morality taken from Kohlberg's theory of post-conventional morality. In this way, he claims to have identified a core aspect of morality (Moralität) that transcends cultural and historical tradition whilst also being firmly embedded in ethical life (Sittlichkeit). If successful, he is in a position to criticise 'distorted' forms of social life according to a transcendent standard that is *immanent* in social life – what Honneth calls 'intramundane transcendence'. The Kantian aspect of this standard is implied in Habermas's appropriation of Peirce's notion of an ideal community of scientists. As Kant steps back from empirical enquiry to identify the transcendental conditions of possibility of such an enquiry and trace them back to the capabilities inherent in the subject itself, Peirce also steps back from empirical enquiry to identify the transcendental conditions of possibility of such an enquiry; however he suggests

²⁹ This more traditional reading of Hegel has, quite rightly, been challenged for some time now by a number of Hegelian scholars. In particular see Rose (1981), Pippin (1989, 1991 and 1997), Pinkard (1996), Redding (1996) and McDowell (1994).

that these conditions involve the mutual agreement of a community of scientists regarding what they consider to be ‘valid’ judgements. Habermas follows Peirce here by shifting the emphasis from the fallible representation of objects to the communal assumptions and discourses involved in establishing what we accept as valid (1987a, p. 95).³⁰ Rather than studying scientific truth in this way though, Habermas concentrates on the formation of normative categories and the conditions of possibility of reaching agreement about normative claims. One way to conceive of this is by referring Habermas’s argument back to Kant. In relation to questions of practical reason, we could say that whereas Kant was concerned with what rational subjects ‘ought’ to do, Habermas takes a further step back and asks what the *conditions of possibility* are for subjects to be able to collectively determine for themselves what they ought to do.

One way in which he does this is to explore what he sees as the historical shift in conceptions of morality with recourse to the argument that modern societies are characterised by what Kohlberg refers to as ‘post-conventional’ morality. Kohlberg argues that child moral development passes through a ‘pre-conventional’ stage, where morals are learnt simply on the basis of consequences for actions, to a ‘conventional’ stage, where one conforms to the expectations of a wider social group, and finally on to a ‘post-conventional’ stage, where one is able to justify morals according to universalistic points of view. Although Kohlberg’s theory of moral development was formulated in relation to the stages of child development, Habermas suggests that the different moral stages identified by Kohlberg can be elucidated at the level of societal development (Habermas, 1990, p. 33-42). A number of problems

³⁰ It is noteworthy here that Habermas chooses Peirce over other pragmatists precisely because of Peirce’s commitment to ‘convergent realism’, an assumption not made by other pragmatists. Other pragmatists might argue that it is Habermas’s commitment to Peirce that leads to him getting caught up in the issue of objectivity and the problem of expertise.

accompany such an ambitious translation from individual child development to societal learning processes, although there is not space to explore these here.³¹ The key point Habermas wants to make however is that post-conventional moral subjects do not simply conform to moral expectations but act according to principles that they, and everyone else, are able to justify as valid. Post-conventional moral subjects know the difference between the justification of norms and the authority of those who subscribe to them.³² Habermas is aware of the problems here associated with the claim to universality and superiority in his account of this ‘decentred worldview’, but he is convinced that the openness and reflexivity involved shows it to be cognitively superior to, and the rational development of, more conventional worldviews (1990, p. 62-74).

Post-conventional moral subjects, according to Habermas, engage in communicative action geared towards understanding and consensus, and this consensus is dependent upon the acceptance of reasons given for validity claims. The three main validity claims raised in dialogue, and discussed earlier, connect to three key spheres of modern society: truth (science), normative rightness (justice and morality), and truthfulness or sincerity (ethics and aesthetics). Habermas’s account of communicative rationality seeks to reconstruct how these validity claims are redeemed in intersubjective dialogue geared towards understanding and consensus; to put it another way, he wants to establish what the (rational) conditions of possibility are for participants to be able to reach agreement in practices of communicatively

³¹ Besides the famous feminist critiques of Habermas – e.g. the appropriation of Kohlberg, his neglect of ‘care’, the emphasis on male ‘rational’ morality etc (see Gilligan, 1993 on Kohlberg, and the essays in Meehan, 1995) – we might also highlight the Eurocentric implications of this appropriation. However, Habermas is mindful of, and sensitive to, such criticisms, and he is determined to avoid the accusation of ethnocentrism in his formal derivation of the ‘moral’ or ‘universalisability’ principle (U). See in particular his *The Inclusion of the Other* (1998).

³² However, this is noticeably different to the pragmatist idea of science, i.e. that authority is the means of justification – e.g. we decide which journals to look at, whose arguments count etc, on the basis of the operation of authority rather than against it.

mediated interaction. He argues that each validity claim has its own form of rationality geared towards agreement, but it is only the validity claims to truth and normative rightness that involve the idea of ‘universality’, i.e. everyone involved in a particular discourse has to be able to agree on the proposed ‘truth’ or norm, *and* they have to agree that this truth or norm is valid for everyone. Habermas argues that the third validity claim, concerning ethical questions about what is ‘good’ rather than ‘right’, is not universal and always depends on context. This is an important point that I will return to later in my criticisms of Habermas.

What makes the redemption of validity claims in argumentation ‘rational’ for Habermas are the ‘universal’, and ‘idealising’, presuppositions at work in all forms of communicative action. He suggests that there are logical-semantic rules and procedural rules as follows (1990, p.87-8):

Logical-Semantic rules:

- (1.1) No speaker may contradict himself.
- (1.2) Every speaker who applies predicate F to object A must be prepared to apply F to all other objects resembling A in all relevant respects.
- (1.3) Different speakers may not use the same expression with different meanings.

Procedural rules:

- (2.1) Every speaker must assert only what he really believes.
- (2.2) A person who disputes a proposition or norm not under discussion must provide a reason for wanting to do so.³³

These rules involve consistency, mutual recognition and reciprocity, and for Habermas they are broad features assumed in all forms of consensual interaction where the force of the better

³³ However, these logical-semantic and procedural rules raise a number of contentious issues. For example, we might question the ban on contradiction (1.1) from a variety of positions – Adorno might ask whether non-contradictoriness is possible in an unreconciled society, and Winch (1964) might ask, as he does in relation to Evans-Pritchard’s work on the Azande, who gets to judge whether there should be any contradictions? In relation to 1.2, Habermas appears to be insensitive to social conventions – e.g. if ‘all swans are white’ is contradicted by a black swan, why is a large black bird judged to be a swan? In relation to 2.1, ethnomethodologists such as Garfinkel would argue that we assert *in order* to find out what we believe.

argument, rather than coercion, is at play. He suggests that, although these rules tend to be a general feature of all lifeworlds, the questioning of validity claims does not necessarily occur in a radically open way, but tends to happen in lifeworld contexts that contain shared ideas about facts, norms and values, and about what might constitute a ‘relevant argument’.

However, he also suggests that there are additional idealising presuppositions of communicative action that characterise ‘post-conventional’ societies, and these are ones that mark a ‘transcendental moment of *universal* validity’ that ‘bursts every provinciality asunder’ (Habermas, 1992, 322). In addition to the logical-semantic rules and procedural rules, Habermas suggests a third set of ‘social’ rules specific to post-conventional contexts (1990, p.89):

- (3.1) Every subject with the competence to speak and act is allowed to take part in the discourse.
- (3.2) a) Everyone is allowed to question any assertion whatsoever.
b) Everyone is allowed to introduce any assertion whatsoever into the discourse.
c) Everyone is allowed to express his attitudes, desires, and needs.
- (3.3) No speaker may be prevented, by internal or external coercion, from exercising his rights as laid down in (1) and (2) above.

It is not sufficient for there to be merely linguistic conditions in place, e.g. principles of consistency and sincerity; guaranteeing the force of the better argument also requires freedom from coercion, self-deception and inequality. The ‘truth’ of validity claims would be empty without freely offered consent, and therefore Habermas’s ideal speech situation contained in these rules is also a social ideal.³⁴

³⁴ More radically, we could say that these ‘social’ rules are also subject to contention and contradiction. In relation to 3.1, we might ask how ‘competence’ is to be judged, and how this relates to expertise. In relation to the issue of ‘self-deception’, some might argue that it contradicts the individual’s rights in 3.3. And how can freedom from self-deception ever be established?

Habermas argues that these ‘rules of discourse’ are ‘universal’ presuppositions due to the fact that they guarantee that mutual understanding and consensus will only be the result of the force of the better argument. The ideal speech situation (or unlimited communication community) that emerges from these idealising presuppositions is therefore identified as a regulative ideal, and critical yardstick, immanent in all speech acts. By turning these presuppositions into rules of discourse, Habermas makes a distinction here between the discourse principle (D) and the moral (or universalisation) principle (U). The principle (D) is a *negative* principle that regulates whether a norm is valid in terms of it gaining (or potentially gaining) the agreement of all those affected by it. If the rules of discourse are followed but consensus is not reached then we can say that the norm is not valid, although it does not necessarily follow that if consensus is reached then a norm is valid³⁵. An account of what *does* make a norm ‘valid’ is provided by Habermas’s principle of universalisation (U), which suggests that all participants cannot accept a controversial norm:

‘unless all affected can freely accept the consequences and the side effects that the general observance of a controversial norm can be expected to have for the satisfaction of the interests of each individual’. (1990: p. 93)

The stronger aspect of principle (U), which is effectively Habermas’s reformulation of Kant’s categorical imperative, claims impartiality by suggesting that each participant in discourse does not accept a particular norm unless it can claim to represent ‘generalisable interests’. Habermas appropriates Mead’s conception of the ‘generalised other’ here for his U principle of *dialogical* morality (see Habermas, 1990, pp. 116-194; Mead, 1967). He argues that

³⁵ This is a source of contention in the debate between Habermas and Rawls, with the latter emphasising the political (rather than metaphysical) justification for right. As with his critique of hermeneutics, Habermas finds this emphasis on social stability separated from validity (and truth) problematic. Instead he seeks to emphasise the moral over the ethical by reference to (secular) cognitive grounds, and accuses Rawls of prioritising the moral on merely functional grounds. See the debate, and comments on this debate, in Finlayson & Freyenhagen (2013). See also Baynes (1992) for a good overview of the issues at stake.

morality requires us to adapt our own desires and interests in accordance with an awareness of the needs of others, an awareness that involves us putting ourselves in the place of others and also requires us to develop a sense of self informed by the way others see us. The position of the 'generalised other', which is carried out as a concrete member of the lifeworld rather than from the position of a perspectiveless observer, requires that we consider the interests of all those who might be affected by a particular norm. It serves the role of socialising individual interests in line with the collective interest so that, in the process of moral discourse, a moral agent should be able to test her own interests against those of someone in different circumstances. This 'general' consideration should therefore avoid the promotion of norms that only work in the interests of particular groups.

Habermas believes that his work here - his reformulation of Kant's categorical imperative and his account of the idealising presuppositions of communicative action - is able to move us beyond both the distinction between morality and ethical life, and the distinction between abstract ideals and actual forms of communication. Although he is proposing a 'universal' principle of validity, he is careful to distinguish his project from one that would claim to be able to determine the 'content' of the validity claims in different discourses. Although he is often read as a 'universalist', he wants to be clear that he is not, nor could be, in a position to legislate what is 'good' concerning substantive ethical issues; for him these remain local issues. The complexity and diversity of modern life does not necessarily throw up universal answers as to what the 'content' of self-realisation, self-understanding or the good life should look like. As philosophers or social theorists we are not in a position to legislate for the 'content' of the substantive issues raised in deliberation, which is ultimately decided by social

actors themselves, *but* he suggests that we are in a position to outline the (implicit) formal aspects of what constitutes a rational procedure of deliberation (in Dews, 1986, p.203-11).

Although this is a more modest claim, it is still rather ambitious in suggesting that philosophy is able to prescribe the rational procedure for deliberation due to the presuppositions of communication being universal regardless of time, space and context. Habermas also suggests that even if we were to reach an ‘ideal speech situation’; whereby dialogue was free from coercion and restraint, it is unlikely that there will be agreement on substantive issues. Rather, there would be a ‘compromise’ in terms of group interests rather than any clear ‘universal’ interests³⁶. The presuppositions of discourse commit us to the possibility of an ideal speech situation where, should the conditions be met, we can reach a rational consensus accepted by all. So on the one hand, the ideal speech situation is a regulative ideal that is only ever approximated, yet on the other hand Habermas argues that it is not an ‘abstract ideal’ as it is inscribed in the ‘real’ context of communication. It is an ideal derived from actual communication, and actual communication *presupposes* such an ideal. Habermas’s notion of a ‘discourse ethics’ walks a fine line between acknowledging the importance of lifeworld contexts on the one hand – and their role in providing meaning, identity, agency and solidarity

³⁶ Habermas pursues these issues in a legal and political direction in his 1992 book *Between Facts and Norms* (1996). Here he explores the role of law and politics in the maintenance of social solidarity in modern, plural societies. In the context of competing ethical visions of the good life, law and politics have an important mediating role to play should such visions come into conflict. However, he argues that these can only be truly successful as stabilising mechanisms on the basis of normative legitimacy and universal democracy. In the absence of traditional means for integrating facticity and validity - e.g. recourse to sacred authority, habit and custom etc – modern law unifies by being both positive (in the sense of being enforced by a recognised authority) and normatively legitimate (insofar as it gains consent from those it applies to). The version of legitimate law that Habermas espouses is informed by his ‘deliberative paradigm’ which seeks to protect both (liberal-democratic conceptions of) private autonomy *and* (civic-republican conceptions of) public autonomy; as he argues, ‘Under postmetaphysical conditions, the only legitimate law is one that emerges from the discursive opinion-and will-formation of equally enfranchised citizens’ (p. 408). He also suggests that legitimate law is in line with the ‘common good’ of post-conventional morality and that such laws can be deemed self-determined (in Western democracies) due to the openness of decision-making bodies to the discursively produced opinions of civil society and the public. For a critique of Habermas’s book, for apologizing for ‘systems paternalism’ and for compromising the critical thrust of his earlier work, see Cook (2001).

for its members - and on the other outlining a critical 'moral' standard independent of that lifeworld to which oppressed members can appeal.

Some Critical Reflections

Hopefully it is clear from this brief overview of Habermas's work that he has produced a powerful body of work and a strong viable alternative for a reconfigured Critical Theory. However, the breadth and ambition of Habermas's work has, not surprisingly, provoked a number of criticisms in a number of areas and from a number of theoretical and political positions. Needless to say it would be impossible to summarise all of them here, although I have made reference to a number of them already, so I will concentrate on the criticisms I feel are most pertinent for a 'critical' theory and the ones I feel are most threatening to the core of his position. These can broadly be split into criticisms directed at Habermas's system & lifeworld thesis, along with his separation of instrumental and communicative rationality, and what we might call 'Hegelian' objections directed at his distinction between morality and ethical life.³⁷ Honneth's criticisms of Habermas encapsulate these two dimensions (Honneth, 1991). He takes Habermas to task for producing an overly neat dualism between the system and lifeworld that has the theoretical advantage of separating communication from power, but ultimately produces the 'fiction' of a 'norm-free' domain of power and a 'power-free' domain of communication. Honneth (2007, p. 70) is also critical of the 'emancipatory process in which Habermas socially anchors the normative perspective of his critical theory'. For Honneth, the key characteristic of Critical Theory is its attempt to ground its 'critical' (i.e. potentially emancipatory) intent in what he calls the 'pre-theoretical resource' apparent in social needs or social movements; without this critical theory becomes just another form of

³⁷ Which is not to say that both categories of criticism are not clearly linked.

social (scientific) critique. The problem, according to Honneth, is that the ‘critical’ and emancipatory element of Habermas’s theory appeals to the normative presuppositions ‘implicit’ in *linguistic* understanding and is therefore too far removed from the actual (moral) experiences of social actors. If a pre-theoretical resource for a ‘critical’ perspective is to be found in social reality, then Honneth suggests that it has to articulate ‘an existing experience of social injustice’ (2007, p. 70). I will explore Honneth’s criticisms of Habermas, and his attempts to develop this communicative position, in the next chapter.

The two categories of criticism I have outlined are apparent in a number of accounts by different social theorists³⁸. Critics such as McCarthy (1991) have questioned Habermas’s use of systems theory in preserving the dualism of system and lifeworld. They argue that the role of social groups in concrete struggles against the pathologies of system integration is relegated to a sphere supposedly free of power relations. Also, to assume that the material reproduction of society is instrumental and develops according to an autonomous logic is to compromise the Marxian insight that what is assumed to be a ‘natural’ feature of social life is in fact the product of particular socio-economic relations at a particular period of history. McCarthy wants to question Habermas’s assumption that the formal aspects of organisations and systems take total precedence over the informal aspects of interactions within them, and he suggests that it is possible to look at forms of social action from both ‘social integration’ and ‘system integration’ perspectives. For McCarthy, these problems are related to Habermas’s increasing appeal to ‘objective standards’ of critique outside of our political and lifeworld practices:

³⁸ Habermas responds to a number of his critics in Thompson & Held (eds.) (1982). Also see his essays in Habermas (1990), (1994) and (2003).

‘Habermas once criticised Marx for succumbing to the illusion of rigorous science, and he traced a number of Marxism’s historical problems with political analysis and political practice to this source. The question I have wanted to pose here is whether in flirting with systems theory he does not run the danger of being seduced by the same illusion in more modern dress’ (1985, p. 53 in Rasmussen, 1990, p.46)

Nancy Fraser extends these criticisms to suggest that no matter how questionable the appeal to norms and consensus might be in certain forms of strategic action, they are always there; therefore, however convenient it might be for theoretical purposes, we are not in a position to analytically separate strategic action from the context of shared norms and meanings. She argues that the ‘system’ is permeated with moral and cultural elements, and the ‘lifeworld’ is unavoidably permeated with the ‘systemic’ elements of money and power. The latter has consequences for the theoretical understanding of gender as well, as the assumption that the family is simply characterised in lifeworld terms separately from the system, risks missing the elements of power in gender relations and also glossing over important issues such as unpaid (domestic) labour (Fraser, 1989, pp. 118-120).³⁹

Rather than seeing the system and lifeworld in dualistic terms as separate spheres with separate practices, whereby the systemic steering media of money and power gradually supplant the communicative practices of the lifeworld, we might more fruitfully see instrumental and strategic power relations and economic exchanges as themselves *part* of the lifeworld, and therefore mutually entangled in rather complex ways with a communicative orientation directed towards recognition and meaning. To separate out a sphere of strategic action from a sphere of shared norms is also to rob everyday or ordinary communication of the difficult process of what we might call ‘dialectical experience’ which involves both

³⁹ Habermas self-critically acknowledges the gendered aspects of the public sphere in Calhoun (ed.) (1992).

strategic action (with its subsumption of particulars under general categories) *and* reflection (on such subsumption and its inadequacy).⁴⁰

These criticisms of the system and lifeworld distinction are intimately linked to a number of ‘Hegelian’ criticisms that suggest that principles of rationality are always embedded in the development of historical and cultural forms.⁴¹ The dangers of a neat separation between system and lifeworld, and between a reconstructive science and concrete social practice, manifest themselves in terms of the problem of motivation, and the problem of universalisability. However much Habermas might provide us with new ways of thinking about limitations on freedom, particularly those conditions that prevent social actors from freely formulating their ‘true’ needs, he is still vulnerable to the kind of criticism Hegel levelled at Kant in terms of the emptiness of universal laws.⁴² Habermas’s theory might be able to tell us what the presuppositions of communication are, and also what social conditions need to be in place for us to fully exercise our communicative competences, but it is still too rarefied to guide everyday social actors in their specific duties. In his quest to distinguish between progressive and regressive social developments, he purifies the ideals of communicative reason and turns practical norms into formal-theoretical norms on the assumption that their formality is what provides them with universality and ‘rational’ authority; however, in the process, he arguably deprives these norms of their link to action, motivation and solidarity (see Bernstein, 2005, pp. 307-8). As Pinsky argues:

⁴⁰ I will explore this notion of ‘dialectical experience’ in more depth in chapter 4. Habermas would of course see this notion as part of the problem, i.e. as signifying a return to an instrumental, subject/object logic of representation rather than a learning process of (mis)representation and (mis)recognition.

⁴¹ These ‘Hegelian’ criticisms could also be equally directed against critics such as McCarthy and Fraser.

⁴² Of course Habermas is very mindful of, and sensitive to, such criticisms. See his "Morality and Ethical Life: Does Hegel's Critique of Kant Apply to Discourse Ethics?" in Habermas (1990) pp. 195-212.

‘Deriving solidarity from the application of universal moral or legal norms supposes that people are capable of forming relationships of intersubjective interdependence and mutual support, even care, from precisely those features of one another that are most abstract and that they share in principle with all other human beings, and this is indeed a significant explanatory burden’ (in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 136).

Similarly, Hegel suggested that Kant’s categorical imperative suffered by abstracting ‘reason’ from the concrete activities of everyday life that give reason its content and its binding character.⁴³ At the heart of Hegel’s notion of ‘ethical life’ (*sittlichkeit*) is the idea that moral principles are, and always have been, inseparable from cultural values and their broader concrete social context; indeed this is what provides such principles with authority and meaning⁴⁴. Bernstein argues that once Habermas ‘purifies’ the ideals of communicative action, he ends up with an idealisation which repudiates ‘the material and temporal conditions of meaning’ such that the meaning of these ideals becomes separated from their use and they lack the practical authority which makes them ‘intrinsically motivating’ (2005, p. 308).

Further to this, if we are only able to perceive our ‘true’ needs and interests in the future-projected state of an ‘ideal speech situation’, and an ideal speech situation itself depends upon social actors not deceiving themselves, then perceiving what ‘full rationality’ might entail is surely not possible before this end-state is achieved. This is to argue, in others words, that

⁴³ It is worth noting that Hegel’s take on language – as ‘the middle term, mediating between independent and acknowledged self-consciousnesses’ - is also markedly different to Habermas’s emphasis on the (abstract) communicative presuppositions in our linguistic exchanges. Habermas neglects the ‘expressive’ dimension of language, and the role it plays in the constitution of the self through relations of mutual recognition; paraphrasing Hegel in his critique of Kantian moral consciousness, we can say that the interlocutor in Habermasian discourse ethics is ‘shut up with itself within its inner life, for there the self does not as yet have an existence: existence and the self stand as yet only in an external relation to each other’ (Hegel, 1977, p. 396 §653).

⁴⁴ Having said this, there are some grounds for exploring the idea that the overly Kantian framework of Habermas’s position is intentional and involves the development of strong idealisations as a response to the broader context of moral scepticism (e.g. See Bernstein, 1995, p. 7 and p. 174, and Bernstein, 2005, pp. 308-9). Also, Habermas is clearly mindful of the temptations and dangers of idealising – for his self-critical reflections on the public sphere, see Habermas in Calhoun (ed.) (1992).

what is 'rational' is always *historical*, all the way down. The tension here is between maintaining a 'critical' position, which appears to require some way of transcending the historically concrete situations that social actors find themselves in, while ensuring that those social actors consider the espoused ideal acceptable and 'rational'. Benhabib (1986) outlines similar criticisms to those of Bernstein and asks whether the separation of a principle of universalisability from concrete social practices is a convincing prospect for a critical theory. She suggests that 'discourses arise when the intersubjectivity of ethical life is *endangered*; but the very project of discursive argumentation presupposes the ongoing validity of a *reconciled* intersubjectivity' (1986, p. 321). The danger here is of a communicative ethics divorced from the actualities of life struggle, or in other words a theory abstracted from practice. Pippin (1997, pp. 157-84), in his Hegelian critique of Habermas, moves some way to answering these problems by suggesting that Habermas needs to give a *historical* account of how we have collectively come to adopt (or create) the norms for communicative action that he outlines, alongside why such norms are yet to be acknowledged as universal. For Pippin, there can be no 'given' norm that we presuppose in communicative action, and the justification for a norm is reliant on a (complex) historical narrative that is able to demonstrate how and why communities came to adopt (or create) such a norm⁴⁵. In this way, 'empirical' reconstruction of such norms, for the purpose of criticism, is only possible with recourse to a historical narrative.

A related problem is the feasibility of 'universally' valid moral norms. If a norm is to get the free consensus of those it affects, while those affected are expected to take the position of the 'generalised other', it is very unlikely that there will be many universally valid norms. If these

⁴⁵ Putnam (2004) makes a similar point by suggesting that the separation of values and norms is not as straight forward as Habermas hopes, and argues that norms presuppose certain values or what he calls 'thick ethical concepts'. See Chapter 7, pp. 111-134 ('Values and Norms').

valid norms are also supposed to be playing a socially integrative role, then surely social cohesion is being dealt with by other mechanisms. Habermas's insensitivity to these other mechanisms is echoed in Benhabib's concern that the position of 'generalised other' tends to neglect the uniqueness of the 'concrete other'. In other words, for subjects to take the position of the 'generalised other' is to abstract from important aspects of concrete individuality and identity so that we can treat each other as equal rational beings with equal rights. She suggests that this position needs to be complemented by the standpoint of the 'concrete other' where we:

'view each and every rational being as an individual with a concrete history, identity and affective-emotional constitution. Our relation to the other is governed by the norm of *complementary reciprocity*: each is entitled to expect and to assume from the other forms of behaviour through which the other feels recognised and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents, and capacities. The norms of our interaction are ... the norms of solidarity, friendship, love and care' (Benhabib, 1986, p. 341).⁴⁶

In terms of 'universalisability', Habermas is claiming to have started from the everyday moral actions of concrete subjects to discover his D and U principles, as these are principles that individuals supposedly use themselves in judging the validity of norms. However he has trouble demonstrating that these principles are not just the reflection of another, historically contingent, ethnocentric bias and simply based on partial moral and ethical assumptions. He is also unable, simply on the basis of his rules of discourse, to formally specify that a norm is valid if it is open to consensus. Pippin argues that such procedural norms already contain an ethical ideal - i.e. 'justice' via the public role of reason - and therefore also restrict what the ethical goals of modern society could be. In other words, Habermas needs to give a historical and cultural account of how and why such ideals have come to acquire collective legitimacy

⁴⁶ This critique will have particular resonance when we consider Honneth's development of the communicative turn in a recognitive direction.

without relying on any claims to transcendental ‘givens’ (Pippin, 1997, pp. 179). The norms of our current practices are already implicated in the ‘procedural’ practices of deliberation. It is not simply the case that we can extract the ‘rational’ procedural aspects from our interactions and then use this as a measuring stick against our current lifeworld practices. To assume the division between substantive lifeworld issues and the rational procedures of deliberation, is to assume that the rational procedures of deliberation are free from the substantive content of radically diverse lifeworlds (and therefore universal). An alternative, Hegelian, response would be that such procedures themselves arise out of the (substantive) norms of lifeworld practices. As Mendelson suggests:

‘The historical potential of the ideal speech situation for becoming the actual organising principle of society can only come to fruition in a society which comes close to articulating it on the level of more historically specific and conscious traditions, for instance, the Western democracies of the twentieth century. While in a sense the ideal of rational consensus may be immanent in language *per se* and not simply an external standard, in most societies it is bound to remain unarticulated in the actual culture. It becomes politically relevant as an ideal to be consciously striven for only in societies which have begun to approach it on the level of their own cultural traditions.’ (Mendelson in Benhabib, 1986, p. 303)

Benhabib’s use of Mendelson here tries to demonstrate the partial nature of Habermas’s notion of universalisability due to its reliance on additional assumptions, namely the way reason has been institutionalised. The principles espoused by Habermas, in other words, are arguably derived from a particular social, historical and political context. Young also makes this point when she suggests that:

‘The deliberative model of communication derives from specific institutional contexts of the modern West – scientific debate, modern parliaments, and courts (each with progenitors in ancient Greek and Roman philosophy and politics, and in the medieval academy). These were some of the aspiring institutions of the bourgeois revolution that succeeded in becoming ruling institutions. Their institutional forms, rules, and rhetorical and cultural styles have defined the meaning of reason itself in the modern world. As ruling institutions, however,

they have been elitist and exclusive, and these exclusions mark their very conceptions of reason and deliberation, both in the institutions and in the rhetorical styles they represent. Since their Enlightenment beginnings, they have been male-dominated institutions, and in class- and race-differentiated societies they have been white- and upper-class dominated. Despite the claim of deliberative forms of orderly meetings to express pure universal reason, the norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people' (Young, 1996, p. 123 in Ashenden and Owen, eds., 1999, p. 139).

There are clear parallels here with the fact that Habermas's ideal speech situation can only claim to be 'universal' by abstracting what is 'rational' from the complexity of a 'far from rational' social world, i.e. one divided by class, gender, ethnicity etc. Is it possible, under these conditions, to separate what is deemed 'rational' from its social context, or can we expect that 'rationality' will carry the remnants of class or gender bias? In such a conflictual world, we might expect that what is deemed 'rational' for one group may not be what is rational for another (Bernstein, 1995, p.56). Without an acknowledgement of this, Habermas is in danger of producing a social theory with no concrete connection to the actual (and complex) lives of social actors. Habermas is sensitive to such criticisms but would want to question the 'partial' nature of his deliberative model, or at least insist that the exclusions described above are ones to which a deliberative model addresses itself and which would hopefully be challenged when guided by such a model as a socio-political ideal.

A connecting feature of all the criticisms of Habermas outlined above, and one which is at the heart of the remainder of my argument, is the danger that a communicative critique ends up repeating a number of the features of an increasingly abstract and pervasive instrumental form of rationality. Although instrumentally-rational proceduralism, and its concomitant nihilism, is at the heart of Critical Theory's understanding, and critique, of contemporary societies – both in the form of Adorno's critique of instrumental rationality's subsumption of the non-

identical and Habermas's critique of the colonisation of the lifeworld by a subject-centred instrumentality – we can argue here that the strong idealising presuppositions at the heart of Habermas's discourse ethics tend to display the purifying and procedural properties of such instrumental rationality. As Bernstein argues, 'what Habermas ranges against the proceduralism of instrumental reason and the purposive-rational frameworks of the functional subsystems of society is another form of procedural rationality' and as 'formalism and proceduralism are themselves the primary *criteria* that make a form of reasoning instrumental ... communicative reason is a component of the very disintegrative process it means to remedy' (Bernstein, 1995, p. 33). The proceduralism at work in Habermas's idealising presuppositions of communication, which seeks to separate out universal norms from ethical values, shares the hallmarks of instrumental rationality inasmuch as it abstracts from difference, particularity, subjectivity, and social – as well as material and temporal – context. Unique things are treated as alike for the sake of procedural success and exchangeability, and all *particular* features that make such things qualitatively incomparable are deemed contingent and extraneous. As Hegel suggests in his critique of Kant, such 'universal' reason is unable to account for the claims that might be made by desire, the body, nature, particularity etc. Therefore, in the same way that Habermas suggests that the steering mechanisms of power and money are unable to foster meaning and community, we could equally argue that a procedural rationality, even in its communicative form, will find itself in a similar position.

The next chapter furthers some of these criticisms of Habermas, and explores Axel Honneth's attempts to overcome a number of them by taking the communicative turn in critical theory in a recognitive direction. He particularly attempts to tackle the overly formal separation of

power and communication (and norms and values/ethics) in Habermas, along with the problem of motivation, and the insensitivity to the unique Other. He does this by connecting to what he sees as the more concrete *moral* experiences of those suffering injustice - injustices which Habermas's linguistic model is unable to fully appreciate - and he explores how the appropriation of implicit moral norms by social and political struggles has developed (and might still develop) historically.

CHAPTER 2: AXEL HONNETH & THE STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

Axel Honneth has been increasingly recognised as an important figure in contemporary Critical Theory and in contemporary social theory as a whole. His work has been at the forefront of what has often been termed a ‘third generation’ of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and has developed the ‘tradition’ in a number of new and interesting ways.¹ In a similar vein to Habermas, his work covers a broad number of areas and disciplines including moral theory, social philosophy, philosophical anthropology, politics, sociology, and psychoanalysis. It has also attracted a growing number of followers and critics, and there is a rapidly growing secondary literature developing around his ideas.² This chapter explores the ways in which Honneth has addressed a number of criticisms directed at Habermas’s communicative project and how his work both continues and differs from this original project. Honneth’s own trajectory has developed in a number of ways, although there are clear continuities between his early essays on Marx, his book on philosophical anthropology with Hans Joas, his exploration of different versions of critical theory in his *Critique of Power* (which includes Foucault) through to his more recent essays on psychoanalysis, his debate with Nancy Fraser, his work on reification, and his essays on individualisation and capitalism. Although I will cover all of these areas of his work in varying degrees of depth, I concentrate on the heart of his project - and still his most significant work to date – which is his *Struggle for Recognition* (1996).

I begin the chapter with Honneth’s attempt to ‘rediscover the social’ from within the earlier Frankfurt School project, before exploring his sympathies for, and criticisms of, Habermas’s

¹ For a brief overview of the ‘third generation’ see Joel Anderson in Petherbridge (ed.) (2011) pp. 44-48.

² For example, see Van Den Brink and Owen (eds.) (2007), Deranty (2009), Huttunen (2009), and Petherbridge (ed.) (2011).

emphasis on communication. I then consider Honneth's use of Foucault to complement Habermas, along with his other reflections on post-structuralist writers and what they might contribute to his critical-theoretical project. However, the bulk of the chapter is dedicated to Honneth's turn to Hegel's early work on recognition (and to Mead's 'postmetaphysical' work on interaction) following his abandonment of Foucault's 'systems-theoretic solution to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'. At the heart of his *Struggle for Recognition* are the underlying forms of mutual recognition – love, rights and solidarity – along with the accompanying forms of self-relation and realisation, disrespect and the potential for moral development and resistance. I explore these along with Honneth's 'formal conception of ethical life' which he hopes can successfully mediate between formal Kantian morality and substantive communitarian ethics whilst also providing him with both a philosophical justification for his normative position and a standard of moral development for evaluating forms of, and struggles for, recognition. My discussion of this is followed by a brief outline of his recent work on reification and recognition before then considering a number of critical responses to Honneth's project as a whole. My criticisms of his work, in the final section of the chapter, focus on his tendency to *idealise* the notion of recognition, his lack of a sufficient conception of *misrecognition* and the *ideological* role that recognition often plays, and ultimately the abstract and procedural nature of his 'formal' conception of ethical life.

Rediscovering the social

Honneth initially attempts to outline a 'social-theoretical alternative' to what he sees as a 'functionalist' program implicit in the original project of the inner circle of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse) – and to the linguistic version of Habermas's Critical Theory - by referring to those more marginal members (Neumann, Kirchheimer, Benjamin,

Fromm) in whose work he sees an implicit reference to an alternative communicative project. One point of reference is the work of Neumann and Kirchheimer, who opposed Pollock's 'state capitalism' thesis by suggesting that National Socialism did not mark the point where bureaucratic administrative controls had been able to supplant the mechanism of the market or the centrality of the interests of private capital, but rather that the latter came under the control of totalitarian management as the result of a political compromise between a range of interest groups with the furtherance of opportunities for profit as their goal. Another point of reference for Honneth is the difference between Benjamin's position and the 'Marxist functionalism' of the 'inner circle' in the debates over aesthetics and politics. Benjamin's strengths are seen as being due to his attempt to counter the key problem with Adorno's conception of the culture industry - a notion of social control and integration which 'reaches into all cultural life-contexts' such that he cannot 'credit social groups with the creative performances which would be necessary in order to learn spontaneously new forms of world disclosure from the mass arts' (Honneth, 1995, p.81). In response to this, Honneth sees Benjamin's work as promising an alternative conception of social experiences, one centred around social interaction and collective forms of perception such that 'the experiential worlds of different groups and collectives represent not so much the material of domination but rather the stubborn energies themselves from which the movement of social life emerges' (Honneth, 1995, p.81).³ Despite Fromm's earlier contributions to a functionalist conception of individual integration, he is also singled out by Honneth as making a promising contribution to an alternative communication-theoretic perspective, specifically at the level of psychology. His psychoanalytical thinking is seen to have moved, under the influence of the work of Karen Horney amongst others, away from a classical Freudian theory of relatively immutable self-

³ I will return to this in chapter 4.

preserving instincts, towards a more 'interactionist' theory of malleable, socially-oriented instincts or needs.

Referring to Neumann and Kirchheimer here, but effectively summarising the advantages of this 'outer circle', Honneth argues that they:

'always start from the interests and orientations that social groups themselves bring into societal reproduction on the basis of their class position. From the communicative process in which different groups negotiate these interests among themselves through the utilisation of their respective power potential, there emerges the fragile compromise which finds expression in the institutional constitution of a society' (1995, p.79).

Social integration is always therefore the result of a compromise between a range of conflicting interests groups with their group-specific norms of self-understanding and action rather than 'a steering process which simply extends into the symbolically mediated interests and orientation of social groups' (Honneth, 1995, p.79). Although Honneth does not further pursue the work of the outer circle in his conception of Critical Theory, it is the communicative possibilities implicit, yet undeveloped, in their work which Honneth wants to develop into a theory of society; a project which, despite its differences, is highly sympathetic to the direction in which Habermas has taken Critical Theory.

Habermas represents the important alternative to earlier Critical Theory for Honneth and opens up the possibility of meeting Horkheimer's original criteria. As we saw in the previous chapter, his 'paradigm of communicative action' replaces the Marxist emphasis on production and social labour and pins its hopes for emancipatory action and social progress on the rational potential inherent in 'social interaction'. The 'rational potential of communicative action' is found in the normative presuppositions contained in the pragmatics of language, and

it is here (in this 'pre-theoretical sphere of emancipation') that Habermas is able to ground his normative position. In the process of communicative action, we carry with us certain normative expectations connected to the linguistic rules that are implicit in communication geared towards understanding. Should our normative expectations not be fulfilled, certain moral demands arise that expose the forms of domination at work in current forms of communicative action. In comparison to Horkheimer who 'saw capitalist relations of production as setting unjustified limits on the development of the human capacity for labour', Honneth suggests that Habermas 'sees the social relations of communication as putting unjust restrictions on the emancipatory potential of intersubjective understanding' (2007, p. 69). By arguing that there is a normative impulse at the very heart of human communication, and that this normative impulse is expressed in the implicit linguistic rules of communication, Habermas is in a position to propose a 'critical' theory that aims to highlight, and hopefully contribute to changing, the social obstacles that impede the full expression of these rules.

Habermas emphasises that subjects are always already in relation to each other due to processes of linguistic understanding, and it is this language-mediated intersubjectivity which distinguishes human beings as a species. If linguistically-mediated intersubjective action is such a distinguishing feature of human life, then social reproduction cannot therefore simply be seen in terms of, or seen as determined by, material reproduction - the interaction of humanity and nature in the form of social labour. Rather language and communication must be seen as playing an equally important role in history, after all, collective material

reproduction relies on communicative understanding and agreement.⁴ Equipped with this distinction between ‘labour’ and ‘interaction’, Habermas attempts to develop a theory of societal rationalisation that outlines the different forms of knowledge production and rationality associated with each; this is a task more straightforwardly carried out with regards to labour due to its close relationship with instrumental action and technical knowledge, but proves somewhat more difficult for interaction. As we have seen, Habermas wants to demonstrate not only the development of strategic action in society through the lens of social labour and political administration, but also to identify a separate communicative sphere whereby certain institutions play the role of reducing barriers to the free communication of the social norms and values which are central to social integration and reproduction. From here, according to Honneth, the task is set for Habermas to develop three key areas of this emerging theory: (a) the linguistic presuppositions of language and communication, (b) a notion of social evolution able to explain the process of societal rationalisation (in both instrumental and communicative spheres), and finally (c) an outline of the ways in which ‘realms of social action become independent purposive-rationally organised systems’ (1995, p.88)

Habermas’s development of these themes throughout his *Theory of Communicative Action* provides Honneth with an alternative ‘communicative-theoretic’ version of Critical Theory able to maintain the key features of the tradition while avoiding what he sees as the

⁴ Honneth explores many of these ideas in his early work on philosophical anthropology, particularly his work with Hans Joas – *Social Action and Human Nature* (1988). Here Feuerbach is identified as playing a key role in outlining the ‘*a priori* intersubjectivity of the human being’ (p. 15) and Marx’s work is also dissected for its intersubjective insights. After an exploration of the development of these ideas in Western Marxism, they analyse theories of social action (e.g. Mead) and the historical-anthropological elements in the work of Foucault, Elias and Habermas. This work in many ways establishes certain foundations for Honneth’s later concerns with the implicit normativity of intersubjective relations. It also seeks to emphasise the unavoidability of anthropological assumptions in social philosophy whilst trying to sidestep the association of anthropology with ahistoricism; philosophical anthropology instead is portrayed as exploring the ‘invariant conditions of human historicity’ (1988, p. 7).

pessimistic conclusions of Adorno and Horkheimer's one-sided account of societal rationalisation. Habermas is applauded for developing a historical account of societal development from the standpoint of communicative rationality in a similar way to the historical account from the standpoint of instrumental rationality and the mastery of nature in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. As we have already seen, Habermas sees the development of systemic forms of strategic action as increasingly separate from other communicative forms of social life, which he collectively refers to as the 'lifeworld'. He is then able to conceive of a dualistic development of society, albeit one where the two logics of development are unevenly weighted. Communicative rationality and linguistic understanding are seen as fundamental to social reproduction, whereas the norm-free sphere of action encapsulated in his notion of 'system' is conceived of as a historical consequence of a process of abstraction. In characteristic medical language, Honneth then outlines Habermas's 'diagnosis' of contemporary society (or rather modernity more broadly) along with its central 'pathology': the systemic forms of instrumental action are not to be seen simply as the logical outcome of humanity's mastery of nature, as he suggests Adorno and Horkheimer would have us believe, but rather as the outcome of a process of societal rationalisation emerging from the lifeworld. Consequently, it is not merely the existence of such instrumentally driven forms of administration, organisation and steering that pose the problem for contemporary society, but rather the way in which they unjustifiably encroach on those areas of social life premised on communicative understanding – what he calls the 'colonisation of the lifeworld'.

A key problem of Habermas's work for Honneth is the very fact that he produces an account of social evolution in terms of a conflict between communicative and purposive-rational action *spheres* rather than conflict within a wider process of understanding between social

classes or *groups*. This conflict is not even seen as being mediated through social struggle but rather as a process of rationalisation over and above classes whereby the purposive-rational actions, whose origin is in intersubjectively produced norms, assume a life of their own and adversely turn upon the sphere of social interaction.⁵ Habermas reifies the distinction between the two action spheres by seeing the sphere of communicative action as not influencing the sphere of purposive-rational action, which in turn only acts destructively upon the communicative sphere of action. For Honneth, as for a number of critics I referred to in the previous chapter, Habermas's conception of contemporary capitalist societies, in terms of the autonomous and opposing spheres of system and lifeworld, lead to what Honneth calls 'complementary fictions', reifications resulting in the supposition of '(1) the existence of norm-free organisations of action and (2) the existence of power-free spheres of communication' (1991, p. 298). Honneth opposes the notion of 'norm-free' strategic action by arguing that 'the organisational structures of management and administration can be generally clarified only as institutional embodiments of both purposive-rational and political-practical principles' (1991, p. 298).⁶ He criticises the notion of 'power-free communication' by questioning Habermas's presupposition of the cognitive separation of actions oriented to success and actions oriented to understanding, and the fiction of a social lifeworld that is reproduced independently of strategic influences. Also, if power is only considered at the level of systems integration, he argues that Habermas ignores 'the importance of pre-state,

⁵ This criticism of Habermas, in many ways, pushes Honneth back towards Marx and the importance of class. Honneth is particularly critical of Habermas's tendency to reduce work to instrumental action and therefore to give up on a 'critical concept of work'. For Honneth's attempts to work through these issues, see his 'Domination and Moral Struggle: The Philosophical Heritage of Marxism Reviewed', 'Work and Instrumental Action: On the Normative Basis of Critical Theory', and 'Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality' in his *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (1995). For an excellent study that explores these earlier elements of Honneth's thought, see Deranty (2009).

⁶ This is very similar to the problem of the analytical and the concrete in Parsons, and in the forms of ideal types in Weber; concrete actions are mixed, but they are represented through analytical abstractions. See Parsons (1968) and Weber (1949).

situationally bound forms of the exercise of everyday domination in the reproduction of a society'; conversely, if social integration is only perceived in lifeworld practices concerned with the symbolic reproduction of society then he ignores 'the importance of processes of social interaction internal to an organisation for the functioning of social organisations' (1991, p. 301). In response to this, Honneth's work moves in a direction that seeks to identify the moral presuppositions at work in all social interactions (i.e. both social and systemic).

For Honneth, Habermas's social theory ends up with an analysis of the social consequences of autonomous power complexes, and his dualism of system/lifeworld parallels that of an organisation/individual dualism in Adorno, and a power apparatus/human body dualism in Foucault; all of which adhere to what he calls a systems-theoretic, rather than a communication-theoretic, approach. The central pathology of contemporary society for Habermas becomes the 'penetration of systemic forms of steering into the previously intact region of a communicative everyday practice' (Honneth, 1991, p. 302). However, despite the conception of social spheres as systems, Honneth sees Habermas's approach as having the advantage over the other critical social theorists due to the serious consideration of moral processes of understanding through his notion of the centrality of communicative action for social reproduction. Yet, the dualistic conclusions of Habermas's thought lead to a two-fold sacrifice. On the one hand he abandons a conception of 'the communicative organisation of material production which, under the title "self-administration", belongs to the productive part of the tradition of critical Marxism' thereby sacrificing 'the possibility of a justified critique of concrete forms of organisation of economic production and political administration' (Honneth, 1991, p. 303). On the other hand, he ends up sacrificing 'the communication-theoretic approach he had initially opened up: the potential for an understanding of the social

order as an institutionally mediated communicative relation between culturally integrated groups that, so long as the exercise of power is asymmetrically distributed, takes place through the medium of social struggle' (1991, p. 303). These criticisms provide the backdrop for the future direction of Honneth's work.

The Uses of Foucault & post-structuralism

Despite Honneth's general commitment to a Habermasian version of critical theory and his criticisms of Adorno and Horkheimer, he distances himself from what he sees as Habermas's increasingly abstract formulations – ones that separate communicative understanding from actual critical social praxis, discourse from social conflict and struggle, and power-free communication from norm-free power. Honneth's initial attempts to transcend this division with a notion of *morally motivated struggle* (1996, p. 1) employ a conception of struggle taken from Foucault's notion of discipline before then emphasising Hegel's early work on recognition. Honneth brings Foucault into the problematic of Frankfurt School Critical Theory as an alternative 'rediscovery of the social' alongside Habermas's communicative approach.⁷ Foucault is of use in emphasising the role of power in the dimension of the social in a way arguably absent from Habermas's account of communicative action which tends to see power as simply an external and corrupting influence. Habermas, in his critique of Marx and his aligning of social labour with instrumental action, had also abandoned the importance of social struggle. For Honneth, Foucault's notion of discipline is useful in reintroducing a notion of struggle and conflict once the purely strategic emphasis is replaced with an emphasis on morality. He argues that Foucault's work moves into the realm of the Frankfurt school problematic once his object of study changes in his 'genealogical' period - from the

⁷ Honneth had also already engaged with the work of Foucault in his earlier book with Joas (see Honneth and Joas, 1988, pp. 129-150).

history of culturally determining forms of knowledge in European modernity to the stabilising effect of institutional and cognitive strategies of social integration on societies of modern Europe – and he begins exploring how theories of knowledge are at once theories of power (Honneth, 1991, p.153). Honneth’s criticism of Foucault however broadly parallels that of Habermas – i.e. that his implicit critique of social relations displays a ‘cryptonormativism’ due to his inability to establish a normative position that is not reducible to its historical function. Honneth plays Foucault and Habermas off against each other in an attempt to produce a theory that is able to emphasise the role of communicative action in an adequate Critical Theory on the one hand, whilst incorporating a notion of struggle, and an explicit sensitivity to the role of power in the social, on the other hand.

Criticising the Marxist theory of state, Foucault suggests that social domination is not explainable in terms of one centralised point of control that rules by means of the political apparatus; alternatively, he proposes a centre-less (or ‘de-centred’), net-like conception of power – a ‘microphysics of power’. A system of power emerges when different objectives or results of action from various social contexts momentarily coincide and form a common objective. The permanence of a system of power is dependent on its ability to repeat such interrelated results in similar contexts of struggle. In contrast to the notion of an individual subject or social group possessing power, Foucault proposes that power be seen as the ‘fragile and open-ended product of strategic conflicts between subjects’ (Honneth, 1991, p. 155). This emphasis on struggle represents for Honneth, initially at least, an action-theoretic approach to power. What Honneth highlights as important here, and what he sees as calling Adorno’s work into question, is ‘the practical foundation of the exercise of power, the substate situations of social struggle’ (ibid, p. 159). Before the state apparatus can function smoothly,

there already has to be a system of power in place established through the interconnection of outcomes at a substate level.⁸

However, according to Honneth, Foucault is unable to sufficiently account for the stabilisation of power, given a conception of the social world in terms of strategic action and the dismissal of moral orientations and legal norms as simply covering up strategic objectives; Honneth suggests that this pushes him towards a more ‘administrative’ theory of power. A system of power is seen as ensuring its stability by developing more thorough means of control - something Foucault attempts to clarify with his notion of the ‘productive’ (rather than simply repressive) nature of power. Modern forms of power produce ‘norms of conduct’ which routinise and discipline patterns of behaviour. To do this, and in turn reduce their own instability, societies seek to control (and produce) the ‘body-bound expressions of life’. In addition to norms and bodies, Foucault emphasises the importance of knowledge, as the disciplining of individual bodies and general life processes are dependent on strategically useful knowledge about humans. Foucault conceives of scientific knowledge as serving the purpose of social control, and its objectivity is measured in relation to its efficacy in the social control of individuals. Every practical attempt to control human life extends the base of scientific knowledge, and every extension of information about human life extends the locus of power and deepens disciplinary control. Here Honneth highlights the key contradiction that he sees in Foucault’s work – if Foucault takes his conception of the human sciences seriously then he calls into question his own work, which is surely nothing more than a reflexive form of strategic action.

⁸ I explore Foucault’s work in more depth in the next chapter.

Honneth is also critical of what he sees as Foucault's shift of focus from the intersubjective nature of social struggle towards a conception of social institutions (such as factories, schools, and prisons) as the subjects of the exercise of power. By doing this Foucault displaces the question of the establishment of such institutional powers through social struggle and attempts to avoid the problem of the stability of power. Ultimately for Honneth, Foucault has a number of choices in explaining the stabilisation of power and these come down to 'the interruption of the struggle in the form of a normatively motivated agreement, or of a pragmatically aimed compromise, or of a permanently emplaced use of force'. For Honneth, Foucault forgoes the first two 'two-sided' options and opts for the latter 'one-sided' possibility (1991, p. 174), presumably on the basis that any form of normative consensus would be seen as a function of power. His model of strategic conflict therefore precludes any conception of the mutual resolution of struggle in an ultimately transitory stabilisation of power. For Honneth, Foucault's work increasingly emphasises the all-encompassing disciplining power of modern institutions at a distance from his starting point of the unceasing process of social struggle.

This contradiction, due to Foucault's reduction of social action to strategic action, is superseded in his historical writings, which go on to emphasise the systematic process of techniques of power. Here he attempts to describe how a number of autonomous disciplinary centres developed into a homogeneous self-regulating system due to institutional overlaps but, for Honneth, he fails to identify the social groups responsible for institutionally linking these separate centres of power. Although social struggle provided the starting point for Foucault's theory of power, his account of the process of increasing power, which adapts to its environment from time to time, conceives of social groups as the bearers (or objects) of

systemic processes rather than the subjects of the institutionalisation of forms of domination. Also, modes of human conduct, especially their bodily forms, are seen as mere material to be manipulated by the prevailing system of power at the time, leaving subjects without the motives or means for the production of social conflict (ibid, p. 194-195). Honneth suggests that Foucault ends up with a 'functionalist' account of 'the augmentation of social power' and social control whereby social groups end up as the mere effects of such systemic processes, and strategic action by motivated social actors is sidelined along with any notion of social struggle.

As is the case in his interpretation of Adorno, Honneth sees Foucault as relying on a systemic conception of societal organisation - accomplished for Adorno by centralised administration and for Foucault by the disciplinary procedures of institutions such as prisons and factories - and as dismissing any role for social groups, or the cultural or normative orientations of socialised subjects, in the social integration of late-capitalist societies (Honneth, 1991, p. 199). In fact Foucault's account ends up in a worse predicament than Adorno, according to Honneth, as he provides an ontology of the pliability of human subjects whereas Adorno's account of the 'administered society' at least sees it as a historical product of civilisation.⁹ Once Foucault moves from a conception of the social in terms of struggle to one in terms of disciplinary institutions, 'it is no longer a question of the complementary process of a gradual human self-alienation as found in Adorno's philosophy of history', but rather Foucault's theory of power represents a 'systems-theoretic solution to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*'

⁹ Although it is worth noting that elsewhere Honneth tends to interpret Adorno and Horkheimer's view of the socialising role of culture (in the culture industry) as a *theoretical* decision characteristic of a 'Marxist Functionalism' rather than a (despairing) *socio-historical* analysis of the fate of culture in contemporary capitalism. Foster (1999, p. 7) also makes this point.

(ibid, p. 201).¹⁰ Despite their differences, this model of ‘critique’ suffers the fate of Adorno’s account of reification according to Honneth – i.e. if society and consciousness, as the possible (social) sources for independent and critical consciousness, have become completely reified, then any attempt at social critique that grounds itself in social reality must be considered impossible. To put it another way, if mundane social experience is considered from the viewpoint of the ‘administered society’, then any attempt to identify a critical element of ‘intramundane transcendence’ will be found wanting.¹¹ Honneth must turn elsewhere for his development of Habermas’s communicative turn.

In addition to his engagement with Foucault, Honneth explores the work of other post-structuralists. Despite his critical comments here, he is rather sympathetic in places and seeks to incorporate some of their insights into his own work on recognition. In his essay ‘Pluralisation and Recognition’ (in Honneth, 1995), Honneth tends to sympathise with a number of societal diagnoses put forward by theorists such as Lyotard, Baudrillard and Rorty – e.g. the death of grand narratives, the end of the social, the decline of shared traditions, the media simulation of reality etc - although he disagrees with their explanations and conclusions. Whereas Lyotard, Baudrillard and Rorty are often portrayed as celebrating a number of these developments, particularly in relation to what they see as an increased opportunity for freedom, difference and (self) creativity unmoored from the restraints of social norms, Honneth questions the possibility of self-realisation without normativity and communicative understanding, and also reads the socio-economic developments that have led

¹⁰ For an additional exploration of the parallels and differences between Foucault and Adorno, see Honneth’s ‘Foucault and Adorno: Two Forms of the Critique of Modernity’ in his *The Fragmented World of the Social: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy* (1995).

¹¹ Honneth later acknowledges however that this doesn’t conclude his thoughts on Foucault and he suggests that ‘I have rethought my relationship to Foucault’s works many times over the years, because I have never been wholly satisfied with the results of my critique’ (in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 410).

to the disintegration of the social world as producing largely negative consequences of atomisation, fragmentation, and the decline of solidarity. Honneth also questions the aesthetic model of freedom and self-creation adopted by many of the post-structuralists for relying on a solipsistic account of self-realisation that neglects the importance of recognition and normativity for self-identity and intersubjective freedom.¹²

A more sympathetic engagement with post-structuralism appears in Honneth's 1994 essay entitled 'The Other of Justice: Habermas and the Ethical Challenge of Postmodernism' (in Honneth, 2007). Here he explores the relative ethical merits of post-structuralism and the ways in which a project that has often been conceived as nihilistic or apolitical can help us transcend both Kantian forms of morality and Habermasian universalist discourse ethics. What Honneth sees in the work of Levinas and Derrida, and to some extent in aspects of Adorno's work, is a valuable attempt to remain sensitive to the particularity and singularity of concrete others which is often lost in accounts of morality and justice (and even accounts of communicative solidarity) that focus on formal equality. In this way he draws parallels between the post-structuralist (and Adornian) concerns with the exclusion of 'others' in metaphysical systems of thought and a concern with those 'others' excluded from social and political institutions and discourses. Honneth assesses the success of Lyotard's 'ethics of the *differend*' but ultimately finds it wanting when compared to Habermas's discourse ethics, despite the latter's tendency to neglect the importance of singularity and particularity.¹³ According to Honneth, Lyotard's attempt to do justice to value pluralism and diverse knowledge claims (i.e. the voice of the excluded), with his notions of incommensurable and

¹² Here I am in agreement with Honneth. I explore this in greater depth, in relation to Foucault, in the next chapter.

¹³ Honneth had already critically engaged with Lyotard's work in his earlier essay 'An Aversion Against the Universal: A Commentary on Lyotard's *Post-Modern Condition*' in *Theory, Culture and Society*, (1985) Vol. 2, No. 3: 147-56

competing genres and ‘language games’, ends up implicitly appealing to a version of ‘justice’ framed in (not un-Habermasian) terms of domination-free discourse.

However it is Derrida’s Levinasian inspired ‘ethics of care’ that is seen to surpass Habermas’s discourse ethics in terms of responsibility to the singular other. Derrida outlines the tension between two (equally legitimate) moral principles which he sees as united, or rather co-existing, in a ‘politics of friendship’ – on the one hand, the treatment of the other as an equal to oneself and other people, and on the other, the asymmetrical and affective care of the other as a unique individual.¹⁴ This tension between equality and justice goes to the very heart of (Kantian) universal forms of morality and legal-formal rights, and in many ways also challenges a perspective which emphasises the importance of mutually recognising others as equals. However, Honneth seeks to use it for his own purposes by highlighting the ways in which the emphasis on asymmetrical care serves to reflexively correct the perspective of equality and increase sensitivity to the concrete other. He claims that deconstructive ethics does a better job of incorporating a notion of care than what he sees as Habermas’s appeal to an affective ‘solidarity’ between communicative partners, because the latter requires us to abstract ourselves from the particularity of our social and cultural (and value) communities – where we often experience concrete forms of solidarity – to find a form of solidarity based on broader shared goals of communication. Honneth also champions the former model on the grounds that our early childhood development attests to the experience of care before equality. Having said this, and despite his inclination towards Derrida’s position here on the productive tension between care and equality, Honneth ends up asserting an incompatibility and opposition between the two rather than a supplementarity, and remains firmly in the

¹⁴ See Derrida (2005).

Habermasian camp.¹⁵ He also then abandons his exploration of Derrida's work, and that of other post-structuralists, without sufficient explanation.

Following the explorations of Foucault and Adorno - whose deficiencies he argues provide an immanent justification for his championing of the work of Habermas - and his brief flirtation with post-structuralism more generally, Honneth turns his attentions to the early Hegel to work through a notion of 'morally motivated struggle'. I will outline the work of Foucault in more depth in the following chapter, along with the links between his work and the project of Critical Theory. I will explore the later 'aesthetic' turn in his work, which is neglected by Honneth, to see what implications this might have in relation to Honneth's criticisms above, and in relation to the communicative turn in Critical Theory as a whole. Adorno also returns in the final chapter and significantly informs my arguments in relation to both Foucault and the communicative turn. Now I turn to the book, and argument, which is in many ways at the heart of Honneth's critical-theoretical project.

Struggle for Recognition

What is at stake in the Critical Theory offered by Habermas, amongst other things according to Honneth, is the absence of a pre-theoretical connection to moral experiences of injustice. Habermas's theory still meets Horkheimer's methodological criteria by replacing social labour with communicative understanding, but he has no replacement for the moral experiences of injustice faced by the proletariat. It was these practical *experiences* that provided the everyday social reality and pre-theoretical resource for Horkheimer's normative standpoint, experiences that could be articulated in a more systematic manner in the form of a

¹⁵ For criticisms of this conclusion see Critchley (1999, pp. 267-80) and Sinnerbrink (in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 201-2).

'critical' theory. Honneth follows Habermas in rejecting the idea that the possibility of emancipation is attributable to 'a group of people who have nothing but socio-economic circumstances in common', but he follows Horkheimer in seeking to identify the moral experiences of social actors that would indicate the justifiability of a 'critical' normative standpoint. The key criticism here is that the process of emancipation that grounds Habermas's 'critical' standpoint is not necessarily apparent in the moral experiences of the social subjects involved; it does not give voice to experiences of social injustice that already exist. The 'communicative rationalisation of the lifeworld', whereby the linguistic rules of understanding are developed, and become apparent, occurs 'behind the backs of the subjects involved; its course is neither directed by human intentions nor can it be grasped within the consciousness of a single individual' (Honneth, 2007, p. 70).

Honneth points to his specific resolution of this problem by seeking to broaden what is at stake in our processes of social interaction. He is still working with a Habermasian notion of the normative presuppositions of communicative action but seeks to make them more substantial than Habermas's linguistic account; he does this by making these presuppositions into explicitly social prerequisites for successful self-relations. Rather than isolating the linguistic rules implicit in communicative action, Honneth wants to emphasise how human subjects can only be said to have moral experiences, and to respond to a sense of injustice, when a broader sense of self is under threat. This broader sense of self is expressed in the following:

'(Subjects) experience an impairment of what we can call their moral experiences, i.e., their "moral point of view", not as a restriction of intuitively mastered rules of language, but as a violation of identity claims acquired in socialisation' (2007, p. 70)

In other words, to prevent Habermas's 'idealising presuppositions' concerning rules of language from forming a moral law without connection to the moral self-understanding of social agents, and thereby reproducing the problem of motivation for which Hegel criticises Kant, Honneth suggests that the normative potential of social interaction lies with the moral experiences of disrespect at work in everyday communication and emerges from the lack of recognition given to one's (implicit) identity claims. Evidence for such experiences is sought in historical and sociological studies, such as those of Barrington Moore or E. P. Thompson, which are concerned with the everyday social resistance of the lower social classes. What Honneth sees here are examples of resistance that, rather than resulting from articulated moral principles, emerge out of *implicit* and *intuitive* notions of justice, unarticulated raw material as such that can be worked up into positive moral principles:

'The normative core of such notions of justice is always constituted by expectations of respect for one's own dignity, honour or integrity. If we generalise these results beyond their particular research context, we arrive at the conclusion that the normative presupposition of all communicative action is to be seen in the acquisition of social recognition: subjects encounter each other within the parameters of the reciprocal expectation that they be given recognition as moral persons and for their social achievements' (2007, p. 71).

Honneth is therefore able to make a stronger link than Habermas between the normative presuppositions of social interaction and the moral feelings of those involved. By identifying the need for recognition as a core (anthropological) aspect of the development of our identities, Honneth argues that any threat to such recognition in the form of 'social disrespect' will lead to a threat to our very identity and will inevitably evoke feelings of 'shame, anger or indignation' (2007, p. 72). It is these feelings in the face of 'structural forms of disrespect' that provides Honneth with the 'pre-theoretical resource' for a coherent critical theory.

Honneth develops these ideas in more detail in arguably still his central work to date, *Struggle for Recognition* (1996). Here he turns to the notion of recognition in the Jena writings of the young Hegel, along with the work of George Herbert Mead, and seeks to identify the communicative presuppositions involved in successful identity-formation, with an emphasis on autonomy and self-realisation. Hegel's Jena writings serve Honneth's project well, as they did for Habermas's distinction between communicative action and instrumental labour, due to their emphasis on the moral-developmental potential of conflict between social subjects for the collective ethical life of the community. Criticising the atomism at work in the Hobbesian notion of struggle and the natural law tradition, Hegel utilises the Classical doctrine of the state along with the politics of Aristotle and the notion of the *polis* to propose that intersubjective forms are always already part of human nature and at the heart of every process of human socialisation. Social struggle is understood to be driven by moral impulses rather than by motives of self-interest and preservation, and the life of the community is not to be conceived of in terms of a necessary limitation of individual liberty, but rather as opening up the possibility for the freedom of every individual. As Honneth argues:

'Hegel was convinced that a struggle among subjects for the mutual recognition of their identity generated inner societal pressure toward the practical, political establishment of institutions that would guarantee freedom. It is individuals' claim to the intersubjective recognition of their identity that is built into social life from the very beginning as a moral tension, transcends the level of social progress institutionalised thus far, and so gradually leads – via the negative path of recurring stages of conflict – to a state of communicatively lived freedom' (1996, p. 5).

However, according to Honneth, this 'original plan' of Hegel's is sacrificed in the development of his thought in favour of the 'philosophy of consciousness' apparent in the

Phenomenology of Spirit.¹⁶ Honneth suggests that what is lost in this later conception, with its emphasis on the ‘stages of the self-mediation of individual consciousness’, is the notion that communicative relations between subjects actually precedes individuals. The earlier conception proceeded from relationships of communication out of which individuals become differentiated, and led to the notion that through the struggle for recognition individuals become emancipated while also rationally understanding their intersubjective similarities - from a state of ‘natural ethical life’ to a state of ‘ethical totality’, or from ‘embryonic forms of community’ to ‘more encompassing relations of social interaction’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 15). The later conception however proceeds from the confrontation between individuals and their environment allowing ‘first, a consciousness of totality to emerge in the individual subject, which leads, second, to the stage of universalisation or decentralisation of ego-perspectives that accompanies the struggle for recognition’ (1996, p. 29). Honneth sets himself the task of completing the lost trajectory of Hegel’s early thought which he sees as consisting of ‘making the necessary distinctions between various degrees of personal autonomy within the framework of a theory of intersubjectivity’ (1996, p. 30).¹⁷

Despite the relatively inconclusive nature of Hegel’s work in the Jena period, Honneth takes from Hegel’s *System of Ethical Life* a distinction between three forms of recognition and proceeds to outline their general structure:

‘[I]n the affective relationship of recognition found in the family, human individuals are recognised as concrete creatures of need; in the cognitive-formal

¹⁶ Here Honneth agrees with Habermas and Theunissen who argue that later Hegel sacrifices his earlier work on intersubjectivity in favour of absolute spirit or the rational state (see Habermas, 1992, and Theunissen in Cornell et al, 1991). It is also of note that Honneth’s account of recognition is markedly different from Hegel’s account of the master/slave dialectic in the *Phenomenology* whereby reciprocal recognition is born out of domination and fear of death. I will return to this briefly in Chapter 4.

¹⁷ However, as already stated in the previous chapter, this Habermasian reading of Hegel has been contested by a number of recent Hegelian scholars such as Rose, Pippin, Pinkard, McDowell, and Redding. My reading in Chapter 4 also questions the interpretations put forward by Habermas and Honneth.

relationship of recognition found in law, they are recognised as abstract legal persons; and finally, in the emotionally enlightened relationship of recognition found in the state, they are recognised as concrete universals, that is, as subjects who are socialised in their particularity' (Honneth, 1996, p. 25).

For Hegel, the emergence from natural ethical life and the subsequent increase in the individuality of subjects occurs through two stages of mutual recognition. Firstly, there is the relationship between parents and children whereby subjects recognise each other as emotionally needy beings, and the aim of parenthood is to develop the secure independence of a child. Secondly, Hegel refers to the exchange relations between property owners, which initiates a process of legal universalisation whereby 'particular conditions of validity' are 'transformed into universal, contractually established legal claims' (Honneth, 1996, p. 18). However, such negative freedom only formalises the elements of individuality that are recognised. Hegel's use of the term 'crime' for the next stage of ethical life directly relates to this in that the subject who commits a destructive criminal act is seen as doing so in response to the merely *negative* form of their integration in collective life. Despite Hegel's lack of a sufficient explanation for the motivation for such criminal acts, Honneth argues that the origins of such crime can be traced to conditions of incomplete recognition and the criminal's individual experience of not being sufficiently recognised. Such struggles, even in the perverse form of crime, occur due to the need for honour, the need for a positive evaluation of one's traits and abilities; the reason this takes the form of an interpersonal struggle is because one is dependent upon the recognition of others for this positive relation to self.¹⁸

¹⁸ It is worth briefly noting here the links to Habermas's functionalism and also the curious absence of any sustained engagement by Honneth with the issue of censure, sanctions and punishment as recognition. System/social integration must also play upon an individual's sense of self in the form of power as sanctions. My sense of self can be impaired through guilt concerning actions I have committed – in other words, it cannot always be assumed that a threat to the sense of self is negative. The right to recognition has its other side, the right to be the object of censure for moral failures, e.g. MPs and their expenses.

The transition from natural ethical life to absolute ethical life, and consequently from ‘person’ to ‘whole person’, only occurs through such acts of destruction, according to Honneth on Hegel. It is through the experiences of different crimes that subjects come to understand their particular identity more fully – the ‘person’ obtaining their identity through the recognition of their legal status turns into the ‘whole person’ who obtains recognition for their particularity. In addition, the attainment of greater autonomy is achieved through increased knowledge of mutual dependence that subjects come to gain through their collective experience of dealing with various crimes. In his account of Hegel’s ‘absolute ethical life’, Honneth emphasises the point that intersubjective relations extend beyond cognitive recognition and ‘provide the communicative basis upon which individuals, who have been isolated from each other by legal relations, can be reunited within the context of an ethical community’ (1996, p. 24). This Hegelian conception of the State would result in the ‘respect of each and every person for the biographical particularity of every other’ becoming ‘the habitual underpinnings of a society’s common mores’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 58). However, he argues that this is a stage left undeveloped by Hegel’s turn to a philosophy of consciousness.

Another key problem Honneth identifies, in his attempt to appropriate Hegel’s notion of a struggle for recognition, is that of Hegel’s reliance on what he sees as certain ‘metaphysical premises’. Despite the initially ‘materialist’ sounding project – ‘to reconstruct the ethical formation of the human species as a process in which, via stages of conflict, a moral potential that is structurally inherent in communicative relations between subjects comes to be recognised’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 67) – Honneth argues that Hegel (unjustifiably) presupposes an underlying ‘objective movement of reason’ with recourse to either ‘(in Aristotelian terms) the social nature of human beings or (in terms of the philosophy of consciousness) the self-

relation of Spirit' (1996, p. 67). Given the criticisms of such idealist notions of reason in post-Hegelian thought, and the need for an empirical grounding free from metaphysical assumptions, Honneth conceives his task as one which should account for Hegel's 'movement of recognition' in terms of 'an inner-worldly process occurring under contingent conditions of human socialisation' (1996, p. 67).

Honneth therefore sets himself three tasks in relation to Hegel's theory. Firstly he attempts to rid Hegel's thesis of what he sees as its speculative foundation by using empirical social psychology, in the form of G. H Mead, to ground the importance of intersubjective relationships – i.e. to demonstrate that the intersubjective process of identity development, whereby individuals only recognise themselves as 'individuated selves' through the confirmation of others, is an empirical event in the social world. Secondly, he seeks to develop an 'empirically supported phenomenology' that is able to concretise the different forms of mutual recognition that Hegel had 'constructed purely conceptually to cover empirical reality' (Honneth, 1996, p. 69). The forms of mutual recognition discernible in Hegel's *System of Ethical Life* and *Realphilosophie* – what Honneth calls 'love', 'law' and 'ethical life' – are to be read as relations whereby individuals recognise each other in increasingly individuated and autonomous ways. Finally, Honneth seeks to develop Hegel's idea of a parallel development between the sequence of forms of recognition presupposed in successful ego-development (i.e. love, rights and solidarity) and the formation of societal structures that develop as a result of moral struggle. In summary, he argues that incomplete identity formation, due to the incomplete nature of societal structures of recognition, produces an experience of disrespect that informs individuals of the 'absence of recognition' and impels them to engage in intersubjective conflicts that result in the (institutionally-mediated)

social affirmation of new claims to mutual recognition and autonomy. Again, to avoid the metaphysical and teleological implications of this account, Honneth suggests that each hypothesis has to be tested separately:

‘first, whether Hegel’s assumption that stages of recognition move in a certain direction can withstand empirical doubts; second, whether these forms of reciprocal recognition can be mapped onto corresponding experiences of social disrespect; and, finally, whether there is historical or sociological evidence for the claim that such forms of disrespect have actually served as a source of motivation for social confrontations’ (1996, p. 70).

It is to the details of this project that I now turn.

G. H. Mead (or ‘postmetaphysical’ Hegel)

Honneth, in a manner similar to Habermas, turns to the social psychology of Mead for a ‘postmetaphysical’ development of Hegel’s notion of the importance of intersubjective recognition for individual identity. Mead’s pragmatist-influenced work looks at those disturbances in practical action (and interaction) that provoke individuals into reflecting on their own subjectivity and producing creative resolutions to such disturbances. He argues that a subject’s consciousness of self is dependent upon the consciousness of the social meaning of its behaviour. Mead distinguishes between the ‘I’ and ‘Me’ to grasp this point. To put it rather simply, the ‘Me’ refers to the cognitive image of oneself as object, a reflection of how our partners to interaction perceive us, and demonstrates that our consciousness-of-self is only attainable through our relations with others. The ‘I’ on the other hand is meant to represent the creative source of spontaneous activity, which cannot be grasped cognitively, and precedes our consciousness of self in the ‘Me’ whilst responding to its behaviour. This relationship between the ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ constitutes a dialogue within an individual’s personality. Honneth suggests that Mead extends this account of self-consciousness beyond a

mere ‘*epistemic* self-relation’ to ‘the issue of the subject’s moral and practical identity-formation’ (1996, p. 76). To put it rather crudely, a child develops a sense of self by reflecting upon the moral values of a partner in interaction (e.g. parent), and this is achieved by incorporating the reactions of the interaction partner to one’s own actions. One changes one’s behaviour when reflecting on one’s actions according to a second-person perspective, and this perspective carries certain normative expectations. As the child develops, and engages with more partners in interaction, the reference point for her practical self-image becomes increasingly generalised. Famously, Mead suggests that the child moves from a position of ‘play’, which involves communicating with the self by imitating a particular interaction partner (e.g. parent), towards the ‘game’ position whereby she integrates a more abstract and generalised position of social expectations – or ‘generalised other’ - into her own actions and self-image (Mead, 1967).

In addition to using Mead’s ‘empirical’ justification for the necessity of the perception of the other in the development of self-consciousness, Honneth argues that his work also provides the means for a convincing explanation of the practical relations-to-self that parallel the forms of social recognition outlined by Hegel. Mead’s notion of the ‘generalised other’, and his further association of this with the idea of recognising oneself as a ‘legal person’, is clearly of use in Honneth’s theory of recognition. The ‘internalisation of the social norms of the community’, as Honneth suggests, allows for the realisation on the part of individuals of both their obligations in relation to others and the legitimate rights they can expect to be respected by the generalised other.¹⁹ Such rights are only attainable if one is fully considered a member

¹⁹ The language of ‘internalised norms’ here is arguably Honneth’s own rather than that of Mead, who would more likely emphasise the ‘reflexive’ ability to perceive one’s actions from the perspective of the other rather than ‘internalisation’, reserving the latter term for dispositions and emotional responses such as anxiety and guilt. See Mead (1967).

of one's community, and this provides the individual with 'self-respect' as it is through such social recognition that they are able to develop a positive relation-to-self. Mead suggests that the realisation that all other partners to interaction are obliged to respect one's rights gives one the trait of morally responsible agency. He also argues that the level of self-respect one has is dependent upon the level of individualisation of the traits recognised; however as this trait of moral responsibility is potentially shared by all, the legal person is unable to relate positively to his own unique characteristics as a 'biographically individuated subject' (Honneth, 1996, p. 80).

The 'I' is clearly important for Honneth here as it represents the resistance to any simple internalisation of the generalised other. The demands emerging from the 'I', as 'the sudden experience of a surge of inner impulses' or 'creative reaction-potential' (Honneth, 1996, pp. 81-2), conflict with the intersubjectively recognised social norms and therefore places one's 'Me' in doubt. In simple terms, Honneth suggests that this conflict explains the moral development of the individual and society, as the 'I' seeks to expand the norms embodied by the 'Me' in order to gain increasing recognition for one's individuality. A moral conflict ensues between the subject and its social environment, as the subject is dependent on the collective will for its sense of self. The individual attempts to resolve this moral conflict by recourse to idealisations, i.e. the demands of the 'I' require a counterfactual future community if they are to be satisfied, and the anticipations of expanded recognition relations involved increasingly turn into a system of normative demands that drive societal progress in the direction of expanded personal autonomy.

According to Honneth, Mead also expands the urges of the 'I' to the desire not only for personal autonomy but also for self-realisation. He argues that this separate class of 'I'-demands' allows the self to 'gain a consciousness of one's individual uniqueness' which in turn is dependent on social recognition (ibid, p. 86) – i.e. what is required is a 'me' of individual self-realisation' where one is 'able to understand oneself as a unique and irreplaceable person' (ibid, p. 87). Beyond the formal equality of the legal recognition relation, a subject develops traits and abilities that they seek to understand as unique by having them valued as unique by their partners to interaction. Honneth, via Mead, further argues that one is only able to do this, and in the process to conceive of oneself as making a unique contribution to society, if *everyone* is able to generalise the values of all their interaction partners and form an abstract idea of the necessary collective goals of the entire community. Honneth argues that the concept of the generalised other necessary to fulfil this task would have presented Mead with a conception not dissimilar to Hegel's 'ethical life':

'The ethical concept of the 'generalised other' that Mead would have arrived at, had he considered the idealizing anticipation of subjects who know themselves to be unrecognized, serves the same purpose as Hegel's conception of ethical life. It identifies a relationship of mutual recognition in which every individual can know himself or herself to be confirmed as a person who is distinct from all others in virtue of his or her particular traits and abilities' (Honneth, 1996, p. 88).

Mead does not really pursue this idea though and for Honneth fails to sufficiently move beyond the form of recognition required for 'the intersubjective establishment of rights' towards one that deals with 'the confirmation of individual particularity' (p. 88). Instead he concludes with the less ambitious notion that self-realisation, along with the consciousness of individual particularity, is achieved through one's identification with the positive contribution one makes within the societal division of labour. However, the prioritising of the 'division of labour', in an attempt to provide a more objective grounding for self-realisation than the

generalised other, ends up begging the question as to how one's achievement in the current division of labour points beyond the current ethical goals of the community. The collective conception of the good life not only determines what constitutes a job well done but also what counts as socially useful work in the first place (Honneth, 1996, p. 90).²⁰

The comparative stage to Mead's 'division of labour', and which Honneth finds more convincing, is Hegel's notion of 'solidarity'. In his earlier work, Hegel sought to combine the element of emotional concern from the previous stage of 'love' and the cognitive element of universal equality from the stage of 'law' to conceive of ethical life as universal solidarity between all members of the community. It is this idea that Honneth pursues further.

Love, Rights & Solidarity

Having sought to rid Hegel's speculative thesis of metaphysical presuppositions by using the empirical social psychology of Mead to provide a more 'materialist' formulation for the importance of intersubjective relationships, Honneth now seeks to differentiate more clearly between the various forms of mutual recognition. He wants to justify the three-fold division of forms of recognition found in Hegel and Mead by recourse to empirical research from individual sciences, and also seeks to identify those forms of disrespect, passed over by Hegel and Mead, that mark the negative elements of recognition relations. These forms of disrespect would not only allow subjects to perceive their lack of recognition, but would also provide the motivation for them to engage in struggles for recognition. What Honneth wants to do in

²⁰ Honneth has since abandoned Mead due to him not providing a sufficient *normative* dimension for recognitive relations – e.g. he 'reduces recognition to the act of reciprocal perspective-taking, without the character of the other's action being of any crucial significance' (2002, p. 502). However, despite his criticisms of Mead for reducing self-realisation and the recognition of individual particularity to the role one assumes within the societal division of labour, Honneth has since concluded that 'individual contributions in economic exchange' rather than 'individual particularities' is the only way to conceive of solidarity in ethically pluralist societies (in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 407; also see Fraser and Honneth, 2003).

distinguishing between the three forms of recognition – love, rights and solidarity – and in testing them in relation to empirical studies, is demonstrate that they ‘form independent types with regard to (a) the medium of recognition, (b) the form of the relation-to-self made possible, and (c) the potential for moral development’ (1996, p. 95).

Hegel identified love as the first stage of mutual recognition whereby subjects respond to each other’s needs and recognise each other as needy beings. Subjects come to recognise their dependence upon each other and that their recognition must take the form of affective approval and esteem. In an attempt to empirically support Hegel’s assertion that love be understood as ‘being oneself in another’, Honneth turns to psychoanalytic object-relations theory which he sees as dealing particularly well with the mutual balance between independence and attachment necessary in those primary relationships of reciprocal recognition. Object-relations theory, particularly the work of Donald Winnicott and Jessica Benjamin’s later work, emphasises the psychological importance of early interactive experiences, in addition to libidinal drives, and argues that the success of such early affectional bonds depends upon the capacity of the child and ‘mother’ to successfully balance self-assertion and symbiosis.²¹ The negotiation between forms of boundary-dissolution and boundary-establishment in later relationships develops out of this originary experience of symbiosis and can take the form of unforced moments in friendship or sexual union in erotic

²¹ For some feminist critiques of Honneth’s notion of love, and his characterisation of the mother-infant relationship, see Allen’s ‘Recognising Domination: Recognition and Power in Honneth’s Critical Theory’ in Haugaard and Clegg (eds.) (2012), Young’s ‘Recognition of Love’s Labour: Considering Axel Honneth’s Feminism’ in Van Den Brink and Owen (eds.) (2007), Meehan’s ‘Recognition and the Dynamics of Intersubjectivity’ in Petherbridge (ed) (2011), and Butler in Honneth (2008, p. 107). At the heart of their criticisms is Honneth’s neglect of the unequal power relationships already at work in such ‘primary’ relationships. Meehan also questions Honneth’s tendency to describe the initial mother-child relationship as one of symbiosis rather than acknowledging research that emphasises distinctive selves within the first few days.

relationships.²² These intimate forms of recognition provide ‘a type of relation-to-self in which subjects mutually acquire basic confidence in themselves’ and they are ‘both conceptually and genetically prior to every other form of reciprocal recognition’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 107).²³ For Hegel too, according to Honneth, the communicative structure of love is at the heart of ethical life as it is love that provides the required degree of self-confidence for the autonomous participation in public life.

The recognition relation at work in the sphere of law is based on the notion that we can only understand ourselves as legal persons, with assurances that our claims will be satisfied, once we have assumed the position of the ‘generalised other’ and recognised others as bearers of rights. Here Honneth identifies a key difference between the accounts of legal recognition in Mead and Hegel. He takes this difference to be representative of the transition from traditional legal relations, whereby the recognition of an individual as a legal person is tied to the social esteem accorded to their social status (Mead), to modern legal relations, whereby rights are detached from social roles and given to all human beings as free individuals (Hegel). Traditional legal recognition is hierarchical, whereas modern legal relations, in

²² Although Honneth does acknowledge the ways in which this initial formative relationship sets the stage for future love relations, and involves the lifelong task of mediating between independence and attachment, he tends to provide a Habermasian idealised form of resolution by assuming that this is something that is a ‘crisis’ in infant development and is then successfully resolved, rather than something associated with dispositions laid down in this period and continuing as forms of ambivalence within the self. See the work of Melanie Klein (1975) and Isaac Balbus (2005), who emphasise the ways in which the impulse towards reparation also has to have its correlate in resistance to reparation – i.e. self-assertion. Judith Butler makes a similar point (in Honneth, 2008, p. 106) as does Jonathan Lear (in Honneth, 2008, p. 133).

²³ Honneth emphasises the connections between Winnicott’s psychoanalysis and Mead’s social psychology in Honneth (1999). The importance of psychoanalysis and Winnicott, without Mead, is pursued in his later work: see Honneth (2001a) and Honneth (2002), and also Honneth’s ‘The Work of Negativity: A Psychoanalytical Revision of the Theory of Recognition’ in Deranty et al (eds.) (2007) and republished in Honneth (2012), and his ‘Appropriating Freedom: Freud’s Conception of Individual Self-Relation’ in Honneth (2009). Honneth has increasingly emphasised psychoanalytical notions such as ‘symbiosis’ and ‘transitional object’ to help him explain the emotional dimensions of recognition (‘affective recognition’). In many ways his earlier conception of struggles for recognition being fuelled by *moral* experiences of injustice appears to have been replaced by an account whereby ‘established forms of recognition can be traced to a deep-seated need to deny the independence of those with whom one interacts and to have them ‘omnipotently’ at one’s disposal’ (2002, p. 504). In other words, our struggles for recognition are fuelled by a desire to re-enact that primary experience of fusion with the ‘mother’ (or main caregiver). See also Honneth’s ‘Rejoinder’ in Honneth (2008, p. 394).

principle, are equal and universal. For Honneth, this process marks the historical juncture at which two aspects of respect are clearly discernible due to the uncoupling of legal recognition from social esteem. The principle of rational agreement concerning societal norms, inherited from political theory and philosophy, affects the established sphere of law such that the legal system is now expected to act in the interests of all members of society without exception or privilege. On the premise that subjects will accept legal norms if they have been able to freely agree to them on an equal basis, a recognition relation is established whereby legal subjects 'recognise each other as persons capable of autonomously making reasonable decisions about moral norms' (Honneth, 1996, p. 110).

Honneth outlines a historical development of personhood, seen in terms of an increase in individual rights-claims, whereby the definition of a morally responsible person is expanded due to certain struggles for recognition which highlight the increasing number of prerequisites which have to be taken into consideration for participation in rational will-formation. For Honneth, this process is due to the way in which the 'institutionalisation of bourgeois liberties' set in motion a moral guiding principle that throughout history has been redeemed by disadvantaged groups who have demonstrated that their conditions are not adequate for full and equal participation in the rational will-formation of the current political community. The demand for equality, so that all citizens have the right of the equal representation of their political interests, develops through social struggles to the point where even economic inequalities are affected:

'Thus, during the last few centuries, the enrichment of the legal status of the individual citizen was accompanied by the successive expansion of the core constellation of capacities that constitutively characterise a human being as a person. In particular, the characteristics that put a subject in a position to act autonomously based on rational insight have since come to include a minimum of

cultural education and economic security. In this sense, then, to recognise one another as legal persons means more today than it possibly could have at the start of the evolution of modern law. In being legally recognised, one is now respected with regard not only to the abstract capacity to orient oneself vis-à-vis moral norms, but also to the concrete human feature that one deserves the social standard of living necessary for this' (Honneth, 1996, p. 117).²⁴

Utilising the work of T. H. Marshall and his historical distinction between civil, political and social rights, Honneth identifies two developmental paths that mark the continuation of the struggle for recognition in the legal sphere. The principle of equality in modern law leads not only to a broadening of the content of the status of a legal person, in terms of differences in individual opportunities for taking advantage of socially guaranteed freedoms, but also to the expansion of such status to an increasing number of previously excluded people. The conflicts that arise in the legal sphere therefore are responses to a lack of recognition, or being treated with disrespect, and aim to expand both the 'substantive content and social scope of the status of a legal person' (Honneth, 1996, p. 118). For Honneth, self-respect is to the legal sphere what self-confidence is to the sphere of love. The granting of rights allows one to relate to oneself as a morally responsible person, and respect oneself as one who deserves the respect of all others. He suggests that it is only with the onset of universal human rights that there is an objective point of reference for an individual to see himself or herself as being recognised for the capacity to make morally responsible autonomous judgements.

²⁴ Honneth is right to highlight the importance of economic security here, but he tends to neglect the link to the issue of autonomy. He also avoids certain difficult issues relating to capitalism here, unlike say Hegel or Marx and Adorno, by attributing the positive aspects of autonomy to law rather than to the market or property; Hegel's definition of the modern subject is, after all, the 'subject capable of property' (see part 3, section 2 on 'Civil Society' in Hegel, G. W. F. (1967) *Philosophy of Right*). For an emphasis on the recognitive dimensions of the market, see Winfield, R. D. (1988) *Just Economy*. Honneth does however tackle market-related issues in his more recent work, particularly in relation to a critique of neo-liberalism: see Fraser & Honneth (2003), also Honneth (2004) and Hartmann & Honneth (2006) which are both republished in Honneth (2012). He also agrees with Hegel that civil society is insufficient in itself to build adequate relationships of social solidarity as it is premised upon satisfying individual needs and desires and therefore cannot unite the particular and the universal (see Hegel, 1967, para 184; also Honneth, 2001b).

The problem of providing empirical support for the phenomenon of self-respect is that it only appears once people suffer from a lack of it. Honneth therefore appeals to those examples whereby groups who have been denied certain rights linguistically express their experiences of the denial of recognition and its effect on individual self-respect. Here he uses the example of the civil rights movement in the US whereby ‘in the relevant publications one regularly finds talk of how the endurance of legal under-privileging necessarily leads to a crippling feeling of social shame, from which one can be liberated only through active protest and resistance’ (1996, p. 121).²⁵

Having outlined the spheres of love and law, Honneth now turns to the importance of the recognition relation he terms ‘solidarity’ – the relation, discernible in Hegel’s concept of ‘ethical life’ and Mead’s emphasis upon the division of labour, that recognises an individual’s *particular* traits and abilities. Honneth stresses how this recognition relation presupposes an ‘intersubjectively shared value-horizon’ in that subjects can ‘mutually esteem each other only on the condition that they share an orientation to those values and goals that indicate to each other the significance or contribution of their qualities for the life of the other’ (1996, p. 121). The social medium that is required to fulfil the task of expressing individual differences in a universal and intersubjective manner, rather than the universal characteristics of human subjects found in modern law, Honneth terms the ‘cultural self-understanding of a society’. This cultural self-understanding is therefore the measure used for the social esteem of individuals due to the fact that their particular traits and abilities are judged according to how they contribute to the culturally defined goals of a society. Thus:

²⁵ Although Honneth does discuss the ways in which individual experiences of disrespect can motivate people to connect with those who have been similarly disrespected and develop forms of social resistance, he doesn’t sufficiently explore the details of this and the ways in which the self can be understood as an expression of a group identity.

‘The more conceptions of ethical goals are open to different values and the more their hierarchical arrangement gives way to horizontal competition, the more clearly social esteem will be able to take on an individualising character and generate symmetrical relationships’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 122).

This recognition relation also undergoes a historical transformation marked by the transition from pre-modern notions of ‘honour’ to modern categories of ‘social standing’ or ‘prestige’ according to Honneth. In pre-modern societies, or ‘corporatively organised societies’, ethical goals and their corresponding areas of responsibility are organised hierarchically according to their contribution to the achievement of certain societal values, and individuals attain ‘honour’ by participating in behaviour which is collectively expected of their social status. A person does not act as a ‘biographically individuated subject’ but rather acts in line with the expected behaviour of their status group. The social ‘worth’ of the individual is dependent upon the social worth of their status group, which is, in turn, dependent upon the socially determined criteria of their collective contribution to societal goals. This process results in the symmetrical relationships within a status group, who are able to esteem each other according to the traits and abilities that they share due to their common social standing. Also, there are asymmetrical relationships between status groups, as societal members are able to esteem subjects outside of their own status groups for their traits and abilities according to their contribution to collectively shared values.

The decline of traditional ethical life, according to Honneth’s somewhat simplistic model here, occurred due to the increasing influence of the ‘cultural innovations’ of ‘post-conventional ideas of philosophy and political theory’. Not only were legal relations transformed in the light of such historical changes but so were the ethical goals of society as well. Honneth sees this change as being due to a transformation in the cultural self-

understanding of a society, from one largely still dependent on religious and metaphysical presuppositions to one that recognised ‘ethical obligations’ as inner-worldly decisions’ (1996, p. 124). The loss of this transcendental basis removed both the ‘objective’ character of a value-system that tied expectations of conduct to the measure of social honour, and the ability for such a value-system to determine a fixed hierarchy of social prestige. Honneth sees this historically in terms of the bourgeoisie’s confrontation with the nobility over notions of honour and conduct in accordance with one’s ‘estate’; a confrontation that not only established new value-principles but also questioned the very status of such value-principles. For Honneth, this historical juncture marks the point at which social esteem is accorded to individuals as individuated beings rather than as a member of a particular social group. The differences in relation to others, that allow one to feel ‘valuable’, are no longer defined collectivistically but rather individualistically, and according to the traits that individuals develop along with evaluation of these traits in terms of the realisation of societal goals.²⁶

‘The individualisation of achievement is inevitably accompanied by the opening of societal value-ideas for differing forms of personal self-realisation. From this point on, it is a form of value pluralism – albeit one defined in class-specific and gender-specific terms – that constitutes the cultural framework of orientation within which individuals’ level of accomplishment and thus their social worth are defined. It is in this context that the concept of social honour gradually becomes watered down into a concept of social prestige’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 125).

For abstract ideas of self-realisation to be applied in the sphere of recognition, under conditions with very little in the way of a universal value system for judging the social worth of particular traits and abilities, Honneth argues that ‘they must always be made concrete through supplemental cultural interpretations’ (1996, p. 126). If this is the case, then the social worth accorded such ideas comes to depend upon the ruling interpretations of societal goals,

²⁶ Again, Honneth fails to explore the role of the market and property here. In fact, he only mentions the importance of the market for Hegel very briefly in a few places (see 1996, pp. 11, 13 and 61).

which in turn depends upon the dominance of particular social groups in having their forms of life publicly recognised as valuable. It is in this sense that Honneth considers relations of social esteem to be subject to cultural *struggle*. The control of symbolic force and the current state of public attention are central factors in a group being able to stabilise the struggle and gain social worth through the assertion of the significance of their neglected traits and abilities.

Whereas the practical-relation-to-self experienced through status groups in corporatively organised societies can be considered in terms of collective honour, the practical-relation-to-self experienced after the individualisation of this form of recognition is seen by Honneth as 'self-esteem'. An individual's socially recognised achievements are no longer attributed to a collective and the individual refers them positively back to themselves. 'Self-esteem' now becomes a parallel concept with 'self-confidence' and 'self-respect' for Honneth, and he looks forward to the 'social relations of symmetrical esteem between individualised (and autonomous subjects)' which would lead to a 'state of societal solidarity' whereby all members of society are able to esteem themselves (1996, p. 129). Honneth points out that solidarity would mean relationships of shared concern for each other's particular abilities and traits, rather than a negative relation of tolerance, and this would be necessary for the achievement of shared goals. The 'symmetricality' of esteem can not be identified in quantitative terms but rather refers to a state where 'every subject is free from being collectively denigrated, so that one is given the chance to experience oneself to be recognised, in light of one's own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable for society' (1996, p. 130).²⁷

²⁷ However, of course, this returns us to the question of how to conceive of a post-traditional ethical life, i.e. one that accepts the loss of a substantive cultural consensus under conditions of social modernity and individualisation. Once a broadly cohesive consensus over social ideals is lost, and recognition relations are increasingly individualised and abstract rather than based on honour and esteem between hierarchically

Disrespect and Resistance

The tripartite distinction between forms of recognition, evident in Hegel's more speculative account and Mead's more empirically-oriented account, is able to disclose 'the moral infrastructure of interactions' according to Honneth (1996, p. 143). These forms of recognition can also be mapped onto the ways in which individuals relate positively to themselves and therefore can be seen to represent types of 'practical relations-to-self'. Once these relationships have been set up, Honneth argues that there are also discernible forms of social disrespect that match up to the practical relations-to-self. In other words, love, rights and solidarity (as forms of recognition) map onto self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem (as practical relations-to-self), and these practical relations-to-self are under threat by what he calls 'the violation of the body', 'the denial of rights', and 'the denigration of ways of life' (as forms of social respect). The diagram that Honneth includes in his book (p. 129) summarising the structure of relations of recognition is included below:²⁸

positioned groups, then how are we to understand the recognition of individuals in their difference and specificity? And how are we to conceive of the cultural consensus which might recognise the individual contributions towards shared societal goals? Honneth (in Petherbridge, ed., 2011, p. 406-7) has since criticised his conception of esteem here suggesting that he 'made the mistake of confounding this kind of social esteem based on individual achievement with the recognition of the *differend* between individual life aims' giving the false impression of the possibility of a normative consensus in times of ethical pluralism; he opts instead for the possibility of agreement on 'constitutional principles' rather than 'ethical values'. I will return to these issues at the end of the chapter.

²⁸ It is worth noting at this point that the diagram is what we might call a 'Habermasian diagram' which invokes the ideal (speech) situation, i.e. a presupposition without an account of what distorts the ideal. My criticisms towards the end of this chapter make this more explicit.

Mode of recognition	emotional support	cognitive respect	social esteem
Dimension of personality	needs and emotions	moral responsibility	traits and abilities
Forms of recognition	primary relationships (love, friendship)	legal relations (rights)	community of value (solidarity)
Developmental potential	-----	generalisation, de-formalisation	individualisation, equalisation
Practical relation-to-self	basic self-confidence	self-respect	self-esteem
Forms of disrespect	abuse and rape	denial of rights, exclusion	denigration, insult
Threatened component of personality	physical integrity	social integrity	'honour', dignity

As we have already seen, Honneth refers to the use of ordinary language to 'empirically' support his assertions about people's experiences of 'disrespect'. Terms such as 'disrespect' and 'insult' are meaningless without reference to claims to recognition made on other human beings, and such words appear in the self-descriptions of those who consider themselves to have been wrongly treated by others. These terms refer not only to direct forms of harm or restrictions on freedom, but also to the damage done to the positive understanding of self acquired by subjects intersubjectively. If one is dependent on recognition from others for

one's normative self-image, then disrespect harbours the possibility of destroying one's personal identity.²⁹ In light of this, Honneth wants to determine how 'the experience of disrespect is anchored in the affective life of human subjects in such a way that it can provide the motivational impetus for social resistance and conflict, indeed, for a struggle for recognition' (1996, p. 132).

He outlines how physical injury, especially in the form of torture or rape, deprives a subject of the ability to dispose over his or her own body. This most fundamental form of disrespect not only causes physical pain to its victim, but also affects their practical-relation-to-self by damaging the basic self-confidence, acquired through love, in autonomously controlling one's own body. Along with social shame, the experience of being at the mercy of another subject damages one's trust in oneself and the world; this in turn affects further interaction with other subjects. Honneth sees this basic self-confidence, acquired through the intersubjective achievement of balance between symbiosis and independence, as historically and culturally invariant and therefore he also applies this to the negative experience of disrespect. The second form of disrespect Honneth identifies, aligning itself with the sphere of 'law', is concerned with experiences of exclusion and the denial of rights which affect an individual's moral self-respect. Being denied rights not only limits an individual's autonomy, but also takes away their ability to experience themselves, according to intersubjective expectations, as a morally responsible partner-to-interaction. As the content of what counts as a morally responsible legal person changes historically with developments in legal relations, so the

²⁹ Van Den Brink (in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 168-169) questions Honneth's conception of personal identity and disrespect here. He argues that Honneth tends to 'understand experiences of disrespect as in principle avoidable threats to sound conditions of achieving an integrated personal identity' rather than 'as often unavoidable and irreparable occurrences in the social world that a sufficiently firm identity enables persons to deal with'. He also suggests that this tends to contradict Honneth's earlier account of the ways in which 'minor subjective experiences of misrecognition gradually 'teach' children to deal adequately with more grave and, in a way, more 'real' experiences of disrespect' (p. 170). Van Den Brink argues that 'the lack of full recognition seems to me a condition rather than a hindrance for a flourishing personal identity in a pluralistic environment' (p. 172).

accompanying form of disrespect also changes according to Honneth. In this sense, the denial of rights develops in terms of content and scope as well as in terms of universalisation. The third and final form of disrespect that Honneth outlines is concerned with ‘the denigration of individual and collective ways of life’. If an individual’s status is dependent upon the collective esteem accorded to their approach to self-realisation within society’s cultural value system, then a cultural system that denigrates certain individual forms of life prevents the subject from socially valuing their own particular traits and abilities. This in turn creates a loss of personal self-esteem for the individual. Also, as the individualisation of this experience of cultural denigration developed historically, so does this third form of disrespect.³⁰

Honneth likens the effects of these forms of disrespect upon one’s identity to the effects of diseases and infections upon one’s body. He supports this assertion by arguing that our linguistic responses to such forms of disrespect are steeped in metaphors relating to the human body. He refers to particular studies that report the language of victims of torture and rape in terms of ‘psychological death’, the exclusion and denial of rights through slavery in terms of ‘social death’, and the experience of the cultural denigration of forms of life in terms of ‘scars’ or ‘injuries’. From these parallels drawn with physical illness, Honneth suggests that two conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, we should be able to identify ‘symptoms’ of social disrespect that make subjects aware of the state they are in such as the ‘negative emotional reactions expressed in feelings of social shame’ (1996, p. 135). Secondly, by obtaining an overview of the different forms of disrespect, a positive sense of what constitutes ‘psychological health’ can be identified along with the ‘social guarantees associated with

³⁰ Honneth elaborates on this point in his ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today’ in Honneth (2007).

those relations of recognition that are able to protect subjects most extensively from suffering disrespect' (1996, p. 135).³¹ Honneth seeks to fill the motivational deficit found in Hegel and Mead by emphasising the importance of negative emotional reactions to disrespect, and how this links with conflict and struggle. These negative emotional reactions, such as shame and rage, are seen as psychological symptoms of the lack of the sufficient intersubjective recognition of one's traits and abilities necessary for a successful relation-to-self. Utilising Dewey's idea that emotions are a response to frustrated actions, Honneth argues that the failure to meet one's expectations in normative action leads to moral conflicts, and also that negative emotional reactions are therefore seen as a response to the violation of normative expectations³². Under conditions of disrespect, he argues that such an emotional experience can provide the motivation to enter into a struggle for recognition, as this kind of action is able to relieve the emotional tension. This struggle can then turn into political resistance once the subject is aware of the cognitive content of the emotional response, i.e. moral knowledge. Honneth argues that the likelihood of the moral knowledge, implicit in experiences of disrespect, becoming political resistance is dependent on the subject's cultural-political context: 'only if the means of articulation of a social movement are available can the experience of disrespect become a source of motivation for acts of political resistance' (1996, p. 139).

³¹ We might want to draw a third conclusion here – that the language used by Honneth marks a pervasive 'medicalisation' of critical theory. For a discussion of some of the dangers of this see Gane (2002). For Honneth's discussion of the issue see his 'Pathologies of the Social' in Honneth (2007). See Zurn in Petherbridge (ed.) (2011) for a discussion of Honneth's work with the notion of pathology at its centre, and for a discussion of critical theory in terms of symptom, epidemiology, etiology and prognosis/therapy. Needless to say, as we will see in the next chapter, Foucault would want to question the normalising and subjectivising role of such medicalised discourse.

³² Honneth does briefly discuss the positive role of shame (1996, pp. 137-8) – i.e. the feeling of guilt and inferiority when we violate a moral norm – but neglects the issue of reintegration and the role of sanctions. His position tends to be rather one-sided here, and he bypasses the important role of frustration in the experience of the I, i.e. my frustrations at not getting my way are not necessarily to be interpreted as a failure to realise a normative expectation. See Melanie Klein (e.g. 'The Psychological Foundations of Child Analysis' in *The Psychoanalysis of Children* (1984)) and Donald Winnicott (e.g. 'Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena' in *Playing and Reality* (1971)). Judith Butler makes a similar point in relation to Honneth's failure to sufficiently integrate aggression into his account (in Honneth, 2008, pp. 103-4).

Once Honneth has made the case for the distinction and relationship between patterns of recognition, practical relations-to-self, and forms of social disrespect, he develops the thesis that a 'struggle for recognition' exists as 'the moral force within lived social reality that is responsible for development and progress' (1996, p. 143). To back up this claim, and demonstrate that affective experiences of disrespect provide knowledge for social resistance and collective struggle, Honneth explores the (flawed) 'traces of a tradition' in the social philosophy of Marx, Sorel and Sartre, as well as some historical research on political movements which exposes the normative, rather than utilitarian, motives for resistance, e.g. the work of E. P. Thompson and Barrington Moore. With the aim of supporting his thesis so far, Honneth looks to parallel attempts in post-Hegelian philosophy that place struggles for recognition at the centre of their theorising. Marx is obviously a key figure, alongside Sartre and Sorel, however he is charged with reducing the demands for recognition solely to the sphere of self-realisation through labour. Despite this, Honneth sees in his early work a 'philosophical anthropology' steeped with normative demands that allows production to be viewed in terms of intersubjective recognition. Honneth sees this in Marx's assertion of the 'double affirmation' apparent through labour (conceived of as artistic or craft activity) whereby the objectification of one's abilities allows one to experience oneself as both a person with particular capabilities and someone able to provide for the needs of others (as potential consumers). Capitalism therefore represents a social system that destroys intersubjective recognition mediated by labour, due to the ruling class's control of the means of production. Without control of their own activity, workers lose 'a social precondition for their being able to recognise each other as co-operative partners within a context of community life' (Honneth, 1996, p. 147). A tension in Marx, between recognitive and utilitarian tendencies, is apparent for Honneth in the differences between his 'expressivist'

historical and political writings (e.g. 'Civil war in France' and 'Eighteenth Brumaire') and his more technical analysis of capital.

In those 'traces of a tradition' that do deal with struggle and conflict, Honneth sees an overall lack of serious consideration of the moral experiences of disrespect in favour of conceptions concerned with the competition over material interests. This applies to Sartre and Sorel as well as Marx.³³ Those social theories that do take seriously the moral elements of social integration, such as those of Durkheim and Tönnies, Honneth sees as neglecting the importance of confrontation and conflict. Although the 'Chicago School' again breaks this mould in some senses by considering the struggle for recognition as central to social conflicts, they also end up neglecting the 'moral logic of social struggles' that Honneth seeks to outline. As he argues:

'Thus, within academic sociology, the internal connection that often holds between the emergence of social movements and the moral experience of disrespect has, to a large extent, been theoretically severed at the start. The motives for rebellion, protest, and resistance have generally been transformed into categories of 'interest', and these interests are supposed to emerge from the objective inequalities in the distribution of material opportunities without ever being linked, in any way, to the everyday web of moral feelings. Relative to the predominance that the Hobbesian conceptual model acquired within modern social theory, the incomplete, even misguided, proposals of Marx, Sorel, and Sartre have remained mere fragments of an invisible, undeveloped theoretical tradition. Today, anyone who tries to reconnect with this disrupted effective history of Hegel's counter-model, in order to acquire the foundations for a normatively substantive social theory, will have to rely primarily on a concept of social struggle that takes as its starting-point moral feelings of indignation, rather than pre-given interests' (1996, p. 161).

³³ Honneth focuses on Sorel's *Reflections on Violence* (1950) and on his 'The Ethics of Socialism' essay (in Stanley, ed., 1976); he singles out Sartre's political writings (e.g. his *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1965) and his introduction to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963)). Sorel is charged with having 'never managed to separate the moral achievements of the bourgeois state from its class-specific implementation' (Honneth, 1996, p. 155); likewise, Sartre 'failed to draw an analytically clear line between law-based and law-transcending forms of mutual recognition' and therefore 'could not avoid confounding the pursuit of self-realisation and the pursuit of an expansion of rights' (ibid, p. 158).

Honneth seeks to outline such an alternative paradigm and looks to recent historiography for support. Whereas the goals of the love relationship are not generalisable beyond the sphere of primary relationships, the socially generalised nature of the forms of recognition associated with rights and social esteem do provide a moral context for social conflict to arise³⁴. In these forms of recognition, individual experiences of disrespect have the potential and likelihood of affecting other subjects, and therefore the potential, in turn, to motivate collective struggles for the expansion of relations of recognition. This broad definition of social struggle has the advantages, for Honneth, of being neutral with regard to the types of tactics employed in different social struggles, and also neutral as to whether the actors are aware of the moral motivation for their action, e.g. they may interpret their struggle as being about a clash of material interests. Another advantage for Honneth of his conception of social struggles is that it is able to provide a bridge between individual experiences of injury and the impersonal goals of social movements. Social resistance is motivated by the violation of moral expectations regarding recognition, expectations internally connected to the formation of personal identity. The feelings activated in response to experiences of disrespect can only become the motivation for resistance ‘if subjects are able to articulate them within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that they can show to be typical for an entire group’ (Honneth, 1996, p. 163). Such ‘shared semantics’, which develop out of the moral norms that inform our notions of social community, not only extend recognition relations but allow for the identification of the social causes of individual injuries according to Honneth.

‘Thus, as soon as ideas of this sort have gained influence within a society, they generate a subcultural horizon of interpretation within which experiences of disrespect that, previously, had been fragmented and had been coped with privately can then become the moral motives for a collective 'struggle for recognition’ (1996, p. 164).

³⁴ Although presumably struggles against torture and rape do also provide a moral context for social conflict to arise.

Victims of disrespect who experience some form of social shame are able to regain a positive-relation-to-self by engaging in political action, and Honneth suggests that individuals can gain a sense of self-respect both through the solidarity within political groups, and by contemplating a future community that will recognise them for their present abilities in a way that the current social and political situation does not allow.

Honneth wants to make clear that many struggles in the name of collective interests are often dependent upon moral experiences as, for example, some circumstances suggest that adequate recognition is dependent upon the acquisition of certain goods. To support this point, Honneth turns to the historical studies of E. P. Thompson and Barrington Moore. The work of Thompson is useful for Honneth's purposes in that it looks at the moral context of the resistance of the lower classes to capitalist industrialisation and points out that social resistance can not be simply an expression of economic deprivation as 'what counts as an unbearable level of economic provision is to be measured in terms of the moral expectations that people consensually bring to the organisation of the community' (Honneth, 1996, p. 166). Changes in economic situation provoke social conflict, as they are experienced as violations to the implicit moral consensus. Honneth complements Thompson's notion of 'moral economy' with Moore's notion of an 'implicit social contract'. By looking at the revolutionary periods of 1848 and 1920 in Germany, Moore outlined how the most active groups within the working class were those whose recognised self-understanding was most at threat from social and political changes. Once the underlying normative consensus between groups is disrupted, a consensus that determines the conditions for mutual recognition,

individual groups experience the disrespect of their identity, and this in turn opens up the possibility of political resistance.³⁵

A Formal Conception of Ethical Life

Having built his 'critical' theory on Hegel's notion of a 'struggle for recognition', and made it more concrete with recourse to Mead's empirical social psychology, Honneth finally seeks 'a philosophical justification for its underlying normative principle' (1996, p. 144) in a frustratingly brief final chapter on what he calls 'the formal conception of ethical life'. Here he takes the 'intersubjective conditions for personal integrity' to be the 'presuppositions for individual self-realisation', and wants to extend his conception of social conflict from being a framework for explaining social struggles to being part of a wider process of moral formation. The important role social struggles play in the logic of recognition relations means that they can be evaluated in terms of the moral progress in the historical development of society. It is in this sense that Honneth sees the moral feelings arising out of experiences of disrespect not only in terms of motives for action, but also in terms of the moral role they play in recognition relations; he suggests that such moral feelings can be judged as either beneficial or detrimental moments in a developmental process. However, to be able to make such judgements, Honneth suggests that he has to be able to identify a normative standard point from which to outline the developmental direction of moral progress.³⁶ Starting with the tripartite distinction between love, rights and solidarity and acknowledging the distinction itself as a historical product, Honneth imagines a past where 'the existence of an archaic group morality, in which aspects of care are not fully separated from either the rights of tribal

³⁵ However, we might want to argue here that Honneth has been operating with a distinction between the traditional and the modern, especially over the development of legal norms, and his examples of moral economy are an invocation of the traditional against the emergent modern.

³⁶ Honneth has since re-emphasised this point in his debate with Fraser (see Fraser and Honneth, 2003)

members or their social esteem' (1996, p. 169). The function of this speculative projection is to determine the moral learning process as one that both differentiates between the different forms of recognition, and also unleashes the normative potential inherent in each – e.g. universalisation and de-formalisation in legal relations, and individualisation and equalisation in communities of value. He argues that these developmental normative potentials are identifiable in experiences of disrespect and can be appealed to in the struggles arising out of such experiences. With this general logic of the expansion of recognition relations in place, Honneth seeks to outline the idealised developmental path that would allow for the evaluation of particular struggles in terms of their positive or negative contribution towards the goal of undistorted recognition.³⁷ Accepting the necessarily hypothetical nature of such a task, Honneth thereby sets out to contemporise Hegel's 'formal conception of ethical life'.

Honneth is dissatisfied with what he sees as the dominant, Kantian, philosophical position on morality, which insists that all subjects be justly given equal respect, on the grounds that it is unable to incorporate all elements necessary for undistorted recognition relations. He is more ambitious in his attempt to outline the necessary conditions for a 'good' rather than a merely 'just' life, and these conditions would include universal respect as one, but not the only, important factor. Honneth's conception is instead concerned with the *self-realisation* of human beings in addition to their moral autonomy.³⁸ However, he insists that:

³⁷ In his debate with Fraser (in Fraser and Honneth, 2003), Honneth has extended this point with recourse to a notion of 'validity surplus' at work in the three forms of recognition, including love. Each form is characterised as having its own internal source of conflict 'whose normative significance is expressed by the constant struggle over its appropriate application and interpretation' (p. 186). In addition to this he argues that the normative possibilities contained in each form of recognition always exceed the current institutionalised forms and therefore remain open to rational public debates and future development and education (ibid). See also Honneth's 'Recognition as Ideology' in Van Den Brink and Owen (eds.) (2007) and republished in Honneth (2012).

³⁸ In many ways, Honneth's emphasis on a recognitive account of autonomy and self-realisation follows the attempt to move beyond the liberal notion of justice made by Hegel in his *Philosophy of Right*. Honneth explores

‘in contrast to those movements that distance themselves from Kant, this concept of the good should not be conceived as the expression of substantive values that constitute the *ethos* of a concrete tradition-based community. Rather, it has to do with the structural elements of ethical life, which, from the general point of view of the communicative enabling of self-realisation, can be normatively extracted from the plurality of all particular forms of life’ (1996, p. 172).

Similarly to Habermas and his notion of ‘discourse ethics’ then, what Honneth wants to do here is place himself in the middle of Kantian moral theory and communitarian ethics³⁹, by championing the former’s emphasis on general norms, while insisting on the importance of the latter’s emphasis on human self-realisation. The problem as Honneth sees it now is as follows:

‘The desired characterisations must, then, be formal or abstract enough not to raise the suspicion of representing merely the deposits of concrete interpretations of the good life; on the other hand, they must also have sufficient substantive content to be of more help than Kantian references to individual autonomy in discovering the conditions for self-realisation’ (1996, p. 173).

Honneth justifies the three forms of recognition as necessary conditions for a successful life by suggesting that it is impossible to imagine successful self-realisation - understood as having the freedom to achieve one’s chosen goals - without self-confidence, legally guaranteed autonomy, and affirmation of the value of one’s abilities. The ‘freedom’ to achieve one’s chosen goals is not just freedom from external coercion, but freedom from internal barriers as well. The internal trust necessary to overcome these internal barriers and develop a basic confidence in one’s abilities – a positive-relation-to-self – is only acquired through the experience of intersubjective recognition. So on the one hand, Honneth now considers the three forms of recognition, which are also necessary conditions for self-realisation, as ‘formal or abstract enough not to raise the suspicion of representing merely the

this in more depth in his Spinoza lectures, published as *Suffering from Indeterminacy: An Attempt at a Reactualisation of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right* (2001b) and republished in Honneth (2010).

³⁹ Arguably, therefore, in the middle of *traditional*, rather than *critical*, theory.

deposits of concrete interpretations of the good life'. They are generalised enough to be applicable to all particular forms of life. On the other hand, he argues that there is sufficient detail 'to be of more help than Kantian references to individual autonomy in discovering the conditions for self-realisation', i.e. they provide the sufficient conditions for the protection of internal as well as external freedom.

In fleshing out what this might mean, Honneth seeks to provide an outline of what a 'post-traditional ethical life' might look like. He begins with 'love' which, as it is a necessary precursor for other types of self-realisation in that it allows individuals to express their needs, 'represents the innermost core of all forms of life that qualify as 'ethical'' (Honneth, 1996, p. 176). He argues that the basic structure of love will remain the same in post-traditional ethical life, as it is not open to normative development.

'On the other hand, however, it is possible that the development of its invariant basic structures will be all the freer from distortion and coercion, the more rights come to be shared by partners in a friendship or love relationship. In this sense, a formal conception of post-traditional ethical life must be constructed in such a way that it can defend the radical egalitarianism of love against external forces and influences' (1996, p. 176).⁴⁰

Turning to the sphere of rights, Honneth finds Hegel's and Mead's conceptions limited in their reference predominantly to liberal civil rights, and instead insists that post-traditional ethical life allows the legal sphere to become more sensitive to individual circumstances.⁴¹

The legal sphere is able to accommodate the fact that there are certain prerequisites that allow

⁴⁰ Honneth has since revisited the claim that love is exempt from the possibility of normative development in Fraser and Honneth (2003). Here he acknowledges that love can only be conceived as a recognition relation necessary for self-confidence once the family as a private sphere, and 'childhood' as a distinct phase, has emerged historically.

⁴¹ Honneth is not suggesting here that Hegel and Mead are *only* concerned with liberal civil rights – i.e. he accepts that Hegel argues that the state has a role to address the general beyond private acts and that Mead was also part of the US progressive tradition on inequality – only that their conception of law doesn't sufficiently acknowledge 'how heavily the individual enjoyment of these liberties can also depend on the legal improvement of the conditions for their application' (1996, p. 177).

individuals to enjoy the liberties that come with civil rights, while not sacrificing its universal quality. Honneth adds to this that the sphere of rights has also come to affect both relationships of love and of solidarity.

Finally, Hegel and Mead are charged with not sufficiently giving the recognition relation of ‘solidarity’ a potentially empirical formulation, as he suggests that they only referred to it as a cultural value-system open enough to allow all members of society to regard themselves as socially esteemed in relation to their particular traits and abilities. Honneth reiterates his criticisms of Hegel’s conception of ‘solidarity’, and Mead’s emphasis upon the division of labour, and speculates upon a resolution to this problem for the present:

‘Indeed, in the meantime, social-structural upheavals in developed societies have so greatly expanded the possibilities for self-realisation that the experience of individual or collective difference has become the impetus for a whole series of political movements. In the long run, their demands can only be satisfied once culture has been transformed so as to radically expand relations of solidarity. In this new situation, the only lesson that the conception sketched here has to learn from the failure of Hegel’s and Mead’s proposals is to be content with an ineluctable tension: we cannot refrain from allowing substantive values – which are supposed to be in a position to generate post-traditional solidarity – to take their place alongside the forms of recognition found in love and developed legal relations; nor, however, can the present proposal, on its own, fill the position that is thereby circumscribed as the locus of the particular in the fabric of relationships belonging to a modern form of ethical life. For, whether these substantive values point in the direction of a political republicanism, an ecologically based asceticism, or a collective existentialism, whether they presuppose changes in socio-economic circumstances or are compatible with the conditions of a capitalist society – this is no longer a matter for theory but rather for the future of social struggles’ (1996, p. 179).

I will return to Honneth’s formal conception of ethical life towards the end of this chapter.

However, before outlining a number of key criticisms of Honneth’s work on recognition, I will briefly explore some of the more recent developments in his work.

Pathologies of recognition

Despite remaining within Habermas's communicative paradigm, it is clear that the 'social pathologies' of Honneth's recognitive theory of society differ markedly from those of Habermas's linguistic approach. The shift of emphasis towards the analysis of 'structural forms of disrespect' necessitates a social-theoretical exploration of 'the social causes responsible for the systematic violation of the conditions of recognition' (2007, p. 72) rather than Habermas's analysis of the systemic 'colonisation of the lifeworld'. Despite his self-conscious relationship to the Frankfurt School tradition, Honneth's work in some ways signals a notable change in direction for Critical Theory. Although Habermas arguably initiated a more significant break with earlier Critical Theory, he remained committed to the idea that 'instrumental reason' and societal rationalisation were the key pathological features of modern societies. Adorno and Horkheimer, and Habermas (and Foucault) all concern themselves with the threat of autonomous, self-reproducing systems of power and social organisation. Honneth, however, is critical of accounts that only explore social pathologies in terms of human rationality, and thereby omit other forms of pathology and critique such as those discernible in Durkheim's account of social bonds and the dangers of individualisation. A critical theory of 'recognition' aims to move beyond what Honneth sees as narrow accounts of rationality, even if those accounts concern themselves with intersubjective forms of rational understanding; he suggests instead that we should concern ourselves with:

'the intersubjective condition of human identity development. These conditions can be found in social forms of communication in which the individual grows up, acquires a social identity and ultimately has to learn to conceive of him- or herself as both an equal and unique member of society. If these forms of communication do not provide the amount of recognition necessary to accomplish the various tasks involved in forming an identity, then this must be taken as an indication of a society's pathological development' (2007, p. 74).

To identify 'pathological' developments in society, Honneth seeks to explore the institutional embodiments of love (via studies of family and socialisation), rights (via studies of legal processes), and solidarity. He argues that the latter is predominantly made up of the societal recognition accorded us through our contribution to society in the form of organised labour, an argument he supports with reference to studies on the psychological effects of unemployment.⁴² This emphasis on the societal organisation and distribution of social labour alters the theoretical transformation that the category of 'social labour' underwent in Habermas's division of work and interaction (or instrumental and communicative action). Although Honneth wants to emphasise the link, severed by Habermas, between work and moral experience, he also wants to avoid reintroducing the role of 'emancipatory consciousness formation' assigned to labour in Marxist philosophies of history. He sees social labour as being of significance to the extent that the development of personal identity is connected to the social recognition accorded one's work within society. A key example that Honneth feels exemplifies this issue is the feminist discussion around unpaid societal labour in the form of childcare and housework. The unequal value, and therefore low social esteem, given to these forms of societal labour in the context of patriarchal cultural values has restricted women from gaining the necessary social respect for a positive sense of self.⁴³ Therefore, the cultural value accorded to social tasks is directly related to the social esteem acquired by individuals who carry out those tasks – 'the chances of forming an individual identity through the experience of recognition are directly related to the societal institutionalisation and distribution of labour' (Honneth, 2007, p. 76).

⁴² However, he doesn't sufficiently explain here how this connection between social labour and solidarity (with the practical self-relation of self-esteem) differs from the position he criticises Mead for in *Struggle for Recognition*.

⁴³ Although he doesn't make this explicit, Honneth appears to be using market value here as an indication of respect; he also assumes, without sufficient elaboration, that inequality is necessarily a form of disrespect. We might also want to suggest that the link between market value and respect is guilty of applying a male standard of what counts as respect.

Although Honneth feels that his overarching account of recognition satisfies the methodological criteria outlined by Horkheimer – particularly in the sense that a pre-theoretical resource for a critical theory of social communication can be identified in the moral experiences of those whose identity claims have not been satisfied – he acknowledges that in other respects it is found wanting. Just because his critical theory is able to point to examples (i.e. moral experiences) in social reality that confirm his analysis of that reality, there are no guarantees that ‘the normative direction of its critique is shared by the victims of disrespect’ (2007, p. 78). In fact:

‘social esteem can just as well be sort in small militaristic groups, whose code of honour is dominated by the practice of violence, as it can in the public arenas of a democratic society. The sense of being no longer included within the network of social recognition is in itself an extremely ambivalent source of motivation for social protest and resistance. It lacks any normative indication or direction that would stipulate in what ways one *should* struggle against the experience of disrespect and humiliation’ (2007, p. 77, *emphasis is mine*).

The question for Honneth therefore becomes one of how a democratic public sphere can foster the kind of ‘moral culture’ that would give those suffering from disrespect ‘the individual strength to articulate their experiences in the democratic public sphere, rather than living them out in a counterculture of violence’ (2007, p. 78). He leaves his answer to this question open, but his faith in the democratic public sphere remains unshaken. Before exploring a number of criticisms that see this commitment to the democratic public sphere as idealised, I want to briefly consider Honneth’s recent turn to the importance of reification, which is where he extends his notion of what constitutes ‘pathological’ development.

In his book, *Reification* (2008), he attempts to further his links with the history of Critical Theory, and its links to Lukács, whilst also wrestling the term ‘reification’ for his recognitive

version of Critical Theory. In many ways this book is a clarification of some of his earlier ideas but it also marks a not insignificant shift in his emphasis on recognition. Although he still maintains his earlier categorisation of recognition relations in terms of love, law and achievement – and the formal conception of ethical life they imply – he argues that underlying these normative forms of recognition there is an ‘existential’ (and transcendental) level of recognition. This ‘affective’ level of recognition is described as a primary mode of relating to the world which colours all of our future human relations and provides a foundation on which other recognition relations are built. As he argues:

‘Normatively substantial forms of recognition such as are embodied in social institutions of traditional honour, modern love, or equal law, represent various manners in which the existential scheme of experience opened up by elementary recognition gets “filled out” historically. Without the experience that other individuals are fellow humans, we would be incapable of equipping this schema with moral values that guide and limit our actions. Therefore, elementary recognition must be carried out, and we must feel existential sympathy for the other, before we can learn to orient ourselves toward norms of recognition that compel us to express certain specific forms of concern or benevolence. The implication for the structure of my own theory of recognition is that I must insert a stage of recognition before the previously discussed forms, one that represents a kind of transcendental condition’ (2008, p. 152).⁴⁴

So in order to be able to engage in other forms of recognition relations, or language-mediated intersubjective relations to use more Habermasian terms, we must already have affirmed our interaction partners in some way, and this affirmation is a form of recognition which involves empathetic engagement.⁴⁵ In his attempt to explore the idea that ‘recognition precedes cognition’, Honneth makes reference to a number of similar ideas including Dewey’s

⁴⁴ This argument also explains Honneth’s increasing distance from Mead’s work which he criticises for neglecting the emotional attachment to an other which, Honneth argues, precedes our ability to assume the perspective of the other (2008, p. 42).

⁴⁵ In response to criticisms of his work by Butler (also in Honneth, 2008), he is quick to assert that this originary emotional receptivity to another (or ‘existential affectedness’) can be made up of ‘love and hate, ambivalence and coldness’ and therefore does not have a ‘normative orientation’ as such (p. 152). Butler makes the point that hateful and sadistic impulses question Honneth’s distinction between failing to take the position of the other and engaging in participatory relations with the other (p. 102).

‘practical involvement’⁴⁶, Cavell’s ‘acknowledgement’, Heidegger’s ‘care’, Adorno’s ‘mimesis’⁴⁷, and Lukács’s ‘engaged praxis’. He ultimately reconfigures Lukács’s original notion of reification in the direction of a ‘forgetting’ of our primordial cognitive praxis such that our cognitive, detached, and spectator-like approaches to the world – and our tendency to instrumentalise others, ourselves and our environment - forget that they are underwritten by a pre-cognitive, affective engagement with others, ourselves and the world. Honneth describes reification as ‘an atrophied or distorted form of a more primordial and genuine form of praxis, in which humans take up an active and involved relationship toward themselves and their surroundings’ (2008, p. 27) and he emphasises ‘the notion that the stance of empathetic engagement in the world, arising from the experience of the world’s significance and value (*Werthaftigkeit*), is prior to our acts of detached cognition’ (2008, p. 38).⁴⁸ Honneth articulates this idea further in relation to ‘forms of knowledge sensitive to recognition’ whereby ‘the act of cognition or detached observation remains conscious of its dependence on an antecedent act of recognition’, and other ‘forms of knowledge in which every trace of their origin in an antecedent act of recognition has been lost’, i.e. where ‘it has freed itself of the

⁴⁶ It is worth noting that in addition to Honneth’s use of Dewey here, and in relation to emotions in his *Struggle for Recognition*, he also makes use of certain aspects of his work on democracy: see Honneth’s ‘Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation: John Dewey and the Theory of Democracy Today’ in Honneth (2007). For a defence of Dewey’s arguments for democracy, which makes reference to Honneth’s appropriation of Dewey in relation to reification and instrumental rationality, see Cruickshank (2014).

⁴⁷ Honneth also makes reference to Adornian ideas inasmuch as he considers both the ways in which our relationship to objects is coloured by the significance which those objects had for our primary carers and significant others, and the ways in which we might be said to have a cognitive relationship to objects as well as people.

⁴⁸ In this way, he distances himself from a number of assumptions and conclusions made by Lukács in his notion of reification: in particular, the importance of *homo faber*, the privileged role of the proletariat as ‘universal class’ (what Jay (in Honneth, 2008, p. 6) calls ‘ontological creators and epistemological knowers of their creation’), and the Marxian emphasis on commodity fetishism whereby the totality is lost through exchange value and commodified labour and current social relations assume the form of a ‘second nature’. Honneth follows Habermas and Arendt in their arguments against the reduction of communication to labour, whilst also emphasising the importance of recognition underneath both communication and labour. We might say that Honneth replaces a notion of ‘production/creation preceding cognition’ with a notion of ‘recognition preceding cognition’. It is worth noting that Lukács’s work, particularly his earlier work, had already provided a point of reference in an early essay by Honneth - see ‘A Fragmented World: On the Implicit Relevance of Lukács’ Early Work’ in Honneth (1995). For an alternative recent exploration of reification, which emphasises the link between the decline of religious experience and our anxieties around reification, see Bewes (2002).

knowledge of this dependency and deludes itself that it has become autonomous of all non-epistemic prerequisites' (2008, p. 56).⁴⁹ Although he accepts that an objectivating stance can be harmless in certain rational, problem-solving contexts, Honneth suggests that an institutionally reproduced, and socially widespread, form of forgetting has had dire consequences for the forms of intersubjective recognition that are at the heart of our ethical life. The objectivation of others involves the usage of prevalent forms of thought and action which involve turning others into objects for our own self-interest (e.g. market-mediated interaction, viewing others as 'means' rather than in terms of intrinsic worth). The reification of the physical world involves forgetting the ways in which objects have meaning for ourselves and others only in the context of intersubjective relationships. Finally, the reification of the self involves forgetting the ways in which our notion of self has been constituted in various relations with others. He suggests that this takes the form of either 'detectivism', whereby we accept ourselves as rigid personality types determined by certain fixed inner states, or 'constructivism', whereby our inner states can be changed at will and understood as forever adaptable to instrumental purposes (e.g. to be sufficiently malleable and marketable in the context of 'flexible' economies).⁵⁰ Despite the bleak consequences of this increasingly pervasive reification, Honneth's optimism lies in the fact that 'even in the midst of the false, ontologically blinded present circumstances, the elementary structures of the human form of life characterized by 'care' and existential interestedness are always already there' (ibid, p. 34). Having said this however the implications of this for social analysis and emancipatory politics are left indeterminate for Honneth.⁵¹

⁴⁹ It is worth noting here that this structure of antecedent acts of recognition and the forgetting of such acts tends to replicate the lifeworld/system structure that Honneth criticises Habermas for.

⁵⁰ For a thoughtful exploration of the latter, see Sennett (1998).

⁵¹ Zurn (in Petherbridge, ed., 2011, p. 346) argues that although Honneth does a good job of outlining cognitive pathologies at the level of personal experiences, he fails to provide 'insightful sociological explanations of the causes of those pathological distortions' (what Zurn refers to as an 'etiological account of

(Mis)Recognition in Honneth's Recognitive Turn

As Honneth's work has become increasingly well-known and influential over the past ten years or so, a number of critical arguments and positions have developed in relation to it. It would be impossible to do justice to all of these here, but I will concentrate on the most significant ones and those that tend to support the thrust of my arguments. I will begin with those who question Honneth's emphasis on recognition as the underlying focal point for explaining suffering and injustice, before then outlining those criticisms that I feel get to the heart of the problems with Honneth's account.

A number of critics, most famously Nancy Fraser, have criticised Honneth's tendency to single out 'recognition' as the underlying source of all forms of injustice and suffering.

Ferrara (in Petherbridge, ed. 2011, pp. 371-90) and Zurn (in Petherbridge, ed. 2011, pp. 345-370), for example, mainly criticise Honneth for relying on a monocausal account of social pathologies that operates with a grand narrative and reduces all injustices and pathologies to the realm of recognition. Instead they suggest that a more multi-dimensional approach would be more effective at addressing the specificities of particular pathologies, something Zurn believes Honneth is attempting to do in his more recent work on organised self-realisation and the paradoxes of capitalism.⁵² Ferrara's analysis of Honneth's *Reification* book criticises the implication in Honneth's work that the different forms of reification (in terms of what Ferrara calls 'technical fetishism', 'misrecognition' and 'inauthenticity') share the same social causes

social pathologies') which are necessary so that 'social members can comprehend the discontinuities between their first-order experiences and their second-order reflexive understandings of them as discontinuities caused by specific social institutions, structures and practices, and for them to engage productively in the manifold social struggles necessary to overcome the causes of the pathological disorders' (Zurn in Petherbridge, ed., 2011, p. 346). In relation to reification, he argues that Honneth's 'socio-theoretic explanations' for forgetting are inconclusive, and we are left wondering whether the social causes of reification are 'ineliminable features of human life' or 'socio-culturally specific forms of pathology that are amenable to amelioration or eradication through the transformations of current social structures, institutions and practices' (pp. 357-8).

⁵² See Honneth (2004) and Hartmann & Honneth (2006), both of which are republished in Honneth (2012).

rather than developing out of differential processes.⁵³ A key critic of Honneth here, and as we have seen of Habermas also, is Nancy Fraser whose exchange with Honneth in *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (2003) centres around the difference between her dualistic approach to injustice (recognition *and* redistribution) and his monistic approach (recognition). Although this debate is not as important for my key criticisms of Honneth, it is worth briefly considering some of the main arguments. Fraser claims that an approach based solely on recognition tends to miss important aspects of economic equality and she therefore sets up an analytical distinction between injustice premised on the lack of economic and political resources and injustice resulting from the lack of social and cultural recognition of one's identity.⁵⁴ Beyond both 'culturalism' and 'economism', she sets herself the task of outlining what a society might look like where all its members are accorded *participatory parity* and the equal opportunity to lead an autonomous life; for her this includes the importance of both distributive and recognitive goods. Honneth on the other hand, according to Fraser, reduces all struggles and injustice to a core of recognition (supplemented with moral psychology) and seeks to provide an excessively strong notion of the good life in the form of 'self-realisation', rather than the more formal account of 'parity' which Fraser believes to be more appropriate in modern, pluralist societies.

In response to this, Honneth suggests that his notion of recognition is sufficiently robust to cover economic and political injustices in addition to cultural recognition, for example he sees struggles over redistribution as being centrally concerned with how we 'recognise' different

⁵³ Honneth however appears to agree with the criticisms of Zurn and Ferrara here but responds by suggesting that his work does in fact avoid a simplistic monocausal approach by concentrating on a range of social, cultural and economic causal factors, however he dismisses the idea that this might constitute a form of 'theoretical eclecticism' in favour of an explanation of social causes akin to Weber's notion of an 'elective affinity between different developmental processes' (Honneth in Petherbridge, ed., 2011, p. 419).

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Fraser has now developed an updated three-dimensional rather than dualistic approach (see Fraser, 2005). For her original conception of injustice in terms of recognition/redistribution, see her *New Left Review* article (Fraser, 1995).

types of labour and economic contribution; he finds the more justice-based approaches, such as Fraser's, as overly formal and lacking substance. Honneth refers to the 'achievement principle' and the notion of 'equal respect' as examples that demonstrate the way in which the capitalist economy is rooted in a broader normative context and displays symptoms of 'asymmetrical forms of recognition'. He suggests that although these principles have served ideological purposes (i.e. justifying wealth inequalities in capitalism), they have also been used to support welfare distribution and used as tools by worker's movements, women and other groups to challenge inequalities and gain recognition for societal contribution.⁵⁵ I tend to broadly agree with Honneth and the other critics of Fraser in this debate, who have not only contested Fraser's tendency to separate out a sphere of the economy (driven solely by the maximisation of profit) from the 'social limits on markets' set by laws and forms of cultural evaluation (see Honneth in Fraser and Honneth, 2003, p. 256), but also questioned the redistribution/recognition division and demonstrated that her own theory of participatory parity, in outlining the necessary conditions for social participation, is '*already a theory of recognition and misrecognition*' (Bernstein, 2005, p. 310).⁵⁶

Having briefly explored the criticisms of Honneth's focus on recognition, I will now consider what I feel to be the most pertinent criticisms of his position. These will fall into four broad

⁵⁵ Although Honneth is right to challenge Fraser on this issue, Smith (in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 341-3) makes the point that Honneth's language concerning the moral 'constraints' that recognitive norms exercise over economic processes fails to develop an adequate conceptualisation of market mechanisms - i.e. what is being constrained - and the ways in which markets might be (inherently) tied to asymmetrical recognition and tend towards constantly undermining norms of mutual recognition. Honneth's response to Smith suggests that he favours the view that the development of the capitalist market towards undermining these norms is not the result of an inherent tendency but rather the temporary result 'of a social conflict in which different collective actors - employer's associations, governmental institutions, and labour unions - are involved' (Honneth in Petherbridge, ed. 2011, p. 401).

⁵⁶ There is also a clear tension here with Fraser's earlier criticism of Habermas's distinction between system and social integration. For notable criticisms of Fraser's recognition/redistribution distinction see Butler (1998), and Fraser's response to Butler (in Fraser, 1998), Young (1997) and Fraser's response to Young (in Fraser, 1997), Philips (1997), Bernstein (2005), and Smith in Petherbridge (ed.) (2011), pp. 335-6.

(and related) categories: the tendency to *idealise* the notion of recognition, the lack of an adequate conception of *misrecognition*, his neglect of the *ideological* role that recognition often plays, and the *abstraction* at work in his ‘formal’ conception of ethical life.

Idealising Recognition

The critics of Honneth’s recent work on reification tend to bring a number of these key criticisms together. Despite their differences, all seek to question the idealised notion of mutual recognition at work in his notion of (precognitive) empathetic engagement.⁵⁷ Judith Butler questions Honneth’s tendency to idealise a notion of empathetic engagement and to neglect the ‘negative’ aspects of what this engagement often involves (e.g. hate, sadism, aggression etc). She suggests that:

‘if a normative value is to be derived from involvement, it is not because involvement presupposes a normative structure of genuine praxis, but because we are beings who have to struggle with both love and aggression in our flawed and commendable efforts to care for other human beings ... It is not a matter of returning to what we “really” know or undoing our deviations from the norm, but of struggling with a set of ethical demands on the basis of myriad affective responses that, prior to their expression in action, have no particular moral valence’ (in Honneth, 2008, p. 104).

She also suggests that ‘there is no innate moral trajectory in involvement, participation and emotionality, since we are beings who, from the start, both love and resist our dependency, and whose psychic reality is, by definition, ambivalent’ (in Honneth, 2008, p. 106). Jonathan Lear makes a similar point and also argues that Honneth’s account assumes the narrative structure of ‘the fall’ with the concomitant tendency to ‘build too much goodness into the prior condition’ (in Honneth, 2008, p. 132 and p. 139).

⁵⁷ For Honneth’s response to the critics of his *Reification* book, see his ‘Rejoinder’ in Honneth (2008).

Foster (2011) develops these ideas further and argues that rather than being a primal layer of social interaction as such, recognition is a ‘dynamic process’ driven by an ‘existential ambiguity’ – the fact that ‘we both want and need recognition, and we fear and refuse it, and neither of these tendencies is more primordial than the other’ (p. 257). Foster goes somewhat towards explaining this ambiguity by suggesting that recognition both humanizes us but at the same time leaves us feeling ‘exposed, dependent, injurable, and mortal’ (ibid); he argues that ‘we are (have become) selves that are invested in this refusal of recognition; it is the continually re-enacted work of denial by the self for whom the exposure to the other is experienced as a source of fear’ (p. 263). So rather than following Honneth in his account of the ‘forgetting’ of recognition as being akin to amnesia or ‘reduced attentiveness’, we might be more convinced by Foster’s more Freudian, psycho-social conception whereby our involvement with others ‘is instead actively, and continually, repressed’ (p. 260). By exploring the relationship between reification, subject-formation and cognitive activity, Foster suggests an Adornian conception of ‘movement, or better, *struggle*, towards self-awareness within cognition itself’ (ibid), whereby our empathy is enlivened by our acknowledging ‘our own self-disfigurement in so far as we have become the type of subjects who are able to function in a way that enforces the dominance of the neutralised point of view’ (pp. 260-261). This way the recovery of such recognition underlying reification would involve the subject becoming aware of the way its own self has been damaged by reified forms of thinking. Here Foster refers to the importance of ‘transformative experiences’ and, following Cavell and Adorno, places a special emphasis on the de-reifying role of aesthetics. I agree with Foster on these points and pursue these ideas further in Chapter 4.

Mis-Recognising

In addition to these criticisms of Honneth for idealising recognition, Foster and other critics question the curious absence of a notion of *misrecognition* in Honneth's work as a whole. As Foster suggests, recognition 'is possible only by working through our inevitable tendency to *misrecognise* the object' or other (p. 258), and to 'deny, repudiate, and refuse the voice of the other' (p. 256) in the process. Instead Honneth gives the impression that recognition is a fixed and constant factor underlying social life and is characterised by positive relations to the self and other. What this misses out according to Foster is the fact that 'recognition is a process that is conflictual and involves struggle, both within the self and between self and others, [and] its realization must encompass a movement of self-transformation' (p. 258).⁵⁸ Without an account of how we attempt to recognise others, fail to do so, and transform our self-conception in the process, Honneth is unable to do justice to the importance of recognition in our collective lives. Along similar lines, Osborne (1996) criticises Honneth's use of 'recognition' for the tendency to separate out the social aspect, whereby individuals or groups are assigned a certain status, from epistemological issues, i.e. how we come to *know* the other, and what we come to *know* about them. It is for this reason that the opposite of recognition for Honneth is 'disrespect' rather than 'misrecognition'. In other words, it tends to be the *phenomenological* aspects of Hegel's notion of recognition that are missing in Honneth's work, including the notion of *desire* which is at the heart of the struggle for recognition for Hegel. I will also pursue the importance of these aspects further in chapter 4.

⁵⁸ Sinnerbrink (in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 177-206) makes a similar point here in relation to the loss of a notion of 'struggle' in Honneth's work. He argues that despite Honneth's engagement with Foucault due to the advantages of a notion of power and struggle he sees missing in Habermas's work, and his subsequent move to the early work of Hegel due to the lack of a notion of 'morally motivated struggle' in Foucault's account of disciplinary institutions, Honneth in fact ends up losing sight of the importance of struggle in his own account of recognition. Sinnerbrink also argues that the emphasis on morality rather than the politics of recognition in Honneth's later work also leads to the abandonment, or at least the neglect, of the importance of an action-theoretic model of the social.

By neglecting the importance of misrecognition, we might also want to ask some difficult questions about which identities are recognised, along with which aspects of our identities, and whether the simple recognition of these identities necessarily constitutes a step forward in terms of emancipatory politics. Despite his earlier appropriation of Foucault's work for example, Honneth tends to miss or at least downplay the point that, as subjects, we tend to be formed partly through our subjection to particular power relations, and therefore the affirmation (or 'recognition') of one's identity or cultural specificity may well serve to affirm certain (socio-economic) power relations. Renault (in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 207-232) criticises Honneth's account of recognition for being predominantly 'expressivist' rather than 'constitutive'. What he means by this is that Honneth tends to understand social institutions as 'expressions' of underlying recognition relations and tends to focus exclusively on the way in which recognition relations transform these institutions. What gets lost in this account, according to Renault, is the way in which social institutions both form and restrict – or 'constitute' – subjects and also pervert certain moral claims; there is an absence of a notion of 'subjectivisation' in the Foucaultian sense of becoming 'subject' to particular institutional discourses.⁵⁹ By neglecting, or not fully appreciating, the importance of this institutional level, Renault suggests that Honneth misses the complexity of struggles for recognition, e.g. the ways in which institutions are evaluated according to people's 'already constituted (social and professional) identities' rather than simply through the lens of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem, or the ways in which 'groups can use institutional recognition models either as a central claim (for instance when minorities struggle for alleged universal rights), or as merely strategic means (for example, when a group calls for more cultural recognition as the only way to benefit from more economical integration)' (ibid, pp. 228-9).

⁵⁹ In his response to this criticism Honneth suggests that we might see the relationship between institutions and recognition as one marked by 'co-evolution' (Honneth's 'Rejoinder' in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 403-4). The next chapter explores the relevance of Foucault's work as a response to Honneth's position.

Related to this is Foster's argument (in Foster 1999), with reference to the work of Wendy Brown (1995), that we might consider genuine cultural critique to be neutralised within the public sphere of late capitalism and that 'by converting cultural opposition into claims to the affirmation of cultural particularity, the link is effectively broken between oppression and the reproduction of socio-economic structures – that is to say, between 'cultural' exclusion and material exclusion' (Foster, 1999, p. 12). This criticism directly relates to the tendency in Honneth to perceive claims to recognition as 'identity' claims. Foster argues that this runs the risk of affirming the notion of a fixed (and private) identity, as a 'victim' that merely needs to be protected by law, rather than allowing for the possibility of a *transformative* identity, e.g. the difference between affirmative gay rights and more transformative queer politics. Osborne (1996) makes a similar point and criticises Honneth for both lacking a sense of how cultural forms already mediate the process of recognition and for focussing on the legal recognition of identity-claims rather than more complex 'social forms of subjectivity'. He argues that Honneth idealises the formal universality of legal recognition and thereby 'abstracts from the existence of the state with its 'class- [and, we might add, gender- and race-] specific implementation' of the law; not to mention the specificity of state forms in different social formations' (ibid, p. 36). Osborne also suggests that we pay significant attention to what we might call 'injuries of recognition', and the ways in which the law actually *forms* certain identities through exclusion, rather than simply focusing on how we might go about recognising already existing identity claims.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Honneth goes some way towards tackling some of these criticisms in his 'Recognition as Ideology' essay (in Van Den Brink and Owen, eds., 2007 and republished in Honneth (2012)) where he seeks to distinguish between ideological forms of recognition (e.g. the recognition of a housewife for her cleaning skills, the recognition of a slave for his subservience etc) and 'socially productive' forms. He suggests that the former are characterised by a gap between what they promise and the material and institutional context within which that promise can be fulfilled. He also suggests here that we might want to distinguish between 'recognition orders' that primarily end up affirming forms of domination and those that create new identities and extend the scope of our normative claims.

Recognition as Ideology

Foster supports the above argument further by drawing attention to the ways in which what appears as successful recognition can be the result of the attempt by dominant interests to undermine emancipatory possibilities. He gives the example of the recognition of trade unions, as the 'legal subjectivity of the working class', and the way that the recognition of certain freedoms (e.g. to strike) paralleled certain administrative procedures (e.g. collective bargaining) that sought to undermine class conflict by establishing unions as mediators between workers and the state. Bernstein makes a similar point in terms of 'idealising identification' when he suggests that 'it is recognising wage labourers as free and equal that secures their domination; just as it is recognising the table as worth a hundred dollars that secures its fetish character' (2005, p. 318). Here Bernstein defends Marx's (dialectical) critique of rights: 'that rights as they now are preserve the very lack their possession promises – the right to vote as a continuation of disenfranchisement, the right to welfare as a way of keeping people impoverished' (2005, p. 324 n.31). Instead, our notions of injustice 'must exceed ideal, established justice because justice's mechanisms of recognition till now simultaneously systematically misrecognise' (2005, p. 318). So not only does Honneth have to be more sensitive to the ways in which recognition is a fragile and ambiguous process, as well as a threat to self-identity and therefore often actively avoided, but he also has to make sense of the struggles that take place over what it is that is being 'recognised' and the often exclusionary practices of established forms of recognition.

Another point of contention is the tendency for Honneth to operate with an idealised notion of cultural autonomy that assumes that individual experiences of disrespect are (directly) translatable into group experiences which are then channelled into collective resistance

without the intervening impact of a liberal ideology (and liberal culture) which encourages us to understand our fate in individualistic terms. Honneth in other words lacks a sufficient account of how power and ideology thwart the emancipatory possibilities of struggles for recognition. Foster (1999) suggests that although Honneth is correct to question the tendency of earlier critical theory to see culture as serving an ideological and socialising function, he doesn't sufficiently explore to what extent contemporary culture can 'serve as the focal point for resistance against dominant norms' (p.11) and the ways in which individual and collective action 'occur under conditions of severe structural constraint and the ubiquitous (but in no sense all-powerful and all-determining) operation of liberal ideology' (p. 13). Foster argues that:

'All too often, in fact, the potential of cultural resistance gets stuck between the 'rock' of a neutralizing assimilation to dominant interpretations of liberal individualism and the 'hard place' of an outright rejection of the dominant value system. In neither of these cases can culture form the basis for the constructive critique of dominant norms, which Honneth's account of the moral logic of social resistance requires' (1999, p. 11)

Foster goes on to suggest that forms of social and economic exclusion may well result in the inversion of dominant values and the redefinition of 'respect' in countercultural terms.

Although, as we have seen, Honneth takes this point on board and responds with the hope that a 'moral culture' will give those suffering from 'disrespect' the 'individual strength to articulate their experiences in the democratic public sphere', Foster suggests that this demonstrates an overly optimistic and idealised faith in the democratic public sphere and thereby 'overlooks the extent to which oppositional subcultures can be understood as a *reaction* to patterns of social exclusion whose very existence is *denied* within the democratic public sphere itself' (Foster, 1999, p. 12). He argues that Honneth neglects the way in which participation in the public sphere tends to require groups to adhere to the demands of a liberal-

individual ideology which in turn neutralises resistance and reproduces structures of domination. Following Foster then, and in the light of our criticisms so far, we might ask whether it might be the case ‘that normative claims emerge through forms of struggle which a liberal-communitarian structuring of the conditions of self-realisation proves unable to satisfy’ (Foster, 1999, p. 10). I will explore this further in my return to Adorno in the final chapter.

We might also criticise Honneth’s account for seeing social and political institutions as ‘conditions for the formation of self-consciousness’ whereby such institutions are slowly transformed in the light of struggles for recognition into conditions adequate for a positive relation to self. This poses the danger that we see politics, and moral progress, through the lens of (individual) self-relations, such that ethical life is reduced to providing the intersubjective context for (individual) self-realisation, we end up instrumentalising politics and turning cooperation and ethical life into the means for our private ends (see Bernstein, 2005, p. 304). We thereby lose the relational aspect of recognition which is concerned with, amongst other things, the destabilising of identity through communal relations, and also the destabilising of current communal relations.

Questioning a ‘Formal’ Conception of Ethical Life?

The final set of criticisms which are of importance for the thrust of my argument, concern the problems with Honneth’s ‘formal conception of ethical life’. At the heart of these criticisms is both the question of the appropriateness of Honneth’s conception in the context of pluralist societies, and the tendency for Honneth to follow Habermas in formalising and purifying practical norms. Pensky (in Petherbridge, 2011, pp. 125-54) and Brink (in Petherbridge, 2011,

pp. 155-76) focus their criticisms of Honneth on the notions of ‘ethical life’ and ‘solidarity’, and at the heart of their critique is the tension, or rather irreconcilability, between a formal conception of ethical life and the pluralism of modern societies. They argue that our modern, ethically pluralist, societies are unlikely to agree upon the kind of common idea of the good life that Honneth believes is necessary to provide the recognition (and esteem) of individuals in their particularity. They remain unconvinced by Honneth’s attempt to mediate between abstract, formal accounts of solidarity on the one hand, and substantive, but often exclusive, accounts of solidarity on the other (see Pensky in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 148). In the light of their comments, it is hard to see how Honneth takes us beyond either the Rawlsian account of an overlapping consensus in terms of broad agreements about how we disagree, or Habermas’s account of the solidary effects of communicative rationality. We are left with the dilemma of broad, yet inclusive, social goals that are too formal to produce solidarity (i.e. notions of procedural justice and public reason), or a substantive version of ethical life which risks forms of denigration and exclusion. Pensky suggests that Honneth’s ‘formal’ conception of ethical life tends to side with the former and therefore lacks a true sense of the ‘*ethical*, in the sense of describing a sphere of interpretations of the kind of life desirable *for us*’ (ibid, p. 152).

Brink also suggests that a *formal* conception of ethical life is incoherent and that Honneth’s conception of ethical life should be conceived as ‘*one* substantive account of ethical life among several, rather than *the* formal account of ethical life for post-traditional societies’ (Brink in Petherbridge, p. 160).⁶¹ In other words, he suggests that self-realisation, autonomy and pluralism can be seen as substantive values, rather than formal ones abstracted from

⁶¹ For a similar critique see Owen’s ‘Self-government and ‘Democracy as Reflexive Co-operation’’ in Van Den Brink and Owen (eds.) (2007), pp. 290-322.

plural versions of the good life, and that a solution to the problem might take the form of a ‘public dialogue among several substantive positions’ (ibid, p. 164).⁶² Honneth however seems to accept the terms of this dilemma and these criticisms in his later work (e.g. see Fraser and Honneth, 2003) and suggests that there might be an ‘overlapping consensus’ regarding constitutional principles but not regarding ethical values. In an attempt to avoid this problem Honneth takes what he sees as a Durkheimian route and links social esteem to ‘the exchange of services’ (as a ‘transcendentally institutionalised medium’) and argues that ‘independent of the ethical aims that individual members of society might pursue, they must share an interest in securing the material conditions of their social existence’ (in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 407). Honneth recognises that the way different tasks are esteemed relies upon ‘ethical or cultural background assumptions’ but believes that this doesn’t involve ‘competing ideas of the good’ and that we can transcend such concerns in a more rational and objective manner by concentrating on the ‘more “concrete” question of which activities are necessary and indispensable for society’s material reproduction’ (ibid, pp. 407-8). However, he fails to elaborate on this in any sustained and convincing way. The fate of Honneth’s original link between self-esteem and individual particularity - i.e. those elements of esteem attached to individual self-realisation that are outside of economic exchange and dependent on ethical convictions – is also in many ways subsumed back within the sphere of legal recognition where the emphasis is on individuals being given the autonomy to pursue their own particular aims (ibid. p. 409).

⁶² In fact, Van Den Brink goes further in suggesting not only that ‘in a pluralistic world, the best we can hope for is that we will mutually *respect* each other’s life-choices even if we cannot really set ourselves to granting them our full *esteem*’, but also that ‘as long as the mutual respect that is implicit in our recognising valid legal relations is warranted, the lack of full esteem and, at times, even the mutual devaluation of each other’s convictions need not be a constant threat to our wellbeing’. For him, contra Honneth, ‘we make ourselves needlessly vulnerable to the impossibility of social harmony if we conceive of ethical life as presupposing undistorted and unrestricted relationships of recognition’ (in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 172).

These final criticisms of Honneth return us to some of the criticisms of Habermas outlined at the end of chapter 1. As we have seen, Honneth seeks to develop a critical theory that maintains Habermas's commitment to communicative action whilst also avoiding the tendency to both oppose norm-free strategic action to power-free social action and to abstract 'reason' from concrete social practices and the moral experiences of social actors. He, like Habermas, wants to avoid the accusation that he is presenting a partial set of 'critical' moral principles as if they are universal, and he also wants to develop an account that is sensitive to the position of the 'concrete Other'. He seeks to meet all of these criteria by shifting the focus away from linguistic communication and towards the 'mutual recognition' of identities. He wants his theory of recognition to be able to outline general norms in a manner similar to Kantian moral theory so that they are 'formal or abstract enough not to raise the suspicion of representing merely the deposits of concrete interpretations of the good life' (Honneth, 1996, p. 173), while also containing the 'sufficient substantive content' he associates with communitarian ethics. Honneth is critical of the way in which the development of Habermas's thought has led him away from the need to 'socially anchor the normative perspective of his critical theory'. Without grounding his 'critical' position in some sort of social 'pre-theoretical resource', his critical theory becomes just another form of social-scientific critique. In other words, the emancipatory element of Habermas's later work appeals to the normative presuppositions 'implicit' in linguistic understanding and which operate behind the backs of social actors rather than in line with their actual (moral) experiences. By turning to experiences of 'disrespect', and the 'moral logic' contained in the forms of resistance and social conflict triggered by such experiences, Honneth hopes to have identified existing forms of social injustice that can provide the 'pre-theoretical resource' for his 'critical' perspective.

In many ways, I believe that Honneth's work has been important in broadening the communicative perspective and in developing a deeper sense of what binds us together, what provides us with a sense of solidarity, and what also motivates us to resist forms of injustice and suffering. However, despite Honneth's attempts to close the gap between abstract rational principles and the (substantive) norms of lifeworld practices, I agree with critics such as Bernstein (2005) who argue that Honneth repeats the tendency in Habermas to 'purify' the ideals of communicative reason for the purposes of distinguishing between progressive and regressive societal developments. Ideals (as quasi-transcendental principles) – i.e. a 'formal conception of ethical life' and 'the general presuppositions of communicative action' - become separated from their (empirical) use in everyday social practices for the purpose of providing a critical yardstick by which to assess such practices. In addition to this, there is the assumption in Honneth, as in Habermas, that the 'formal' nature of such ideals is what gives them their 'rational' authority. Bernstein (2005, p. 308) argues that the 'formal' ideals outlined in Habermas and Honneth are in many ways part of the problem: despite their attempts to ground such ideals in the 'pre-theoretical resource' of social action and resistance, they end up turning practical norms into 'theoretical norms', i.e. the 'purification' of practical norms robs them of their immanent link to motivation and action and they become merely contemplative. As Bernstein argues:

'however delicate, a formal conception of ethical life, even if it does accurately reconstruct the cognitive achievements of modernity, must nonetheless purify those achievements, denying both that those forms are implicated in the reproduction of the domination they oppose – as if Marx in *On the Jewish Question* had not emphatically demonstrated that the duality between state and civil society, between the ideal and its material base, that continues unmodified to this day, itself perverts the republican end into becoming an instrument serving what should only be the economic means for societal reproduction – and that, in

order to comprehend this constant cooptation or perversion, we must assume that what is at issue is historical formations of reason itself” (p. 317).⁶³

Despite pointing to this in his criticisms of others, Honneth’s ultimate emphasis on ‘rights’, as we have seen, tends to neglect the fact that they might be implicated in forms of ‘misrecognition’, e.g. the tendency for legal recognition to be premised on mutual indifference and to abstract from particularity. As Bernstein suggests therefore ‘Honneth’s purification of recognition reiterates without shifting the wild hopefulness implied by Habermas’s wish to obtain a clean separation of instrumental and communicative rationality’ (p. 317).⁶⁴ Foster (2011) also suggests that Honneth is guilty of too neatly ‘analytically separating the instrumental from the intersubjective’ and therefore risks ‘becoming blind to the persistence of instrumental attitudes within the intersubjective, and to the persistence of the intersubjective dimension of our interaction with the non-human world’ (p. 259).

So despite Honneth’s desire to bridge the gap between abstract rational principles and the (substantive) norms of lifeworld practices, and to avoid the abstraction and proceduralism of Habermas’s ‘idealising presuppositions of communication’, Honneth’s ‘formal conception of ethical life’ again abstracts from difference, particularity, subjectivity, and social – as well as material and temporal – context. The proceduralism we saw in Habermas’s work, despite his attempts to escape the confines of instrumental rationality, reappears in a new form in

⁶³ García Düttman (2000) makes a similar point. In criticising Honneth’s formal conception of ethical life he suggests that the struggle for recognition is determined in advance by Honneth’s idealisations and he argues that there is ‘an essential link between the reification or objectification of recognition and an idealisation which has the effect of an ideologisation. It is difficult not to conclude that a politics of recognition which is determined by such a link cannot but produce and reproduce *social conformism*’ (p. 156). See also García Düttman (1997).

⁶⁴ Despite their emphasis on intersubjectivity, rather than the autonomous individual subject, there are strong links to be made here to Kant’s ‘practical reason’ and his separation of (autonomous) rational subjects from the complexity of other (heteronomous) aspects of social life, which in turn reflects the abstraction of ‘legally’ autonomous individuals in the separation of civil society and state. Bernstein also hints at the implicit dangers of excluding those forms of ethical life that do not fit Habermas and Honneth’s *a priori* ideals of communicative and recognitive legitimacy and the way this parallels ‘secular practices of purification’ such as the Terror (p. 308).

Honneth's idealising presuppositions of recognition. Again we encounter a 'universal' reason at odds with the claims made by desire, the body, nature, and particularity. At this point we might ask whether Honneth dispensed with the critical position of Foucault too soon? Might Foucault help provide us with a more promising programme for critique? One not only critical of the dangers of idealisation and procedural rationality - and more sensitive to the potential claims made by particularity, desire, and the body - but also one that centres on struggle and the ways in which established forms of recognition are often complicit in forms of misrecognition. Or does Foucault's work return us to the points made by Honneth in his original criticisms of Foucault's work as a 'systems-theoretic solution to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*' - i.e. that Foucault loses the emphasis on social struggle and avoids notions of normative consensus in an account of the stabilisation of power which ends up outlining the operation of autonomous power systems over and above social actors? I will explore these issues in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: MICHEL FOUCAULT - POWER/KNOWLEDGE, ETHICS & AESTHETICS

As I already suggested in the introduction, in many ways it could be construed as odd to include the work of Michel Foucault within a thesis concerned with the trajectory, and problematic, of Frankfurt School Critical Theory in its development from Adorno and Horkheimer, through the work of Habermas, up to the recognitive concerns of Axel Honneth. However, taking my lead from Honneth's *Critique of Power*¹, not only do I recognise the significance of Foucault's work for social theory as a whole, and feel that Foucault helps us clarify a number of key 'critical-theoretical' concerns in addition to criticising Habermasian style universalism, but I also want to argue that his work poses a similar challenge to Honneth's formal conception of ethical life and his account of recognition. The role of the self-normalising subject is particularly important here given the absence of a notion of 'subjectivisation' in Honneth's account of recognition. Alongside the obvious importance of Foucault's work on power/knowledge here, I also want to argue that Foucault's later work on aesthetics and ethics, which shares with earlier Adornian critical theory an inclination towards an aesthetic critique of modernity, is worthy of consideration as a possible antidote to the idealising and proceduralism we have identified in Habermasian and Honnethian variants of the communicative turn in Critical Theory.

My exposition, and criticisms, of Foucault's work will take the familiar form of three distinct periods in his writing: his earlier 'archaeological' works, his middle 'genealogical' period,

¹ Also see the essays in Kelly, M. (ed.) (1994) (particularly McCarthy's 'The Critique of Impure Reason: Foucault and the Frankfurt School'), Dews (1987) (particularly pp. 150-161), David Couzens Hoy's 'Power, Repression, Progress: Foucault, Lukes and the Frankfurt School' (and other essays) in Hoy (ed.) (1986), and the essays in Ashenden and Owen (eds.) (1999).

and his later turn to ‘aesthetics/ethics’.² However, I will concentrate on the latter two periods, partly due to limitations of space, but also due to the fact that these phases of his work share more with a Critical Theory, broadly construed, whilst helping us to clarify the problems with the communicative turn that we have encountered so far. As Honneth suggests, the clearest links between Foucault and early Critical Theory are apparent in the genealogical concern with the connection between power and knowledge, or domination and reason, and the embeddedness of ‘reason’ in historical, social and cultural contexts. However, rather than exploring the possibility of a domination-free rationality – however fragile that may be – or the idealised presuppositions of interaction which might point towards non-coercive dialogue, Foucault instead doggedly pursues a Nietzschean account of the origins of the ‘social’ in power/knowledge and emphasises the impossibility of a context transcendence of truth or emancipatory knowledge. I outline a number of familiar criticisms of Foucault’s genealogical period before considering the shift to an emphasis on subjectivisation and ‘techniques of the self’. I explore the merits of his aesthetic critique – the self-creation of identity as a ‘work of art’ – but ultimately find it overly subjective and lacking a more substantive conception of culture, democracy, recognition, and ethical responsibility.

Foucault’s Early Work

Foucault’s initial project - apparent in his *Madness and Civilisation*, *The Birth of the Clinic*, but particularly *The Order of Things* and *The Archaeology of Knowledge* – seeks to provide what he calls an ‘archaeological’ analysis of modern (humanist) discourses and their consequences and exclusions. He explores the unifying features and presuppositions of historical discourses – the connections between their concepts, themes and objects - and takes

² For this schema see, in particular, Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982).

aim at the heart of what he calls the ‘anthropological’ modern episteme with the human subject (as the ‘transcendental-empirical doublet’ or both subject *and* object of knowledge) at its centre. By demonstrating that the subject is an *effect* of discourse, rather than its foundation or condition of possibility, he seeks to provide a historiography that bypasses the consciousness of subjects whilst also recovering those voices silenced by modern human(ist) sciences.³ Consistent with the Structuralist argument that thoughts and ideas are not the creation of individual consciousness, and that thought is inseparable from the language we use, Foucault explores the dominant ideas of a particular historical period as reflections of a particular ‘discourse’ or ‘discursive formation’. Discourses are rule-bound ways of speaking and writing about the world that are intimately connected to their social and historical context, and Foucault is primarily concerned with the ways in which different discursive formations operate. In his critique of our modern (subject-centred) discursive practices, Foucault not only appeals to the ‘thought from the outside’ with recourse to the transgressive nature of avant-garde writers (e.g. Foucault, 1971, pp. 48-49) and the revelatory voice of madness (Foucault, 1965), but he also hopes for the disintegration of the modern ‘episteme’ and the rise of a post-humanist future. If the idea of man can be demonstrated to be the product of the end of the ‘classical episteme’ and the birth of the ‘modern episteme’, he argues that the ‘end of man’ may well be on the horizon:

‘Man is an invention easily shown by the archaeology of our thought to be of recent date. And whose end is, perhaps, nigh ... We can readily wager that man will be effaced, like a face traced in the sand at the edge of the sea’ (1971, p. 387).

³ In their quest to ground knowledge claims as ‘universal’ and ‘true’, Foucault argues that Enlightenment knowledge-claims and their modern offshoots have sought to master or suppress the notion of the (empirical) historically-constituted and contingent human being as ‘object’ of knowledge with recourse to the transcendental ego (Kant) or the self-consciousness of a collective subject (Hegel, Lukács etc) as synthetic ‘subject’ of knowledge. Instead of ‘universality’, Foucault argues that Enlightenment thought should be understood as the generalisations of a historically specific, and *contingent*, human subjectivity.

Foucault's emphasis on the subject as an *effect* of discourse also provides him with a methodological justification for his (disinterested and non-ideological) science of discourse, and he appeals to ethnology as a 'counterscience' to justify his own scientific approach (Foucault, 1971, pp. 412-22).⁴ In an attempt to purely describe and historically analyse his own European culture 'from outside', he aims to eliminate any vestiges of the modern philosophy of the subject (or philosophy of reflection) from his own work and to develop a new theoretical language in the process. There can be no 'objective' knowledge as such for Foucault, in terms of 'true' pre-discursive knowledge of objective reality, because objects (and subjects) are themselves formed within discourse and it is discourse that *produces* what we understand as reality; however, at this stage of his thinking, he believes that there can be a *science* of discourse.⁵ He argues that this does *not* involve a 'critical' or 'transcendental' method as such – which he sees as products of the modern humanist episteme – *but* an archaeological method akin to mathematical science: what he calls 'a pure description of discursive events' (1972, p. 27).

The prevalence of Structuralist thinking in the 1950s and 1960s, with its emphasis on the decentred subject, the explanatory value of unconscious structures, and the centrality of a system of linguistic signs, influenced the early work of Foucault and his attempts to write 'subject-less' histories.⁶ Operating with a Kantian notion of the 'conditions of possibility' of knowledge, or rather a historical *a priori* of knowledge - instead of a specifically Freudian

⁴ See also Honneth's discussion of Foucault and ethnology in Honneth (1991, pp. 105-11)

⁵ In this period of his work, and in common with other structuralisms, he does operate with an idea of 'true sciences' with proper objects of study – labour, language, etc – and improper sciences that are constitutive of their objects of study rather than constituted by them. A key concern of his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), which seeks to methodologically clarify his earlier historiographical work, is to outline the scientific rationality he uses in his classification and analysis of other forms of scientific rationality.

⁶ His archaeological work shares similarities with Saussure's concern with the ways in which the system of language – as the condition of possibility of knowledge - operates as a collection of units with internal differences out of which meaningful sentences are constructed.

notion of the unconscious - Foucault attempts to uncover 'a positive unconscious of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse' (Foucault, 1971, p. xi).⁷ He sets out to identify and describe the historical and epistemological conditions of possibility for different systems of thought, the unacknowledged rules used by scientists to 'define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories' (ibid., p. xi). He refers to these underlying rules as 'epistemes' and defines them as:

'the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possibly formalised systems ... , the totality of relations that can be discovered, for a given period, between the sciences when one analyses them at the level of discursive regularities' (Foucault, 1972, p. 191).

Deep epistemic structures (*savoir*), as *a priori* conditions of possibility of knowledge, allow historically-specific knowledges (*connaissance*) and practices to function, and they make possible the discussion of certain 'objects' of knowledge.⁸ Discursive formations *form* their 'objects' of knowledge and develop concepts and procedures that express the validity of different statements within a particular discourse. So for example, the modern 'scientific'

⁷ The influence of Kant is apparent both in Foucault's emphasis on the discourse-mediated nature of knowledge and truth, and his appeal to the conditions of possibility of experience. However, in the place of Kant's transcendental subject, Foucault's archaeology places subject-less and historically contingent epistemic rules. Kant's influence on Foucault is apparent in the complementary thesis of his doctoral work - his principal thesis being *Madness and Civilisation* – which was a translation of Kant's 1798 *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (see Macey, 1993, pp. 88-89). See Allen (2003) for an account of how Foucault's reading of Kant's *Anthropology* in this thesis was crucial in determining the future direction of his work. Also, the influence of Kant applies not only to Foucault's early work but, as we shall see, his later work on aesthetics, ethics and Enlightenment. See also Foucault's interviews 'Critical Theory/Intellectual History' and 'The Art of Telling the Truth' (in Kritzman, ed., 1990).

⁸ Despite Foucault's claims to be neutral and to provide a 'pure description of the facts of discourse' however, his analysis does arguably contain certain normative prescriptions in the form of his welcoming the breakdown of the modern episteme and the 'end of man'. Habermas refers to this as 'cryptonormativism'. If, as Foucault claims, each episteme is marked by its *difference* from others due to the lack of any overarching principles or transcendent criteria by which to judge between epistemes, then he is unable to explain why we should welcome a new episteme. If he welcomes a new episteme on the grounds that the modern episteme elides difference and otherness, then he is in danger of contradiction by positing a transcendental principle by which to judge epistemes (Habermas, 1992, p. 268)

discourse on ‘mental illness’, outlined by Foucault in *Madness and Civilisation* (1965), ‘forms’ the ‘mentally ill’ as an object of the discourse of psychiatry and now operates with a category of person that can be diagnosed, treated with drugs or therapy etc.⁹ This new category of the ‘mental patient’, an object that could not previously be spoken or written about except within the confines of the previous discourse of ‘madness’, can now be identified and also further spoken and written about in terms of a range of ‘mental illnesses’ such as schizophrenia or depression. Different criteria and symptoms are used to identify the various illnesses and their sub-categories, and different procedures and social roles are in place to determine the validity of certain statements about the ‘object’ of the discourse. Professionally qualified individuals are in a position to diagnose and treat the mentally ill and their statements are considered valid in comparison to those deemed mentally ill whose statements may well be perceived as ‘symptoms’ of their illness. Certain ‘rules’ of discourses are in place such that only certain things can be said and only certain people can say them.¹⁰

Each of Foucault’s significant earlier works provides us with an alternative, non-traditional (and non-teleological) history of its object - be it madness, health, or broader conceptions of knowledge. These histories are non-progressive and non-triumphal and instead outline a series of radical historical junctures or ‘epistemic shifts’ between different ways of understanding, and dealing with a topic or object of knowledge. Despite some differences in approach between each of his earlier works, they all explore the divergences between various historical ‘epistemes’ and how these have been formed by a disparate range of historical and

⁹ However at this stage of his research, Foucault argues that these modern discourses are not ‘truly scientific’, despite their claims, since they are not constituted by a proper epistemological break – in other words, these discourses are socially constructed, whereas ‘true’ scientific discourses are not.

¹⁰ However this is not to argue that discourses are simply closed and coherent ways of speaking and writing about objects, such that everyone within that discursive formation will agree on all issues. Foucault suggests that discourses unleash a wide range of possibilities, which is evident in disagreements over a range of issues, but that this dispersal of elements still operates within the confines of a shared *episteme*.

institutional factors; these factors are seen to coalesce at specific historical moments and radically change dominant discourses whilst producing new ways of thinking and relating to objects as well as creating new objects of knowledge. Each his earlier works also tend to focus, as 'histories of the present', on the historical 'conditions of possibility' for our modern humanist discourses as well as the practical consequences of such discourses. Although Foucault is committed to the idea that epistemes are only related in terms of 'difference' and cannot therefore be judged according to any (historically) transcendent, and non-episteme specific, criteria as such (e.g. the self-realisation of the historical subject), his histories do tend to be histories of increasing control, classification, surveillance and normalisation under the (humanist) auspices of truth, morality and progress.

Foucault's history of madness from the Renaissance to the modern day, for example, becomes a history of increasing surveillance, silencing and control rather than the more conventional history of increasing respect for, and humane treatment of, the mad.¹¹ This is not a 'progressive' history whereby our ways of thinking come to more accurately represent the 'reality' of madness; it is instead a history of radical junctures between different ways of understanding, and dealing with, madness, and how these have been formed by a range of, relatively contingent, historical and discursive factors – e.g. institutions, laws, political

¹¹ Foucault compares the madman of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, who was often left to wander in the open countryside and whose 'folly' was often considered to contain its own wisdom or special knowledge about humanity, to the 'Classical era' (which he dates from the Hôpital Général in 1656 - where madness was increasingly seen as having idleness or deviance at its core (Foucault, 1965, p. 64) – through to the 'great confinement' of the Parisian poor, and on to Pinel's liberation of the inmates of Bicêtre in 1794, and the birth of the Asylum). The eighteenth century is seen as the period where madness enters the 'garden of species' and where attempts are now made to scientifically (and medically) classify all those who represent the 'other' of bourgeois order and scientific 'reason'. The birth of the asylum, and the founding of the York retreat by Tuke in 1796, is re-read by Foucault as the site of normalisation and confessional self-identification rather than as a place of humane treatment - it marks the transition from earlier, overt forms of repression, to more covert forms of surveillance and control.

reforms, architectural forms, scientific and philosophical arguments.¹² In many ways, *Madness and Civilisation* pre-empts many of the key issues in the rest of Foucault's work – e.g. the ways in which the knowledge produced by the human sciences is not simply disinterested inquiry but is embedded in power relations which it also sustains, in this case the self-confidence of Enlightenment rationality being defined against a realm of excluded 'unreason' which itself is intimately connected to the institutional confinement of the mad.¹³ For our purposes, what begins to emerge in Foucault's work at this point is a sensitivity to the paradoxes of modernity, the impurity of 'reason', and the relationship between universalist Enlightenment rationality and forms of (exclusionary) power relations, in addition to the normalising nature of universalist forms of thought (e.g. the confessional self-identification of the 'mad' with the institutional definitions and structures which 'recognise' them albeit in an ultimately oppressive and restrictive manner). His later genealogical work develops these ideas further and, I want to argue, challenges the ideals at work in Habermas's and Honneth's work by emphasising the ways in which humanist ideals of autonomy and recognition have often involved darker elements of humanist domination, and also the ways in which subjects are constituted by self-subjection, in addition to being oppressed by others. Foucault's work helps us to remain vigilant to the ways in which communicative rationality itself, when applied as a 'rational' standard to others and ourselves, may well exclude those identities and

¹² The same applies to Foucault's 'archaeology of the medical gaze' in his *The Birth of the Clinic* (1973). Rather than a history of medical progression, and an increasing approximation to the 'truth' of disease, he suggests that we witness a radical change in relations of visibility and spatialisation: a shift from the eighteenth century conception of disease as having a pathological essence, separate from its materialisation in the human body, to the modern (humanist) conception of disease as necessarily manifested in the human body. The clinical gaze *objectifies* the body by looking within and dissecting the patient in order to find the disease, and man comes to 'constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science' (1973, p. 243).

¹³ Foucault's response to this, in the form of an 'archaeology of silence', seeks to recover something of the experience of madness that has been lost (see Foucault in Macey, 1993, p. 95). He detects a 'muffled noise' breaking through the attempts of confinement to silence it, and looks to the writings and paintings of Artaud, Nerval, Goya, Van Gogh, Nietzsche and de Sade, for important elements of human experience absent from reason. It is in this 'excess', i.e. the forms of experience excluded by the rationality of Enlightenment thought, that he appears to ground freedom in opposition to 'reason's monologue on madness'. However, the idea that a 'primitive, basic and muffled experience' of 'madness' could exist separately from the discourses that constitute it was later criticised by Foucault in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (see Foucault, 1972, p. 39).

forms of action, resistance and satisfaction which aren't easily translatable into the 'rational' solidarity required of Habermas's 'discursive' theory nor Honneth's 'recognitive' one.

Genealogy, Power/Knowledge, and Resistance

A number of ambiguities and problems arise in Foucault's archaeological work, mainly connected to the relationship between an episteme, as an *a priori* set of rules, and the determination of knowledge by wider social structures and power relations; this ambiguity also causes problems for his explanations for both resistance and historical change (see Honneth, 1991, p. 139).¹⁴ His archaeological approach aims to provide a significant degree of autonomy for discourse and to avoid an account of knowledge that reduces it to its socio-economic, material determination (see *Foucault Live*, 1989, pp. 18-19); however, to avoid the charge of idealism, Foucault also acknowledges the need to relate the autonomous level of discourse to social and political practices and institutions. These issues are of particular prominence in his *The Order of Things* (1971), but despite his attempts here and his further attempts in his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault fails to sufficiently clarify the relationship between discursive and non-discursive elements in his notion of 'discursive formation' (See McNay, 1994, p. 73; also Honneth, 1991, pp. 146-7).¹⁵ His acknowledgement

¹⁴ Rather than 'transcendence' being an immanent possibility *within* an epistemic order, Foucault's treatment of discursive regularities as if they were concrete realities leads to a notion of the epistemic order as absolute and therefore only subject to challenge from 'beyond', i.e. from outside its limits – despite him also later claiming that there can be no outside. The Other of Enlightenment rationality, previously an authentic and pre-discursive 'madness', becomes the 'epistemic break' or is represented by avant-garde forms of aesthetic practice that have somehow retained their autonomy from the dominant episteme.

¹⁵ Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1971) is his general 'archaeology of the human sciences', where he steps back from the particular fields of madness and medicine etc, and attempts to outline changes in overarching conceptions of knowledge from the Renaissance, via the Classical period, to the modern. Each of these periods displayed an internal coherence in the ways in which the disciplines of economics, linguistics and natural history understood the world and defined their objects, but they classified the world in ways radically incommensurable with each other. The Renaissance period, characterised by 'resemblances' between things, shifts to the Classical period where words - previously part of the world of resemblances – are now understood as *representing* and classifying the objects they speak of; the natural and social worlds are also now seen as measurable and ordered according to the new scientific principles propounded by the likes of Bacon and Descartes (e.g. *mathesis* and *taxonomia*). The human subject replaces language as the centre of knowledge, in the modern episteme, and

of the inherent problems in his archaeological work leads to an eventual reconceptualisation of his notion of discourse.¹⁶ Discourse is no longer seen as an internally regulating system, whereby rules regulate themselves, but as both determined by, and constitutive of, power relations.

The term ‘genealogy’ first appears in a 1971 essay of Foucault’s that explicitly acknowledges the influence of Nietzsche – ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’ (in Rabinow, ed., 1991, pp. 76-100).¹⁷ Here Foucault uses Nietzsche’s idea of ‘genealogy’ as a challenge to those traditional histories which seek to understand history as a series of causal events with an overall pattern. The dangers associated with such histories according to Foucault are threefold: (a) the erasure of difference and the singularity of ‘the event’ by subsumption into a general historical narrative; (b) the privileging of the self-reflexive subject at the centre of historical movement; and (c) the retrospective, and narcissistic, reading of history as leading up to the present (as fulfilment). Foucault seeks to replace traditional histories with non-metaphysical histories of contingency and discontinuity. History is to have no immanent meaning but is to be seen as a history of accidents and a history of power struggles, where such struggles do not culminate

becomes the (Kantian) transcendental ‘condition of possibility’. There is also a decline in the classification of what is visible, and an increase in the use of concepts that go beyond immediate description (e.g. the concept of ‘labour’ in explaining value, internal organic features and evolutionary-historical conceptions in natural history, etc). Each of the human sciences explore the hidden forces that explain the existence of ‘Man’, and ‘Man’ becomes the object of knowledge *and* the transcendental subject of knowledge; this in turn gives rise to irreconcilable tensions at the very heart of the foundations of modern knowledge.

¹⁶ The starting point for this shift, which Foucault makes reference to as a ‘moment of transition’ (in Gordon, ed., 1980, p. 183), is his inaugural lecture in 1970 - ‘The Order of Discourse’ (in Young, ed., 1981). See also Foucault (in Gordon, ed., 1980, p. 113) where he states: ‘what was lacking here (in the earlier work) was this problem of the ‘discursive regime’, of the effects of power peculiar to the play of statements’, and also ‘one’s point of reference should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning’ (ibid, p. 114).

¹⁷ Although this is not the first place he tackles the influence of Nietzsche on his work, e.g. see Foucault’s 1967 text ‘Nietzsche, Freud, Marx’ (Foucault, 1986) and the introduction to his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972). For some of Foucault’s reflections on his Nietzscheanism, see the interviews in Kritzman (ed., 1990) – in particular the interviews ‘Critical Theory/Intellectual History’ (pp. 17-46) and ‘Return to Morality’ (pp. 242-254).

in mutuality ‘where the rule of law finally replaces warfare’, but rather ‘humanity installs each of its violences in a system of rules and thus proceeds from domination to domination’ (in Rabinow, ed., 1991, p. 85). Foucault famously inverts Clausewitz’s aphorism to make this point: ‘politics is war continued by other means’. Also the body, rather than the meaning-giving subject, is seen to be at the centre of his non-teleological histories of struggle, and Foucault presents us with a material history of the way in which the body is inscribed, shaped and reshaped by power struggles.¹⁸ It is the body that will take centre stage in Foucault’s key genealogical works – *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *History of Sexuality (volume one)* (1990).

There are a number of clear Nietzschean themes in Foucault’s genealogical period. Not only the notion of ‘genealogy’ itself, and the emphasis on contingent and subjectless histories, but Foucault also pursues Nietzsche’s obsession with exploring the sacrifices which are made in the formation of autonomous subjectivity.¹⁹ Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish* (1977) echoes Nietzsche’s concern with the formation of morality through obedience and punishment in his *Genealogy of Morals* (1956), and there are also clear parallels with Nietzsche in Foucault’s exploration of the double meaning of ‘discipline’ (i.e. the role of the human sciences, as ‘disciplines’, in calculating and ‘disciplining’ the behaviour of human beings). Foucault explicitly follows Nietzsche in his attempt to undermine those humanist histories which outline the progressive (or potential) separation of truth and power, instead opting to expose the (unavoidable) ‘will to power’ lurking behind the ‘will to truth’ (or in Foucault’s subtitle to

¹⁸ A key difficulty for Foucault, as we will see however, will be to use the language of power without infusing it with its conventionally associated meanings of the self-reflexive agent as subject and other forms of teleology.

¹⁹ Honneth makes clear links here between the Nietzschean influence on Foucault and some similar themes shared by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (see Honneth, 1991, pp. xxii).

Volume 1 of his *History of Sexuality*, the ‘will to know’).²⁰ Both Nietzsche and Foucault see our interpretations of the world, and the way we give meaning to it, as an imposition on (or violence to) things, which in turn is dependent on our particular position of interest. This also fuels their interest not only in the myriad ways in which power and knowledge are entangled, but also in the recognition that ‘truth’ is produced and created, rather than simply unearthed, and also therefore open to reversals and transgressions.²¹ Related to this is Foucault’s adherence to Nietzsche’s histories of rationality and truth, which concern themselves with the historical construction(s) of notions of good, evil, truth etc, without recourse to any underlying essential ‘truthful’ interpretation or distinction between truth and ideology. However, having said this, they both also rather paradoxically tend to impose criteria of their own when deciding between alternative interpretations (or forms of knowledge), and these criteria are driven by an interest in promoting agonistic struggle, transgression and heterogeneity.

Without abandoning many of the key ideas of his archaeological period, Foucault’s genealogical studies aim to clarify, and make explicit, the relationship between discourse and power; rather than lurking in the background, as they did with his archaeological studies, social structures and the institutional conditions of knowledge production come to the fore (Foucault in Gordon, ed., 1980, pp. 113-14). Here Foucault is primarily concerned with the ways in which specific bodies of knowledge, particularly the human sciences, have developed in conjunction with power relations. His history of what he calls the ‘carceral society’ focuses on the ways in which certain activities are regulated and transformed by professionals and

²⁰ Foucault also describes his project in these terms in his earlier inaugural lecture (see Foucault in Young, ed., 1981, pp. 48-78).

²¹ See in particular Nietzsche’s *Beyond Good and Evil* (1990). I will briefly explore the political implications of this below in terms of a shared interest in a political aesthetics.

administrative officials on the basis of scientific bodies of knowledge. These functionaries serve to both redefine activities in such a way that they can operate within the confines of a 'rational' science, and to reorganise human conduct in line with rational and efficient procedures. The 'disciplinary power' wielded by such functionaries operates according to a process of 'normalisation' at work in the very formation of certain bodies of scientific knowledge. In the process of (scientifically) defining what constitutes 'normal', for example 'normal sexuality', scientific knowledge also operates with a notion of its Other as deviant, for example 'abnormal sexual practices' (Foucault, 1990). In applying the idea of 'normality' across a range of different activities, new categories of 'deviance' are constantly created, and the attempt to ensure 'normal' practices in the population at large requires both 'surveillance' and the regulation and elimination of 'abnormal' practices. Individuals are increasingly controlled through normative power - the relatively invisible standards of normality generated by moral and scientific discourses - rather than overt repression; hence the importance for Foucault of the self-normalising subject and the links between subjectivity and epistemic configurations. In addition to this, he emphasises the ways in which surveillance may take the form of policing or administration, and the ways in which it is intimately linked to the reorganisation of activities with the aim of making them more amenable to observation and supervision. In other words, the relationship between power and knowledge – between administration, discipline and control on the one hand, and rationality and science on the other – is so entwined, that it is impossible to speak of them separately, hence Foucault's use of the expression *power/knowledge* (Gordon, ed., 1980).

The 'subject' plays a similar role in Foucault's genealogies to the one it played in his archaeologies, except there is more of an emphasis here on the dual meaning of 'subject' –

meaning both human being and the process of *subjection*.²² Foucault's genealogies focus on the links between subjectivity and epistemic configurations with an emphasis on the self-normalising subject. In a similar way to his portrayal of the 'mad person' in his earlier *Madness and Civilisation* (Foucault, 1965) – the person who is no longer the target of physical torture but is *self-controlling* in line with the moral expectations of medical authority – the modern subject assumes that he is autonomous and free despite the meticulous operations of power that have shaped him. The notion of 'disciplinary power' not only describes the punitive practices that operate in the name of power, but also, and more importantly, the production of obedient, well-disciplined (and self-disciplined) individuals. Connected to this idea of the formation of the modern subject, therefore, is Foucault's definition of power as being 'without a subject'. Whereas more traditional conceptions of power have seen it in terms of being something that is held, and wielded, by individuals and groups (e.g. by a sovereign ruler or the bourgeoisie), Foucault proposes a conception of power which sees it as dispersed throughout social institutions and practices, as the product of strategic conflict between subjects, and as integral to the formation of the subject and the formation of discourses. Rather than the kind of power that is external to, but exercised *over*, the activities of subjects – e.g. the power of the sovereign who rules at a distance and is broadly uninterested in the everyday activities of his subjects – Foucault emphasises the all-pervasive nature of modern power which is integrated into the everyday activities it regulates (Foucault in Gordon, ed., 1980, p. 122).²³ The proliferation of administrative activities has impacted upon the vast majority of aspects of modern life and has extended the effects of

²² See in particular Foucault's 'Subject and Power' essay in Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) where Foucault emphasises the 'two meanings of the word "subject": subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (p. 212).

²³ Although at this point we might note that 'power to' always has to also be 'power over' if its function is to regulate.

power in all directions, although Foucault is keen to dismiss the idea of a unified and highly co-ordinated operation of power that works towards a particular goal, or is in the hands of a particular individual or group. In many ways, he conceives of power as the very social environment in which groups and individuals operate; power has a complex ‘capillary’ structure, it is everywhere and emerges from everywhere.

The key texts that exemplify this genealogical stage of Foucault’s work are *Discipline and Punish* (1977) and *History of Sexuality (volume one)* (1990). The central thesis of his *Discipline and Punish* is that the Enlightenment notion of the triumph of scientific knowledge and rational organisation over authority and absolute power is in fact a history of the reorganisation of power and the development of an all-pervasive *disciplinary power*. Sovereign power, characterised by punishment and torture, is illustrated in Foucault’s book with the gruesome opening image of the death of Damians the regicide in 1757 who was publicly tortured, dismembered and killed. The following image in the book, set a mere eighty years after the death of Damians, involves the highly disciplined and rule-bound day of prisoners in Paris, whose activities include prayer, bathing, work, education etc. The short period between these two images is reminiscent of Foucault’s notion of an epistemic shift, central to his earlier ‘archaeological’ work, in this case the radical rupture in conceptions of power and knowledge related to punishment. This shift is not to be attributed to an increasing compassion in the treatment of all human beings, but as the rise of a disciplinary power that develops out of the objectifying and controlling tendencies of *scientism*. Central to this shift is the aim:

‘to make of the punishment and repression of illegalities a regular function, coextensive with society; not to punish less, but to punish better; to punish with an attenuated severity perhaps, but in order to punish with more universality and

necessity; to insert the power to punish more deeply into the social body' (Foucault, 1977, p. 82).

Although penal reformers criticised the unrestrained nature of punishment under the feudal system of justice, the impetus for change was motivated predominantly by the desire for greater efficiency and regularity in the process of punishment.²⁴ During the transition to the modern period the public spectacle of torture, characteristic of sovereign power, is replaced by (self-) regulation in prison, characteristic of the nation state; public trials and punishment are replaced by administrative procedures carried out by legal professionals; imprisonment as a means of simply ensuring the availability of the criminal for punishment, and also as a means of containing non-criminals such as the mad and the poor, is replaced by imprisonment as a form of punishment in itself; also the focus on whether someone is guilty is replaced by the focus on the social or psychological *cause* that led to their act. The key image used by Foucault to represent this shift to the *disciplinary power* of modern society is Bentham's 'panopticon' design of an 'ideal' prison. The circular building – with its central observation tower obscured by Venetian blinds so that prisoners are unaware as to whether they are being watched, and its individual cells between the tower and the outer walls – is characterised by its rational plan for the treatment, and control, of prisoners, and by its intention to get the prisoners to reflect on, and control, their own conduct. Without the need for physical control, architectural design ensures the more efficient functioning of power.

Foucault refers to the modern forms of control as the *microphysics of power* and it is here that the inseparability of knowledge and power comes to the fore. The human sciences, or

²⁴ There are clear Marxist and Weberian themes at work in Foucault's account of penal reform – the emphasis on capital's need for 'docile bodies' ready for productive labour, and the rationalisation of social and legal spheres to ensure more efficient social administration. For an elaboration of these connections see, amongst others, Smart (1983) and O'Neill (1986).

‘disciplines’, are seen as playing a key role in conceptualising important aspects of disciplinary power, such as what constitutes ‘normal’, and in creating new and more effective ways of controlling people. The modern penal system as an institutional practice is supported by conceptions of ‘truth’ created in criminological, sociological, psychological and medical discourses (Foucault, 1977, p. 226). The prisoner is not simply subjected to control through surveillance, but also through the myriad forms of assessment and diagnosis in line with the normative, and normalising, assumptions of these discourses. The criminal is also no longer judged according to the criminal act itself but according to the, often psychological, reasons for committing the crime. The criminal’s *intentions* are under scrutiny and measured against certain criteria of ‘normality’, and these criteria are used to understand the possibility of (normative) rehabilitation. This relationship between normative knowledge and social control leads Foucault to argue that:

‘There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’ (1977, p. 27).

Power operates effectively through the production of knowledge, and knowledge is never free from power relations, despite claims to value freedom and objectivity. Although he concentrates on the modern penal system, Foucault is keen to suggest that it provides a model for a broader *carceral* society of which the prison is only one institution in which individuals are regulated by, and regulate themselves in accordance with, surveillance; other institutions where power and knowledge work in tandem include schools, factories and hospitals (Foucault, 1977, pp. 138-9). Each of these institutions have their ‘judges’, such as teachers and doctors, who assess and diagnose individuals according to certain ‘normalising’ criteria, but they also importantly utilise architectural designs to ensure enclosure and

individualisation, and therefore the more efficient control of bodies within a network of disciplinary power. As I've already mentioned, for Foucault modern techniques of power seek to produce norms of conduct through disciplining the body. He sees the body, and its activities and expressions, as the lifeblood of societies and therefore as the target for control for the purposes of societal stability and integration²⁵. Bodily processes at the levels of movements, illnesses, and reproduction, are the focal points for the operation of power and therefore play a central role in his studies of punishment and sexuality. In his *Discipline and Punish* he focuses on the development of training procedures for 'docile bodies' (e.g. the spatial distribution and temporal rationalisation of bodies) alongside the 'means of correct training' (e.g. surveillance and examination).²⁶

Although, as we have seen, Foucault sees power as dispersed throughout society, rather than simply being held by a particular group, he does reflect upon the importance of the role of the state. He utilises the notion of *biopower* to suggest that the state obtains its power from a large, healthy and educated population, and is therefore concerned with its general welfare while seeking to regulate and develop it (Foucault, 1990, p. 139). Administrative mechanisms attempt to ensure the reproduction and health of a population in line with society's discipline-related needs such as military participation and industrial production. It is in the first volume of his *History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1990) that Foucault develops this idea, along with a conception of power which emphasises its *productive* (or rather constitutive) side. Here Foucault seeks to question traditional histories of sexuality, particularly the 'repressive

²⁵ See 'Body/Power' in Gordon (ed., 1980, pp. 55-62).

²⁶ More specifically he refers to the training procedures for 'docile bodies' in terms of (a) the art of distributions, (b) the control of activity, (c) the organisation of geneses, and (d) the composition of forces (Foucault, 1977, pp. 141-69); and he refers to 'the means of correct training' in terms of (i) hierarchical observation, (ii) normalising judgement, and (c) the examination (ibid, pp. 170-194). The examination brings together both hierarchical observation and normalising judgement inasmuch as it is 'a normalising gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish' (p. 184).

hypothesis': the hypothesis which suggests that sex was increasingly repressed in the seventeenth century, significantly repressed as both a topic of discussion and as an activity in the Victorian period, then increasingly liberated in the twentieth century. He argues that rather than witnessing a historical absence of discourse about sex followed by an increasing liberation, there has instead been an important *shift* in the way we talk about sex.

Although the Victorian period might have involved the repression of sexual feelings and behaviour, it was also a period marked by a rapid increase in scientific and therapeutic discourses about sex. There was a medicalisation of sexuality and the creation of sexuality as an object of knowledge, a '*scientia sexualis*'; here sexuality was attached to discourses of 'truth', and 'abnormal' sexual practices were aligned with deviancy and mental illness. The attempts to generate and provoke discourses about sex are seen by Foucault as directly linked with, and constitutive of, attempts to regulate sex in line with the state's concern with a healthy and productive population. To bring people's sexual activities and thoughts to the point of articulation is to make them more easily identifiable and controllable. Rather than a history of the repression of discourse, we are faced with an understanding of the development of the discourse of sexuality as being concerned with an 'incitement to discourse'. For Foucault, the Victorian period was marked by:

'... a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex ... an institutional incitement to speak about it, and to do so more and more; a determination on the part of the agencies of power to hear it spoken about, and to cause it to speak through explicit articulation and endlessly accumulated detail' (1990, p. 18).

Foucault makes clear links here to the Western practice of religious confession and its dispersion into other areas of social practices, including scientific ones such as psychotherapy. A key change however involves the transition from confession about transgressive practices,

i.e. forbidden *acts*, to confession about internal thoughts, feelings and intentions. Scientific and medical notions of ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ sexual activities are therefore seen as continuing the (religious) moral notions of sin and guilt as means of social control, albeit in less explicit ways. The internalisation of ‘normal’ behaviour in line with such scientific and medical discourses, encouraged in modern medical approaches to madness and criminal behaviour, is continued in discourses around sexuality. It is in this light that Foucault conceives of psychoanalysis as the modern discipline, par excellence, due to its conception of the *voluntary* confession of inner desires as being the key to psychological liberation, a development Foucault sees as implicating individuals ever deeper in networks of disciplinary power.

A central idea in Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* is that power is not simply repressive, inhibiting sexual activity or sexual expression, but is *productive* or constitutive in that it creates new discourses about sexuality along with new practices. Rather than these discourses simply turning sex into a reproductive activity, that is observed and regulated by medical professions in line with the demands of biopower, they create new sexual pleasures and concomitant forms of resistance. Foucault’s treatment of homosexuality illustrates this point. Traditional accounts of the field of sexuality suggest that homosexuality has been actively repressed, however Foucault concentrates on the contribution made by medical discourses in defining ‘the homosexual’ as someone in need of treatment and to be cured of their pathological illness. He argues that it was in the development of medical discourses that the category of ‘the homosexual’ was *created*; although same-sex relations clearly occurred before this time, ‘the homosexual’ as a category of person simply did not exist until formed by medicalised discourses. The creation of ‘the homosexual’ by such discourses demonstrates

the entwinement of power and knowledge, or rather exemplifies power/knowledge at work, as the formation of ‘scientific’ knowledge about this ‘object’ of sexuality is intimately tied to the aim of repressing same-sex relations. However, it also illustrates the point Foucault makes about disciplinary power creating its own forms of resistance. The category of ‘homosexual’ allows ‘homosexuals’ to see themselves as a group united by common interests and with common experiences of prejudice and exclusion, who might potentially engage in collective action with the aim of legitimising their sexual practices.²⁷ As Foucault argues:

‘Homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified’ (1990, p. 101).

Foucault’s conception of power as *productive*, and as productive of resistance, changes the focus of those traditional conceptions of power which locate power in a particular social group or structural location within society. The idea of confronting power in a unified way - e.g. via Marxist revolutionary activity - loses its significance for Foucault given the ubiquity of power, and resistance appears in those more localised and marginal forms emerging alongside attempts at regulation. Disciplinary power in prisons for example can also be seen as giving birth to its own forms of resistance such as everyday disobedience or prison riots; and it was here, amongst other struggles, that Foucault focussed his attentions as a founding member of the ‘Groupe d’Information sur les Prisons’ in 1971 (see Macey, 1993, pp. 257-289).²⁸

²⁷ Foucault’s *productive* notion of power thereby not only compensates for the formalism of his earlier archaeological work, but also represents an important advance over his previous notion of resistance and the Other. Rather than being external to the epistemic order - i.e. in the form of an authentic ‘madness’, an epistemic break, or certain forms of art and literature – resistance, and the Other, are now firmly *within* it in the guise of a product or effect of power relations.

²⁸ Foucault’s politics were notoriously varied and his activities encompassed a number of political issues. Amused by the frustrated attempts to label him, Foucault acknowledged that: ‘I think I have in fact been situated in most of the squares of the political checkerboard, one after another and sometimes simultaneously: as anarchist, leftist, ostentatious or disguised Marxist, nihilist, explicit or secret anti-Marxist, technocrat in the

Power, Subjectivity and Normativity: Some Critical Reflections on Genealogy

Having briefly outlined the central points of Foucault's genealogical studies, I will now consider some of the key criticisms provoked by this period in his work. These tend to be concentrated in three related areas: (a) a lack of clarity in his definition of power and the related problems of excessive domination and his neglect of resistance; (b) the lack of an adequate conception of 'subjectivity'; and (c) the lack of a clear normative basis for critique. The problem of a lack of clarity in his definition of power involves the emphasis on an all-encompassing domination, with very few resources for resistance, along with an inability to account for the concentration of power. Some have argued that Foucault's notion of power is far too all encompassing to be in any way differentiating when describing social control. Although he is right to try and avoid the kind of economic reductionism at work in Marxist accounts of power, he is unclear about the way in which power is concentrated in certain parts of society, such as the State and productive relations (Poulantzas, 1978, p. 67). Also, despite the emphasis on power as 'productive', rather than simply repressive (e.g. the constitution of the category of 'homosexual' as both restrictive and resistant), Foucault still appears to leave us with an account of a totally administered society based on the model of dominant institutional forms of power such as penal systems. Accounts of power based on such models are in danger of overestimating the 'total' nature of control, and of neglecting less oppressive

service of Gaullism, new liberal etc. An American professor complained that a crypto-Marxist like me was invited to the U.S.A, and I was denounced by the press in Eastern European countries of being an accomplice of the dissidents. None of these descriptions is important by itself; taken together, on the other hand, they mean something. And I must admit that I rather like what they mean. It's true that I prefer not to identify myself and that I'm amused by the diversity of ways I've been judged and classified' (in Rabinow, ed., 1991, pp. 383-4). He started out as broadly Marxist and, influenced by his tutor Althusser, had been a (non-orthodox) member of the PCF. His politics shifted away from Marxism in the 1960s, and although he missed the student revolts in Paris in 1968 whilst in Tunis, he was engaged with those opposed to the regime there. The early 1970s saw him mainly associated with the GIP prison reform group, which influenced his *Discipline and Punish*. He was also involved, alongside Genet and Sartre, in immigration and anti-racist campaigns, in demonstrations against the Vietnam war, and he later courted controversy with his support for the Iranian revolution and Islamic spiritual revolt (although later condemning the Iranian regime's human rights abuses). He was also briefly associated with the Nouveaux Philosophes movement in the late 1970s, alongside Glucksmann and Levy, and was actively involved in supporting the Solidarity movement in Poland in the 1980s. For a comprehensive overview of Foucault's life and politics, see Macey (1993).

social contexts. Given Foucault's attempts to emphasise that power is not simply repressive, it is surprising that he ends up with an account that reproduces such traditional conceptions of domination.²⁹ Dews (1987, p. 188), for example, questions Foucault's tendency to rely on the standpoint of the official aspects of oppressive institutions to understand how they work, such as medical procedures or architectural designs, rather than resistant elements at the heart of these institutions (e.g. prison subcultures); these 'others' within oppressive institutions might be conceived of as representing serious contenders to the 'total' nature of domination. Despite Foucault's arguments about what he calls 'the rule of tactical polyvalency of discourses', or the inevitable rise of resistance in relation to power, his lack of sufficient exploration and clarification in this area leaves the sources of resistance relatively ill defined. Although he hints at 'the body and its pleasures', his emphasis on the subjection of 'docile bodies' and the imperative to tell the 'truth' about sexuality leaves us without a sufficiently clear idea as to the possibilities of liberation.

Related to the ambiguities surrounding Foucault's conception of power at this stage in his work is the lack of an adequate conception of 'subjectivity'. In his emphasis on the socially constructed nature of human subjectivity, through his suggestion that the human soul is merely a creation of the exercise of disciplinary power upon the body (Foucault, 1977, p. 29), Foucault appears to undermine the possibility of autonomous action. He also neglects aspects of subject construction other than the corporeal effects of disciplinary power, such as social, legal and psychological definitions that might point the way to the possibility of autonomous experience (Rose, 1984, p. 178). For example, Habermas suggests that legal power should not to be seen simply as a normalising tool for disciplinary power, but also as liberating with

²⁹ For a defence of Foucault against this charge of power as totalising, see Deleuze (1988, chapter 5 – 'Foldings, or the Inside of Thought')

regards to guarantees of security and civil rights (1992, p. 290). Honneth argues that Foucault neglects the ‘universal achievements of bourgeois law’ and fails to distinguish between ‘social organisations in which membership is regulated on the basis of juridically free contracts and total institutions in which membership is coerced on the basis of legal orders’ because ‘legal norms and moral ideas’ are conceived as ‘the cultural superstructure of a systemic process of the augmentation of power’ (Honneth, 1991, p. 197).³⁰ What appears to be missing from Foucault’s histories is an account of the ‘paradoxes and antinomies of law in capitalist societies’ (Rose, 1984, p. 174). Habermas also suggests that Foucault is unable to account for other forms of liberation at work in modernity, particularly through the process of individualisation. Although Foucault would see individualisation as a key component in the workings of disciplinary power, Habermas suggests that it is a process that has brought freedom in relation to individual identity and the possibilities for reflexive action (1992, p. 287).³¹

A clearer conception of subjectivity might provide Foucault with more adequate tools in his attempts to account for resistance, otherwise he is left in the curious position of *implicitly* judging the regimes of truth and disciplinary power that he describes, without an *explicit* account of his normative position, especially given his critique of any notion of ideology or possibility of truth; as Fraser asks: “Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted?” (1981, p. 283, cited in Habermas, 1992, p. 284).³² Foucault’s genealogical work dismisses the distinction between science and ideology as he claims that all

³⁰ See Foucault’s ‘Two Lectures’ in Gordon (ed., 1980, pp. 78-108) for a discussion of the distinction between juridical and disciplinary power. Foucault also discusses the importance of local, rather than global, critique here.

³¹ It is the tension between the constraints on subjects and the possibility of their creative expression that Foucault goes on to explore in his final works discussed below.

³² In relation to ‘domination’ here though, it is worth noting that Foucault is keen to make a distinction between relational forms of ‘power’ and more centralised and stable forms of ‘domination’ (see Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 225).

forms of knowledge, including all those claiming access to a ‘truth’ underlying reality, are intimately tied to regimes of power; ‘truths’ are therefore seen as tools of regulation and normalisation. As Habermas argues in relation to Foucault:

‘Disciplinary power functions without the detour through a necessarily false consciousness shaped within humanistic discourses and hence exposed to the criticism of counterdiscourses. The discourses of human sciences merge with the practices of their application into an opaque power complex on which the critique of ideology makes no impression’ (Habermas, 1992, p. 283).

However, if knowledge is always implicated in, and constitutive of, discursive regimes, then we might ask how Foucault is able to sufficiently separate *his* knowledge from disciplinary relations of power enough to suggest what should be resisted, and how we should go about it?³³ Or, to put the question another way, if power and knowledge are always mutually entangled then which regime of power/knowledge is his work part of or formed by? Foucault dismisses this interpretation of his work for a number of reasons; partly because he does not claim to speak for others from a ‘universal’ position of progressive politics and because he believes that those engaged in struggles can speak for themselves without the need for philosophical justifications³⁴, partly because he sees the danger of a *normative* position becoming a *normalising* one, and also partly because he sees the attempt to separate knowledge from power – and to establish some form of transcendental truth – as attached to the epistemology of humanism.³⁵ However, there are certain implicit normative positions

³³ For example, Honneth (1991, p. 172) argues: ‘the kind of theory of knowledge that Foucault posits as the basis of his critique of the sciences would entangle him in the contradiction of no longer being able to justify epistemologically his own academic research activity, while it would itself be subject to the verdict of its own proposed claims (that is, it would have to expose itself as merely a reflexive form of strategic action)’.

³⁴ See his ‘Intellectuals and Power’ conversation with Deleuze in Bouchard (ed., 1977) in addition to his ‘Subject and Power’ essay (in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982).

³⁵ It also follows from this, for Foucault, that the entanglement of power and knowledge in the production of ‘truth’ does not therefore mean that the human sciences are ‘untrue’. Foucault’s genealogical ‘anti-sciences’ concern themselves with the broader governmental and subjugating effects of the human sciences rather than their ‘contents, methods or concepts’ (Foucault in Gordon, ed., 1980, p. 84). He also seeks to avoid prioritising his genealogical (and archaeological) work in relation to other knowledge(s), as if they were in some way ‘more

which are mobilised in his work - what Habermas calls 'cryptonormativism'³⁶ - without being clearly worked through.³⁷ Related to this criticism is the absence of a theory of normative traditions in Foucault's work, and therefore an account of social cohesion. Norms only appear to serve a disciplinary function in terms of 'normalisation', and therefore cohesion tends to be created only by violence and domination, rather than the possibility of normative agreement.³⁸ Law and morality are dismissed on the basis that they ultimately hide strategic goals.

Foucault & the Frankfurt School

Before considering Foucault's responses to some of these criticisms in the final phase of his work, it is worth briefly exploring what is at stake in his genealogical work for the project of (Frankfurt) Critical Theory as a whole. It is clear that Foucault's genealogical period, and its concern with the entanglement of power and knowledge, has the most direct links with the concerns of earlier Critical Theory; also, it is these links which often provide the platform for a number of criticisms from Habermas and Honneth and their later communicative/recognitive turn(s). However, it is also worth considering how some of the

true', and instead turns to the models of 'fictions', 'instruments' and 'tools' that might contribute to the transgression of limits, transformation of identities, and produce 'truth' (albeit in a contingent and transient manner) (e.g. see Gordon, ed., 1980, p. 193; Foucault, 1985, p. 14; Bouchard, ed., 1977, p. 208)

³⁶ Habermas's main criticisms of Foucault's theory of power are summed up as follows: 'his putative objectivity of knowledge is itself put in question (1) by the involuntary *presentism* of a historiography that remains hermeneutically stuck in its starting situation; (2) by the unavoidable *relativism* of an analysis related to the present that can understand itself only as a context-dependent practical enterprise; (3) by the arbitrary *partisanship* of a criticism that cannot account for its normative foundations' (Habermas, 1992, p. 276). Presentism involves instrumentalising 'the contemplation of the past for the needs of the present' (p. 278), e.g. reading disciplinary power back into the power relationships of previous historical epochs; and relativism involves Foucault's inability to justify the 'validity' claims of counterdiscourses in relation to dominant discourses. See also Habermas's essay 'Taking Aim at the Heart of the Present' in his *The New Conservatism* (Habermas, 1991).

³⁷ Similar arguments are made by Taylor (1984; 1985) and Walzer (1989). However, I think we can safely suggest, following Simons (1995, p. 86), that Foucault operates with an implicit principle of 'agonal subjectivity' – i.e. that regimes are to be assessed according to their tendency to either open up or close down possibilities of individual liberty and transgression. Strategic relations of constant struggle are to be protected from their ossification into rigid relations of domination.

³⁸ This is obviously a key criticism of Foucault made by Honneth in his *Critique of Power* (1991: see pp. 161, 162, 174, 197, 199)

parallels between Foucault's work and that of Adorno and Horkheimer help us to draw out some of the shortcomings of the normative-universalist positions of Habermas and Honneth.

Given their shared concern with the entwinement of rationality and domination, Foucault and early Critical Theory are often both charged with undermining the possibility of their own 'critical' philosophy.³⁹ Foucault's work could be under threat from the same problem we considered earlier in Habermas and Honneth's critique of Adorno's position: how is it possible, given such entwinement, to ground a (rational) critical position able to provide an account of the (rational) possibility of emancipation?⁴⁰ Honneth also accuses both Adorno and Foucault of relying on a systemic conception of societal organisation and neglecting to consider the role of social groups and the cultural or normative orientations of socialised subjects in late-capitalist societies (Honneth, 1991, p. 199)⁴¹. As we have seen, there are a number of similarities between the work of Foucault and that of the Frankfurt School

³⁹ Habermas (1992, pp. 126-130, 279, 282-286) and Honneth (1991, pp. 61-63, 198-202)

⁴⁰ However, an alternative response to this criticism (and that of cryptonormativism) levelled at Adorno and Foucault by Habermas and Honneth is to suggest that both Adorno and Foucault are primarily concerned with the damage done to particularity (and the particularity of suffering bodies) by universal (subsumptive) rationality. An interesting defence of this position (from an Adornian standpoint) can be seen in Bernstein (1995, pp. 161-7) who argues that: 'Foucault's work is not cryptonormative, but just normative otherwise, 'internally' normative perhaps. The charge of cryptonormativism presupposes that normativity is the deriving of judgements from universal premises or procedures, and hence that the force of normative judgements is derived from the general (the Categorical Imperative, or the Utilitarian Calculus, or the Ideal Speech Situation); but of course it is this subsumption model of the force of norms that Foucault's 'aesthetic' discourse is challenging' (p. 166). Bernstein emphasises the aesthetic critique of modernity in both Adorno and Foucault (e.g. he suggests that Foucault's books 'are meant to be *judged* as one would judge a work of art rather than raising a validity claim which could be vindicated by the force of better argument and outside the context of its inscription' (p. 166)). I will make some parallel arguments below and in the next chapter.

⁴¹ For Honneth, this is only true of Foucault's genealogical work once he moves from an earlier, more promising, position whereby power is seen in terms of 'the strategic intersubjectivity of struggle', towards what Honneth sees as Foucault's later problematic 'systems-theoretical' historical investigations. For Honneth, the earlier genealogical model, which concentrates on strategic action between subjects, benefits from a notion of struggle which undermines systems-theoretic accounts of all-encompassing institutional power – a problem to which the later, historical genealogical work succumbs. The latter 'uses the idea of power-wielding institutions without having to refer to the process of their social establishment' (Honneth, 1991, p. 173). The problems with the earlier model however are the inability to account for the stabilisation of power and the lack of a notion of 'normatively motivated consent' (ibid, pp. 160-161). Missing from both genealogical models for Honneth is a conception of 'the stabilisation of practically secured positions of power in the form of their social institutionalisation' (ibid, p. 173).

concerning the nature of reason, the rational subject, the human sciences, and critique. Both radicalize Kantian critique by emphasizing the way in which reason is tied up with social, historical and cultural factors. They consider the way in which 'reason' varies historically in form and content, and the way it is intimately tied to practical interests and power. They also both seek to undermine the centrality of the autonomous, rational subject in its representative and dominating relationship to the material world of objects; they argue that this subject should be seen in its socio-historical context and therefore as influenced in its actions by *particular* interests, rather than being seen as the 'disinterested' guarantor of truth. Both see a dominant subject being reflected in a historically-formed egocentrism which is complicit in acts of exclusion and domination. In relation to the human sciences, they are both critical of the dominance of positivism and the implicit instrumentalism that has played a key role in the administration and domination of our social and natural worlds. Also, regarding their respective positions on critique, arguably they both emphasise the importance of a 'critical distance' from current social practices and the way this distance potentially feeds into practical social change (see McCarthy in Kelly, ed., 1994, pp. 243-247).⁴²

However, there are also key differences between Foucault and the early Frankfurt School on each of these dimensions. Whereas Critical Theory follows Hegel and Marx in utilizing determinate negation as a form of critique, one that aims for a 'better' form of reason, Foucault rejects rationalism at its very heart as inevitably connected to power. The mutual concern with the subject-centredness of reason also leads them in different directions - Foucault into an anti-humanist conception of the 'end of man', and (early) critical theory into exploring the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and ('objective') social determination. In relation to the disciplinary elements of the human sciences, Foucault

⁴² For Foucault's own brief reflections on the Frankfurt School, and his relationship to it, see Foucault (in Kritzman, ed., 1990, pp. 25-27, 33-35, 59, 95, and 104).

denounces them as disciplinary at their core whereas critical theory, to varying degrees, attacks only certain (instrumental) forms of social research. Finally, critical theory ultimately sees itself as working in the name of reason and justice, however vague and rarefied this might be, whereas Foucault suggests that social life is inevitably constituted by power which leads him towards a form of 'critique' dismissive of claims to truth and freedom (see McCarthy in Kelly, ed., 1994, pp. 248-249).

Their alternative responses to the subject-centredness of reason give us a certain amount of clarity in terms of the above differences. Whereas Adorno and Horkheimer put forward a *historical* thesis concerning the 'end of the individual', a thesis connected to their concerns with instrumental reason and the administered society, Foucault's work – albeit not directly – questions the humanist presuppositions in their argument and instead advances a theory of the modern subject as an illusory unity originating in rules of discourse and strategies of domination. The end of the individual is not to be seen as the (historical) 'fate' of the modern subject but as an inevitable consequence of its (discursive or power-determined) origin.⁴³ Foucault argues that what we need to do is bracket out the validity claims of subjects, and the notion of the subject as the origin of meaning, and understand how they are *produced* by (historically contingent) discursive or strategic means. Any (humanist) appeals to subjective autonomy, however implicit, should be understood as themselves part of wider discursive and disciplinary regimes. Whereas Adorno and Horkheimer consider the dialectic of the 'transcendental-empirical doublet' - where man is both an empirical object in the world *and*

⁴³ See Honneth (1991, p. 200) for a similar outline of these differences. As we saw in the earlier chapter on Honneth, Foucault is accused of moving in his genealogical period from a conception of the social in terms of struggle to one in terms of disciplinary institutions. Honneth argues that 'it is no longer a question of the complementary process of a gradual human self-alienation as found in Adorno's philosophy of history', but rather Foucault's theory of power represents a 'systems-theoretic solution to the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*' (ibid, p. 201).

the being that constitutes the empirical world of objects - as in many ways an inevitable component of modern reason, Foucault claims to abandon it and to produce histories that do not rely on the dual conception of man, or rather histories that concern themselves with the consequences of our taking ourselves as the objects (and subjects) of knowledge.

Foucault would therefore understand the problems encountered by Adorno (in Habermas and Honneth's reading of Adorno at least) as being due to the (futile) attachment to the possibility of a more adequate reason, and the persistence of a humanist concern with the relationship between the subject and object of knowledge. From this perspective, Adorno and Horkheimer are caught within the 'transcendental-empirical doublet' and thereby seek the possible reconciliation of man and nature (and inner nature); he would see their account of instrumental reason and the 'end of the individual' as being due to their humanist hopes of a better world being compromised by historical circumstances. Foucault, on the other hand, refuses to concede any ground to humanist conceptions of man and pursues an alternative, post-humanist critique of subjectivity itself. What is required is therefore a more radical critique of 'reason' and an anti-humanist form of knowledge that allows us to transcend the humanist division between subject and object of knowledge, and related divisions between transcendental and empirical (i.e. between man as empirical object in the world *and* as the being that constitutes the empirical world of objects), cogito and unthought (i.e. between our acknowledgment that we are both governed by unknown forces while *also* being aware of this, therefore seeking to free ourselves by bringing such forces under our control and comprehension), and also between creative origin and alienated from origin (i.e. between man as creative origin and as alienated from that origin). These all see us as both the productive

authors of history *and* the products of a history over which we do not have control (see Foucault, 1971).

There are certain points of agreement between Foucault and Habermas on these issues as both are highly critical of subject-centred reason, be it in the form of humanism for Foucault or the philosophy of consciousness for Habermas. However, Habermas suggests that Foucault fails to find a way out of the problems of subject-centred reason because his concept of power:

‘has been taken from the repertoire of the philosophy of the subject itself. According to this philosophy, the subject can take up basically two and only two relationships toward the world of imaginable and manipulable objects: cognitive relationships regulated by the *truth* of judgements; and practical relationships regulated by the *success* of actions’ (Habermas, 1992, p. 274).

Despite his attempts to transcend the aporias of the human(ist) sciences, Habermas argues that Foucault’s theory of power is merely an inversion of humanism and suffers a similar fate; as we have seen, it ‘gets caught all the more hopelessly in the trap of a presentist historiography, which sees itself compelled to a relativist self-denial and can give no account of the normative foundations of its own rhetoric’ (Habermas, 1992, p. 294). Whereas Foucault removes the subject in all its forms from the centre of western philosophy and explores its constitution through epistemic rules of discourse or power relations, Habermas and Honneth retain a notion of subjectivity but one thoroughly mediated by intersubjective relations.⁴⁴ For them, Foucault’s rejection of subjectivity also results in his rejection of intersubjectivity by association, and this leaves him with no autonomous (or relatively autonomous) sphere of action free from determination by relations of power. They argue that he ends up with a

⁴⁴ As Honneth (1991, p. 120) argues: ‘instead of questioning the singularity of the historical subject, to which the constitutive achievements are assigned, and substituting the more convincing model of a plurality of historical actors, Foucault adopts the opposing approach of an elimination of the concept of the subject in general. He does not question the monological character of the philosophy of reflection, but rather rejects its underlying model of thought generally’.

functionalist account of the augmentation of social domination which removes the possibility of autonomy and resistance.⁴⁵ Habermas and Honneth are keen to emphasise the way in which the reduction of all social action to the subject/object relation – and therefore the logic of reification - neglects the importance of ‘communicative’ action. Indeed, their emphasis on communicative action allows them to see many parallel mistakes in the work of Foucault and Adorno - particularly the problem of how to elaborate a ‘critical’ position once the entwinement of reason and domination is considered total, and how such a critical position should itself be grounded in concrete social experience or practical activity.

Despite these criticisms, we are also now in a position to acknowledge the merits of Foucault’s genealogy and suggest that, even though it does give rise to certain aporias, it does succeed in posing important problems for Habermas’s and Honneth’s versions of normative universalism. Arguably, Foucault’s work is more sensitive to the paradoxes of modernity and its darker underbelly: what we might see as the historical formation of its key (humanist) concepts – of morality, autonomy, recognition, subjective freedom etc - in the context of exclusionary power relations and domination. He is more mindful not only of the complicity of reason - including ‘critical’ reason itself (along with its emancipatory promises) - in the normalising projects of the human sciences, but also of the processes by which (institutionalised) forms of recognition often ‘re-cognise’ (and constitute) identities in

⁴⁵ As we have seen, Honneth argues that Foucault’s historical work in *Discipline and Punish* culminates in a systems-theoretic vision of society in terms of ‘a universal transformation of techniques of social power’ whereby ‘during the course of the eighteenth century the disciplinary institutions that had existed alongside one another in society in an unconnected manner grew together into a kind of self-regulating system’ (Honneth, 1991, p. 191). For Honneth, Foucault explains this process without recourse to ‘social groups through whose practical initiatives the initially isolated disciplinary centers were institutionally linked’ or ‘the societal institution generally responsible for bringing about such an intermeshing of systems of action’ (p. 192). Rather the institutional coordination, and augmentation of social power, occurs as a functional response (or ‘systemic adaptation’) to the potential conflict produced by an increase in population and economic growth and therefore the need for effective social control (and individual productivity). In this view, the importance of social struggle is reduced and individuals (and classes) become ‘mere bearers of systemic processes’ (p. 195).

restrictive ways.⁴⁶ Foucault emphasises the ways in which subjects are often formed through subjection to power relations, and therefore the ways in which ‘recognition’ of one’s identity often serves to affirm certain (socio-economic) power relations, which is arguably neglected in Habermas and Honneth’s work. Rather than see social institutions as ‘expressions’ of underlying recognition relations as Honneth (and arguably Habermas) does, Foucault considers what we might call the ‘injuries of recognition’ and explores the ways in which social institutions both form and restrict subjects; for example, he considers the importance of ‘subjectivisation’ in the sense of becoming ‘subject’ to particular institutional discourses, and also the ways in which new (resistant) transformative identities are formed. Foucault’s work keeps us conscious of the ways in which normative universalism – be it in the form of communicative or recognitive rationality – might exclude the possibility of fuller forms of recognition, satisfaction and solidarity by measuring forms of social action according to certain (limited) rational standards. As with other critics of Habermas and Honneth, discussed in earlier chapters, Foucault would also take issue with their tendency to idealise linguistic communication, recognition, the public sphere and the lifeworld, and to separate out strategic action from the context of shared norms and meanings.⁴⁷ In relation to Habermas, he argues:

‘The thought that there could be a state of communication which would be such that the games of truth could circulate freely, without obstacles, without constraint and without coercive effects, seems to me to be Utopia. It is being blind to the fact that relations of power are not something bad in themselves, from which one must free one’s self. I don’t believe there can be a society without relations of power, if

⁴⁶ Fraser (in Kelly, ed., 1994, pp. 202-3), who is broadly sympathetic to Habermas’s position, makes the point that it is conceivable that ‘members of the fully panopticed society are in an ideal speech situation, so that notion will have no critical force here’. The internalisation and subjectification of normalising power and disciplinary norms could erode the distinction between external control and internal freedom. If the ‘humanist ideals of autonomy and reciprocity’, which are also important for Habermas’s critical project, are themselves ‘internal to the disciplinary regime’ as disciplinary norms, then those projects that rely on such ideals become ‘devoid of critical, emancipatory force’.

⁴⁷ Although this is a criticism Honneth makes of Habermas, we saw in the last chapter how this criticism also applies to Honneth’s work as he too tends to neatly separate out the instrumental from the intersubjective thereby neglecting the important ways in which instrumental attitudes persist within our everyday intersubjective relations.

you understand them as means by which individuals try to conduct, to determine the behaviour of others. The problem is not of trying to dissolve them in the utopia of a perfectly transparent communication, but to give one's self the rules of law, the techniques of management, and also the ethics, the *ethos*, the practice of self, which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination' (Foucault in Fornet-Betancourt et al, 1987, p. 129)

Alongside this, Foucault would also criticise Habermas and Honneth's purification of the ideals of communicative reason as they seek to distinguish between progressive and regressive social developments and attempt to establish universal and formal standards and procedures for socio-political emancipation.⁴⁸ His work displays a greater sensitivity to the ways in which the abstraction of what is 'rational' from the complexity of a 'far from rational' social world all too often ends up complicit with partial interests and specific institutional contexts which silence the speech of certain excluded groups. He would also be critical of the ways in which such 'universal' reason excludes the claims that might be made by desire, the body, and particularity etc.⁴⁹

Having explored a number of criticisms of Foucault's work, and the points of similarity and difference between his work and the Frankfurt school, I will now briefly examine the later developments in his writings. These later works on ethics and aesthetics have received very little attention from Habermas and Honneth although they do open up new and promising avenues in Foucault's work; they also point towards further parallels between the ideas of

⁴⁸ For example, in relation to Habermas, Foucault questions the idea that consensual politics as either a regulatory or critical principle 'liquidates the problem of the power relation' (in Rabinow, ed., 1991, pp. 378-9). See also Foucault's 'Subject and Power' essay (in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 218).

⁴⁹ Despite a number of differences, some of which have been outlined above, I believe Foucault and Adorno would be in agreement as to these shortcomings of the communicative project in both its Habermasian and Honnethian varieties. For a defence of Foucault against Habermas in these terms see Bernstein (1995, p. 165), who argues that for Foucault, 'the body signifies, as writing does in Derrida, the suppressed other of reason, language, logos, universality. As such, it further signifies the claim of particularity against universality; a particularity that would hence be further violated if its history and suffering were inscribed in a history generated in the very terms responsible for its suppression. The body can be given voice, its suffering made visible, only if its articulated particularity and integrity are, in some sense, respected'.

Foucault and Adorno inasmuch as both focus on the exclusion, and promise, of aesthetic experience in modernity.

Towards an Ethics and Aesthetics of Existence

Foucault attempts to resolve some of the problems and aporia in his genealogical work by clarifying his notion of power and further exploring the possible forms of resistance. His work on 'governmentality' and the 'ethics of the self' seeks to separate out violence and domination from other forms of power and aims to clarify the nature of autonomy and freedom. He seeks to counteract the claim that his genealogical work tended to concentrate on the effects of power emanating from above, despite his attempt to outline its micro-level operations, by emphasizing the way power flows between individuals (i.e. as 'an endless play of dominations'). He suggests here that we should understand relations of power between subjects as only being possible on the basis of their capacity to act – i.e. 'free' individuals seek to govern others by directing their actions. The freedom to resist or to act differently now becomes a presupposition of power relations for Foucault, and he argues that without such freedom there is only domination or violence (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982, p. 221). However, Foucault is careful not to suggest any kind of 'essential' freedom – he maintains that power is the 'condition of possibility' of freedom and that the individual is to be seen as an *effect* of power relations, i.e. the outcome of strategies of normalization. Also, and related to this point, Foucault argues that the incompleteness and instability of power is matched by the instability of freedom. He sees freedom as a *practice* that cannot rely on any certain state of emancipation and has to be constantly renewed; new forms of emancipation open up new relations of power which have to be curbed by new practices of liberty etc.

The shift of emphasis in his work, to freedom being a *presupposition* of power, is also marked by Foucault's concern with the process of 'subjectivisation'. He acknowledged that his earlier work on the effects of power on the body (as 'docile bodies') tended to over-emphasise an all-encompassing view of power, and now believed that the emphasis on techniques of domination needed to be complemented with an account of the 'techniques of the self'. His later work therefore marks a shift away from the centrality of biopower, with its emphasis on objectivisation (i.e. the turning of individuals into docile bodies or objects), to an emphasis on subjectivisation (i.e. the way a human being turns itself into a subject). The earlier notion of power had tended to deem it unnecessary to consider the mediation of power through subjective consciousness, due to the direct action of power on the subject's body; however, as we have seen, this led to a weak conception of subjectivity and resistance. The notion of power in his work on governmentality however not only sees the process of subjectivisation as a process of the manipulation of consciousness, in other words that the formation of subjectivity arises out of *subjection* to others or to internalized social norms, *but also* as providing the possibility of resistance through rational and purposive action by subjects. By concentrating on the way human beings turn themselves into subjects however, Foucault is not looking to any notion of the inner self as inherently resistant; in fact he is continuing the anti-essentialist thrust of his work and wants to criticize any notion of the self complicit with a 'cult of the self'. Rather, he is interested in the self-creation of identity in everyday life as a 'work of art' (Foucault in Rabinow, 1984, p. 350) - the way we are able to explore a multitude of possible identities and ways of being in the world, and therefore question the idea of inevitable or 'natural' identities. It is here that Foucault emphasizes the freedom of subjects to explore the limits of identity and resist the disciplinary process of normalization. His

conception of the Other, or potential ‘resistance’ to the dominant order, now resides in the everyday practices-of-the-self carried out by individuals.

It is in the final two volumes of his *History of Sexuality* that Foucault seeks to counterbalance his previous emphasis on techniques of domination and objectivisation with an exploration of ‘techniques of the self’ and subjectivisation – or how individuals understand themselves and turn themselves into subjects.⁵⁰ He calls this a ‘genealogy of desire as an ethical problem’ (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 356). His outline of Ancient Greek, Roman and Christian moral practices points towards a distinction between ‘morality’ (or ‘moral code’), involving strict rules and laws, and ‘ethics’ (or ‘morality of behaviours’), concerned with the ways in which individuals relate to the rules that have been passed down to them. In his *The Use of Pleasure* (1992), Foucault wants to highlight the way in which the prohibitive codes of Ancient Greece and those of the early Empire weren’t significantly different but that the ethical responses to such codes were. Despite the similarities between classical, Roman and Christian forms of morality in relation to specific rules and prohibitions around sexuality, marriage and self-control, Foucault argues that classical thought allowed for a greater degree of freedom and interpretation than Christian morality at an everyday, practical level. Whereas the Christian system was more unified and imposed a stricter universal moral code, the classical system emphasised the individual practice of liberty in relation to laws and common rules of conduct. The key distinction being that Ancient Greek ethics were predominantly *aesthetic* whereas those of the Empire and Christianity were predominantly *normalising*. He makes the point that Greek ethics tended to focus on the personal choice of a small elite, rather than being a standard of behaviour for all, and he suggests that ‘the reason for making

⁵⁰ For an account that sees the later Foucault as a ‘return to the subject’ see Dews (1989). For alternative accounts, which argue against any ‘death of the subject’ in Foucault’s work in the first place, see Bernstein (1992) and Allen (2000).

this choice was the will to live a beautiful life, and to leave others memories of a beautiful existence' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 341).

What interests Foucault is 'the idea of the *bios* as a material for an aesthetic piece of art' and also 'that ethics can be a very strong structure of existence, without any relation with the juridical per se, with an authoritarian system, with a disciplinary structure' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 348). It is this 'ethical' practice that Foucault talks about when discussing the 'techniques of the self' or the 'aesthetics of existence'. He describes this as:

'... those intentional and voluntary actions by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria' (1992, p. 10-11).

Foucault's characterisation of the Ancient Greeks, in relation to these techniques of the self, emphasises the role of self-mastery in sexual conduct and the importance of 'intensity of practice' and 'activity/passivity'. He suggests that 'the ethical question that was raised was not: which desires? which acts? which pleasures? but rather: with what force is one transported "by the pleasures and desires"?' (1992, p. 43). Moderation or excess, or the intensity of practice, was the central concern rather than the object of desire as such. In addition to this, it mattered who the 'active actors' were and who the 'passive actors' were, with adult free men in the former category and 'women, boys, slaves' in the latter. In sum, he suggests that 'for a man, excess and passivity were the two main forms of immorality in the practice of the *aphrodisia*' (ibid, p. 47).

Foucault explores these twin variables in relation to 'the existing and recognised practices by which men sought to shape their conduct: their dietary practice, their practice of domestic

government, their courtship practice as expressed in amorous behaviour' (ibid, p. 93). In brief, the first practice of dietetics, when considered in relation to sexual conduct, warned both of excess and ascetic restraint and the potential harmful effects they could have on the body. The second practice of economics, or man's role as the head of the family, recommended fidelity; however, importantly, this was not recommended as a general principle but rather as a sign of *self-mastery* for men. Foucault also outlines the way in which such sexual self-mastery was connected to a broader ethical and political commitment to limit oneself when exercising power in the realm of the state. The key point here is again the exercise of *self-limitation* as opposed to what Foucault sees as the more universal and duty-bound forms of Christian morality. The third practice of erotics, predominantly concerned with the relation between men and boys, is deemed rather problematic due to the precarious status of the boy (as future free-man). As the object, the boy was expected to be passive, but as an adult male the boy is to become active and self-limiting.

'The problem was that they couldn't accept that a young boy who was supposed to become a free citizen could be dominated and used as an object for someone's pleasure. A woman, a slave, could be passive: such was their nature, their status. All this reflection, philosophizing about the love of boys – with always the same conclusion: please, don't treat a boy as a woman – is proof that they could not integrate this real practice in the framework of their social selves' (Foucault, in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, pp. 344-5).

This antinomy, as Foucault characterises it, persists until the dilemma is resolved, or rather diverted, by the Platonic concern with the origin and true nature of love in its relationship to truth. It is in Platonic erotics, for Foucault, that self-formation becomes attached to knowledge (of desiring man) rather than art (see Foucault, 1992, p. 243).

What is important in this brief overview of Foucault's description of Greek moral reflection on sexual conduct is his suggestion that the medical and philosophical recommendations emerging from such reflections were:

‘not for codifying sexual conduct in a precise way, but for “stylizing” it: stylizations within dietetics, understood as an art of the everyday relationship of the individual with his body; in economics as an art of a man's behaviour as head of a family; and in erotics as an art of the reciprocal conduct of a man and a boy in a love relationship’ (Foucault, 1992, p. 93).

However, this concern with pleasure and the aesthetics of practice declines in Hellenistic Rome and the emphasis is increasingly on the nature of the desiring subject. This shift of focus had a clear impact on the everyday practices of dietetics, economics and erotics. In dietetics, a stronger link was made between medical knowledge and care of the self, and sexual restraint was now seen as desirable due to the fear that sexual activity could damage the body; emphasis also shifted towards sex within marriage (see part four, ‘the body’, in Foucault, 1988). In economics, although sex was increasingly limited to marital relations, it was also limited within these relations to procreation. The link between private and public morality was also reduced, and the emphasis on self-mastery was replaced with a notion of reciprocal concern and love (see part five, ‘the wife’, in Foucault, 1988). Finally, in erotics, abstention from love between men and boys became increasingly important in light of the emphasis on sex within marriage, and also virginity was valued in light of the anxiety around sexual activity being destructive of body and soul (see part six, ‘boys’, in Foucault, 1988).

Foucault further conceptualises the shifts described above with a wider historical focus and through what he sees as the four major elements in one's relationship to oneself (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, pp. 352-5). The first element relates to the aspect of ourselves most

relevant to morality (e.g. desire in Christianity, intention in Kant, and feelings in contemporary society), and this relates to ethical substance (*substance éthique*), or the ethical area of concern (e.g. flesh for Christians but unified acts of desire and pleasure for the Greeks). The second element is what Foucault calls the ‘mode of subjection’ (*mode d’assujettissement*) and this concerns the way in which people come to understand what their moral obligations are (e.g. through religious decree, through rational-universal law, or the one Foucault favours – ‘the attempt to give your existence the most beautiful form possible’). The third element is ‘asceticism’ or the ‘self-forming activity’ (*techne*) and involves the acts we need to carry out on ourselves to meet our ethical vision. The final element is the ‘telos’ (*téléologie*) and involves the question: ‘which is the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way? For instance, shall we become pure, or immortal, or free, or masters of ourselves and so on?’ (ibid, p. 355).

A key point here is that it is these relations to oneself which Foucault sees as changing most significantly between Greek and Christian ethics rather than the actual prohibitive codes themselves, give or take some changes in rigour and strictness (see Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, pp. 356-9). In Classical Greece, the *substance éthique* is *aphrodisia* and involves a mixture of pleasure, desire and acts. The *mode d’assujettissement* is aesthetic (and political) and emphasises the attainment of a beautiful life; it is not an obligation as such to be honest and true to wives and to avoid physical relations with boys, but if one wants to live a beautiful life and rule over others then this is what you will do. Here, as suggested above, there is a link between mastery over oneself and the (unequal) ability to rule over others. The important point though is that whether or not you followed these obligations and lived a beautiful existence was a matter of personal choice. The *techne* in Classical Greece was ascetic in form,

and the *téléologie* was mastery over oneself. In terms of sexual behaviour, Foucault suggests that ‘acts’ were more important than either pleasure or desire. This begins to change in late Stoicism once the formation of the self becomes increasingly attached to ‘knowledge’ and universal rational codes (p. 356). The *substance éthique* is still *aphrodisia*, but the *mode d’assujettissement* changes once obligations are no longer an aesthetic and personal choice but a requirement of a universal, rational being. No longer is mastery over yourself simply related to the ability to rule over others but rather you are a master of yourself due to being a *rational* being. Unlike the explicit (unequal) power relations in the Ancient Greek practice of self-mastery, here everyone is related reciprocally through the mastery of themselves. In terms of sexual behaviour, ‘acts’ were still considered more important than either pleasure or desire, although there are early signs that desire, and its condemnation, are increasingly prominent.

In Christianity, Foucault suggests that ‘desire’ becomes more important than either pleasure or acts. Desire, or more specifically the eradication of desire, was the central focus; pleasure was excluded, and acts were mostly deemed neutral (e.g. to procreate, fulfil marital obligations etc). Sexual codes had developed a religious justification, and were backed by religious institutions, but the obligation to follow these codes now assumed a legal form. By this point the nature of ethics had changed substantially. The *substance éthique* was no longer *aphrodisia* but desire and flesh. The *mode d’assujettissement* was divine law. The *techné* involved self-decipherment rather than a self-examining form of asceticism – i.e. the Christian self had to be vigilant when exploring the self, as that self was now seen as containing both overt and hidden desires of the flesh. The *téléologie* was immortality and purity, and self-control served the purpose of keeping yourself pure. This also had a clear gender dimension in

Christianity as sexual self-restraint became linked to virginity and female physical integrity. Foucault suggests that virginity was barely an issue in Greco-Roman asceticism but by the Christian period 'the problem of ethics as an aesthetics of existence is covered over by the problem of purification' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 366). Since the 18th Century, he suggests that the religious framework declines and is replaced by a mixture of scientific, medical and legal justification. In terms of sexual behaviour, Foucault hints that desire is still central but increasingly in terms of the *liberation* of desire, whilst 'acts' are particularly important, 'and pleasure – nobody knows what it is!' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 359).

Although Foucault's account here is in no way simplistically linear, the heart of his argument is that a universal notion of the desiring subject emerges during the Roman Empire, is consolidated in Christianity, and assumes a pernicious form in the scientific explorations of the self since the 18th century. The individual's care of the self is increasingly dominated by 'universal principles of nature or reason' (Foucault, 1988, pp. 67-68), and the individual autonomy of ethical conduct, apparent in Greek morality, gradually gives way to more absolute forms of (disciplinary) moral rules and codes. Hellenic Rome had emphasised the individual's conformity to such codes, in a way that pointed forward to Christian morality, and it is the subsequent sacrifice of autonomous individual conduct in the name of the universal moral principles of Christianity that Foucault particularly mourns. There are clear links here to the earlier genealogical period of Foucault's work, which focused on the ways in which social norms and moral codes are grounded in scientific, rational and legal 'regimes of truth' which served to normalise the individual; the 'true', ontological nature of the individual is determined by disciplinary scientific practices which then feed into forms of knowledge

which ultimately erase autonomy. It is in response to these forms of modern power that Foucault counterposes the (autonomous) ethics of the self, or aesthetics of existence, apparent in Ancient Greek ethics.

Foucault develops this idea further in his *The Care of the Self* (1988) with the notion of *epimeleia heautou*. This refers to taking care of oneself but also has the implication of being concerned with and working on oneself. Again the distinction is not between a permissive Greco-Roman world and an austere Christian world as such, but rather between an individual choosing to care for themselves and an individual experiencing the imposition of religious obligation or civil law – ‘between a form of austerity which is linked to an aesthetics of existence and other forms of austerity which are linked to the necessity of renouncing the self and deciphering its truth’ (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 366). Besides brief ‘episodes’ in the Renaissance and in 19th century dandyism, Foucault suggests that what we glimpse in Ancient Greek culture is a unique attempt to apply aesthetic values to one’s life and oneself, to turn one’s life ‘into an object for a sort of knowledge, for a *techne* – for an art’ (ibid, p. 362). Foucault mourns the fact that contemporary society lacks the notion that ‘the principal work of art which one has to take care of, the main area to which one must apply aesthetic values, is oneself, one’s life, one’s existence’ (ibid). Although Ancient Greek ethics are not directly translatable into modern ethical practices, it is the autonomous spirit of such ethics that Foucault wishes to elucidate and apply under contemporary conditions. It is the aesthetic relation to the self, and the individual’s ability to stylize one’s existence, that Foucault wants to reinvent for (post-)modern times. This relation to the self promises to foster new forms of subjectivity against prescribed, regulated, and normalizing forms of identity and individuality (see Foucault in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982).

Foucault enlists Kant, and Baudelaire, here to articulate what form a (post)modern ethics of the self might take, and his starting point is Kant's 1784 essay 'Was ist Aufklärung?' He begins by outlining Kant's definition of modernity as an 'attitude' rather than a period of history:

'And by "attitude", I mean a mode of relating to contemporary reality; a voluntary choice made by certain people; in the end, a way of thinking and feeling; a way, too, of acting and behaving that at one and the same time marks a relation of belonging and presents itself as a task. A bit, no doubt, like what the Greeks called an *ethos*' (Foucault, in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 39)

Baudelaire exemplifies this critical attitude for Foucault, an attitude that doesn't merely accept the dizzying, ephemeral nature of modernity but one which 'consists in recapturing something eternal that is not beyond the present instant, nor behind it, but within it ... that makes it possible to grasp the "heroic" aspect of the present moment' (ibid, pp. 39-40).

Baudelaire seeks the beauty of the contemporary age rather than some pure or invariable beauty. For Baudelaire, and in turn Foucault, the critical attitude involves both a fierce attentiveness to reality and also a freedom that seeks to transgress and transfigure such reality. Of central importance here is Baudelaire's emphasis on one's relationship to oneself, particularly the mode of relationship at work in the 'asceticism of the dandy who makes of his body, his behaviour, his feelings and passions, his very existence, a work of art' (ibid, pp. 40-41). What appeals to Foucault here though, is that this conception of an aesthetics of the self places the emphasis on *self*-production and invention, in the face of subjection and limits, rather than the search for a hidden truth about the self. He attaches this enquiry, into what he calls the 'constitution of the self as an autonomous subject', back to a notion of the Enlightenment as a 'philosophical ethos that could be described as a permanent critique of our historical era' (ibid. p. 42). His surprising appeal to the Enlightenment is not an appeal to any

true, essential rational principles as such, but to an enquiry into the ‘contemporary limits of the necessary’ or what is ‘no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects’ (ibid, p. 43). This is the Enlightenment as historical self-consciousness operating with ‘the principle of a critique and a permanent creation of ourselves in our autonomy’ (ibid, p. 44).

Foucault sees this conception of the Enlightenment as helping to produce a ‘practical critique that takes the form of a possible transgression’ whereby,

‘criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value, but rather as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognise ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying. In that sense, this criticism is not transcendental, and its goal is not that of making a metaphysics possible: it is genealogical in its design and archaeological in its method’ (ibid, pp. 45-46).

This combination of archaeological and genealogical enquiry does not seek to identify universal forms of knowledge or action (what he refers to as an ‘analytics of truth’) but rather to both historicise our discourse and its contingencies, and to identify the cracks within such contingency that open up ‘the possibility of no longer being, doing, or thinking what we are, do, or think’ (ibid, p. 46). This he refers to as an ‘ontology of the present’. The key point here is that Foucault wants to distance himself from any Kantian appeal to a transcendental guarantee of freedom – an appeal grounded in *a priori* and universal forms of morality and reason (e.g. the categorical imperative). Like Adorno, contra Habermas and Honneth, Foucault is more sensitive to the ways in which such transcendental forms all too easily evolve into a normalising and oppressive procedural rationality. Freedom and autonomy are not to be protected by an appeal to universal rationality, instead we should be keen to sever

the link between morality and universal reason and to develop a more concrete, substantive, historical and practical ethics.

Also, rather than the Kantian concern with the limits of possible knowledge, and the Habermasian and Honnethian push towards universal processes in communicative developments, Foucault asks the question: ‘in what is given to us as universal, necessary, obligatory, what place is occupied by whatever is singular, contingent, and the product of arbitrary constraints?’ (ibid, p. 45). Eschewing what he calls ‘global or radical’ projects, and what he see as their dangerous consequences, his alternative is characterised as a ‘historico-practical test of the limits that we may go beyond, and thus as work carried out by ourselves upon ourselves as free beings’ (ibid, p. 47). In sum, Foucault suggests that:

‘The critical ontology of ourselves has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it has to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them.’ (ibid, p. 50).

At the heart of Foucault’s account then is the exploration of limits. Rather than submitting to external moral codes, he urges us to explore the limits of our identities and to uncover historical contingency and arbitrariness where we usually set out to find universality and naturalness. In other words, for Foucault, contra Kant, limits are not universal and necessary, but historical and contingent, and therefore subject to transformation. Also, autonomy is not to be found when we subject ourselves to a rationality free from heteronomous influences, as I have argued is the case with Habermas and Honneth, but when we seek to transgress the historical limits that have defined our identity thus far. By exploring what we are meant to be, our supposed limits, and the essence or truth of our identity, we can uncover other possible

subjective experiences for ourselves. This denaturalisation and exploration of limits also does not seek a final or definitive version of the self, and isn't a historical constant as such, but is rather a restless process of self-production and creation in the face of various limits and limitations.

As stated above, this emphasis on self-creation, and transgression, for Foucault is ultimately an aesthetic pursuit; in addition to his appeal to both Kant and Baudelaire in his Enlightenment essay, Foucault's aesthetic relation-to-self is also clearly influenced by Nietzsche's insistence that one should 'give style to one's character' (section 290 of Nietzsche's *The Gay Science*). One must treat oneself as the material for aesthetic creativity, and seek to make one's life beautiful; in treating oneself as a work of art we practice freedom outside the authority of 'true' (scientific and moral) versions of subjectivity. Both Nietzsche and Foucault subscribe to the idea that it is through art and creativity that we experience ourselves as autonomous and powerful beings, and in many ways they both believe that the stylisation of the self is necessary as a bulwark against forms of oppression and normalisation. In relation to contemporary ethics and an aesthetics of existence, Foucault says that we have to move away from the fact that:

'art has become something which is related only to objects and not to individuals, or to life. That art is something which is specialized or which is done by experts who are artists. But couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 350).⁵¹

Foucault distances this idea from a Sartrean existentialism, which he sees as intimately tied to a notion of 'authenticity' rather than creativity. On the contrary, he suggests that 'we should

⁵¹ As we will see in the next chapter, despite certain similarities, this position is markedly different to Adorno's aesthetic theory.

not have to refer the creative activity of somebody to the kind of relation he has to himself, but should relate the kind of relation one has to oneself to a creative activity' (ibid, p. 351). This is also very different from the 'Californian cult of the self' which seeks to separate out, using the techniques of psychology, a true self from an alienated self (ibid, p. 362). If the self is not a given, as Foucault suggests, then 'there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art' (ibid, p. 351).

An Idealised Aesthetics

However, a number of problems arise for Foucault's 'ethics of the self'. Despite him operating with more dialectical notions of both power and subjectivity in his later work on ethics, Foucault ends up idealising 'aesthetic' practice as an autonomous sphere and downplays its connection to wider socio-historical processes; there is also the tendency to repeat some of the problems associated with a philosophy of the subject; and finally he is unable to sufficiently account for the norms implicit in his critique. There is a certain irony that a body of work such as Foucault's, which sets out from a radical critique of the subject, ends up with an account of self-constitution, in the form of an 'ethics of the self', constructed through an 'autonomous' notion of aesthetics. Although Foucault is keen to conceive of an ethics of the self as a process of 'critical' (and reflexive) mediation, rather than simply in terms of either a direct reflection of wider cultural factors or a form of voluntarist self-constitution, he insufficiently outlines this process. His appeal to a (relatively unexamined) category of the aesthetic blocks the sort of genealogical examination needed to identify the power relations that provide the social context for aesthetic practice.

Foucault, despite his renown as the theorist of power/knowledge, ends up neglecting the relationship between power and aesthetics in his later work. As Simons argues, in his broadly sympathetic account, Foucault fails to analyse his attachment to aesthetics and his implicit claim that aesthetics ‘seems to have the capacity to detach ethics from power and truth’ (Simons, 1995, p. 79). To sufficiently tackle this issue Foucault would need to provide a clearer account of the role of art and aesthetics in our culture, and he would need to articulate the various constraints and limits placed on art by an array of contemporary socio-political processes. As Simons suggests ‘Foucault confuses the conceptual differentiation of aesthetic ethical self-formation from power, truth and morality, with an actual or practical detachment of the axes of his genealogies’ (ibid, p. 80). However, this is not to say that Foucault isn’t sensitive to the relationship between an aesthetics of existence and wider social and political concerns – for example, his discussion of the relationship between mastery of the self and political rule over others in Greek ethics – nor to the possibility of social and political community above and beyond that of rational and legal subjects - for example, in his concern with gay friendship and S/M subcultures. He is also mindful of the ways in which artistic self-creation necessarily draws its materials from the wider shared culture. Yet having said this, and despite his hints that changes in subjectivity necessitate changes in wider politics and government, the political aspects of his later work on ethics remain implicit, or denied, rather than fully articulated.

Although it is certainly not his intention, he fails to mediate between a position whereby cultural factors are simply reproduced in the individual, and a position where the individual freely self-creates, and this tends to result in a broadly voluntarist ethics. As Simons (1995, p. 70) suggests, Foucault ‘is tempted to leap into the abyss of unbearably light being as if

freedom were a safe place beyond all limits'. McNay also argues that Foucault fails 'to contextualise the notion of an aesthetics of existence with regard to the social relations in which it is embedded', and suggests that:

'in a society in which the behaviour of individuals is often governed by an incitement to consumption, it may be necessary to determine the point at which the construction of one's life as a work of art ceases to be an act of conspicuous consumption – or in Bourdieu's terms a sign of 'distinction' – and becomes a gesture of resistance' (McNay, 1994, p. 155).⁵²

For Foucault, on the other hand, the desire to understand the connection between an aesthetics of existence and its social context all too often leads to the 'idea of an analytical or necessary link between ethics and other social or economic or political structures' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.), 1991, p. 350), and this is something he feels we should rid ourselves of.

However, by reducing all analytical connections between social structures and personal ethics to 'regimes of truth', and thereby seeking to emphasise aesthetic ethical practices as local and contingent, Foucault effectively neutralizes the 'critical' potential of the notion of reflexivity that lies at the heart of his 'ethics of the self'. If reflexivity is the ethical moment that guarantees the individual's autonomy – i.e. if it is the critical questioning of the construction of oneself that attests to one's autonomy – then severing the analytical link between ethical practices of the self and wider social structures undermines the reflexive process which was meant to allow us to examine the mediation of such practices through social structures in the first place. Without recourse to an analytical link between practices of the self and wider social structures, or to knowledge of the normative effects of one's behaviour in relation to collective social forces, we are left with an unmediated link between aesthetic practice and

⁵² Again, this is an issue I will argue is more appropriately tackled by Adorno in the next chapter.

(critical) self-knowledge.⁵³ And without an analytical link between individual practices and the social context of their application, it is difficult for individuals to assess the meaning and social consequences of their attempts at aesthetic self-creation; instead we end up with an overly isolated and inward-looking account of subjectivity.

Foucault's aesthetic practices become overheated gestures of subjectivity, and fail to make links to something more substantive: there is very little in the way of links between his ethics of the self and any conception, and culture, of democracy or responsibility to others (e.g. the possibility of ethical satisfaction in the other, leading to a culture of recognition, democracy and autonomy). As Rose (1996, p. 7) suggests:

‘It is conceptually impossible to produce a taxonomy which would sequester concepts of justice and the good from concepts of ‘self-creation’, for the very formation of ‘selfhood’ takes place in interaction with the mingled ethical and epistemological positings of the other, the partner in the formation of our contingent and unstable identities’.⁵⁴

Foucault is quite rightly sensitive to the ways in which normative prescriptions can often become normalising; he is also right to see such prescriptiveness as often tied to universal notions of rationality and as foreclosing possible forms of resistance. However, he provides very little detail in terms of how his category of the aesthetic might function on an everyday practical level and also how we might distinguish between resistant and affirmative practices;

⁵³ In her criticisms of his later work, McNay refers to this as a ‘fetishized notion of individual practice’ (McNay, 1994, p. 160)

⁵⁴ Rose isn't referring to Foucault directly here, but her criticisms of ‘postmodernism’ – or what she preferred to call ‘despairing rationalism without reason’ (p. 7) – apply to his later work on ethics. Despite clear differences between the work of Rose and that of Habermas and Honneth, her reference to the importance of intersubjectivity here would clearly be echoed in their criticisms of Foucault's later work. Despite Foucault's concerted attempts to displace the philosophy of the subject, he ends up prioritizing the relation-to-self over and above intersubjective relations. An undialectical account of the relations between self and others develops along with an emphasis on self-mastery as the means for resistance and autonomy. Besides posing problems for Foucault's attempts to escape the philosophy of the subject, again this feature of his work also leaves him without an understanding of the importance of normative agreements, traditions and forms of solidarity (Honneth, 1991, p. 174).

instead he appears to merely assert, without qualification, the inherently critical nature of the aesthetic and an ethics of the self. To refuse to articulate any kind of distinction between progressive and regressive forms of social interaction, besides loosely defined notions of individual autonomy and agonistic relations, leaves us with an approach akin to political libertarianism.⁵⁵

Arguably, Foucault fails to distinguish between a normalising tendency fuelled by transcendental arguments, and a political judgement geared towards non-objectifying social relations. Foucault's insistence on the separation of metaphysics from ethics, and a notion of self-creation separate from theories of justice, ends up in danger of leaving unanalysed 'the preconditions and rampant consequences of power, domination and authority' (Rose, 1996, p. 7). Rather than having to choose between normalising forms of *a priori* argument and 'partial and local enquiry' (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.) 1991, p. 47), might it not be more productive to think in terms of 'the persistence of always fallible and contestable representation' (Rose, 1996, p. 41)? Of a more dialectical relation between social context and our representations of ourselves?

In sum, Foucault's work sensitises us to the paradoxes of modernity - or at least the dark underbelly of its idealised self-conception - in ways often missing from Habermas and Honneth's universalism and proceduralism, e.g. the ways in which (idealised) forms of normativity, morality, recognition, communication, truth etc, are often complicit in forms of

⁵⁵ Habermas's criticism of 'cryptonormativism' arises again in relation to Foucault's ethics of the self. Despite his reluctance to outline a positive form of critique in his genealogical work on power, he implicitly appealed to notions of autonomy and liberty in his confrontation of disciplinary power with 'the body and its pleasures'. Similarly here he emphasizes the need for a curtailment of domination in our 'games of power', a suggestion which implicitly appeals to notions of autonomy and liberty without sufficiently tackling the question of which individual (or collective) acts constitute progressive or regressive forces.

domination. His work helps us understand how forms of recognition are often embroiled in deeper, more diverse forms of *misrecognition*, and the ways in which the claims of universal reason often exclude particularity, desire, the body, and those voices unable to articulate themselves in the rhetoric required of political philosophy and philosophical justification. He also presents us with an aesthetic critique of modernity, and an account of critical reflexivity, which helps us to explore the transgression of limits and possible avenues for resistance. However, as we have seen, the different phases of his work – and the relationship between those phases – have not been without their problems and inconsistencies. His genealogical work tends towards an all encompassing, and undifferentiated, account of power which often reproduces traditional conceptions of domination without clear resources for resistance, and it also leaves us with a limited (and overly determined) conception of subjectivity. He neglects the paradoxes (and liberatory potential) of law, morality and individualisation, and is often unable to satisfactorily articulate the (arguably implicit) critical and normative position that his genealogical work assumes. His later work on the ethics of the self and aesthetics of existence, for all its merits, ends up positing an autonomous notion of aesthetics overly separated from a broader socio-political context alongside a notion of subjectivity disconnected from wider relations of recognition and inter-subjectivity. This culminates in his failure to present us with a convincing, and sufficiently substantive, conception of culture, democracy, recognition, and ethical responsibility.

These limitations set us the challenge of outlining a position which is not only able to provide a more substantive conception of culture, democracy, recognition, and ethical responsibility than we see in Foucault's later work, whilst remaining sensitive to the paradoxes of recognition and modernity, but also one which avoids the temptations of idealisation,

normative universalism and procedural accounts of freedom which we discovered in the work of Habermas and Honneth. In the next chapter, I will argue that the problems we have encountered in the critical theories of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault return us to the political aesthetics of Adorno, particularly his work on an ethics of non-identity. To make this case requires not only demonstrating that Adorno can help us overcome the aporias of their work, and thereby produce a more promising account of critical theory, but also that his work can adequately respond to the criticisms it has faced both explicitly in the work of Habermas and Honneth, and implicitly in the work of Foucault. I seek to make this case and tackle these related issues in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 4: THEODOR ADORNO – RECOGNITION, REPRESENTATION, AND AESTHETICS

What I seek to demonstrate in this chapter is that the problems we have encountered in the work of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault necessitate a return to the work of Adorno.¹ I argue that Adorno, in many ways, represents a development beyond these later social theorists, and that there are resources in his thought that enable us to avoid the pitfalls he is accused of by Habermas and Honneth. If what I've argued so far is correct, then an Adornian critique of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault requires an account that avoids the idealisation and proceduralism I've argued is at work in both Habermas's and Honneth's versions of communicative democracy, whilst also presenting a (predominantly aesthetic) critique of modernity that avoids the overheated gestures of subjectivity we discovered in the late ethics of Foucault. I want to suggest that this is what Adorno's account of a non-reified culture provides us with, however difficult it is to pin down and despite disagreements within the secondary literature. I will argue that Adorno's account shares with Foucault a concern for the rationalising aspects of transcendental, *a priori*, scientific and moral accounts of human experience – aspects of which are at work in both Habermas's '*universal or transcendental pragmatics*' and Honneth's '*moral grammar of social conflict*'; however, Adorno does not respond to this overly rationalised position by appealing, as Foucault in his later work ultimately appears to, to an aesthetic realm that is inherently free and transgressive seemingly without limits. Rather Adorno shares with Habermas and Honneth a substantive concern with a conception and culture of democracy, albeit a more fragile version, and also goes further in

¹ Here I am in agreement with an increasing number of contemporary critics; e.g. see Bernstein (2001), Cook (2004), the essays in Huhn (ed.) (2004), Hammer (2005), and Foster (2008), to name a few.

emphasising the damage to, along with the responsibility for and ethical satisfaction in, the other.

To make these points, I will firstly outline the importance of a notion of ‘dialectical experience’ in Adorno’s philosophy - alongside similar notions in Hegel and in the work of Gillian Rose - and briefly explore how this position is markedly different to, and absent from, those covered so far. I will argue that the conception of education and (mis)recognition it contains, along with an emphasis on non-identity and particularity, takes us beyond the idealised and procedural (and quasi-transcendental) accounts of communication and recognition provided by Habermas and Honneth. It also more accurately grasps the (educational) development of self-other relations - with their entanglement of communication and domination, instrumentality and intersubjectivity, morality and ethics, and truth and power – whilst maintaining a (dialectical) commitment to the notions of subject-object (mis)representation and truth predominantly abandoned by Habermas, Honneth and Foucault. The section on the culture industry, although in many ways well-trodden ground, seeks to challenge Habermas’s and Honneth’s idealisation of the public sphere and the democratic process whilst further highlighting a number of challenges to the educational process of dialectical experience and reflection. The presuppositions of liberal (and communicative/recognitive) accounts of democracy – e.g. autonomous political judgement, reflexivity, individuality, education etc – I will argue are threatened by the closed world of the culture industry and its claims to ethical totality, along with its sacrifice of particularity and heterogeneity. Adorno’s work in this area also helps us to identify a number of the ways in which we are often structurally encouraged to objectify, and *mis*recognise, others whilst disavowing our own need for recognition.

This theme is continued, with the help of the work of Gillian Rose and Nigel Tubbs, in the brief section on the politics of representation which not only extends Adorno's concerns over the culture industry - particularly with regards to the fate of experience, universality, particularity and mutual recognition - but also defends the importance of re-presentation/misrepresentation and re-cognition/(mis)recognition. This section highlights the centrality of complicity, self-divestiture and re-configured identity in opposition to an atomistic and acquisitive culture characterised by instrumentality and freedom-from-otherness, implication and dependence. In the final section, and following on from this, I outline the ways in which Adorno's work points towards a notion of 'non-reified culture'. Not only do I try and draw out the key conclusions of his politics of representation here, but I also seek to demonstrate that his work in this area provides us with a more convincing account of substantive, historical and practical ethics than those put forward by Habermas and Honneth (and to a certain extent Foucault). Adorno's (political) aesthetics emphasises the ethical and aesthetic dimensions of human experience in an attempt to avoid the abstract separation of formal (universal) morality from ethical values and particularity, and also thereby avoid the nihilistic consequences of a formalisation that both assumes the liberal separation of individuals and produces formal criteria which has little purchase on everyday experiences. However, his work in this area also provides us with a notion of mutual recognition, albeit negatively construed, which pushes us beyond current (institutionalised) forms; it also emphasises the fragile and fleeting nature of mutual recognition as an achievement, focusing on suffering and the injuries of recognition, as well as the capacity of these experiences to provide us with practical (and non-theoretical) norms without the need for quasi-transcendental guarantees.²

² Throughout this chapter I also attempt to tackle the key criticisms of Adorno (and earlier critical theory more generally) that we have previously encountered in the work of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault.

Dialectical experience

Of utmost importance to Adorno's philosophical approach, and his approach to culture, is a conception of 'dialectical experience' – a notion adopted from Hegel's *Phenomenology*. The central idea here involves the *experience* of contradiction or illusion, or lack of identity, between our initial representation or conception (or 'concept') of an object and the object itself (or 'intuition'). During this experience the concept is faced with a reality that resists the concept's own expectations and intentions. Another way to state this would be that the particularity of the object – be that object social or natural - resists the *universal* conception that consciousness has of it. In social and political terms, for example, this might involve the conflict between our conception of freedom (e.g. my acceptance of the neo-liberal version of 'freedom') and our particular experience of it (e.g. my far from 'free' experience of instability in the workplace and the need to constantly adapt to market imperatives); here the concept can be seen as 'ideological', for once it is exposed to the self-reflection prompted by contradictory experience it is unable to live up to the claims that it makes. The despair or loss – or for Adorno, 'suffering' - contained in this negative experience of lack of identity urges us to re-cognise or re-conceptualise the object, and this involves a de-stabilising of consciousness (and the subject) as it is forced to relinquish its immediate sense of identity.

This initial loss of identity is also an *education* of finite self-consciousness towards truth, as a new form of recognition is established. This process, described by Rose (1996, p. 72) as a 'ceaseless comedy', continues as this new form of (relative) recognition between subject and object also involves the *experience* of lack of identity and necessitates yet another reconfiguration. This process of (relative) re-cognition, stated rather abstractly here, contains within it the notion of 'real' or 'absolute' recognition (or truth) whereby consciousness and its

objects - or concept and intuition³ - would be reconciled without domination. As Rose suggests:

“Recognition’ refers to the lack of identity or relation which the initial dichotomy between concept and intuition, or consciousness and its objects, represents. But it also implies a unity which includes the relation or lack of identity. This unity mediates between the poles of the opposition and is hence triune. ‘Recognition’, ‘concept’, and ‘spirit’ all have this triune structure. They all refer initially to lack of identity, relation, or domination. They all yield speculative oppositions, and eschew the propositions of identity based on the primacy of the concept of pure practical reason. Misrecognition implies, but does not pre-judge, real recognition’ (Rose, 1981, p. 71).⁴

Real recognition therefore mediates between subject and object; however, the added dimension here is that we do not have direct access to what absolute recognition (or truth) would entail, nor any guarantees that it is a finite possibility, as it is only *implied* in our experiences of misrecognition or misrepresentation. As Jarvis eloquently states in relation to Adorno’s work, ‘truth is glimpsed in the determinate negation of what is false’ (1998, p. 51). Importantly, truth is only ever truth *for* a (finite) self-consciousness, and this finite self-consciousness is always *this side* of (absolute) truth – i.e. ‘comprehension is always provisional and preliminary’ (Rose, 1996, p. 72) and is re-shaped through the changes in both subject-object relations and the intersubjective relations of our ethical life.

³ Or, in social and political terms, our subjectivity and our social and political institutions.

⁴ My use of Gillian Rose here, and throughout this chapter, aims to develop and complement many of the points made by Adorno. However, despite the clear influence of Adorno on Rose’s work, it is important not to downplay their differences and present Rose as in anyway a clear Adornian. For her criticisms of Adorno, see *The Melancholy Science* (2014), *Hegel Contra Sociology* (1981), and *Judaism and Modernity* (1993), particularly the ‘From Speculative to Dialectical Thinking – Hegel and Adorno’ essay in the latter (pp. 53-4) where she sides with Hegel and accuses Adorno of reducing speculative to dialectical thinking and of thereby insufficiently recollecting the whole. Rose effectively accuses Adorno of a ‘dialectical dogmatism’, which in turn echoes Adorno’s own criticisms of Hegel (see Adorno, 1993, and especially the following sections from Adorno (1990): ‘Critique of Positive Negation’ (pp. 158-161) and ‘World Spirit and Natural History’ (pp. 300-360)). Adorno accuses Hegel of operating methodically and repeating a logic of identification by turning the negation of negation into a positive, and Rose accuses Adorno’s work as ultimately espousing a ‘morality of method’ which embraces Hegel’s Bacchanalian revel but without repose. There is insufficient space here to adequately explore these important differences, however the main thrust of my argument seeks to draw out the shared positions of Hegel, Adorno, and Rose, especially as these contrast to the work of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault.

Rose suggests that philosophy itself does not escape the lack of identity between consciousness and its objects, or the fate of ethical life, as any ‘concept of real recognition’ would be abstract:

‘because it arises in a society where real recognition has not been achieved. Philosophy, in this sense, reinforces the primacy of the concept, and falls into the terms of the dichotomy which it seeks to transform. It thus contains an abstract imperative, a moment of *Sollen*’ (Rose, 1981, p. 78).

So real or absolute recognition cannot simply be achieved in thought but relies on the reconciliation of contradictions in reality; it relies on ‘absolute ethical life’, where subjectivity (‘subject’) and substantial freedom (‘substance’ or objective ethical life) would be reconciled without domination. This is expressed in Adorno as the ‘standpoint of redemption’ (1999, p. 247). As Rose suggests:

‘representation which appears as knowledge, as truth, cannot be true, but must, by definition, be misrepresentation. It must be ‘in truth’ the ‘unrealised concept’, for re-presentation is the concept which is not united with intuition and is hence ‘unrealised’, a mere concept’ (1981, p. 153).

Rather than assuming an ahistorical, transcendent position however, real recognition is an immanent perspective contained within the historical *experiences* of social (and philosophical) contradictions and aporia.⁵ Philosophy should therefore seek to comprehend the origins and determinations of these social and philosophical contradictions, whilst acknowledging its own determination within them; this is a task that requires sensitivity not only to the modern forms that social illusion takes but also to the way philosophy repeats such illusions. For Adorno and Rose, the resolution of antinomies and contradictions depends upon historical change rather than philosophical deftness. Rather than seeking non-contradiction,

⁵ Given the importance of the *experience* of *misrecognition* here, my discussion of this process is, of course, inevitably abstract and schematic and therefore doesn’t grasp the experiential and educational dimensions of what I am describing.

and thereby working in the interests of power by disavowing real social and political contradictions, Adorno argues that ‘the responsibility of philosophical thought in its essential situations is not to play this game’; philosophy should be the ‘voice of contradiction’ whilst also acknowledging its own place within such contradictions.⁶

Philosophy as dialectical thinking is important here – particularly Adorno’s outline of the distinction, and interrelationship, between (negative) dialectics and identity-thinking.

Dialectical thinking, or ‘cognition of non-identity’ aims to ‘say what something is, while identitarian thinking says what something comes under, what it exemplifies or represents, and what, accordingly, it is not itself’ (Adorno, 1990, p. 149). Whereas identity thinking merely classifies (sensuous, particular) objects and turns those objects into examples of a (universal) concept, dialectical thinking seeks to highlight the ‘untruth of identity, the fact that the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived’ and the way ‘that objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder’ (Adorno, 1990, p. 5). Central for Adorno is non-identity, or what is non-identical to thought. Dialectical thinking is committed to what Adorno calls ‘the preponderance of the object’ (Adorno, 1990, p. 183). The subject attempts to grasp objects conceptually but objects are not themselves reducible to concepts, and therefore concepts suffer under the weight of their own insufficiency over time and are replaced by new conceptualisations.⁷ Adorno’s work seeks to use concepts to point beyond the conceptual, or

⁶ For the role of philosophy to ‘not play this game’, see the section on ‘Vertiginousness’ in *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno, 1990, pp. 31-33); for philosophy as the ‘voice of contradiction’, see ‘Philosophy and the Division of Labour’, pp. 242-244, and ‘Contradictions’, pp. 237-240, in *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997). I explore these ideas further towards the end of this chapter, and in the conclusion, where I try and draw out the active and practical elements of philosophy (and aesthetics) in the work of Adorno: more specifically, the way in which seeing the world through ‘sabbath eyes’ (Adorno, 1999, p. 48) – along with the perspectives gained by ‘felt contact with its objects’ (ibid, p. 247) and the forms of ethical and aesthetic imagination this provokes – is transformative.

⁷ This is quite different to Habermas’s claim that Adorno appeals to immediacy in the form of an intuitive ‘mimetic rationality’ beyond conceptual thinking (see Habermas, 1984, pp. 382-3). See both ‘peephole metaphysics’ (pp. 138-140) and ‘the object’s preponderance’ (pp. 183-6) in Adorno (1990) for his criticisms of

as he also puts it ‘to use the strength of the subject to break through the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity’ (ibid, p. xx)⁸. Dialectical experience, and dialectical thinking itself, however relies on the persistence of thought’s confrontation with what it is unable to classify.

Dialectical thinking relies on identity thinking for its own position; it is only through the experience of failed identity-thinking that dialectical thinking arises. It is therefore not a new kind of thinking or method – e.g. one that could do without identification – but a way of representing what happens in the very process of thought. In exposing the inadequacies of identification through the experience of contradiction, dialectical thinking seeks to reveal the interdependence of – yet lack of identity between - thought and being, concepts and objects, ideas and social experience. Unlike identity thinking, dialectical thinking sees contradiction as real; rather than seeking to dismiss and eradicate contradictions as faulty logic, dialectical thinking seeks to expose the way in which logical contradictions are an expression of real social and political contradictions. It is the reconciliation of real contradictions, rather than the eradication of merely logical ones, that dialectical thinking seeks.⁹

immediacy and for his claims that ‘the beyond’ is always mediated through subjectivity and conceptual reflection.

⁸ Adorno’s position is in marked contrast here to Habermas’s intersubjective brand of humanism but also to the anti-humanist strains we found in Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical work. Adorno is critical of humanist ideals insofar as they have been both complicit in forms of exclusion and domination and lacked the acknowledgement of our dependence on social and natural influences; however, rather than sidestepping subjectivity, and subject-mediated knowledge, and positing new (anti-humanist) first principles, Adorno uses negative dialectics and immanent critique to demonstrate the lack of subjective mastery of the object. For Adorno, anti-humanism displays regressive tendencies: considering Heidegger, Adorno argues that ‘the truth that expels man from the center of creation and reminds him of his impotence – this same truth will, as a subjective mode of conduct, confirm the sense of impotence, cause men to identify with it, and thus reinforce the spell of second nature’ (Adorno, 1990, p. 68)

⁹ These points provide us with a response to Habermas’s (and Honneth’s) claim that Adorno reduces reason to instrumentality and identity-thinking and therefore ends up with a performative contradiction leaving us without any ‘rational’ criteria for critique (e.g. see Habermas, 1992, pp. 126-7, and Honneth, 1995, pp. 61-91). Instead, Adorno would suggest that reason might be predominantly instrumental but is also able to criticise itself and recognise its own complicity in domination (which in turns has educational and transformative value etc). The emphasis on contradiction and particularity in dialectical thinking, alongside Adorno’s appeal to aesthetics and ethics, suggests that reason need not be (perpetually) instrumental.

For Adorno, identity thinking has been a key feature of human life to date and is tied to self-preservation and the mastery of nature. It is particularly prevalent in capitalist exchange, as outlined in Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, whereby objects with particular (and incommensurable) use-values are made equivalent. Commodification is seen as the social counterpart of identification and both are seen as misrepresenting their objects.

‘The exchange principle, the reduction of human labour to the abstract universal concept of average working hours, is fundamentally akin to the principle of identification. Exchange is the social model of the principle, and without the principle there would be no exchange; it is through exchange that non-identical individuals and performances become commensurable and identical’ (Adorno, 1990, p. 146).

However, it does not follow that we can have direct, unmediated access to use-values and particulars or shelter them from commodification and identification; rather the aim of dialectical thinking is to highlight the discrepancies (and misrepresentation) concealed in apparently fair exchange and identification. As suggested above, dialectical thinking is not a method which can be (undialectically) separated from and applied to its object, but rather emerges out of the object itself; another way of putting this would be to say that it doesn't begin with its own (transcendent) values through which it then judges the facts, but (immanently) starts with the values of its object. Marx's treatment of commodification in *Capital* (1974) is indebted to this Hegelian (immanent) logic inasmuch as Marx avoids a predetermined methodology. The dialectical thinking apparent in *Capital* relies on the assertions of classical political economy and exposes the contradictions they contain. It brings out the hidden prescriptive element (the 'ought') in what parades as pure description (the 'is'). Whereas 'fair exchange' appears to be a simple 'description' of how the economy works, Marx demonstrates how a society based on this principle produces *experiences* that contradict it. In this way, bourgeois political economy – its categories and the society such categories

describe - is found wanting when judged according to its implicit prescriptive elements.

However, rather than such criticism leading to a description of how bourgeois political economy *really* works, dialectical thinking seeks to expose the interdependence of, yet lack of identity between, description and prescription, being and thought.

Hegel's *Phenomenology* also provides an important context for our reflections on dialectical experience and thought. Here Hegel famously demonstrates the ways in which forms of consciousness and self-consciousness are inescapably connected with concrete social processes. He makes the point in the *Phenomenology* that our assumptions of immediate access to truth are constantly transformed by the (dialectical) experience of mediation, i.e. what we take as immediate (or truth) ends up depending for its identity on certain (social and political) elements outside of it. This is famously expressed in Hegel's account of master and slave in his *Phenomenology* (1977, pp. 104-119). Here he suggests that the life and death struggle, as the origin of self-consciousness, determines the ways in which we come to understand ourselves, the other, and the world. Death, as the absolute master, is central to the formation of sociality and to the origin of master and slave as forms of self-consciousness. The initial conception of the master's sovereignty is undermined in the struggle between master and slave as the master learns that his autonomy and sovereignty is an illusion; he is dependent for his freedom (and identity) on the labour and recognition of an 'other', the slave. A new social configuration, or form of (relative) recognition, is established but the illusion of mastery present in 'lordship and bondage' persists in new forms. Throughout the *Phenomenology* Hegel demonstrates that all attempts at the mastery of social conditions undergo a series of contradictory experiences requiring new forms of self-consciousness and

relations of (relative) recognition. All attempts at mastery are exposed as ‘moments’ in a broader process of practical relations with things and others.¹⁰

The Hegelian and Marxian thrust of Adorno’s work on dialectical experience - along with the emphasis on contradiction, particularity, education, complicity, and truth – is in marked contrast to the positions we have seen espoused in Habermas and Honneth (and Foucault), despite their own complex and self-conscious relationships to these traditions and issues. The ethical dimension of Adorno’s work - which seeks to undermine totalising forms of rationality and open up spaces of possibility, mutual recognition and freedom – also differs markedly from the ethical positions we have seen in the work of Habermas, Honneth and Foucault. A key feature of Adorno’s notion of experience, which in a number of ways resolves the weaknesses we found in Habermas, Honneth and Foucault, is the centrality of complicity and entanglement in self-other relations (i.e. the entanglement of truth and power, communication and domination, intersubjectivity and instrumentality) and the educational development such (mis)recognition and (mis)representation entails. Dialectical experience allows us to avoid the separation of norm-free power and power-free communication we saw in Habermas along with the proceduralism of his idealising presuppositions of communication, and it also sidesteps the ‘formal’ nature of recognition in Honneth along with his later idealised account of empathetic engagement and reification and the absence of a notion of *mis*recognition; in

¹⁰ It is precisely this Hegelian approach to knowledge and representation that Adorno adopts, and which Habermas misconstrues as a problematic, subject-object based, ‘philosophy of consciousness’ which should be superseded by a philosophy of intersubjectivity and communication (Habermas, 1984, pp. 386-7). However, rather than adhering to those characteristics of a philosophy of consciousness outlined by Habermas, both Adorno and Hegel criticise epistemological attempts to secure the (*a priori*) foundations of knowledge and representational truth, opting instead for phenomenological accounts which make use of the language of subject and object in the context of the dialectical development of fallible representations of truth. At the heart of their accounts is not only the acknowledgement that subjectivity is only possible in the context of intersubjective relations of mutual recognition, but also that knowledge itself is *always* conditioned and is formed in the broader process of the social and practical engagement with others and things in the world – this would include the communicative positions of Habermas and Honneth.

relation to both Habermas and Honneth, we avoid their purification of the ideals of communicative reason and their procedural conceptions of freedom and solidarity. Dialectical experience also helps us to avoid what are in many ways the opposite problems we found in the work of Foucault, for example the tendency in his genealogical work on power to neglect the paradoxes of freedom and autonomy in modernity in favour of their reduction to pervasive forms of power and control - a criticism both Habermas and Honneth in fact level at Adorno as well¹¹ - and the converse tendency in his later work to conceive of an aesthetic subject seemingly free from structural limits.

Adorno's notion of experience challenges those tendencies, apparent in Habermas's and Honneth's accounts and raised by a number of critics discussed in previous chapters, to idealise linguistic communication, recognition, the public sphere and the lifeworld, and to separate out strategic action from the context of shared norms and meanings. To overly separate strategic action from shared norms – as was particularly the case with Habermas's tendency to separate 'norm-free' power from 'power-free' communication - neglects the difficult process of 'dialectical experience' in everyday interactions, a process which involves

¹¹ Despite some clear parallels between Foucault's genealogical work and Adorno's social theory, I think that Adorno would take a middle (and dialectical) route between Foucault and Habermas/Honneth inasmuch as he would agree on the one hand with those criticisms of Foucault we saw in chapter 3 - whereby Foucault is seen to neglect the possibility of subject construction and liberating forms of autonomous experience beyond disciplinary power (e.g. what Rose called the 'paradoxes and antinomies of law in capitalist societies') and to reduce normative agreement and social cohesion to 'normalisation' - whilst also avoiding Habermas and Honneth's tendency to neglect the power relations and forms of subjugation lurking behind apparent freedom and liberation. Adorno would refuse the temptation to either clearly separate out freedom (or rationality) and domination, as is the tendency in Habermas and Honneth, or insist on their inevitable and *invariant* entanglement, as tends to be the case in Foucault's (Nietzschean) genealogical period. For interesting accounts of the 'aporia and determinate negation of morality' in Adorno, which emphasise both the repressive and emancipatory moments in morality, see Schweppenhauser's 'Adorno's Negative Moral Philosophy' and Menke's 'Genealogy and Critique' (in Huhn, ed. 2004, pp. 328-353 and pp. 302-327 respectively). The latter essay separates Habermas and Kant's 'reflective *foundation* of morality' from Adorno and Nietzsche's 'questioning of morality' whilst further distinguishing Nietzsche's questioning of morality, geared towards individual *self*-perfection, from Adorno's *other*-oriented account which seeks 'the liberation of social virtues ... from the false models of reason and freedom with which they have grown entangled in modern morality' (p. 305).

both strategic action (with its subsumption of particulars under general categories) *and* reflection (on such subsumption and its inadequacy). Adorno would suggest that our relationships with others give rise to convoluted forms of both recognition and strategic instrumentality and this necessitates educational dialectical experiences - i.e. we learn, in our (failed) attempts to recognise the other, that our original intentions may well involve a misrepresentation and misrecognition. Adorno's position would also be that we need to be sensitive to the ways in which what often appears as norm-free power (in the system) is *itself* a reification, and what appears as power-free communication (in the lifeworld) contains forms of exclusion, subsumption and domination. His work not only emphasises the structural compulsions which encourage us to objectify others and to disavow our need for the recognition of others, which I will explore further below in the context of the culture industry, but also suggests that our earnest attempts to attain genuine recognition are often perverted.¹²

Despite the famously sombre conclusions of his work – especially sombre when compared to Habermas's and Honneth's idealised accounts of the liberatory forms of communication underlying the messiness of our everyday interactions - it does not follow that mutual recognition is unattainable for Adorno, but rather that it is often a fragile and fleeting *achievement* requiring commitment, work and 'education'.¹³ Rather than idealising the notion of recognition, as Honneth arguably does, Adorno is more sensitive to the ambiguous nature

¹² In many ways, these themes are also an extension of Hegel's claim that self-conscious individuals often take themselves to be the sole purpose of ethical life, even when their ultimate end appears to be a virtuous or moral one. See 'the actualisation of rational self-consciousness through its own activity' and 'individuality which takes itself to be real in and for itself' (particularly 'reason as lawgiver' and 'reason as testing laws' in the latter section) in Hegel (1977). These themes are also developed in Rose (1981) where she talks about 'cultures of subjective consciousness' that become split off from *sittlichkeit* and thereby increase its lawlessness.

¹³ Here Adorno would also agree with Butler's critique of Honneth's notion of reification, and his related notion of empathetic engagement, inasmuch as mutual recognition and love are not simply necessary givens discernible under the surface and suppressed by society but involve 'struggling with a set of ethical demands on the basis of myriad affective responses that, prior to their expression in action, have no particular moral valence' (Butler in Honneth, 2008, p. 104).

of recognition, our desire for it alongside our desire to disavow and repress it. Instead, recognition is better captured through a notion of dialectical experience characterised by what Foster, as we saw in chapter 2, calls ‘working through our inevitable tendency to *misrecognise* the object’ (Foster, 2011, p. 258) and the ‘movement, or better, *struggle*, towards self-awareness within cognition itself’ (ibid, p. 260). This alternative reading of recognition (and *misrecognition*) not only captures the ambiguous nature of recognition and the importance of struggle, but also the transformative and *self*-transformative nature of recognition. Alongside Adorno’s emphasis on particularity and non-identity, this (negative) conception of recognition avoids the sort of reduction of recognition to (broadly already existing) ‘identity claims’ that we saw in Honneth. It also allows for an understanding of identity beyond liberal-individualist ideology and beyond a private and fixed identity protected by forms of legal recognition, forms which often secure domination and are themselves premised on mutual indifference and abstraction from particularity.¹⁴

Also, as we have seen, Habermas’s and Honneth’s appeals to the normative presuppositions ‘implicit’ in linguistic understanding and recognitive interaction tend to excessively abstract the ethical and emancipatory ambitions of their work from the actual experiences of social actors. In their attempts to separate out progressive from regressive developments, their purification and formalisation of the ideals of communicative reason - under the assumption that the formal element provides universality and ‘rational’ authority – ends up robbing

¹⁴ See Chapter 2 above, and Bernstein (2005, pp. 304, 317) for an elaboration of similar points. Here he makes the point that Adorno uses the language of ‘suffering’, ‘non-identity’, ‘damaged life’ etc rather than the language of ‘justice’, due to the belief that the language of (liberal) justice often takes the competitive market as the model for social cooperation and thereby reproduces forms of exclusion. He warns against the fact that ‘emphatic justice has been sublimated into democratic procedures for the warranting of social norms as a means for coordinating actions among competing interests. In this respect, social norms presuppose the mutual indifference of a plurality of strangers forced to coordinate their actions with one another if they are to achieve their individual ends’ (p. 304). We end up in a situation where ‘political cooperation and a just social order themselves become a means to a private end – formally the end of each citizen pursuing their own conception of the good life, substantially the end of capital reproduction’. (p. 304).

practical norms of their motivating quality and their ability to foster solidarity (see Bernstein, 2005).¹⁵ In the process, their moral universalism (overly separated from ethical values) shares the characteristics of the kind of instrumental rationality that is the target of Adorno's work: an instrumental reason which abstracts from difference, subjectivity, and particularity. Adorno refuses to identify (quasi)transcendental normative presuppositions, and to purify practical norms, on the basis that such formalisation itself has nihilistic consequences and is part of the process of instrumental reason which his work seeks to resist. Adorno's concern with cultural differentiation and the modern separation of the particular and the universal - whereby the particular takes refuge in the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of human experience in contrast to the universalising tendencies of technological rationality and formal morality - means that his philosophy is forever sensitive to false claims to ethical totality and the sacrifice of the particular. His work (along with Foucault's) helps us to remain vigilant to the ways in which forms of rationality, in this case communicative rationality, often exclude those forms of action and identity, and of desire and satisfaction, that aren't easily understood in terms of Habermas's discursive (and Honneth's recognitive) account of 'rational' solidarity. His work also - again with Foucault - highlights the paradoxes of modernity, the way that notions of morality, autonomy, recognition, and subjective freedom are often tied to, and emerge out of, contexts of oppressive power relations and domination. It also, importantly, draws our attention to the ways in which (formalising, instrumental) reason, often including 'critical' and emancipatory forms of reason, is complicit in forms of domination. His ideas help us to understand how current (institutionalised) forms of

¹⁵ As we saw in chapter 2, Pinsky (in Petherbridge, 2011) makes a similar point specifically in relation to Honneth's 'formal' (and ultimately procedural) conception of ethical life which he suggests ends up lacking a notion of the truly '*ethical*', in the sense of describing a sphere of interpretations of the kind of life desirable *for us*' (p. 152).

recognition often *mis*-recognise, and how normative universalism often excludes more comprehensive forms of recognition, satisfaction and solidarity.

Adorno would suggest that freedom and autonomy are not best protected via appeals to universal rationality, rather we should avoid the link between morality and universal reason and instead seek to develop a more concrete, substantive, historical and practical ethics.¹⁶ His position on Habermas and Honneth would, I believe, echo his criticisms of Kant's 'causality of freedom' in the 'metacritique of practical reason' section of his *Negative Dialectics*.¹⁷ Here he criticises the formal nature of Kant's moral law on the grounds that he ends up with a notion of the subject as transcendently free whilst empirically unfree; this notion not only makes freedom separate from our historical and empirical world, but also leads to the *a priori* deduction of a moral law which ultimately ties freedom to moral compulsion.¹⁸ He argues that Kant's formal separation of moral autonomy from heteronomous influence is precisely what turns freedom into compulsion, and further suggests that all attempts to establish an *a priori* account of freedom - and we can add to this even those as socio-politically minded as Habermas's and Honneth's - end up reproducing a potentially coercive moral law.¹⁹ Adorno's alternative account avoids positing the nature of freedom and instead is resigned to the

¹⁶ Having said this, we might argue that there remains a gap in Adorno's work in terms of its practical (and ethical) consequences, although Adorno is clearly not ignorant of these issues – see in particular some of the later essays he referred to in terms of 'critical models' (in Adorno, 2005); also, amongst others, critics such as Cook (2004), the essays by Menke and Schweppenhäuser in Huhn (ed., 2004), the special edition of *New German Critique* entitled 'Adorno and Ethics' (Gerhardt, ed., 2006), alongside Bernstein's attempts to elaborate an Adornian ethics in aesthetics on the basis of social and bodily suffering and compassion (in Bernstein, 2001; Bernstein, 2005; and Bernstein, 2006).

¹⁷ See the first section of part 3 in Adorno (1990), particularly pp. 231-240. See also Adorno (2000, pp. 119-20) where he argues that Kant 'banishes sympathy, compassion and the direct expression of pity from his ethics because all impulses of this sort are merely natural impulses, and are purely instinctual. As such they are said to be incompatible with pure reason, with the principle of reason. Therefore, because this extreme view of the concept of freedom is based on its absolute independence from all existing beings, from nature as such, it threatens to become transformed into unfreedom'.

¹⁸ There are clear affinities here with Hegel's 'The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate' in his *Early Theological Writings* (1961, pp. 182-301) and Marx's 'On the Jewish Question' in his *Early Writings* (1992, pp. 211-41).

¹⁹ We saw, in chapter 2, how Bernstein linked this to 'secular practices of purification' such as the Terror.

negative task of exposing the ways in which freedom and compulsion remain entwined in current experience, i.e. to the determinate negation of false totalities.²⁰ His negative position here seeks to emphasise the historical, rather than formal/transcendental, nature of norms; the emphasis on both particularity and non-identity in his philosophy insists on the need to attend to everyday practical norms in their (negative) appearance through our shared experiences of injury and suffering. Rather than establishing the ‘universality’ and rational authority of norms by formal/transcendental means,²¹ Adorno denies direct access to any pre-given or *a priori* structures that would produce universal solidarity and freedom amongst members of the community, instead suggesting that practical norms can only attain validity through their acceptance by others.

Having briefly explored the importance of dialectical thought and experience in Hegel, Adorno and Rose, I will now outline the ways in which dialectical experience – and the implicit notion of absolute recognition - is under threat in contemporary cultural experience (as well as contemporary philosophy/social theory), before concluding with a brief outline of Adorno’s ethics and his conception of non-reified culture and ethical life. For Adorno and Hegel, cultural experience and philosophy are both important expressions of the universal insofar as they express and embody social contradictions and point beyond the world as it currently is. Following Adorno, I will argue that the dialectical experience they (potentially) contain is threatened by the increasing dominance of the culture industry – along with what Rose calls the ‘fascism of representation’ - and also by non-dialectical forms of philosophy

²⁰ However, this is not to say that current experience is evidence that such entwinement is ‘how it has always been’ and ‘will continue to be’; this is a broadly Nietzschean position which Foucault’s genealogical work closely approximates at times.

²¹ A position that, incidentally, allows the philosopher to assume a position of representative universality and authority in the process. Foucault makes a similar point in his reflections on ‘specific’ and ‘universal’ intellectuals in his ‘Truth and Power’ essay (in Gordon, ed., 1980, pp. 109-133).

(including Habermas, Honneth and Foucault). Rose's contribution to Adorno's culture industry thesis, is to suggest that an abstract and technological form of representation is increasingly dominant in contemporary society, and is a form of representation that is tied to the excessive individualism of civil society. The danger such representation poses is that it potentially frees us as subjects from a relationship to the object, such that either we do not experience the contradictions between our initial conception and the object itself or our lived experience of contradictions holds no significance for us and leads to resignation or nihilism. In the absence of such experience, or the absence of transformation in the light of such experience, there is no re-cognition of the object and no de-position of the subject; we remain trapped in a particular subject-object configuration and the guiding notion of absolute recognition I have outlined is in danger of being lost. This idea helps us to comprehend how individuals in civil society come to understand themselves and their actions without understanding their complicity in the suffering of others – and without being educated through contradictory experiences. These arguments also lead us to question Habermas and Honneth's faith in both the public sphere and forms of intersubjective recognition under current conditions.²²

The culture industry & the loss of dialectical experience.

Alongside the prevalence of positivism and the horrors of fascism at the time of his writing, Adorno also holds the culture industry responsible for the erosion of the kind of dialectical experience outlined above. An understanding of the culture industry also helps us explain the persistence of late capitalism despite significant contradictions and social ills; it helps us

²² By considering the ways in which the culture industry might pervert the potentials of a democratic public sphere, I am also extending the criticisms of Honneth that we saw from Renault in chapter 2, i.e. the limitations of seeing social institutions simply as expressions of underlying recognition relations and thereby missing the capacity for these institutions to restrict and 'constitute' subjects, and to encourage subjects to disavow complicity, dependency and recognition.

understand how a particular, and highly flawed, socio-historical form comes to assume a reified permanence. Adorno suggests that the way we conceptualise the world, and identify objects within it, is also increasingly determined by the culture industry as a self-perpetuating system that we are both alienated from and have no conscious control over. Our very conception of objects in the world is structurally determined by the images and patterns of thought that emerge out of the culture industry. The omnipresence of the culture industry, the fact that ‘the whole world is made to pass through the filter of the culture industry’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 126), results in the tendency for it to provide individuals with a framework for understanding their lives and the world around them. It enters into our very being and provides us with models (of morality, gender identity, heroism etc) to identify with and aspire to. Its representations and images – and, as we shall see, its mode of representation – come to dominate our experience of the world and how we understand it. The culture industry silences thought and reflection by pre-forming or ‘schematising’ our experience. For Adorno the main form ideology takes in late capitalism is *identity* – the closure of the relationship between subject and object along with the eternal recurrence of the same without subjective reflection or transformative experience. As we have seen, the criticism of such identity would involve a form of self-reflection provoked by dialectical experience - the conflict between our conception of the object and our actual experience of it. It is this excess of experience in relation to our conception of the object, and the despair or loss involved in such an experience of the negative, that constitutes the ‘education’ of consciousness; such education requires reflection and effort on our part and opens up the possibility of negation. Dialectical experience is crucial for Adorno in terms of its ability to break through and point beyond the apparent immutability of reified social and historical structures, however it is this experience or education that Adorno is suggesting is precluded by the workings of the culture industry.

Adorno's culture industry thesis needs to be understood within the broader context of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* such that the culture industry is conceived as the further triumph of instrumental or subsumptive rationality, alongside commodification and the end of reflection.²³ In the name of self-preservation, the particular is subsumed under the universal by an instrumental rationality that seeks technical control and mastery; it is this aspect of enlightenment reason – an aspect which has also brought us both control over nature and freedom from myth – that poses the threat of new forms of myth and social control.

Adorno and Horkheimer argue that the increasing elision of instrumental rationality and 'reason as a whole' leads to the sacrifice not only of the possibility of comprehending particularity but also the rational judgement of human ends and therefore the possibility of happiness and freedom. As we have seen, this perversion of reason, in the form of instrumental rationality, comes to fruition in modern capitalist societies where production is primarily for exchange rather than use - production for the market, for profit and further accumulation rather than need.²⁴ Of significance here is Marx's analysis of commodity 'fetishism' whereby the value of commodities, produced through human labour and the social process of exchange, appears as 'objective' or as the attribute of the objects themselves.

²³ As we have seen, Habermas and Honneth attempt to sever the link, made by Adorno and Horkheimer, between Enlightenment rationality and the commodity form. The purpose of distancing themselves from earlier critical theory has been to rescue the democratic possibilities of the public sphere and delineate a relatively autonomous realm of communicative rationality. It is this severing, and the associated claims to autonomy, that I seek to challenge with the help of Adorno's work. Honneth's (and Habermas's) criticism that Adorno and Horkheimer model social domination on the mastery of nature, thereby neglecting the (relatively autonomous) social realm of intersubjectivity and producing a functionalist conception of culture, has been one important element in the attempt to separate out a (communicative) form of reason from complicity in domination (see Honneth, 1991, pp. 51-53). As we have seen, Adorno's (materialist) refusal to separate out truth and power, intersubjectivity and instrumentality, and communication and domination etc for sake of convenience, also applies to nature and the social. As Jarvis (1998, p. 35) suggests, 'to dominate other humans – since humans are not pure culture – is *already* domination of nature as well as social domination'. Honneth concedes this point to a certain extent in his 'Afterword' in Honneth (1991, p. xx-xxii). Jarvis (1998) usefully highlights the related point that *Dialectic of Enlightenment* avoids the separation of social action and (a pre-social) nature we find in cultural idealism, and instead seeks a 'reconciliation of culture and nature' (p. 35) whereby happiness would involve more than 'free and rational intersubjectivity' and include 'bodily delight' along with freedom from self-preservation and 'material suffering' (p. 221).

²⁴ Although, as we have seen, for Adorno the distinction between false and 'true' or 'natural' needs is not clearly evident in the context of the thorough mediation of consciousness by exchange value and the consumption (and production) of commodities for exchange (rather than use) value. For example, see Adorno (1990, pp. 92-3).

Value, which for the purposes of exchange treats objects with a different sensuous particularity and use-value as though they are equivalent, is misrepresented as an inherent quality of the object itself rather than the outcome of collective social processes. The fetishism of the commodity occurs when these social processes and human actions take on a life of their own above and beyond the conscious control of human beings (Marx, 1974, pp. 76-87). It also helps explain how individual citizens in civil society come to understand their activity without recognising their complicity in the suffering of others. This notion of fetishism is a key element in Adorno's analysis of the culture industry and will be discussed later, however for the time being it is sufficient to note the parallels between instrumental rationality and commodity exchange. Both instrumental rationality and capitalist production make incommensurable things interchangeable, and transform uniqueness into sameness. Instrumental rationality is means rather than ends-based and it subsumes particulars under universal categories; capitalist production is primarily for exchange rather than use and it subsumes use value under exchange value.

Adorno's culture industry thesis seeks to understand the ways in which this broader standardisation of nature, and process of commodification, has expanded in scope to incorporate spheres of social life previously considered immune to the effects of rationalisation. The power of the culture industry, as a form of instrumental rationality, is due to the way it integrates individuals into society while, or rather by, granting them the right to have their desires 'satisfied'. The severely curtailed notion of culture it contains involves the organisation of 'free time' or leisure in line with the logic of exchange and fungibility apparent in the realm of work and production such that cultural works are produced solely for reproduction and consumption. Rather than culture and art offering us the promise of future

happiness and freedom from self-preservation, as Adorno suggests they can and should, in the guise of the culture industry they, for the most part, merely affirm current reality and offer undemanding and pre-digested forms of amusement and escape. Culture ceases to be what Bernstein terms ‘the repository of a reflective comprehension of the present in terms of a redeemed future’ and instead it becomes a ‘culture industry [which] forsakes the promise of happiness in the name of the degraded utopia of the present’ (in Adorno, 1991, p. 8). Rather than producing new ‘particular’ experiences, challenging our current conceptions of the world, and encouraging our active participation and autonomous judgement – in short, fostering the dialectical experience discussed above - it turns us into external *consumers* of culture and encourages us to adapt ourselves to the world in its current configuration.

Mirroring instrumental rationality’s subsumption of the particular under the (false) universal, the culture industry sacrifices individuality and particularity within the false universality it proposes. For Adorno, what is excluded from subsumptive rationality – i.e. rational human ends and sensuous particularity – takes refuge in art, albeit an autonomous art separated from everyday social practice and, for the most part, from the lower social classes. This division within culture, between the culture industry and autonomous art, reflects the division between the universal and particular in late capitalist society. Art keeps open the possibility of a true universality, of a genuine reconciliation of universal and particular, whereas the culture industry hides the violent subsumption of the particular under a false or illusory universality. As Adorno suggests, ‘culture is the perennial claim of the particular over the general, as long as the latter remains unreconciled to the former’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 98).

Culture and contradiction

Culture, in its truest sense, would embody contradictions - quite rightly for Adorno given the real social and political contradictions that exist - and thereby make claims that would require autonomous judgement on the part of those engaged in it. Rather than resolving such contradictions for us it would highlight the lack of reconciliation between subject and substance, and our cultural experience would leave us in the difficult position of (dialectically) experiencing contradictions, acknowledging our complicity in such contradictions, and requiring us to judge and work through them. It would treat us as autonomous agents and keep alive the possibility of a reconciled community – of the reconciliation between autonomous agency and our social and political relations. Such culture points towards true universality and fosters the autonomous judgement such universality would, by definition, require. The culture industry, on the other hand, ‘resolves contradictions in a spurious harmony’ and fails to make claims on us, leaving us without the need for autonomous judgement.

‘While it claims to lead the perplexed, it deludes them with false conflicts which they are to exchange for their own. It solves conflicts for them only in appearance, in a way that they can hardly be solved in their real lives. In the products of the culture industry human beings get into trouble only so that they can be rescued unharmed, usually by representatives of a benevolent collective; and then in empty harmony, they are reconciled with the general, whose demands they had experienced at the outset as irreconcilable with their interests. For this purpose the culture industry has developed formulas which even reach into such non-conceptual areas as light musical entertainment. Here too one gets into a ‘jam’, into rhythmic problems, which can be instantly disentangled by the triumph of the basic beat’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 90).

Our relationship with its cultural products is one of passive consumption, and a form of consumption that leaves us morally intact and separated from ‘dialectical experience’. We are not treated as autonomous agents by the culture industry, but instead our capacity for

autonomous judgement is deadened. Without the consent and judgement of autonomous agents, the possibility of reconciliation is impeded if not precluded. Such culture does not point to true universality but proclaims that it already exists insofar as it is possible.

Culture, in the form of the culture industry, no longer seeks to 'maintain a grasp on the idea of the good life' (Adorno, 1991, p. 90). Instead of embodying social contradictions and (implicitly) pointing to the possibility of what Hegel calls 'absolute ethical life', a social order where subjectivity and objective ethical life would be reconciled without domination,

'The concepts of order which [the culture industry] hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo. They remain unquestioned, unanalysed and undialectically presupposed, even though they no longer have any substance for those who accept them ... The power of the culture industry's ideology is such that conformity has replaced consciousness. The order that springs from it is never confronted with what it claims to be or with the real interests of human beings. Order, however, is not good in itself. It would be so only as a good order' (1991, p. 90).

Rather than a good order based upon the harmony of individual interests and the interests of the whole, which requires autonomous judgement, the culture industry instead promotes concepts of order that bypass and diminish autonomous judgement. Rather than a true reconciliation of universal and particular, it promotes a false universality.

The promise of true happiness, which Adorno suggests is expressed in 'autonomous' bourgeois art, is also increasingly under threat by the empty pleasures of the culture industry. The decline of high modernism, with its oblique promise of particularity and sensuous happiness, runs the risk of eradicating the distinction between the pleasure derived from the entertainment of the culture industry and the possibility of true happiness. For Adorno, the pleasures offered up by the culture industry deliver neither sensuous happiness nor freedom

from the everyday repressions experienced in the context of capital, rather they offer up repression as fulfilment. Instead, it is the division between autonomous art and the culture industry – itself the result of the historical separation of particular and universal - that embodies the truth. Autonomous art's purposelessness and freedom from the instrumentality of everyday life bears witness to the possibility of sensuous particularity and happiness but at the expense of excluding the masses, whereas the culture industry gains its legitimacy from the lack of exclusion whilst sacrificing the particular.

Instead of culture and art embodying the experience of the negative, contributing to a crisis in current values, and pointing beyond the present to a future of possible happiness and freedom from self-preservation, the culture industry increasingly secures their services in the interests of marketability and profit. The consequences of this are such that 'the commercial character of culture causes the difference between culture and practical life to disappear' and 'aesthetic semblance (Schein) turns into the sheen which commercial advertising lends to the commodities which absorb it in turn' (Adorno, 1991, p. 53). This aestheticisation of practical life embellishes the empirical world but doesn't radically transform it in the spirit of freedom and happiness; it assures us that our current pleasures (of consumption) and freedoms are the best that we can hope for and further precludes the possibility of thinking otherwise. Unlike autonomous artworks, the products of the culture industry are not (partially) separated from the empirical world, despite their claims to provide an escape from it, but rather reinforce it such that 'the borderline between culture and empirical reality becomes more and more indistinct' (Adorno, 1991, p. 53). For Adorno, high modernism expresses (or expressed) a truth content in opposition to the instrumental rationality of the culture industry, and it contains all those aspects excluded by subsumptive reason such as substantive ends, sensuous

happiness, particularity, individuality etc. However, even those characteristics of high art that had once contained moments of cultural negativity are often incorporated into the culture industry and put to work in the promotion of 'diverse' products and lifestyle choices, and the fostering of new 'needs'. Not only does art become increasingly commodified - in terms of production, consumption and reception - but also commodities become increasingly dependent on their aesthetic representation. Commodities are characterised by, or co-extensive with, their advertising image, and consumers become increasingly obsessed with the promises such representations make rather than simply obsessed with the commodities or objects in themselves.

Before further developing these ideas, and exploring the politics of representation along with the role of aesthetics in non-reified culture, I will briefly rehearse Adorno's explanation for the ways in which the pervasiveness of this instrumental and commodified culture preclude the dialectical experience of contradiction. At the heart of his account are the processes of standardisation, the regression of consciousness, pseudo-individualisation (or illusory universality), the reproduction of desire, and the flight from resistance.

Standardisation, pseudo-individuality, and the reproduction of desire.

Instrumental rationality and commodification are at work in the way the culture industry seeks to calculate the effects that the products have on consumers. This drive for calculation gives rise to uniform and standardised products that are diminished as artworks and which deaden aesthetic response. Cultural standardisation produces an eternal sameness hidden behind an apparent diversity; the specific qualities of any cultural product cease to have any significance and instead must predominantly fit into existing cultural forms. The formulaic

nature of such products – the fact that we know how the film will proceed and end without seeing it, and we know the structure of the pop song without hearing it – makes them exchangeable and, in the process, reduces the particular parts to mere effects that have no relationship to an aesthetic whole. The significance of particularity is lost as every detail is reduced to a common denominator; thereby standardisation ensures that the cultural industry affirms current reality. Autonomous art on the other hand uses existing materials (e.g. sounds, words, colours, forms etc) but reconfigures them (and the historical meanings they embody) to produce meaningful relationships and new experiences. In such works of art ‘technique is concerned with the internal organisation of the object itself, with its inner logic’, whereas in the culture industry technique is ‘one of distribution and mechanical reproduction, and therefore always remains external to its object’ (Adorno, 1991, pp. 87-88). Autonomous artworks use existent reality but open it up, look at it anew and point beyond it. In this way they represent ‘a consciousness that is more than the mere imprint of that which exists, and which seeks to penetrate into this existence’ (Adorno in Viertel, 1973, p. 199). Autonomous art has affinities with non-identity thinking here inasmuch as it undermines the unity of thought and (current) being and exposes the domination of the particular by the universal.

The fetish-character of culture industry products, on the other hand, involve their production for exchange value rather than their *particular* quality, and tend to lead a life of their own inasmuch as their consumers assume a passive, unreflective role in relation to them. So not only does the culture industry lead to the decline of works themselves but also to an increase in easily-consumable repetitiveness. This repetition produces automatic reactions in the audience and compels us to accept what appears as inescapable. The ‘isolated moments of enjoyment’ that pop songs offer up become ‘an excuse for absolving the listener from the

thought of the whole' (Adorno, 1991, p. 92); we are urged to find pleasure in the isolated details and effects of these products rather than experience the real joy that comes from our thought and reflection on the way the parts interconnect and constitute the whole.²⁵ The only response such cultural products demand is passive consumption, without thought or effort or reflection, and this 'impedes the development of autonomous, independent individuals who judge and decide consciously for themselves' (ibid, p. 92). The standardised and pre-digested nature of such products – of music that does the listening for you or films that do the watching for you – removes the possibility of real choice or spontaneity. Autonomous judgements of taste are replaced by familiarity, and the notion of 'value judgements' has 'become a fiction for the person who finds himself hemmed in by standardised musical goods' (ibid, p. 26). The differences between products – e.g. types of music or film genres – are of very little creative importance and rather serve to integrate everyone into the same system. All tastes and types are provided for and every response is built-in to the product consumed; consumption becomes the only response that counts.

Alongside standardisation, Adorno emphasised the importance of pseudo-individuality to the culture industry. Once the particular qualities of a product become less important, due to standardisation and the increasing production of exchange-value for its own sake, consumers become more concerned with the *pseudo*-individuality of products – i.e. those aspects of the products singled out as unique by advertisers, such as the specific personality of a celebrity or the distinctive voice of a new singer etc. Such 'distinctiveness' has to be emphasised due to the broader context of the sameness of such cultural products and it is this that serves to give the illusion that we are consuming unique use-value rather than exchange-value for its own

²⁵ For Adorno, 'real joy' tends to lie closer to certain forms of autonomous aesthetic practice that, through *particular* experiences of intense affect, provoke unanticipated outcomes and forms of recognition and resistance. I explore this in further depth towards the end of this chapter.

sake. As Adorno suggests ‘the more dehumanised its methods of operation and content, the more diligently and successfully the culture industry propagates supposedly great personalities and operates with heart-throbs’ (1991, p. 87). Such novelty also hides the affirmation of the conventional norms of intelligibility. Pseudo-individuality functions by:

‘endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardisation itself. Standardisation of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing the listening for them. Pseudo-individualisation, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or “pre-digested”’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 45).

Although the culture industry provides us with a dazzling array of new products, and succeeds in providing for a large range of tastes, the plurality it proffers only operates at a surface level. Behind this illusion of diversity and distinctiveness lies sameness and homogeneity and, for Adorno, to take this illusion at face value would run the risk of conflating the surface plurality of products in the marketplace with the real plurality that would constitute human freedom. It would run the risk of conflating consumerist ‘choice’, largely determined by our ability to identify with the spectacular world of advertising imagery, and autonomous judgement.

If we recall the discussion of dialectical experience at the beginning of this chapter, where we considered the importance of particularity and its resistance to universal conceptions, we can see how, given the role of pseudo-individuality in the culture industry, the illusion of particularity forecloses the possibility of the kind of dialectical experience that would lead to new forms of (relative) recognition.²⁶ The individuality or particularity in cultural works that

²⁶ It is worth noting that Adorno uses the Kantian term ‘schema’ to draw parallels between the way the culture industry schematises the individual’s experience of the world and the way the schematism in Kant produces a correspondence between our concepts, or *a priori* categories, and our mental images, or representations of objects (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1997, p. 124; see also Adorno’s ‘Schema of Mass Culture’ in Adorno, 1991, pp. 53-84). Kant’s transcendental schema, itself the product of the transcendental imagination, is the positive mediating element he uses to account for the relationship between concepts and intuitions (see ‘On the

had once posed a threat to aesthetic unity – e.g. the expressiveness of colour or material in painting, musical dissonance etc – is integrated and neutralised in the culture industry; details, effects and dissonance serve only to help further the uniformity of the whole as they come to function as markers of pseudo-specificity for homogenised cultural products. It is in this aspect of the culture industry – the illusion of unity between universal and particular - that Adorno sees totalitarian tendencies where all qualitative difference and otherness are liquidated. The mismatch between the (universal) conception of the object and our (particular) *experience* of it, and the potential negation of contemporary social relations provoked by such a contradiction, is under threat once experience itself becomes exchangeable. Once ‘the real becomes an image insofar as in its particularity it becomes equivalent to the whole as one Ford car is to all the others of the same range, then the image on the other hand turns into immediate reality’ (Adorno, 1991, p. 55). Imagination plays no role here as it is ‘replaced by a mechanically relentless control mechanism which determines whether the latest imago to be distributed really represents an exact, accurate and reliable reflection of the relevant item of reality’ (ibid). Particularity is lost once it is reproduced as pseudo-individuality, and our experience of the distinction between image and reality is lost once we fetishise the image.

In addition to standardisation and pseudo-individualisation, Adorno emphasises the closed totality of desire produced by the ideology of the culture industry. Despite claiming to offer a release from the mechanistic conditions of work, the culture industry – itself standardised and mechanistic - reproduces them, and our experiences end up becoming after-images of the

schematism of pure concepts of the understanding’ in Kant, 2000, pp. 271-77); elsewhere, Adorno focuses on the metaphysical element in Kant’s schematism due to the excessive (and, for Adorno, untenable) separation between concepts and intuition (see the ‘schematism’ chapter in Adorno, 2001, pp. 128-137). The parallel Adorno draws between Kant’s schematism and the schema of the culture industry brings together nicely Adorno’s cultural critique and the philosophical approach we explored in the ‘dialectical experience’ section above.

work process. The culture industry produces a certain desire for freedom but ultimately denies its fulfilment. However, Adorno argues that if individuals have the kind of experiences in their free time that are dictated by the culture industry, then they think of themselves as free - despite mechanistic experiences - and then their dissatisfaction with the products of the culture industry is channelled back into the culture industry with its future promises of pleasure, satisfaction and freedom. Rather than these experiences leading us to question the form of (mechanical) representation of the culture industry itself, we buy into the representation and then our experiences of dissatisfaction reproduce an insatiable desire for the next thing that we hope will confirm our freedom and unify our identity. The less the products satisfy, the more they reproduce the appetite for them. When considered in relation to the notion of dialectical experience that I have outlined, where the lack of identity between concept and object leads to a re-cognition of the object and a de-position of the subject, we instead have a closed totality of desire-consumption-disappointment-desire. The disappointment when compared to our original conception of the product, taken from the claims of the culture industry, does not lead us to question the belief that such products would satisfy us and then question the industry as a whole. Instead of educating us about our conception of the object, and also our conception of ourselves, we end up with an empty experience where the lack of identity between our conception of the product and (our experience of) the product itself leads to a renewed desire for further consumption of culture industry products.

Seeing through and obeying

An oft-repeated criticism of Adorno's theory of the culture industry is that it over-states the manipulation of consumers and the 'regression' of consciousness.²⁷ However, Adorno emphasises both the way in which the culture industry relies on the 'active' participation of its consumers and the way that consumers may well 'see through' the culture industry's products but 'feel compelled to buy and use its products even though they see through them' (Adorno, 1997, p. 167). Active participation in the culture industry is required under threat of social exclusion but it becomes a 'pseudo-activity' or leisure-equivalent of 'production for its own sake' – a mirror of the mechanized work process it is seen as being an escape from. Despite the effort required here, it is less effort than that required for truly transformative cultural (and political) experiences, i.e. the kind of experiences that point beyond life as it is currently configured. Also, although consumers may well see through the products themselves, e.g. taking 'ironic' pleasure in manufactured pop music, Adorno points out that this does not constitute seeing through the illusory character of the culture industry itself:

'People are not only, as the saying goes, falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them. They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured. Without admitting it they sense that their lives would be completely intolerable as soon as they no longer clung to satisfactions which are none at all' (1991, p. 89).

For example, in his study of astrology (see Adorno, 1994) he seeks to understand how readers can 'believe' in both astrology and modern natural science despite their incompatibility.

Whilst the everyday practical advice offered by astrology columns and also the movement of the stars might be separately rational in themselves, what disturbs Adorno is the

²⁷ For example, see Kellner (1989) and (1995), and Collins (1987)

indiscriminate mixing of the two, e.g. the idea that the movement of the stars makes Wednesday a good day for building social networks etc. The link between the two is left unclear, isn't open to rational scrutiny, and the source of authority is relinquished to a remote metaphysical realm. The advice offered is commonplace and taken up by readers without needing any rational justification for the legitimacy of underlying astrological beliefs. What is disturbing about astrology for Adorno is the way in which it encourages us to hold contradictory attitudes and for the contradiction to either go unnoticed or to hold no education for us.

As with everyday life more generally, we are left with a level of ordinary and understandable activities embedded within broader social structures that, for the most part, exceed both our understanding and rational explanation. What is appealing about astrology, even to those who 'see through' it as such and who don't expect to give up their rational reservations, is that it doesn't demand much of us (e.g. faith, seriousness, commitment, or the labour of thought and reflection) but it does offer us a way of making sense of the world and gives us a certain direction. It elicits compliance by speaking to our confusions and frustrations and by offering practical solutions and comforting beliefs. The 'fate' determined by the stars reflects the 'fate' we are subject to as the result of complicated and reified social structures, that are seemingly beyond our control and unyielding to our needs; however the astrological understanding of 'fate' is more palatable as it, along with the culture industry more generally, provides us with superficial meaning and a sense of involvement and agency. It operates with an ideology that supports current social relations by suggesting that we simply adapt ourselves to the predestined path mapped out by the authority of the stars whilst also allowing for a (limited) degree of agency geared towards individual achievement and success – e.g. the (pseudo-)

activity and (pseudo-) individuality involved in our ability to heed the advice of the astrology column and to make the changes necessary to transform our fortunes. In this sense, and recalling Lowenthal's suggestion that 'mass culture is psychoanalysis in reverse' (in Jay, 1974, p. 173), astrology tends to strengthen rather than undermine our narcissistic defences whilst also offering us the security and comfort of a lack of responsibility. Astrology, and the wider culture industry, bracket out coercion and irrationality and encourage us to adapt and accept; rather than pointing beyond current reality they offer us freedom *from* the very notion of resistance to that reality. As Adorno suggests in relation to the pleasure of the culture industry:

'Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance. The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and from negation.' (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1997, p. 144).

The nihilism involved in 'seeing through' and believing (and buying) at the same time, and particularly taking ironic 'pleasure' in cultural vacuity, suggests that real change therefore involves more than simple acknowledgement of the swindle. What Adorno calls 'a tone of ironic toleration' (1991, p. 89) can be seen as a gesture of resignation in the face of an apparently inescapable totality.

The Politics of Representation

The pervasiveness of the culture industry, and its colonisation of social and symbolic reproduction, increasingly means that the individual loses his active connection to, and responsibility for, the other. Standardisation, regression of consciousness, pseudo-individualisation, and the reproduction of desire, lead to an emptying out of cultural

experience and to potentially dire consequences for mutual social relations. Rather than it being the individual's *particular* experience – and his consequent self-reflection and independent thought – which underlines his individual significance and uniqueness and binds him to others in relations of mutual care, the 'shared' experiences produced by the impersonal mechanisms of the culture industry alienates the individual from others and makes him insignificant and expendable. Rather than this 'universality' of audience experience in the culture industry marking a true reconciliation of universal and particular, it signifies a domination of the particular by the universal. Without the real (individual) experience that would bring us recognition in a symbolic community, both individualising us before the other and making us responsible in relation to the other, we end up lost and in search of meaning and also, as Rose (1996) argues, particularly vulnerable to an aesthetic of authenticity.

Gillian Rose extends Adorno's analysis in her chapter entitled 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation' (in her *Mourning Becomes the Law*, 1996), where she seeks to highlight the ways in which contemporary aesthetic, philosophical and political attempts to overcome 'representation' are complicit with the 'spirit of fascism'. Instead of following this path, one that leads from an acknowledgement of the inseparability of Fascism and representation to the argument for the overcoming of representation, she suggests that:

'Only the persistence of always fallible and contestable representation opens the possibility for our acknowledgement of mutual implication in the fascism of our cultural rites and rituals. If Fascism promises the beginnings of the day, representation exposes the interests of the middle of the day; then the owl of Minerva, flying at dusk, may reflect on the remains of the day – the ruins of the morning's hope, the actuality of the broken middles' (1996, pp. 41-42).

She argues that what is required is 'representation, the critique of representation, and the critique of the critique of representation' (1996, p. 62). She criticises what she calls

'Holocaust piety' in aesthetic representation for its attempt to witness the 'ineffable' through non-representation, i.e. for its tendency to '*mystify something we dare not understand*, because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human' (ibid, p. 43).²⁸ She pursues this point by favourably comparing the book *Schindler's Ark*, which she argues 'leaves the crisis to the reader' (ibid, p. 47) and provokes the audience to 'experience the crisis of identity in their own breasts' (ibid, p. 46), with the film adaptation *Schindler's List*, which spares the audience 'the encounter with the indecency of their position' (ibid, p. 45) and 'makes the crisis external' (ibid, p. 47). The film employs a range of mythological heroes and villains who provide us with clear ethical positions; it also relies upon the 'sentimentality of the ultimate predator ... whose complacency is left in place and wilfully reinforced' (ibid). As Rose argues:

'Schindler's List betrays the crisis of ambiguity in characterisation, mythologisation and identification, because of its anxiety that our sentimentality be left intact. It leaves us at the beginning of the day, in a Fascist security of our own unreflected predation ... It should leave us unsafe, but with the remains of the day. To have that experience, we would have to discover and confront our own fascism' (ibid, p. 48).

In contrast to this, the film *Remains of the Day* succeeds where *Schindler's List* fails:

'Without sentimental voyeurism, it induces a crisis of identification in the viewer, who is brought up flat against equally the representation of Fascism, the

²⁸ There is a tension here with Adorno's famous account, in *Negative Dialectics*, of Auschwitz as a 'model' which blocks dialectical recuperation and which also imposes on us a 'new categorical imperative' whereby we are impelled to arrange our 'thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen' (1990, p. 365). As Adorno suggests, 'our metaphysical faculty is paralysed because actual events have shattered the basis on which speculative metaphysical thought could be reconciled with experience' (1990, p. 362). For an excellent comparison of Adorno and Rose (and Lyotard) on the issue of representation, see Cohen (2003, pp. 45-50). Lyotard's (Kantian) position, as found in *The Differend* (1988) and *Heidegger and 'the Jews'* (1990), despite clear and self-conscious links to Adorno, tends to ignore its own complicity by (ironically) claiming direct access to the non-identical by conceiving of Auschwitz as 'the sublime Other of the concept' (Cohen, 2003, p. 48). Adorno and Rose on the other hand emphasise complicity, but 'where Adorno's aesthetic teaches that Auschwitz ruins representation, Rose's seems to return to representation its lost efficacy, to draw Auschwitz back into the order of historical and psychic intelligibility', and this runs the risk of not recognising its non-identity (ibid. p. 50).

honourable tradition which could not recognise the evils of Nazism, and the corporate order of the great house, and *the fascism of representation*, a political culture which we identify as our own, and hence an emotional economy which we cannot project and disown ... Instead of emerging with sentimental tears, which leave us emotionally and politically intact, we emerge with the dry eyes of a deep grief, which belongs to the recognition of our ineluctable grounding in the norms of the emotional and political culture represented, and which leaves us with the uncertainty of the remains of the day' (ibid, pp. 53-54).

The (fascistic) representation of fascism we see in *Schindler's List* separates us, as voyeur, from the events on screen; it thereby aestheticises political experience. Even if we feel 'revulsion' or 'pity', our own moral identity and sense of self remains intact and is affirmed rather than shaken. Rather than aestheticising political experience, the acknowledgement of the 'fascism of representation' on the other hand draws us into it, makes it our own. It reaches across the defences of our moral will and our particular interests and, as we saw in the section on dialectical experience above, it shakes us out of the fixity of our initial self-definition; we experience the otherness of ourselves. We acknowledge the inherent violence in our initial self-identity and undergo a transformation wherein we glimpse, albeit momentarily, the possibility of 'absolute recognition' or the universal. As we have seen from both Adorno and Rose, the culture industry and its attendant (fascistic) form of representation aestheticise political experience, protect our self-defences and particular interests, affirm our current self-identity, and prevent the possibility of transformation and 'the universal'. Rather than contributing to a reflection on, and a crisis in, our current values, they preclude such a crisis and become an extension of the status quo by reproducing dominant versions of reality rather than reconfiguring them. They stabilise a spectatorial relationship to culture and consolidate a relationship to the universal in terms of exchange relations and the consumption of commodities. Here we find the logic of civil society, of the individual in its freedom *from* others. Our cultural experience is one of consumption rather than the transformative

experience of the particularity of the object forcing us to reconfigure our conception of the world and of ourselves. Our experience of freedom is as consumer, as master over things and others, and takes the form of the freedom *from* complicity. The experience of the ‘dissolution of particular identity’ and the opening up of the possibility of real symbolic community is replaced by the shared experience of the audience as consumers. Rose makes this point in her distinction between the consumption of the holocaust as spectacle and the attempt at comprehending the holocaust. What is required of culture is that it:

‘provokes the grief of encountering the violence normally legitimised by the individual moral will, with which we defend our particular interests, and see only the egoism of the other – these may be interests of disinterested service, race, gender, religion, class. This grief expresses the crisis of the dissolution of particular identity and the vision of the universal. Across the unprotected exposure of our singularity, of our otherness to ourselves, we sense this ‘we’, which we otherwise so partially and carelessly assume’ (Rose, 1996, pp. 54-55).

What is required is our sensitivity to, and exposure of, the particular interests that lie behind claims to universalism; as with Adorno, such criticism of forms of universalism is driven by the hope and possibility of truly universal, reciprocal social subjectivity.

Tubbs (2008) builds on the work of Adorno and Rose by highlighting what he sees as the dangers inherent in both the collapse of the image/reality distinction, as we saw in the brief discussion of the culture industry, and in our freedom without complicity. He argues that without the resistance of the object as non-identical (as heterogeneous particular, as other, as qualitative), the productive (dialectical) gap between thought and being or image and reality disappears. The culture industry, alongside advertising, turns the object into an image devoid of substance; the image becomes spectacle and pure exchangeability without meaning and without reference to history, nature or politics. We come to consume the *image* of the object

or of the event rather than its concrete reality; we fetishise the image rather than the object itself. Our experience of the world is thereby foreshortened and we are separated from those elements of experience that implicate us in social and political relations. Tubbs draws out the significance of this and suggests that:

‘Here representation eschews opposition or negation by rendering all reality equivalent as image. Appearing as liberal democracy, this representation in fact marks an important development in the spirit of Fascism. It liquidates opposition by freeing everything (and everyone) from the illusion, now overcome, of the universal. Image is a form of voyeurism of totality from without, meaning that there is no totality. As such, freed from any dependence upon the object, image is the new political reality, a reality which knows it is liberated from the political *per se*’ (Tubbs, 2008, p. 79).

Tubbs extends this analysis, and the culture industry thesis more generally, in his discussion of the ‘freedom from implication’ that develops within what he calls ‘fossil fuel culture’. His discussion of fossil fuel culture is concerned with the ways in which ‘the freedoms made possible by burning fossil fuels have contributed to a culture which liberates personal freedom from the relation to the other, to death and to the universal’ (ibid, p. 69). This ‘freedom’, or rather unfreedom, involves the ‘freedom to travel without the recognition of nature as other’ and ‘freedom to shop without the recognition of labour and poverty’. We are free ‘because released from implication’ and free ‘as voyeur of a negation which is not mine’ (ibid, p. 81). Instead of a universality pointed to in the dialectic between image and reality, and thought and being, we are left with only image and a freedom which is ‘freedom from otherness *per se*’ (ibid). As Tubbs argues:

‘Thus my identity as a person, my mastery, consists in my having fossil fuel culture relieve me from all social and political relations. It relieves me from my determination as self *and* other, because it aestheticises the life and death struggle. Death is reduced to an image, something unreal, something represented in such a way as to have no actual relation to life. Death, and the slave, and the other – the carriers of the meaning of our political education – in fossil fuel culture are

entertainment. It means that I am never other because the other is not real. As such I am relieved of any experience in which I learn of myself as the master of fossil fuel culture, or as the destroyer' (ibid, p. 81).

The logical extension of this is Benjamin's comment on Marinetti and the way in which 'self-alienation has reached such a degree that it can experience its own destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the first order' (Benjamin, 1973, p. 244). It is within this context of the aestheticisation of the life and death struggle that Habermas and Honneth's accounts are found wanting. In a culture without (or limited in) negative possibilities, where we are individuals obsessed by our 'freedoms' (and 'choices') and increasingly unable to acknowledge anything or anyone outside of our particular desires, the intersubjective learning process outlined in Habermas and Honneth's communicative turn appears idealistic. This culture fosters a tendency to objectify and instrumentalise the other rather than a realisation of the ways in which we are dependent on the other's recognition.

From the above account of the culture industry and (fascistic) representation, we can see how Adorno's (and Rose's) position might go some way towards challenging Habermas and Honneth's faith in, and idealisation of, the public sphere and the reflexive models they propose. The culture industry thesis, opposed by Habermas and Honneth, calls into question the communicative autonomy presupposed in their accounts, whilst also challenging the model of intersubjectively-mediated education they see as pointing the way forward to substantive freedom. The self-reflection required by individuals in the models put forward by Habermas and Honneth is arguably curtailed by a culture that affirms individuals in their current (atomistic and acquisitive) form - a culture, and form of representation, that is abstract

and promotes freedom as freedom-from-negation or freedom from dialectical experience.²⁹ Habermas's and Honneth's versions of communicative autonomy parallel liberal conceptions of democracy inasmuch as they assume a relative autonomy of culture from economic and systemic demands alongside the possibility of collective will-formation based on rational and autonomous political judgement in the public sphere. Adorno is not necessarily saying that the latter is not possible per se, but he is concerned with the ways in which such autonomy and judgement are obstructed, and the ways in which the public sphere is liable to administration and management at the expense of genuine political participation. He also neither wants to dismiss the possibility of mutual recognition nor assume it as a given, but instead he seeks to emphasise the fact that it is a fragile, and often fleeting, *accomplishment*. For Adorno, the possibility of genuine mutual recognition is undermined by an abstract culture where the social practices that provide us with collective symbolic meaning - and make us count for, and be accountable to, each other - are replaced by impersonal mechanisms wherein we cease to count for each other.³⁰ Rather than learning about our mutual dependence and our reliance on

²⁹ A related issue regarding representation is the fundamental difference in the mode of representation between Adorno's and Habermas's work, a difference which reflects broader divergences in their social theories and which also aligns with their respective historical and theoretical presuppositions. Given Adorno's philosophical-historical concern with the growth of reification and instrumental rationality, his philosophy operates with a form of representation that is opposed to rational abstraction and to systematic and methodical approaches to theoretical understanding (especially those operating with first principles). His emphasis on the non-identical commits him to a form of representation that emphasises the reconfiguration of existing categories and the possibility of new experience, and in many ways appeals to the mimetic qualities of aesthetic experience rather than the demonstrative processes of scientific work. This also explains his use of 'speculative propositions', which seek to reveal the identity and non-identity of related but different terms (e.g. universal and particular, rationality and sensuous particularity, culture industry and advanced art etc), and also implicate the reader into the work (for an outline of Adorno's 'search for style' see Rose, 2014, pp. 15-34). Although Habermas does not explicitly thematise the form of representation at work in his philosophy, it comes as no surprise that his concern for the ways in which communication and dialogue have been deformed and repressed manifests itself in a form of representation centred around intersubjective scrutiny and domination-free interaction. The notion of the 'scientific community' - with its associated ideas of intersubjective testability and the discursive construction of scientific theory - as making knowledge possible, is his model. See Honneth (1995, pp. 104-110); also Adorno's 'The Essay as form' in Adorno (1992, pp. 3-23).

³⁰ Deranty (in Petherbridge, 2011, p. 87) nicely states that 'Capitalism is viewed by Adorno as that social organisation, which, by expanding indefinitely the logic of marketisation and commodification, produces a 'social pathology of reason' by severing subjects from their capacity to take the perspective of the other'. Adorno's position here clearly poses particular problems for Habermas's moral (or universalisation) principle (U), which we encountered in chapter 1, and also Honneth's dimension of solidarity discussed in chapter 2.

the recognition of the other, our relationships are reduced to objectification and instrumentality. Rather than culture being concerned with experience, contradiction and education, the culture industry abstracts consciousness from culture such that culture is something to be (passively) consumed instead of being something in which we are actively, and ethically, engaged.

Towards a non-reified culture

If the culture industry is a misrepresentation of ethical totality and universal subjectivity, then how might culture be otherwise? What might an Adornian version of non-reified culture and ethics look like, and how might it respond to the instrumentality and atomism of our late capitalist acquisitive culture? How might it encompass a notion of dialectical experience (with a sensitivity to otherness, non-identity and particularity), avoid the pitfalls of the culture industry outlined above (along with the ‘fascism of representation’), and in turn move beyond both the procedural, formal and idealised accounts of freedom provided by Habermas and Honneth, and the overly subjective version of aesthetic critique in Foucault’s late work? How might it also present a fuller sense of recognition than that forwarded by Honneth; one with a greater sense of complicity, fallibility and reconfiguration of self, entwined with a greater sense of responsibility to (and ethical satisfaction in) the Other? We have already made some inroads into Adorno’s response above, in the section on ‘culture and contradiction’, however I want to conclude this chapter by making these points more explicit and also relating them more explicitly to an ethics (and politics) of aesthetics.

Adorno’s work seeks to reinvigorate ethical life by emphasising the aesthetic, and related ethical, elements of social life that tend to go missing in procedural accounts of freedom and

solidarity.³¹ Not surprisingly, the role of aesthetics is downplayed in the more procedural accounts of freedom provided by Habermas and Honneth - actively sidelined by Habermas, and mostly absent for Honneth.³² As we briefly saw in chapter one, Habermas follows Weber's account of the disenchantment of the lifeworld in modernity and the separation, and institutionalisation, of autonomous value spheres.³³ These value spheres mirror Kant's outline of the different forms of judgement we make – scientific, moral and aesthetic – and Habermas connects each of these to specific human interests: the need for technical control of the natural world, the need for the rational determination of shared goals, and the need for expression.³⁴ In the wake of the collapse of religious world-views, authority shifts from religious traditions to the realm of 'validity' and each of these value spheres contain their own distinct form of validity claim and are dealt with within a specific sphere of discourse (Habermas in D'Entreves and Benhabib, eds., 1997, p. 45). Scientific-technical discourse deals with the question of truth, moral-legal discourse tackles the issue of rightness, and aesthetic discourse concerns itself with truthfulness or authenticity. Habermas accepts this rationalisation as irreversible and instead seeks to 'complete' this modern project by subjecting the different validity claims to an overarching communicative reason which appeals to the free, intersubjective agreement between participants on what counts as true, right and beautiful.

³¹ Although, of course, Adorno's position doesn't seek merely to emphasise the realm of art and aesthetics as a counterweight to the dominance of science and morality, but instead, and more radically, conceives of art and aesthetics as a realm cast out from truth, and therefore as a realm which contains the deeper (reflective) truth concerning the partial nature of, and the damage done to truth by, subsumptive reason and universal morality. I will return to this in the final section of the chapter.

³² Sinnerbrink (in Petherbridge, 2011) also questions the lack of any consideration of the (modernist) aesthetic critique of modernity in Honneth's account of recognition, suggesting that his account would benefit by exploring 'the cultural responses to distorted forms of social intersubjectivity' (p. 204).

³³ See Weber's 'Science as a Vocation' (in Gerth and Mills, ed., 1982, pp. 129-156) and 'Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions' (ibid, pp. 323-359). Here he discusses the clash between 'the religion of brotherliness' and 'the orders and values of this world' (see p. 330) and how the shift leads to disintegration, loss of community *and* loss of meaning (characterised by the differentiation of, and antagonism between, value spheres – see p. 357).

³⁴ Needless to say, Adorno's critique of the separation of the Kantian faculties and the related (autonomous) value spheres relates, contra Habermas, to those critiques of Kant, and thereby the critiques of the fragmentation of modernity, attempted by Hegel, Schiller and Schelling.

Although he is sympathetic to those who criticise the dominance of procedural rationality and scientific-technical discourse in modernity, the violence it fosters and what gets left out as a result, he is also critical of those who would seek de-differentiation, or seek to prioritise the aesthetic; instead he emphasises the need for a rebalancing of scientific, moral and aesthetic spheres.³⁵

Adorno and Foucault, contra Habermas, develop forms of philosophical thinking which seek to employ a form of (non-instrumental) aesthetics for the purposes of ethical critique; for them, aesthetics and art play a key role in broadening the goals of philosophy and transcending limited forms of rationality and social identity. Both thinkers also share a certain commitment to *autonomous* art – an art which, having lost its religious function as iconography, and been excluded from (scientific and moral) conceptions of truth and rightness, becomes an activity without clear purpose or social function as such. The political intimations of aesthetic practice are then due to its status as a refuge for those sensuous or transformative elements of human experience excluded by the rationalisation and reification of modern life. Whereas Habermas sees cultural differentiation in terms of the cognitive separation of value spheres with their different forms of validity, and all open to the emancipatory potential of communicative rationality, Adorno sees the dominance of a (universal) procedural rationality which has sacrificed meaning and particularity and transformed the three spheres into realms of technological instrumentality, formal morality and instrumentalised entertainment. In this context of disenchantment, meaning and particularity are to be discovered in aesthetics (and ethics), and autonomous art becomes an indirect realm of social and political engagement. Habermas, on the other hand, reduces art to

³⁵ See Habermas's reference to terroristic activities and the dangers of overextending one sphere, such as the aesthetic, over the others in D'Entreves and Benhabib (eds., 1997, pp. 49-50).

it's communicative potential and instead requires that any claims it might make become subject to cognitive justification and rational argumentation; thereby art is only of political significance when it is made rational, in the form of art criticism, and its 'validity' is open to rational accountability. Against Adorno and Foucault, and those more generally who display the influences of aesthetic modernism, Habermas is cautious of a political aesthetics or the extension of aesthetics into politics. On the one hand, he is critical of those who focus on the autonomy of the aesthetic sphere and criticise the process of rationalisation without acknowledging the fact that such autonomy is itself the product of rationalisation – this is particularly the case in his criticism of Foucault (Habermas, 1992, pp. 284-6). On the other hand, he sees aesthetics as merely the realm of subjective expression, emotion and intuition, and therefore without reason. Art and aesthetic ways of living are acceptable when expressing beauty and authentic desires, and as forms of protest against rationalisation, but for Habermas they cannot provide us with a positive conception of freedom or social order (Habermas, 1984, pp. 238-9).³⁶

Adorno and Foucault would of course disagree with Habermas's reduction, and sidelining, of aesthetics. They would both be concerned that the filtering of art through rational justification, even communicative reason, would potentially return us to the problems of normalisation, instrumentality and proceduralism, with the subsequent loss of particularity and an openness to the broader Other(s) of reason. However, as previously stated, Adorno does not respond to this overly rationalised position by appealing, as I've argued Foucault

³⁶ This position is at the heart of Habermas's critique of Foucault, although he tends to misrepresent Foucault's aesthetic critique of modernity, which is less concerned with the expression of an authentic inner self and more centred around the project of self-creation and stylisation – the self as a 'work of art'. In an attempt to avoid the implications of notions of inner depth and truth - ideas that allow for normalisation and oppression – Foucault's 'aesthetics of existence' pursues a radically open and experimental conception of identity. Habermas's critique of aesthetics here is also at the heart of his chapters on Derrida in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Habermas, 1992, pp. 161-184 and 185-210).

does, to an inherently free and transgressive aesthetic realm. Adorno's position on aesthetics instead remains more substantive and is tied to notions of solidarity, mutuality, and a (fragile) conception of democracy. It is a (politics of) aesthetics that, without being procedural or overly aesthetic, responds to damaged and reified social life and incorporates a responsibility for, and ethical satisfaction in, the other. As we saw at the end of the last chapter, it is this dimension that is predominantly missing from Foucault's 'aesthetics of existence'.³⁷

Foucault's tendency to idealise 'aesthetic' practice as an autonomous sphere neglects the links to wider socio-historical processes and to the importance of solidarity and recognition in the constitution of the self. His appeal to a (largely unexamined) notion of the aesthetic also fails to make wider connections to the power relations that provide the social context for aesthetic practice; despite his intentions, he fails to mediate between a position whereby cultural factors are simply reproduced in the individual, and a position where the individual freely self-creates, resulting in a broadly voluntarist ethics. His later work leaves us with an unmediated link between aesthetic practice, social context, and (critical) self-knowledge, making it difficult for us to assess the meaning and social consequences of our attempts at aesthetic self-creation, and he thereby misses the importance of the dialectical experience and education we saw in Adorno's philosophy, and also 'the persistence of always fallible and contestable representation' we saw in Rose. Instead, we end up with an isolated and inward-looking account of subjectivity and freedom, with little in the way of links between an ethics of the self and any conception, and culture, of democracy or responsibility to (and ethical satisfaction in) the other.

³⁷ Although Foucault's reflections elsewhere (e.g. Foucault in Fernet-Betancourt et al, 1987, pp. 118-120) would make me stop short of accusing Foucault, as others have, of an out and out 'aesthetic decisionism' (see Wolin, 1986). Also, Bernstein (1995, p. 166), in his critique of Habermas, makes a compelling case for seeing the importance of aesthetics in Foucault's work, not simply in terms of his later work or his earlier discussions of the transgressive nature of modernist art and literature (e.g. Artaud, Van Gogh, Klossowski etc), but in the very fabric of his own books; Bernstein argues that they are philosophically modernist works themselves and should be interpreted as asking to be '*judged*' as one would judge a work of art rather than raising a validity claim which could be vindicated by the force of better argument and outside the context of its inscription'.

Adorno's aesthetics of recognition

In the final section of this chapter, I will give a brief overview of Adorno's aesthetics as the most promising response to the problems of both communicative democracy (in its Habermasian and Honnethian forms) and Foucault's individualised aesthetics. What I believe Adorno does in his work on aesthetics is outline the possibility of a fragile community of 'spirit' in response to the suffering that is produced by commodification, identity thinking and technological rationality. Despite some important differences, his work here in many ways approximates Kant's *sensus communis* from the *Critique of Judgment*, i.e. the possibility of a 'public sense' involving the subjective exercise of judgement free from domination by either concept or law.³⁸ What Adorno proposes here is a project markedly different from Habermas's and Honneth's accounts of a communicative democracy determined by a framework of non-coercive relations that provides the broader context for the possibility of dialogical exchange and consensus. Adorno's work on aesthetics allows us a glimpse of an alternative praxis and an alternative account of recognition, one that unites – or rather promises to unite - universal and particular (and concept and intuition) in a solidarity without subsumption or domination. His account acknowledges the threat (to the self) of recognition, our subsequent attempts to avoid recognising the Other, and the importance of aesthetic experiences which - often through transformative experiences of 'shudder' – can break

³⁸ See §40 'Of taste as a kind of *sensus communis*' (Kant, 1951, pp. 135-8) where Kant suggests that 'the aesthetical judgement rather than the intellectual may bear the name of a sense common to all, if we are willing to use the word "sense" of an effect of mere reflection upon the mind, for then we understand by sense the feeling of pleasure. We could even define taste as the faculty of judging of that which makes *universally communicable*, without the mediation of a concept, our feeling in a given representation' (p. 138). Importantly, Kant also suggests that 'only where the imagination in its freedom awakens the understanding and is put by it into regular play, without the aid of concepts, does the representation communicate itself, not as a thought, but as an internal feeling of a purposive state of the mind' (ibid). For an alternative, and more explicitly political, appropriation of Kant's *sensus communis*, see Arendt's *Between Past and Future* (2006) and also her *Lectures on Kant's Philosophy* (1989). For an excellent overview of the related complex issues involved in the aestheticisation of politics and the politicisation of aesthetics, see chapter 6 in Jay (1993, pp. 71-83).

through our avoidance of recognition, however fleetingly, and point beyond reified consciousness towards the possibility of ‘genuine’ mutual recognition.³⁹

The ethical and political dimensions of Adorno’s work on aesthetics are famously odd inasmuch as they appear to mirror a cultural conservative approach, which champions high culture and autonomous art for their own sake whilst dismissing politicised art as crude and contaminated by concerns outside of aesthetic values.⁴⁰ However, it is instead art’s forced exclusion from dominant forms of cognition which concerns Adorno, along with the ways in which art’s autonomy places it in a privileged - albeit relatively impotent - position from which to challenge cultural differentiation and the foreshortened version of reason it has produced. Bernstein (1993, p. 268), in his Adornian thesis on aesthetic alienation, argues that modern politics has become ‘depoliticised’ inasmuch as it has involved an emphatic separation (and exclusion) of the particular from the universal, with the former being dominated by the latter in its many guises (e.g. identity thinking, technological rationality, commodity exchange etc)⁴¹; it is in this context that modernist art - in its autonomy, and with

³⁹ The (utopian) role of aesthetic experience in breaking through reified consciousness, or experience, in the context of instrumental/technological rationality, industrialisation, and commodification is a key feature in a number of, otherwise differing, thinkers such as Dewey and Cavell (e.g. see Dewey, 2009, and Cavell, 2002). For discussions of the links between Adorno and Dewey, see Lewis (2005) and Lysaker (1998). For further attempts to develop an Adornian notion of aesthetics and recognition, see Foster (2011) and Seel (2004).

⁴⁰ Adorno is not simply arguing that high culture and autonomous art are to be championed for their own sake, i.e. the cultural conservative approach, nor would he in any way accept the argument that they should be demonised due to their very existence, i.e. the postmodern response to the conservative critic.

⁴¹ Bernstein further substantiates this point, which in turn is an extension of Marx’s argument in *On The Jewish Question* (1992, pp. 211-41), arguing that liberal politics separates the individual from the collective, and separates him from his own concrete (heteronomous) interests and desires, by emphasising ‘respect’ for others (institutionalised in the form of legal equality) and by asserting an individual’s freedom to pursue his own goals without interference from the will of others. A key aspect of this is the separation between a (silenced) private sphere - containing those elements of particularity, concrete individual need, ethics, sensuous desire etc - and a political sphere of abstract and legal persons with formal rights and responsibilities. We have also seen echoes of this in the work of Habermas and Honneth, despite their critical engagement with the issue, inasmuch as both have accepted that the individual (and cultural) needs that are relegated to the private sphere are non-universalisable and therefore excluded from truth and morality. An account that has similarities to Bernstein’s, whilst emphasising the gendered nature of the public/private split, is available in Benhabib (1986). She shares a similar concern with Honneth, in terms of doing greater justice to the unique and concrete ‘other’ than Habermas’s account allows; however, as with Honneth, and unlike Bernstein, Benhabib believes that the

its alternative synthesis of universal and particular alongside its concern for sensuous particularity - can be said to assume a truly critical (and political) position. This position is very different to, and in many ways explicitly opposed to, those attempts to politicise art in a more direct way.

The most relevant attempt to politicise art, and one with which Adorno engaged, was that put forward by Benjamin in his 1936 essay 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction' (Benjamin, 1973). Here Benjamin was generally concerned with the possibility of a coherent Marxist position on culture, and specifically concerned with countering what he saw as fascism's 'aestheticisation of the political' which sought to 'organise the newly created proletarian masses without affecting the property structure which the masses strive to eliminate'; it did this by giving the masses 'a chance to express themselves' (Benjamin, 1973, p. 243). In response to this, and contra Adorno, he argued that art should give up its pretensions to autonomy and, in response, communism should be concerned with 'politicizing art' (ibid, p. 244). For him, autonomous bourgeois art had sought to counteract the pernicious effects of commodified culture, but in the context of Fascism had ended up impotent at best or, even worse, an aesthetic resource for Fascism to draw upon. It is Benjamin's alternative suggestion of a non-autonomous and politicised art, alongside his (ambiguous) celebration of the decline of aura precipitated by mechanical reproduction, which marks the point of disagreement between him and Adorno.

For Benjamin, the mechanical reproducibility of art – i.e. the circulation of multiple copies of the 'original' – and its acceptance by the audience poses a direct challenge to those

concrete other can be simply added to Habermas's account as a (rational) extra without radically transforming the terms of engagement.

institutions whose power and authority has relied on the unique and sacred character of art. The unique artwork, be it in the form of an idol or statue, had been imbued with an ‘aura’ of magical power and detached authority, and such power had been seen to emerge from within and to be free from human involvement and control. For Benjamin, a central component of the aura carried by the artwork was its singularity and irreproducibility.⁴² The process of mechanical reproducibility was seen to detach the audience from the ritual, and auratic, elements of aesthetics and politics and instead turn them into (potentially) critical and rational observers. Film as a medium, for example, was not only to be championed for its separation of the viewer from ritualistic practice (e.g. from the more immediate experiences of theatre), but also for the collective nature of its production and consumption and its ability to produce ‘shock effects’ in the audience (Benjamin, 1973, p. 240). The ‘shock effects’ - produced by the use of montage with its sudden changes and juxtapositions – was seen as preventing aesthetic closure and as highlighting the artificial nature of the medium whilst disrupting the simple consumption of images and requiring the active contemplation of the viewer. The collective aspect of film was also seen as posing a direct challenge to the private production and consumption of bourgeois art, which Benjamin saw as isolating and passifying the spectator, and as opening up new possibilities for the communication of political ideals (ibid, pp. 236-7).

⁴² Of course, for Adorno the aura takes on a different significance. What is to be preserved here is the ‘freedom toward the object’ and the ‘objective meaning that surpasses subjective intention’ (1997, p. 275). It relates to the ‘shudder’ experienced in the face of overwhelming nature, and to those important works of art which point us towards the experience of the Other in its otherness, non-identity, and sensuous particularity. As I will argue, Adorno emphasises the importance of this in interrupting our narcissistic, and subsumptive, forms of rational subjectivity. However, both Adorno and Benjamin recognised the ways in which those negative aspects Benjamin associates with aura – i.e. cultic value, ritual, and authority – are mass produced in the culture industry which fosters a ‘cult of stars’ and operates with a range of devices such as sentimentality and romanticism (Adorno, 1991, p. 88). There are parallels to be made for both Adorno and Benjamin between the aestheticisation at work in Fascism, which seeks to conceal social contradictions by appealing to pre-modern aesthetic categories, and the mass production of aura in the culture industry. As Benjamin argues, ‘film responds to the shrivelling of the aura with an artificial build-up of the “personality” outside the studio. The cult of the movie star, fostered by the money of the film industry, preserves not the unique aura of the person but the “spell of the personality,” the phony spell of a commodity’ (Benjamin, 1973, p. 233).

For Adorno, Benjamin's Brechtian reduction of art to explicit political assertion or performance both assumes the possibility of direct communication with the audience and runs the risk of sacrificing the degree of autonomy required to provide a sufficient critique of contemporary societies. For him, the communicative conception of art fails to take seriously the extent to which reification and commodification have precluded the possibility of direct and immediate expression (see Adorno in Jameson (ed.), 2007, pp 165-195). Populist realism, which Adorno discerns in the otherwise differing positions of Lukács and Brecht, is particularly critically impotent from this point of view, even when it seeks to expose the myriad ways in which capitalism glosses over its own inherent contradictions. For Adorno, the significance of art – i.e. its ability to negate existent reality - is lost once it is subordinated to political function; by speaking the language of existent reality, politically committed work is always in danger of incorporation. If a central concern of Adorno's critical theory is to put an end to the dominance of instrumental reason - whereby reason is conceived as a tool which subsumes the particularity of the object under universal categories, a process culminating in the capitalist subsumption of use-value by exchange-value – then the notion that art should serve as a political *instrument* is in danger of universalising that instrumentality. Inasmuch as art has a 'function' or role in the context of late capitalism, it is its 'functionlessness' that is important: as Adorno suggests, 'the instrumentalisation of art sabotages its opposition to instrumentalisation; only where art respects its own immanence does it convict practical reason of its lack of reason' (Adorno, 1997, pp. 320-1).

Adorno's alternative conception of the relationship between art and politics is one in which 'autonomous' art, in negating empirical reality in its current form, holds out the possibility (or thought) of a non-violent reconciliation between universal and particular, between finite and

infinite, between subjects and between subjects and nature. Advanced works of art are to configure and anticipate a genuine collective sociality, albeit one conceived negatively. This is not to say that such art works assure us of a coming utopia, but rather that they keep open the possibility of new experience – a matter of great urgency for Adorno given the late capitalist context of a culture industry which, as we have seen, liquidates the possibility of a change in our social experience and which seeks to assert present empirical reality as absolute. It is in this context that Adorno emphasises the importance of the (illusory) autonomy of art, an illusion which is not simply to be dissolved in the name of ideology-critique, but rather redeemed in the spirit of freedom.⁴³

To explore the significance of these ideas in relation to Adorno's aesthetic theory, it is important to briefly consider his account of the 'illusory' autonomy of art. Central to his account of the rise of autonomous art, and its separation from ritual, is the commodification of culture in both its production and consumption. Whereas Benjamin concentrated on the role of technology in separating art from aura and ritual, Adorno emphasises the role of the broader mode of production in this separation and its impact not only on technically reproducible art forms but also on the material and character of high art. Art's claim to autonomy – the claim to obey its own laws and to be unique and valuable in itself – is a *historical* development. For Hegel, the emancipation of art from fulfilling a pre-established social role was characterised by the shift from 'classical' (Greek) art - where art was not part

⁴³ There are clear parallels here between Adorno's account of the truth content in the illusory character of art and his, seemingly paradoxical, account of the truth content of ideology (see his 'Ideology' in Viertel, ed., 1973, pp. 182-205). To dismiss concepts such as freedom and justice, and by extension the 'illusory' character of art, as mere ideology is to close down the possibility of new experience and a better world for Adorno. Although 'justice' and 'freedom' might be inaccurate as descriptive concepts, they do contain a prescriptive truth that we should seek to redeem rather than dismiss as a metaphysical anachronism. If ideology in late capitalism is as Adorno describes – i.e. it seeks to turn the 'what is' of existent reality into 'what ought to be' – then we should be wary of all tendencies to remove the normative claims contained in our concepts of freedom, justice and autonomy.

of a specialised sphere but rather pervaded all aspects of communal life - to 'romantic' (Christian and modern) art. This historical development saw an increasing shift towards autonomously selected subject matter, and the self-reflexive treatment of it, at the expense of the political and cultural significance of the artwork.⁴⁴ There are a number of parallels between Hegel and Adorno's accounts of this transition, although it is the transition from feudalism to capitalism that is decisive for Adorno's account of art. He argues that it is the commodity character of art, and the commodification of culture in general, which prompted art's separation from its functional role - determined by politics and ritual - and allowed it to make a claim to autonomy.

The (dialectical) irony involved in the work of art's critical capacity is the fact that its opposition to a world characterised by commodity fetishism and reification is a product of the work of art's own fetishised character. Adorno is not claiming that the autonomous work of art draws its resistant qualities from somehow escaping the clutches of a commodified world, but rather that its status as an 'absolute commodity' ironically distances it from the ideological claims of a commodity producing society. In a world dominated by the commodity form, where production is production of exchange value for its own sake, commodities operate under the illusion that they are use-values. Unlike the commodity form more generally, the autonomous artwork, in its form as absolute commodity, does not conceal the fact that it is the result of production for its own sake. Adorno argues that:

'If artworks are in fact absolute commodities in that they are a social product that has rejected every semblance of existing for society, a semblance to which commodities otherwise urgently cling, the determining relation of production, the

⁴⁴ In many ways, Hegel sees this as a shift from social transparency to a (formal) freedom without transparency. See Hegel (1988, particularly section 2, chapter 3 on 'The Dissolution of the Classical Form of Art', pp. 502-16, and section 3 on 'The Romantic Form of Art', pp. 517-551). For an interesting reading of Hegel's aesthetics, see chapter 4 of Rose (1981) - 'The Division of Labour and Illusion', pp. 121-48.

commodity form, enters the artwork equally with the social force of production and the antagonism between the two. The absolute commodity would be free of the ideology inherent in the commodity form, which pretends to exist for-another, whereas ironically it is something merely for-itself: It exists for those who hold power.’ (Adorno, 1997, p. 236).⁴⁵

A crucial element here is the fact that the illusory autonomy of art has a double character. On the one hand, its claim to autonomy – which Adorno refers to as its ‘fetish-character’ - enhances the illusory nature of its independence; on the other hand it makes the thought of true freedom from domination imaginable. In the context of Adorno’s analysis of late capitalism, art’s illusory claim to autonomy signifies the resistance of qualitative uniqueness to quantitative exchangeability. As he argues:

‘art becomes social by its opposition to society, and it occupies this position only as autonomous art. By crystallizing in itself as something unique to itself, rather than complying with existing social norms and qualifying as “socially useful,” it criticises society by merely existing, for which puritans of all stripes condemn it. There is nothing pure, nothing structured strictly according to its own immanent law, that does not implicitly criticise the debasement of a situation evolving in the direction of a total exchange society in which everything is heteronomously defined. Art’s asociality is the determinate negation of a determinate society... Art keeps itself alive through its social force of resistance; unless it reifies itself, it becomes a commodity. Its contribution to society is not communication with it but rather something extremely mediated: It is resistance in which, by virtue of inner-aesthetic development, social development is reproduced without being imitated. At the risk of its self-alienation, radical modernity preserves art’s immanence by admitting society only in an obscured form, as in the dreams with which artworks have always been compared. Nothing social in art is immediately social, not even when this is its aim’ (Adorno, 1997, pp. 225-6).

⁴⁵ However, this notion of the artwork as produced for its own sake is frequently in danger of claiming access to a realm of use-value or ‘real’ needs, i.e. as being the expression of ‘real’ or ‘natural’ needs in a world of falsely created needs. For Adorno, as we have seen, late capitalism is characterised by the all-pervasive nature of exchange-value - by the way in which access to use-value is thoroughly mediated by exchange value, and the distinction between true and false needs is blurred - such that any claim to direct access to use-value or ‘real’ need itself becomes an ideological veil. Direct access to use-value depends on the transformation of reified social relations, on the end of production of exchange value for its own sake; access is only possible through the criticism of reified relations, and such criticism is itself dependent on the end of such relations. In relation to artworks, it is not simply a case of protecting them from sale in the marketplace, and therefore of protecting their authenticity or purity, because their fetish character is an integral part of what they are.

Art's connection to the social, without being 'immediately social', is the way in which it mirrors 'social development' albeit differently and through its 'inner-aesthetic development'. Modern art's concern with its own internal developments is part of its autonomy, and also appears to be non-social due its tendency to sever direct forms of communication; however Adorno asserts that 'the communication of artworks with what is external to them, with the world from which they blissfully or unhappily seal themselves off, occurs through non-communication' (ibid, p. 5). Non-representation and dissonance in modernist forms of visual art, literature and music can therefore be comprehended in these terms. For Adorno, 'the acute reason today for the social inefficacy of artworks – those that do not surrender to crude propaganda – is that in order to resist the all-powerful system of communication they must rid themselves of any communicative means that would perhaps make them accessible to the public' (ibid, p. 243).

For Adorno, art's asociality is not simply wilful incomprehensibility for its own sake, or simply an elitist quest for exclusivity, rather it is the outcome of its (historical) exclusion from a rational(ised) modernity dominated by scientific-technological and moral reason - in both their institutionalised and everyday practical forms - and by commodification. As Bernstein (1993, p. 211) argues, 'art is the remainder, the result of the exclusions which allowed enlightened rationality and an autonomous economy to centre themselves without the encumbrances of the claims of sensuousness or teleology (the submersion of use-value by exchange value)'. Having lost its significance and authority in wider communal life, Adorno suggests that art came to acknowledge that its own claims to significance were to be found internally, i.e. within the elements of its own practice. So, for example, representational paintings gave way to those which emphasised the material nature of the paint used, or

focused on shapes and colour, or reflected on the surface of the canvas itself; literature shifted from realist representations to a concern with words and narrative themselves etc. This turn towards technique and the exploration of forms became a (if not *the*) driving force of aesthetic production, and a process (or inner logic) of internal rationalisation developed whereby art came to continually question its own principles of production, its own forms of authority, and even its own existence. In this way, modernist art pursued its 'autonomous' quest to produce works that emphasised their own internal intelligibility without being answerable to external (moral, political, religious, traditional) forms, or to the confines of cognitive and moral discourse. This helps us to make sense of modernist attempts to refuse interpretation, and therefore cognition, and to continually resist being categorised and subsumed within previous art traditions or movements.

The importance of this inward turn for Adorno also involves the fact that, in its continual reflection on itself as an autonomous practice in the context of cultural differentiation and disintegration, modernist art came to criticise modernity (albeit mostly implicitly rather than necessarily consciously) for its exclusion of sensuous experience and particularity. The (critical) aesthetic response to this was not only an exploration of what had been left to it in the context of a divided reason (science, morality, art), but also an alternative praxis which foregrounded our sensuous (embodied) engagement with things without seeking to subsume such experience under abstract (predetermined) concepts. We can therefore make more sense of the lack of direct communication in modernist art, its unintelligibility and the need for (discursive) interpretation, as being one of the elements that marks out its solidarity with sensuous particularity. In addition to this, in its autonomy and its practice, art came to recognise not only the ways in which it had been disfigured itself (as non-cognitive), but also

the disfigurement of dominant (non-aesthetic) forms of reason in their separation from the particularity of their objects. The privileged position of modernist art, in the context of the separation of value spheres, is that its own internal ('cognitive') logic of rationalisation involves a critical reflection on the state of (fragmented, divided, and instrumental) reason itself. Rather than being separated, and isolated, in its own sphere, Adorno argues that modernist art resists differentiation by making not only aesthetic claims (beyond mere beauty) and ethical claims (beyond *formal* morality), but also cognitive claims (beyond subsumption and towards a differently configured cognition). Art's capacity to do this, to appear meaningful and to engage us in reflection and judgement on *its* terms and beyond discursive comprehension, is what makes it matter and gives it significance for Adorno. Although, of course, its claims and its significance arise from its autonomous position, which itself was (historically) formed as a position of powerlessness and exclusion, and therefore the 'cognitive' character of art predominantly appears as non-cognitive, meaningless, and irrational, in the context of a subsumptive (and exclusionary) rationality.

However, Adorno also argues that art's autonomy is only possible when it is not made total. What he means by this is that by seeking after the merely beautiful – e.g. in the attempt of the aestheticist movement to establish art as an end in itself as 'art for art's sake' - art relinquishes its position of 'critical' autonomy and 'becomes entangled in the fate of artificial ornamentation' (Adorno, 1997, p. 237). For Adorno, therefore, the social situation of art is aporetic:

'If art cedes its autonomy, it delivers itself over to the machinations of the status quo; if art remains strictly for-itself, it nonetheless submits to integration as one harmless domain among others. The social totality appears in this aporia, swallowing whole whatever occurs. That works renounce communication is a

necessary yet by no means sufficient condition of their unideological essence’ (ibid, p. 237).

Art is caught in a difficult position: it has to carefully tread the line between remaining autonomous, and thereby critical of existing empirical reality on the one hand, and simply becoming an illusory, trivial, and affirmative object of aesthetic beauty without cognitive claims on the other – *merely art*. It is the *risk* taken by modernist art in its refusal of aesthetic beauty, or of being ‘merely art’, which attests to its truth-content. Adorno seeks to emphasise the ‘cognitive’ content of art whilst arguing that artworks refuse any clear-cut synthesis of cognitive-rational and mimetic components; in contrast to the identity-thinking of instrumental reason, which covers over the domination and conflict that exists between universal and particular, he suggests that artworks instead bear witness to this conflict in the tension they display between their cognitive-rational and mimetic elements. He argues that:

‘A successful work ... is not one which resolves objective contradictions in a spurious harmony, but one which expresses the idea of harmony negatively by embodying the contradictions, pure and uncompromised, in its innermost structure’ (in Connerton (ed.), 1976, p. 274).

For art to bear witness to the promise of a reconciled society - of a reconciliation between universal and particular – from within an unreconciled society, it must contain the oppositions and contradictions and present these in an unresolved form: this is its ‘truth-content’. The key opposition for Adorno is between the (particular) mimetic and (universal) discursive-rational components of artworks: what Adorno calls ‘the dialectic of rationality and mimesis immanent to art’ (1997, p. 54). Mimesis, or the non-instrumental attempt to assimilate to the object and to know it in its ‘particularity’ – what Adorno refers to as ‘the nonconceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other’ (ibid, p. 54) – has been confined to the ‘aesthetic’ sphere, whilst discursive rationality, or the instrumental attempt to classify

the object under 'universal' categories, has been the exclusive territory of scientific-technological rationality.⁴⁶ The 'cognitive character' of art is important in this context, as it suggests that advanced artworks are those that do not simply conform to the mimetic function designated to them by modern rationality's separation of classification and mimesis.

Adorno suggests that artworks, despite their claims to autonomy, are inevitably tied to the empirical world inasmuch as they rely on certain empirical components that make them up. Of central importance is the way in which components, which are not particularly meaningful in themselves, are configured within artworks and formed into a whole that displays (new) meaning. Sounds, words, colours, and forms themselves do not have fixed discernible meanings as such but find meaning in their relationships and in the context of earlier, and later, artistic developments. This organisation of components is not to be understood simply in terms of subjective interpretation nor in terms of 'objectivity' in any traditional sense. It is the way that artistic form organises meaning, and also how this meaning exceeds the subjective intention of artist and audience, which Adorno refers to as the cognitive-rational element in art. It is also important to acknowledge, however, that what Adorno calls the 'truth-content' of art – that is produced in these configurations and discovered in the cognitive character of art - does not contain a transhistorical essence or something true for all time; instead it is often found in the 'determinate negation of what is false'. By criticising what is,

⁴⁶ There are clear parallels here with the relationship Adorno discusses between philosophy and art. As previously noted, Adorno's philosophy – his own form of representation - in many ways attempts to assimilate itself to aesthetics, i.e. to make itself like the aesthetic objects it analyses. This explains his often unusual writing style, e.g. his use of shock, exaggeration, constellations, provocations and speculative propositions etc. However, Adorno is also aware of the relationship, and differences between, art and philosophy – for example, the fact that 'art requires philosophy, which interprets it in order to say what it is unable to say, whereas art is only able to say it by not saying it' (1997, p. 72). He seeks a mutuality between them, where art (as particular/intuition) bears witness to the separation of the universal and particular, and the domination of the latter by the former; philosophy (as universal/concept), on the other hand, articulates the nature of that separation and domination whilst being implicated and complicit in what it articulates. He suggests that philosophy has a delicate role to play in balancing the line between a discursivity, which often compromises the 'truth' of art, and an assimilation, which risks the loss of (discursive) meaning.

and what has come before, artworks hold out the possibility of new experience – of the kind of experience excluded from instrumental reason – and thereby point to the possibility of reconciliation: for Adorno, ‘the fact that artworks exist signals the possibility of the nonexisting ... the possibility of the possible’ (Adorno, 1997, p. 132). They do this by reconfiguring existing materials (e.g. sounds, words, colours, forms etc) which, rather than having any timeless meaning, contain *historical* meaning.⁴⁷

The ways in which artworks are configured is important for Adorno, inasmuch as they provide us with an alternative view of what real praxis could be – he suggests that ‘the process enacted internally by each and every artwork works back on society as the model of a possible praxis in which something on the order of a collective subject is constituted’ (1997, 242). Artworks utilise form and materials in a non-subsumptive, non-dominating manner, and therefore provide an image of a real praxis which would involve a form of cognition that does not exclude the aesthetic or the particular. Aesthetic form is not simply conceptual but is always already concrete and material, thereby making its meaning contextual and avoiding the domination of sensuous particularity characteristic of subsumptive rationality, capital exchange relations, and procedural accounts of freedom. As Adorno argues, ‘everything appearing in the artwork is virtually content as much as it is form, whereas form remains that by which the appearing determines itself and content remains what is self-determining’ (ibid, p. 145). Art forms both approximate and diverge from conceptuality; they approximate inasmuch as they seek to synthesise their internal elements, but they diverge from

⁴⁷ The historical character of the materials also means that not only is the notion of immediacy problematic – e.g. the idea that certain colours or chords have natural expressive effects – but also that previously shocking or transgressive artworks and materials become commonplace and neutralised, as suggested above, by the fate of abstract art as corporate decoration for example. The resistant impulse of autonomous art is constantly under threat by the pernicious effects of the administered world, and previously radical, non-representational art becomes ‘suitable for decorating the walls of the newly prosperous’ (Adorno, 1997, p. 229).

conceptuality by avoiding subsumption and closure of meaning; Adorno conceives of art works as synthesising both conceptual and intuitive aspects. By avoiding subsumption, and reconfiguring the form that synthesis takes, (modernist) works of art do justice to, and reinstate, sensuous particularity - 'in art the concept becomes qualitatively other than collections of characteristics shared by empirical objects' (ibid, p. 96). This image of a different cognition, and an alternative praxis, is one where reason would no longer be divided from its object, would be ends rather than merely means oriented, and also where rationality and particularity would be mutually constituting. As Adorno argues:

'What makes aesthetic comportment as irrational according to the criteria of dominant rationality is that art denounces the particular essence of a *ratio* that pursues means rather than ends. Art reminds us of the latter and of an objectivity freed from the categorical structure. This is the source of art's rationality, its character as knowledge. Aesthetic comportment is the capacity to perceive more in things than they are; it is the gaze under which the given is transformed into an image' (ibid, p. 330).

Art risks alternative forms of meaning and synthesis in an attempt to expose the partial nature of meaning in both scientific-technological and practical reason; for Adorno 'art is no more concept than it is pure intuition, and it is precisely thereby that art protests against their separation' (ibid, p. 96). However, Adorno suggests that these alternatives are only possible in the form of autonomous art, and this therefore entails the problem that we are left with an illusory form of meaning and synthesis. Art provides us with an *image* of alternative praxis only, and this image is trapped within art's own illusory world, a world which is excluded from the everyday (and scientific) realm of cognitive meaningfulness and practical reason. Art wants to be more than illusion but fails to be so; however, for Adorno, it does bear witness to a historical disfigurement of truth and therefore contains a historical potentiality.

It is worth briefly noting at this point how Adorno's position on art builds on Kant's aesthetics. As Bernstein (1993, p. 211) argues:

'the Kantian thought that aesthetic awareness mimics the unifying work of conceptual judgement without however actually bringing the art object under a concept becomes both a conception of artistic practice, of how artistic form is to deal with its materials, and a statement about the socio-historical predicament of art rather than an a priori account of it'.

Adorno proposes a 'dialectical aesthetics' which moves beyond both a 'subjective aesthetics' which is 'either abstractly transcendental or arbitrary in its dependence on individual taste' and an 'objective aesthetics' which 'overlooks the objective mediatedness of art by the subject' (Adorno, 1997, p. 166). He suggests that 'in the artwork the subject is neither the observer nor the creator nor absolute spirit, but rather spirit bound up with, preformed and mediated by the object' (ibid.). Kant's aesthetics recognised this inasmuch as he understood that beauty is not simply an inherent quality of the object that can be appealed to without recourse to subjective experience, whilst also arguing that beauty cannot be reduced to individual feeling and taste. Aesthetic judgement does not have the same 'objectively' binding characteristics associated with conceptual or scientific judgement, but it also makes a *claim* to universality rather than simply reflecting (heteronomous) individual gratification. It is Kant's *transcendental* solution to the difficulty of a *sensus communis*, or a 'sense common to all' (Kant, 1951, p. 136), however which draws disagreement from Adorno. Kant identifies this combination of the non-conceptual and a 'sense common to all' in the subjective conditions of the possibility of experience:

'he who feels pleasure in the mere reflection upon the form of an object without respect to any concept although this judgement be empirical and singular, justly claims the agreement of all men, because the ground of this pleasure is found in the universal, although subjective, condition of reflective judgements, viz. the purposive harmony of an object (whether a product of nature or of art) with the

mutual relations of the cognitive faculties (the imagination and the understanding), a harmony which is requisite for every empirical cognition' (Kant, 1951, p. 28).

In other words, I find pleasure in what is beautiful due to the way in which it excites the free play of the imagination – a faculty of reason shared by all. Kant believed that the imagination, which played a key role in the synthesis of concept and intuition in his first critique, could be separated from the conceptual rules of the understanding such that I can have an experience which is, in-itself, free from concepts but to which my imagination creates an indeterminate unity. Although this unity, in which I find pleasure, is *my* perception, it is due to a capacity shared by all beings with imagination. Despite agreeing with Kant's critique of the notion that aesthetic judgement is merely subjective, Adorno criticises Kant's *transcendental* attempt to use the subject to ground aesthetic objectivity as ultimately 'subjective' due to the neglect of art objects themselves which are then only perceived through the lens of the subject, i.e. the lens of those who create or judge them (see Adorno, 1997, pp. 10-13). Adorno suggests that Kant acknowledges the aporia between the mimetic and cognitive-rational aspects of artworks but neglects their cognitive character or 'truth-content', something Adorno also argues cannot be understood simply through the subjective intentions of the artist or through audience reception. In addition to this, Adorno takes Kant's 'transcendental' aesthetics to task for turning the *historical* experience of the autonomy of art into a transhistorical invariant (ibid. p. 10).⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Hegel was already critical of such a transhistorical approach in his distinction between the classical and romantic work of art (for Hegel on Kant's aesthetics, see Hegel, 1988, pp. 56-61). However, despite Adorno's agreement with Hegel's critique of Kant's aesthetics for being ultimately subjective and ahistorical, he ultimately charges 'Hegel's objective idealism' for becoming a 'crass, virtually unreflected partisanship for subjective spirit' (Adorno, 1997, p. 75).

In his quest for a ‘progressive dialectical aesthetics’ (Adorno, 1997, p. 77), Adorno does however pursue Kant’s concern for the role of natural beauty and the sublime.⁴⁹ He concentrates on the parallels between the experience of artworks and the aesthetic experience of nature, and particularly focuses on their shared incomprehensibility and the challenges they pose to our subjective (and subsumptive) conceptualisations of intuition. He argues that:

‘What is beautiful in nature is what appears to be more than what is literally there. Without receptivity there would be no such objective expression, but it is not reducible to the subject; natural beauty points to the primacy of the object in subjective experience. Natural beauty is perceived both as authoritatively binding and as incomprehensible that questioningly awaits its solution. Above all else it is this double character of natural beauty that has been conferred on art’ (ibid, p. 70-71).

Natural beauty and the sublime – ‘which Kant reserved exclusively for nature [but] later became the historical constituent of art itself’ (ibid, p. 196) – challenge our (reified) subjective experience and provoke an alternative experience which asks us to reconceptualise the other and ourselves in relation to that other. For Adorno, art inherits this role inasmuch as its objectifications not only present us with an image of an alternative praxis but, in the process, also confront us with dissonant experiences which jar with our current forms of cognition and conceptuality; the art object is thereby placed in a (sublime) position of incomprehensibility, and encourages us to encounter it in a mimetic, rather than subsumptive, manner. Adorno draws out these parallels and suggests that ‘the ascendancy of the sublime is one with art’s compulsion that fundamental contradictions not be covered up but fought through in themselves’ (ibid, p. 196).

⁴⁹ Contra Hegel’s dismissal of natural beauty which ‘flickers out without a trace of it being recognisable in art beauty’ due to it not being ‘thoroughly ruled and defined by spirit’ (Adorno, 1977, p. 76).

Adorno refers to the ‘feeling of being overwhelmed when faced with an important work’ in terms of a ‘shudder’ (1997, p. 79), and he refers to this shudder as ‘the irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness’ (ibid, p. 245). The modernist sublime is capable of producing the kind of shudder - a mixture of feelings of fear, wonder and reverence - usually only experienced when confronted by an uncontrollable, and incomprehensible, nature. He suggests that ‘under patient contemplation artworks begin to move (and) to this extent they are truly afterimages of the primordial shudder in the age of reification’ (ibid). He goes on to argue that:

‘Ultimately, aesthetic comportment is to be defined as the capacity to shudder, as if goose bumps were the first aesthetic image. What later came to be called subjectivity, freeing itself from the blind anxiety of the shudder, is at the same time the shudder’s own development; life in the subject is nothing but what shudders, the reaction to the total spell that transcends the spell. Consciousness without shudder is reified consciousness. That shudder in which subjectivity stirs without yet being subjectivity is the act of being touched by the other. Aesthetic comportment assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it. Such a constitutive relation of the subject to objectivity in aesthetic comportment joins eros and knowledge’ (ibid, p. 331).

This shudder is the experience of the Other in its otherness, its alterity, its non-identity, and its sensuous particularity. It interrupts our narcissistic, subsumptive, rational subjectivity, for Adorno, and produces ‘real experiences’ whereby ‘the subject’s petrification in his own subjectivity dissolves and the narrowness of his self-posedness is revealed’ (ibid, p. 269).⁵⁰

It is the non-identity, and the lack of reconciliation, expressed in art works that confronts the viewer with an object or experience that transgresses their current means of categorisation.

⁵⁰ Of course, Adorno is keen to distinguish these experiences (‘in which recipients forget themselves and disappear into the work’ – 1997, p. 244) from those of the culture industry. He argues that: ‘Shudder, radically opposed to the conventional idea of experience [*Erlebnis*], provides no particular satisfaction for the I; it bears no similarity to desire. Rather, it is a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude. This experience [*Erfahrung*] is contrary to the weakening of the I that the culture industry manipulates. For the culture industry the idea of the shudder is idle nonsense ... To catch even the slightest glimpse beyond the prison that it itself is, the I requires not distraction but rather the utmost tension’ (ibid, p. 245). For a discussion of the distinction between the experiences of *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* as it appears in a range of thinkers from Benjamin to Dilthey, Gadamer, and Dewey, see Jay (2005).

The viewer's, or subject's, experience of mismatch between concept and intuition provokes an awareness of their own limits or boundaries and the need to reconstitute them.

This emphasis on non-identity and the lack of reconciliation is, unsurprisingly, a key point of contention between the Adornian 'model' outlined here and the position taken by those committed to the communicative turn in critical theory. In many ways, this area of disagreement encapsulates much of what is at stake between the two models of a critical theory, and can be seen particularly in the work of Albrecht Wellmer. Wellmer criticises Adorno's work on modern art for relying too heavily on an 'aesthetics of reconciliation' (Wellmer, 1998, p. 158).⁵¹ He is taken to task for his 'dialectics of subjectification and reification (i.e. the dialectics of enlightenment)', which Wellmer sees as leading to 'the polarity of complete negativity and reconciled spirit', and for not developing 'an adequate conception of the intersubjectivity of language which would have allowed him to link the disenchantment of the world – the "explosion of metaphysical meaning" – to a gain in communicative rationality' (ibid, pp. 161-2). Rather than reading the link between 'the emancipation of the modern subject and the loss of objectively assured systems of meaning' in terms of the connection between subjectification and reification, Adorno should have considered this as 'the price that has to be paid by subjects who are trying to emancipate themselves from tradition and convention' (ibid); rather than a 'catastrophe of spirit' he should have seen 'the condition of a spirit that has come to recognise itself as finite, and which, as it reflects upon its own finitude, might be able to discover and develop its potential as a potential for communicative reason' (ibid, p. 162).

⁵¹ See also Wellmer (1991), particularly his 'Truth, Semblance, Reconciliation' chapter.

It is in this context that Wellmer suggests that advanced artworks should be committed to, and understood as provoking, the possibility of ‘communicatively shared meaning’ (1998, p. 177). Modern art, for Wellmer, transforms ‘the finitude, the fragmentariness, the unfathomableness of meaning and its subjects into aesthetic sense’ and ‘fires the finite world of communicative meaning with excitement and makes its colours glow’ (ibid). For Wellmer, and those who embrace the Habermasian communicative turn in general, aesthetic ‘truth’ – as well as discursive truth – should be subsumed under the norms of communicative reason (e.g. see Habermas in D’Entrèves and Benhabib, eds., 1997); its truth-content would therefore lie in the universal (and transparent) communicability of meaning. Habermas – alongside Wellmer and Honneth – sees aesthetic representation in discursive terms, such that the relation between image and discourse can be rendered discursively (Habermas in D’Entrèves and Benhabib, eds., 1997, pp. 51-52); whereas Adorno, on the other hand, as we have seen, suggests that the relationship between image and discourse is much more problematic. For reasons already discussed, these communicative conclusions would be unacceptable to Adorno given his emphasis on the importance of dissonance in modern art, its *transgression* of communicable meaning, the importance of reflective judgement, and the argument that the truth-content of art resides in its expression of non-identity - of the lack of reconciliation between universal and particular.⁵²

Instead, I believe that Adorno’s work on aesthetics offers us more than the procedural accounts of (communicative) freedom we have discovered in the work of Habermas and Honneth, and more than the overly subjective version of (aesthetic) freedom we found in the late work of Foucault. He presents us with an account of non-reified culture which is forever

⁵² He would also, as we have seen, be critical of the tendency here to identify a (quasi)transcendental realm of communicative reason that somehow remains pure and unaffected by the process of cultural rationalisation and the entanglement of truth and power.

sensitive to the exclusion of sensuous particularity, and to the forms of misrecognition and suffering produced by commodification, identity thinking and technological rationality. He also, in the process, gives us an alternative account of what recognition might mean in its fullness, and the role played by our acknowledgement of complicity, by responsibility for (and ethical satisfaction in) the other, by dialectical experience, and by our self-relinquishment and transformation of identity. Art's role in all this is to challenge a divided reason and its related dualisms which tend to prioritise universality over particularity, form over content, concept over intuition, cognition over mimesis etc.⁵³ Artworks form a solidarity with the exclusions of rationalised modernity, and present us with an image of an alternative praxis, of what a substantive reason might be. They shake us out of our (reified) subjective consciousness and generate emphatic experiences that compel us to reconceptualise the other and reconfigure ourselves in relation to that other. Not only do they offer us an alternative praxis however, they also point towards an alternative community, albeit one solely in image form. As Bernstein (1993, p. 13) argues, 'art now, or just before now, is (or was) the cipher for an absent politics' and that 'the modern work of art itself in its unity without a principle or concept determining that unity, and the community gathered around particular works with their shared *sensus communis*' provide us with 'images or after-images of the (idealised) polis' (ibid.).⁵⁴ However oblique and rarefied - and historically under threat of being eclipsed - the promise made by advanced artworks does bear witness to a divided reason, and to the suffering produced by proceduralism, identity thinking and commodification; it also keeps

⁵³ I have also argued that it points beyond the antinomy of autonomy and heteronomy found in Kantian morality and liberal theories of justice, which instrumentalise politics and assume that heteronomous factors, along with the will of others, are restrictions on freedom rather than conditions for the possibility of (a fuller, cognitive) freedom. As we have seen, these assumptions of Kantian morality and liberal justice have reappeared in the work of Habermas and Honneth, despite their explicit critical engagement with these problems.

⁵⁴ Here Bernstein is referring to the idea that art is an 'after-image of practical knowing' (1993, p. 13), a reference to Aristotle's *phronesis* in Greek ethical life, i.e. of 'worldly engagement' prior to practical reason becoming 'the application of theoretical understanding to practical matters' (ibid, p. 12).

open the possibility of reconciliation and points towards fuller forms of recognition and solidarity, which are more worldly and more inclusive of sensuous particularity and otherness.

CONCLUSION

Towards the end of part one of his *Minima Moralia*,¹ Adorno writes the following in his aphorism 'For Anatole France':

'In a phase when the subject is capitulating before the alienated predominance of things ... (t)he universality of beauty can communicate itself to the subject in no other way than in obsession with the particular. No gaze attains beauty that is not accompanied by indifference, indeed almost by contempt, for all that lies outside the object contemplated. And it is only infatuation, the unjust disregard for the claims of every existing thing, that does justice to what exists....The eyes that lose themselves to the one and only beauty are sabbath eyes. They save in their object something of the calm of its day of creation. But if one-sidedness is cancelled by the introduction from outside of awareness of universality, if the particular is startled from its rapture, interchanged and weighed up, the just overall view makes its own the universal injustice that lies in exchangeability and substitution. ...Perdition comes from thought as violence, as a short cut that breaches the impenetrable to attain the universal, which has content in impenetrability alone, not in abstracted correspondences between different objects. One might almost say that truth itself depends on the tempo, patience and perseverance of lingering with the particular: what passes beyond it without having first entirely lost itself, what proceeds to judge without having first been guilty of the injustice of contemplation, loses itself at last in emptiness.' (1999, pp. 76-77)

This in many ways captures the concerns of Adorno's philosophy and negative aesthetics. In the broader context of commodification and instrumental rationality, a context which gives rise to the suffering of the irreducible and particular, Adorno emphasizes the importance of 'Sabbath eyes' in alluding to true universality - those eyes 'that lose themselves to the one and only beauty' and 'save in their object something of the calm of its day of creation'. As he argues elsewhere, 'every individual object of nature that is experienced as beautiful presents itself as if it were the only beautiful thing on earth' and he further argues that 'this is passed on to every artwork' (1997, p. 70). The Sabbath eyes that rest exclusively (and aesthetically)

¹ The aphoristic form of which enacts Adorno's concern for the fate of individual experience in the context of theoretical and societal totalisation.

on the object do so in constant struggle with those imperatives emerging from damaged life - what he refers to as the 'universal injustice that lies in exchangeability and substitution' and which always threatens to pierce the 'patience and perseverance of lingering with the particular'.² What is required in response, according to Adorno, is an 'obsession with the particular': an aesthetic gaze which, however fleetingly, acknowledges the object in its singularity and fullness, its strangeness and 'impenetrability', before it is then subsumed and erased, and its 'one-sidedness is cancelled by the introduction from outside of awareness of universality'. To disregard or bypass the particular in the quest for identity or unity, as is the case in instrumental rationality and commodification, only produces an empty universal: as Adorno suggests above, 'what passes beyond it without having first entirely lost itself, what proceeds to judge without having first been guilty of the injustice of contemplation, loses itself at last in emptiness.' The universal judgements apparent in historical and philosophical conceptualization, but particularly characteristic of exchange relations and instrumental reason, are guilty of doing violence to the particular by establishing 'abstracted correspondences between different objects'. As we have seen, Adorno's own philosophy, and his negative conception of aesthetics, seeks to counter this and to transform the way we see the world; it urges us to do justice to the particularity under threat from the historical forces of instrumental reason and the homogenizing power of the culture industry. Seeing the world through 'Sabbath eyes' is a useful way to conceive of the active and practical-historical principle of philosophy emphasized by Adorno, where the 'obsession with the particular' is a transformative principle in itself. In his early essay 'The Actuality of Philosophy' Adorno (1977) refers to his philosophy as a form of interpretation and, in doing so, he attempts to transcend any simple distinction between philosophers having 'only variously interpreted the

² For a rare illustration of Adorno's notion of 'sabbath eyes' in the context of literary studies, and specifically applied to the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, see Schweizer (2005).

world' whilst 'the point was to change it'. He suggests that:

'The interpretation of given reality and its abolition are connected to each other, not, of course, in the sense that reality is negated in the concept, but that out of the construction of a configuration of reality the demand for its [reality's] real change always follows promptly' (ibid. p. 129).

Rather than simply being conceived as passive, the philosophical (and aesthetic) interpretation of the world - through Sabbath eyes – arguably engenders forms of ethical and aesthetic imagination which open up the possibility of new experience beyond the world as it is. It shakes the fixity of current conceptualisations and forms of subsumption and, in solidarity with the suffering of the particular under conditions of exchangeability and instrumentality, provokes the resistance of objects against their reification.

Adorno's philosophy adopts what he calls 'the micrological view' which 'cracks the shells of what, measured by the subsuming cover concept, is helplessly isolated and explodes its identity, the delusion that it is but a specimen' (1990, p. 408). In a context where 'the more tightly the network of general definitions covers its objects', and where 'the greater will be the tendency of individual facts to be direct transparencies of their universals', Adorno suggests that 'the greater the yield a viewer obtains precisely by micrological immersion' (1990, p. 83). As we have seen, this is also the importance of modernist artworks for Adorno, particularly those fragile works which, 'in the face of the abnormality into which reality is developing', have acknowledged that 'art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fiber' (1997, p. 2). These works, which themselves have become 'qualitatively other', most faithfully shine a light on singularity and serve to protect particularity from the incursion of coercive forms of universality; their truth for Adorno 'depends on whether they succeed at absorbing into their

immanent necessity what is not identical with the concept, what is according to that concept accidental. The purposefulness of artworks requires the purposeless' (1997, p.101). They also, as we have seen, provide us with an intimation of an alternative praxis:

'What appears (in art) is not interchangeable because it does not remain a dull particular for which other particulars could be substituted, nor is it an empty universal that equates everything specific that it comprehends by abstracting the common characteristics. If in empirical reality everything has become fungible, art holds up to the world of everything-for-something-else images of what it itself would be if it were emancipated from the schemata of imposed identification' (Adorno, 1997, p. 83).

In its quest to give voice to the particularity of things, Adorno suggests that 'art has converged with natural beauty' inasmuch as 'artworks say that something exists in itself, without predicating anything about it' (1997, p. 77). He argues that with art, as with the 'micrological perception of the beautiful in nature' (1997, p. 70), it is 'undefinable precisely because its own concept has its substance in what withdraws from universal conceptuality' (1997, p. 70). The mimetic form of 'aesthetic comportment', which involves 'the capacity to perceive more in things than they are' (1997, p. 330) and which 'assimilates itself to that other rather than subordinating it' (1997, p. 331), allows for the ephemeral moment of 'being touched by the other', by the object in its singularity and irreducible uniqueness. Artworks, like natural beauty, resonate with us beyond mere conceptual determination and intention. Rather than assimilating the object and subsuming it under our own categories and interests, we are instead shaken out of our fixity and encouraged to assimilate ourselves to that particular object: as Adorno argues, 'without receptivity there would be no such objective expression, but it is not reducible to the subject; natural beauty points to the primacy of the object in subjective experience' (1997, p. 71). Adorno makes a passing reference to Rilke's 'Archaic Torso of Apollo' poem, which he says 'codified the nonsignificative language of

artworks in an incomparable fashion' (1997, p. 112). Arguably this poem, itself the response to the 'patient contemplation' of a fragmented sculpture, expresses the way in which we are left mute when faced with an auratic object, in this case one without a head that 'still glows like a candelabrum'; yet despite its lack of eyes 'there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life' (Rilke, 2011, p. 83). The object reaches out to us, and touches us, beyond any attempt to assimilate or easily interpret it, especially given the lack of original face and eyes which might have allowed us an easier conceptualization in line with the sculptor's intention; and the final line of the poem expresses this power of being touched and the intense sense of implication in the experience.

It is here where Adorno also suggests that 'the expression of artworks is the nonsubjective in the subject' (1997, p. 113) and that 'artworks bear expression not where they communicate the subject, but rather where they reverberate with the protohistory of subjectivity' (1997, p. 112). As we have seen, not only do artworks involve the 'non-conceptual affinity of the subjectively produced with its unposited other' (1997, p. 54), but their movement under 'patient contemplation' mark them out as 'afterimages of the primordial shudder in the age of reification' (1997, p. 79); for Adorno this produces transformative experiences which challenge our current (subsumptive) models of cognition and conceptualisation. Artworks, and aesthetic comportment, imagine an alternative form of praxis to the dominant subsumptive model and, as we have also seen, they perform a critique of divided reason. They criticise both the disfigurement of themselves (as non-cognitive art) and the violence of those (non-aesthetic) forms of cognition that subsume particularity through proceduralism, exchangeability and substitution. Through the tension, or rather irreconcilability, between their cognitive-rational and mimetic (aconceptual) components, artworks express the

possibility and promise of redemption without violating it; they maintain the necessary tension between redemption and finitude without reifying either.³ Art promises but does not fulfill, it points to the possibility of undamaged life from within ‘damaged life’ by keeping open the possibility of the absolute without attempting to explicitly represent it. As Adorno argues, ‘art must be and wants to be utopia, and the more utopia is blocked by the real functional order, the more this is true; yet at the same time art may not be utopia in order not to betray it by providing semblance and consolation’ (1997, p. 32). In more theological language, he suggests that ‘by the autonomy of their form, artworks forbid the incorporation of the absolute as if they were symbols. Aesthetic images stand under the prohibition on graven images. To this extent aesthetic semblance, even its ultimate form in the hermetic artwork, is truth’ (1997, p. 104). By maintaining, although also not reifying, the tension between its conceptual and mimetic elements, artworks avoid the temptation to prioritise either the conceptual or mimetic side; however, as Adorno is keen to point out, this tension is best maintained or elaborated when we critically engage with artworks (and with the wider social and material world) *micrologically*, i.e. through immersion in particulars. For Adorno, the universal appears in the particular but not in any immediate sense of identity or unity; instead it appears only when it refrains from subsuming the particular into its totalising logic.⁴

³ This defense of critical tension, and the accompanying criticisms of both claims that there is nothing beyond the conditional on the one hand and claims to positive access to the unconditional on the other, can be found in Adorno’s critiques of both positivism and positive religion (see his ‘Reason and Revelation’ essay in *Critical Models*, 2005, pp. 135-142, for the latter). It is also apparent in his Hegelian criticisms of Kant (whose account of self-critical reason is taken to task for emphasizing finite knowledge and placing a block on thinking the absolute), and his Kantian criticisms of Hegel (whose account of self-critical reason is questioned for its claims to gain access to Absolute knowledge). Both, in their different ways, are accused by Adorno of violating the non-identical. Adorno’s position on the other hand (with, between, and beyond Kant and Hegel), is a defence of the restless spirit of self-critical reason and a cautiousness concerning any claims to closure. See in particular the final section of *Negative Dialectics* (i.e. ‘Meditations on Metaphysics’ in Adorno, 1990, pp. 361-408) where he outlines his philosophy ‘After Auschwitz’.

⁴ He suggests that ‘for the sake of reconciliation, authentic works must blot out every trace of reconciliation in memory’ (1997, p. 234).

To remain true to the particular and to the (im)possibility of reconciliation, art must give voice to the ‘micrological’ suffering of the particular under the broader regime of instrumental reason⁵; as Adorno argues, ‘it would be preferable that some fine day art vanish altogether than that it forget the suffering that is its expression and in which form has its substance’ (1997, p. 260). However, art cannot do this by seeking to directly *represent* such suffering without itself subsuming, and thereby doing damage to, the very thing it claims to represent. This is why the artists he champions in *Aesthetic Theory* and elsewhere (e.g. Celan, Webern, Beckett, Hölderlin, Proust etc) are those who, in their different ways, produce ‘sublime’ forms which challenge our previous conceptual categories and means of comprehension, and do so through their focus on uncertainty, fragmentation, difficulty, negation, and silence. Adorno argues that:

‘Suffering remains foreign to [discursive] knowledge; though knowledge can subordinate it conceptually and provide means for its amelioration, knowledge can scarcely express it through its own means of experience without itself becoming irrational. Suffering conceptualized remains mute and inconsequential, as is obvious in post-Hitler Germany.... The darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational: radically darkened art. What the enemies of modern art, with a better instinct than its anxious apologists, call its negativity is the epitome of what established culture has repressed and that toward which art is drawn. In its pleasure in the repressed, art at the same time takes into itself the disaster, the principle of repression, rather than merely protesting hopelessly against it. That art enunciates the disaster by identifying with it anticipates its enervation; this, not any photograph of the disaster or false happiness, defines the attitude of authentic contemporary art to a radically darkened objectivity; the sweetness of any other gives itself the lie.’ (1997, pp. 18-19)

The new categorical imperative that Adorno suggests Auschwitz imposes on culture (and philosophy) makes previous forms of representation both inaccessible and unattainable, yet also requires us to comprehend both the ‘disaster’ and the possibility of reconciliation as a

⁵ Here Adorno is following the claim in his *Negative Dialectics* that ‘the need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth’ (1990, pp. 17-18).

moral necessity; although he argues that this cannot be actualised as such, he suggests that it instead drives our thinking onwards without repose. Adorno's standpoint here is a 'standpoint of redemption', which nevertheless - and simultaneously - refuses redemption; a thought of reconciliation which recognises its impossibility even though 'its own impossibility it must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible' (Adorno, 1999, p. 247). He makes this point in the 'Finale' section of *Minima Moralia*, which shares a number of images with his notion of 'sabbath eyes':

'The only philosophy which can be responsibly practised in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light. To gain such perspectives without velleity or violence, entirely from felt contact with its objects – this alone is the task of thought. It is the simplest of all things, because the situation calls imperatively for such knowledge, indeed because consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror image of its opposite. But it is also the utterly impossible thing, because it presupposes a standpoint removed, even though by a hair's breadth, from the scope of existence, whereas we well know that any possible knowledge must not only be first wrested from what is, if it shall hold good, but is also marked, for this very reason, by the same distortion and indigence which it seeks to escape. The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world.' (Adorno, 1999, p. 247).

Adorno's philosophy and negative aesthetics, with their emphasis on 'the felt contact with its objects', are themselves perspectives fashioned 'without velleity or violence' and which aim to 'displace and estrange the world'. They also represent a 'standpoint removed', yet are inevitably 'marked' by the 'distortion and indigence' they seek to escape; they are complicit in what they criticise and, in turn, require self-comprehension and further transformation. Both (dialectical) philosophy and art, for Adorno, point towards the unconditional whilst remaining inescapably grounded in our conditional experience; they are privileged spheres of

immanent (or intramundane) transcendence which maintain and work through these tensions and difficulties.

Adorno's 'micrological view', and his concern with aesthetics and the particular, is clearly at odds with the proceduralism I have argued is at work in both Habermas's 'idealising presuppositions of communication' and Honneth's 'idealising presuppositions of recognition'; both of which, I've argued, despite themselves, share too much with the characteristics of a formal (and ultimately) instrumental rationality which abstracts from difference, particularity, and subjectivity. Despite Honneth's attempts to avoid some of the shortcomings of Habermas's work, by reconciling rational principles and the substantive norms of lifeworld practices through an emphasis on mutual recognition, his 'formal conception of ethical life' ends up displaying those characteristics of formal abstraction that ultimately exclude sensuous particularity and meaning. As we have seen, in many ways Foucault's work compensates for this lack apparent in Critical Theory's communicative turn, by both highlighting the power relations and exclusions at work in idealised forms of recognition, normativity, communication, morality etc, and also by turning to an aesthetic critique of modernity in his later work. However, as I've argued, his genealogical work tended towards an excessive, and often indiscriminate, account of power, along with an overly determined conception of subjectivity, whilst his work on ethics and the aesthetics of existence ended up with an overly autonomous notion of aesthetics and an account of subjectivity unduly disconnected from wider relations of recognition. His work thereby lacks a more substantive conception of culture, democracy, recognition, and responsibility. In response to the shortcomings of both the communicative turn in Critical Theory and Foucault's philosophy, I have argued that an Adornian account of non-reified culture and

ethics - with its fragile community of 'spirit' united by the suffering produced by commodification, identity thinking and technological rationality - is the most adequate response to the instrumentality and atomism of our late capitalist acquisitive culture, and therefore provides us with the most promising 'model' of a critical theory of contemporary society. Its commitment to otherness, non-identity and particularity, its focus on dialectical experience and the complicities of representation, and its adherence to a notion of aesthetic praxis as a refuge for the sensuous elements of human experience side-lined by the rationalisation and reification of modern life, provides us with a fuller sense of what the labour of recognition and solidarity involves and the infinite to which it is promised.

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